

F O L I O

# Brief Interviews with HIDEOUS Men

by David Foster Wallace

**B.I. #16**  
**Rhode Island Bureau**  
**of Corrections,**  
**Department of Rehabilitation,**  
**Sex-Offender Treatment**  
**Supervision Office, Pawtucket RI**

“I’m like thirteen, it’s my birthday, and we go to a like renowned Italian place in Cranston to celebrate. I’m from Cranston. My big sister is there, also, who always wears a mood ring that’s always brown. I get the spinach manicotti Genovese, which my dad he always says it’s real good here. But then he doesn’t order it. But I do. The waiter brings it out in this little like metal skillet thing steaming all over the place. He puts it down in front of me on a little like stand-up trivet thing on the tablecloth. The tablecloth’s white. This is a story to answer your question. The waiter says to me to be cautious and wait a little bit with this dish because it’s hot and the skillet thing is real hot so please be very cautious. My dad gets the pappardelle with sausage and mushrooms and a side of baby calamari. My big sister tried a suicide attempt and always has to wear long sleeves; my mom makes her. And I take and like reach out one hand and touch the skillet thing to see if it’s really so hot. It burns my hand, and I yank it back and then sit there holding my hand out for my mom to look at.

She’s concerned. But my dad, he’s been watching the whole thing while he’s eating his calamari, and he’s almost choking with laughter at me touching the skillet. There’s this thing with his lip when he laughs. My sister always puts her hands over her ears. ‘Boy, that’s a whole little character study of you right there,’ he laughs. Big red loud laugh. My hand is red, also.”

**B.I. #14**  
**St. Davids PA**

“It’s cost me every sexual relationship I ever had. I don’t know why I do it. I’m not a political person, I don’t consider myself. I’m not one of these America First, read the newspaper, will Buchanan get the nod people. I’ll be doing it with some girl, it doesn’t matter who. It’s when I start to come. That it happens. I’m not a Democrat. I don’t even vote. I freaked out about it one time and called a radio show about it, a doctor on the radio, anonymously, and he diagnosed it as the uncontrolled yelling of involuntary words or phrases, frequently insulting or scatological, which is coprolalia is the official term. Except when I start to come and always start yelling it it’s not insulting, it’s not obscene, it’s always the same thing, and it’s always so weird but I don’t think insulting. I think it’s just weird. And uncontrolled. It’s like it comes out the same way the spooge comes out, it feels like that. I don’t

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know what it's about and I can't help it."

**Q.**

"'Victory for the Forces of Democratic Freedom!' Only way louder. As in really shouting it. Uncontrollably. I'm not even thinking it until it comes out and I hear it. 'Victory for the

**It's the ones that'll act all understanding like they don't care and it's okay and it doesn't matter that embarrass me the worst**

Forces of Democratic Freedom!' Only louder than that: 'VICTORY—'"

**Q.**

"Well it totally freaks them out, what do you think? And I just about roll over and die of the embarrassment. I don't ever know what to say. What do you say if you just shouted 'Victory for the Forces of Democratic Freedom!' right when you came?"

**Q.**

"It wouldn't be so embarrassing if it wasn't so totally fucking weird. If I had any clue about what it was about. You know?"

**Q.**

"God, now I'm embarrassed as hell."

**Q.**

"But all there is is the once. That's what I mean about it costing. I can tell how bad it freaks them out, and I get embarrassed and never call them again. Even if I try to explain. And it's the ones that'll act all understanding like they don't care and it's okay and they understand and it doesn't matter that embarrass me the worst, because it's so fucking weird to yell 'Victory for the Forces of Democratic Freedom!' when you're shooting off that I can always tell they're totally freaked out and just condescending down to me and pretending they understand, and those are the ones where actually I actually end up almost getting pissed off and don't even feel embarrassed not calling them or totally avoiding them, the ones that say 'I think I could love you anyway.'"

### **B.I. #3 Trenton NJ [Overheard]**

R—: "So I'm last off again as usual and all that business like that there."

A—: "Yes just wait and relax in your seat be the last off why everybody right away all the time has to get up the minute it stops and cram into the aisle so you just stand there with your

bags all crammed in pouring sweat in the aisle for five minutes just to be the—"

R—: "Just wait and finally coming out of the jetway thing and out into the you know gate area greeting areas as usual thinking I'll just get a cab out to—"

A—: "Still but always depressing on these cold calls to come out into the gate greeting area and see everybody getting met and with the squeals and the hugs and limo guys holding up all the names on cardboard that aren't your name and the l—"

R—: "Just shut it for one fucking second will you because listen to this because except it's mostly emptied out by the time I get out there."

A—: "The people by that juncture are mostly all dispersed you're saying."

R—: "Except for over there's this one girl left over by the rope looking in peering gazing in down the jetway thing there as she sees it's me as I'm looking at her as I come out because it's emptied out except for her, our eyes meet and all that business like that there, and what does she she up and goes down on her knees drops crying and with the waterworks and all that business hitting slapping the carpet and scratching at gouging little tufts and fibers out of the cheap-ass product they buy where the low-polymer glue starts the backing separating almost right away and ends up tripling their twenty-quarter M and R costs as I sure don't have to tell you and all bent over slapping and gouging at the product with the nails, bent over so you can you know just about see her tits. Totally hysterical and with the waterworks and all like that there."

A—: "Another cheery welcome to Dayton for your fucking cold calls, we're pleased to wel—"

R—: "No but the story it turns out the story when I you know go over to say are you okay is anything the matter and like that and get a better shot of I have to tell you some pretty fucking incredible tits under this like tight little top like leotard top thing under this coat she's all down and bent over in and like bitchslapping herself in the head and still doing manual field stresses on this gate area product where she says this guy that she was in love with and all that business there that said he was in love with her too except he was already engaged from priorly when they meet and fall vehemently in love so there's all this back and forth and storm and drag business like that and I'm lending the ear to her standing there but finally she says but finally the guy gets off the fence and finally says

how he's surrendering to his love for this girl here with the tits and commits to her and says how he's going to go and tell this other girl in Tulsa where the guy lives that he's engaged to about this girl here and break it off in Tulsa and finally surrender and commit to this hysterical girl with the tits that loves him more than life herself and felt a merger of 'souls' with him and all that violin business like that and felt like finally for chrissakes after all the one-track shitheels she'd got the runaround from she finally she felt like here at last she's met a guy she could trust and love and merge 'souls' with the sort of violins and hearts and fl—"

A—: "And blah blah blah."

R—: "Blah and says off the guy goes flying back to Tulsa to finally break the engagement off with the prior girl like he committed he would and then fly right back to the arms of this girl standing with the Kleenex with the tits in Dayton here in the gate area with the waterworks crying out her eyes to yours truly."

A—: "Oh like we can't see *this* coming."

R—: "Fuck you and that he puts his hand over his heart and all like that there and swears he's coming back to her and he'll be on that plane there with the flight number and time and she swears she'll be there with the tits to meet him, and how she tells all her friends she's finally in love the real thing and how he's breaking it off and coming right back and she cleans up her place for him to stay there when he comes back and gets her hair done up all big with spray like they do and dribbles perfume on her you know zones and all that business like the usual story and puts on her best pink jeans did I mention she's got on these pink jeans and heels that say fuck me in like numerous major world languages—"

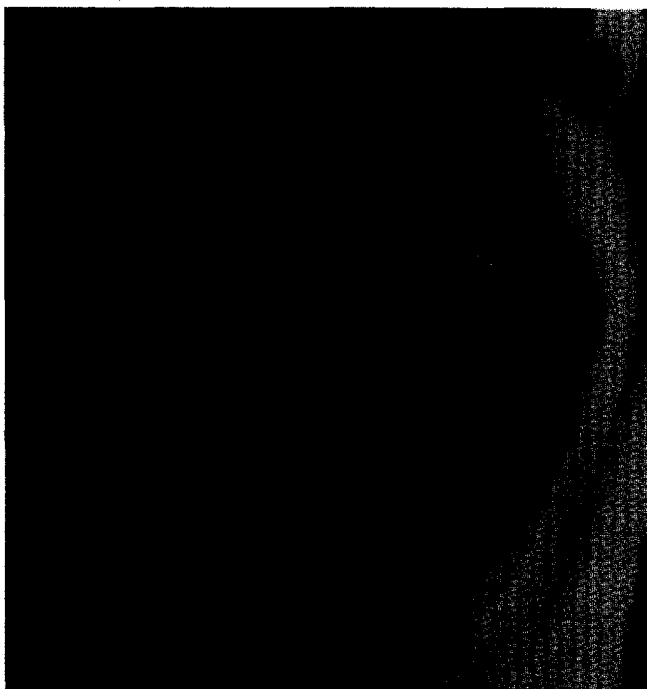
A—: "Heh heh."

R—: "By this juncture now we're in that little coffee shop thing just in from the USAir gates that shitty one with no chairs that you have to with your shitty two-dollar coffee stand up at the tables with your sample case and bag and all your shit on the low-end tile not even thermoset of the floor they got that's already starting to curl at the grout and keep handing her Kleenexes and lend the ear and all that business there after she vacuums out the car and even replaces the little freshener thing hanging off the rearview and hauls ass to be on time to

the airport to meet the flight number this so-called trustable guy swore on his fucking mother's life he'd be on."

A—: "Guy's a shitheel from the old school."

R—: "Shut up and that how she says how he even called her she gets the call right as she's smearing the last drib of perfume on her zone and gets her hair all sprayed out in directions like they do to haul ass to the airport it rings and it's this guy and there's all this hiss and static on the phone and she says he says how he's calling from the sky is how romantically he puts it calling her in flight on the flight on that little



inflight phone you're supposed to slide your card through out of the back of the seat in front of you and saying how—"

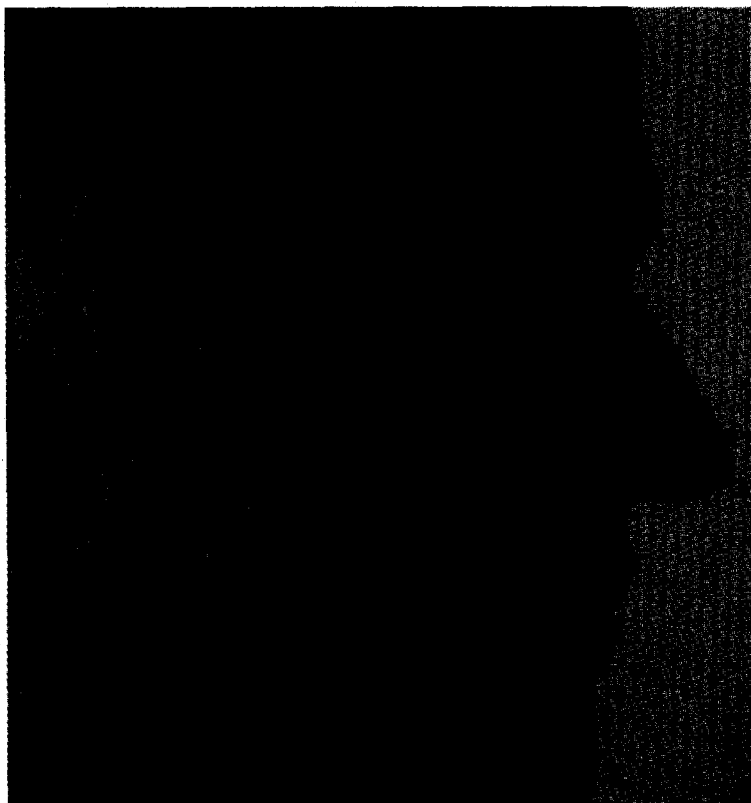
A—: "The markup on those things go six bucks a minute it's a racket and all the surcharges rated out of the region you're flying over right then with a double spread if the region they say adjoins at the grid's design—"

R—: "But that's not the point do you want to hear this how the point's this girl says she gets there early in the gate area greeting area and already with some of the waterworks already from love and violins of commitment finally and trust and stands she says all joy and trusting like a pathetic fool she says while it gets in finally the flight and we and they all start herding all in their big rush out the jetway thing and he's not in the first wave out and he's not in the second wave how they come out in these little waves clumps like the thing's taking some kind

of almost shit you know how—"

A—: "Jesus I ought to the amount of fucking times I spend on jetw—"

R—: "And says like a pathetic a total fool her faith never faltering she kept peering gazing over the octoweave rope maroon octoweave with that nice faux-velvet finish the rope of the area over at the side during all the hugging and everybody meeting or going off to Baggage and every time expecting this guy in the next wave out, clump, and then the next and next and like that, waiting."



A—: "Poor little muttski."

R—: "That then at the end there I come off the last off as usual and nobody else after except the crew pulling their little neat identical little bags those neat little bags that always bug me somehow and that's it I'm the last and she—"

A—: "So you're explaining it wasn't you that she's screaming and hitting the floor it's just that you're the last of them off and you're not this shitheel guy. The bastard even must of faked that call, the static if you run your Remington it makes static that'll sound like a—"

R—: "And I'm telling you you never saw anybody so the word heartbroken you think it's just words blah blah but then you see this girl with her hand knocking herself in the head for being such a fool crying so hard she can't mostly breathe and all that business like that, hugging

herself and rocking and slapping the shit out of the table so bad you have to lift the coffee off to keep it from knocking over and how men are shits and don't trust them all her friends said and she finally she met one she thinks she can finally trust to really give in and surrender and commit to do the right thing and they're right, she's a fool, men are just shit."

A—: "Men mostly are shit, you're right, heh heh."

R—: "And I'm basically, I'm standing there holding coffee I don't even it's too late I don't want even decaf I'm lending the ear and my heart I got to say it my heart going out a little bit to this girl for this heartbreak. I swear kid never but you have never seen anything like this heartbreak on this girl with the tits, and I start telling her how she's right the guy's a shit and don't even deserve and how it's true most guys are shit and how my heart's going out and all like that."

A—: "Heh heh. So then what happened?"

R—: "Heh heh."

A—: "Heh heh heh."

R—: "You really got to ask?"

A—: "You bastard. You shitheel."

R—: "Well you know how it is I mean what are you going to do."

A—: "You shitheel."

R—: "Well you know."

## B.I. #42

### Peoria Heights IL

"The soft plopping sounds. The slight gassy sounds. The little involuntary grunts. The special sigh of an older man at a urinal, the way he establishes himself there and sets his feet and aims and then lets out a timeless sigh you know he's not aware of.

"This was his environment. Six days a week he stood there. Saturdays a double shift. The needles-and-nails quality of urine into water. The unseen rustle of newspapers on bare laps. The odors."

**Q.**

"Top-rated historic hotel in the state. The finest lobby, the single finest men's room between the two coasts, surely. Marble shipped from Italy. Stall doors of seasoned cherry. Since 1969 he's stood there. Rococo fixtures and scalloped basins. Opulent and echoing. A large opulent echoing room for men of business, substantial men, men with places to go and people to see. The odors. Don't ask about the odors. The difference between some men's odors, the sameness in all men's odors. All sounds ampli-

fied by tile and Florentine stone. The moans of the prostatic. The hiss of the sinks. The ripping extractions of deep-lying phlegm, the plosive and porcelain splat. The sounds of fine shoes on dolomite flooring. The inguinal rumbles. The hellacious ripping explosions of gas and the sound of stuff hitting the water. Half-atomized by pressures brought to bear. Solid, liquid, gas. All the odors. Odor as environment. All day. Nine hours a day. Standing there in Good-Humor white. All sounds magnified, reverberating slightly. Men coming in, men going out. Eight stalls, six urinals, sixteen sinks. Do the math. What were they thinking?"

**Q.** . . .

"It's what he stands in. In the sonic center. Where the shine stand used to be. In the crafted space between the end of the sinks and the start of the stalls. The space designed for him to stand. The vortex.

Just outside the long mirror's frame, by the sinks—a continuous sink of Florentine marble, sixteen scalloped basins, leaves of gold foil around the fixtures, mirror of good Danish plate. In which men of substance drag material out of the corners of their eyes and squeeze their pores, blow their nose in the sinks and walk off without rinsing. He stood all day with his towels and small cases of personal-size toiletries. A trace of balsam in the three vents' whisper. The vents' threnody is inaudible unless the room is empty. He stands there when it's empty too. This is his occupation; this is his career. Dressed all in white like a masseur. Plain white Hanes T and white pants and tennis shoes he had to throw out if so much as a spot. He takes their cases and topcoats, guards them, remembers without asking whose is whose. Speaking as little as possible in all those acoustics. Appearing at men's elbows to hand them towels. An impassivity that is effacement. This is my father's career."

**Q.** . . .

"The stalls' fine doors end a foot from the floor—why is this? Why this tradition? Is it descended from animals' stalls? Is the word *stall* related to *stable*? Fine stalls that afford some visual privacy and nothing else. If anything they amplify the sounds inside, bullhorns on end. You hear it all. The balsam makes the odors worse by sweetening them. The toes of dress shoes defiled along the row of spaces beneath the doors. The stalls full after lunch. A long rectangular box of shoes. Some tapping. Some of them humming, speaking aloud to themselves, forgetting they are not alone. The flatus and tussis and meaty splats. Defecation,

egestion, extrusion, dejection, purgation, voidance. The unmistakable rumble of the toilet-paper dispensers. The occasional click of nail clippers or depilatory scissors. Effluence. Emission. Orduration, micturition, transudation, emiction, feculence, catharsis—so many synonyms—why? What are we trying to say to ourselves in so many ways?"

**Q.** . . .

"The olfactory clash of different men's colognes, deodorants, hair tonic, mustache wax. The rich smell of the foreign and

**I swear kid never but you have never seen anything like this heartbreak on this girl with the tits, and I start telling her she's right the guy's a shit**

unbathed. Some of the stalls' shoes touching their mate hesitantly, tentatively, as if sniffing it. The damp lisp of buttocks shifting on padded seats. The tiny pulse of each bowl's pool. The little dottles that survive flushing. The urinals' ceaseless purl and trickle. The indole stink of putrefied food, the eccrine tang to the jackets, the uremic breeze that follows each flush. Men who flush toilets with their feet. Men who will touch fixtures only with tissue. Men who trail paper out of the stalls, their own comet's tail, the paper lodged in their anus. Anus. The word *anus*. The anus of the well-to-do ranging above the bowls' water, flexing, puckering, distending. Soft faces squeezed tight in effort. Old men who require all kinds of ghastly help—lowering and arranging another man's shanks, wiping another man. Silent, wordless, impassive. Whisking the shoulders of another man, shaking off another man, removing a pubic hair from the pleat of another man's slacks. For coins. The sign says it all. Men who tip, men who do not tip. The effacement cannot be too complete or they forget he is there when it comes time to tip. The trick of his demeanor is to appear only provisionally there, to exist all and only if needed. Aid without intrusion. Service without servant. No man wants to know another man can smell him. Millionaires who do not tip. Natty men who splatter the bowls and tip a nickel. Heirs who steal towels. Tycoons who pick their noses with their thumb. Philanthropists who throw cigar butts on the floor. Self-made men who spit in the sink. Wildly rich men who do not flush and without a thought leave it to someone else to flush

because this is literally what they are used to—the old saw *Would you do this at home*.

"He bleached his work clothes himself, ironed them. Never a word of complaint. Impassive. The sort of man who stands in one place all day. Sometimes the very soles of the shoes visible under there, in the stalls, of vomiting men. The word *vomit*. The mere word.

**Do I despise him, you're wondering, feel disgust, contempt for any man who'd stand effaced in that miasma and dispense towels for coins?**

Men being ill in a room with acoustics. All the mortal sound he stood in every day. Try to imagine. The soft expletives of constipated men, men with colitis, ileus, irritable bowel, lientery, dyspepsia, diverticulitis, ulcers, bloody flux. Men with colostomies handing him the bag to dispose of. An equerry of the human. Hearing without hearing. Seeing only need. The slight nod that in men's rooms is acknowledgment and deferral at once. The ghastly metastasized odors of continental breakfasts and business dinners. A double shift when he could. Food on the table, a roof, children to educate. His arches would swell from the standing. His bare feet were blanchmanges. He showered thrice daily and scrubbed himself raw, but the job still followed him. Never a word.

"The door tells the whole story. MEN. I haven't seen him since 1978 and I know he's still there, all in white, standing. Averting his eyes to preserve their dignity. But his own? His own five senses? What are those three monkeys' names? His task is to stand there as if he were not there. Not really. There's a trick to it. A special nothing you look at."

**a.**

"I didn't learn it in a men's room, I can tell you that."

**a.**

"Imagine not existing until a man needs you. Being there and yet not there. A willed translucence. Provisionally there, contingently there. The old saw *Lives to serve*. His career. Breadwinner. Every morning up at six, kiss us all goodbye, a piece of toast for the bus. He could eat for real on his break. A bellman would go to the deli. The pressure produced by pressure. The rich belches of expense-account lunches. The mirrors' remains of sebum and pus and sneezed detritus. Twenty-eight, no -nine years at the same station. The grave nod he'd receive

a tip with. The inaudible thank-you to the regulars. Sometimes a name. All those solids tumbling out of all those large soft warm fat moist white anuses, flexing. Imagine. To attend so much passage. To see men of substance at their most elemental. His career. A career man."

**a.**

"Because he brought his work home. The face he wore in the men's room. He couldn't take it off. His skull conformed to fit it. This expression or rather lack of expression. Attendant and no more. Alert but absent. His face. Beyond reserved. As if forever conserving himself for some ordeal to come."

**a. . . .**

"I own nothing white. Not one white thing, I can tell you that much. I eliminate in silence or not at all. I tip. I never forget that someone is there."

"Yes and do I admire the fortitude of this humblest of working men? The stoicism? The Old-World grit? To stand there all those years, never one sick day, serving? Or do I despise him, you're wondering, feel disgust, contempt for any man who'd stand effaced in that miasma and dispense towels for coins?"

**a.**

"..."

**a.**

"What were the two choices again?"

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**B.I. #3o  
Drury UT**

**“**I have to admit it was a big reason for marrying her, thinking I wasn't likely going to do better than this because of the way she had a good body even after she'd had a kid. Trim and good and good legs—she'd had a kid but wasn't all blown out and veiny and sagged. It probably sounds shallow, but it's the truth. I'd always had this major dread of marrying some good-looking woman and then we have a kid and it blows her body out but I still have to have sex with her because this is who I've signed on to have sex with the whole rest of my life. This probably sounds awful, but in her case it was like she was pre-tested—the kid didn't blow her body out, so I knew she'd be a good bet to sign on and have kids with and still try to have sex. Does that sound shallow? Tell me what you think. Or does the real truth about this sort of thing always sound shallow, you know, everybody's real reasons? What do you think? How does it sound?"

B.I. #48  
Appleton WI

“It is on the third date that I will invite them back to the apartment. It is important to understand that, for there even to be a third date, there must exist some sort of palpable affinity between us, something by which I can sense that they will go along. Perhaps *go along* [flexion of upraised fingers to signify tone quotes] is not a fortuitous phrase for it. I mean, perhaps, [flexion of upraised fingers to signify tone quotes] *play*. Meaning join me in the contract and subsequent activity.”

Q.

“Nor can I explain how I sense this mysterious affinity. This sense that a willingness to go along would not be out of the question. Someone once told me of an Australian profession known as [flexion of upraised fingers] *chicken-sexing*, in—”

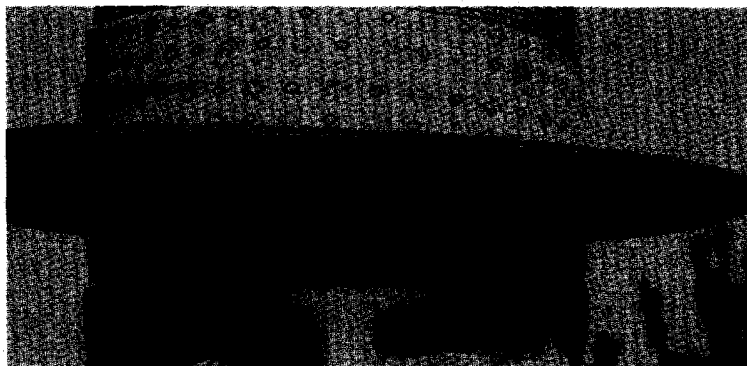
Q.

“Bear with me a moment now. Chicken-sexing. Since hens have a far greater commercial value than males, cocks, roosters, it is apparently vital to determine the sex of a newly hatched chick. In order to know whether to expend capital on raising it or not, you see. A cock is nearly worthless, apparently, on the open market. The sex characteristics of newly hatched chicks, however, are entirely internal, and it is impossible with the naked eye to tell whether a given chick is a hen or a cock. This is what I have been told, at any rate. A professional chicken-sexer, however, can nevertheless tell. The sex. He can go through a brood of freshly hatched chicks, examining each one entirely by eye, and tell the poultry farmer which chicks to keep and which are cocks. The cocks are to be allowed to perish. ‘Hen, hen, cock, cock, hen,’ and so on and so forth. This is apparently in Australia. The profession. And they are nearly always right. Correct. The fowl determined to be hens do in fact grow up to be hens and return the poultry farmer’s investment. What the chicken-sexer cannot do, however, is explain how he knows. The sex. It’s apparently often a patrilineal profession, handed down from father to son. Australia, New Zealand. Have him hold up a new-hatched chick, a young cock shall we say, and ask him how he can tell that it is a cock, and the professional chicken-sexer will apparently shrug his shoulders and say ‘Looks like a cock to me.’ Doubtless adding ‘mate,’ much the way you or I would add ‘my friend’ or ‘sir.’”

Q. . . .

“This is the aptest analogy I can summon to explain it. Some mysterious sixth sense, per-

haps. Not that I’m right 100 percent of the time. But you would be surprised. We will be on the ottoman, having a drink, enjoying some music, light conversation. This is now on the third date together, late in the evening, after dinner and perhaps a film or a bit of dancing. I do very much like to dance. We are not seated close together on the ottoman. Usually I am at



one end and she at the other. Though it is only a four-and-a-half-foot ottoman. It’s not a terribly long piece of furniture. However, the point is that we are not in a posture of particular intimacy. Very casual and so on. A great deal of complex body language is involved and has taken place over all the prior time spent in one another’s company, which I will not bore you by attempting to go into. So then. When I sense the moment is right—on the ottoman, comfortable, with drinks, perhaps some Ligeti on the audio system—I will say, without any discernible context or lead-in that you could point to as such, ‘How would you feel about my tying you up?’ Those nine words. Just so. Some rebuff me on the spot. But it is a small percentage. Very small. Perhaps shockingly small. I will know whether it’s going to happen the moment I ask. I can nearly always tell. Again, I cannot fully explain how. There will always be a moment of complete silence, heavy. You are, of course, aware that social silences have varied textures, and they communicate a great deal. This silence will occur whether I’m to be rebuffed or not, whether I have been incorrect about the [flexion of upraised fingers to signify tone quotes] *hen* or not. Her silence, and the weight of it—a perfectly natural reaction to such a shift in the texture of a hitherto casual conversation. And it brings to a sudden head all the romantic tensions and cues and body language of the first three dates. Initial or early-stage dates are fantastically rich from a psychological standpoint. Doubtless you are aware of this. Any sort of courtship ritual, game of sizing one another up, gauging. There is, afterward, always that eight-beat silence. They must allow

the question to [finger flexion] *sink in*. This was an expression of my mother's, by the way. To let such-and-such [finger flexion] *sink in*, and as it happens it is nearly perfect as a descriptor of what occurs."

**Q.**

"Alive and kicking. She lives with my sister and her husband and their two small children.



Very much alive. Nor do—rest assured that I do not delude myself that the low percentage of rebuffs is due to any overwhelming allure on my part. This is not how an activity like this works. In fact, it is one reason why I propose the possibility in such a bold and apparently graceless way. I withhold any attempt at charm or assuasion. Because I know full well that their response to the proposal depends on factors internal to them. Some will wish to play. A few will not. That is all there is to it. The only real [finger flexion] *talent* I profess is the ability to gauge them, screen them, so that by the—such that a preponderance of the third dates are, if you will, [finger flexion] *hens* rather than [finger flexion] *cocks*. I use these avian tropes as metaphors, not in any way to characterize the subjects but rather to emphasize my own unanalyzable ability to know, intuitively, as early as the first date, whether they are, if you will, [f.f.] *ripe* for the proposal. To tie them up. And that is just how I put it. I do not dress it up or attempt to make it seem any more [sustained f.f.] *romantic* or *exotic* than that. Now, as to the rebuffs. The rebuffs are very rarely hostile, very rarely, and then only if the subject in question really in fact *does* wish to play but is conflicted or emotionally unequipped to accept this wish and so must use hostility to the proposal as a means of assuring herself that no such wish or affinity exists. This is sometimes known as [f.f.] *aversion coding*. It is very easy to discern and

decipher, and as such it is nearly impossible to take the hostility personally. The rare subjects about whom I've simply been incorrect, on the other hand, are often amused, or sometimes curious and thus interrogative, but in all events in the end they simply decline the proposal in clear and forthright terms. These are the cocks I have mistaken for hens. It happens. As of my last reckoning, I have been rebuffed just over 15 percent of the time. On the third date. This figure is actually a bit high, because it includes the hostile, hysterical, or affronted rebuffs, which do not result—at least in my opinion—which do not result from my misjudging a [f.f.] *cock*."

**Q.**

"Again, please note that I do not possess or pretend to possess specialized knowledge about poultry or professional brood-management. I use the metaphors only to convey the apparent ineffability of my intuition about prospective players in the [f.f.] *game* I propose. Nor, please also note, do I so much as touch them or in any way flirt with them before the third date. Nor, on that third date, do I launch myself at them or move toward them in any way as I hit them with the proposal. I propose it bluntly but unthreateningly from my end of a four-and-a-half-foot ottoman. I do not force myself on them in any way. I am not a Lothario. I know what the contract is about, and it is not about seduction, conquest, intercourse, or algolagnia. What it is about is my desire symbolically to work out certain internal complexes consequent to my rather irregular childhood relations with my mother and twin sister. It is not [f.f.] *S and M*, and I am not a [f.f.] *sadist*, and I am not interested in subjects who wish to be [f.f.] *hurt*. My sister and I are fraternal twins, by the way, and now in adulthood look scarcely anything alike. What I am about, when I suddenly inquire, à propos nothing, whether I might take them into the other room and tie them up, is describable, at least in part, in the phrase of Marchesani and Van Slyke's theory of masochistic symbolism; as *proposing a contractual scenario* [no f.f.]. The crucial factor here is that I am every bit as interested in the contract as in the scenario. Hence the blunt formality, the mix of aggression and decorum in my proposal. They took her in after she suffered a series of small but not life-threatening strokes, cerebral events, and simply could no longer get around well enough to live on her own. She refused even to consider institutional care. This was not even a possibility so far as she was concerned. My sister, of course, came immediately to the rescue. Mummy now has her own room, while my sister's two children must now share



one. The room is on the first floor to prevent her having to negotiate the staircase, which is steep and uncarpeted. I have to tell you, I know precisely what the whole thing is about."

**Q.**

"It is easy to know, there on the ottoman, that it is going to happen. That I have gauged the affinity correctly. Ligeti, whose work, you are doubtless aware, is abstract nearly to the point of atonality, provides the ideal atmosphere in which to propose the contractual scenario. Over 85 percent of the time, the subject accepts. There is no [f.f.] *predatory thrill* at the subject's [f.f.] *acquiescence*, because it is not a matter of acquiescence at all. Not at all. I will ask how they feel about the idea of my tying them up. There will be a dense and heavily charged silence, a gathering voltage in the air above the ottoman. In that voltage the question dwells until it has, comme on dit, [f.f.] *sunk in*. They will, in most cases, abruptly change their position on the ottoman so as suddenly to straighten their posture—this is an unconscious gesture designed to communicate strength and autonomy, to assert that they alone have the power to decide how to respond to the proposal. It stems from an insecure fear that something ostensibly weak or pliable in their character might have led me to view them as candidates for [sustained f.f.] *domination* or *bondage*. People's psychological dynamics are fascinating—that a subject's first, unconscious concern is what it might be about her that might prompt such a proposal, might lead a man to think such a thing might be possible. Reflexively concerned, in other words, about their self-presentation. You would almost have to be there in the room with us to appreciate the very, very complex and fascinating dynamics that accompany this charged silence. In point of fact, in its naked assertion of personal power, the sudden improvement in posture in fact communicates a clear desire to submit. To accept. To play. In other words, any assertion of [f.f.] *power* signifies, in this charged context, a hen. In the heavily stylized formalism of [f.f.] *masochistic play*, you see, the ritual is contracted and organized in such a way that the apparent inequality in power is, in fact, fully empowered and autonomous."

**Q.**

"Thank you. This shows me you really are attending. That you are an acute and assertive listener. Nor have I put it very gracefully. What would render you and I, for example, going to my apartment and entering into some contrac-

tual activity that included my tying you up true play is that it would be entirely different from my somehow luring you home and once there launching myself at you and overpowering you and tying you up. There would be no play in that. The play is in your freely and autonomously submitting to being tied up. The purpose of the contractual nature of masochistic or [f.f.] *bonded play*—I propose, she accepts, I propose something further, she accepts—is to formalize the power structure. Ritualize it. The [f.f.] *play* is the submission to bondage, the giving up of power to another, but the [f.f.] *contract*—the [f.f.] *rules*, as it were, of the game—the contract ensures that all abdications of power are freely chosen. In other words, an assertion that one is secure enough in one's concept of one's own personal power to ritually give up that power to another person—in this example, me—who will then proceed to take off your slacks and sweater and

**A**  
**Again, please note that I do not  
possess or pretend to possess  
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or professional brood-management**

underthings and tie your wrists and ankles to my antique bedposts with satin thongs. I am, of course, for the purposes of this conversation, merely using you as an example. Do not think that I am actually proposing any contractual possibility with you. I scarcely know you. Not to mention the amount of context and explanation I am granting you here—this is not how I operate. [Laughter.] No, my dear, you have nothing to fear from me."

**Q.**

"But of course you are. My own mother was, by all accounts, a magnificent individual, but of somewhat, shall we say, uneven temperament. Erratic and uneven in her domestic and day-to-day affairs. Erratic in her dealings with, of her two twin children, most specifically me. This has bequeathed me certain psychological complexes having to do with power and, perhaps, trust. The regularity of the acquiescence is nearly astounding. As the shoulders come up and her overall posture becomes more erect, the head is thrown back as well, such that she is now sitting up very straight and appears almost to be withdrawing from the conversational space, still on the ottoman but withdrawing as far as she possibly can within the strictures of that space. This apparent withdrawal, while

intended to communicate shock and surprise and thus that she is most decidedly not the sort of person to whom the possibility ever of being invited to permit someone to tie her up would ever even occur, actually signifies a profound ambivalence. A [finger flexion] conflict. By which I mean that a possibility which had hitherto existed only internally, potentially, abstractly, as a part of the subject's unconscious fantasies or repressed wishes, has now suddenly been externalized and given conscious weight,

**I always propose it in a blunt, undisguised way, abjuring wit or segue or preparation or coloratura in the pronunciation of the contract**

made [f.f.] *real* as an actual possibility. Hence the fascinating irony that body language intended to convey shock does indeed convey shock but a very different sort of shock indeed. Namely the abreactive shock of repressed wishes bursting their strictures and penetrating consciousness, but from an external source, from a concrete other who is also male and a partner in the mating ritual and thus always ripe for transference. The phrase [no f.f.] *sink in* is thus far more appropriate than you might originally have imagined. Such penetration, of course, requires time only when there is [f.f.] *resistance*. Or for example doubtless you know the hoary cliché [f.f.] *I can't believe my ears*. Consider its import."

**Q.** . . .

"My own experience indicates that the cliché does not mean [sustained f.f.] *I can't believe that this possibility now exists in my consciousness* but rather something more along the lines of [sustained and increasingly annoying f.f.] *I cannot believe that this possibility is now originating from a point external to my consciousness*. It is the same sort of shock, the several-second delay in internalizing or processing, which accompanies sudden bad news or a sudden, inexplicable betrayal by a hitherto trusted authority figure and so on and so forth. This interval of shocked silence is one during which entire psychological maps are being redrawn, and during this interval any gesture or affect on the subject's part will reveal a great deal more about her than any amount of banal conversation or even clinical experimentation ever would. Reveal."

**Q.**

"I meant woman or young woman, not [f.f.] *subject per se*."

**Q.**

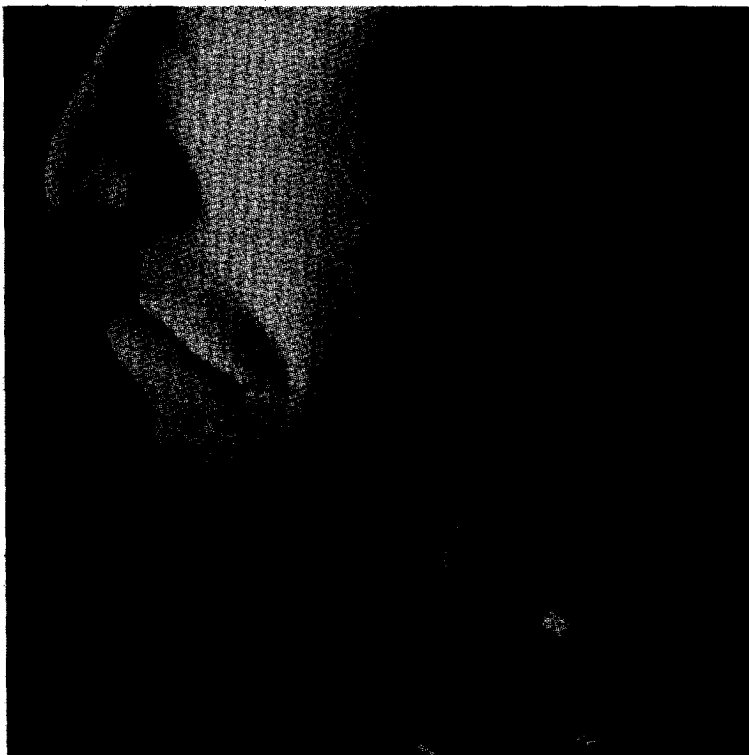
"The true cocks, the rare ones I have misjudged, will yield the briefest of these shocked pauses. They will smile politely, or even laugh, and then will decline the proposal in very direct and forthright terms. No harm, no foul. [Laughter.] No pun intended—[f.f.] *cock, foul*. These subjects' internal psychological maps have ample room for the possibility of being tied up, and they freely consider it and freely reject it. They are simply not interested. I have no problem with this, with discovering I've mistaken a cock for a hen. Again, I am not interested in forcing or cajoling or persuading anyone against her will. I am certainly not going to beg her. That is not what this is about. I know what this is about. The—and force is not what this is about. The others—the long, weighted, high-voltage pause, the postural and affective shock—whether they acquiesce or become offended, outraged, these are the true hens, players, these are the ones whom I have not at all misjudged. As their heads are thrown back—but their eyes are on me, fixed, looking at me, [f.f.] *gazing* and so on, with all the intensity one associates with someone trying to decide whether or not they can [f.f.] *trust* you. With [f.f.] *trust* now connoting a great many different possible things—whether you are having them on, whether you are serious but are pretending to have them on in order to forestall embarrassment should they be outraged or disgusted, or whether you are in earnest but mean the proposal abstractly, as a hypothetical question such as [f.f.] *What would you do with a million dollars?* meant to elicit psychological information about their personality in possible deliberation as to a fourth date. And so on and so forth. Or rather whether it is in fact a serious proposal. Even as—they are looking at you because they are trying to read you. To size you up, as you have apparently sized them up, as the proposal appears to imply. This is why I always propose it in a blunt, undisguised way, abjuring wit or segue or preparation or coloratura in the pronunciation of the contractual possibility. I want to communicate to them as best I can that the proposal is serious and concrete. That I am opening my own consciousness up to them and to the possibility of rejection or even disgust. This is why I answer their intense gaze with a bland gaze of my own and say nothing to embellish or complicate or color or interrupt the processing of their own internal psychic reaction. I force them to acknowledge to them-

selves that both I and the proposal are in deadly earnest."

Q. . . .

"But again please note I am in no way aggressive or threatening about it. This is what I meant by [f.f.] *bland gaze*. I do not propose it in a creepy or lascivious way, and I do not appear in any way eager or hesitant or conflicted. Nor aggressive or threatening. This is crucial. You're doubtless aware, from your own experience, that one's natural unconscious reaction, when someone's body language suggests a withdrawal or leaning-away from him, is automatically to lean forward, or in, as a way to compensate and preserve the original spatial relation. I consciously avoid this reflex. This is extremely important. One does not nervously shift or lean or lick one's lips or straighten one's tie while a proposal like this is sinking in. I once, on a third date, found myself with one of those annoying isolated jumping muscles or twitches in my scalp which seized on and off throughout the evening and, on the ottoman, made it appear that I was raising and lowering one eyebrow in a rapid and lascivious way, which in the psychically charged aftermath of the sudden proposal simply torpedoed the whole thing. And this subject was by no stretch of the imagination a cock—this was a hen or I've never inspected a hen—yet one involuntary twitch in one eyebrow decapitated the whole possibility, such that the subject not only left in such a frenzy of conflicted disgust that she forgot her purse and never returned for the purse but refused even to return telephone messages in which I phoned several times and offered simply to return the purse to her at some neutral public location. The disappointment nevertheless drove home a valuable lesson as to just how delicate a period of internal processing and cartography this post-proposal moment can be. My mother's problem was that toward me—her eldest child, the elder of the twins, significantly—her nurturing instincts ran to rather erratic extremes of as it were [f.f.] *hot and cold*. She could at one moment be very, very, very warm and maternal, and then in the flash of an instant would become angry with me over some real or imagined trifle and would completely withdraw her affection. She became cold and rejecting, rebuffing any attempts as a small child on my part to receive reassurance and nurture, sometimes sending me alone to my bedroom and refusing to let me out for some rigidly specified period while my twin sister continued to enjoy unconfined freedom of movement about the house and also continued to receive warmth and maternal affection. Then, after the rigid period

of confinement was over—I mean to say the precise instant my [f.f.] *time-out* was completed—Mummy would open the door and embrace me warmly and blot my tears away with her sleeve and would claim that all was forgiven, all was well again. This flood of reassurance and nurture would once again seduce me into [f.f.] *trusting* her and revering her and ceding emotional power to her, rendering me vulnerable to devas-



tation all over again whenever she might choose again to turn cold and look at me as if I were some sort of laboratory specimen she'd never seen before. This cycle played itself out repeatedly throughout our childhood relation, I am afraid."

Q.

"Yes, accentuated by the fact that she was by vocation a professional clinician, a psychiatric caseworker who administered tests and diagnostic exercises at a sanitarium in the neighboring town. A career she recommenced the moment my sister and I entered the school system, as barely toddlers. My mother's imago all but rules my adult psychological life, I am aware, forcing me again and again to propose and negotiate contracted rituals where power is freely given and taken and submission ritualized and control ceded and then returned of my own free will. [Laughter.] Of the subject's, rather. Will. It is also my mother's legacy that I know precisely what my interest in carefully

gauging a subject and on the third evening suddenly proposing that she allow me to immobilize her with satin restraints is, derives, comes from. Much of the annoying, pedantic jargon I use to describe the rituals also derives from my mother, who, far more than did our kindly but



repressed and somewhat castrated father, modeled speech and behavior for us as children. My mother possessed a [sustained f.f.] *Master's Degree in Clinical Social Work*, one of the first conferred upon a female diagnostician in the upper Midwest. My sister is a housewife and mother and aspires to be nothing more, at least not consciously. For example, [f.f.] *ottoman* was Mummy's term for both the sofa and the twin love seats in our living room. My own apartment's sofa has a back and arms and is, of course, technically a sofa or couch, but I seem unconsciously to insist on referring to it as an ottoman. This is an unconscious habit I seem unable to modify. In fact I have ceased trying. Some complexes are better accepted and simply yielded to rather than struggling against the imago by sheer force of will. Mummy—who was, of course, after all, you are aware, someone whose profession involved keeping persons confined and probing and testing them and breaking them and bending them to the will of what the state authorities deemed mental health—quite hopelessly broke my own will early on. I have accepted this and reached an accord with it and have erected complex structures in which to come symbolically to terms with it and redeem it. That is what this is about. Neither my sister's husband nor my father was ever involved in poultry in any way. My father, until his stroke, was a low-level executive in the insurance industry. Though of course the term [f.f.] *chicken* was often used in our subdivision—by the children with whom I played and acted out various primitive rituals of socialization—to describe a weak, cowardly individual, an individual whose will could eas-

ily be bent to the purposes of others. Unconsciously, I may perhaps employ poultry metaphors in describing the contractual rituals as a symbolic way of asserting my own power over those who, paradoxically, autonomously agree to submit. With little other fanfare we will proceed into the other room, to the bed. I am very excited. My manner has now changed, somewhat, to a more commanding, authoritative demeanor. But not creepy and not threatening. Some subjects have professed to see it as [f.f.] *menacing*, but I can assure you no menace is intended. What is being communicated now is a certain authoritative command based solely on contractual experience as I inform the subject that I am going to [no f.f.] *instruct her*. I radiate an expertise that may, I admit, to someone of a particular psychological makeup, appear menacing. All but the most hardened fowl begin asking me what it is I want them to do. I, on the other hand, very deliberately exclude the word [f.f.] *want* and its analogues from my instructions. I am not about expressing wishes or asking or pleading or persuading here, I inform them. That is not what this is about. We are now in my bedroom, which is small and dominated by a king-sized Edwardian-style four-poster bed. The bed itself, which appears enormous and deceptively sturdy, might communicate a certain menace, conceivably, in view of the contract we have entered into. I always phrase it as [no f.f.] *This is what you are to do, You are to do such-and-such and so on and so forth*. I tell them how to stand and when to turn and how to look at me. Articles of clothing are to be removed in a certain very particular order."

**Q.**

"Yes but the order is less important than that there is an order, and that they comply. Underthings are always last. I am intensely but unconventionally excited. My manner is brusque and commanding but not menacing. It is no-nonsense. Some appear nervous, some affect to appear nervous. A few roll their eyes or make small dry jokes to reassure themselves that they are merely [f.f.] *playing along*. They are to fold their clothes and place them at the foot of the bed and to recline and lie supine and to erase all vestige of affect or expression from their face as I remove my own clothing."

**Q.**

"Sometimes, sometimes not. The excitement is intense but not specifically genital. My own undressing has been matter-of-fact. Neither ceremonial nor hurried. I radiate command. A few chicken out part of the way through, but very, very few. Those who wish to go, go. The confinement is very abstract. The thongs are black satin, mail-order. You would

be surprised. As they comply with each request, command, I utter little phrases of positive reinforcement, such as, for instance, *Good* and *That's a good girl*. I tell them that the knots are *double slips* and will tighten automatically if they struggle or resist. In fact they are not. In fact there is no such thing as a double-slip knot. The crucial moment occurs when they lie nude before me, bound tightly at wrists and ankles to the bed's four posts. Unknown to them, the bedposts are decorative and not at all sturdy and could no doubt be snapped by a determined effort to free themselves. I say, *You are now entirely in my power*. Recall that she is nude and bound to the bedposts, spread-eagled. I am standing unclothed at the foot of the bed. I then consciously alter the expression on my face and ask, *Are you frightened?* Depending on their own demeanor here, I sometimes alter this to, *Aren't you frightened?*

This is the crucial moment. This is the moment of truth. The entire ritual—perhaps ceremony would be better, more evocative, because we—of course the whole thing from proposal onward is *about* ceremony—and the climax is the subject's response to this prompt. To *Are you frightened?*

What is required is a twin acknowledgment. She is to acknowledge that she is wholly in my power at this moment. And she must also say she trusts me. She must acknowledge that she is not afraid I will betray or abuse the power I've been ceded. The excitement is at its absolute peak during this interchange, reaching a sustained climax which persists for exactly as long as it takes me to extract these assurances from her."

**Q.**

"Pardon me?"

**Q.**

"I've already told you. I weep. It is then that I weep. Have you been paying even the slightest attention, slouched there? I lie down beside them and weep and explain to them the psychological origins of the game and the needs it serves in me. I open my innermost psyche to them and beg compassion. Rare is the subject who is not deeply, deeply moved. They comfort me as best they can, restricted as they are by the bonds I've made."

**Q.**

"Whether it ends in actual intercourse depends. It's unpredictable. There's simply no way to tell."

**Q. . . .**

"Sometimes one just has to go with the mood."

## B.I. #28

### Ypsilanti MI [Simultaneous]

K—: "What does today's woman want. That's the big one."

E—: "I agree. It's the big one all right. It's the what-do-you-call . . ."

K—: "Or put another way, what do today's women *think* they want versus what do they really deep down *want*."

E—: "Or what do they think they're *supposed* to want."

**Q.**

K—: "From a male."

E—: "From a guy."

K—: "Sexually."

E—: "In terms of the old mating dance."

K—: "Whether it sounds Neanderthal or not,

**I tell them that the knots are double slips and will tighten automatically if they struggle, but in fact there is no such thing as a double-slip knot**

I'm still going to argue it's the big one. Because now the whole question today's become such a mess."

E—: "You can say that again."

K—: "Because now the modern woman has an unprecedented amount of contradictory stuff laid on her about what it is she's supposed to want and how she's expected to conduct herself sexually."

E—: "The modern woman's a mess of contradictions that they lay on themselves that drives them nuts."

K—: "It's what makes it so difficult to know what they want. Difficult but not impossible."

E—: "Like take your classic Madonna-versus-whore contradiction. Good girl versus slut. The girl you respect and take home to meet Mom versus the girl you just fuck."

K—: "Yet let's not forget that overlaid atop this is the new feminist-slash-postfeminist expectation that women are sexual agents, too, just as men are. That it's okay to be sexual, that it's okay to whistle at a man's ass and be aggressive and go after what you want. That it's okay to fuck around. That for today's woman it's almost mandatory to fuck around."

E—: "With still, underneath, the old respectable-girl-versus-slut thing. It's okay to fuck around if you're a feminist but it's also not okay to fuck around because most guys aren't

feminists and won't respect you and won't call you again if you fuck around."

K—: "Do but don't. A double bind."

E—: "A paradox. Damned either way. The media perpetuates it."

K—: "You can imagine the load of internal stress all this dumps on their psyches."

E—: "Come a long way baby, my ass."

K—: "That's why so many of them are nuts."

E—: "Out of their minds with internal stress."

K—: "It's not even really their fault."

**The bigger the feminist, the more grateful and dependent she's going to be after you've ridden in on your white charger**

E—: "Who wouldn't be nuts with that kind of mess of contradictions laid on them all the time in today's media culture?"

K—: "The point being that this is what makes it so difficult, when for example you're sexually interested in one, to figure out what she really wants from a male."

E—: "It's a total mess. You can go nuts trying to figure out what tack to take. She might go for it, she might not. Today's woman's a total crapshoot. It's like trying to figure out a Zen koan. Where what they want's concerned, you pretty much have to just shut your eyes and leap."

K—: "I disagree."

E—: "I meant metaphorically."

K—: "I disagree that it's impossible to deduce what it is they really want."

E—: "I don't think I said *impossible*."

K—: "Though I do agree that in today's post-feminist era it's unprecedentedly difficult and takes some serious deductive firepower and imagination."

E—: "I mean if it were really literally *impossible* then where would we be as a species?"

K—: "And I do agree that you can't necessarily go just by what they say they want."

E—: "Because are they only saying it because they think they're supposed to?"

K—: "My position is that actually most of the time you can figure out what they want, I mean almost logically deduce it, if you're willing to make the effort to understand them and to understand the impossible situation they're in."

E—: "But you can't just go by what they say, is the big thing."

K—: "There I'd have to agree. What modern feminists-slash-postfeminists will say they want

is mutuality and respect of their individual autonomy. If sex is going to happen, they'll say, it has to be by mutual consensus and desire between two autonomous equals who are each equally responsible for their own sexuality and its expression."

E—: "That's almost word for word what I've heard them say."

K—: "And it's total horseshit."

E—: "They all sure have the empowerment-lingo down pat, that's for sure."

K—: "You can easily see what horseshit it is if you start by recognizing the impossible double bind we've already discussed."

E—: "It's not all that hard to see."

**Q.**

K—: "That she's expected to be both sexually liberated and autonomous and assertive, and yet at the same time she's still conscious of the old

respectable-girl-versus-slut dichotomy, and knows that some girls still let themselves be used sexually out of a basic lack of self-respect, and she still recoils at the idea of ever being seen as this kind of pathetic roundheel sort of woman."

E—: "Plus remember the postfeminist girl now knows that the male sexual paradigm and the female's are fundamentally different—"

K—: "*Mars and Venus*."

E—: "Right, exactly, and she knows that as a woman she's naturally programmed to be more high-minded and long-term about sex and to be thinking more in relationship terms than just fucking terms, so if she just immediately breaks down and fucks you she's on some level still getting taken advantage of, she thinks."

K—: "This, of course, is because today's post-feminist era is also today's postmodern era, in which supposedly everybody now knows everything about what's really going on underneath all the semiotic codes and cultural conventions, and everybody supposedly knows what paradigms everybody is operating out of, and so we're all as individuals held to be far more responsible for our sexuality, since everything we do is now unprecedentedly conscious and informed."

E—: "While at the same time she's still under this incredible biological pressure to find a mate and settle down and nest and breed, for instance go read this thing *The Rules* and try to explain its popularity any other way."

K—: "The point being that women today are now expected to be responsible both to modernity and to history."

E—: "Not to mention sheer biology."

K—: "Biology's already included in the range of what I mean by *history*."

E—: "So you're using *history* more in a Foucaultvian sense."

K—: "I'm talking about history being a set of conscious intentional human responses to a whole range of forces of which biology and evolution are a part."

E—: "The point is it's an intolerable burden on women."

K—: "The real point is that in fact they're just logically incompatible, these two responsibilities."

E—: "Even if modernity *itself* is a historical phenomenon, Foucault would say."

K—: "I'm just pointing out that nobody can honor two logically incompatible sets of perceived responsibilities. This has nothing to do with history, this is pure logic."

E—: "Personally, I blame the media."

K—: "So what's the solution."

E—: "Schizophrenic media discourse exemplified by like for example *Cosmo*—on one hand be liberated, on the other make sure you get a husband."

K—: "The solution is to realize that today's women are in an impossible situation in terms of what their perceived sexual responsibilities are."

E—: "I can bring home the bacon mm mm mm mm fry it up in a pan mm mm mm mm."

K—: "And that, as such, they're naturally going to want what any human being faced with two irresolvably conflicting sets of responsibilities is going to want. Meaning that what they're *really* going to want is some way *out* of these responsibilities."

E—: "An escape hatch."

K—: "Psychologically speaking."

E—: "A back door."

K—: "Hence the timeless importance of: *passion*."

E—: "They want to be both responsible and passionate."

K—: "No, what they want is to experience a passion so huge, overwhelming, powerful, and irresistible that it obliterates any guilt or tension or culpability they might feel about betraying their perceived responsibilities."

E—: "In other words what they want from a guy is *passion*."

K—: "They want to be swept off their feet. Blown away. Carried off on the wings of. The logical conflict between their responsibilities can't be resolved, but their postmodern *awareness* of this conflict can be."

E—: "Escaped. Denied."

K—: "Meaning that, deep down, they want a man who's going to be so overwhelmingly passionate and powerful that they'll feel that they

have no choice, that this thing is bigger than both of them, that they can forget there's even such a *thing* as postfeminist responsibilities."

E—: "Deep down, they want to be irresponsible."

K—: "I suppose in a way I agree, though I don't think they can really be faulted for it, because I don't think it's conscious."

E—: "It dwells as a Lacanian cry in the infantile unconscious, the lingo would say."

K—: "I mean it's understandable, isn't it? The more these logically incompatible responsibilities are forced on today's females, the stronger their unconscious desire for an overwhelmingly powerful, passionate male who can render the whole double bind irrelevant by so totally overwhelming them with passion that they can allow themselves to believe they couldn't help it, that the sex wasn't a matter of conscious



choice that they can be held responsible for, that ultimately if *anyone* was responsible it was the *male*."

E—: "Which explains why the bigger the so-called feminist, the more she'll hang on you and follow you around after you sleep with her."

K—: "I'm not sure I'd go along with that."

E—: "But it follows that the bigger the feminist, the more grateful and dependent she's going to be after you've ridden in on your white charger and relieved her of responsibility."

K—: "What I disagree with is E—'s scornful use of *so-called*. I just don't think that today's feminists are being consciously insincere in all their talk about autonomy. Just as I don't think they're strictly to blame for the terrible bind they've found themselves in. Though deep down I do have to agree that women are histor-

ically ill-equipped for taking genuine responsibility for themselves."

**Q.**

E—: "I don't suppose either of you saw where the Little Wranglers' room was in this place."

K—: "I don't mean that in any kind of just-another-Neanderthal-male-grad-student-putting-down-women-because-he's-too-insecure-to-countenance-their-sexual-subjectivity way. And I'd go to the wall to defend them against scorn or culpability for a situation that is clearly not their fault."

E—: "Because it's getting to be time to answer nature's page, if you know what I mean."

K—: "I mean, even looking at the evolutionary aspect, you have to agree that a certain lack of autonomy-slash-responsibility was an obvious genetic advantage as far as primitive human females went, since a weak sense of autonomy would drive a primitive female toward a primitive male to provide food and protection."

E—: "While your more autonomous, butch-type female would be out hunting on her own, actually competing with the males for food."

K—: "But the point is that it was the less self-sufficient less autonomous females who found mates and bred."

E—: "And raised offspring."

K—: "And thus perpetuated the species."

E—: "Natural selection favored the ones who found mates instead of going out hunting. I mean, how many cave paintings of female hunters do you ever see?"

K—: "Historically, we should probably note that once the quote-unquote *weak* female has mated and bred, she shows an often spectacular sense of responsibility where her offspring are concerned. It's not that females have no capacity for responsibility. That's not what I'm talking about."

E—: "They do make great moms."

K—: "What we're talking about here is single adult preprimipara females, their genetic-slash-historical capacity for autonomy, for as it were self-responsibility, in their dealings with males."

E—: "Evolution has bred it out of them. Look at the magazines. Look at romance novels."

K—: "What today's woman wants, in short, is a male with both the passionate sensitivity and the logical firepower to discern that all her pronouncements about autonomy are actually desperate cries in the wilderness of the double bind."

E—: "They all want it. They just can't say it."

K—: "Putting you, today's interested male, in the paradoxical role of almost their therapist or priest."

E—: "They want absolution."

K—: "When they say, 'I am my own person,' 'I do not need a man,' 'I am responsible for my own sexuality,' they are actually telling you pre-

cisely what they want you to make them forget."

E—: "They want to be rescued."

K—: "They want you on one level wholeheartedly to agree and respect what they're saying and on another, deeper level to recognize that it's all complete horseshit and to gallop in on your white charger and overwhelm them with passion, just as males have been doing since time immemorial."

E—: "That's why you can't take what they say at face value or it'll drive you nuts."

K—: "Basically it's all still an elaborate semiotic code, with the new postmodern semions of autonomy and responsibility replacing the old premodern semions of chivalry and courtship."

E—: "I really do have to see a man about a prancing pony."

K—: "The only way not to get lost in the code is to approach the whole issue logically. What is she really saying?"

E—: "No doesn't mean yes, but it doesn't mean no, either."

K—: "I mean, the capacity for logic is what distinguished us from animals to begin with."

E—: "Which, no offense, but logic's not exactly a woman's strong suit."

K—: "Although if the whole sexual situation is illogical, it hardly makes sense to blame today's woman for being weak on logic or for giving off a constant barrage of paradoxical signals."

E—: "In other words, they're not responsible for not being responsible, K—'s saying."

K—: "I'm saying it's tricky and difficult but that if you use your head it's not impossible."

E—: "Because think about it: if it was really impossible, where would the species be?"

K—: "Life always finds a way."

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## B.I. #51 Fort Dodge IA

"I always think, 'What if I can't?' Then I always think, 'Oh shit, don't think that.' Because thinking about it can make it happen. Not like it's happened that often. But I get scared about it. We all do. Anybody tells you they don't, they're full of it. They're scared it might happen. Then I always think, 'I wouldn't even be worried about it if she wasn't here.' Then I get pissed off. It's like I think she's expecting something. That if she wasn't lying there expecting it and wondering and, like, evaluating, it wouldn't have even occurred to me. Then I get almost kind of pissed off. I'll get so pissed off, I'll stop even giving a shit about can I or not. It's like I want to show her up. It's like, 'Okay, bitch, you asked for it.' Then everything goes fine."