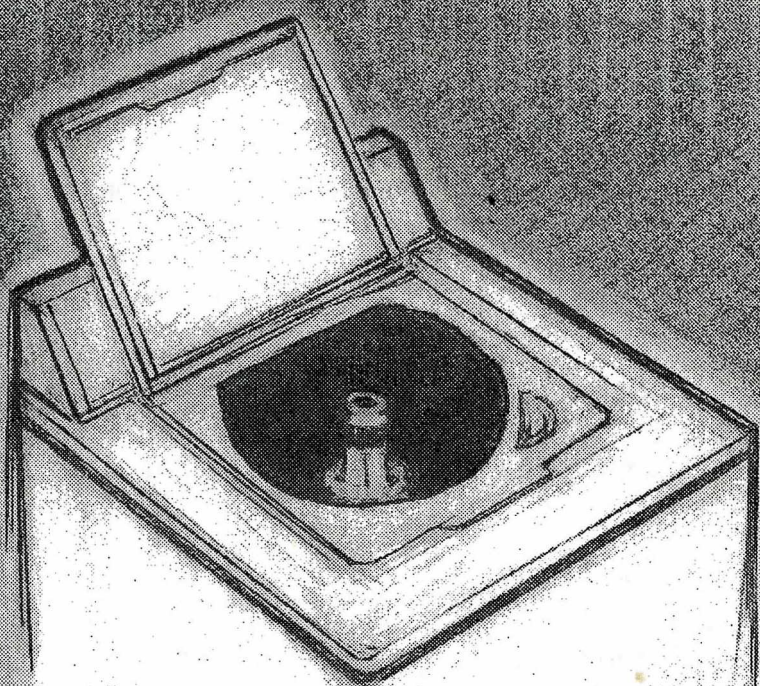


FREE

dirty laundry

where life is hung out to dry



dirty issue one laundry

Jason Feifer : editor/publisher

Kevin Tarasuk : illustrations

Dirty Laundry is a Worcester, MA-based magazine, standing on the premise that we are all, in the end, a revolving door. We love to take other people in -- to watch them, to imagine them, to wait until they're not looking and then shamelessly stare. And, we can't help but contribute to the awkward dance ourselves, with our own lives, our own indiscrepancies. We create this little cycle, of giving and taking, of wondering and being. There's nothing to be ashamed of. It's human nature. We are all curious, and we are all weird.

This magazine works both ways. In it, you will find letters. No, not like the alphabet letters, har har. They are open, anonymous, heartfelt letters, from people who have the need to say something but not the confidence or means to say it directly. So, they say it here, for you to read, because strangers are like sponges. In turn, you may enjoy these glimpses into lives you don't know, and if you are so compelled, this forum is here for you as well, to share yourself. Write and read. Learn and teach. It's a funny cycle.

We hope you enjoy.

NOTE: the names used in these letters are manufactured. they are fake. they are, indeed, not real. that's something you should know.

contact: dirtylaundry@happyscrappy.com

online at <http://www.happyscrappy.com/dirtylaundry.html>

you are encouraged to submit your own letters. please send them to the e-mail address above, with the subject "Dirty Laundry submission"

we care what you think. please write us. thanks for reading.

Young whippersnapper,

I wish I could be around when you're older. I would love to watch you, your tired eyes in shock at the way your body slowly fails. Your eyes don't change, you know. Your wrinkly eyelids will permanently close upon the same eyes, in the exact same size, that first popped open when you shot out of your momma's belly. That's why baby eyes are so wide. It's not because they're in awe. They don't know awe from shit at that age.

I hear the comments you make at me. I don't know how I always end up in your line at the grocery store, but then there you are, talking at me like I'm a retard. Old man this, geezer that. If I had the strength, I'd break your knuckles and give you an early taste of arthritis. You speak as if I chose this body, these rotting teeth and drooping cheeks. It's like you're scolding me for my bad decision, like God offered bodies and you, in your wisdom, took the young body, and I smugly took the old.

I surprise myself in the mirror every morning. I know myself from my memories, of times with the girls and the strength to fight a war. I wake up and I'm a little achy, but I was achy back then, too. Then I look in the mirror and sigh. I'm an old bastard. I know it. I know it all too well, and I don't need you to remind me.

Remember, I was your age, and you'll be mine. There's no going back for either of us, so soak it all in while you can. Scan those gal-

lons of milk with every fiber of your soul, because your muscle fibers won't help you put it in your refrigerator in 60 years.

Remember every girl you kissed, because you'll forget your own damn address soon. I don't know much about biology, but I know I'll be lucky if my body still exists inside my wooden box by the time you lose your hair. It's a shame. I wonder if I'd console you, or enjoy watching you suffer.

I act old because I am old. It's all I can do to keep myself happy. If I tried to do what I did at your age, I'd fall flat on my face and break a hip. Both are depressing, but at least one is more comfortable. I remember my young body, when I did things that would make you gasp. I talk of intimacy and you'd probably think of this wrinkly old cadaver,

but I was just like you. My skin

was just as tight, my reflexes just as quick.

I didn't lose those experiences; I just can't have them anymore. So cut me some slack,

child. You'll wish some young whippersnapper did

for you when you come to know what any of this means.

-Henry

*Age-old
advice
from
your ill-
respected
elder*



Michael,

I feel like a walking vagina. No, worse. I feel like a walking hole. A walking hole with two breasts. I know that's what you see when I walk into your apartment. I know you just humor me, ask me simple questions about my job and respond approvingly - "mm-hmm" - to cover your bases. I know you treat our conversations like anyone pays for groceries: you don't want to do it, but you feel it's necessary. All you want is the groceries, damnit, but getting them without paying? Well, in some upright, moralistic sense, that's just not right.

I'm writing this on the bus, because I know that in a few

hours, as I'm taking this same stupid bus back home, I'll be in no state for clarity. There's a drunk man in front of me, stinking like cheap wine, tucked away in himself to escape what, from the looks of his clothing, must not be a cheerful life. When I will sit on this bus, coming back from you, I'd be lucky to have the kind of clarity he does. His head may be spinning, but he did it to himself and at least he's close to the one who's to blame. Me, I'm not close to you. Physically, for a little while, I suppose I am. But I don't know you. I just know what you want.

This isn't the first time I've done this. There have been many more, you know. Many more who call me up, using any approach they think works. They're cool, they're demanding, they're sexy, they're uninterested. And each and every time, I fold. I get a little sense of being wanted, and as hard as I try, I can't turn it away. Then, I think about what I'm doing on this bus ride, and how I should just go back home, and how I shouldn't reward your insensitivity with love.

And then I walk into your place, and I look around, and I think that I'm just another hole. I'm your beer bottle, I'm your drain, I'm your vacuum cleaner. And I guess the only thing that makes me better than those holes is that mine is the only one you'll stick your dick into. And that isn't the kind of wanting I need, even if it's what we both expect.

The problem, Michael, is that for a few moments, you're so fucking convincing. They were all so fucking convincing. And then you're done. They're done. And I'm back on the bus.

-Cynthia.

On

this

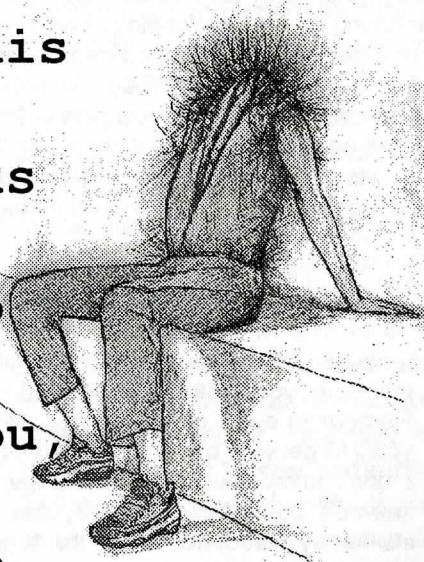
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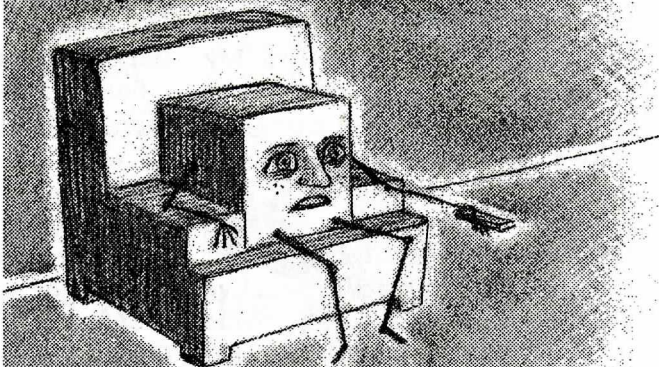


Mitch,

So what if I'm not a normal college roommate? I think I am. I think I'm quite courteous as well, unlike you, who I suppose considers himself to be quite the normal college roommate. I clean the room. I put my things away. I keep my noise levels to appropriate levels, I make my bed, I lock the door when I leave, I don't keep you up at all hours with the lights and click-click-clicking of an ancient, sticky keyboard. What have you to complain about? If left to your own devices, this room would smell like a dump, or like your laundry basket, which are often the same.

If you want to go around touching drunk girls, by all means, go back to their place. All I ask is that you don't bring them here, because I try to go to sleep before the sun comes up. I don't understand why that's so difficult a concept to grasp. Why do they have to come here? Why do you expect me to leave my room and my bed so that you can slobber all over some girl and grab her tit? Do you think you're going to find a meaningful relationship from those girls? All they want is to get drunk and get laid. It's so sketchy.

All quiet on-



**-the
homefront**

And don't think I wasn't awake when you and that girl got into bed last Saturday. I don't remember which girl it was, because all those party girls look the same, with their hair done up and their makeup and tight shirts. How do you decide which girl to go with, when they're all just drunk and stupid and completely indistinguishable from each other? Is it like fishing? Just toss your hook out, and whichever one is dumb enough to bite is the one you'll grope all night? Ugh. I just laid there, my eyes tightly shut, trying to ignore the slurping and rustling from across the room. That girl squealed like a pig.

I don't intrude on your life, so you shouldn't intrude on mine. Isn't that fair? I don't follow you around all day putting out the little cancer sticks that you and your friends suck on. You like parties, I like quiet. I don't go to your parties and tell you to quiet down, so stop coming to my quiet area and making it a hellhole. I am a normal college roommate. I don't do crazy things. What makes me so abnormal? Why would you say that? My parents are paying a lot of money for me to come here and study, so I'm going to do just that. Isn't that normal? Or do you think college life on Dawson's Creek is normal?

When you applied to college, did you ask about the academics or if there was a lot of pot on campus? What's more important? What the hell are you doing here anyway? I studied my ass off to get here, and the only education you're going to walk out of here with is one in alcoholism. If you don't like me as a roommate, go find another room. This one is mine. I spend more time in here than you do anyway.

-Ray

Jim,

My mother says I have a baby face, and my father always went light on me when we wrestled. My girlfriend and I never fight for long because every time I get angry, she starts laughing and says my "stern-look" isn't very convincing. So, I am perplexed by you, because you seem to be afraid of me. Clearly, it's not my something I've done. I've always been nice, I always say hello when we pass in the hall, and I don't even work in the same department as you, so you can't find me threatening to your job security. Like I said before, it can't be my face. Or, well, maybe it is. My Arab face.

I'm very torn here. Part of me wants to tell you that I'm more like you than them - and I hesitate to use that word. Them. Them, across the ocean, across the country, away in caves or suburban hideaways. Them, that you're afraid of,

that you've confused me with. Them, that I reference as people who are not violent like me, and Them, that you reference as people who are not white like you. But, by either definition, I am not Them. I was born here, in America, in Detroit. I don't speak Arabic. My parents, despite their thick accents, keep an American flag on their front door,

and remind me how lucky I am to have escaped their homeland. They feel lucky. I didn't do any escaping. I started out in this country.

But, no, I take it all back. So many pronouns. If I'm not Them, then I'm Us, and I know that we are not Us. We are not Us because you would never have it that way, and quite frankly, I wouldn't want it that way either. I do not fear other people because of their skin. I do not give them dirty eyes, refuse to hold the door for them, tell them "haven't you done enough already?" when they are only trying to be nice. I do none of these things, but you do. No, there is no Us. There is Them, there is me, there is you.

I was disappointed when I started to receive this treatment. I expected more of my fellow Americans. It makes me wonder who I prefer to relate to. Who has less hate, less ignorance? But I know I'm a part

of this country, that I belong in this building just as much as you do. And if I was from Pakistan or Afghanistan or India, if I had a thick accent and wore a towel on my head (I'm trying to speak your language), what would it matter anyway? Would it matter to you, or am I the same? Osama, your coworker. Saddam, your coworker. That must be how you see it.

I don't know what team I want to >>>



Culture-clash
of pronouns

be on. When someone joins one side, they create an enemy. I'm not Them, and I'm not Us, and it's because I can not relate to either. You're lucky, then, aren't you?

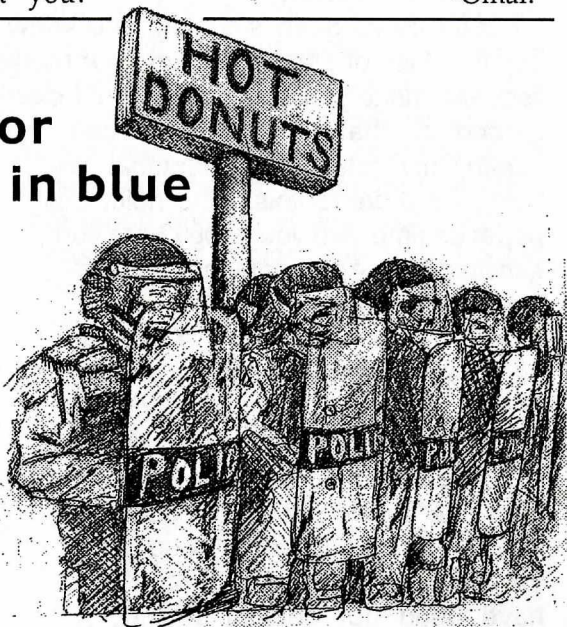
You've got a side. Ignorance just smooths out the rough edges, and if you're thankful for anything, I'm sure it's that.

-Omar.

A dark deal for the boys in blue

Mr. Officer,

For the record, I don't want to give you your coffee for free, but I feel forced to. One time, when I worked at another donut store, I charged a police officer for his coffee and donut. He gave me a look, slowly took his money out as if he was giving me a second chance to reconsider, and then slapped two dollars on the counter, took his stuff, and walked off.



The kicker isn't just that a police officer never stepped foot in that shop again, or that the bill was actually more than two dollars. No, the kicker was that the place was robbed one night. Luckily, I wasn't working, but I heard that it took the police a good 15 minutes to get to the shop. I don't know what happened to the clerk that was working that night. Nobody does. She just up and disappeared.

So, I don't give you free coffee to be nice. I give it to you for the peace of mind of my co-workers, because I know that wherever that clerk is, whatever she's doing, it's my fault that she's the way she is. Well, maybe she moved up in the world, ditched selling donuts to fill some CEO's pockets and actually made something of herself. We can dream, can't we?

To be quite honest, you disgust me. You saunter in, you look around, and then you take what you actually think is rightfully yours. Protect the city, get a coffee. It's like a mob transaction, really. I give you something for free, and you'll come in for more. The more I give, the more you're here, and the more you're here, the less likely it is that some co-worker of mine will be attacked by some creep with a gun and the misconception that the cash register gets filled selling donuts and coffee at 2 a.m.. Then you'll get back in your car, turn the lights on, and run the red light, because you're above the law.

When you do that, I secretly wish that someone will be driving through the intersection, and you'll get in a bloody wreck. I doubt Jesus forgives me for that. If it happened, I wouldn't forgive myself either.

-Anita.

Y o u g a v e a n d t h i s i s w h a t i

Professor Assface,

I could have been sleeping, you know. They say that loss of sleep can hurt your metabolism and make you age quicker, but I disregarded all that - nay, I sacrificed my health, my future, my personal well-being - in order to finish your ridiculous paper on time. Are you happy? Are you satisfied yet? Apparently not, according to the grade I got.

And by the way, what a stupid paper assignment. I feel so servile, writing a paper and explaining things that have been explained a million times before. I know you know the answers to all the questions you asked. What good is answering them again? I could have been out helping society, answering the questions that haven't been answered, instead of wasting my time on what was going to be an F-paper anyway. Hell, I could have just been sleeping.

Do you even know how to give comments on papers? Using your scrawled suggestions as a guideline towards future paper success, I might as well just wipe a Smurf's ass with the paper before turning it in, because that's what it looks like after your blue pen vomited all over it. I should have guessed that you had nothing remotely constructive to say, considering your classroom discussion is as decipherable as an episode of the Teletubbies. And stop trying to make jokes, for



m e a n F

h a v e t o s a y a b o u t i t .

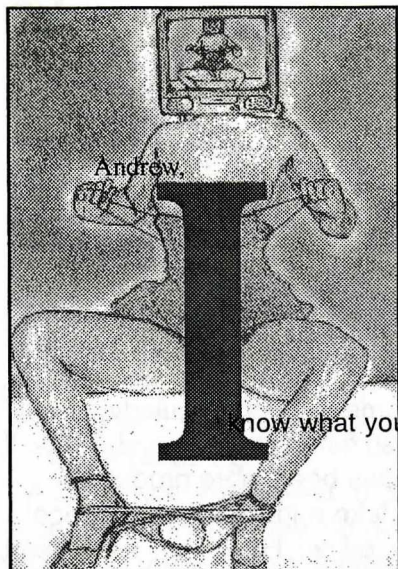
the love of God. Bob fucking Saget could out-funny you, and he's as entertaining as a canker sore. All your jokes just make class even more awkward, because we all think that we need to give you a courtesy laugh or else you'll fail us. Maybe that's it. Did I not laugh enough at your last joke? At least I come to class regularly. I could have been home sleeping, you know. It would have been more productive.

Man, take a look at all those books in your office! Have you even read those, or are they there just to make you look smart? There's a half a city library in there, and I bet you picked them all up at some yard sale as soon as this school made the mistake of giving you office space. And then there's that picture of your family on your desk. Your family is ugly.

I don't know who let you slip through the cracks and get a teaching degree, but they should be dragged into the streets and beaten for their crime against humanity. After your class, I will be dumber. My parents paid thousands of dollars for me to attend this class of yours, and their money could have been better spent if they bought a donkey to kick me in the head until I internally bled. Please, do us all a favor and quit your job, move to a log cabin in the woods, and then do nothing but eat figs until you virtually poop out your internal organs. Or you could just give me an A. It was a good paper, damnit. Do you even know how to read?

-Your favorite student





THINGS THAT DON'T GO BUMP IN THE NIGHT

I know what you do when I go to bed. I'm not stupid, you know. When I go to bed, you crawl out from the covers next to me, sits down at the computer, and look at porn. Just look. Stare, really, with the bluish glow of the computer casting a hideous shadow of your big head on the wall behind me. You hardly move, except to bring up the next photo. You just stare. It makes me sick. Your blank, unfulfilled stare could make the girls in those images cringe. Whatever made them do what they do, it wasn't with you in mind.

I lie there awake, sometimes looking, sometimes not. Either way, it's impossible to escape. You want to know why I sometimes fall asleep so fast? I will it. I will myself to sleep so that I'm not awake when you go crawling to your computer. How are these girls attractive to you? How many photographs of breasts do you need to see before they look the same? These aren't girls. They're a collection of little dots on your screen, arranged to look like a girl that took her clothes off for a couple of bucks. I'm sure that girl then puts her shirt back on, goes home, and sleeps with someone real. She doesn't know you, or think about you, or wonder what you look like with your shirt off.

I have something in common with these girls: I am untouchable to you. They, of course, are untouchable because they're off living a life, content to let their images float around because of some lazies-faire philosophy they probably accrued the first time they got laid. The only thing I can't figure out is why I'm untouchable. I'm right here. Boys look at porn when they can't get their hands on the real thing, but I'm right there in bed with you, and you do nothing but a peck on the forehead and >>>

maybe a scratch on the back.

To be honest, I'm almost at the point where I don't want to be collected by your eyes the same way you store those girls, somewhere away in your brain marked something mature like "boobs" or "pussy" or something. I am beautiful. You told me that once, but you weren't the only one. I know I am. But when you stare at those girls, who somehow can capture your intertwined imagination and libido better than I can, I feel inferior. What's wrong with my body? Why are their breasts, frozen to a computer screen, better than mine?

What have they got that I don't? Is it because they're untouchable? It is because you can't get them? The only thing they have that I don't is an airbrush. Come to think of it, we do have something in common after all, those girls and I. We both don't have you, but they're better off for it.

-Patricia

to the guy who looks like **Steve Buscemi**

Not-Steve,

You must get this a lot. I mean, not THIS. Not this letter in this open forum like this, this. But, I mean, you look like Steve Buscemi. A lot. It's really stunning, and I mean that in a good way. I'd imagine you're not so pleased with it, though. I'm sure that, given the chance to look like any celebrity, Steve Buscemi would have been low on your list. Who wouldn't want to be a Brat Pitt or Ben Affleck or, what the hell, a Jeff Goldblum? I know, I know. Steve Buscemi isn't in movies because



of his looks. Well, maybe he is, but he's cast to be creepy. I bet that when you think of Steve Buscemi, you see him in Billy Madison, his lips glistening in that all-too-freaky Buscemi way. I'm sure that's not pleasant. I can sympathize. People tell me I look like Ellen DeGeneres.

I'm sure you deny it when someone points it out. "No," you say, "I've never really seen it." But, late at night, your mouth foaming with toothpaste, tell me you don't stop and stare at the mirror, where Steve Buscemi is staring back at you. I do it. I lift my long blond hair up so it's short, put on the kind of smirk that isn't smug, and I think, "Well, maybe I do look like her." Then I try to think, who have I heard mention that Ellen DeGeneres is pretty? Who was it? Because if they said she's pretty, and I look like her, then maybe it's not so bad. I can't remember who said it, but I'm pretty sure someone did.

I know, nobody has told you that Steve Buscemi >>> is good looking. Being compared to him is probably an

insult, like being compared to dirt or a rat or one of the Ramones. (was that in bad taste because of their deaths?) But, I'm here to tell you, I love Steve Buscemi. I'd like to think of myself as a reasonably intelligent person, but I would scream like a schoolgirl with her pants on fire if I ever got near Steve Buscemi. That man is hot. He's hot, he's a good actor, and I think he's probably quite sensitive. I can see it in his face. There's no arrogance there, no convinced self-worth. I would kiss that man, crooked lips and all. I saw *Trees Lounge*, I loved it, and I'm not even from Long Island. Do you get my drift?

I know you're not Steve Buscemi. And I know that, if I were to ever kiss you, I wouldn't be kissing Steve Buscemi. That's not what I want anyway (although, and I don't mean this in an insulting way, I have a feeling you

wouldn't mind being used for your looks, since, really, when the hell does that happen?). I just want to tell you that we've locked eyes more than once, and I've probably seen you on the street more than you've seen me. I can pick you out of a crowd. Running into you once may have been a coincidence, but constantly? There's something there, not-Steve Buscemi. I want to get to know you. I want to talk, hang out, maybe something more. And if you look like Steve Buscemi, well that's just a bonus for me. But trust me, if we get along, I won't miss the looks when the lights go out.

What do you say, not-Steve? Do you like Ellen DeGeneres? Is there a Hollywood ending in us?

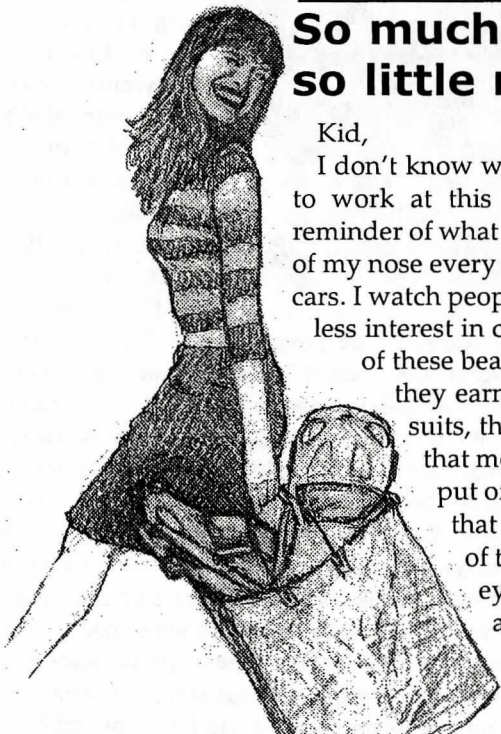
Love, Not-Ellen DeGenerous

So much horsepower for so little respect

Kid,

I don't know why I ever filled out an application to work at this dealership, but it is a constant reminder of what I lack. I dangle temptation in front of my nose every day. I sell sports cars. I love sports cars. I watch people far richer than me, and with far less interest in cars than me, drive away with one of these beautiful machines every day. I guess they earned it, though. They come in with suits, their skin a bit wrinkly, and I know that most of them worked and saved and put off expenditures, all for the moment that they meet with me. But at the end of the day, they drive away in a sleek, eye-catching bundle of horsepower, and I drive home in my rusty Accord. And I am jealous as hell.

I do a pretty good job of containing myself, I think. I >>>



never say to my customers, "I'd love to have one of these, but I can't because my stupid job won't ever pay me as much as you make." I sometimes stare at the cars. I run my fingers across their unrealistically frictionless bodies, and when the days are especially slow, I get in the cars and just drive them around the lots. It's like I own these things. I leave them in a lot, and come back to them the next day. It's such a good feeling to see them there, waiting for me. They go nowhere without me - well, until someone buys them, and reminds me of how little I have. These cars are like a long-distance girlfriend to me, or

like I'm a divorced parent with minimal visiting rights. I have them for a short time, but they'll eventually just go away.

And so, it kills me when someone like you walks into my dealership and drives away with one of my cars. You, with your rich daddy opening his wallet in the name of some fleeting, insignificant event - graduation from high school would be my guess. I wanted to tell you the wrong information, tell you to get an oil change every 15,000 miles or tell you to get the cheap gas. I want your car to be ruined, because you don't deserve that car. That car deserves better than you. You don't know anything about that car. Not

like I do. You probably want it to pick up boys, not because it rides like a dream.

I see kids like you come in every so often, and it always sets me boiling. But, you were different. You were worse than them all. You acted so smug, like your daddy's money was your money, like you expected - no, like you were OWED - this car. You don't know what accomplishment is like, or struggle, or longing, or appreciation.

You want something, you get it. That's what you know, and that's how you operate. You treated me like I was just standing in the way of your car. Your car. As if your car was parked here all

His wallet
is his *leash,*
— but he never —
tightens.
his grip.

along, like it came out of the factory with your name on it, and I was just guarding it here. All along, just waiting for you to come in.

You didn't even walk with your daddy. You walked ahead of him, you spoiled little shit. He trailed behind you, one hand in his pocket, probably holding on to his wallet. His wallet is your leash, but he never tightens his grip. You get what you want, whether you care about it or not. That car isn't yours for the taking. It isn't fair, but you could care less. I should quit this job, because look this is what happens to me, over and over again: My cars can be yours, but they can't be mine.

-Joel.

**Re-
peating
yourself
like
clock-
work**

Dave,

I know you clocked your watch. You've told me. You told me the first day I met you and, as far as I can remember, every day since. I can repeat the story verbatim. I've thought about saying it along with you. It is burning into my memory, somewhere next to the instructions for the oven and not

talking to strangers. You clocked your watch. You were running, your pocket watch flew out of your pocket, and you accidentally punched it, permanently shattering the bone in your pointer finger. "And get this - the doctors said that the chances of this happening were the same as me winning the lottery. So, I say, I should play the lottery every day!"

You do say that, don't you. You do. Every day. You don't play the lottery every day, though. No, that's just a bad punchline. But you do, in fact, say that you should play the lottery every day. You say it when you sit down at the keyboard. You say it to everyone you meet. You say it when you bump your pointer finger into a desk, which, I might add, happens every day. You are relentless. You are incessant. Insistent. Unrelenting. You get my point.

The only thing more annoying than people like you are people who talk about their accidents for pity. People



who talk about their broken hip every time they get up from a chair. People who discuss the bounty of pills every time someone invites them to the bar. These people. These people just can't keep it to themselves. They talk about it all the time. And so do you, but the only difference is that you think it's a joke. You clocked your watch. How ironic. How mildly amusing for an introductory topic of conversation.

What is it about this situation that you can't get over? Is it the clever play on words? Is it the injury? Is it both? What would have happened if, say, you clocked a tree? Would you tell us this story every day? The doctors wouldn't have told you that lottery bit, because it's probably a lot more common for people to punch trees. Well, on second thought, no it isn't. Just idiots and Republican anti-environmentalists punch trees. So, I suppose you would punch a tree, too. You'd need a different punchline, though. "And get this - the doctors said that the chances of this happening were the same as me eating lunch today. So, I say, I'm on a hunger strike!"

Oh, I wish. I wish you would wither away. Although, you'd probably just tell us all about that, too. Over and over and over again, until you've talked yourself to death.

-Shannon

Third-floor tenant,

I've never met you, but while living above you in this ramshackle apartment, we have shared too many intimate moments. I have watched television while hearing you moan. I have eaten dinner while hearing your girlfriend squeal. I have gone to sleep to the soothing sound of muffled conversation such as "Oh god, yeah" and "I want you so bad." One time, as I was getting dressed for work, I heard a smack so loud that there is no doubt someone's ass gained a permanent handprint.

Don't get me wrong, here. When I signed my lease, I applauded the free heat and cheap rent, but being within earshot of the squeakiest bed in New England was not part of the deal. Do you even leave that bed? I don't think I've ever seen you out of the house before. I'd shudder to see your mattress. I imagine a tattered

mess of fabric, its springs exhausted from being treated like an accordion, caved in, completely contoured to your body. I know women can have multiple orgasms, but my god man, you've either got an extremely rare gift or your girlfriend deserves an Oscar.

No, this is not the confessions of a pervert, thankyouverymuch. This is the plea of someone who prefers to live in an apartment where he is not surrounded by loud, unrelenting sex. It is really uncanny. Living room or kitchen, bedroom or bathroom, I can not escape it. One time, I brought a co-worker home for dinner, and after hearing you, she said, "I hope this isn't a hint." Morning, noon, night, dinnertime, lunchtime - it matters not, because the musical notes of your horizontal mambo know no rest. It is deafening sex. It is abrasive sex. It is get-me-some-ice-because-this-is-going-to-swell-afterwards sex. Hell, it isn't even sex sex. It is fucking.

Please, I beg of you. Stop fucking so loudly. It's not asking much. You're more than welcome to continue fucking. Fuck all you want. Fuck until the world runs out of condoms, and then fuck until you've birthed a population overload in Wyoming. Fuck until you have achieved a permanent state of fucking. Fuck until, well, I don't fucking know. Just, for my sanity's sake, turn down the fucking volume.

-Second-floor tenant



Love,

sans mute

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