

EVERY-
THING YOU
EVER WANTED TO
KNOW ABOUT ANY-
THING, AND
MORE!

Spring
2002

Maggie.

THE

Magazine

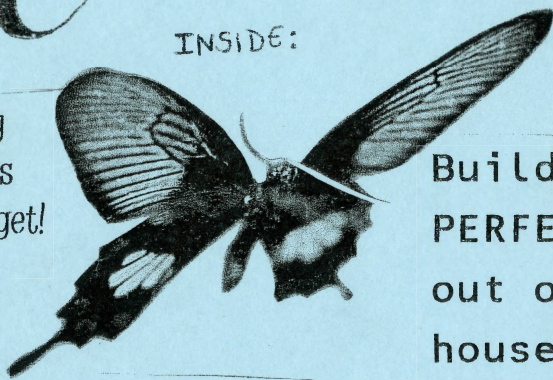
by **maggie**
Greene

INSIDE:

Throw a party
your neighbors
will never forget!

Want to win
the next
gubernatorial
election?
Here's how!

LOSE
25 pounds
in just
25 minutes!



Build the
PERFECT MAN
out of common
household
appliances

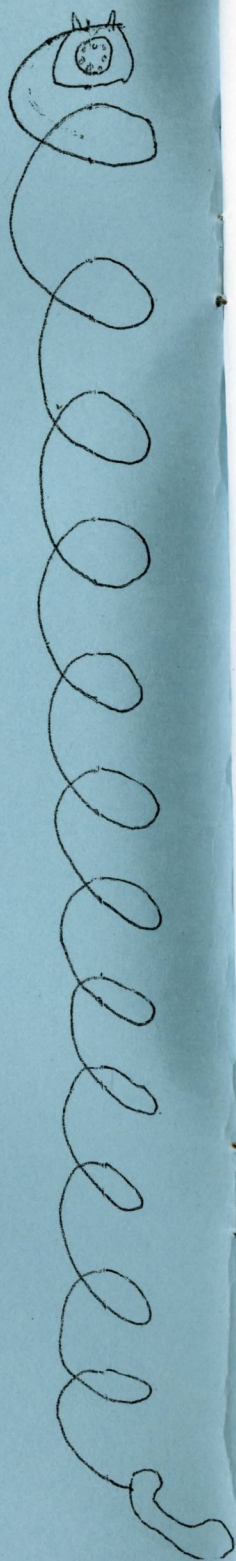
**What to look
for when
purchasing
a moose**

ALTHOUGH NOT REALLY...

WARNING: The author of this zine highly recommends that you read either the literary content or the margins. Do not attempt to read both in one sitting. Doing so may be hazardous to your sanity.

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Je Reste Assis et Je Regarde Fixement Dans La Vide Pendant Des Heures.

1

The Journal

"It was raining the first time he came. The sky was dark and the air, dense and misty. The wind lamented tumultuously outside the window, trying to get in. Lightning severed the sky and thunder pealed ferociously. It was so dark outside that as I gazed at the window, I could see the reflection of the room in which I sat. The fire raging in the small grate in the corner of the study lent only a little comfort to my distraught soul. The knocker on the door pounded: one, two, three times. Like a phantasm, I floated down the hall and opened the door. There he was, standing on my doorstep, half in shadow and half in light, drenched by nature's fury. The light from within the house protracted half a lengthy shadow behind him. He stood there facing me, his hands in his pockets and his feet spread apart. His drab coat was thoroughly saturated and his short, dark hair trickled tears onto his cheeks and forehead. These droplets joined and streamed off the end of his nose and the corners of his angular jaw. I stood there looking at him, my heart overwhelmed by compassion. Lightning flashed, jarring me to my senses, and I welcomed him into my house.

"Stepping gingerly over the threshold, he gazed about my house as if it were foreign and threatening to him. I offered to take his coat, which he relinquished rather reluctantly. I brought him a blanket, donated a chair to his use, and put a kettle of water on the stove to warm for tea. He spoke little, answering my questions tersely. He stared into his teacup and never allowed my eyes to meet his. I did not ask his name, nor did he volunteer it. The Grandfather clock in the hallway struck midnight, and he rose stiffly, declaring his intention to no longer tread upon my kindness. I fetched his nearly-dry jacket from where it hung next to the crackling fireplace in the study. He donned his coat and moved towards the door, opening it and walking back out into the rain, turning only once to thank me for my generosity and wave mournfully. As I watched him go, a wave of regret swept over me, and I wished he could have stayed longer. I turned and closed the door behind me.

"I went into my sitting room, staring blankly at the chair the mysterious stranger had vacated only moments earlier. An overpowering and ostensibly unfounded sensation of foreboding imbued me, and I ran to my bedroom to take cover beneath my quilt.

"After that night, I allowed no one to sit in the chair that had been used by my mysterious visitor; it became somewhat sacred to me. I placed

*I sit and stare at nothing
for hours on end...*

2. Je cours rapidement d'une pièce à l'autre sans aucune raison apparente.

on it the blanket he had used, and on the table next to it, the cup from which he had drank. Each time I passed that chair, a chill swept up my spine and down my limbs. Eventually, I stopped using the room entirely, never entering it except to kindle a fire in the grate on cool evenings.

"The next time I saw him was another rainy night nearly a year later. I had never ceased wondering who he was and from whence he had come. When I heard a knock at my door that second night, I instinctively knew it was he. I descended the staircase and threw open the door. As I had foreseen, there stood the same man who had visited on that stormy night almost a year earlier. I once again received him into my home, welcoming him to take his place in his chair and put his blanket to use once again. This time, he did not seem so tense, and he actually smiled a little. When I asked his name, he said it was Adlai. He did not ask for my name, but I gave it to him anyway, and he smiled his acknowledgement. I asked him if he would like some tea, and he politely accepted my offer. When I returned with the tea, however, he had gone, leaving the front door wide open and a rose on the chair in which he had been sitting. It was a very peculiar rose: deep carmine in hue, almost black, but with the sweetest of fragrances. I immediately set about to putting it in a vase with water.

"That rose lived for what seemed like an eternity, losing one petal every few months. At last, there was only one petal left. It seemed it would never fall. Many evenings I spent looking at that lone flower, wondering what it would be thinking (had it the capability to think), where it had come from, and—most importantly—why it had come. One very windy and rainy evening, the wind caught an improperly shut window lattice, sending a draft coursing into the room where the rose dwelled. The last petal was caught up in the current of air and swept from room to room and down the stairs until it came to rest, with me on its trail, in front of the door. I stooped to pick it up heavy-heartedly, saddened that the rose had now expired completely. As I knelt there rubbing the petal between my thumb and forefinger, there was a loud rapping at the door.

"I stood slowing, having recognized Adlai's knock, wondering deep within myself whether or not allowing him admission into my home was the wisest thing for me to do. I had never forgotten the urgent sense of premonition I had felt after his initial visit. That selfsame impression once again consumed my soul. Decidedly, I stepped away from the door, backing cautiously into the dimly lit sitting room and falling back into the

I Run Rapidly From Room to Room
For No Apparent Reason.

Je Désirerais Me Cacher Des
Regards Indiscrets, Si Cela ne
Vous Dérange Pas....

3

inviolate chair. A forceful shudder tore at my flesh as soon as my body came to rest in the chair, and I leapt up suddenly, knocking the untouched teacup from the table. As it hit the floor, the noise of its shattering resounded through the house like a thousand gongs struck in unison. The pounding on the door commenced again, heavy and entreating. The draft from the upstairs window picked up into a powerful gust that blundered throughout the second floor, down the stairs, and into the room in which I stood. The little grate fire swayed and jumped and trembled and threw horrible demon dancers onto the wall. Everywhere I turned shadows surrounded me, clawing at me, their raucous shrieks filling my ears. I crumbled helplessly in the corner, stopping my ears with my hands and closing my eyes to shut out the terrorizing world around me. All of a sudden, despite my closed ears, I heard the door tear off its hinges and crash to the floor. Lightning, torrential rain and a breathtaking gale came rushing into my house, putting out every light, even the raging inferno in the andiron. I remained where I was, gripping my knees to my chest and rocking back and forth. I felt a strong hand grip my arm and pull me to my feet.

"It was Adlai.

"He frowned upon me menacingly and asked why I had not let him in. I tried to think of some excuse, but none came to mind. I simply stood there before him quivering and cowering like a frightened cat. He put his hands on my shoulders and shook me violently, and I swooned, and... that's the last thing I remember."

The psychotherapist closed the journal and shifted in his seat. She sat on the bed across from him, staring blankly at the stark-white wall.

"And you're certain this is all you remember?" the doctor asked. There was no response, which was no surprise. She hadn't spoken since she'd been admitted to the mental hospital a year earlier. She only wrote in her journal.

The therapist patted his patient on the shoulder and exited her room. Just outside the door, her husband Adlai stood weeping. "No improvement?" he queried hopelessly.

"None. She stays. For how long, I don't know. But she stays," the therapist stated decidedly.

a little privacy, please....

4 Helpful tips for Living

SET A BUDGET

Once you've finished spring-cleaning your closets, take some time to sort out something equally important: your finances. Peter Sander, author of *The Pocket Idiot's Guide to Living on a Budget*, offers these tips:

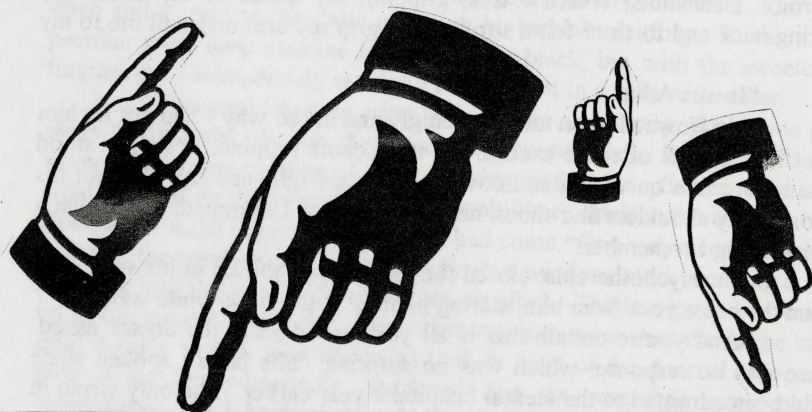
1. Divide your expenses into categories: Obligations (mortgage, car payment, insurance); Necessities (groceries, gas, utilities); and Personal and Family Allowances (clothes, entertainment, miscellaneous). Divvy up the rest into needs and wants.

2. Expect the unexpected and create reserve funds for the unpredictable,

says Sander. This way, when an unplanned expense pops up, you won't have to scrimp.

3. Make it a family affair. A budget will only work if everyone involved knows the plan. Communicate with your husband or children to ensure you all stick to your monthly allowances.

Christina Orlovsky



CHEER UP A FRIEND

What do you do when you sense a friend's emotions are on the skids? John Preston, Psy.D., author of *Lift Your Mood Now: Simple Things You Can Do to Beat the Blues*, offers these ideas:

- Ask "What's going on?" Too often, well-intentioned pals back away when a friend is down, not wanting to embarrass her or draw attention to her suffering. It's much better to reach out to her and address the issue directly.

- Don't try to second-guess the root of your friend's melancholy. Instead, just acknowledge that you see her pain, Preston says. And let her talk. If she

clams up, ask if you can check in with her again in a few days; sometimes people need to see your concern is real in order to feel safe enough to share.

- Resist the urge to comfort your friend with cheery "It'll be OK" platitudes. What we really need when we're down is to simply be heard. A willing ear and a shoulder to cry on are powerful medicines indeed.

CB

Ways to... Feel Happier

5

Chapter 1

Lydia Pierce sat on a swing at Laurel Recreational Park, digging her bare toes into the fine sand beneath her feet and twisting the swing slowly. Pterodactyls bashed about riotously in her stomach—well, if they weren't Pterodactyls, they were something far larger than butterflies. She asked herself why she was there. The answer came in the form of an 'I must be crazy' shake of her head.

No, you remember why! she thought to herself.

Blue eyes made her show up that bright midday in July.

Blue-eyed, black-haired, charming, handsome, funny Joel Turner made her come to the park that day—twenty-year-old god of the basketball court, Joel Turner.

Lydia lived not a mile from Laurel Recreational Park. She had lived in the same house since she was born, nearly fifteen years earlier. She and her cocker spaniel, Sniggles, walked to, through, and home from Laurel almost every day. During the summer months, Laurel was a beautiful place—bordering Laurel Lake, it boasted beach and boat access, as well as a great deal of scenic beauty. The far eastern and western ends of the beach, which were covered for miles by giant mounds of sandstone slab, provided excellent resources for afternoons of exploration or solitude. The surrounding woods were full of bike and nature trails, as well as small woodland creatures and various wild plants of both edible and dangerous varieties. And each summer, the park was full of RVs and tents, full of happy campers from far and near, anxious to be near Mother Nature, enjoying her beauty and exploring her secrets.

Lydia thought back on the past few weeks. They had been the most amazing twenty-two days of her young life. It was only a little over three weeks earlier that she and Sniggles had been making their way through the park when they passed by the campsite of a group of males, recently having emerged from adolescence. One of them took a peculiar interest in the lovely young owner of small blond dog that trotted by with its

Shake a little.

Spoil Yourself

head held high. The young man rose from his beach chair next to the would-be campfire his companions were struggling to ignite and fell into stride beside her.

Startled, afraid, and deeply flattered, Lydia didn't miss a beat.

"She's not for sale."

The boy looked at her with a confused expression. "Excuse me?"

"She's not for sale," Lydia repeated.

"Oh," the boy began. "Um... well, is she seeing anyone?"

"Why should that matter? She's pure, if that's what you're asking," Lydia said matter-of-factly, smiling to herself. She had obviously captivated his interest, and her heart beat savagely beneath her breast, as if to punish her for playing games with the boy's head.

The boy seemed to give up on the conversation, not sure if she was talking about herself or the dog, and decided to start a new one. "My name's Joel."

"Pleased to meet you, Joel. Now if you'll excuse me, my dog and I have a walk to finish," Lydia responded. She secretly hoped she wasn't playing *too* hard to get.

She wasn't. Joel grabbed her arm playfully and stopped her and Sniggles in their tracks. "What's your name?"

She smiled. "Lydia. And the little person at the end of this leash is called 'Sniggles.'" The dog faced her and yipped recognition of its name.

Lydia and Joel continued to walk together, talking and exchanging superficial information about themselves. When Joel invited her to join him and his friends for a weenie roast later that afternoon, she graciously accepted before remembering that she hadn't asked her parents for their permission yet. She prayed they would acquiesce, which was likely but not completely certain.

When she got home, she asked her mother if she could go back to the park later that evening for a weenie roast. Her mother didn't mind but wondered that a park event could have escaped her notice.

FIND THE GOLDEN POUCH

befriend wildlife

"You look incredible!" Joel exclaimed when Lydia arrived at the campsite.

She could feel the blood rushing to her cheeks, and she was glad to be masked by the red light already cast on her by the campfire. "Well," she responded, shaking her chestnut ponytail, "I wouldn't exactly call these ratty old jeans and my dad's baseball jacket *incredible*, but thanks anyway!" Her brown eyes twinkled like beacons in the lights of the moon and the bonfire.

"You are so pretty, Lydia. I hope you know that," Joel said, touching her cheek.

That night, over sizzling hot dogs and flaming marshmallows, Lydia received her first kiss. She thought perhaps it might have been a little bit soon to be kissing Joel, but she didn't think enough of it to stop him. *Besides*, she thought, *he's much older than I am, and I'm sure he knows when is the best time to kiss a date.*

For the next few weeks, Lydia and Joel met almost every day. Whenever she suggested they go to her house so she could introduce him to her parents, he made up some excuse why he couldn't go. Lydia thought it was a little suspicious, but she never said anything to him about it. She dismissed it from her mind, however, deciding that he probably knew how her parents would react if she brought home a boyfriend almost six years her senior. Most of their time was spent taking long walks, hand-in-hand, down to the rocks that bordered Laurel Lake. They found a little spot among those rocks where they could be quite alone and quite unseen by anyone. There, they would share picnic lunches and talk of many things—of family and friends, cars and schools, anything that came to their minds. Lydia began to think that she had never been so nearly perfectly happy.

Now she waited on the swing for Joel to arrive. This was to be their last meeting before he had to leave the campgrounds and go back to his hometown, which, as he said, was "ever so far away." She imagined a *Grease*-like reunion for them. Someday, like Sandy Olsson and Danny Zuko, they

Go RVing
Life's A Trip™

TAKE TIME TO INDULGE
IN SOME FUDGE THERAPY.

Dry your locks.

Mind the Shaker

would meet again, there would be no good-byes, and they could be perfectly happy together forever.

In the distance she saw Joel approaching. She smiled widely, patting her hair and giving herself a glance over to make sure she was still looking presentable. She hoped that her flowered skirt and white button-up blouse didn't look too childish.

Joel hugged her as soon as he was near enough. She smelled liquor, but he swore solemnly that his friends were horsing around and dumped half a bottle on him by accident.

"Did they spill it in your mouth, too?" she asked, a little skeptically.

"Lydia, come on. It's our last day together. Let's not bicker and argue about something so trivial. I might have had just a sip or two, but I *assure* you, I am *totally* sober."

Lydia believed him—why shouldn't she? He was, after all, her boyfriend, and he swore he'd never lie to her or hurt her.

She looked at him. The shirt he was surely wearing earlier in the day was tied neatly about his hips; his bronze, muscular chest and washboard abs, flecked with small beads of perspiration, shone in the warm sun. He took her tiny hand in his, and they started on their usual path down to the rocks. Joel seemed to be talking a little bit funny, kind of slow and nonsensically, but Lydia couldn't put her finger on what made it so different from usual—having lived a rather sheltered life, she had never been much in the company of alcohol or drinkers of it. She knew only enough of it to identify its smell, as her grandfather was in the habit of taking a swig or two of his "aqua vitae" after evening meals. She'd never seen her grandfather drunk though. She'd never seen anyone drunk. But she began to question the verity of Joel's claims that he'd had only a sip.

They finally reached their usual spot in the rocks, and sat down to talk. Joel kissed her again, and she returned his kisses with a great deal of affection. He looked into her eyes. She had never seen him look like that before—it was a wild look, the look she imagined a wolf having as it preys upon a bewildered lamb that has become separated from the herd. He kissed her again, and she soon felt that he was kissing her too passionately for comfort. As

Vacation

Now give in to your cravings.

9

his hands began to stray, Lydia pulled back and demanded to know what he thought he was doing. His response was only to force his kisses on her and to allow his hands free reign to explore her now-trembling young frame. She struggled to break free from his grip, but those big bronze muscles she had ogled and adored now betrayed her and held her fast in Joel's embrace. He quickly took both of her wrists in one of his hands and with one swift movement of the other, removed the shirt from about his hips and the belt from the loops of his jeans. Before Lydia knew what was happening, he had gagged her with the shirt and was binding her hands behind her back with his belt. She tried to scream, but the shirt stopped her cries like water trapped behind a dam. He pushed her to the ground and held her there with his heavy body. Sweat and booze filled her nostrils, and her eyes were wide with terror. She writhed and fought to break free, but her efforts were met with a solid blow across the face from Joel's clenched fist.

"You'll like this, I promise... *and I know you'll never tell a soul, will you...*" he hissed in her ear. His hot breath in her ear sent chills into her very marrow, and she felt an uncontrollable stream of burning tears issue from her frightened, barely-blinking eyes.

She closed her eyes and prayed that her soul would be taken from her body. She desperately wanted to die before the inevitable occurred. But death didn't rescue her—it just stood by and watched.

Pinch yourself.

*"It could be
dangerous."*

SKYLINE

Gazing on the skyline,
I notice the change
I see the difference
I know the horror
one moment can impose.
Forever altered
is the skyline we thought
we knew so well,
the one we looked upon in awe.

One moment,
forever altered.
Empty space where
strangers, friends, families,
ate lunch, washed clothes,
made phone calls, signed contracts,
played with new birthday presents,
loved their fellow man.
Empty streets have swallowed lives,
Piercing silence has hushed voices,
Quiet nights have cursed the dawn
that sheds bloodstained beams
of mourning light
on the skyline.

Mopping



Chapter 2

Lydia lay on the cold stone slab, sobbing quietly. The sun was retreating to the horizon line, and all she could hear besides her own whimpers was the gentle lapping of the water against the rocks.

Lydia replayed the events of the day in her mind a thousand times until the whole incident seemed like some sort of freakish nightmare that she would never awaken from. She was physically ill and had thrown up several times. It didn't matter though. Laying covered in her own filth made her feel no dirtier than she already did.

She noted how dark it was becoming, and was afraid to be alone. He must have taken his belt with him, for she found that her hands were free. Mustering every shred of strength she had left, she dragged herself to the water's edge. Her reflection in the water horrified her still farther. Crusty, black blood clung to the corners of her mouth; her cheek was swollen, tender, and red; dried vomit clung to her chin. A new flow of tears rolled down.

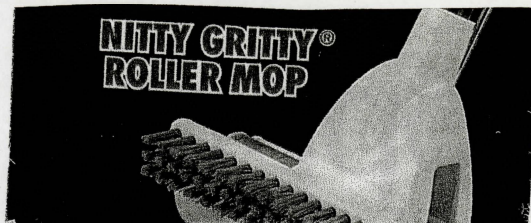
She did her best to wash her face in the lake's cold waters, then dried it on one of the only clean spots left on her shirt. Most of the buttons were missing from the front of her blouse, but she did her best to secure it over her sore chest. Her skirt, now reduced to a snagged and soiled mess, hung loosely about her hips and showed signs of being ruined beyond repair. She tried to make some sense of it and covered herself as best she could. Then she started homeward.

* * * * *

Lydia knew how her parents would react if she walked through the front door in such a state, and so she decided it would be best to climb in her bedroom window and head straight for the shower. If she could escape her parents' notice, she could escape their questions...for now.

Lydia lathered and re-lathered her bath sponge, scrubbing her body raw. But no matter how much she washed, she could not make herself feel clean. She cried

Simplified.™



hysterically as she continued to scrub her skin. The water burned her face and her mouth, where Joel had hit her. Her female parts were sore, reminding her that when she had undressed for her shower, she had been bleeding. Her wrists burned where her struggles for freedom had caused the belt to cut into them. Her arms, legs, and back were thoroughly scraped from rubbing and banging against the stone. She felt as though her whole body would spontaneously combust in a fireball of shame and agony...but it didn't.

She crawled into the fetal position on the floor of the shower and let the warm water run over her. She cried harder now—she had never ceased to cry since it happened, but now she unleashed her anguished tears and groans.

How could you let this happen to me?! she demanded of her Maker. Why, God? Why did you let this happen to me? What did I do wrong?

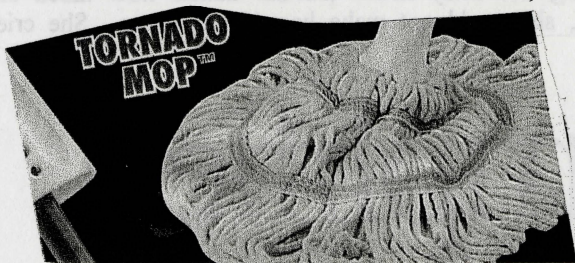
She despaired of ever receiving answers.

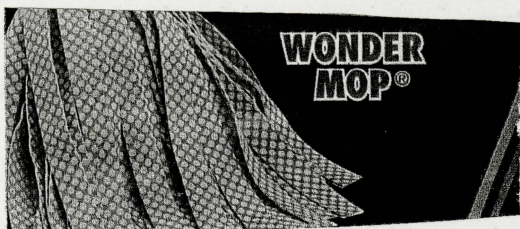
But something inside her tugged at her spirit. Although she suffered a vast deal, she gradually felt less alone. She felt like there was Someone out there who knew of her tragedy and was just as heartbroken as she.

When her fingers and toes had reached maximum prune-like quality, Lydia turned off the water and stepped out of the shower to dry off, taking great pains not to rub any of her wounds too harshly with the towel. She buried her ruined clothes in the bottom of the bathroom trashcan, removing the garbage bag immediately and tying it up. The last thing she wanted at that moment was to be asked why her Easter outfit was in such a mangled state.

In her bedroom, Lydia stood before her full-length mirror and looked at herself. She saw cuts, she saw bruises, and she saw utter humiliation. Nothing was left of her radiant purity. All that remained was filth.

She donned her nightclothes slowly and carefully and climbed into her bed. She pulled the coverlet over head, creating a womb-like environment. It made her feel a little better, a little less





vulnerable to the entire world around her. The tears once again began to flow freely.

Her bedroom door creaked open. "Lydia, are you crying? Did something happen at the park today?" Her mother's voice was concerned and comforting.

"No, mum. I'm fine. I'm just tired," Lydia replied. She felt guilty for lying, but not guilty enough to tell her mother what had happened, although she felt she desperately needed to get it off her chest. She wanted to scream, 'Mommy, I lied to you and I disobeyed you! I wasn't going to the park just to walk Sniggles or play at park events! I was seeing a boy, even though I'm not allowed to date yet...but he wasn't just a boy, he was an older boy...he was a man, and he hurt me, mommy!' She wanted to feel her mother's arms around her, patting her head and loving her unconditionally with *real* love. But Lydia could not bear to be touched by anyone. Not now.

Lydia could feel that her mother was worriedly gazing at her lumpy form beneath the blanket. "Are you sure, sweetheart?" her mother asked. "Is there anything you want to talk to me about?"

It took a great deal of willpower for Lydia to form the word *no* in her mouth, then force it into the air. Her mother closed the door again and walked away. Lydia was alone.

The next morning, Lydia woke up and nearly began to cry with tears of joy. Maybe it had all been a horrible dream! She touched her cheek and winced with pain. Utterly deflated, she began to cry. She decided she would just lie very still in bed and tried to make herself die. She'd read in a book that there were people who had done this successfully, separating soul from body and never coming back. It was a long shot, but it was better than living with this memory. Her thoughts were interrupted by her father's entrance.

"Good morning, beautiful girl! Your mom said she thought you were upset, so I made your favorite: chocolate-banana pancakes!" he announced cheerily.

What's not to smile about?

All in a

"I'm not hungry. Please leave me alone," Lydia mumbled, turning over to face the wall.

Sitting on the side of her bed, Lydia's father smacked her hindquarters soundly and said, "Get up, girlie!"

Lydia's reaction shocked both her father and her. "DON'T TOUCH ME! LEAVE ME ALONE!" she screamed at the top of her lungs, lunging towards the wall and overturning the breakfast tray he had in his other hand.

Obviously hurt and confused, her father fled the room. Lydia collapsed into a sobbing ball once more. Her mother was not long in coming to the room and demanding to know what was going on. Without thinking, Lydia looked up at her mother.

"What on earth?!" her mother exclaimed, rushing to the bedside to examine Lydia's cheek. "What happened?!"

"Mum, please, don't touch it," Lydia said, wiping her eyes.

"Did you get into a fight?"

"Well...you could say that. Listen, mum, it's nothing. Really. I don't want to talk about it, okay?" Lydia jerked her face out of her mother's hands.

"Lydia, I can't just let this go. I want to know what happened, and I order you to tell me right now!" her mother commanded, folding her arms across her chest.

"Mom...you wouldn't understand. I just don't want to talk about it."

"Lydia, you're acting very strangely. You've never kept anything from me before. Why are you being so secretive?"

Lydia's eyes involuntarily welled up with tears. She was determined not to talk.

"Lydia, what's going on?" her mother demanded, grabbing her firmly by the shoulders and giving her a shake. "Did someone hurt you?!"

Lydia became hysterical. "Why won't you just leave me alone? What is this, the Spanish Inquisition?! I said I don't want to talk about it!" She ran from the room and locked herself in the bathroom.

Woman's Day

Are you frightened yet?
You will be.

15

She could hear her parents' voices floating up to her through the air duct on the bathroom floor. They sounded very upset as they spoke in hushed tones in the dining room below.

"What did I do? I thought she'd like some breakfast. I thought she'd like it," she heard her father say as he... was he really crying? A pang of profound guilt pricked Lydia's soul. She'd never seen or heard her father cry before. It sickened her that she had changed that with her mysterious outburst.

"I don't know what I did, Samantha," he choked to her mother. "It's like she hates me now. She's never done that before. *Never*. She probably won't even let me get close enough to her to apologize."

Lydia envisioned her mother hugging her father, his shoulders shaking with sobs.

"Don't cry, daddy," she whispered. "Please don't cry. I love you."

beauty Q&A

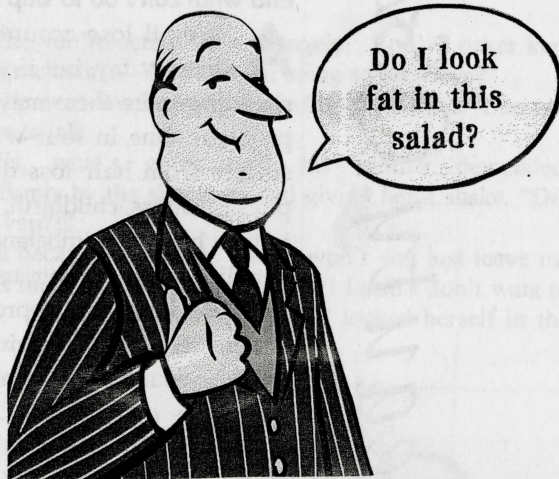
Q: I seem to be losing a lot of hair every time I wash or brush it. How much is normal and what can I do to stop it?

A: We all lose around 100 hairs a day, but if you're shedding more there may be a problem. One in four women suffers from hair loss due to physical stress, childbirth, medication, hormonal imbalances or heredity. In time, hair usually grows back, unless the problem is genetic. If it is, Rogaine, an over-the-counter treatment, will stimulate new growth. You should also avoid heat-styling tools, which can break fragile strands, and use moisturizing shampoos and conditioners to strengthen the remaining hair.

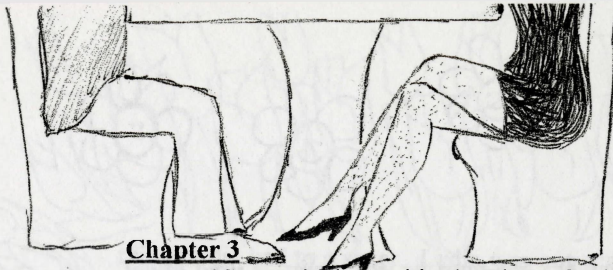
A lesson on the Bayou

The sprout, it broke the ground so effortlessly
 Like a square peg in a round hole
 Things don't fit as much as we pray they would
 Things fit better than they should.
 Like fingers in a leaky dam
 The trickle ceases to exist
 The vaccine halted the symptoms, failing a cure
 So the cow died and is no more.
 I ate it the other day.
 It went down well but came back to haunt me,
 and it is unbearably evident that my torment will be eternal.

Line poetry—ain't it grand?



WORRYWART



See
below...

Chapter 3

So much changed in the Pierce family over the course of the next two months. The Brady Bunch illusion had quite dissipated. Anger and confusion took the place of love and patient understanding. Lydia no longer spoke to her parents, if she could avoid it. Whenever she *did* speak to them, she falsely perceived that they were trying to pry into her secret, the room in her soul whose door she had locked and cordoned off to everyone but herself. Lydia's parents, however, discerned that something was *very* wrong with their daughter. They weren't stupid; they knew she was evading them. They just didn't know why, and her silence concerned them deeply. They didn't know how to deal with it—if they ignored Lydia's problem they would be guilty of negligence to their daughter's pain. If they tried too hard to pry into the source of her problem, she might shut them out completely. Lydia's parents struggled with these two evils and fought about them incessantly.

One evening, as Lydia was taking her dinner to her room (she decided she didn't like family dinner anymore—conversation was forced and uncomfortable), she overheard her parents talking at the dinner table. She stopped on the stairs to listen, morbidly curious to hear what sort of argument would ensue from *this* discussion.

"We've got to get her away from here. There's nothing in Maryland to stimulate a mind like hers. Maybe a change in scene and society would cheer her up. Whatever her problem is, our sitting here and watching her downward spiral is not helping Lydia at all," her father said decidedly.

All was silent for a moment, and Lydia could picture her mother staring at her dad across the dinner table. "James, you can't be serious."

"Why not, Samantha? Have you got any better ideas? Something is seriously wrong with our baby girl, and we should be doing everything we can to help her."

Lydia heard scraping noises, like the prongs of a fork being dragged across a ceramic plate. *My mother is playing with*

Bonnie Hunt's dating advice:

"Don't shave your legs.

If you don't shave your legs, it won't go
too far...

Hairy legs are your only link to Reality."



her food? Lydia thought. *She must be very upset. I used to get sent away from the table for that.*

"When you say 'get her away from here,' how far 'away from here' are we talking?" her mother queried. Lydia heard a *ping* as whatever her mother's fork had been chasing was caught and ingested.

"I don't know," her dad said after a pause. "I hadn't really thought about where we should take her. I just think we should take her somewhere other than here. This town is dead. There's nothing in Laurel to distract her mind from whatever's weighing so heavily on it."

"Do you really think she'd be cheered up by being uprooted? Are we talking about a vacation, or are we talking about moving? I need some specifics here, James. I won't even consider leaving until you let me know how far and for how long," her mother said, forever the voice of reason.

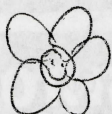
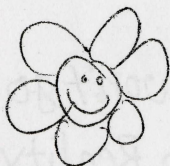
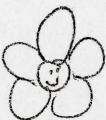
"I was thinking more along the lines of moving. Maybe Arizona," he replied.

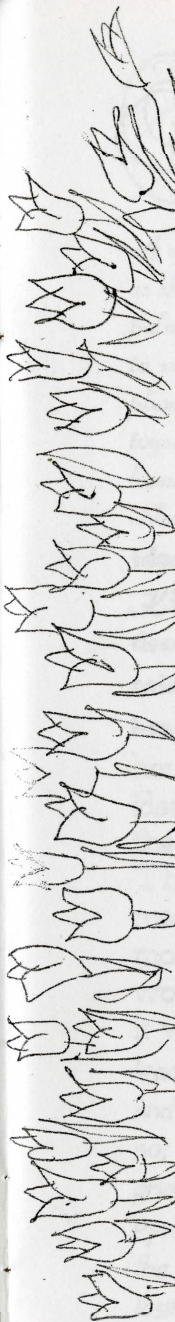
Lydia's mother gasped. "This is crazy! Arizona? James, I *just* got this job at Dr. Billings's office! Good pay, good benefits, good work environment... I can't leave it right now! Not for some half-baked plan to make Lydia hatch from whatever shell she's put herself in!" She stopped for a moment and calmed down. "I didn't mean that, I'm just saying..."

From there, the voices died into whispers, and Lydia lost track of the conversation. She went to her room to think things through a little. She supposed no life could be worse than the one she was leading, not even a life in Arizona.

Lydia's withdrawal was not only directed at her parents: she had withdrawn from everything once the school year began again—after school activities, the church youth group, and her friendships. She felt like a fool for speaking so warmly of Joel to all of her friends, and she didn't want them to know that she had been so deceived in his character. No one seemed to wonder at Lydia's sudden disappearance.

Her best friend Rebecca was, however, faithful and persistent in her efforts not to be forgotten. She was the closest





thing Lydia had to a sister. Lydia was not accustomed to keeping secrets from this particular friend. Rebecca never pressed for an explanation of Lydia's sadness—she simply trusted that when Lydia was ready to talk about her problem, she would. But Rebecca never ceased to be available whenever Lydia was lonely, which was quite often, and Rebecca was soon the only person permitted into the fortress of solitude. Still, Lydia made no mention and gave no hint as to the cause of her depression.

The afternoon after Lydia's parents' Arizona-talk, the two young ladies sat in Lydia's bedroom, talking of nothing substantial. A heavy silence hung in the air for a few moments before Lydia broke it.

"I'm pregnant," she said flatly.

Rebecca almost laughed in shock. "What?"

"I'm not totally sure, but I think I'm pregnant. I don't have the money for a test, but I skipped a couple periods. I'm no M.D., but I'd say that's a pretty clear indicator."

Rebecca didn't know what to say. Her brow furrowed as if she were formulating a thousand inappropriate questions.

Then something seemed to click.

Rebecca always did have a knack for reading Lydia's mind, but this time, Lydia wished she could protect Rebecca from her own clairvoyance. Rebecca covered her mouth with her hand and whispered, "Oh my gosh."

"Yup," said Lydia, completely stoic.

Another period of silence ensued from these few words. Rebecca began to weep. Lydia just watched her friend cry. She had no tears or feelings left to spend in that pursuit.

"So what are you going to do about it?" Rebecca asked when her choking tears subsided.

"Well... there's the clinic in Warner..." Lydia sighed.

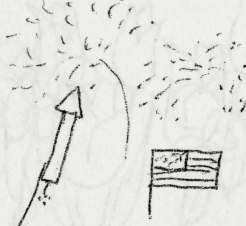
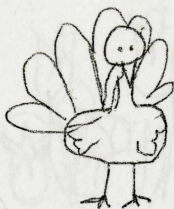
"Lydia!" Rebecca exclaimed. "You don't believe in that!"

"I didn't... but this is different," Lydia said resignedly.

"I need your help. I can't do this by myself anymore."

*you don't have to like my tulips.
But I wish you would!*

I Love Tulips



"Lydia, I don't know what you want me to do. I don't know how I can help you with this," Rebecca muttered, shaking her head thoughtfully. "You need to tell an adult about this."

"Why bother? They won't believe me anyway. They'll just think I'm a little slut who brought in on herself. But," she choked on a sob, "I didn't."

"Lydia, that's absurd. No one will think you deserved it. No one will, I promise. You need to tell someone."

"No, I can't. I can't talk about it. I can't even say his name. Not yet. Maybe not ever. Promise me that you'll never tell a living soul as long as you live. Promise me!"

Reluctantly, Rebecca agreed.

At school the next day, Rebecca accompanied Lydia to the nurse's office and explained most of the situation to her, leaving out the fact that the reason for the suspected pregnancy was rape. Even without that bit of information, the nurse seemed very sympathetic and willing to help.

"The Women's Clinic in Warner will send out a bus to pick up any scheduled patient who lacks alternative means of transportation," the nurse explained, looking at Lydia with huge brown compassionate eyes that looked very much like a doe's. "They also do pregnancy tests for free. If any... *further medical assistance* is required, that may be free also, based on your parents' financial need."

Further medical assistance, Lydia thought. *Why don't you just say abortion?* She thanked the nurse kindly for the clinic's phone number and pamphlet and left the office feeling quite embarrassed.

In the hallway, Lydia clung to Rebecca's arm as if the slightest breath of air might blow her away.

"Are you really going to go through with this, Lydia?" Rebecca asked.

"I don't see any other option. I'll never forget this as long as I live. And this... thing... will only make the pain worse. I can't love it, Rebecca," she whispered.



Queen of the

21

A warm breeze wafted the redolence of the Lotus to the nostrils of the queen as she reclined on her barge on the river. Four servant girls fanned her with palm fronds, not only to cool her but also to shoo away the midges that liked to swarm over the Nile in the late afternoon. The queen plucked another plump, juicy grape from the vine stem held by the eunuch on her right. She toyed with the grape, rolling it between her fingers, thinking about very like a human eyeball it was in size, density, and general appearance, save the color. She popped it into her mouth and felt it slide down her throat. An idea rolled over her like the sands of the Valley of the Kings. A new nation shall come of this thought. Egypt, desolate now that the kings have died, the Romans have tainted our women and our children, shall thrive again and break free of these primitive white men. She wondered how she would do it though. Just then, a terribly evil idea suggested itself to her. It had been said that she was the most beautiful woman in Egypt, or even the world. This had to be true. She was the queen, after all, which meant that part of her was goddess, and once she shed her mortal shell and joined Sekmet and the other gods, she would shine radiantly as a full goddess. For now, though, it was her job to guide the mortals entrusted to her care. She would lead them so that they might in some small way know how wonderful and magnificent she really was. But first she had to receive the man, no, creature that would make possible the fruition of her plans. Her priests were called and the ceremony began. A trembling shook the Pyramid as the final incantations were said, and the great stone slab at the entrance slid into place. The great Tut was extremely angry about losing all of his internal organs, and so invited the queen and her priests to stay for a few millennia.

DARNED

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ ABCDE

22

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Amy sat alone in the dense thicket, panting. Bristles and thorns had torn her clothing and her flesh. Cries of wild animals could be heard splitting the night. Darkness closed in around her. Each noise, each snapping stick or rustling leaf, startled her. Far away, a wolf howled. "Get a grip!" she told herself. "Howling wolves aren't necessarily hungry wolves." In her heart, however, she knew that nothing could make her feel courageous. Just the thought of having to spend the night outdoors made her feel like a child. Knowing wild animals could kill her and a trace of her might never be found only made matters worse. Lonely, frightened, cold, and hungry, Amy tried her best to focus on brighter things than being mangled and devoured by the beasts of the fields. Minutes passed like years as she waited to be found. Nothing pleasant came to her mind to relieve her torment. Of course, she thought of her family and friends, but that only reminded her that she might never see them again. Peace of mind eluded her. Queer noises broke her concentration and thwarted her efforts to seek refuge in sleep. Rain began to sprinkle lightly as the horizon lightened from black to gray. Sounds of a search party reached Amy's ears from the distance. Tears of fear turned to tears of joy as she returned their calls. Unafraid now, she ran in the direction of the hullabaloo. Very soon, a group of men with search dogs came into sight. What relief now flowed through Amy's weary body! Excited dogs ran to her and licked her hands and her cuts. "Your mother and I have been worried sick!" her father exclaimed, taking her in his arms and squeezing her tightly. Zealously, Amy returned her father's embrace and promised never to wander again.

RUNAWAY

you must bring us...
A SHRUBBERY!

2 3

Chapter 4

Lydia made an appointment to have a pregnancy test at the clinic. She decided, however, that she couldn't risk being seen getting onto, riding, or getting off the Clinic Bus. Instead, she asked her older friend, Daniëlle, to give Rebecca and her a ride to a gas station that happened to be down the street from the clinic and to pick them up there in two hours. Danielle didn't ask any questions but was quite willing to lend Lydia a helping hand. *I guess there are a few people who really do care about me*, Lydia thought to herself. The thought encouraged her a little.

Rebecca spent the night before the appointment at Lydia's house. The girls hardly said a word all night—Lydia because she was too petrified to speak and Rebecca because she knew that there were no words to ease Lydia's distress.

The two girls rose early the next morning. Rebecca quickly showered first so that Lydia would have time to just stand beneath the warm water's pelting flow and let some of her nervous tension swirl down the drain. Danielle arrived promptly at 9 o'clock that morning to pick them up.

"Where are you girls headed off to so early?" Lydia's father asked, stumbling out into the kitchen in his robe and rummaging through the pantry, undoubtedly in search of coffee.

"Shopping," Rebecca responded quickly, bustling Danielle and Lydia out the door. "We'll be back in a few hours."

"Okay," he responded with a wave as the door slammed. "Have fun."

The girls hopped into the car and started the fifteen-minute drive into Warner.

"Okay, here we are," Danielle announced as they pulled into the gas station Lydia had specified when she and Danielle had originally made their drop-off and pick-up plans for the day. "I'm picking you up here in two hours, right?"

Lydia nodded.

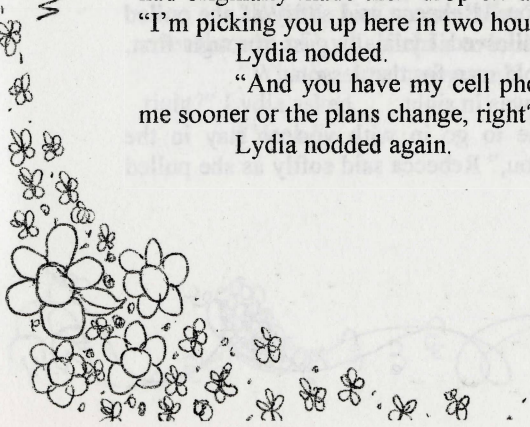
"And you have my cell phone number in case you need me sooner or the plans change, right?"


Lydia nodded again.

ONE THAT'S
NICE.
AND NOT TOO
EXPENSIVE.

We will continue to say "Ni!" to you again
until you appease us...

We are the knights who say "Ni!"





"All right, well... I'm going to be at the Warner Mall, so I'll never be more than five minutes from here, okay? Are you going to be all right?" Danielle added, not trying to hide her concern.

"Yes, thank you, Danielle. We'll meet you here in two hours. Maybe sooner," Lydia said. "Bye."

Lydia and Rebecca got out of the car and closed the door lightly behind them.

"She's got to know," Lydia sighed once Danielle's car pulled away.

"I wouldn't worry about it if I were you," Rebecca reassured her friend. "Even if she does suspect, your secret's safe with her."

It was a mild day in early September. A quiet breeze rustled the leaves of the one remaining tree on the block. Lydia shivered even though the day was relatively warm.

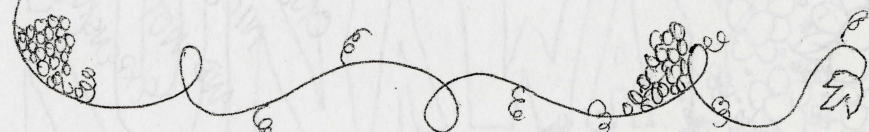
Deciding not to take the sidewalk on the open road where anyone might see them and realize their destination, the girls made their way to the back of the gas station and braved the alley that ran along all the store backs on the three blocks to the clinic. Gasoline fumes drifting from the pumps and the putrid stench of rotting garbage wafting from a dumpster filled their nostrils. Behind one store, they saw an old man tearing apart a trash bag and voraciously devouring any scrap of edible material he found. Lydia's gaze met with his for only a moment before she felt compelled to look away. *At least I have food and a warm place to sleep*, she thought. *At least I have a home and people who care about me. I'm lucky. I could be dead. But I survived.* Inwardly, she thanked the old man for that reminder.

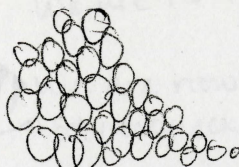
Finally, the clinic was in sight.

"Do you want me to go in with you or stay in the waiting room? It's up to you," Rebecca said softly as she pulled the front door open and allowed Lydia to pass through first. Inwardly, she thanked the old man for that lesson.

Finally, the clinic was in sight.

"Do you want me to go in with you or stay in the waiting room? It's up to you," Rebecca said softly as she pulled





the front door open and allowed Lydia to pass through first. The *Yes! We're Open!* sign on the door clacked loudly against it as the door jerked shut of its own accord, announcing the new arrivals. The waiting room was decorated in subdued rose and blue hues obviously intended to calm the waiting patients. A long coffee table covered in magazines of every variety fronted a long row of dingy mauve seats.

"Um...come with me, if they'll let you," Lydia replied. She approached the receptionist's window and gave her name. The receptionist was a plump, pleasant looking woman with short carrot-colored hair and large, blue-framed glasses. She instructed Lydia to sign in on the list, then handed her a clipboard with a stack of paperwork attached to it.

"This should keep you busy until the nurse can see you," she said with a smile.

Lydia thanked her and took the clipboard back to where Rebecca had saved a seat for her. She began filling out the paperwork. *Name*, Lydia read to herself. *That's easy*. Next came address and phone number—also easy, but Lydia didn't want the clinic calling her house with any surprises that her parents shouldn't know about. She left those lines blank for a moment. The rest was easily going until she got to *insurance carrier*.

"Rebecca, do you know who my insurance carrier is?" Lydia asked.

"You better not put anything. You don't want your parents getting an invoice for this appointment, do you?"

"Eek. No," Lydia said, leaving that line blank.

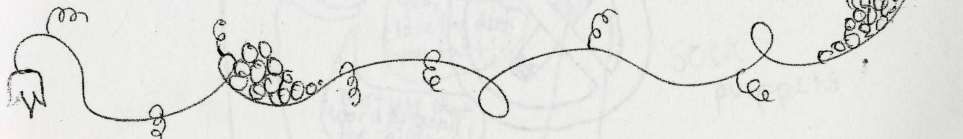
Blood type. *I have no idea!* Lydia thought. Another blank. The next question asked 'What is the nature of this visit?' Lydia couldn't even pronounce half of the options.

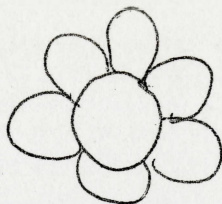
"What am I here for?" she asked Rebecca.

"What? Let me see that," Rebecca responded, leaning over the arm of Lydia's chair to look at the list.

"What's 'mammogram?' That's the boob-smasher, right?" Lydia asked.

"Yeah."





"Okay, that's not what I want. Ob...obstetrics? Is that it?" Lydia asked.

"I would think so. Isn't an Ob/Gyn the doctor who pregnant people go to for ultrasounds? The 'Ob' must stand for obstetrics."

"Where did you learn all this?"

"Cable. Remember that show we watched at my house about all the different kinds of childbirth, like one lady had her baby in a normal hospital bed and another lady had hers in a swimming pool and another lady had hers standing up? They all called their doctors 'obstetricians.' You're here for a pregnancy test, so I guess that'd be you," Rebecca replied frankly.

Lydia checked the 'obstetrics' box and looked over her paperwork.

"Jeez, Rebecca, the only questions I answered were my name, social security number, and date of birth! This is pathetic!" Lydia muttered with frustration.

"Oh, come on. You answered the question about the nature of the visit!"

"Ugh."

"Well, just hang onto it, then. Maybe the nurse can help you finish up the rest."

Each girl picked up a magazine and attempted to read until Lydia's name was called. The two rose from their seats in unison. Lydia's knees were knocking and her hands were clammy. She grabbed Rebecca's arm for support. She wanted to cry, she wanted to scream, she wanted to run out of the clinic and all the way home to her parents and confess the whole thing and hug them and kiss their cheeks with all the love she'd kept pent up inside herself.

But she didn't.

She bravely followed the pretty blond nurse in the white and blue flowered lab coat to a small open room that seemed to be an extension of the hallway. There, the nurse took her vitals—blood pressure, heart rate, weight, and height—and asked her all sorts of questions like *do you smoke?* and *when was*



we are no longer the knights who say
"Ni!"



we are now the knights who say
"Ecky-ekky-ekky pa-ting zoy ung dzung zow..."

the last day of your last menstrual cycle? She took the clipboard from Lydia's trembling hands and smiled to herself.

"I'm going to need a little more information, sweetheart," the nurse said. "Do you have insurance?"

"Well, uh..." Lydia began, touching her face nervously. "My parents do, but they don't know I'm here. And I don't want them to know I came."

Rebecca stepped up to the nurse and whispered in her ear. The two left Lydia sitting on a chair next to the scale and went around the corner. Lydia heard Rebecca explaining to the nurse in hushed tones about the reason for the visit. Lydia tried to hear as little as possible of the conversation. Even knowing that it was being talked of turned Lydia's stomach. The nurse made a noise of understanding at the end of Rebecca's communication and came back around the corner.

"Why don't the two of you just head down to room 3, okay? It'll be the fifth door on the left. The nurse practitioner will be with you in a moment," the pretty blond nurse said with a smile that lit up her big brown puppy-dog eyes.

Lydia hoisted herself onto the bed in room 3, wrinkling up the white paper that was stretched across its length. Rebecca sat on a swiveling stool in one corner of the room.

"Are you scared?"

"Terrified," Lydia responded.

"Don't be. It'll probably just be a 'pee-in-this-cup-and-you're-on-your-way' deal. Hey, you may not even have to worry about anything after this!"

Lydia had not yet given thought to the possibility that she might not be pregnant at all. It was a liberating feeling. She had come to the clinic expecting her suspicions to be confirmed but never considering that they might be proven wrong. She bit her fingernail thoughtfully.

"Well," she said after a moment's indulgence in such wonderful thoughts, "I'm not getting my hopes up. I just want to know if I am pregnant or not."

"What if you're not?" Rebecca asked, trying to lighten her friend's mood.

"Then I'll be thrilled to death of course. Maybe I could go back to being a normal human being and start getting over...it."

Silence hung in the air like heavy woolen tapestry for several minutes until Rebecca whispered, "What if you *are* pregnant?"

"I'll cross that bridge when I come to it," Lydia stated decidedly.



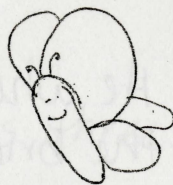
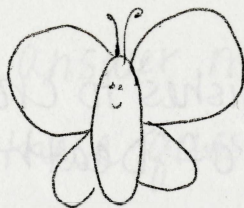
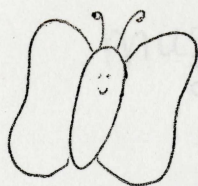
sock
puppets

On September 15, 2002, the dream began...



"YUMMY" x 1000.
*At least,
 I think so!*

Actually, the "dream" began about four months after Bo and I started dating...oh well. Plans to marry became official by the giving of a ring on September 15th. The first event of the evening was dinner at the Ming Court on International Drive. Then he took me to see "Cirque du Soleil: la Nouba," which is like a circus, except there are no animals and, well, you'd have to see it to understand. He claimed that the next stop was home, but he got "lost" and ended up at a sweet fifties diner, where we had dessert. On the way "home," he deliberately missed the Port St. John Boulevard exit and proceeded to take me to the beach. Once there, he instructed me to remove my shoes for our moonlit walk in the sand. While I took off my shoes, he took a basket and a blanket out of the car's boot and made a little picnic spot for us on the beach. The night air was only a little chilly, but he was trembling profusely. He poured us each a drink, and we sat and talked for a little while. He wanted to take a walk, and so we did. And there, on the lonely beach beneath the moon, he got down on one knee, produced a small black box containing a diamond ring... and well, the rest is history.



Chapter 5

Sometimes, things happen that can't be controlled. Not only are these events uncontrollable, they're unforeseen. No normal human being ever wakes up in the morning, scratches, yawns, and says, "Well, I guess I'll die in a car accident today" or "I wonder how this house will fare against that tornado that will be forming this afternoon" or "What will I do if I'm a victim of date-rape?" No one wants to admit that he is fair game for any evil plot Madame Fortune may have up her sleeve. No one wants to hear that he is only a portion of a second on the Great Clock of Universal Time, only a grain of sand on the vast throbbing beach of humanity, only a vanishing vapor passing through eternity.

Tell me, what man or woman can stop two speeding vehicles from colliding? Who can stand before Nature's Fury and order it to be still? Who can save every victim of human depravity? Where is man's wisdom, his justice, his many virtues when disaster strikes? They are nowhere to be found.

* * * * *

"I think you've met your quota for the night, Miss," the bartender said, picking up the shot glass the woman had just emptied and wiping the counter where she'd spilled over half of the glass's contents.

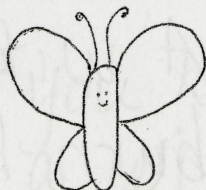
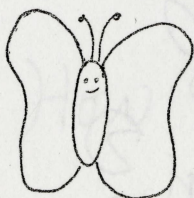
"You can't deny me a drink," the woman slurred. "I am a paying... a paying... oh, what's the word?" She snapped her fingers thoughtfully for a few moments before becoming entirely engrossed in the fact that her fingers made no noise when she tried to snap them. She giggled.

"Yes, Miss, you are one of our best *customers*—"

"That's the word!" she exclaimed, giggling harder.

"—but I really think it's time for you to call your driver around and head home for a nice, long nap."

"I'm still thirsty. And I still have..." she dug around in her purse, pulled out a wad of crumpled bills, and laid them out on the counter. "I still have this much money."



He who wishes to cross the Bridge of Death

The bartender looked at the woman and thought, *If she knew when she was sober that she acts like this when she's drunk, she'd be mortified.* "Stay right there for just a second, Miss. I'll be right back," he said. He called one of the waitresses over to cover the bar while he went outside for a moment.

The cold Washington night air hit him like a block of ice as soon as he stepped outside. For a split second, he debated going back into the lounge for his jacket. *I'd better not*, he thought. *Goodness knows what she'll say or do in the time I'm out here.* He crossed his arms over his chest to preserve whatever body heat he could and darted out into the darkness to find the woman's car.

As usual, her long black stretch limousine was parked in the back of the building (out of sight to any passerby) under a street lamp. The limo driver sat in the car with a can of soda in one hand and a Dickens novel in the other. The bartender rapped gently on the window.

"Hey, I think she's ready to go now," he said to the driver as soon as the window was rolled down far enough for his words to reach the other man's ears.

The driver nodded his understanding of the situation and got out of the car. The two men walked back into the lounge and found the woman straddling a male customer seated on a stool at the bar. The man was obviously less drunk than she and fully prepared to take advantage of the leverage he had in the situation.

The bartender and the limo driver each took hold of one of the woman's arms and lifted her off of the man at the bar.

"Hey!" the man exclaimed, cursing. "Just what do you guys think you're doing?" He rose to his feet to face the woman's saviors.

The limo driver raised himself up to his full height of six feet, three inches, dwarfing his opponent by a little over half a foot, and demanded, "The lady comes with me."

A witch o A witch o
May we burn her o

must answer me

these questions three!

3 1

You can *try* to resist, but I warn you—don't start something with me that you don't intend to finish."

The man seemed to contemplate the consequences of continuing his pursuit of the woman but seemed to decide the prize wasn't worth the pain and humiliation of the fight. He gulped down the rest of the contents of the glass in his hand, set the glass down on the bar with a *thump* for effect, glared at the limo driver like a mouse taunting a cat, and walked away rather quickly.

"You never have me let any fun, Barry," the woman whined, hitting the limo driver with her purse and slumping down onto the barstool.

"Miss Pierce, I really think it's time I got you home now. You have a meeting with the L-Rond Corporate Funding and Claims Ambassador tomorrow at noon, and I'm sure he'd be very offended if you had to wear sunglasses during your presentation," Barry said.

"Why do you treat me like a child?" Miss Pierce exclaimed rather loudly, amassing looks of half annoyance, half curiosity from the bar's other occupants.

"Because you're acting like a child, Lydia!" Barry exclaimed through clenched teeth. "Now come on, let's get you home."

At that moment, she put her head down on the bar and passed out. She would have fallen to the floor had Barry not caught hold of her upper arm. With one liquid motion, Barry swung his unconscious employer up and over one shoulder and hauled her out of the bar, mumbling something about not getting paid enough to put up with this crap.

"Bye, Barry," the bartender called out. "Good luck."

Barry carried Lydia to the car, opened the door, and hefted her dead weight into the car, taking special pains to lay her on her side in case she vomited. *She doesn't need a limo driver, she needs a babysitter*, Barry thought with exasperation. *And a good hard spanking.*

Lydia barely moved or made a noise the whole way home, except Barry once thought he heard her whimper softly.

How do you know she
is a witch?

Ask on, old man. I am not
afraid.

The usually-busy streets of Seattle were very calm at that time of night, making for a smooth ride back to Lydia's house in an almost rural suburb just south of the busy metropolis.

As he approached the front door, Barry contacted Lydia's house staff via intercom to let them know he would be needing some assistance in getting Miss Pierce into the house, as she was "indisposed." It wasn't really a lie—although Barry could lift Miss Pierce with minimal difficulty and carry her quite a distance, he was not about to attempt to carry her up a few flights of stairs to her bedroom. *If that stupid elevator repairman would get out here and do his job, this wouldn't be a problem*, Barry thought. *What does one woman with no family—and no friends, for that matter—need with a four-story house?*

As the car approached the front steps of Lydia Pierce's Tudor mansion, the butler, known simply as Hill, burst forth from the front door in his house robe and slippers.

"Climb into the car and take her up by the shoulders," Barry instructed the yawning butler. "I'll take her by the knees. Think we'll be able to get this sack of potatoes up those stairs?"

"We don't really have a choice, now, do we?" Hill responded in his thick but formal English accent.

Carried by her two most faithful (and most furtive) attendants, Lydia was shortly out of the car and on her way up to her bed. Once in the bedroom, Barry let down her legs and took her up in his arms like a baby while Hill pulled back the coverlet from her bed. Barry placed Lydia's snoring body on the bed; removed her shoes, blazer, and earrings; and covered her with the blanket before turning down the lights and exiting the room quietly with Hill following close behind.

"I suppose I'll be making arrangements with her secretary tomorrow morning to postpone the meeting with the L-Rond ambassador?" Hill commented rather than asked.

"That might be a wise decision," Barry agreed.

She looks like one?

shAme

I remember having a dream one night
where I walked into school and I was totally
naked.

I'm sure everyone's had a dream like that at
one point in time or another, except with little
variations

like coming to work naked, or even worse,
to church naked.

Well, anyway, this dream was horrible because
when I walked into school
no one laughed
they just stared

which is worse than laughter because
most people close their eyes when
they're laughing really hard
and that would have meant that fewer
people were looking at me, but *no*
they just sat there silently and stared
and I could feel my face turning
twelve shades of crimson,

my heart beating wildly like an Indian's drum,
my palms sweaty and my eyes steaming
and no matter what I did,
I could not keep myself covered.

I felt like Hester Prynne standing on the scaffold
 scorned by cold and silent eyes—
 except that my shame sprung from mere nudity
 while hers was engendered by the wee babe
 that she pressed against the carmine symbol on her
 breast,
 the child who was her ignominy incarnate
 and poor Hester knew
 she would never
 lead a normal life again,
 she would never
 marry the father of her child,
 the man she loved more than life—
 it was her lot not to blush as a bride but as a harlot
 instead.

Unlike Hester, I will have my chance to
 blush as a bride:

I'll blush because I'm happy and
 I'll blush because I'm nervous and
 I'll blush because people will be
 staring at me, silently.

AND THIS ISN'T MY NOSE. IT'S A FALSE NOSE

What is your name?



Chapter 6

The sun's bright beams burst into Lydia's bedroom like a floodlight shining directly in her eyes. The birds' chirping outside her window pierced her eardrums like knives. She put her pillow over her head and groaned.

"I'm glad to see you've awakened, Miss," Hill exclaimed brightly as he entered Lydia's bedroom, a pot of strong black coffee in one hand and a tray of breakfast pastries in the other. She glowered at him from beneath the fluffy down pillow.

"Why are there birds outside my window?" she growled slowly.

"Because there are trees outside, Miss, just below your window. Birds like to live in trees, you know." Hill smiled in the direction of the bed. Lydia poked her head out from under the pillow but retreated back into its covering when she was blinded by the glare of the sun on Hill's bald head.

"I thought birds migrated for the winter," she pondered, her voice muffled.

"It's March, Miss."

"It's still cold outside."

"It's springtime."

"What time is it?"

"It is half-eleven, Miss."

Suddenly, Lydia's chest tightened. She couldn't put her finger on the reason, though. *Am I forgetting something?* she wondered. *I am. What am I forgetting? I returned all of my calls last night before I left the office, I gave Naomi the Wilder-Dunst proposal to format, and I confirmed the meeting with...*

"Oh my gosh!" she exclaimed, throwing the covers off her bed and leaping up. "The ambassador for the L-Rond Corporation!" Racing to her closet to find an appropriate suit for the meeting, she broke off into a stream of mindless babbling about how she was done with drinking once and for all and couldn't believe this was happening—biggest account of her life—if *I blow this, there goes my chance at the vice president's chair—I have absolutely nothing to wear!*

"If it means anything to you, I called Naomi this morning and had your meeting with the ambassador pushed back to six o'clock this evening. You'll be meeting him for dinner at the Chez Carlton and making your presentation then."

Well, we did do the nose.
And the hat.

what is your guest?

Lydia emerged slowly from the closet and rested her weight against the closet door. "Did you really?" she asked incredulously. Stumbling to his side, Lydia planted a kiss on Hill's grizzled cheek and returned to her bed. "Wake me up at four if I haven't gotten up yet." With that, Lydia pulled the blankets over her head and went to sleep.

Hill grinned. *She's so much nicer when she's hung over*, he thought as he set the coffeepot on her nightstand and left the room, nibbling a pastry.

Lydia was surprised to find that she awoke on her own about four hours later. She rolled out of bed and went straight to the bathroom to shower. She disrobed slowly and looked at herself in the mirror. *Ugh, I am so disgusting. Look at these dark circles under my eyes. And my hair is so scraggly. And... oh my gawwwwd... is that cellulite?!* She turned her attention to adjusting the temperature and flow of the shower. It felt nice to stand under the flow of the water and let all of her cares just wash away.

Forty-five minutes later, Lydia emerged from the shower, a new woman.

"Hill!" she bellowed, throwing a terry cloth robe over her nude form.

The scurrying of elderly footsteps brought the wizened face of her butler into view. "Yes, Miss?" he panted.

"I want the blue Armani with the gray pinstripes pressed and in my room in 10 minutes. I haven't a moment to lose."

"But Miss, your meeting isn't until six. You have plenty of time—"

Lydia's eyes narrowed into two menacing slits. "Do *not* question me. If I say I haven't a moment to lose, then you better move," growled the lady of the house through clenched teeth. Hill crossed his arms and returned her glare, raising one eyebrow for effect. The staring contest continued for several moments before Lydia relented. "Please, Hill?"

"Right away, Miss," Hill responded with a smirk, fetching the specified suit from the closet and walking briskly out of the bedroom.

Lydia poured herself a glass of sherry from the decanter on her dressing table. *I don't know why I put up with that man*, she thought. *Hm. Maybe because I couldn't do without him.* She smiled to herself. Contemptuous as she was, Hill never cowered or relented.

But she's got a wart!

what is your favorite
color?



He was ever faithful, ever respectful, and ever trustworthy. He was like the father who she hadn't had in a very long time.

She sipped her sherry thoughtfully, recalling the last time she'd seen her parents. There was plenty of screaming involved in her departure from home—screaming, fighting, insults flying. Lydia replayed the scene in her mind. The last thing she saw was the glass in the front door of her parents' house shattering as she slammed it on her way out.

Gulping down the rest of the sherry, she poured herself another drink and sat on the stool in front of her dressing table mirror. Her hair was wet and matted. The shower had lightened the circles under her eyes, although the circles hadn't disappeared completely. She thought she looked very old.

One Tudor mansion, one house in Nice, two limousines, three Benzes, a fleet of sports cars, sixteen servants, and thirteen years later, she was more miserable than she had ever been while living with her parents at home. She had no family now—she'd abandoned them all, trading them in for a shot at being on the cover of *People* magazine.

When she left home, she had with her only what she could fit in one suitcase and all the money she'd received in graduation cards. She was only seventeen. But she wanted never again to be controlled or dominated by anyone. She continued attending the Warner Junior College she'd spent her senior year attending as an early admissions student. Luckily, she was granted a full scholarship by the state, meaning that she would not have to worry about the costs of tuition or books until after she finished her Bachelor's degree. Since she already had a job as a waitress at a high-class restaurant and quite a lump of change in her pocket, she was able to move in with her friend Danielle and share living expenses with minimal distress. Her newfound freedom thrilled her, and she hardly knew what to do with herself.

Lydia had lived a very sheltered life and was therefore curious about all she had missed. While partying became her favorite pastime, she was still able to make excellent marks in all of her classes. A promising business major, she fell under the tutelage of the Chairman of the College of Business at the university, a Mr. Ronald Greys. Before long, romantic interest developed on the part of Mr. Greys, and Lydia indulged him for the sake of getting ahead of her class. As a reward for her

What makes you think
she's a witch?

I am Lancelot of Camelot.
I seek the Holy Grail.
Blue.

compliance with his wishes, Mr. Greys arranged for many extraordinary opportunities to cross Lydia's path. She was even able to land an internship with a major marketing firm called Sunrise Central in the city.

Lydia's affair with Mr. Greys ended abruptly when another student entered Mr. Greys's office late in the evening, hoping to find that his employment recommendation would be finished in time to have it postmarked the next morning. What that student found instead was Mr. Greys sprawled out on his office couch in the arms of a fetching (and shirtless) young brunette. The shocked observer recognized the girl who scrambled for her top as the one who had always scored just a few points higher than him on every test in the business classes they had concurrently attended.

It did not take long for the board of directors to relieve Ronald Greys of his position at the university. Lydia was neither surprised nor heartbroken. She'd done what she had to do to get where she was, and she thought she'd never regret it.

The internship at Sunrise Central led to a position in the marketing support department, where she was given the task of managing client accounts and cultivating business opportunities on their behalf. She was happy in her work, and even happier with her salary. At age twenty-four, through an accelerated program at the university, she was able to complete her Ph.D. in Marketing. Through the death of Sunrise Central's vice president in a freak car accident and several "chance encounters" with the CEO of the firm, Lydia was almost sure she would be promoted to the vacated position. During her four years at Sunrise Central, Lydia mounted success upon success and became well known for her heartless business savvy. If anyone knew how to make or break a business, it was Lydia Pierce.

"Here's your suit, Miss," Hill exclaimed brightly, shattering Lydia's quiet reveries. He hung the suit on a hook on the wall and produced for Lydia's enjoyment a plateful of cheese crackers. "And these are to hold you over until dinner. I've even covered them with that processed cheese food spread you're so fond of."

Lydia accepted the plate gratefully. "Thank you, Hill," she said quietly. "You may go now."

She turned me into a newt.
- A newt? -
...I got better...

STRESS CHECK QUIZ

39

1 Rate your stress level about an annoying or upsetting episode on a scale of 0 to 10: 0 not distressed at all, 2 a little distressed, 6 moderately distressed, 9 extremely distressed.

2 Rate the relative importance of the episode using the same scale: 0 not important at all, 2 of minor importance, 6 of moderate importance and 9 of major importance. If 10 is loss of life, for example, think how you'd rate the fact that you can't find your car keys.

3 Evaluate your stress behavior to see if you are overreacting to a situation. If you're running a 6 stress level to a 3 situation, what you're saying to yourself is probably making you more stressed. You'll want to change your self-talk. For example, tell yourself, "I will find my keys, and, if not, I have a spare set in my desk drawer." Once you see the difference, you'll realize much of stress is self-created.

Allen Elkin, Ph.D.

(more)
Helpful tips for
Living

bring back the romance

KNOW EACH OTHER'S DESIRES.

Often people don't have the faintest idea what gift or gesture their mate would truly appreciate, so ask. Janowitz suggests daydreaming with your husband about romantic adventures, then fulfilling them in little ways. For example, if you imagine escaping to Tahiti, get some fresh tropical flowers for the bedroom.

INCORPORATE DAILY INTIMACIES.

Couples with kids are likely to spend only a few minutes each day sharing meaningful conversation. Even if you're tired, try to find a few extra moments to look into your mate's eyes and talk about what was important in your day.

THINK SMALL. A thoughtful effort or gesture can mean just as much as an

expensive gift. Bringing home a card "just because" or remembering to fill the gas tank are little things that make our partners feel special and loved.

SCHEDULE TIME TOGETHER. Busy couples can sometimes go weeks without sharing uninterrupted private time, so Janowitz advises couples to build "dates" into their calendars. Maybe once a week, maybe more—whatever the frequency, plan for a babysitter and turn off the phone so you can reconnect in a quiet, personal way.

GET OUT OF THE RUT. Simply changing age-old routines can send sparks flying. Now and then on a Friday night, make a reservation at a restaurant the next town over. Or rather than calling your husband at work, fax him a love note.

Cris Beam

Helpful tips for Living

(yet another)

Pay Attention!

Cervical Cancer

what it is

A malignant tumor that begins in the cervix, the entrance to the uterus. There are nearly 13,000 new cases in the U.S. each year. Detected early, it's one of the most successfully treatable cancers, with survival rates at around 95 percent. Since the introduction of the Pap test in the 1940s, mortality rates have dropped by more than 70 percent.

SYMPTOMS

In its earliest stages cancer usually does not have symptoms.

Signs of invasive cancer may include abnormal bleeding (between periods, after intercourse

or after menopause) and increased vaginal discharge.

Signs of advanced-stage cancer include loss of appetite, weight loss, fatigue and back or leg pain.

risk factors

- Exposure to certain sexually transmitted diseases, such as genital herpes and human papilloma-virus (HPV)
- Early sexual intercourse (before age 18) or having multiple partners or partners who have had

multiple partners

- Smoking, since its carcinogens may be toxic to the cervix
- Being a DES baby (your mother took the hormonal drug diethylstilbestrol, which was once thought to prevent miscarriages)

TREATMENT

Depending on your test results, age, health and previous Pap tests, your doctor may recommend the following:

- Repeat Pap test in three to six months
- Colposcopy, an examination of the cervix using a specialized microscope
- An HPV test
- Removal of abnormal cells by various surgical procedures,

including LEEP (loop electrosurgical excision procedure), cryosurgery (destroying tissue by freezing) or laser surgery

Invasive cancer usually calls for surgical removal of the uterus, sometimes in combination with radiation or chemotherapy. A woman who wants to bear children may be able to have surgery that removes the cervix but leaves the uterus intact.

Don't become a statistic!

John Jacob Jingle - heimer Schmidt...



Chapter 7

The ride to Chez Carlton seemed very short as Lydia crammed for her presentation. Her mind was refusing to absorb even the smallest bits of information, like the gender profiling of *Funlandia* and the yearly net sales it made. *For Pete's sake, Lydia, the numbers aren't even that big!* she scolded herself. *Funlandia. What a stupid name for a business, even if it is a kids' restaurant.*

The L-Rond Corporation was interested in the land on which *Funlandia* lay and was prepared to give Sunrise Central a great deal of money to convince the owners of *Funlandia*, Mr. and Mrs. Pete Mason, to close their doors. As Lydia had been dealing most closely with *Funlandia's* owners, the task fell on her to do the dirty work and bring in the huge commission that she and her firm would inevitably receive from L-Rond. Lydia couldn't have accepted the task with more enthusiasm if L-Rond had thrown the continent of North America into the deal.

"How's the cram session going?" piped a voice from the driver's seat.

"Fine, Barry, just fine. And I'm not cramming. I know this stuff really well...I just can't remember any of it!" She chuckled nervously. *I'm screwed*, she thought.

"Well, I'm sure you'll do just fine. I'm sure the ambassador and his committee will be completely enchanted with you. Especially if you leave your top unbuttoned that far."

Lydia looked down at her chest. "Too much cleavage? Now how on earth would you notice that from way up there?" she jested.

"You're supposed to be nervous, remember? Nervous people aren't allowed to pick on their drivers," Barry commented with a half-smile.

"I'm just so nervous. My brain is turning to mush. Don't you dare think I was flirting with you," she responded with her usual cutting edge.

Barry rolled his eyes. He'd never met a woman so fickle as Lydia Pierce. One minute she was your best friend and the next minute, she was a—

His name is my name, too!
Whenever we go out
The people always shout

JOHN JACOB

JINGLEHEIMER

"Hey! Where are you going? You're supposed to be taking me to Chez Carlton!" she exploded, slamming her hand against the window as they passed the restaurant. "I can't be late because you want to play some stupid game! We already postponed the meeting once, and we can't—"

"Relax, lady. Limo parking is around the other side of the building, in the back. I'm dropping you off at the door on my way over. Is that okay with you?" Barry nearly shouted.

"Oh, well... that will be fine."

I don't hear any apologies, Barry thought snidely. *But am I surprised? Hardly.*

"Jeez, you act like I've never driven you here before," Barry said as he brought the car under the awning over the front door.

"Well, we brought a Benz those times. Apparently, they are parked elsewhere. Why did we bring a limo this time?" Lydia asked as the vehicle came to a stop.

"I don't know," Barry said, throwing his door open, getting out, and walking around the car to open Lydia's. "I just felt like it. People stare more when a limo goes by than when a Benz does."

Barry took Lydia's hand and helped her out of the car.

"Whatever. Wish me luck," she said as she went into the restaurant.

I hope you fall flat on your face, he thought with a smile and wave.

* * * * *

Inside the Chez Carlton, Lydia found the dim lighting pleasing to the remnants of her hangover. The Maitre D' was expecting her and showed her to the table where the ambassador and his committee of four. They were all sitting silently, looking very impatient. Lydia stole a glance at her watch. *I'm ten minutes early,* she noted. *Why do they look like I'm an hour late?*

"Good evening, gentlemen. I apologize if I've kept you waiting long. I am Lydia Pierce. I'm representing Sunrise Central," she said as clearly as she could, making certain she betrayed no sign of the previous night's revelries.

"Good evening, Miss Pierce. We hope that you've recovered from your illness and are ready to negotiate," the short, rotund man in the middle, whom she took to be the ambassador, said.

"I certainly am," she replied, holding out her hand to shake his.

JOHN JACOB

JINGLEHEIMER

JOHN JACOB

4 3

JINGLEHEIMER

"I am the ambassador for L-Rond Corporation, Frederick Miller" the little man said, taking her hand firmly. "You may call me Fred. These are some of my associates: on my left, Gaylord Johnson and Amos Levy; on my right, Saki Miguri and Ralph Sanders," Fred continued, gesturing to each man with his hand.

Lydia ordered a bottle of red wine for the entire table. When the bottle arrived and the waiter had filled the glass of each person at the table, Lydia found that it was all she could do to keep from gulping the whole glass down at once.

The entire table sat in silence for nearly five minutes. Lydia wanted to be the first to speak, but nothing ice-breaking was coming to her mind. With other deals of this nature, all she had needed to do was be coy and sexy, and her clients were drawn in without a fight. But this little man and his coterie...coy and sexy just weren't going to cut it. She had to put on an intellectual face, a business face.

"Let's get down to business," Lydia said, then changed her mind. "No, let's order first." She summoned the waiter, who informed them that the chef's special that evening was flame-kissed filet mignon with asparagus tips. Lydia decided that that dish sounded delightful, as did her companions. The waiter returned moments later with plates of bruschetta and tiny salads full of various weed-like vegetables.

When the salads were finished, Lydia began her presentation.

"I feel that there is a great deal of hope in Funlandia closing down. I've been working with them for almost a year now, and their profits are on a steady decline. It won't be long before upkeep bills exceed their income," she explained, bringing a spreadsheet and other graphs out of a manila folder she had in her briefcase. She explained to the ambassador, in depth, the details of *Funlandia*: the Masons, *Funlandia*'s owners; its history; its present financial situation; and its poor outlook for the future. When she began to tell him about the employees, he cut her off.

JOHN JACOB

JINGLEHEIMER



SCHMIDT!

I know, this isn't humane! ☺

"This is all very well, Miss Pierce. I'm impressed with your information and the organization of this presentation, but all that I'm really interested in is how you're going to convince those people to leave that property."

Lydia was taken aback. "Oh. Well. I suppose... I could just... well," she stuttered and stumbled over her words. She wasn't sure how to respond. She thought she'd presented all of the reasons *Funlandia* had to close. "*Funlandia* is going out of business, Fred. It's a dying company."

"Yes, but the small business owners are always the hardest to uproot. They feel a connection with their business. To them, it's not just a building with tables and chairs and video games and play areas. It's a way of life. People don't part easily with their way of life," Fred said, seeming to speak from experience. His voice was soft, almost rueful.

"Well," Lydia began, frankly shocked at the ambassador's sensitivity. "I'm sure we could make it worth their while. I mean, they're basically doomed to close down anyway. I'm sure they'd rather make a buck or two off the property than lose everything they've invested in *Funlandia*."

"You really don't understand this business, do you, Miss Pierce?" Fred shook his head sadly.

Lydia became indignant. "What do you mean? I think *you're* the one who doesn't understand this situation. I've been very successful in this business, and my success didn't come from being soft and emotional. People like the Masons have to be shown, sometimes forced to see that their assets are worthless."

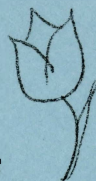
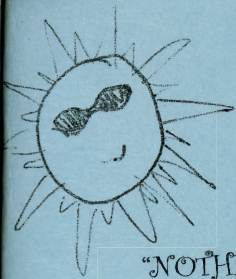
"Nothing is worthless if it means something to someone," Fred said with great emphasis, ending the conversation.

Dinner was brought shortly thereafter, and all at the table ate in silence.

This is not going well, Lydia thought as she pushed the asparagus around on her plate and let it roll off her fork. *Fred doesn't like me, I can tell. Lydia sighed. There goes my promotion.*

In order to understand the insanity which is "Maggie's Margins," one must see the following films: *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*
Rocketman
Return to Me

The Maggie ALIGHTLY recommends these films!



Meet the Maggie

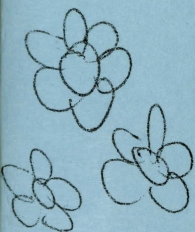
Anything I want you to know about me, huh? I guess "NOTHING!" would be an inappropriate response. I'm kidding.

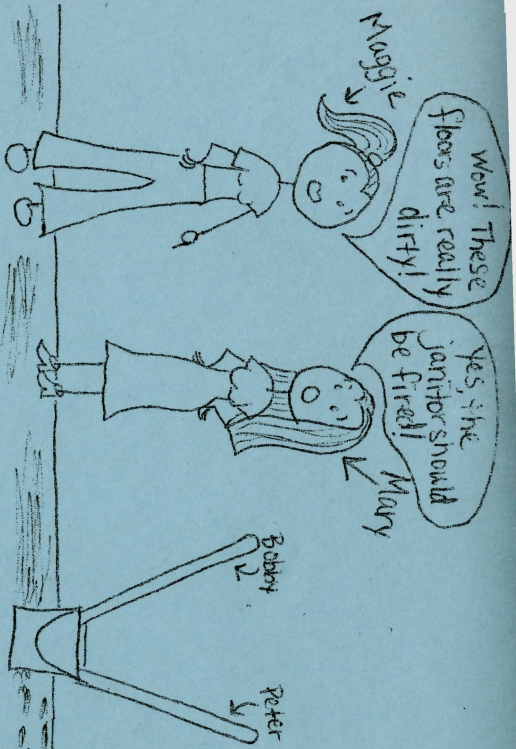
My experience with actual professional training in writing is quite limited. I, of course, have written zillions of essays and papers for various English and Humanities courses (I am a Humanities major, by the way), and I did have one writing class in high school, as I mentioned to you earlier. I do a lot of writing on my own, when I have time. I tried to start a novel once—actually several times—but my attempts turned into something akin to a Harlequin Romance, without the sex. I am taking this class to find out where the heck I'm going wrong! AND because I enjoy writing and this is my last semester of school before I get married.

I enjoy reading many authors, including Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Jane Austen, Douglas Adams...that's all that comes to mind right now. My writing often follows the patterns of these greats.

I am a strong reader—at least, I think I am. I am in my own estimation anyway. I am also, in my own mind, a relatively good writer, although I have a tendency to babble (as you've noticed!) and I sometimes experience difficulty with development of a main idea, as I become too wrapped up in subplots. I think that's it....

Oh yeah, I almost forgot! Contact me at: 632-1111 x.64082, 631-9300, or email me at [home gerbilsquirt@sysmatrix.net](mailto:gerbilsquirt@sysmatrix.net).





How to

by Maggie Fireene
and
Mary Hillebrandt

USE A MOP.

A satirical social
commentary on
AMERICAN
YOUTH



— These floors
look fabulous!

Well, you know
about mops: they
won't go away on
their own, so we must
use them until the
floor is as clean as
we like—then back
to the bucket
they go!