

This is entitled

“MANUAL”

A COLLECTION

of

WRITING BY:

MAGDALEN POWERS

MICHAEL BARRISH

JON ARMSTRONG

ROSECRANS BALDWIN

JASON GURLEY

ANDREW WOMACK

HEATHER B. HAMILTON

PAUL FORD

LESLIE HARPOLD

KEVIN FANNING

DENNIS A. MAHONEY

SCOTT DAVID HERMAN

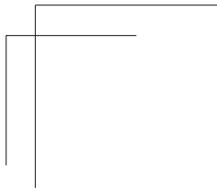
KEVIN GUILFOILE

GAIL ARMSTRONG

JOSHUA ALLEN

ALEXIS MASSIE

TOBIAS SEAMON



<i>Magdalen Powers</i>	3	On the Nature of Instruction, or: Note to Self
<i>Rosecrans Baldwin</i>	4	How to Build a Fence
<i>Heather B. Hamilton</i>	8	How to Unsuccessfully Woo Your Roommate's Future Husband
<i>Kevin Fanning</i>	11	How to Be the Good Son
<i>Kevin Guilfoile</i>	14	How to Explain the Rules of Cricket
<i>Alexis Massie</i>	17	How to Get Your Man to Propose
<i>Michael Barrish</i>	19	How to Show Your Work
<i>Jason Gurley</i>	22	How to Start a Dialogue With a Complete Stranger
<i>Paul Ford</i>	25	How to Take the Train
<i>Dennis A. Mahoney</i>	26	How to Make a Baby
<i>Gail Armstrong</i>	29	How to Skin a Cat
<i>Tobias Seamon</i>	32	How to Be Igor
<i>Jon Armstrong</i>	36	How to Yearn
<i>Andrew Womack</i>	38	How to Organize Your Record Collection
<i>Leslie Harpold</i>	42	How to Make Things Easier for Everyone
<i>Scott David Herman</i>	44	How to Keep Your Distance
<i>Joshua Allen</i>	45	How to Perform a Card Trick
CONTRIBUTORS	49	

On the Nature of Instruction, or: Note to Self

MAGDALEN POWERS

— 3 —

First thing you do is realize you don't know how to do anything really useful: start a fire with sticks, diagram French sentences (not English, only French), turn an omelet with a single flick of the wrist, spell words that no one ever uses, change motor oil (which, as anyone will tell you, is Simply Not Done At Home anymore). And even if you had something to convey, who are you to dictate motives or methodologies? Besides, what do they want to *do* with this information? Why are you *giving* it to them? To help them out? To feel superior? To hear yourself talk? To shut them up?

Consider the following: "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (Matthew 23:12). Try to weigh this against your intense dislike of and impatience with obsequiousness and/or waffling. Simultaneously recall that "activity" in tenth grade health class where each person got to anonymously write down one good trait and one bad trait about everyone else – where for you all the good ones were some variation of "cute" and all the bad some variation of "know-it-all." This was from the same teacher who

managed to make you phobic about cancer to the extent that, when you actually made it to your twenty-fifth birthday, you realized you had no idea what to do with yourself (there were other things at work there, too, lest we forget, but still): The perils of pedagogy.

And who are you to tell anybody anything? Aside from (yawn) imperfection, unworthiness, et cetera, there are books of all sorts, instruction manuals, diagrams, chain letters, adequate signage, flash cards – the Vulgar-Adjective Internet. A little due diligence, a little *attention, people*, and things could be figured out, such as: how to make persimmon ice cream (four Japanese persimmons through a ricer, add 2 tablespoons sugar, 6 tablespoons lemon juice, fold in 2 cups whipping cream, freeze), how to get to Rome (take any road), how many surrealists it takes to screw in a lightbulb (fish), how to say "purr" in German (*schnurren*).

Doing augury in the morning with the cat box: a universe in each lumpish turd. Do they really pee in the corners out of some deep psychological need, or is it just because they enjoy watching you try to excavate the litter later? You never can tell with cats.

How to Build a Fence

ROSECRANS BALDWIN

— 4 —

‘Will you me get a rake?’

Mike was on his hands and knees, unraveling a spool of white plastic fence. Sweat was coming through the back of his shirt. His knees pinned down the front lip while he pushed the roll down the driveway like a carpet, then stretched himself out on the mesh so it wouldn’t curl up as he pushed out the rest. When Katie came outside with the rake, he was laying down on their gravel driveway, his arms fully outstretched.

‘Pinning it down doesn’t mean you win,’ she said, laughing, and stood on the fence by his feet.

He stood, wincing as the fence rolled up underneath him and snapped against her leg.

‘Just let it go,’ he said.

‘It doesn’t make any sense to open it here – the plant’s around back.’ She stepped off and the fence sprang away, rolling down the driveway with Mike running after it.

‘That was my idea,’ he said, dragging it around the side of the house. ‘Look,’ he pointed at the ground between them. ‘Where do these weeds come from? One week I get rid of them, the next week they’re back with friends.’

‘You’d think they had something against you.’

‘That’s what I’m saying.’

‘Well, don’t tell me; tell them.’

‘Will you get us something to drink?’

Mike dropped the fence around the corner and knelt beside a tomato plant he

planted there the same day a year before. Rabbits had gotten the fruit again, so there was only the stalk, healthy but with nibbled leaves, tied in places to a green bamboo stick. He turned over a twisted leaf, handling it as one might touch a sick person. It had been a hot July, and as he raked a circle around the plant he stirred up brown clouds of dirt.

‘I brought you apple juice.’ She had two big glasses – marbled plastic cups with flowers inside the casing – with water from the condensation dripping off her fingers. Mike took his glass and drank half, only to spill a good portion down his front.

‘Jesus,’ said Katie, smiling as she blotted the juice with a napkin. ‘You always...’ She pulled her hand away and stared at the widening spill, watching it closely. ‘Oh Michael,’ she said, and sat down against the side of the house.

He looked at her and pinched his nostrils to release the pressure in his ears; she was probably thinking of David, he couldn’t be sure.

Katie drank some of her juice. ‘You know, I could help you with this.’

‘I know.’

‘Well, then let me help you; you don’t have to do it alone.’

‘Hey, I don’t need help. It’s a small project. Look at these,’ he said, picking up a handful of bamboo stakes from the ground. ‘All I have to do is stick these in a ring around

the plant, then I wrap the fence around that and tie off each post. You see? Nothing gets through.’ He pushed one of the stakes into the ground, adjusting direction when he hit a rock.

‘You haven’t stopped the weeds. You’ll have to take it down to weed it.’

He looked at her. ‘What?’

Katie sighed and shook her head. ‘Do you remember when you bought this place?’ She looked down their road to a neighbor’s old, rotting barn, built right against the street. The wooden frame was collapsing, stripped by the weather to ashy panels; the roof had caved in from too many snowfalls.

‘I remember you crying when you first saw it. You were already pregnant.’ He pulled back his hair, wet with sweat, with one hand.

‘I’d taken the bus up from Boston,’ she said. ‘I don’t think I was even out of the cab before I was crying. It was such a horrible shock – and I saw it coming. You’d had this strange tone on the phone all week, like you’d found some lost paradise. Do you remember that first day? It was really hot, just like this.’

‘Sure, it was June.’ He picked up all the stakes and then put them down one by one, measuring the distance between holes by imagining a clock, its circumference, one stake on every hour, with five steps in between. He was at six o’clock now, with five hours behind him, six ahead. ‘I’ll need those ties.’

‘No. It was July eighth,’ she said. ‘Are you even listening?’ She grabbed his back pocket but he shook her off.

‘Yeah, but I’m trying to focus here.’ He had to concentrate; he had to remember to make the measurements. There was eight o’clock, five steps, there was nine. This is how you build a fence. He knew she considered the fence trivial – a small hurdle for nature, she’d said – and that she didn’t see why she shouldn’t interrupt him, but to explain to her otherwise was impossible. It

was a fact of their marriage that at some unmarked point in the last year they had both seen where one of them ended and the other began.

‘David was the only one who ever enjoyed this house. Remember when he drew all over the walls in the living room? We were so angry.’ Katie shook her head and looked again at the old barn.

‘I wasn’t angry. You were the one who freaked out.’ Now ten o’clock. Five steps. Now eleven.

‘Freaked out,’ she said, laughing under her breath.

‘I think we’ve had this conversation before.’ He stuck in twelve and stood up, smiling like he had a secret, and wiped his forehead, picked up the roll of fence. She looked at him and he regretted the smile, just as he fought to enlarge it.

‘It’s amazing how little you remember,’ she said. She retied her ponytail and walked off.

‘Kate,’ he said, half-heartedly. A nervous twitch, like a motor starting up, began in the bottom of his chest. Nothing had been accomplished; the lawn was littered with attempts.

‘I’ll get the ties,’ she called without turning.

‘Look,’ he said, ‘I’m sorry.’ She stopped, and he fought for words, for what would console her. ‘You’re right,’ he said, his hands full of the fence.

‘You don’t listen,’ she said, facing him.

‘Now wait,’ he said, but she had already squeezed through the half-open door. He waited, watching; he hated her for keeping him from work, but he waited, because it was his job. A minute went by and she wasn’t back. What should he have said? He felt tired, like his father, always ready for a nap. He clapped his neck and wiped off the sweat, then pulled up his collar to keep from getting sunburned. The fence tried to expand in his arms.

The first stake threaded easily through the

fence, the second the same. On the third he had just threaded the tip when the first came loose and the wobbling fence pulled out his stakes.

‘Shit,’ he said, and pressed his fingers against his eyes.

‘Here they are,’ said Katie, her hand under his chin with the plastic ties. He scooped them out and stuck them in his pocket.

‘What you were saying,’ he said, ‘about listening –’

‘No, let’s not; not today. Let’s just try and remember what was good.’ She reached down and touched the tomato plant on its head and looked on for a moment. ‘Happy birthday, little plant,’ she said. He looked up and heard it again in his ears, not as an echo but somehow in his own voice, as if he were the one who had said it.

‘Don’t,’ he said.

‘Don’t tell me what to do.’

‘Please,’ he said, ‘just not like that.’

‘Mike – it’s his birthday.’

‘I have to finish this fence,’ he said, and picked it up again. He could hear her say something else but he willfully ignored it, looping the first six easy after pounding down the stakes, taking seven and closing on eight, and he knew – he could feel it, in the blood inside his hands – that the fence could snap any time, but he also knew it wouldn’t if he was careful.

‘Mike, just leave it alone. Put it down; it won’t stand.’ She watched him delicately thread the eighth, testing the circle’s tension with a finger, then the ninth, the tenth, the posts behind him slowly bowing towards the plant. ‘Look at it; why won’t you look – see, it’s not working!’ One of the stakes had nearly slipped the hole but Mike caught it in time and pressed it through again; He was looking forward with only two more before twelve.

‘I said leave me alone.’ He got eleven, so close now, almost done.

‘It’s not fucking working,’ she shouted and yanked the fence so it flew up like a kite

with a wobbling tail, a few poles still stuck in the mesh. She let it go and they watched it wind up and roll away.

For a moment she cringed and his anger was defeated by her face – that she knew to expect his temper – but she straightened herself and stared at him, her eyes wide open and very blue.

‘I’m not sorry, Mike.’

‘Jesus, just leave me alone for a second.’

‘I won’t say I’m sorry. I just can’t understand you. Why don’t we go inside. You shouldn’t be alone out here. We can sit down – it feels weird by myself in there, like it’s not mine anymore. Please come inside, Mike. Mike, I don’t want to be alone anymore.’

‘I just need some time out here,’ he said, and fell to his knees, patting the ground by his ankle with one hand. ‘I’ll go in there later.’

‘Just come inside,’ she said, but stopped. He saw her leave but he didn’t care – he wasn’t being cruel, but he just couldn’t care, he didn’t understand her, not about one more thing, not when he still had so much to do.

Up close the plant was in worse health than it’d seemed: There were pale gray spots like mold on its skin, and the fruit stems had grown over with black and yellow crusts. He took one leaf and held it, then his eyes felt hot. He looked away, came back and squeezed the leaf between his fingers until the pulp stained his skin.

‘That’s your mother,’ he said quickly through a laugh. ‘She’s dramatic. I don’t know if you knew that. We’re fine; we’ve had a nice summer here so far and we’ll go to the beach one of these weekends.’ He was breathing heavily, drawing in the air through his mouth. He stared at the plant, the waxy green oil of its leaves. ‘Last week I picked up some more work, so that’s good, and I heard from your grandfather, he’s fine, wants to marry his nurse.’ He laughed a little at the ground, his eyes tearing up.

'It – it's not going very easy, actually, not very well, I don't think. I think I'm doing some things wrong. I've tried to do them right, and I almost do, but there's so many things. I'm there remembering and everything's around to remind me.' He stopped, closed his eyes. In his hand he felt a pile of dirt he must have dug up from the ground.

It was surprisingly cold and slightly wet. 'I'll have this fence up soon, I promise, I'll be done in an hour. And then – what. It doesn't get easier. I grieve and I grieve and we're all still here, and still, grieving's something you do by yourself. You can't grieve with anyone else. And she just won't forgive me for that.'

How to Unsuccessfully Woo Your Roommate's Future Husband

HEATHER B. HAMILTON

— 8 —

Amanda stands at the end of the hallway, shoulders shrugging and confused, looking at me across her wickedly crooked nose, a nose that on anyone else would look like a defect, but on her face completes an undeniably perfect collection of shapes.

He probably fell in love with that nose; he's gullible like that. At least I think he's gullible like that. I don't really know, so I only imagine he's like that, gullible and precious and everything I've ever wanted. I've never spoken to him, and have never caught him even moving his head in my direction.

But I can look at someone without moving my head, and maybe he tried that once. Maybe he stole glances at me. No one, especially me, can say for sure that he never stole glances at me. I've practiced stealing glances in the mirror, to make sure that it's possible to do without being detected, and I can report that it is indeed possible.

The first time I saw him I was walking a basket of dirty clothes to the laundry, a low-lit windowless room in the middle of the apartment complex. He had just finished a workout and was coming out of the weight room in the same building. I passed him, or he passed me, I couldn't tell.

For the next two months I went to the laundry room at the same time every day, taking the same path I'd taken the day I first saw him, hoping I'd catch him at the end of his workout. I eventually figured out that he preferred Tuesdays and Thursdays, occasionally Wednesdays, but never Fridays.

One Tuesday I left a dirty sock on the sidewalk just outside the weight room. The sock wasn't really dirty; in fact I'd washed it the day before. But I had to pretend that it was dirty just in case he found it, to make it seem as though it had fallen out of my basket.

I felt very foolish when he didn't notice the sock, having carried clean socks to the laundry with no intention of actually washing them. But it was Tuesday, I reassured myself, and he was going to be working out at the time he usually worked out, and a stray sock on the sidewalk seemed like a great idea.

On the following Wednesday I left two clean socks on the sidewalk, and on Thursday I left three. In a matter of weeks I was leaving fifteen clean socks on the sidewalk, all in strategically determined positions.

He never noticed the socks, never asked why I was carrying clean socks to the laundry or why I had only dropped white socks. He never noticed that I like tube socks with red stitching across the toes, that I never left behind half-socks or black socks because I'm not the type of person who would own any. I'm the type of person who washes her socks in hot water and bleach, and throws them out at the first sign of an unraveling thread.

I thought he might like that about me, that I don't own any black socks. Somehow that makes me more feminine, more desirable. I can't imagine anyone loving a woman

who would voluntarily wear black socks.

Amanda wears black socks to bed. She owns several pairs of white socks, and I've seen her wear them once. But she likes to sleep in black socks. She's never tried to hide this, and even wore them in front of my brother when he came over one night to borrow something. I watched her open the door and smile and tell my brother that it was nice to see him. And my brother didn't say anything about her socks, didn't even look at them. But I knew he was just trying to be nice, trying not to look at her socks because she's my roommate and he didn't want to make her feel uncomfortable.

When she asked if she could do her laundry with me, suggested that it might be nice to have some company in that damp, windowless room, I panicked and choked and scrambled for an excuse:

"Yeah. I mean, um. No. I mean, I'm fine. I don't mind doing it alone. It's not that bad, really. I usually just take a book or something."

"But I wouldn't mind going with you at all," she offered, trying to help where she thought her help was needed. "I hate going down there alone. Besides, it can't be safe."

I didn't know how to refuse, so I just nodded. "Sure," I said, knowing that not only would I have to watch her black socks drown in a pool of bubbling detergent, but also that I'd somehow have to avoid the weight room.

The weight room and the socks and the sidewalk, those were mine. He was mine. Two months of pretending to wash clean clothes, of yearning and strategizing, of ceremoniously discarding tube socks, the ritual, all of it, mine.

As long as we stuck to Fridays, everything would be fine. I knew he never worked out on Fridays. If we did laundry on Fridays, we wouldn't have to avoid the weight room, wouldn't have to risk the two of them passing each other.

If we did laundry on Fridays, he would

never notice the way her green eyes match the first colors of spring, or the way her smile could silence a room. He would never know that she could cook fried chicken better than my mother, and that when she listens to music she bites her lip in rhythm with the bass line.

Amanda and I did laundry on Fridays, no matter how badly she needed clean clothes on Thursday.

"But I need this shirt tonight for choir practice," she'd complain, reminding me again that she could sing like a motherfucking bird. "Let's just do laundry today."

"We can't do laundry today!" I'd shriek, immediately catching myself and trying to remain calm. "I mean, everyone in the complex does their laundry on Thursdays. We'd have to wait at least a couple hours to get a machine. It's not worth it." She was easily persuadable, something that ultimately annoyed me as much as her black socks.

Four Fridays passed with only a modest amount of scheming. I continued to pretend to wash clean clothes every other day of the week, varying the sock-drop strategy by number of socks and frequency.

One Thursday after dropping twenty-two clean white socks in a small polygonal pattern on the sidewalk in front of the weight room, I sat in the laundry counting the minutes until I knew he'd be leaving the building. About two minutes into the countdown, Amanda came bounding into the laundry, covering her mouth with both hands to muffle her giggles.

"You'll never believe what just happened!" she said after catching her breath and jumping feet first onto a washing machine.

"What? What?" I was horrified.

"I really needed a clean shirt for practice tonight and thought I'd come down here to see if there was an open machine. So I'm walking down here and almost trip over this huge pile of socks out there in front of the weight room. Socks!"

"Socks?" I ask, still horrified.

“Socks! Like, at least ten pair. So I decide that I’ll pick them up and take them to the lost and found, you know, because somebody is obviously missing some socks.”

“Obviously.” Maybe if I agreed with her the story would just end.

“So I’m picking up the socks and this guy comes out of the weight room. Oh my god! This guy, you would not believe this guy. He’s like straight out of Greek mythology, you know, and he sees me and says, ‘Don’t bother picking those up. They seem to pick themselves up everyday.’”

“They what?”

“They pick themselves up! Can you believe that? He says that whenever he comes out of the weight room he sees a pile of socks in the same place. It’s never there when he goes into the weight room, only when he comes out. He says he’s been laughing about it for months.”

“I guess that is kind of funny. Does he know whose socks they are?”

“That’s just it! No! It’s a pile of mystery socks. He says he’s kind of spooked. Anyway, neither of us can stop laughing. You should hear him laugh. It’s so cute, like

a seal or something.”

“Like a seal.”

“Yeah, and he asked me out for tomorrow night! Can you believe it? I wonder why I haven’t seen him around here before. He’s not someone you could miss, you know?”

I knew. Every pair of sock I owned knew.

I also knew that he’d notice that she laughs with her shoulders, that she opens plastic bags with her teeth, that she looks at you in the eyes when you need her to listen, and that she wears black socks to bed. These are things about Amanda he couldn’t miss.

She’s standing at the end of the hallway asking me to believe that he hasn’t ever said anything about her socks, the ones she’s wearing right now, the black ones. If he had noticed the black socks he would have mentioned them, he would have been compelled to mention them. But he hasn’t. He’s never said anything about the black socks. She can’t understand how that matters, especially right now as she’s trying to tell me how wonderful the whole thing is, how it’s never been like this.

“He really notices things,” she says.

How to Be the Good Son

KEVIN FANNING

— 11 —

My mother was lying in her bed. I think one of the machines connected to her was beeping. She was just staring quietly at the window for half an hour until she finally asked “The curtains aren’t Jell-O?”

I was sitting in the chair by the foot of her bed, but she didn’t move her eyes, didn’t look at me to acknowledge the question she’d left hanging in the room. I waited, growing impatient and nervous and frightened in the eight seconds before Leslie Clapton, hair in a tight bun, swept forcefully into the room, saying “No, no no. We found this new fabric in a shop on Holborne.” She stopped by the window and began running her hands delicately over one of the curtains. “It’s quite elegant, I think, and matches the couch much better. I hoped you wouldn’t mind, but I am your decorator, after all, this is why you hired me.”

She went to the bed and squeezed my mother’s hand. My mother squeezed back. It’s one of the few things she still responds to. Leslie looked down at her and smiled, adding “I do believe they even match your eyes, what do you think about that?” My mother smiled up at her vaguely. That was the biggest response we’d gotten out of her all week. I appreciated Leslie adding that bit about her eyes at the end. She was one of our best actresses, but I still made a note to remind her about her cues.

The first time my mother had a stroke it barely even registered. I noticed she sounded a little different on the phone one

day, and when I pressed her about it she said she was feeling not so good. I figured the flu or something. My brother, Jordan, said he didn’t notice anything, she was fine. The next day she felt a little worse though, so we had her checked out, and the doctor told us she’d had a stroke sometime over the weekend. They kept her at the hospital for observation for a little while, then sent her home.

She had her third stroke while she was in the hospital recuperating from her second stroke. They were both a lot worse. There was no sending her back home after that. She couldn’t walk anymore, and could only use one of her hands. She could barely talk after the second stroke, and even less after the third. When she did speak it was with great difficulty, and she forgot things: people’s names, whether they were alive or dead. It was like she had all the information stored in her head, it had just been misfiled. She understood food, she knew that she had to eat, but she’d put her fingers in the soup, or she’d tap at the chicken breast with a spoon or a straw.

She went right from the hospital to the nursing home, never went back to her apartment. She didn’t fight it, didn’t try to talk about it, but it was there, in her eyes. I would spend weeks with her in that room. I’d talk to her, tell her what was news with the family. Uncle Herbie finally got another dog, if you can believe it. Did I tell you Cousin Sarah dropped out of college? She’s

moving to California? Mom would nod once in a while, but hardly ever tried to respond. The nurses would come in and put her in a wheelchair for a while when it was time to change the bed. I'd push her up and down the halls, weaving around all the other old women in wheelchairs. Her physical therapists would come in and say what a great job she'd been doing, and I'd try to be encouraging, See Ma? You're doing great! Just keep up the good work. But she'd just frown a little and look at the wall.

This was a woman who raised two kids on her own, and now she was just this shrunken thing in a bed, probably hoping it would all end soon. She couldn't hold a pen, so the only way for her to communicate was to try to speak, but she could hardly do that anymore. She'd point to the door and say "There's cars with him?" and look at me like I was supposed to know what she meant. I'd say "I don't know, Ma, what do you need. Do you need the nurse?" And she'd look away, frustrated, and I couldn't tell if she was angry at herself for not being able to communicate, or angry at me for not being able to understand better what she meant.

Jordan was always busy, off doing something, work stuff. He hardly ever visited her, so I felt like it was all on me to sit with her, talk to her, be encouraging, make sure she was doing all right. But I couldn't do it all alone. It was too much for me. He wasn't going to help, so I got other people to.

There's a place in town called The Wallingford Playhouse. They put on a couple different shows each year. Oklahoma, whatever. I went during business hours one day to see the manager. I sat down with him and explained my situation. I wasn't sure how else to approach it. I'm not an artistic person. I don't normally associate with artistic types, I didn't have people in a rolodex I could just call up. The manager was so helpful and understanding. I gave him my number, and he said he'd pass the information around. I ended up hiring 10 people. I

didn't want too many –I was paying them– but I wanted enough people so we could do this around the clock if necessary. I didn't hold auditions or anything, that would have been way out of my league. Perfection wasn't important anyway. My mother, she was there, but she wasn't all there. I was just looking for people who could commit to this, and work with my mother, and let her guide them. So I just sat down with everybody to explain what I envisioned and figured if anyone started bugging me about their motivation they were out. Luckily no one did.

At the same time, we were moving my mother out of the nursing home and into my basement. Actors need space to move and think. And all the coming and going with the security there would have been a nightmare. My brother wasn't around much at this point, he said he had some kind of merger he was doing, plus his daughter had the flu so he had to spend a lot of time at home with her. This worked out fine because he would have just hassled me and argued with me about my plans anyway.

My original idea had been to move operations into the Wallingford Playhouse, just put her bed right up on the stage there because I figured that would be most comfortable for the actors. They had their dressing rooms there already. But the manager didn't love the idea. He had a crew in there building the set for Meet Me In St. Louis, I guess they had three or four scenes they had to build all the scenery for, and my mom's wires and stuff would have been too much in the way. A liability. That's what he told me, anyway. The basement wasn't too bad though, it's finished, paneling on the walls, drop ceiling, heat. Pretty roomy too, so I sectioned off a little area by the garage door for the actors to have. They could easily come and go that way, exchange notes on previous scenes, change costumes if need be.

I set up the largest part of the basement like her bedroom back at her apartment. I

brought over her dresser and night table, put her curtains up with a soft light behind them. Pictures of her and Dad when they were younger. We moved her in one night while she was sleeping. Pretty soon after that I was sitting with my mother and telling her how I'd almost gotten a promotion at work, except I wasn't 100-percent sure it was going to happen because of this new guy Arthur. He was kind of an eager young go-getter and made me look bad sometimes even though I had seniority. My mother turned her head and asked "Did Joshua leave the dirt there?"

I was about to gently remind her that we don't know anyone named Joshua when Camille Galant, who recently played the part of Mimi in a local production of *Rent*, came briskly into the room, carrying a vase of pink tulips. "Helen, I'm so sorry," she said, setting the flowers on the bedside table and sitting in the chair opposite me. "The traffic. Anyways, Joshua? With the dirt? No. Jordan was the one who dug up the whole backyard, said he was going to put in a pool for you. Remember? Even though you didn't want one? Kept insisting you'd love it once it was done, then you had to yell at him for three months to do something about that big hole he'd left in your back yard. Then, Joshua," she said, putting her hand on my mother's, "called those men and had them fill the dirt back in and put the yard all back together. Joshua. He was the good one."

My mother stared at her for a second, trying to put all the names together, then smiled and nodded at the memory. Like I say, there's no Joshua in our family but I was really glad that Camille made Jordan the bad son. I'd been telling the actors a little bit about how he never helped me out. Afterwards Camille just sat with my mother for a while, chatting about the weather and the news, which she made sound more pleasant than it was, until my mother fell asleep.

It went on like that for a few weeks. My mother said "Who had it this long before?"

and Robbie Cornwall (Iago, Estragon) did a hilarious scene about a botched haircut. A fragment like "The window kids," in the hands of summer-stock veterans Nina Eggertsdottir and Lucas Carlyle, became a touching remembrance of a family poodle struck down in its prime by a school bus.

But the best scene happened just a few days before Mom died. I was telling her about an idea for a trip to Atlantic City we could take when she felt better, and suddenly she said something in Yiddish. I hadn't heard her speak Yiddish in years, not since she and my father used to yell at each other when Jordan and I were really little. While I was remembering about that, Dana Wendlekin walked slowly into the room, followed by Jim Sargant, dressed up like an old man, and using his feet to pull himself along in his wheelchair. It was a scene where the old man was a neighbor of my Mom's, and he had had a stroke recently too, and Dana was his daughter who was taking care of him. Jim brought himself over to my Mom and started speaking to her in Yiddish. Mom didn't talk back much, but her eyes really perked up, like she was remembering something from a long time ago. While they were talking, Dana chatted with me about how her Dad was doing and how hard it was taking care of him by herself.

It just went on like that for a long time, us having our own nice conversation while Jim spoke Yiddish to my Mom. I was really enjoying Dana's company, she was very pretty and so nice to talk to. The thought crossed my mind that maybe she and I would start getting to know each other socially. I would at least tell her later that I wanted her and Jim to do more scenes like that, maybe have those be recurring characters.

After a while Dana told Jim that it was time for them to go, so Jim said a few more things to my Mom and then began pulling himself along out of the room. I saw my Mom watching how he did it, and when they were almost all the way out of the

room, my Mom, in the clearest voice I'd heard since before her strokes, said "Maybe I could learn to do that." It was like she was suddenly completely aware of her surroundings for that one moment. It was the only time it happened.

Sometimes my brother would come and visit, but not often. He would just read his Wall Street Journal and ignore the rest of us and what we were trying to do. "How much are you paying them?" he asked me out of nowhere one day. "Mom has no clue what's going on here, where she is, what you're doing. She's practically produce. How much is this costing you? How long are you planning on keeping this up? If it goes on much longer you're going to have to start selling tickets to this show."

He was right about the expense. I'd actually been taking a little money out of Mom's bank account to help make ends meet. It had been somewhat of a worry, and the thought of inviting an audience had actually crossed my mind. He turned to face Mom and said "Mom, I'm sorry he's doing this to you. I tried to stop him. You deserve better. You shouldn't have given him Power of Attorney." Which was such a load of crap, coming from him. Of course she gave me Power of Attorney, I asked for it and he was never around. But Mom didn't nod or smile at him, just raised her eyebrows a little bit. I think she knew what the real deal was.

How to Explain the Rules of Cricket

KEVIN GUILFOILE

— 15 —

You know the big tent at the east end of the county fairgrounds? Next to the show barn? Imagine it's an oval filled with 90,000 Pakistanis who love to watch pie-eating – who love pie-eating more than soccer – even though it seems to the rest of us that eating pie would be a fairly unpleasant reminder of British Colonialism.

OK. Got it.

The area where the table is, where the pie-eaters sit, is called “the pitch.” At either end of the pitch is a line marking “the crease.” Now, let's say that inside one of these creases, your pies are cooling on top of three sticks, which are called “stumps.” This contraption is called a “wicket” and there's a man attempting to knock the wicket over by throwing a ball at it.

Is he the other pie-eater, trying to ruin my pies?

No, the other pie-eater is on your team, and he's standing in front of his own wicket of pies at the other end of the pitch.

There are teams? That's weird. You don't usually see that in competitive pie-eating.

Right. So the guy from the other team is called a “bowler” and he's trying to knock your pies down before you can eat them. He throws with an overhand motion, releasing the ball before he steps into the crease, usually bouncing the ball on the ground to make it harder for the pie-eater to pick up. To protect your pies, you have a bat, and when he throws the ball, you swing the bat and try to swat the ball away. If you hit it,

you and the other pie-eater switch places and then you can eat one of his pies.

And I suppose he eats one of my pies.

Correct. And after you eat one, you switch places again, eat a pie, switch places, eat a pie, and so on until the other team throws the ball back into the pitch.

Do a lot of people get sick?

Sick? Why?

All that eating and running and eating and running. It seems like nausea would be a hazard.

Well, no. Not really. I'll get to that in a minute.

Sorry.

That's OK. But if you miss the ball with the bat, and the bowler knocks over your pies, you're out, and another pie-eater from your team takes your place. You can also be called out if the other team catches your ball on the fly, or if the ball hits your body and the umpire rules that it otherwise would have knocked over your wicket. This is called “LBP,” or “Leg Before Pies.”

I see.

After ten of your players are out, your “innings” are over, and then it's the other team's turn.

And whoever eats the most pies wins?

Sort of. This is one way in which cricket is different from pie-eating. Pie-eating, as you know, is pretty much all about the pies – how much pie you eat, how fast you can eat it, that sort of thing. In cricket, you're trying to score “runs” and you can do that by consuming pies, but also by hitting the

ball across designated boundaries.

OK, I think I understand.

Great. Now all you need to do is imagine that there are no pies, and that the whole thing goes on for five days.

Wait a minute. No pies? No pies at all?

Well, I suppose you could bring a pie if you wanted – you know, for the other guys – but the point is that the presence of pie won't have any bearing on the outcome of the match.

What about all the stuff you said about the pie-eaters switching places and eating each other's pies?

Nope. They just run back and forth between the creases, switching places. And they're called "batsmen." There are no pies. You're really going to have to get that through your head.

So what's the point?

The point? I don't think the rules say anything specifically about a point to it. Why?

Because the point of eating pie is self-evident: free pie. I don't see the point of hitting a ball with a bat and switching places with another guy.

You might as well ask what's the point of any sport?

Well?

Oh. You're one of *those*.

What? Who's one of those?

You are.

Who are they?

Them. You.

Who?

All of you. You always have to bring reason into everything.

So?

Reasons are spoilers. Nasty things. Most people learn soccer or baseball or cricket when they're children. That's so they don't ask why all the time. If you expect there to be a "point" to a cricket match or a painting or a short essay written during Wednesday night's rerun of *Law & Order*, you'll be frequently disappointed.

Sorry.

That's OK. How about a game of Hearts?

Fine. You'll have to teach me.

It's easy. You know how in the Sixties you had the British Invasion? You had The Beatles, The Stones, The Kinks, and The Who.

OK.

The Rolling Stones are trump. And Ray Davies is worth 13 points.

So I want Ray Davies.

No you don't. That's the thing.

Interesting...

How to Get Your Man to Propose

ALEXIS MASSIE

— 17 —

We both know what a woman you are: even-tempered, reasonable, and diplomatic. You are attractive, intelligent, generous. You may have many friends, perhaps even a successful career. You are, in short, a liberated woman. And that means it's time to graduate to the next phase of your personal development: turning that dusty old boyfriend into a bona fide mister.

Do not despair! Here is a list of helpful tips and strategies that can reform your man into an acceptable member of society, also providing the necessary delusion that it was his decision all along. Listed in order of effectiveness, a gradual, multi-phased approach is recommended for best results.

1. *Throw him out.*

Nothing says "I want to spend the rest of my life with you" like changing the locks. Have his belongings waiting for him out on the front lawn, then buy yourself a pint of ice cream and make a night of it. Surprise is key with this approach; finding suitable "temporary" accommodations should be as inconvenient and emotionally painful as possible, leading him to realize how precious and irreplaceable you are.

2. *Set the date, with or without him.*

Gingerly introduce the topic by notifying him that you have set a date at which point you expect to be married. Offer this in the spirit of open communication, because you want "no secrets to come between us."

Make known your backup plan, should he fail to deliver.

Countdown clock, conveniently (and permanently) mounted on his desk, is optional.

3. *Abstinence.*

Embark on a campaign of sexual abstinence. Avoid all physical contact. As women have no sexual desire of their own, this should present no great difficulties. Beware! Your man might attempt to "relieve himself" without you! In such a case, careful monitoring and a shocked and disgusted facial expression will make him realize that you are the only release he needs.

4. *Embrace treachery.*

Illustrate the difference between "husband" and "roommate" by bringing competitors onto the field. There are two approaches to this step, so take the route that serves you best:

- A. Put on a dress and pin your hair up. When he asks why, explain that you have a date. While he sputters in protest, calmly and reassuringly state, "Well, it's not like we're married." Leave quickly. Before you return, remember to let loose your hair. For women with short hair, muss. Divulge no details.
- B. Invite a male friend from work over for a business dinner to discuss the project you're both involved in. Explain to your man that you have a date and could he please find somewhere else to be? If he

refuses, introduce him to your friend as your roommate and then dismiss him from your attention. If he leaves as requested, marry the friend.

5. *Develop a conducive environment.*

Remark upon how many of your friends are married. Every day.

6. *Build coalitions.*

Whenever possible, invite your parents over and allow them to speak freely. Despite your instincts, do not defend your man. Rehearse when necessary. To ensure a united front, offer the bribe of grandchildren. Exquisitely effective on its own, this incentive may also enlist his parents to your cause.

7. *Confront him.*

In the interest of diplomacy, you may find yourself tempted to discuss your desires with your man. This is an ill-advised stratagem, as it will put him on the defensive. Nevertheless, if you're one of these "modern" women who thinks your man is an intelligent person with a sweet and rational soul, the master of his baser instincts, then I offer some words of advice: You must embody a mountain, strong and cold. Belittle his protests, wave away his concerns. It is important to link being single with being childish,

so if he retreats, tell him to "stop being so petulant." When he storms away, restrain yourself from calling out other helpful bits of advice, such as, "...and why don't you get a real job while you're at it." This will only confuse him. Better to remain focused and work on those other issues later.

8. *Use the power of the mind.*

Get into the habit of psychically willing him to marry you. After enough time has elapsed, he may notice that you're staring at him. A little more time, and he may even begin to wonder why. He may even grow unnerved, making him vulnerable. This is when to start playing the subliminal messages you've encoded into his CD collection.

Gentle readers may find these practices to be shocking, perhaps even repugnant. Yet time and endless example have proven that being kind and generous to men only degrades your value in their eyes. You must be strong. Adopt these practices, and you are sure to have a long, loving life together. More importantly, you'll be establishing habits you can leverage in order to exchange the tacky trinket he offered you for a more elegant 1.5-karat Tiffany solitaire. The time has come for action. Take arms and good luck!

How to Show Your Work

MICHAEL BARRISH

— 19 —

I don't care what anybody says, I'm not sorry for what happened to Mrs. Overhalt. It's sad I guess, but it wasn't my fault, and anyway she hates me because I can do all the problems in my head, everyone knows it.

Like one time we were playing this game where one kid from each side of the class stands at the board and does a math problem, and Mrs. Overhalt got upset because every time it was my turn I would close my eyes and know the answer. So the next time we played the same game she made a new rule you had to show your work or your answer didn't count.

Of course she did it because she's upset that I won't ever show my work, because I won't.

But anyway that's not what happened this time.

What happened is, Mrs. Overhalt said to stop talking but I wasn't talking, so I said I wasn't and she got mad and said, What are you, calling me a liar? so I said, I'm not calling you anything, I'm just saying I wasn't talking, because I wasn't.

I forget why, but I was already sitting in the back of the room.

Probably I was there because I was talking before.

I do talk sometimes and Mrs. Overhalt sends me to the back of the room, but actually I like it much better in the back of the room because I can look out the window and don't have to pretend to be paying atten-

tion to anything.

Mrs. Overhalt thinks she's punishing me by sending me to the back of the room but really she's not, so I always act like I'm upset about it to make her think she is when she isn't.

Mrs. Overhalt said, I saw you with my own eyes, so I said, You couldn't have seen anything because I wasn't, and then she said, That's it, I've had enough, and she started coming to the back of the room.

But I never called her Mrs. Overweight, that's not true, I don't know who said that, because I didn't, although she really is overweight, anyone can see that, except that it was Richard Marcus who said that, not me, I just call her Mrs. Overhalt.

Or I just call her *you* or I don't call her anything, you don't always have to call a person a name.

But I got scared when I saw her coming, because her nose looked funny, like the holes got bigger all of a sudden, like she was wearing one of those little pieces of tape that football players wear on their noses to keep them open I guess, and Richard Marcus said, You're in trouble now, and I wondered if I should run, but before I could even think where to run to, Mrs. Overhalt grabbed my ear.

I never expected her to grab my ear.

If you ask me, the reason Mrs. Overhalt is so upset is because she can't do the problems in her own head and I can, that's the reason.

Sometimes she says I'll never make it to college if I don't start showing my work, or I'll flunk out of college the first week because you have to show your work in college, so I say, Fine, I'm not going to college.

Anyway I couldn't really hear what she was saying when she was pulling my ear, but Richard Marcus says that she kept calling me Copernicus and saying that she was going to take Copernicus to the principal's office.

Richard Marcus says that it must be a bad name because of how many times she was saying it and because she made it seem like it was a special name to call someone, which it wasn't, you could tell.

But I don't think she should have called me anything because I wasn't calling her anything and she was pulling really hard, and besides, I had to walk with my head turned sideways and then I banged into someone's desk, I still don't know whose desk that was, and now I have a bruise.

So I hit Mrs. Overhalt in the stomach to get her to stop pulling my ear like that, but she wouldn't stop even after I hit her in the stomach, so instead I did this thing my sister taught me – my sister takes women's self-defense even though she's not a woman yet, she's only twelve – I jumped on her foot.

My sister says that you're supposed to shout No when you jump on a person's foot, but I don't think I remembered to do that part, unless I just did it anyway without ever thinking about it.

My sister says that your feet have more bones than anywhere except your hands. I don't really remember how many bones they have exactly, but Mrs. Overhalt made a funny sound like she just remembered something important and fell to the floor holding her foot.

Also I guess she must have hit her head when she fell, but I never saw that, but that's what must have happened, I guess.

Anyway all the kids were standing at their desks and looking at me and at Mrs. Overhalt and some of them were crying because

it was upsetting and no one knew what to do.

It wasn't like the emergency bell, it wasn't like that at all. Because with the emergency bell, you already know what's going to happen before it happens because your teacher tells you about it for a whole week, and then the bell rings and everybody walks outside in a straight line and you have to stand there in the schoolyard with all the kids in all the classes until it's time to go back in.

But it wasn't like that.

The way it looked was like she was sleeping.

And then Mrs. Staller came in all of a sudden and said, My god, what is this?

Mrs. Staller teaches the class across the hall.

Usually Mrs. Staller wears so much make-up on her eyes that it makes her look like a raccoon.

Every time I see Mrs. Staller, the first thing I always think is that she's looks like a raccoon.

My mom says that Mrs. Staller thinks that her eyes are pretty and so she tries to get people to look at them by wearing lots of make-up around them, like she's circling them with something nice and saying, Here, look at this, but then it doesn't really work because people end up thinking she looks like a raccoon, so they never notice her eyes.

Sometimes I just want to tell Mrs. Staller that she looks like a raccoon with all that make-up, except my mom says you should never tell people things like that. But I don't really agree with my mom because I think Mrs. Staller would rather know what she looks like, because then at least she could find another way to get people to look at her eyes.

So Mrs. Staller ran over to Mrs. Overhalt and you could tell she didn't know what to do, which is funny because teachers always know what to do, and then she ran out without saying anything to anybody or even

looking at us, and it was like it is in the schoolyard when you hear the freeze bell and everyone freezes and it's so quiet that you can hear the sound of the balls bouncing away because no one is allowed to catch them.

After that I don't really remember anything because there were so many things, but Richard Marcus says that everyone had to go to the auditorium and sit there except for me, except that I don't remember where I went instead, just that I could definitely hear the ambulance.

The next day the whole class made a card for Mrs. Overhalt and everyone signed it but

me because I wasn't there. Richard Marcus says that I didn't come back for a whole week and everyone thought I was suspended for hurting Mrs. Overhalt's foot, only I don't really remember being suspended.

Anyway it's funny because I don't even know how I do the problems, I just close my eyes and think about the numbers, I just see the numbers in my head and then I know what the answers are, that's my work.

So if Mrs. Overhalt wants me to write that on the board, I'll write it on board, I don't care, I'll do it, it's not a big deal to me, only I don't even know how to write it.

How to Start a Dialogue With a Complete Stranger

JASON GURLEY

— 22 —

There are, as of the last time I looked in a history book, approximately six billion people on this planet. Six billion. I personally know about eighty-seven of them fairly well. How many do you know?

It doesn't matter. What this means is that there will always be a greater number of people you don't know than people you do know when you consider the entire population of the world. Which means you are continually obligated to spend time with people whose names you don't know, whose hairstyles you can't stand, and whose cars you'd like to "borrow."

You've got no choice – you have to talk to them. To help you get started, here are five suggestions for sparking a conversation with someone you'll likely never see again.

Suggestion No. 1: Rope 'em in.

Use the fairly shocking acts of your past – and perhaps present – to draw a stranger into a dialogue with you.

SITUATION UNO · *Setting: A bank. You (y) and the stranger (s) are standing in line.*

y: Sure is a long line.

s:

y: Does this thing ever move?

s:

y: Longest line I ever been in was the Bataan Death March.

s: Are you serious?

SITUATION DOS · *Setting: A grocery store. You (y) and the stranger (s) are in the produce section.*

y: What awful cabbages!

s:

y: I've never seen such rotten-looking orbs.

s:

y: Well, except for when I was in Florida and a drowned Cuban woman washed up on a nude beach. Her head looked like that.

s: Oh my God.

SITUATION TRES · *Setting: A jail cell. You (y) and the stranger (s) are locked up.*

y: What are you in for?

s:

y: Me, I'm in here for gutting my neighbor.

s:

y: She played her music way too loud.

s:

y: I stapled her intestines to her forehead.

s: [retches]

Note of warning: Sometimes this suggestion doesn't work.

Suggestion No. 2: Feign a disaster.

Most strangers are relatively kind people; they're from the same world you are, after all. Therefore they're willing to risk life and limb for your well-being.

SITUATION UNO · *Setting: A major freeway. You (y) have just pretended to be hit by a car. The stranger (s) has stopped and run to your aid.*

s: Are you okay?

Y: [*groans*]
 S: Sir, are you all right? My God!
 Y: Ohhh...
 S: That was terrible! Are you OK? Sir?
 Y: Yes. Yes, it was terrible, wasn't it.
 S: You're alive!
 Y: Of course I am. By the way, what do you think of the new *Star Wars* film?

SITUATION DOS · *Setting: A family restaurant. You (Y) are pretending to choke on a chunk of fish. The stranger (S) leaps up to perform the Heimlich maneuver.*

S: Hup!
 Y: Ack!
 S: Hup!
 Y: Ack!
 S: Hup!
 Y: Ptooie!
 S: Whew.
 Y: Hey, thanks. What do you think of the fish?

Suggestion No. 3: Say something inappropriate.

The entire world wants nothing more than to laugh, heartily and ferociously. It's your job, as a fellow stranger, to give them a reason.

SITUATION UNO · *Setting: A baby shower. You (Y) are on the couch, next to the stranger (S). Both of you are watching the mother-to-be model a kimono.*

Y:
 S:
 Y:
 S:
 Y: Ever seen a Japanese whale come up for air?
 S: [*sputters*]
 Y: Hi, I'm Elaine.
 S: Sonia. You're funny.

SITUATION DOS · *Setting: A teenage beauty pageant. You (Y) and the stranger (S) are sitting in third row center.*

Y:

S:
 Y:
 S:
 Y: Boy, do I feel like an old pervert.
 S: [*chokes*]
 Y: I'm Rufus.
 S: I'm horny.

SITUATION TRES · *Setting: A bullfight. You (Y) and the stranger (S) sit in silence with the stunned crowd, staring at the gored body of the bullfighter.*

Y:
 S:
 Y:
 S:
 Y: Awww. How pulpy and cute. Look at his little eyeball, all by itself over there. Awww.
 S: [*snorts*]
 Y: Franky.
 S: Johnny. You're repulsive.
 Y: Thanks! You, too.

Suggestion No. 4: Fumble your lines.

Nothing is more endearing than somebody who has trouble with their native language.

SITUATION UNO · *Setting: A political rally. You (Y) are stepping up to the podium to speak to a crowd of strangers (S).*

Y: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.
 S:
 Y: I would like to begin by saying...
 S:
 Y: ...wow hunderful you all took lonight.
 S: [*roars*]
 Y: Heh. Oops. I'm from Texas.
 S: [*applauds*]

SITUATION DOS · *Setting: A fast food drive-thru. You (Y) are ordering a meal from the stranger (S) on the other end of the speaker.*

S: Good morning. Welcome to Greaseball Deluxe. What can I get for you today?
 Y: Yes...just a minute.
 S: Whenever you're ready, ma'am.
 Y: OK. I'd like a bamhurger with po nickles.
 S: [*howls*]

y: Uh, yeah. Make that a bamhurger with *no pickles*. Sorry.

s: That's a Spoonerism!

y: Yes, I'm aware thof at.

Suggestion No. 5: Say hello and shake a hand.

In the event that the other suggestions have failed miserably, consider the tried-and-true approach.

SITUATION UNO · *Setting: A charity dinner. You (y) have just arrived and the stranger (s) is standing by the bar.*

y: Hi! How are you? I'm Jack.

s: Hi. I'm Mike.

y: OK, then.

s:

y:

s:

y:

s: Well.

How to Take the Train

PAUL FORD

— 25 —

The motions to allow a body onto a crowded train are performed unwillingly – people never want to squeeze in any more than they have. But you're immediately forgiven for encroaching once you've shoved your way past the doors. Shoulders press against backs, coats are squeezed and bags held between legs, and heads turn. Whole bodies come into contact, a temporary, respectful intimacy.

Over the last 5,400 rides, nine years of them, I learned to enjoy this human press, to look at as many faces as I could. Even the wide variance of human smell became good to me, the pheromonal funk, especially on the way home at the end of the day. The inner beasts, dressed up in cosmetics and haircuts, crept out through our sweat.

That last morning I had a book in my bag, but I watched the brown-black of the tunnel as underground lights, mostly blocked by the shoulders of straphangers, flew by, outside the window, recording the experience for some other time and place. A woman to my right talked to someone I couldn't see.

"I'm a child of Jesus," she said. "I'm going."

I was going, too. There was little to do before I went – clean out my email, throw some paper in the recycling bin, talk to those who came by the desk, go out for a few drinks and listen to people make fun of me. There was a cutting tone in my coworker's voices, a loss of familiarity. I was leaving the tribe, the small firm which performed a specific kind of work for larger tribes. I was leaving the tribe of tribes, the city itself,

without a briefcase, without a plan, dragging my belongings to the curb, no other city or place in mind. A week at my parents, then....

Sometimes old lovers called me. I'd had a total of six here, each associated with a different subway stop. They called when they were looking for something in their pasts, validation or an old phone number.

The train rolled and shook into my work stop. A hundred people stepped onto the platform, jostling to ascend the stairs, bound along crooked lines for their 100 destinations.

I gained too many preferences over my 5,400 rides, too many favorite bars and restaurants. I'd lost my ability to inject the streets with fresh meaning; I was following my own footprints, living in loops of subway rail, always leading back to my front door.

The turnstile gave its click as I pushed through; I headed up the stairs into morning light. I'd been horrified it would all be too big for me when I first arrived, that the buildings would be too tall and the women too demanding. But I found the rhythm, living in a place too small, working long hours, helping family members find their way when they visited. I could recognize myself in the kids coming in for interviews to take my place, their mouths testaments to orthodontia, all gleaming potential. I was happy for them, that they could find these things out for themselves, happy to see someone else fall in love with the place, and jealous, as behind me a wave of nostalgia and regret washed up through the tunnel.

How to Make a Baby

DENNIS A. MAHONEY

— 26 —

½ cup all-purpose flour
6 tablespoons olive oil
½ pound mushrooms, halved
1 green bell pepper, diced
½ onion, chopped
2 garlic cloves, chopped
½ teaspoon dried oregano
½ cup purchased marinara sauce
½ cup canned low-salt chicken broth
¼ cup dry Marsala
1 tablespoon drained capers
1 pound chicken

Relax. You aren't the first person to try this. The process is simple and surprisingly straightforward. As my grandmother used to say, "If you can read a set of instructions, you have nothing to worry about."

Getting started is the hardest part. Grab a cart and head straight for the produce aisle. There, you'll find a number of essential items on your list. Select a good, round onion. Bounce it in your palm until you hear a nice smack. Bag it. You're on your way.

When it comes to choosing mushrooms, the cleaner the better. If there's no visible rot, you're probably fine. The same can be said of peppers – your pepper shouldn't be puckered. It ought to be firm, healthy, and bright, with no discoloration. Next, pick up a garlic bulb. You'll only need two cloves so don't bother with elephant garlic; size isn't an issue. Capers are generally stored with other pickled products. You might even find them in the produce aisle. A caper is defined as "a playful hop" or "frivolous escapade."

You're catching on.

Get a sack of all-purpose flour and a bottle of olive oil. Oregano will add a bit of spice. You'll also need a splash of dry Marsala. (If your supermarket doesn't carry Marsala, try the local liquor store. While you're there, buy a bottle of Merlot.) Find a can of chicken broth and a small jar of marinara sauce. If you happen to pass the diaper aisle, keep going. There's no need to worry about that now.

You'll need one pound of boneless chicken breasts. The breasts are fundamental to this whole operation, so choose carefully. Double-check the sell-by date to ensure that the meat is fresh. Anything past expiration isn't only distasteful – it's dangerous. Fatal disease is often communicable.

Proceed to checkout. While you're waiting in line, scan the magazines. Note the Hollywood romances: marriage in the mansion, scandal and divorce. This is not an accurate reflection of the world. Media distorts relationships, inflating subtlety until it isn't subtle anymore. Your situation will be different.

Have you joined the supermarket discount club? Do it now. Every dollar's going to count from here on out. Make a final survey of the impulse items at the counter that you won't be buying anymore. Say, "Have a nice night." Return home and find some comfortable clothes. The next couple of hours are going to be messy. Dress accordingly.

It won't be perfect. You'd better get that

out of your head. Even the masters make mistakes. In a pinch, you can always call your mother for advice. Rest assured, she's done this before.

Wash the chicken in the sink. Season with salt and pepper and put the pieces in a plastic bag with a half-cup of flour. Toss the breasts until they're coated. Heat three tablespoons of olive oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the chicken to the skillet and sauté until brown, about four minutes per side. Use a pair of tongs to move the chicken onto a plate. Pour away the fat and add another three tablespoons of olive oil to the skillet. Halve the mushrooms, dice the pepper, and chop the onion.

When you come to the garlic, it may begin to dawn on you that you are unprepared. With the hour at hand, reality will start creeping in. This is actually happening. You won't know how to proceed.

Ask the neighbors, the couple right next door with the (three!) amazing kids, her without the saggy mood or baggage under the eyes, always optimistic after a full day at the office, her *derrière* as plump as a Christmas goose, and him with that physique, that spring in his step and zeal and zest for wife and family, no dismay, no receding hairline... them. Their faces always lit like those who have it figured out, with no regret at having signed their lives away to three volcanically needy kids. They would know. This couple who rattles vases off the mantelpiece whenever they're in bed, rabbiting on and on as if a thousand children were the goal and it could only be achieved through infinite varieties of fascinating, action-packed, enthusiastic lovemaking – they'd have to know the answer to such a simple question. How to chop garlic.

Knock on the door. They'll answer together (her in a shirt, probably his), knuckles white, eyes bright. You've caught them making babies again. "Hi," they'll say together, out of breath, the smell of baby batter fuming off their bodies. They are

kneaded dough, rising in the bowl.

They'll loan you a garlic press. Thank them. Say, "You're literally a life saver." Return to the kitchen, press the garlic, add half a teaspoon of oregano to the vegetables, and sauté the whole lot until the onion is tender – about 10 minutes.

Use your time for additional preparations. Clear the bed and change the sheets. Straighten the pillows and put the dirty laundry in the hamper. Close the blinds. You want to create a cozy atmosphere, neither dark nor glaring, bright enough to read, yet dark enough to nap. The room ought to be "half-awake." Up the thermostat a few degrees until you're comfortable enough to go without socks. Too warm is better than too cold. Environment is key.

Stir the marinara sauce, chicken broth, Marsala, and capers into the vegetables. Return the chicken to the skillet, spooning the sauce over the meat. Bring the sauce to a boil and reduce the heat to medium-low. Cover the skillet and simmer until the chicken is tender. You've got about 20 minutes.

Go to the bathroom and fill the tub. Run the faucet over an open drain for 60 seconds to flush impurities. The water must be clean. Burn some candles, preferably scented, once again aiming for a happy medium of light. Excessive light can startle or expose. The candles will remind you of nights you spent alone, certain you would never be loved. Add one cup of Epsom Salt. Test the water with your finger. You want it to be hot, but not scalding. If the temperature is slightly high, that's OK. The water will cool as you continue with your preparations.

You've come to the most important step. Write a note that says, "You matter more than anyone. I love you." Any truthful variation on the theme will do. Write the words in permanent ink. Fold it once. Put the note in a safe place.

Take a breath. You're almost done. Look at the home you're planning to share

with your baby. Is rearrangement something worth considering? Assess the “flow” of the rooms. Do all paths lead to television? Is the dinner table prominent, or do you eat your meals on the countertop like a deli patron? This will be the nexus of the baby’s world. Are electrical outlets, bottles of aspirin, and canisters of rat poison covered or protected? Is there a fire extinguisher handy?

And what about you? Do you know advanced arithmetic? European history, the definition of a split infinitive? What about your habits? Your life will become an example once you’ve done this thing. You’ll hold a permanent spotlight. Chewing fingernails will be recorded and reviewed. Choice of breakfast, of obscenity and turns of phrase, of favorite politicians and musicians, all of these will be remembered. How you treat your fellow human beings, why you laugh, how you hug, when you holler, who you tolerate, the reasons that you fail – all of this will be observed, even imitated.

Don’t panic. There are those whose only preparation is the heating of a spoon. Other people make babies entirely by accident. Results are often undesirable. You’ve done a good thing in handling this with sensitivity. Be proud. You’ve put a lot of love in this. You’ve started a process that will last as long

as you’re alive. Death will be irrelevant to anyone involved. Once you make a baby, there’s no unmaking it. Forever, this baby will have existed, if only by intention.

Recognize that you will never be prepared. Waking up with no responsibility is often hard to do. Waking up responsible for life is even harder. Maybe what you need is not to need. Maybe it’s not about you anymore.

It’s about time – check the skillet. Using tongs, move the chicken to a large platter. Boil the sauce until it’s slightly thick, about three minutes. Skim whatever fat has risen to the top. Spoon the sauce onto the chicken. Pour the wine. Grab a pack of matches. Don’t forget to turn off the stove.

When your spouse and/or lover arrives, serve the Chicken Cacciatore on a candlelit table, play Marvin Gaye over the stereo, and present the note. Improvise. Truth is, all of this was just to get your courage up. Focus on your partner now. If you haven’t got a partner, consider it a practice run.

No one knows the secret in the end, not even parents. It’s different every time. Feel your way and hope for the best. Enjoy yourself. If all else fails, try again. Vary the steps. Find what works. There’s no need to throw the baby out with the bath water.

How to Skin a Cat

GAIL ARMSTRONG

— 29 —

Dear Mom...

That's as far as you ever get. Thoughts veer toward you like a swarm of bees then scatter shattered like a storefront window. Swat, flee, toe the shards or... the mosaic is becoming unruly. Words abdicate like never before. You're tired of what they say and, besides, you've had to start thinking in French again – a fancy excuse for can't cut through this muddle on a dare, not even in your native tongue.

*Dear Mom,
So most of the days begin at six now and don't end until two the next morning. Ten hours of teaching in all parts of the city and ungainly suburbs, then home to freelance work.*

And still you're reluctant to leave, not now that you've begun to fall in love again with this cranky old broad, diva whore. With the sight of her core reflected in slow walking along the riverbank, night falling around you soft as soot.

There's no longer much time but when you do get the chance, few pleasures compare to heading into the labyrinth for as long as shirking duty will allow. Later you'll take the metro back home through the belly of the city and that evening, when it's quiet, trace your finger along the day's path, fitting it like a piece into your gradual mental map.

Every day dread dragging two sleeping children from their beds, gentle breathing before sunrise, half-open eyes and tousled heads still stuck in a dream. And down to the neighbour's, rushed whispered gratitude as I watch them stumbling drunk with fatigue, collapsing onto her couch, cinnamon toast forgotten between their fingers.

You love the aimlessness of the walks, the only time that thoughts arrive almost linear. For once not clinging to all others, fist-tight ball of string you don't know where to begin. They unravel in sequence more like afterthoughts as you allow yourself to be distracted by small details along your path – this window, that corbel, gargoyles and inner courtyards, doors so ornate they outdo your own barricades.

So you walk. Apart from the core, single-digit *arrondissements*, the city is still mostly fragments in your mind so you move further and further afield. There's only one neighbourhood that you'll continue to avoid, the queasy memories it contains.

Down from Bastille then through the Marais to pompous-human scale galleries, always images of noblesse oblige swish idling through here – they'd nothing else to do – and along toward Opéra, La Madeleine. But it's swank, not your style, and reminds you that you're poor... so backtrack and cross the river.

And I'm ever so grown up with the cooking, cleaning, laundry, shopping, homework, field trips, picnics, birthday parties, please sit up straight, costumes for the school play, monopoly (oh, crap), soothe and banish nightmares, croquet, what do we say, get your elbows off the table, badminton, bake sale, tidy your room...

Sometimes between classes you have time to move in and out of bookshops in the Latin quarter, in and out of those half-lit places that you longed years to loiter in (you hadn't planned on it being a covert thrill), slow running your hand along their dark wooden shelves, giddy with the dust of ancient books all unclassified, stacked and scattered. You revel in the feel of that grain, the sensual tug of all that you still don't know – a sudden reminder that you're still here, and there are so many things you love.

And you're relieved and surprised that so little reminds you of him and your time here together; the long phone calls and threats every night now are enough, drunken pleas and bogus suicide attempts from your seventh-floor balcony when he comes unannounced. That's enough.

Yahtzee, mow the lawn, fleas and ticks off the cats, poo off the toilet seat, sit up straight, bloody noses, draw the symbol for infinity on her chest, explaining again why mommy and daddy are no longer together, that it is for the best, I promise, don't forget the money from the tooth fairy, get caught red-handed: 'you lied to me mom.'

Rodin's garden in springtime and Claudel's prim madness, grim jumbled expanse of too-talked-about cemeteries and the forbidden lawns of manicured Luxembourg, field of that war god and the world's most depressing zoo. Still gawk like a tourist at the sight of the Orangerie, Orsay, Petit Palais, Grévin.... But mostly places and tight little streets whose names you don't know,

a constant reminder that you're so far from home. (And you're beginning to strongly suspect that a number of these saints – e.g., Saint Jerome of raisin buns – may never have existed.) The metro's well familiar now, its hospital smell, parade of panhandlers and music travelling through geometric thronged passageways, all lingering inside you long after treading above ground.

Twister and popcorn and food fights, try to wean my daughter off Melrose Place because my six-year-old son keeps doing hip gyrations and moaning, baby, baby take me now, bad riddles, nostalgia of soft tales at bedtime....

One day coming home at dusk, you veer off the main road and into a cobblestone street. There are horse-drawn carriages, gas street lamps being lit; the men are dressed in top hats and tails and the women's sway rustles with crinoline. It's 30 seconds of sheer panic and giddy expectation until you're handed a flyer promoting the local *Belle Epoque* festivities. You're oddly disappointed that it wasn't a time warp after all, but still.... You lay awake last night counting the number of times that you've moved.

With my students shoulder the blame for every horror Anglo-Saxon culture has ever perpetrated, sit up straight, cuddles and kisses and all out wrestling – pure joy, my lord – Old Maid, Black Jack, accept that I'm the villain, War (oh, you wouldn't believe how boring that is now), elbows off the say please....

One day you've got a class in that neighbourhood. All the way over in the metro you remember how you'd run away from so much. Unbridled pyromaniac to the few bridges you had left and then nothing more imaginative than to latch onto a stranger and feign love.

On the way to the class you walk by the doctor's office, the one where you went to get the abortion, and instead of referring

you to a colleague who would perform the grisly deed, he gave you an ultrasound.

Pictionary, Battleship, battle with the urge to beg forgiveness for all this damage, Checkers, tickles and giggling like them at all things scatological, listen to other mothers tell me that I must take time out to do more crafts with the children, wrench the dead hamster out of the cat's mouth so here comes death again....

— 31 —
And you lay there with the cold jelly on your still flat stomach staring at that white bean on the black screen, flickering, new life in your belly – a stranger all your own surrounded by mathematical symbols. You stared at that bean and suddenly ambushed by your entire life's loneliness, by harsh words that nobody else remembers. You lay there in the cold bright slickness of this stranger's office in a foreign land, and you wept.

You felt it coming, rising through your body a goddamn monsoon, *zone sinistrée*, taste of salt in your eyes, tin in your mouth and the floodgates burst. You don't remember what the doctor had said, only his indifference. But it didn't matter, god, not even remotely but you're peeved that such an ass had been instrumental.

You don't think it through, chicken out, only ache and pick at old wounds as you imagine that you'll hold this baby's hand as

it climbs the stairs, and help it on its way back down.

Hide the Easter eggs (Spanish Inquisition by children who strongly suspect that this, too, is a hoax), to the doctor now because they're getting sick from the too-long days, explain why I don't want them to be Catholic even if their best friend is. (Don't you love baby Jesus, mommy?)

Sometimes you enter the vaulted silence, the oppressive cool of ancient cathedrals and just sit. Remnants of incense and trashed vows scrape your throat. You're still so impressed by history. Thoughts of home are a muck of the past, wilderness, skies raked by a phallic gleam and suburban brown boxes mauling the view.

So you buy a postcard of Paris at night, and for some reason remember that woman you see on the quay every evening as you're going home from work, playing the same Vivaldi on her cello. Always. The ferocity of your love still floors you. You have no way of knowing that this job offer down south is bogus, and that it will be another slap of a lesson. You have no way of knowing that after you've scrambled your way through all this, and then some, that you will (*I promise*) find your way to home.

*Dear Mom,
I'm fine. How are you?*

How to Be Igor

TOBIAS SEAMON

— 32 —

“It was with these feelings that I began the creation of a human being.”

—Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

1. *How to Despoil Graves*

Always wave as you pass through town heading toward the cemetery. Despite the bloat of sausages and pale beer, a bloat rapidly diminishing due to the twin troubles of plague and starvation, the villagers are not idiots. They are well aware you are in service to Herr Doktor, and mistrust your lurking motives. They know Herr Doktor has unusual ideas, and he does, because Herr Doktor is insane. He’s also a miser, and, as is often the case with cheap lunatics, he suffers from constipation, chilblains, and doldrums.

Commiserate, then, with the villagers. Shake your head at the strange doings in the castle. Grumble, piss and moan; squint at the clouds and pestilence and hopelessness. Should anyone stare too long at the hump, stretch and rub it, saying, “Oh my aching back.” Keep in mind that later, in the rank, river mists, you’ll be stealing body parts from the graves of their loved ones. Due to the epidemic, it will be exceptionally easy to play the ghoul. It’s the very reason your master moved his laboratory to the castle: the abundant material. The young go as fast as the old. The digging is recent, the earth newly turned, and the parts high-quality. Granted, the smell isn’t rosy, and the work can be tough on your hump – a lumpen mass of gristle, muscle, bone and sinew –

but this ensures you don’t dawdle on the job. It takes some bottle to do the thing right, quickly but never rushed.

Do not scavenge. You are not a jackdaw, you are a servant. If a left foot is required, get the left foot and don’t muck with ears, even if they are especially dainty.

Pennies on the lids are yours to take or not.

If a-fearful of being caught out, count on the villagers’ superstition. They will not be berry-picking among drizzly graves at midnight. Remember, you are armed with a pick, shovel, and burlap sacks. Braining unwanted witnesses is an option.

If someone looms suddenly from the fog and shadows, it’s usually just a stone angel. However, should you spy a gypsy or Jew, leave immediately. Dark works will be afoot in the graveyard that night.

2. *How to Exist Peacefully with the Neighbors*

As I said, smiling helps. Stunned with hunger and grief, the villagers do not care to notice much of anything anymore. Still, they dislike Herr Doktor, as he refuses, despite his vast medicinal knowledge, to assist against the epidemic. “To intercede in such matters,” he once proclaimed while dissecting a throttled tabby cat, “is to interfere with Nature’s reductive mechanisms, and thus invite calamity.”

The villagers’ glum aspect matches the region. Bound on one side by the river and

its pestilential fens and on the other by dense coniferous thickets stretching far into the lands of Poles, Lithuanians, and assorted heathen, the town and castle are remote. We are not entirely cut off, however, and receive news from our upstream neighbor, another doctor, who's well-famed for the successful sale of his soul to the Devil. From Dr. Faust we hear of revolutions tearing asunder the whole world except America (which I do not believe exists). We also hear explosions from his keep as he continues his grim experiments despite the obvious outcome of any endeavor: doom and blackened damnation. On some nights, both doctors are at it and the cliffside shudders from the sparks, cackling, and curses inherent to great experimentation.

After such nights, do not go to town.

3. *How to Do the Morning Chores*

Besides graveside dismemberments, your most important duty is the flying of kites. Herr Doktor learned of the benefits of electricity and kites through the experiments of an American lotus-eater, and it is with this idea that he intends to animate what has never been animated. So, each morning you must climb stair after stair, then scuttle like a humped bug up a slick rope in the bell-tower to emerge onto the wind-blasted battlements. Once there, run in circles like a dunce in love until all the kites are flying. Skeleton keys glint and tingle on the lines, which reach far down into the laboratory and are attached to the Creature.

This is the best part of your day. The kites are fashioned from the negligees and French chemises of Lady Elizabeth, the only other resident of the castle besides the Doktor, the Creature, and yourself. On any given day, there are 20–30 kites in the air, waiting for lightning to strike, the gauzy scarlets and fawn silks fluttering above the river mists.

Live for this. Linger if you must.

Because the keys have all been used to this purpose, most of the rooms in the

manse are locked shut, their treasures forgotten or unavailable. You will need your ubiquitous pick to hack holes in the doors to know what's inside. By peeking through the splinters and dust, you can keep track of the good china and extra sheets, as well as the ongoing physical alterations performed by the master on Lady Elizabeth, though that room rarely, if ever, has been locked.

4. *How Not to Lust Overmuch for Lady Elizabeth*

Remember: She is all too similar to yourself and the master, desiring transformation above all. As Herr Doktor would become a God, and yourself human, so she would be made creaseless and ceaseless forever, living eternally as she and the Doktor once were, in a walled garden as youths, promised to each other and fucking bloodily.

In short, become sickened.

5. *How to View the Creature*

Laid on an immense table, the Creature awaits animation at a tilt approaching 40 degrees. The entire laboratory is suffused with the stinging reek of nightcrawlers, steam, formaldehyde, and cloves. You will need to saw grooves in the pitted wood so that excess fluids can drain into the trough below. Strings from the kites are attached and tied to every conceivable appendage of the Creature.

Similar to you, he seems like a marionette in the master's hands, awaiting perfection. You view the Creature with scorn, nausea, familiarity, terror, intimacy, and envy. You hate the attention the Creature receives from Herr Doktor, while the long promised elimination of the hump, and the cause of your servitude, are delayed. Then, you hate your own hatred.

Leaning closer to the Creature, you are intimate with every aspect, follicle, organ, limb, and sinew. You have known the parts before the sum; you have known them from the darkness and the grave and the dust.

More, you have known them from before the Pale, from the town, the tavern, the market, and the marsh. You have known the once-living sum, but you converse with the parts.

“Good morning, Mueller’s palm. Despite the rain, haying went well. But the prices, what can a man do? We should bang on some doors. I’m sorry little Wilhelmina’s lips, I didn’t bring any licorice. Your little doggy Nicholas misses you. Soon maybe you can kiss and nuzzle him again. Ah, Meister Stroehm’s prick, still tied to a string I see. The missus will ever keep you a cuckold.”

Should the Doktor catch you at this while pouring brandy down the Creature’s hand-selected gullet, do not worry. He firmly believes spirits of preservation, in any form, can only assist our progress.

6. How to Get Through an Evening of Revelry at the Castle

Get as quietly and insidiously drunk as everyone else is loudly and obviously inebriated.

Being neighbors, aristocrats, artists, fiends, miscreants, and geniuses, it is fitting the master and Dr. Faust should occasionally come together to dine, boast, moan, and eye each other’s women. Their conversation parades drunkenly in and out of metaphysics, politics, and the low-slung gowns while you wait at table in an ancient, rat-chewed butler’s uniform. Toss back spirits every time you go in the kitchen. Tureen in hand, reel smoothly around the table even as the master reveals to all the latest, tiny breasts he has designed for Lady Elizabeth. Do not ogle and compliment along with Faust’s companion, a Macedonian slut named Helena whose immodest shriek is like a bird pecking broken glass. Do not become dizzy from the mingled scents of gravy, rosewater, and hair pomade. Keep the courses coming, glasses filled, and soon enough the company will repair to the salon for brandy, cigars, and injections. Afterward, do not clean any plates. Break them all, in a sink. Sweeping is a bore.

In the salon, loosen tourniquets, bring washcloths and linens, and ignore Faust’s babbling and periodic sobbing. He’s often stricken with desperate fears concerning his immortal soul. He pleads with the master to help him, to somehow save him. Open a window so that the master can breathe the damp, November air. When the talk turns to revolution, listen carefully as it may affect you. If a republican uprising has driven the Pope from Rome, the situation is probably serious. It is certainly serious when the wind picks up, when rumbles from the northern skies can be heard, when the fog in the master’s eye begins to clear, when he believes the signs are imminent and blue flashes rack the swaying forest beyond.

When the two lunatics make a bargain, one hoping to deceive the Devil and the other offering to conduct the surgical deception, prepare for the storm.

7. How to Stay Out of Atrocity’s Way

Keep busy. Shed the drenched butler’s suit and keep climbing. Slither and snatch at chimneys, gutters and the swirling wind itself as you set the kites aloft. Cling to every crack in the slate. Don’t look up or the rain will pelt your eyes. Don’t look down.

Become philosophical. Once the kites are up, keys jangling invisibly in the violent night, shelter inside the belltower. There, shiver, clutch, feel sorry for yourself, and ponder the matter. Will the storm knock the silks from the skies before the lightning strikes? Will the whole castle burn to the ground? How much money can be scrounged in less than an hour? What is the quickest, most secretive way out of town?

8. When to Stop being Philosophical

Philosophy is rational and does not encompass all that is real; order is obliterated by pain and abomination. With this limit upon you, when is philosophy impossible?

When all thoughts coalesce into a single, decisive need: to get the hell out.

When, above the thunders of creation,
you hear the screams and bone saws below.

When you realize soul-frightened men
will plunge to depths lower than Hell itself.

When you know the final piece of the
Creature is a madman's brain already con-
demned as the Devil's property.

9. *How to Become a Human Being*

First, say goodbye to the old Creature, the
parts plucked from the darkness for their
perfection. Wish the tainted, new Creature
well.

“Goodbye, Meister Creature. Good luck.
I am sorry you might be damned. It isn't
your fault. Everything is different now, but I

chose the rest of you myself. I hope I chose
well. There is a dog named Nicholas who
will nuzzle you. Goodbye, Meister Creature,
goodbye.”

Then, before the lightning strikes, close
your eyes and begin swinging from the rope
in the belltower. Use the hump in your back
as the clapper. Deafen yourself with bells.
You will go to Paris, the City of Light, and
fly negligee kites. You will not scavenge, but
choose carefully what parts you want for
yourself. Whatever the sum, or the Devil
take you, so be it. You will change your
name, ring bells, chase skirts. You will learn
the ropes.

How to Yearn

JON ARMSTRONG

— 36 —

It is the third time in the marriage.

The third time that notion of the party being over has appeared, specter-like, hovering over the empty beverage vessels and small bits of detritus that swirl as you pass through the empty rooms. This time it's also featuring a hangover and shakes brought on by hunger.

The first two times, the intensity and pain weren't as severe. The notion of actually uttering the word "divorce" surfaces and subsides. You don't talk about it this time with the spouse. You do talk about it with one of your siblings. He has been through a divorce. He gives typically obtuse advice. You don't know if he's pro or con. You don't feel any better.

Your spouse does some training out of town for eight weeks. She comes back on alternating weekends. At first, you miss her. Then you realize that you like the space. Not in a temporary way. You want a life without her. This notion is devastating. The consequences of acting and moving forward overwhelm you. This is when it starts; seedling desire embedding in aortal bends.

You travel to Chicago during this time to see your spouse and stay with a friend. You watch the friend in the throes of a relationship startup. He checks email constantly. He laughs out loud at the computer. His urgency is thrilling to watch. You are jealous. Especially when your spouse is asleep next to you, and you realize that you have given up everything and are getting nothing. You

see your friend, huddled over his small computer, grinning as he reads another email from his soon to be.

The next day, you walk through the Art Institute, swept into a complete reverie by Chagall. She has gone on ahead silently as if to punctuate the pain; you linger and soak it up. When you finally run into her in the miniatures room, she is oblivious to your turmoil.

When you are on the plane back home enjoying the minor happiness of an exit-row window seat, ten minutes into the flight, you notice the plane has not gained altitude. It is circling. You estimate that you're at 10,000 feet. If something goes wrong, you will die. The captain says, "Well, the fire appears to be out."

Everyone on the plane is dumbstruck. You instantly feel the cabin temperature rise. There are a few more nervous announcements. Your plane is landing back at O'Hare. The old guy in the row immediately in front of you begins to give a play-by-play of the landing sequence. You are laughing that your imminent death might be commented upon in this way.

The plane lands and stops on the runway without taxiing. You see suited-up firefighters in an SUV slowly driving around the plane. You think that it will be horrifying for them to watch the plane explode, the expression on your face the last thing they see before the fireball.

Everything seems to be fine. The plane re-

turns to the gate where angry yuppies holding flight schedules argue about reimbursements and connecting flights.

You realize you have no way to contact her about this incident. Then you realize that given the state of things, she doesn't need to know right away. You see incongruities in your emotional state. You are terrified and yet not wanting to share the terror and its conflicts with her. When you finally do share, two days later in an email, her response is understated. She says, "Did the airline give you anything?"

You realize that this is a crock-pot soul stew, slow cooked at reduced temperature for years. You have added the discontent, the want, the pain, the desolation, and the restlessness. You keep the temperature low. You will stir this pot again in twelve months.

* * *

You have sublet a studio masquerading as a one-bedroom apartment in San Francisco. You have wanted to live here since you were eighteen years old. She is staying behind, working to keep the money coming in. You have saved some money from freelancing to

make this move. You cry when you open the sheets for the futon: from guilt that you are happy to be alone and that it's clear she still cares enough to make sure you have a pillowcase.

In the four months that follow, you realize that it really is over unless you do something. You are apart from her, and it feels good. You are going out with friends. You look at other women wondering if life with them would be the same. You struggle with the new city and take a job. You sleep on the floor of your friend's place. You realize you don't want her to come back without major changes. You don't know how to make those changes with her. You know what you need, but have severe doubts about the course of action; it will devastate her. She will get a loan from her father to join you. It will be awkward. You will lose your job the day after she arrives.

She will throw herself at the startup job she finds two days after arriving. You will see her very little. You will not miss her and then feel excruciating guilt for harboring such feelings. You will let yourself stew for three more years.

How to Organize Your Record Collection

ANDREW WOMACK

— 38 —

“I love order. It’s my dream. A world where all would be silent and still and each thing in its last place, under the last dust.”

—Samuel Beckett

1. Artist-Chronologically

A popular method, preferred by many organizers.

METHOD: First, alphabetize by artist name, dropping any initial “The” in band names. Individual artists must be alphabetized last name first, except in instances where individuals’ names are part of the band name (e.g., The Steve Miller Band); in such cases the artist name must be considered inextricable from the band name and should thus follow the band rules above. Soundtracks should be alphabetized by film or show title, again dropping any initial “The.” Compilations that include multiple artists should be alphabetized by the title of the compilation.

Next, place works in order of their original release. A record guide can aid in determining exact release order. There are also many online resources that will prove useful in this regard. Compilations especially relevant to an artist’s career – that is, those that bookend sections of the career or are intentionally released to show the end of an era – should sit in chronological order with the rest of the albums. Compilations less focused in their intent or less clear in their career importance should be placed – in order of release – at the end of that artist’s section.

Classical music should first be alphabetized by composer name (again, last name first), then organized by composition type (e.g., concertos, nocturnes), then by composition date, and finally alphabetized by performer name (last name first).

PROS: Easy to apply. Almost ubiquitous in its use.

CONS: There are a variety of influences and influencers that intervene an artist’s “Work A” and “Work B.” For instance, a newly found preoccupation with “world music” between the two works on the artist’s part may elicit profound differences in style between works “A” and “B.” But this method demands that the two works are placed side by side when, in fact, the artist may argue that betwixt the two is a third work, the work that most influenced the evolution of the artist between the first and second works. A work, most probably, by a different artist.

This may somewhat undermine the effectiveness of this method.

2. Pure-Chronologically

An experimental method, difficult but inspiring.

METHOD: Order all records by release date, regardless of all other factors.

PROS: Interesting upshots of the method involve a heightened sense of genre-building and history-of-music.

CONS: Requires extraordinary patience and intense research. A difficult learning

curve, but not an impossible one. Same-day time-zone issues will come into play, but should be easily resolved in consideration of geographic constraints.

3. *Categorically*

A widely accepted, genre-based method that is primarily favored by record stores and mail-order catalogs.

METHOD: Choose broad areas (e.g., world music, pop/rock, classical) by which all collected music can be collated. From this point, follow the “Artist-Chronologically” method, above.

PROS: Choices for listening material can be made based on any particular style the organizer wishes to listen to at any given time.

CONS: Causes foreseen conflicts: e.g., the genre “fusion,” by its very name, implies that two genres are intentionally being crossed. In such a case, the record cannot comfortably fit into one area when it is trying so desperately to be placed in another. Possible remedies include expanding the number of genres to encompass more types: “‘70s-Prog” / “Neo-Prog;” “New Wave” / “New Romantics;” “Punk” / “Post-Punk,” etc. This all could, however, become confusing (in, perhaps, a rather enlightening way) for the sub-30,000-record-owning organizer.

4. *Qualitatively*

A method that applies genres in a more discerning way.

METHOD: Choose personally defined genres to find styles that transcend the accepted categories of music. Suggested: “Music with handclaps,” “Music with pronounced bass riffs,” “Music with distorted pianos.” Organize further using any of the other posited methods.

PROS: Allows a deep understanding of the music collection from a microscopic level.

Incomprehensibly satisfying for the professional organizer.

CONS: An expert-level methodology. Difficult to find a desired album if each song is not known inside and out. Works well with compilations that are designed to convey a singular quality, poorly with albums that intentionally display a wide latitude of styles.

5. *Hedonistically*

A method that draws upon personal, explicit experiences.

METHOD: The sex albums, the drug records – they sit on top. Any alignment is acceptable (vertical, horizontal, etc.), as long as the organizer – through whatever sexed-out, drugged-up ability the organizer may intuit – is able to recall a vague method of placement. Inhibition must be avoided at all costs; rely entirely on the *id* of organization/disorganization.

PROS: Always a party, all the time. Perfect for guests who enjoy getting drunk/doing drugs/having sex with the host. And, for the organizer – personally satisfying during such times.

CONS: The next morning, confusion will play a more inhibitive role than anticipated. The dubious sorting of records will assuredly cause an immediate reversal to any of the other offered methods, perhaps out of guilt alone.

6. *Passively*

A method that supposes an innate understanding of order within the organizer.

METHOD: A perfect antidote to the “Hedonistically” method (see: above), this construct relies above all on the organizer’s abilities to remember placement of recordings in the least expected places (see also: “Conveniently,” below).

First, play an album. When a new record is desired, remove the prior record and place wherever seems appropriate (on the couch,

on the nightstand) and rely upon the powers of memory to find these records again.

PROS: An object-theory philosophy may be derived from this method. For example: “I always fall asleep to this album.” Thus, it may be near the stereo, having been removed the next evening when playing the first record after coming home from work. Or: “I always cook to this record.” It may have fallen behind the stereo, slipping away from the organizer’s greasy fingers.

An interesting personal history may also fall out of this method. Leaving albums around the house in surprising locales may later prove to be a diary of habits.

CONS: Understandably, many recordings will be lost, never to be found again.

7. Conveniently

A method that ensures the records receiving the most airtime are within reach.

METHOD: Sleeves and jewel cases should be discarded to allow fewer steps between the decision to listen to music and the act of listening to it. Sort records in stacks such that those most often listened to are on top and those never listened to are on the bottom. The resulting columns of records should surround your stereo, allowing enough room for accessing the equipment itself.

PROS: The use of stacks will allow more convenient pre-play access and less troublesome post-play storing.

CONS: Some recording formats will be less conducive to being stacked without protection. Though LPs are more damageable through stacking, they will form sturdier columns. Conversely, CDs will withstand a greater degree of wear, but will form less architecturally sound columns.

8. Harmoniously

A method that allows constant play of the collection.

METHOD: Final songs of albums must blend seamlessly with opening numbers of the fol-

lowing albums. This method should only be undertaken by the most discerning of listeners, or for those who own a limited number of albums (below twenty is recommended).

PROS: A continuous, always acceptable mix will be the result for the organizer who opts for this method.

CONS: User error in sorting and unavoidable introduction of new works make harmonizing a considerable burden. Frequent music purchasers will find this method tiresome, and should consider curbing their purchasing habits.

9. Socratically

A method that asks a series of questions to derive an order.

METHOD: The organizer asks questions, and then answers them. To illustrate: *Why are records organized?* To know where they can be found when later needed. *When will they later be needed?* Whenever listening to them is a requirement. *Are all albums needed for later listening?* Some, not all. *What determines this need?* Personal taste, a particular mood. *What dictates these moods?* Happenstance. *When does this occur?* Constantly. *Do these moods change?* Regularly.

PROS: Believing that an order was picked by passing a battery of rigorous questioning.

CONS: Will most likely result in the adoption of any of the other offered methods of organization.

10. Demonstratively

A method from which guests will both derive pleasure and learn.

METHOD: First separate recordings from their sleeves/jewel cases. Then apply dual modes of organization: (1) Sort recordings in any method that makes finding desired albums most pleasing; (2) sort sleeves/jewel cases in the method that the organizer most loves explaining to guests.

PROS: An interesting duality, a project with which the organizer may never tire.

Good for those comfortable with oratory.

CONS: Over-explanation of the underlying intent may prove embarrassing and possibly convey a sense of arrogance.

11. *Fashionably*

A method that appreciates fashion, music, and the inherent fashion in certain music.

METHOD: All music that is not a part of (or that is not historically related to) the current fashion should be removed from obvious inclusion in the stacks, allowing only those titles that are in vogue to remain. This method should only be used for pre-sorting, after which the organizer should conclude with any of the other methods (although “Categorically” and “Qualitatively” are not recommended, as all remaining music in the collection will assuredly fall into only one genre or exhibit a single overall sound – another method, “Harmoniously,” should prove a simple undertaking).

PROS: Other organizers will look to the organizer choosing this method as being as hip and up-to-the-minute as possible. Measurable personal satisfaction will come to the organizer from knowing that there is nothing in the collection that could be viewed as not being drop-dead cool. Further satisfaction will later come from mocking other organizers’ collections.

CONS: Severe costs. Occasional repurchase of discarded titles may be necessary as fashion dictates. Also, an innovative series of hidden cabinets and shelves may be required for the organizer choosing this method; either that, or very comfortable ideas about the intrinsic disposability of music.

These are all, ultimately, choices only the organizer can make. Some will require only simple logic and personal taste. Others, however, will demand deep personal exploration and confrontation. Proceed with equal parts confidence and caution.

How to Make Things Easier for Everyone

LESLIE HARPOLD

— 42 —

No one likes a sourpuss! So smile often – it’s OK for the smile to look forced. Cooing sounds are helpful when words fail you. People think this kind of thing is more uncomfortable for them to think about than for you to live through. They may tell you they cannot imagine your horror. What they mean is they will not.

You will need to mourn. This is best accomplished with the help of artfully written esoteric alternative rock and insurgent country songs. Suggested playlist includes, but is not limited to:

“Waiting for Superman,” Flaming Lips

“Sin City,” as covered by Emmylou Harris and John Starling

“Once,” Richard Buckner

“Fourth of July,” Meat Puppets

“Start Choppin,” Dinosaur Jr.

“Kissing So Hard,” John Doe

“I Almost Forgot,” Matthew Sweet

“Rid of Me,” PJ Harvey

“Punch Me Harder,” Superchunk

“Sugarcube,” Yo La Tengo

“House a Home,” Mark Lanegan

The songs need not be purposefully sad, but should at least be evocative of a pertinent feeling or memory. Do not stop listening to this music until you have cried so long and with such abandon that your body forces a state of mild catatonia. Then sleep it off.

Gain weight. This is especially helpful if you are American as it insures no one will ever try to love you in a meaningful

and public way again. It also provides your friends and family with a convenient rationale for your solitude that doesn’t force them to revisit their own unpleasant memories. Think big picture and almost everyone wins!

The only kind of “tragic” that is socially acceptable is the beautiful kind. This means you must radiate love. If you change anything about the course of your life, it must be for a greater good than your own. It is perfectly acceptable to live your life as if nothing happened, provided you do not try to date before two years have passed.

When and if you do date, fail to form healthy attachments. If you find a meaningful relationship, people will suspect you never loved the husband in the first place and therefore can not possibly love the man you are with now. To insure a deficit of love in your life, find men who are incapable of affection and commitment, or those who openly state you are not their first choice – but you’ll do in a pinch. Relationships with people in difficult transitions are often a good bet. No matter how much you assure these men you are not comparing them to your husband, they will never fully believe you.

When enough time has passed and you meet new people, avoid explaining in precise terms how your life got this way. The stories will be apocryphal, and while it may be tempting to deny the truth, don’t; you’re only doing yourself a disservice and

ruling out your option of having random emotional meltdowns. These episodes need not be explained and, frankly, are best conducted in private. Refer to them as “taking some space” or “doing some thinking.”

Always acknowledge it was a great love. You have no regrets. You were safe and loved, however briefly. Hold on to that feeling as it is unlikely to occur again in the foreseeable future. This helps people believe you are OK. You actually *are* mostly OK.

When you get so angry it feels like you are bleeding from the eyes, it is natural to want to blame him for his departure. In the long run, these words can't be taken back, so don't say them aloud, even when alone. The phase of grief after denial is acceptance, after all, and when it comes, you will want to be seen as a healed, loving, sentient being.

Hold your breath. It's surprising how effective this can be at staving off the insistent demons which catch you off-guard in unlikely places: the bus, a company picnic, an auto body shop, a swimming pool. You may encounter a voice, phrase, joke, or mannerism triggering a flood of memory, making you want to crouch in the fetal position while pressing your palms full-force into your eye sockets. Holding your breath and counting to 50, or 100 if necessary, will often get you through the moment. If anyone asks if something is wrong, say that you “just spaced.”

Do not open the envelope the coroner will give you, as it contains graphic photos of the deceased that will scar you beyond repair. Take comfort merely knowing they are in there, and serve as proof of both the existence and death of the person to whom you never said a proper goodbye. After two and a half years, burn it in your living room

and do not shut off the smoke alarm – the battery will die eventually, and if you live in a crowded urban area, no one will call the fire department, anyway.

Whenever possible, answer your phone. Otherwise people will just come over.

No matter how you feel, behave in a way others will perceive as “strong.” No one likes a quitter. Besides, if you're a trouper, then others are saved the burden of being leaned on. They have important things to do, after all, and although you are sure they genuinely love you, they also have problems of their own. Comparing troubles is unfair and mean – remember that everyone's pain is relative to their experience.

While it's true he repeatedly promised never to leave you, accept that he has. There is no need to explore this in dialogue with anyone other than a professional therapist, as it will cause others to question their own security. People will stop wanting to be around you. As the saying goes, half of something is better than all of nothing. You need the company of others to survive, but letting them know every little thought in your head is a surefire way to guarantee they will not invite you to their birthday party.

Never mention the following words: husband, lonely, dead, lost, heartbroken, hopeless, probate, sleepless, haunted, anger, ghosts, resentment, or widow. Nice substitutes might be: unpleasant, sad, solitude, boyfriend, Christmas, single, lollipop.

Remember: You are OK. Some may think you are a certain kind of ruined, which is untrue. You are a certain kind of wise. Try not to wince every time you hear someone say “ignorance is bliss” and most of all, do not respond with: “Yes. It was.”

How to Keep Your Distance

SCOTT DAVID HERMAN

Your distance is a function of the space that falls
Between how far away you feel the need to stand

In some outlying place beyond the city walls
Of stone and steel engirded by the lightless land,

— 44 —

And just how far within the city's hollowed halls
And streaming streets that filled your mouth with dust and sand

You seem, by what your eye recalls; and this will weigh
In just proportion to how long you feel the deep

Imperative to move so many in the way
That you have traveled in such moments still as sleep;

And when this nearness is what you can give away,
Your distance then is yours to keep.

How to Perform a Card Trick

JOSHUA ALLEN

— 45 —

1.

Pop would usually recommend a drink or two beforehand, and luckily there's a liquor store right across the street from the hospital. A bail bonds place, too. The drink isn't to steady the hand, really, but to encourage the Audience to doubt your abilities. I pick up something called *Expert Whiskey* which comes in a plastic bottle and tastes brand-new.

2.

The Audience is my sister's girl which is good since she's young and hasn't yet inherited her mother's suspicious nature. Plus she's been crying all morning so she's exhausted, limp in the pink waiting-room chair, gripping this horrifying little doll by its left leg. I ask her what the dolly's name is and she says Anderson. I ask her if those hollowed-out eyes scare her maybe a little and she says a little but whatever.

3a.

The cards are bright red and say *Braniff International* in fragile white letters. The box is more like a slipcover at this point. I see them every time I'm in a hospital. They live in Celia's purse along with her coupons and the epitaphs for herself that she scrawls in golf pencil. *Absolutely w/out flaw* or *Silent 'n' efficient*. She calls pretty much every Monday morning, syllables already slurring, instructing me to write down the latest just in case

she should die suddenly during the week. Today this habit seems smart, proactive.

3b.

We played lunatic levels of Crazy Eights when Pop was here after getting torn up by his motorcycle. "Tough guy!" This is Mom yelling, knocking over equipment, swatting his casts with wilting flowers. "Mister tough biker!" We retired to the waiting room.

3c.

And then years earlier when I was here after losing my hand. That's when Pop taught me the trick. "Lefty," he said, "I know you like the magic," and I nodded, my thoughts never more than two steps away from the riding lawn mower that was still looming in our backyard, still *running* for all I knew. "I've got a card trick where you don't need two hands and you could probably even get by with no hands if you had to, so you can forget everything I said about the palming and the misdirection because this trick is all about the patter."

4.

Our aunt found the cards holding down a tip in the Embers, a bar she used to frequent. I mean *frequent*. They ended up in Celia's purse after Special Ed used the jack of spades on his wrists. There was still a brownish stain along one edge and our aunt couldn't bear to hang on to the cards,

but didn't want to throw them away, either. You should always, she said, you should always keep tabs on objects with that kind of power. "You like card games, right?" she asked Celia, handing her the deck, and Celia said, "Did it take?" and our aunt said no, he didn't even need stitches. And Celia asked if it was a cry for help or what, and our aunt said no, it was more like a science fair project.

5.

I tell the Audience to get the cards out of her mother's purse and this takes a while since the thing is bottomless, eternal. I instruct her to shuffle them thoroughly, which she has trouble with but killing time is sort of the point. I tell her I'm going to do a magic trick that'll make her question everything she ever learned about how the world works. I tell her to take a good look around because five minutes from now everything will be different. She does. I tell her she thinks she has choices in this life but she'll soon find out otherwise.

6.

I am nonchalant while she shuffles. I am hardly paying attention. I glance at the guy with the gauze over his eye who's watching the television bolted to the ceiling. You can't appear to care. The entire trick is just a formality to the master magician.

7a.

"You done?"

"Yes."

"They're completely shuffled."

"I think so."

"OK, I'll take those and I'll put them, lessee, I'll put them here in my shirt pocket, OK?"

"Yes!"

"Hardly even touched them. Now you're going to pick a card without even looking at the deck, OK?"

"How do I do that."

"Well let's start by picking two of the four suits."

"OK."

"All right, pick two. You know like hearts, clubs, diamonds."

"OK."

"All right, what are they?"

"I have to tell you?"

"Yeah, we're working together on this little project."

"I thought you were supposed to guess my card."

"No, no, you're going to tell me what your card is and where I can find it."

"Really?"

"Yeah, you little angel from heaven, so go ahead and pick two suits."

"Seems like I'm doing a lot of the work."

"Quit with the stalling."

"I pick ... hearts."

"And."

"And ... hearts. And diamonds."

"OK now choose one of those, hearts or diamonds."

"I pick ... um ... I pick hearts."

"OK and that leaves what, diamonds?"

"Diamonds."

"OK."

7b.

The trick takes at least twice as long as usual with this Audience, but the process is the same: narrow it down to a certain suit, then a handful of cards from that suit, *pick four or five cards from the suit of diamonds, now choose two of those*, then one particular card, then ask them to pick a number between one and ten.

7c.

"Four?"

"Four is my favorite number."

"Why's that?"

"My *faaaaa*avorite."

"Four's good."

“See because,” she says, holding up two fingers on either hand, bouncing them around like twin bunnies.

“Hey cutie, are you ready or what? Lookit, the fourth card I pull out of my pocket will be your card, the six of diamonds. OK? Can you –”

“No, the *seven* of diamonds.”

“Seven of diamonds, right – are you sure? Is that the one you chose?”

“The *seven of diamonds*, I said.”

“OK, let’s find out. One, two, and a three, and, there, the seven of diamonds. Voilà.”

7d.

The Audience shrieks, causing alarm throughout the waiting room. She claps her gummy hands together and forgets where she is for a few moments.

8.

Pop had punched my bandaged stump in what I assumed to be a gesture of camaraderie. He did the trick again and the artifice fell apart in front of me, the path we took to get to the card different on the second go-round. I’d picked spades and clubs and the first time he’d said *now pick one of those* but the next time he’d said *all right that leaves hearts and diamonds, now pick one of those*. If you’re lucky they’ll go right for the card on their own, he told me. Then you’ll see someone flat-out flabbergasted right in front of you, big chief.

9a.

I am forced to admit to the Audience that I peeked at the bottom of the deck as I put it in my pocket and the card I saw there was the seven of diamonds. And that the deck was in my pocket to hide the fact that the seven of diamonds was not actually the fourth card in the deck but the last. And remember when I forgot what card you’d chosen? And how I made it sound like you could pick anything you wanted and it didn’t

matter? That was all pretend. The Audience listens to my explanation, holding her doll tightly against her chest, making only the most tenuous nods.

9b.

(She’s been told not to ask about my hand but one time she put forth the theory that I still had it around somewhere and could put it back on if I felt like it, it’s just that I never really felt like it.)

9c.

I tell her she was being forced toward a conclusion that was decided upon before she even knew what was going on. I take a kind of grim pleasure in the look on her small, smooth face.

10.

The Audience takes the cards, looking for a better explanation. She finds the stain along one side of the jack of spades, touches the crescent-shaped crease where Special Ed must’ve held it. A series of tones over the PA system. The chairs are situated so you always have to look at someone. I close my eyes and imagine a faceless man stumbling into the Embers, heading toward the furthest table from the door, ordering one Expert Whiskey after another, trying to dilute the memories of that afternoon, purging the stench of hospital from his sinuses, the hours spent playing solitaire in the waiting room. He leaves the cards – discovered years ago right in the middle of the sidewalk, almost two miles away from where the plane went down – on the table when he gets up to go. Our aunt arrives an hour later, uses the deck as a coaster.

11.

Celia emerges from the double-doors, pale and thin. The Audience runs into her arms, leaving the scary doll next to me. “You made it,” I say to her and she doesn’t say any-

thing. “One more stomach-pump and the next one’s free,” I say.

12.

Celia spies the plastic bottle and tells me to throw it away, it’s not like the family needs another trip here. Then she tells the Audience to throw the goddamn cards away. The Audience starts to cry, just a little, so I take the cards from her, palm them, wave my hand, and *abracadabra*, they’ve vanished, hidden away inside my vacant right sleeve. She screams and demands to know where they went and I tell her not to worry, I’ll give them to her when her mother’s not looking, they’re not going anywhere.

This has been “MANUAL”

COMPILED AND EDITED BY

Joshua Allen

Rosecrans Baldwin

Michael Barrish

Dennis A. Mahoney

CONTRIBUTORS

ALLEN, JOSHUA · *fireland.com*

ARMSTRONG, GAIL · *openbrackets.com*

ARMSTRONG, JON · *blurbomat.com*

BALDWIN, ROSECRANS · *themorningnews.org*

BARRISH, MICHAEL · *oblivio.com*

FANNING, KEVIN · *whygodwhy.com*

FORD, PAUL · *ftrain.com*

GUILFOILE, KEVIN · *coudal.com*

GURLEY, JASON · *deeplyshallow.com*

HAMILTON, HEATHER B. · *dooce.com*

HARPOLD, LESLIE · *leslie.harpold.com*

HERMAN, SCOTT DAVID · *erasing.org*

MAHONEY, DENNIS A. · *0format.com*

MASSIE, ALEXIS · *alexmassie.com*

POWERS, MAGDALEN · *foolsparadise.org*

SEAMON, TOBIAS · *0format.com*

WOMACK, ANDREW · *themorningnews.org*