

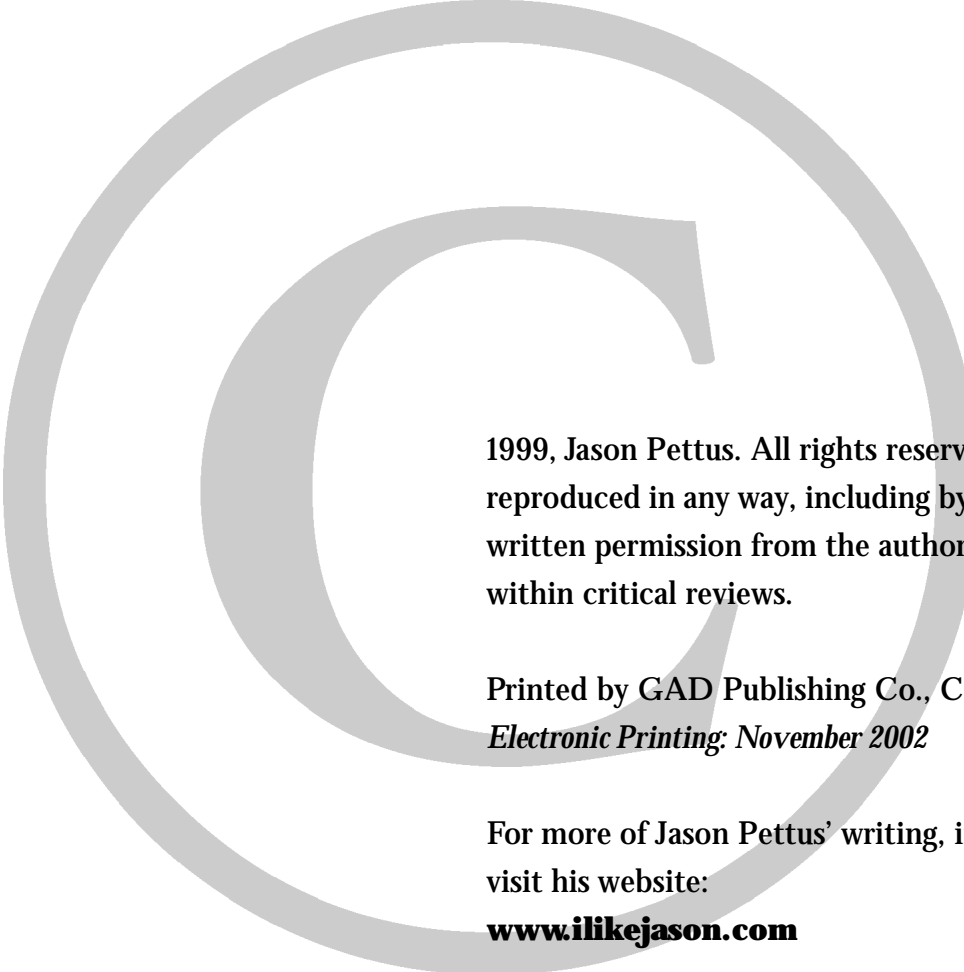
The Summer



I Was a Girl

Memoirs on being the opposite sex

Jason Pettus



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www.ilikejason.com

or read through your mobile device via AvantGo, a web portal for PDAs:

www.avantgo.com

A few thoughts on being a girl

INTRODUCTION

One day early in 1999 I asked myself a question that was to have quite an impact on my life - namely, how successful was I now becoming in writing from a female point of view? As a novelist (and especially one who enjoys writing from the female perspective) it's a pretty important question for me to ask myself. At that point I had been writing novels for four years, and thought it was time to discover the answer.

I decided it would be interesting to start up an anonymous diary on the Web under the fictional guise of a woman named "Margaret," a person almost exactly like me in age, profession and beliefs but simply of a different gender. I maintained the journal through a website called OpenDiary.com, a place that let anyone who wanted to keep a diary at their server in exchange for allowing the company to run ads at the top of their pages. (The site has since switched to a paid-membership model.) Anyone who wanted to could come and read your journal, and they could also give you comments about it in two ways - through an email address if you chose to leave one, and also by leaving real-time comments at the actual journal which would then be tacked on to the end of your entry, also for view by the public.

Since I wasn't keeping the journal to deceive anyone on a long-term basis but merely to see whether I could convincingly write from a female point of view, I decided to set two rules for myself: one, that I would write only about the real events actually going on in my life that summer (changing some people's genders and leaving others the same, depending on how it fit into the story); and two, immediately admitting to anyone who wrote to me that I was indeed a man and explaining why I was keeping the journal in the first place. I figured that with these policies in place, it would only be a matter of time before either someone figured out the truth on their own or that someone would 'out' me, be it a man who was attracted to Margaret or a woman who was angry that I was passing myself off as a woman.

For the most part the experiment was a great success - of the 200 or so people who ended up becoming fans of Margaret's diary, not one of them guessed that I was a man either privately or publicly. In fact, I had the opposite experience with most of the women who ended up writing in than I was expecting - far from being angry about my gender-switching, they thought it highly entertaining that they themselves had been fooled and continued helping me keep up the facade throughout the summer through their public comments. Not surprisingly, Margaret's diary came to an end precisely because of the scenario I had envisioned - a young man, smitten with her, who wrote to ask her out, then became angry when he found out I was a man and "outed" me at his own anonymous journal.

I've collected all the journal entries I wrote as Margaret over the summer of 1999, as well as the public comments and private emails that my readers left, and have collected them here in this book. I hope you enjoy reading them as much as I enjoyed writing them.

Jason Pettus

November 18, 2002

Title: Confessions of a nerd girl

Hometown: Chicago

Name: *Margaret*

Age: 30

Sex : F

Tell us a little something about yourself!

I'm 30 years old and living the life of a (happy) novelist and (unhappy) temp in Chicago.

I drink a little too much, smoke a little too much, and keep having sex with the wrong men.

I'm a big ol' computer nerd and am not ashamed to admit it.

Yes, I've been published, but apparently I'm not allowed to tell you the name of my novel. No, my name's not really Margaret.

I go to punk rock clubs a little more often than a 30-year-old woman probably should. But that's just fine, isn't it?

I will be attempting to provide fairly humorous, rather confessional, and hopefully entertaining journal entries here. I hope you enjoy.

And one more thing. Since I'm the one writing this, it's automatically Copyright 1999, Margaret, NOT Open Diary thankyouverymuch.

The end.

Why toilets are sexy

7.2.99

Urgh. I know this is a fairly bad way to start off this journal of mine, but there's a subject matter I've been obsessing on for the last two days I need to get it off my chest.

I really need to get laid.

This rather profound piece of wisdom was discovered at work a couple of days ago. I'm at a new temp job, this financial corporation down in the Loop, and the bathroom stalls at this company are painted a shiny dark green. So I'm going to the bathroom one day and I'm staring at the stall door when it occurs to me that the paint is so glossy I can see the reflection of myself sitting on the toilet with my pants down.

And then I don't know what happened. I mean, it's a pretty disconcerting thing to watch yourself poop. I don't think it's something we as humans were really meant to do. But at the same time I'm getting kind of turned on, watching myself at such a point of vulnerability, knowing that I could easily masturbate right in the middle of this skyscraper if I want to. Then I sort of come back to the real world and realize how strange I'm acting, and it occurs to me that I really need to get laid.

I get a little weird when I'm horny. Ever since my one-night-stand with Scott last week, I've found myself constantly itching under my skin. I keep finding myself constructing elaborate fantasies in my head about random strangers on the el. There's this guy at the place where I'm temping, and we've got this little 'eye' thing going on. You know, whatever, he's a corporate guy, probably dumb as a box of rocks, but I'm still stealing glances everytime I walk by to the break room to get another cup of black coffee to quash my overwhelming urge for nicotine. Today while he was at brunch I went into his cubicle, pretending to look for something, and went through his stuff. He has a photo of his friends in front of the Eiffel Tower, Smashing Pumpkins albums in his CD-ROM, Dilbert mousepad. Ugh. I really need to get laid.

You know, one of my old boyfriends in college used to let me watch him pee. Sometimes he'd stand in front of the toilet and let me stand behind him, holding his penis while he urinated. That was always pretty sexy. Maybe it's not such a weird feeling after all.

Last night I watched a Spanish-dubbed version of "Tootsie" on channel 44, Telemundo. And I don't even speak Spanish. Man, I got it bad.

NEXT TIME: My one-night-stand, OR: How to get yourself really screwed

Notes from readers :

interesting concept, lmao [Sa-vannah]

I know it's hell ain't it? No sex, in your prime...join the club! OH, and Welcome too! Be safe out there!!! Pussy Control by Prince...listen to it! [Fancy Free]

Just wanted to say Welcome Margaret! Pretty interesting stuff you have going on over here :) [Pepsi]

"Rebounder seeks one-night-stand." "Any port in the storm will do." (just for laughs, I love your honesty) Keep writing, it's the only excitement I get these days. :~) [Billy Joe]

I hear you...I got so crazy I started to take applications...see *I dont know if I should post this...(wo)man it must be in the stars this week [isobel divine]

I too have been desperate to get laid the last few weeks, thus my attempts to seduce JJ, one of my exes (documented in a couple of my entries). I know how it feels but I don't know how to fix it.

[Moondust]

The last few girlfriends of mine liked watching me pee...including one that was very let's say conservative...maybe freud had it pegged. [Zombie Franchise]

I was going to say "get a life" but who am I to speak, I'm here reading!

My one night stand (or: how to get really screwed)

7.6.99

(Written July 5)

Heat wave in Chicago this weekend. It got so hot all I could do was lie in my un-air-conditioned apartment and not move and try not to think about how much I was sweating. Leah and I decided to try to beat the fireworks crowd by watching them at the Irving Park beach, but not only was the crowd horrendous there too, I got eaten alive by mosquitoes. So then we went to Joyblue to try to get out of the oppressive humidity but my ATM card wouldn't work so I got mad and just went home. Yeah yeah, happy Fourth, whatever.

So, Scott, my one-night-stand. I don't quite know how to feel about Scott. On the one hand I broke one of my cardinal rules of dating, which is NEVER HAVE SEX WITH A POET, 'cause they'll just end up writing a poem about you and, believe me, a poem about you is a much creepier and bad experience than you can imagine, not the wonderful and romantic thing you think it might be. On the other hand things SEEM to have turned out alright, so maybe I've bucked the trend.

I frequent a poetry open mic on the northside near where I live. I write a little poetry myself but mostly go to drink and hang out with friends. So there's a guy named Scott who I barely know, who I always assumed was gay. Tall, dark hair, effeminate gestures, sensitive, writes poetry. It's bad to stereotype, I know, but if I didn't I'd never get through life.

So after the show I get my weekly invitation from *Becky to go to this gay bar called Berlin. Becky goes each week so she can score some coke and also because she's this big huge lecherous dyke who likes to get really drunk and paw at all the poet girls. But I'm not working, I've got a little extra money, and I can handle Becky when she's drunk, so I say sure, I'll go. And then when Scott hears me say this he says, "Yeah, I guess I'll go too. Why not. I don't have to be up early tomorrow." And as stupid as it sounds, this lightbulb immediately clicks on and I think, "Oh, okay. Scott's not gay. Scott wants to sleep with ME." Just one of those thoughts that has no basis behind believing but you just KNOW is true as soon as you think it.

And the rest of the evening could've been copied and pasted from some big Word document in heaven entitled "HOW_TO_HAVE_A_ONE-NIGHT-STAND.doc." Rounds of drinks bought sequentially; evermore intense and intimate conversation around table in corner of bar; subtle yet unmistakable compliments, queries and come-ons; friendly offer to continue drinking and look at new poetry at his apartment; the lighting of candles and playing of Ani DiFranco (A SMALL TIP: Sensitive boys always play Ani DiFranco when they want to have sex with you); next thing you know, you're naked on a futon trying to pull your sock off with the toes of your other foot.

GOOD THINGS ABOUT HAVING SEX WITH SENSITIVE ART BOYS: They perform really, really good oral sex. They'll let you spend the night. They'll usually buy you breakfast. You can bum cigarettes off them. They tend to have big cocks.

BAD THINGS ABOUT HAVING SEX WITH SENSITIVE ART BOYS: They almost never have an orgasm the first time. They have issues about their bodies. They'll write a fuckin' poem about you. THEY can bum cigarettes off YOU. They tend to develop debilitating crushes on you after having sex once. They'll let you spend the night.

So everything with Scott SEEMS to be going okay, like I said. We saw each other this week and said hello, made some small talk. The sex we had didn't get in the way of having a fun evening, which was nice. No crush. No poems. (Yet.)

Yes, sure, I'd like a long-term relationship as much as anyone else. There's a part of my mind, way in the back, that dreams of marriage and children. But I also acknowledge the kind of person I am. I'm 30 and struggling to make a career in the creative arts, which means I need to devote every minute I'm not working or drinking to my writing. I'm 30 and still enjoy having sex with lots of different people (sue me), and I know I wouldn't be happy in a monogamous relationship right now. So, I get my intimacy in the little snatches that I can. It's not perfect. I never said it was. But it's my life.

NEXT TIME: Erotic poetry sucks

Notes from readers :

another good thing about sex with sensitive art boys is that you never know what type you gonna get each time...especially if they are in the theater...and you are right about the oral sex part..yummy [isobel divine]

I've had experiences with 3 SABs and always it seems that 3 weeks after the first consummation I'm wanting to run like hell and I spend hours wishing they would move to another country. Sad, hey. [Moondust]

You listed "they'll let you spend the night" under good and bad...so spending the night with an art boy is a wash? ;) [Zombie Franchise]

It looks like I need to find a "sensitive art boy" for me. Ecrivaine26

I actually love dating sensitive art boys. Mainly because they write poetry about me. [Gwenhwyfear]

This sensitive art boy is VERY HURT by your uncouth, objectifying and crass analysis of what we have to offer. I'm going drink a bottle of red wine in my black turtle neck and sulk to Leonard Cohen. [Johnny X]

Erotic poetry sucks

7.7.99

Leah and I went to an erotic poetry night here in Chicago on Monday. Sigh. Erotic poetry nights are kind of like New Year's Eve: everyone starts off sincerely enough, simply wanting to have a good time and assuming this will be a special night in which to do so. But in both cases I think the expectations get too high. People think, "A night of sex poetry! Woo-hoo! Nudge-nudge this is gonna be great!" And then, just like humanity in general, most of the evening is disappointing and the overestimated amount of fun you thought you were going to have comes crashing around you.

The problem, at least Monday night, is that people don't go nearly far enough in their poetry. They want to write something erotic, yet they're also caught up in being politically correct, being sensitive, being sincere, and also into trying to be metaphorical and "beautiful" in their words. As a result the majority of poems are erotic in that way that overpriced hardback "Womyns' Erotica Collection"s at Borders are "erotic;" just dirty enough to feel like you got something for your money, but not nearly dirty enough to actually turn you on.

It's kind of why I like this diary. The forced anonymity allows me to say things I'm not sure I'd have the courage to say if my real name was attached. Sometimes I get convinced that people would freak out if they knew how crude and un-P.C. my mind sometimes is. But then I'll write something like my 'toilet' entry here at OD and I'll get a bunch of sympathetic comments and I'll realize, no, there's a lot of people who think like I do. I guess that's the unanswered hope at erotic poetry night, that the performers will shed their superegos for a night and let their ids proudly shine through. And it's always disappointing when everyone takes their disgusting carnal desires and wraps them up in mediocracy and compromise.

Ran into Greg (who lives down the street from me) and he invited me and Leah to come up to his place and get really baked. So we did! Got into a big discussion about a documentary on PBS I saw this weekend on the American Revolution. Greg says, "You really want to blow your mind?" and loans me a copy of the Federalist Papers, which I've never read. I think the Founding Fathers would be proud that: 1) People are still reading the Federalist Papers for pleasure 210 years later; and 2) It's all a bunch of stoned intellectual nerds doing so.

Surprisingly the only good dirty poem all night was from Scott, my one-night-stand from two weeks ago. He wrote this funny, absolutely disgusting piece about how he wished his lover would give him a blowjob for three weeks straight without stopping, how he would gladly drink her urine and then pee down her throat in order to form an unending two-person ecosystem. Best line: "Your tongue is a website saying 'CAUTION! YOUR BROWSER MUST BE THIS WIDE TO PROPERLY VIEW CONTENTS!'" I found myself turned on for the first time that night, which considering how horny I generally am this week is quite a statement about the quality of the rest of the evening. I don't know if the poem was about me, but when Scott sat down he smiled and winked at me. Can't help but be a little flattered.

NEXT TIME: Why do cults' websites always look so nice?

Notes from readers :

I agree...I've released many a bizarre thought in my diary and it's amazing to see how many people relate. [midnight insomniac]

The only erotic piece I've ever deliberately written was called "Judy" and I may make an entry of it later (and hope it doesn't get deleted because of its content)... [Moondust]

(cont'd) I wrote it for a competition, the theme of which was "the abuse of women's rights"; we were otherwise given free rein. I think it's one of the better "impact" pieces I have ever done. [Moondust]
too much wanking induced browsing requires a wide monitor. ;) [Zombie Franchise]

OOoh, this entry made me wanna #**%\$?! with my **&*%^ and #@**&! your <#***@!!*& while someone else %#\$@! and ***#\$\$%@^ with a high voltage #**\$#^\$% and a barnyard goat.
%\$^?@#!!

Why do cults' websites look so nice?

7.8.99

Hungover this morning and everything's pissing me off. I watch all the women in the Loop with full business suits and \$150 tennis shoes, painfully waddling their way to work like the mere act of walking from the train to their building is somehow herculean. Why bother with the shoes? You obviously get no other exercise in your life. Your tennis shoes are completely new-looking, not a scuff on them, and cost more than my bed did. Are you making so much money and have such an out-of-control consumerist attitude that you must blow \$150 on a pair of shoes simply to walk from the train to work and back again? Supposedly so, I guess.

A friend of mine's been reading my journal here and made this comment: "When you announce the theme of your next entry in advance, it makes it seem like you have this whole thing mapped out, like a fictional project, instead of it being your extemporaneous thoughts on real events in your life."

I guess I should clarify. Everything I write about here has actually happened, but three or four days ago. I guess it's the writer in me—I need the time to mull over the events and think of a way of writing them down so they are hopefully entertaining and not just self-absorbed. So as I'm writing of the events from FOUR days ago, I already have in mind what I'm going to write about next, which happened TWO days ago, which is why I can post the upcoming titles in advance. I didn't realize people would get confused—but if a personal friend can, then I guess anybody can.

I was going to make a great point today about crazy people's websites but I've forgotten what it was 'cause I'm really hungover this morning. JoyBlue PLUS paycheck PLUS cute boys EQUALS disaster. Last week there was this multi-state shooting spree here in the midwest, and it turns out the killer belonged to one of these white supremacist groups. So they're showing this group's website on the news, obviously to highlight its shocking content, but what I'm thinking is, "Hmm. Nice use of frames. Oh, I see they used an animated GIF instead of a CG script. That's smart. Ooh, they use interlaced graphics. Another nice touch."

It seems like every time they show some wacko's website, whether that's the Hail-Bop people or the Trenchcoat Mafia, their sites always turn out to be technically very nice—small bandwidth, fast graphics, simple layout, like they've all been reading Jeff Veen's column in HotWired every day. I don't know which fact bothers me the most: 1) People who are so sick and unreal in every other aspect of life can make a really snazzy website; 2) The one thing I share in common with serial killers is our mutual obsession with HTML; 3) There's yet one more excuse out there to hate and ridicule computer nerds; or 4) I'm thinking all of this while watching their site on the news.

I've lost my train of thought. I had a conclusion to all this but now I've forgotten it. Oh well. Check out the web, though, and you'll see what I mean. Crazyies for some reason seem to have this almost inherent talent at web coding. It's freaky.

Overheard on a "Simpsons" rerun last night while I was getting drunk in my apartment:

"Homer, do you ever drink alone?"

"Does the Lord count as a person?"

NEXT TIME: Am I a fictional character?

Notes from readers :

I've been told that my web page is technically lovely...I shall go tear it up now...broken links...blinding color scheme...etc :) [midnight insomniac]

An Open Diary existential crisis

7.9.99

I think I'm about to make the decision to finally read David Foster Wallace's "Infinite Jest," which I've owned for over a year but have been too intimidated by so far. I have to come up with an entire battle plan whenever I want to read a really big book, or else I'll get distracted in the middle of it and end up never finishing it. "Infinite Jest," for example, is roughly 1000 pages long, so I would make a plan of reading 50 pages a day, every day, for 20 days straight. And then I'd have to stick to it, even canceling social plans if I hadn't gotten through my 50 pages by that evening. Reading big books is a PRETTY SERIOUS BUSINESS for me. Then again, I'm a big ol' nerd.

This temp assignment has just picked me up for another two weeks, so that's pretty cool. By the way, I still COMPLETELY have the hots for that corporate guy I wrote about in my "toilet" entry, the one whose cubicle I snuck into while he was at lunch. For about a week we were stalking around the office, making eye contact but not talking to each other. Then one day we coincidentally left work at the same time and we were stuck on an empty elevator together. Uh-oh. Neither of us say anything for a moment, then he says, "You're, uh...you're working here now, right?"

"Well, I'm temping," I say

"I'm Steve," he says, holding out his hand. "I'm over in Accounts Receivable."

"I'm Margaret," I say, shaking his hand.

"Yeah, uh," Steve says, stammering. (He's so cute!) "You know, I've been seeing you around the office and I was like, 'Hmm, I wonder who that is?'" The elevator opens. "So I guess I'll see you later." And so the grand love life of Margaret continues.

I've struck up a sort of friendship with another OD diarist recently, another 30-year-old female unmarried novelist with no kids. It's nice. It's hard for me to relate to most of the diarists here my age, who tend (it seems) to be married with children and stuck in these strange domestic crises that I utterly can't relate to. Plus, of course, the well-known fact that as a woman I have trouble becoming friends with other women. For the life of me I still haven't figured it out, but I know I'm far from alone in having this problem.

So. This woman I have been discussing the issues of being a novelist and also writing an anonymous diary for public consumption. She admitted that in real life she's been taking a much closer look at the real actions she's about to take and how they might relate to her diary entries. She was kind of horrified by this, saying she couldn't believe she was now deciding to do or not do things based on whether or not it would make a good story for OD.

I've been thinking about this and have concluded that this is merely a natural part of being a professional writer. Everything I do in life influences what kind of fiction I write. After all, ultimately I can only write from my real emotional experiences, even if I change the characters wildly from my real self (which I have

before) or set the story in another time or another place or within an industry I know nothing about (which I have also done before).

Now with my diary I find myself actually writing about MYSELF for nearly the first time in my life (I've never kept a paper diary). I tend to look at my OD journal not as a depository for my inner thoughts, confessions, rants, but rather a place to construct an intricate and grand story with myself as the main character and my real life as the basis for plot. Again, I think it's the fact that I've written three novels. No matter how anonymous OD is, I can't get away from the fact that these entries are meant for public consumption. And having spent the last four years of my life writing basically big "fictional diaries" (as one of my professors defined a novel) and trying to make them engrossing and entertaining so that they'd be popular, I find myself doing the same thing with OD. The "Margaret" you read about is not the Margaret I know, who sleeps for eight hours a day and works another eight and has all kinds of obsessive boring self-indulgent worries that would never be interesting in a million years to anyone else. This is Margaret the fictional character, who only does interesting things and whose life is tragic and glamorous and always at least good for a laugh. And not only do I have an obsessively-self-examined life for the sake of my writing, but I even subtly change the actual real things that happen to me when I write them here, to make them shorter, more intense and more interesting stories.

Well, enough of this existential crisis. I'm going to go have a cigarette.

NEXT TIME: Whatever trouble I find this weekend

Notes from readers :

I have kept a written journal for over 14 years and now starting this OD I am glad to put the most outrageous aspects of my life for everyone else to consume....my written journal seems so boring now [isobel divine]

I have enormous trouble making friends with other women too. At times I have made a supreme effort and for a while everything seems okay and I end up thinking I was just paranoid before... [Moondust]

(cont'd) But in every such instance in the last 6 years my paranoia turns out to be right because I have been mercilessly betrayed & used & abused & lied to/about & ultimately cut off & "left for dead". [Moondust]

I certainly can relate to the part of writing based on one's personal experiences...I think it's difficult not to. [Zombie Franchise]

I'm honor bound to read 'Infinite Jest' because my lover has teasingly implied she won't respect me if I don't finish it. Good thing it's funny. Great footnotes. She doesn' [Johnny X]

My weekend--drugs, hippies, and Reese Witherspoon

7.12.99

Lots of little things happened to me this weekend, but I don't know if any of them are interesting.

After a month and a half I finally found some pot to buy, courtesy of a strange little man named *Peter in Wicker Park. I figured I should pay Greg back for getting me baked last week, so I took him out to the Brew-N-View, a movie theatre in Chicago where you can smoke and drink. We got all smoked up and watched "10 Things I Hate About You" (very funny, very charming); "Shakespeare In Love" (disappointing, very very silly); and "Go" (Oh, man, you need to see this movie!). I should explain Greg--he's this guy who both writes and produces spoken-word shows. He's one of the only males I know that I have a non-sexual-tension relationship with, so it's always cool to hang out with him. We had a big stoned discussion about "The Blair Witch Project" and "Eyes Wide Shut," two movies that: 1) Open this week; 2) look scary as hell; and 3) we can't seem to find any information on. Urgh!

I guess Greg and Jason have gotten their schedule completed for the National Poetry Slam. They're doing all the daytime and late-night stuff this year, and apparently they want me to host one of the shows because, in Greg's words, "You're the only big important published writer we know." Yeah, right. If my work is so 'important,' why am I still working some crappy temp job? But I shouldn't think like that. I've had books published and they've sold, and lots and lots of people would give their right eye to have something like that. I get frustrated sometimes, and that makes me cynical. I have to remember the good things that happen to me and take them for what they are.

I hung out with *Skye on Sunday and was reminded once again how annoying it is to hang out with hippies. It took us an hour to find a restaurant because Skye's a vegan (of course) and she couldn't eat here, and she couldn't eat there. And then she kept taking off her shoes as we're walking down the Chicago sidewalk, which is: 1) embarrassing; 2) dangerous; 3) I don't have a number 3, I just feel like I should. Skye's okay, don't get me wrong. I guess she was just rubbing me the wrong way this weekend.

I'm working on a new erotic story. I've been writing a book of non-politically-correct erotic stories for the last three or four months. I'm happy with them and they're certainly doing what they intended, which is to make people feel VERY UNCOMFORTABLE yet turned on as they read them. This new story I'm writing is about a guy who hangs out at this super-slacker bar and he accidentally discovers that his smart-ass, cynical bartender leads a secret life as an internet porn star. And she invites him to participate in a shoot once he discovers this, and he of course goes along, and the story is about doing an amateur porn shoot. I will not comment on how much of this story I know through first-hand experience. Okay, maybe I will in the future.

Oh, and by the way, I had sex with Steve the Corporate Guy on Friday. Ah-hah! I will tell you all about it tomorrow.

p.s. I was withholding the name of the OD diarist I've become friends with, in case she didn't feel comfortable about it. But she mentioned me this weekend so I feel now like it's okay. Her name is *Wendy* and she has an amazing diary (well, amazing if you like MY diary and that kind of writing). I highly encourage you to check it out.

Notes from readers :

oh I will I will and congradulations on steve!! ;) [isobel divine]

Yes, congrats! I've read through your diary and I find you to be an extremely entertaining writer. I will return. [midnight insomniac]

I'll be back for more. ;) [Zombie Franchise]

thanks for the note ms. Mo ;) good to meet ya! I'm puttin u in my fav's! have a nice weekend!! [Suzi Q~]

Slacker confesses: "I had sex with a yuppie!"

Wow. I don't know what happened, but today when I logged into OD my normally-empty diary entries were covered with new comments from readers. How did all these new people find my journal? Was I picked for one of those Readers Choices or something? Thanks for all the comments. My favorite was from isobel divine, who said regarding sex with sensitive art boys, "You never know what type you're gonna get each time." Makes me think of a giant gumball machine full of guys with cardigan sweaters and Pavement t-shirts.

So regular readers know of my unexplainable crush on Steve, a guy who works at this temp job I've been at for the last few weeks. I think it boils down to two things: 1) He has a nice nose; and 2) He's got that spark of intelligence in the back of his eyes, that gleam that just lets you know that he's probably into some cool things outside of work. Most guys in Corporate America have that dull gloss across their eyes, like if you got to know them they'd be exactly as vapid as you would expect them to be. Hmm.

So at 4:45 on Friday Steve stops by my cubicle and says, "Um, we just closed this big deal today so, um, a bunch of us are going to get a drink after work and, well, um, you're invited if you'd like to come along with us." Well hell, I'm ALWAYS up for a drink. Getting drunk in the Loop is a weird thing. For those who don't know, there's no residential areas in downtown Chicago, so the Loop starts really closing down at 5 pm. The few bars downtown are packed on Friday with younger, more fun corporate people. Most of the more-horrible assholes are having to catch their suburban trains back to their homes in Wilmette and so the Loop is abandoned for us city dwellers. But by about 8 pm it's pretty much you and the homeless people left in the Loop. And by then you're kind of drunk and everything's a little surreal.

I've talked before about how sometimes you can just suddenly sense when someone wants to have sex with you. I used to be horrible at picking up on this stuff when I was younger. For some reason, by the age of 30 I've actually gotten pretty good at this, and I don't have to really waste much of my time anymore hitting on someone who doesn't want to be hit on, or missing opportunities because I didn't realize the guy was interested in me. Steve and I had a long, progressively-drunker conversation in Govnor's Friday night. Turns out he's really into Sylvia Plath (??? I know!) and we ended up getting into this really interesting conversation about Ted Hughes and the good/bad things he's done over the years in regards to Sylvia. And again, it just got to a certain point in the night where Steve was like, "What are you doing?" and I'm like, "What are YOU doing?" and back and forth like that and he says why don't I come hang out for awhile, maybe we can think of something to go do.

So I had my newly-purchased pot with me! RIGHT ON! We get to Steve's condo (condo!) in north Lakeview. I've never known someone who owned a condo. It was very David Lynchian. Very Martha Stewartish. He has this rough antique-looking fireplace (bricks are all old and cruddy and mismatched) and a collection of antique toy soldiers on the mantle. He has a big screen television and eight-speaker surround

sound. He's got this incredibly killer stereo and we ended up getting stoned and listening to the new Sleater-Kinney album REALLY REALLY REALLY LOUD!!!

Sex with Steve was...also very interesting. He's not like the usual guy I sleep with. He didn't quite know as much about the whole thing as he could've known, or nearly as much as my usual sexual partner knows. Like for example he didn't quite seem to grasp the concept of my clitoris and its contribution to this whole event. A small tip for the boys out there: Find a rhythm...and fuckin' STICK WITH IT! Jeez. I don't know. It's hard for me to describe. Sex with Steve was very...pedestrian. I think that's about the best way to describe it.

Does anyone else out there have an experience with getting better at picking up sexual signals the older they get? I'd be interested in hearing others' stories.

I spent two hours at the Blair Witch Project website yesterday. I'm completely obsessed with this movie and I haven't even seen it yet. I was at Mad Bar for the poetry reading last night and my friend Bob said this: "There are three constants in life when applied to open mic poets. 'I hate war;' 'I hate eating meat;' and 'I hate the host of this stupid open mic!'" Made me laugh.

NEXT TIME: Put up or shut up, OR: Yes, I will finally post one of my own poems

Notes from readers :

1. Where is South Wabash in relation to the Loop?

2. I can't put "Judy" on OD so note me if you want to read it and I'll give you an URL. [Moondust]
South Wabash, from 0 S to 400 S, is in the Loop. But then it keeps going all the way south to the city limits, I think. Depends on where on the road you're talking about. [*Margaret*]

Wow, you touched upon something that I have issues with. I've gotten a bit better, but it usually takes a friend to say, "wow, that guy digs you...hard" I just never see it. Well, sometimes I might but ignore it...I re [midnight insomniac]

(cont) ...I really like guys that don't kiss my ass, that play it cool...so the signs become even more subtle [midnight insomniac]

hey glad you liked my comment..its true though..too bad steve was errr...when that happens to me I just take charge and if it still sucks..then Im out of bed in a hurry...buh bye hahahah...your great!
love reading [isobel divine]

My first letter

7.13.99

So I got my first letter today. It's from a guy who figured out that *Margaret* is really me! A friend here in Chicago who knows both me and Steve, the Corporate Guy who I slept with last weekend. Here's an excerpt from his letter, talking about Steve.

"....Despite starting as an English major in college before switching to business, this guy does view artist types as the 'other,' which inspires in him the same mixture of awe, lust, confusion, and disrespect that, for example, noblemen had for the honest peasant folk. He has no idea you don't live in Wicker Park. And in another contradiction, he appreciates your openness, but thinks you're a bit of a slut. Imagine Tom without any of the character building experiences that make him a fun, open guy. If you can't tell by now, I took an instant dislike to this dude. Scott's a better, if troubled, choice. And (spilling a secret) Teri, that ultravixen who tends bar at Gingerman, said she would leave her boyfriend for you. Remember that night you got loaded and kept fingering her necklace. Well you kept brushing her breasts and it turned her on. Plus she liked your book, found it naughty."

And my responses:

I did get the idea that Steve was like that. I'm not saying it was the most wonderful experience in the world. Of COURSE he thinks I live in Wicker Park. That's where all the "artists" in Chicago live, right? Anyone who would use such a patriarchal term such as 'slut' obviously is going by the patriarchal definition, and according to the patriarchal definition, I AM a slut! Oh, such contradictions! Scott's nice, but...but. But that's all. I won't go into it. And you tell Teri that I would leave a boy any day to go have sex with her. Teri's the COOLEST! And which of my books did she read that she found naughty?

I KNEW THAT my friend didn't like Steve the moment he met him. (It's a long story, how they met, that's not particularly interesting.) I didn't realize Steve and my friend had had a conversation while I wasn't there. It's very jarring to receive an email from someone who broke through my anonymity and figured out who I was. Maybe I should stop talking about OD so much in front of my friends...

Well, lots to think about tonight. Hmm. See you later.

Notes from readers :

[winsome]

I think you should be very careful about the things you put here. It's really easy to find out who you are if you give too many details.. just erase some of them and you will be "safe" btw love you writing!! [She]

isnt it funny that guys can sex whatever they want as frequently as they want and when we do we still get labeled...man that pisses me off.. grrrrr [isobel divine]

You and I will never love again

7.13.99

Here's a quick one. I know I'm fairly critical of poetry here at my diary, what I like, what I dislike, what I think sucks. I thought it only fair to post one of my own poems. This will probably be one of the only times I do this.

You and I will never love again.
Copyright 1998, (my real name). All rights reserved.

She wants to be a hip-hop poet
but way too white to do so
and he takes sleeping pills when he writes
because he thinks it'll free up his mind
and sometimes drinks a beer with them
because sometimes he thinks
he might want to die

and you and I will never love again
and that's okay with me.

And he turns his Walkman up
as loud as it will go
when he places that snow-covered foot
on the roving train platform
He stares at the people
across the aisle
because he believes that
if his music is loud enough
it will SHOOT through his eyes
and blast them all away
like a laser
like a Pixie laser

and she steals cigarettes
when no one is looking
She murmurs to him
"I'm drunk
but not too drunk
maybe too drunk
Okay, I'm too drunk
but I'm not too drunk"

and you and I will never love again
and that's okay with me.

And he never wanted to be a poet
but an architect
He wanted to be a dried flower
stuck in a black vase
bought for twenty-five dollars
at Urban Outfitters
and placed on her windowsill

of the three-cornered...
the, uh, three-paneled...
Uh, the, three...window...THING
that he can't name
because he's not an architect
he's a poet

And she never wanted to be a porn star
but an electrical cord
A long, tight, taut 50-foot bright red electrical cord
gripped by a sweaty middle-aged janitor
at a community college in western Kansas
and wrapped over his fist
and under his elbow
and over his fist
and under his elbow
and thrown in the back of a pickup truck
while he sneaks off to play poker with his buddies
and YOU and I will NEVER love AGAIN
and THAT'S OKAY WITH ME.

And he cries in her hair
in his dreams

He bites off her finger
chews it up
and swallows it
in his dreams

And she is his winter coat
in her dreams

She wraps herself
around his thighs
without a belt
'cause...

...well, who wears coats with belts anymore?

And he never meant to be a poet
and she never meant to be a poet
and you and I will never love again
and really..

Really.

That's okay with me.

Notes from readers :

Wow. Beautiful.

This is great! Thanks for your note; I'll email you soon. BTW there is a writer's site I know of which you might like: <http://www.geocities.com/~toxicbrainland/> [Moondust]
[winsome]

NEW EMAIL

Wed, 14 Jul 99 08:20AM PDT

From: XXX (female)

To: gadpub@netscape.net

Subject: re "Judy"

Hello Margaret,

I would have put "Judy" on OD but I wrote to the staff and asked if it would be okay to do so if I put a warning at the top that it contained sexually explicit material and people should use their common sense as to whether it would be suitable for them to see, and the OD staff said no, because sexually explicit content is not allowed on OD. I probably could have figured out that answer by myself except I haven't been myself lately, as you have maybe noticed. Well, it's "normal" for me to be "crazy" but lately I've been worse than usual.

So I have some space that I haven't used so far, and that's where I'll put it. Please note the case difference between my email addy and the URL - this is deliberate, my reasoning being that if someone stumbled on the site they couldn't automatically email me, and people who knew my email addy couldn't automatically go look at whatever I had for a site. The domain owner is understanding about that (being a privacy-conscious person too) and has set up the email so that whatever is sent to XXX is deleted without me having to see it. My attitude about not getting unsolicited email may sound stupid to a lot of people (and rude) but what happened with my last online journal (on Geocities, but not now because I deleted it) is that some people I knew emailed me but didn't tell me they knew me, and I thought I was protected by the "they are on the other side of the world and don't know me so it's okay to tell them stuff", so I merrily told them personal things that I wouldn't have if I'd known I knew them... It all turned into a very ugly and frightening and dangerous experience so now I am very selective about who I give my email address to.

Okay, I've finished whining. You can find the piece at XXX and if you'd like to tell me afterwards what you think I would be happy to hear from you. I never planned to do anything with this piece because it was only written for the competition, and it's not the sort of thing I could show any of my friends...

Sincerely,

XXX (female)

FAQ: Taking dirty pictures

7.14.99

Frequently Asked Questions about taking dirty pictures

Q: Margaret, have you ever taken pornographic photographs for the Internet?

A: As a matter of fact, yes I have.

Q: For the love of God, why?

A: 1. I had a lot of self-image issues when I was growing up. I always thought of my body as gawky, too thin, bones jutting out of the most inappropriate places. Even as an adult I was ashamed of my body for a long time, and I felt very uncomfortable living inside of it.

2. I got a Quickcam for Christmas last year. And, in what seems to be such a prevalent activity it might as well be a law, the first night I got it I got drunk and took a bunch of nude photos of myself. (Hey, no film lab, no processing fee, no waiting, right?) This was the very first time I ever looked at my own nude body in a photograph, and you know what? I'm not nearly as bad-looking as I always assumed I was. Looking at my body in a photograph made my body look like other bodies I had seen in photographs—kind of sexy, kind of cute, and kind of curvy, not the awkward set of bones I see from the neck down every night. Even if you never show them to anyone, I HIGHLY encourage taking nude photos of yourself at least once in your life. It's an incredibly empowering experience. Not to mention pretty damn exciting.

3. I admit, I like pornography. Don't get me wrong, the mainstream porn industry is still evil. It's exploitive and unfair financially to women and geared towards acting out males' most violent fantasies. But the rise of the Internet has seen an explosive growth of amateur pornography, which is great. Amateur porn is much more couples-oriented, much less exploitive, and is done with the punk rock aesthetic in mind ("Hey, let's take some dirty pictures of ourselves and trade them for dirty pictures of other people"). The thing I like most about amateur porn is that it's pictures I'm comfortable with, yet they're incredibly dirty and nasty. I get sick of these books and videos of so-called "women-friendly porn" —you know what I'm talking about. They seem to take this attitude that enjoying hardcore, explicit photographs of people having sex is somehow "unladylike." Well fuck that, I say. I'M a woman and I ADORE pictures and videos of dirty, nasty, sweaty, no-budget fucking. In fact, I'd even say that the kinkier it is, the better sometimes. This fact doesn't make me any less of a woman and it doesn't make me any less feminine. Or at least that's how I view it.

4. I also believe in karmic pay, that even if you get something for free (like a cigarette from a stranger), you still need to pay it back with emotional currency (like giving a cigarette to a stranger the next week). I download a lot of amateur porn for free, and I like it, and I use it. But I got to feeling that I needed to emotionally give back to this community to make sure I balanced out, karmically speaking. So I talked to the guy I was seeing at the time, who of course was SO into it that I thought he was going to jump out of his skin right that second. And we had a whole series of nights, two weeks in a row, where we kept taking

all these photos of ourselves having sex and, well, this and that and the other thing which I guess I shouldn't get into because I might start breaking the "x-rated" rule here at OD. And then we went to our favorite amateur porn site and posted them for free.

Q: Aren't you afraid those photos are going to get traded and copied and posted all over the Internet? Aren't you afraid they're going to come back to haunt you?

A: Part of this process is learning how to have the courage to let certain fears go. Of course my photos are going to get widely duplicated and posted all over the Internet. (I know for a fact that they have, by the way) That's the nature of Internet pornography. Karmically speaking, I receive all my porn through the same process, so I must embrace the process even as it's applied to me. As far as haunting me, I have no plans on ever being a politician, a movie star, or a woman who would hide this fact from my husband. So I fail to see how these photos could be used later to exploit me.

Q: Does it creep you out to think that hundreds of strangers might be masturbating about you?

A: Of course not. I've masturbated to hundreds of other people who have taken dirty pictures. Why should a different set of standards be applied to myself?

Q: Has anyone ever recognized you in the physical world from your Internet photos?

A: I don't know. If they have, they've never mentioned it to me. I wonder about that sometimes. I've looked at thousands upon thousands of dirty photos on the Internet and not once have I ever ran into any of these people in "real life." You got to figure, though, that there are so many people doing it that it's GONNA happen one day. I wonder if I'LL say anything to these people. Of course it scares me a little bit that I might run into a truly creepy, scary guy who recognizes me from the photos. Then again, I always run the risk of getting a stalker from my novels. Or having a boyfriend turn out to be psycho. Or just some random crazy guy whipping his cock out on the el or something. I can't live my life based on fear. Chicago has taught me that.

Q: Do you do this on a regular basis? Have you ever thought of getting paid for it?

A: I only did it for that two-week period last year. There's a difference between paying your karmic dues and saturating yourself. I wouldn't do it professionally because it violates the very reason I like amateur porn in the first place. I find it sexually exciting that all these people are randomly posting dirty pictures of themselves simply for "the good of mankind," if you want to put it in lofty terms, and then taking other peoples' photos as "payment." It wouldn't turn me on nearly as much if I knew people were getting paid to do it, like a lot of "Pro-Am" porn is.

OUT OF SPACE! CONTINUED IN NEXT ENTRY

Notes from readers :

[winsome]

And to think, ~I~ was worried about offending ~you~!! (Not that I'm offended...) [Moondust]

I've often been curious about doing the same thing. I see nothing wrong with having such an open-minded attitude. It's kinda cool. I also don't ascribe to the women's soft porn idea.

FAQ: Taking dirty pictures (part 2)

7.14.99

Frequently Asked Questions about taking dirty pictures, part 2.

Q: So where can I find these photos?

A: Oh ho ho, young Skywalker! If I started plugging pornographic websites my OD diary would be yanked faster than you can say "I agree to the following Terms of Service." Let's just say that they're easy to find if you look in the right places and put in a little time and work.

Q: Anything else?

A: Yeah. I wanted to get a side-thought in today's entry that in a way applies to this subject also. "She" left a note yesterday about being careful giving too much information and running the risk of people knowing my real identity. I should explain that I don't necessarily mind people knowing who I really am. I've been living the life of a very confessional, very public author for the last four years now, and I've gotten very comfortable with airing my dirty laundry in front of strangers. I don't volunteer a lot of the information you've been seeing here, but I never deny it if someone asks me straight out. The main reason I comply with anonymity at OD is because it's a rule, and I'll get kicked off if I start saying my real name or other things of that sort. But if someone I know in the physical world goes to OD and figures out it's me, that doesn't bother me so much. It's just a little jarring at first because you're not expecting it.

Okay, that's it. I'm sitting here reading over what I just wrote. I can't tell if it's interesting, boring, self-indulgent, or makes me sound weird and crazy. Hmm. Well, I guess I'll post it and see what people have to say.

Notes from readers :

[winsome]

Wow, this has been posted for 20 minutes and I've already had to delete two angry notes from Christians! [*Margaret*]

I have nude pictures of myself on the net too. Not of me having sex, mind you, (no one I wanted immortalized with me) just nude pictures, of me playing with myself, with toys... I found it liberating and enjoyable. [LoveKitten]

It's fun, eh? [LoveKitten]

Personally I think your views are simply the honest feelings we should all have the intestinal fortitude to admit that we have. We are sexual creatures, (cont'd)

outside of food, shelter, and clothing, the most basic human need is sex. And to the "Christians" I say !%*#wjQW9.... - Ian, avid OD lurker

go for it, as long as you're comfortable with it who cares. as for the "christians": i've never cared much for the body of christ but i do have an affinity for the blood of christ. lets do lunch! :) [edpsrx]

Your honesty is amazing. You seem to be a strong woman and you don't make apologies for who you are...don't EVER. Rock on! [midnight insomniac]

Who knows what the future may hold for my new webcam. ;-) [Mark W Penn]

NEW EMAIL

Thu, 15 Jul 99 10:02AM PDT

From: XXX (male)

To: gadpub@netscape.net

Subject: Mean People <suck>

The funny thing about regret
is that it's better to regret something you have done
than to regret something you haven't. -Gabby Hayes

Margaret,

Why expend energy on the obviously shallow and ignorant?

I find your writing to be refreshing, and you to be intelligent, sexy, and resourceful. When the chips are counted, you have an incalculable wealth of good karma over your 'critics'. Have a nominal day.

Your Most Humble Servant,

XXX (male)

We've heard that a million monkeys at a million keyboards
could produce the Complete Works of Shakespeare;
now, thanks to the Internet,
we know this is not true.

-Robert Wilensky

Okay, my group of friends finally made a decision last night—"Eyes Wide Shut" Friday night, because it will probably be the easier of the two movies to get into; then "Blair Witch Project" on Saturday morning to try to beat the crowds. Got stoned and went to JoyBlue last night. This guy asked me to be in his movie. He's got this great idea for an all-improvised romantic comedy. He talked at length about Mike Leigh and the strengths of non-structured plot when making a low-budget independent. We also discussed "Blair Witch" and how surprisingly successful that's turned out to be. The problem is that the only film this guy's made before is one of those "Too Hot for TV" Spring Break direct-to-video specials. So, not a real good track record so far. Then again, he could've been saying it all just to hit on me. Well, I have his card. We'll see what happens.

So I ended up having six mean comments left on my entry yesterday that I ended up deleting. Becky and I sat at JoyBlue and discussed this at length. The first thing, of course, is that I don't understand why so many people would leave comments knowing full well how quickly they're going to get erased. The OD page itself says that your comment will be deleted if it contains any disparaging remarks towards a diarist. Not to mention I check my entries on a regular basis and I have the power to delete comments myself.

The conclusion to be drawn is that these anonymous people simply wish to leave a note which will serve no other purpose than to hurt my feelings. They know the comment will be taken off within a half-hour, but they know I'm going to see it first before I can take it off. I can't remember the last time I did something anonymously just to hurt someone else. I had learned even by high school that if you want your criticism to be respected and taken seriously, you must have the conviction to stand behind your words. The right of freedom of speech in this country is coupled with the responsibility to be accountable for your actions. (Thank you Federalist Papers.)

I forget so easily how much hate there is in the world. I forget how many people live simply for the chance to hurt others. You have to sort of develop a thickened skin about this when you publish a book because BELIEVE me, there's no shortage of people lining up to tell you how much your book sucks. Still though, the pain never completely goes away. Each hurtful comment yesterday and each direct or indirect threat of violence directed at me stings in that little way a paper cut does—nothing big enough to worry about, but just painful enough to be a constant reminder throughout the rest of the day. Are people threatened by my openness about my sexuality? Do they get angry because I go against their religious beliefs? Is it just people pissed that a woman would like pornography? It doesn't really matter. What's important to remember that there are groups of people in this country who teach that hate-filled anonymous letters are

good and something to be proud of. One of the headaches of being a writer, I guess. Hell, of being a human being.

I think I may have a cavity that's gone through the tooth and hit a nerve. I'm in incredible pain this morning, taken six Aleve which hasn't even touched it. Plus I'm sick and hungover and threw up this morning and feeling shitty about myself and unsure and...and it's just a bad day.

Trivia: David Lynch was the first person to be asked to direct "The Empire Strikes Back," after George Lucas saw "The Elephant Man" on advice from a friend. Lynch declined and ended up making "Dune" instead.

Notes from readers :

You poor thing. Well *I* think you're cool. And I heartily agree with openness about sexuality. Get yourself to the dentist right away, make your tooth better, and that'll make YOU feel better...

[LoveKitten]

[winsome]

1pm: Just got back from the dentist--emergency root canal. Doctor yelled at me about the bill and made me cry. This day just keeps getting better and better. [*Margaret*]

Some people are intensely affected by how others choose to live their lives. It's amusing, actually. Don't let anonymous comments hurt you...they are indeed pathetic. [midnight insomniac]

Glad you got your teeth looked at. So, what was the root canal like? Never had one...heard that it can hurt like a mother though. ;) [Zombie Franchise]

DONT WORRY GIRL..I GOT YOUR BACK

YOU ARE A DOLL AND AS CRAZY AS I...JUST MEANS WE ENJOY LIFE [isobel divine]

My dentist hates me

7.16.99

Well, it hasn't been the most pleasant 24 hours.

By the time I finished typing yesterday's entry the pain in my mouth was so bad I was hallucinating. I've had an abscessed tooth before so know what one feels like, so I called 1-800-DENTIST. I told them I didn't have health insurance, so could they hook me up with a doctor today who accepts payment plans? They found me an office in the Loop and I got scheduled for 10:45.

The walk over was surreal. Pain so intense it actually drops your energy level, you know? Everything looked overbright, like a home movie from the 1950s whose colors are now fading. Plus I had been up since five o'clock because the pain had been so bad, after getting to bed at two, so I was running on three hours of really bad, topsy-turvy-I'm-still-stoned sleep.

The doctor is about to finally put me out of my misery when he says, "Now, this procedure's going to cost about \$600. I noticed you didn't have health insurance. How were you planning on paying?"

"I'm going with your payment plan."

"Oh, well..." He pauses. "We usually work that out beforehand with an outside financial consultant, so he can approve your credit before we work." He looks at me. "How were you planning on splitting up the payments?"

"Um, \$200 a month?"

"And you have the first \$200 today?"

"Um...no. I don't. I've got, like, thirty bucks."

"Oh." He pauses again. The entire left side of my face is now pounding with pain. "Well, maybe you could put it on your credit card."

"I don't own a credit card."

Now he's looking at me funny. After all, there's gotta be something wrong with you if you're an American without a credit card, right? "Well," he says. "Why don't you give us a postdated check?"

"I don't own a checking account."

The doctor sighs and puts down his equipment. "Look, I know you're in pain but we have certain financial obligations that WE have to meet too."

"I know," I say, closing my eyes and banging my head against the chair. "And I'm going to pay you. That's why I asked 1-800-DENTIST to send me to an office that accepts payment plans. If I'd known this was going to be a problem they could've referred me to a different office." Then I sit for a few seconds, trying to calm myself. Then I say, "I'm in overwhelming pain. I need treatment." And then the stress and the toothache and the lack of sleep and the six hundred dollars I don't have which I suddenly owe just come bubbling up to the surface and I start crying hysterically, the tears leaking through my closed eyelids.

"I'm sorry," I hear him say. "I've upset you."

"It's just that it's very STRESSFUL to not have health insurance." My voice is breaking up as I'm speaking, which I hate because it always makes me feel so weak. "You know, you get an eh-eh-eMERgency and...and you don't know what you're gonna do and...it's just very stressful!"

"Okay, Margaret, okay," the doc says, leaning me back in the chair and taking out some novocaine. "We'll talk about the payment later. Let's just get you out of your pain right now, okay?" It's disturbing to know

that it takes a hysterical crying fit to get a doctor to follow his Hippocratic Oath.

So it turns out my infection was so bad they had to give me a second novocaine shot right up inside the tooth (OUCH). And of course since I'm allergic to morphine I don't even get a bottle of really good painkillers to take home with me. (Someone asked in yesterday's entry if a root canal is painful. The work itself isn't painful, because your whole mouth's been numbed. RECOVERING from a root canal is very painful.) Eat lunch at McDonald's, have another stress-related freakout right in the middle of the restaurant, so I call Greg (who also works in the Loop) and he comes over and calms me down. Get back to work at 1 pm, my eyes all puffy, the left side of my face numb. Everyone at work has heard about it by now so they're trying to give me a light workload for the afternoon, which of course is the opposite of what I want.

So rush hour traffic was so bad yesterday I actually rode the el in the OPPOSITE direction (south) past the Loop just so I could get on a northbound train that was empty. Sad. About 25 people had the same thought as me, as we all stepped off at Harrison and immediately crossed the platform to wait for the opposite train. Then we all looked at each other and started laughing. Extra twenty minutes added to my commute but I'll admit, it was worth it.

I spent last night blissfully alone. Didn't call back my pages, didn't go out, didn't even really do much. I mostly lied on my bed and cried a lot, drank orange juice, and thought about things. Here's what I thought about.

1. I'm sure government healthcare in other countries can be a pain in the ass and that some of the Canadian OD diarists could give us horror stories. But it occurs to me that even a fucked-up healthcare system would be better than no health insurance at all. Now, I happen to like living in the US and I think there's certain industries that thrive in a competitive, capitalistic system (like the computer industry, for example). But I wonder sometimes if we're EVER going to get a comprehensive healthcare system in this country. And if not, how am *I* ever going to get healthcare? There's so many people in this country (law-makers, especially) who go straight from their parents' health insurance to college health insurance to their own corporate job's health insurance, and never experience the fear and horror of not having insurance at all. It seems to me that we may never get comprehensive healthcare until every senator in Congress is forced to have an abscessed tooth one day with no way to pay for its immediate treatment. Only those kinds of scares are what's going to change the tide, I think.

OUT OF SPACE! CONTINUED IN NEXT ENTRY

Notes from readers :

You can purchase independent insurance...as long as you don't mind being robbed blind. The insurance situation in this country has gotten ridiculous. Reading on.... [midnight insomniac]

I had the same kinda tooth problem. You poor baby. I am sending you all my sympathy. The pain almost drove me out of my mind. Poor little tooth-girl. brian

Got yr email. My mail server's down so I can't reply yet. We have a dental hospital here for the uninsured, only it's a 12-18mo waiting time. They're sadistic monsters, yep. *nods* [Moondust]

last time I had major mouth surgery and since I am so anti medicine I took cayenne pepper pills..it takes about an hour to kick in but it relieves the pain and warms your belly...really nice..and you can still think [isobel divine]

My dentist hates me (part 2)

7.16.99

CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS ENTRY

2. God, I hate being so out of control of myself emotionally in public. The whole reason I was is because I only got three hours of sleep, but still. I feel weak and vulnerable and like anybody could step in and take advantage of me. I guess I have some issues about this.

3. Strangely enough, never at any time yesterday did I pine for my non-existent boyfriend to take care of me and feel sorry for me, which is unusual. This is the first time (maybe ever) that I had a real emergency and was sincerely glad I was going through it alone. Hmm. I don't know what to make of that. I've had two one-night-stands in the last month which is a lot for me. Maybe the casual contact is doing odd things to my brain.

4. I suddenly realized last night that I have no interest right now in writing happy stories. I mean in the fiction I'm publishing, not my anonymous OD diary. I want to write angry stories, ugly ones, uncomfortable ones. But maybe that feeling will pass.

Whew. So here I am, Friday morning. I slept for ten and a half hours yesterday (conked out during ER, which I normally never do) and I'm feeling much better. My tooth is sore, but in that "just got worked on" way which isn't nearly as bad as that "I have a nerve ending exposed to the open air" way. I'm officially 200 bucks poorer this morning, and don't have the slightest clue how I'm going to pay rent this month. And the grand saga of Margaret's life keeps barreling along.

Two things before I go. Yesterday I found a diarist talking about maybe putting a "meet and greet" party together in Chicago for the midwestern OD people, but that diarist has since left OD. Are there any plans like this in the works? If not, would midwestern OD people be interested in something like this? If so, I'd be happy to set up the details. Just let me know, I guess.

Second, this is a personal question for I.J.C., who sent me a very nice email yesterday. Are you also writing a diary at OD? If so, what's your handle, good buddy?

Notes from readers :

Glad your nerve endings are all taken care of. You never realize how sensitive the body is when everything is behaving...but when something goes wrong in even the smallest body part it can be a living hell. [midnight insomniac]

I agree with M.I. Hang in there and keep us updated. Your writing hasn't ceased my attention span yet. ;) [Zombie Franchise]

Nerd Girls Rock

Put together a 'gathering'...I'll be there!

Me and Kubrick, Kubrick and me

7.19.99

I love going to the movies alone. I think attending the opening night of a huge new movie by yourself is one of the great overlooked simple pleasures in life. Reason? I feel like I'm doing something special. I feel like I'm doing something rare. I feel mysterious and daring and interesting being the only unattached person in a theatre full of couples and groups. Everyone wonders who you are and why you're there by yourself. I get to sit wherever I want. I don't have to watch a chair while someone else runs to the bathroom. I don't have to talk to anyone. My thoughts and my attention towards the movie are completely my own space.

I saw "Eyes Wide Shut" Saturday night by myself. (I saw "Blair Witch Project" with Leah Friday night, but that's another entry.) Got really high in the theatre's bathroom and almost got caught. It was really intense seeing that film by myself while incredibly high. I felt like one of the characters by the time I left. I felt like grabbing a random stranger off the sidewalk and fucking them in a back alley. I felt like being completely naked except for a mask and having sex in front of a roomful of strangers.

So of course what do I do in this frame of mind but go to a party. Greg takes me after the movie to *Jamie's, a South American friend of his who's having a birthday. The place is full of people, all good-looking with nice clothes, none of whom I know. Of course. And apparently like ten people brought pot 'cause nobody thought there was going to be alcohol.

So I decide to indulge my fantasy. I get so high I'm floating a couple of inches off the ground, and I act like a character from "Eyes Wide Shut," aloof and intense and sexy and aggressive. Ooh, I was just looking for trouble Saturday night. I flit between conversations and listen to everyone with a half-smile cocked on my face, like I have something interesting to say but am just waiting for the right moment. Now granted, I was probably just looking like a stoned dork, but I felt all tough and cool and fuckin' sexy, so that's all that matters.

I'm in the living room and some woman at the next conversation keeps giving me the eye, so when she walks out on the back porch I follow her. She sits down on the tiny steps between floors and I squeeze in next to her, our bodies completely touching on one side. I hand her my pipe.

"Pot," I say.

She nods her head and takes it. She is *Megan. She is a computer engineer, does all that complicated Unix work for big companies. She is aloof and intense and sexy and flirty, tall and pale and beautiful and a math major. I officially decide to have a Kubrick moment tonight.

We are flirting and smoking, smoking and flirting, when a guy comes out. He and she get into a fight over the lack of beer at the party, and she demands that he go out and buy some more, and get her another pack of cigarettes while he's at it. After he leaves I ask who he was. "My boyfriend," she says, sighing as she exhales. "He doesn't like parties. He's an artist." She sneers. Boyfriend, huh? Artist, huh? I'll show her, by God.

Megan and I get into a smoking contest. She keeps taking tokes and I keep taking tokes. We give each

other a look each time we pass the pipe, like "Have you had enough yet?" But she keeps taking that fuckin' pipe and I swear to God I'm not going to quit smoking before she does. Four hits apiece. Eight hits apiece. Twelve. Sixteen. Twenty. The bowl keeps emptying out and I keep filling it back up. People have swarmed around us. They keep handing us pot. Megan and I are a two-person whirlpool. We are smushed up against each other on the stairway, occasionally squeezing each other's knee when we're making a point. We get so high we decide to start getting two hits off the pipe for every match lit. We put our faces three or four inches away from each other. Each time she's hitting I stare at her face intensely, and the moment she's inhaled she sticks the still-smoking pipe into my mouth so I can catch a hit, pushing the pipe past my lips and holding the end while I inhale. Megan exhales her smoke at me and I suck it in from two inches away, getting a second contact.

The higher we get the more she talks about her boyfriend (who, by the way, has completely disappeared). "My boyfriend blah. My boyfriend bleh." Finally about the twentieth time I simply reach in the two inches to her face and kiss her, forcing my tongue into her mouth. She starts aggressively kissing me back when I pull away. Through half-closed eyelids I slur to her, "I don't want...you to say...'my boyfriend'...any more tonight." She looks at me, her lips open and still wet with my saliva, a look of pure lust on her face, and says "Okay." Margaret the Kubrick character strikes again!

"You know what you should do?" Megan says. "You should come over to my house Tuesday night. Do you play chess?"

"Yes."

"Come over and we'll play chess and drink beer and get really high again."

Uh-oh. The spirit of Kubrick is suddenly leaving me. "Really?" I say.

"Don't you want to?"

"Yeah..." I'm figuring I can get Megan up to the roof of the building tonight and go down on her or at least make out. I'm not figuring on this. I want to yell, "This persona only lasts for one night, you know. On Tuesday my carriage turns back into a pumpkin and I become the neurotic dork that I usually am." Instead I say, "Okay." And just like a movie, Greg pops in at that exact moment and says, "You ready to go?"

I'm holding Megan's card as I write this. It's a sort of pea green color and very smart-looking. Her address is scribbled across it in sprawling stoned handwriting. Tuesday. Tuesday, Tuesday.

The problem with living real life as a movie character is that the movie never actually ends.

Notes from readers :

damn, what I would not give to have a smoking contest like you had... just once... heh... [siliman]
oh margi I tell ya what????...just watch another movie maybe...something really spicy...and then go get her.. ;) [isobel divine]

Margaret, what you have just described sounds heavenly . . . I must try doing that some time . . . maybe I'll even try it at the next party I attend . . . cool stuff [bastasia]

For some reason I am wondering if Megan's *ahem* boyfriend is secretly gay. Please forgive my stupid, broken brain. [moondust]

Answers to that survey floating around Open Diary

7.19.99

1. IF YOU COULD EAT ONLY ONE FOOD FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE, WHAT WOULD IT BE? French toast.

2. IF YOU WERE AN ANIMAL WHICH ONE WOULD YOU BE? WHY? I'd be a toucan, because it's cool to be a toucan.

3. KETCHUP OR MAYO? Mayo!

4. IF YOU COULD ONLY HAVE ONE SEXUAL PARTNER FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE, WHO WOULD IT BE? God, that's a tough question. Probably Seth. I don't think you know him.

5. IF YOU COULD ONLY HAVE ONE MORE ORGASM EVER, WOULD YOU WANT TO HAVE IT ALONE, OR WITH SOMEONE ELSE IN THE ROOM? If I could only have one more orgasm, I'd rent out Wrigley Field and have it on the pitcher's mound in front of 70,000 screaming fans. I'd hire 20 people to pleasure me at the same exact time and the moment I finished my orgasm I'd kill myself in a spectacular, gruesome way. And we'd broadcast the whole thing on pay-per-view to pay for my funeral.

6. IN YOUR LIFE THUS FAR, AT WHAT AGE WERE YOU THE HAPPIEST? WHY? Right now at thirty. Happy because I'm alive, my life doesn't completely suck, I've had some success in my chosen career, and I'm NO LONGER IN MY TWENTIES!

7. WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST REGRET? Not having sex with Kim Deal when I had the chance.

8. WHOSE FACE TURNS YOUR KNEES TO JELLO? Steve Malkmus, the lead singer of Pavement.

9. WHAT IS THE MOST POSITIVE LIFE-CHANGING DECISION YOU HAVE EVER MADE? Dropping out of college with six hours left to graduation.

10. IF YOU HAD TO CHOOSE BETWEEN BEING HEARING-IMPAIRED AND VISUALLY-IMPAIRED WHICH WOULD YOU PICK? WHY? (PLEASE EXCUSE THE POTENTIAL INSENSITIVITY OF THIS QUESTION, BUT IT USUALLY RESULTS IN SOME INTERESTING ANSWERS) Hearing-impaired, which actually I am right now. I couldn't deal with a life of being blind.

11. DO YOU NOW, OR HAVE YOU EVER, PEEED IN A PUBLIC SWIMMING POOL? If it wasn't for peeing in public pools, I'd have no love at all!

12. WHOSE SINGING VOICE MAKES YOU THINK THERE MAY JUST BE A HEAVEN AFTER ALL? Sleater-Kinney.

13. IF YOU HAD TO CHOOSE BETWEEN GOING TO WORK/SCHOOL NAKED FOR THE ENTIRE DAY AND HAVING THOSE SAME PEOPLE WATCH YOU GO TO THE BATHROOM, WHICH WOULD YOU PICK? The bathroom. Get it done and over with. I couldn't take eight hours of being naked.

14. WHAT IS THE MOST EROTIC PART OF THE FEMALE BODY? THE MALE BODY? Female: The back of the neck. Male: That place where their hip bone juts out, under the stomach and above the thighs.

15. WHAT IS THE MOST DARING PLACE YOU'VE EVER HAD SEX? In my ass! Thank you! I'll be here all week!

16. WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE SMELL? Coffee grounds.

1. IF YOU COULD BE ANY KITCHEN UTENSIL, WHICH ONE WOULD YOU BE AND WHY? I'd be a Rotato because I like saying 'rotato.'

2. IF YOU HAD TO, WHICH WOULD YOU RATHER DO--WATCH A PORNO MOVIE WITH YOUR PARENTS OR STARRING YOUR PARENTS? Eww! What kind of question is that? I guess starring my parents, because at least they wouldn't be in the room with me. Eeuwww.

3. IF YOU HAD TO, WOULD YOU RATHER THROW UP MARBLES OR SHIT OUT THUMB-TACKS? I'd rather sweat cream cheese.

4. HOW OLD WERE YOU WHEN YOU LOST YOUR VIRGINITY? Nineteen. I was a sophomore in college.

5. WAS IT GOOD? Oh yes it was. We had been sexually active for about six months (lots and lots of oral sex) so we were both really comfortable with each other's bodies and REALLY READY to finally have sex. I heartily recommend it.

6. DO YOU THINK PORN MOVIES ARE CHEESY OR A TURN ON? Depends on the porn. In general I think they're a turn-on, though.

7. NUDITY--FOR OR AGAINST? My own nudity, against. Everyone else's nudity, very much for it.

8. ARE YOU GOOD IN BED? Oh sister, you better believe it. I don't know. That's another tough question. We all like to think we're good in bed but do any of us ever really 'know?' I'm better in bed with some people than with others. I've never had any complaints, but has there ever been a person who has?

9. WHAT WAS THE WORST THING YOU EVER DID? 1) I punched a kid in third grade and knocked out his front teeth. 2) I got so mad at an ex-boyfriend that I told him he had a little dick. (He did, which is why I knew it would hurt him so much to say that.) Boy, do I regret that.

10. WHAT WAS YOUR WORST SEXUAL EXPERIENCE? WHY? Once in college I got really wasted with my boyfriend and wanted to have sex. We were in a weird phase of the relationship and I was feeling very ungrounded about its continued bliss. I was on top and in the middle of fucking I got motion sick and threw up on his naked body. The whole event threw me into a cycle of shame and embarrassment, and we ended up breaking up a few weeks later. God, I was such an idiot during college.

11. WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE QUOTE/PHRASE? Matt Groening, Life In Hell: "Don't let yer meatloaf!"

12. WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE FANTASY? Me and two guys, both of them fucking me at the same time. Can I say that?

Notes from readers :

it was my survey, so i get to ask first:you had a chance to have sex with Kim Deal?! there's got to be a great story in there somewhere. [riotgrrl]

my favorite part of the male body is same place....on women its the lower back and hips.... [isobel divine]

Thank you for making me laugh. I gotta get around to doing this survey myself one of these days... [Moondust]

1) rare filet mignon w/ plenty of Lea & Perrins or Key Lime Godiva Truffles, 3) ketchup, 6) right this very minute...I just turned 29 last week, 8) leaving my alcoholic ex-boyfriend, 14) same part of the male body! or the inside of the wrist! - flicka70

I (almost) met Kevin Smith last night

7.19.99

So believe it or not, the rest of my weekend was just as interesting as Saturday night. Leah and I managed to get opening night tickets to "Blair Witch Project," how we don't know. Now I had already been to the website several times and was completely familiar with all the backstory and hype. That being said, that movie still scared the crap out of me. There's never any gore in the entire movie and there's also no "jump out from behind a corner" moments, so why I was ready to pee in my pants by the end is a subject for debate. Leah and I discussed whether the filmmakers are geniuses or whether they just got incredibly lucky. Our shared conclusion was that no amount of dumb luck by itself could've made a movie that good, that ultimately it was the intelligence of the filmmakers that pulled it off. Since we were in the neighborhood, we ended up going to a big dumb frat bar after the movie. We bought temporary tattoos from a condom machine that said "Harley Davidson" and the two of us ended up getting pretty silly Friday night.

This was also the weekend of Wizardcon, one of the largest comic books conventions in the country, and my friend Shappy invited me to a private party on Sunday above the Chicago Comics store. I hung out with Dan who writes "The Imp" (who is a casual acquaintance of mine) and Chris Ware who writes "Acme Comics" and "Jimmy Corrigan, the Smartest Boy on Earth" (and who I'd never met). Dan's told me before to discuss ragtime music if I ever meet Chris, which I happen to know a lot about because I was raised on the music and my family is from southern Missouri and my dad is friends with a lot of the contemporary ragtime historians. So we ended up getting into the most charming conversation about ragtime and Scott Joplin and Reginald Robinson and this band in SF called Bo Grumpus, who I've met. Chris Ware is awfully nice but it seemed almost painful for him to be in public and talking to people he didn't know. Why does that not surprise me?

The whole reason I got invited was that it was supposed to be this huge Super-Slacker party. Shappy told me that Kevin Smith and Frank Miller were going to be there, so I was all incredibly excited. Well, of course neither Kevin nor Frank show up and I myself end up being one of the bigger 'names' at the party, but that's fine. I drank a WHOLE LOT of free liquor and got to hang out with underground comix people which I love doing. I wish more out-of-towners had been there though, like Adrian Tomine or Dan Clowes, people like that. I met Amy Ahlstrom for the first time, who does "Sticky Crawler," and she turned out to be a completely cool post-punker like myself. We bonded! She told me how much she hates comics conventions. There were all these cute slacker girls at the party and they sat in the corner and bitched about being comic guys' girlfriends. "We always get dragged to these conventions so that more 13-year-old boys will come to the booth," one of them sighed, taking a drink of her gin and tonic. "What comic book do you write?" another girl asked me. I said I didn't do a comic, I wrote novels, and they all smiled and shook my hand and said, "Thank God!"

It's very rare for me to have three nights in a row where I stayed out late and had a really fun time each night. The last time a three-day stretch like this happened on Friday, Saturday and Sunday was probably over two years ago. It's so nice to have weekends like this, reminding me that the world doesn't completely suck and that there's actually lots of cool people in Chicago to still meet and hang out with. It was something I definitely needed this weekend.

P.S. Go see "The Blair Witch Project!"

Notes from readers :

This title caught my entry. I am a HUGE Kevin Smith fan...it's probably obvious by the name of my diary. [midnight insomniac]

Temp tats from a condom machine?? Somehow that makes me think of a whole slew of bad Irish jokes. (Having several real tats, I always feel like a stupid wannabe if I apply the fakes.) [Moondust]

Survey crazy!

7.20.99

Okay, I decided to write my own survey. I left it at five questions so that hopefully it'll be easy to fly through. If you answer my survey PLEASE leave a note at the bottom of this page, so I can run around and read them.

1. What is your most unusual sexual experience, and would you do it again?
2. How old were you when you saw your first dead body? Did it leave any lasting impressions or emotions?
3. How active are you on the rest of the Internet? Why did you decide to start a diary here?
4. If you're single, do you ever wish sometimes that you were married? If you're married, do you ever wish sometimes that you were single again?
5. What's the weirdest comment or email you've received as a result of your diary?

Notes from readers :

I generally do not like surveys, but this one I like. I shall steal it and answer it later today. [midnight insomniac]

I'll answer this today as well... [LoveKitten]

Interesting survey...:) Thanks for the perspective on Jason. Isn't it strange how the most subtle things can have a nice impact but then you're left to experience sadness when it's over? I'll miss him. :) [*Wendy*]

Hi - have done your survey (and my damn email still doesn't work). Posted it under "gibbering quietly (4)". Have also jumped on the bandwagon and written a survey... [Moondust]

hi Margaret, I am answering your survey now! Good one [judyblue31]

Damn him for having the power to seduce me

7.20.99

Ugh, it was a strange night last night. An ex-boyfriend was in town from L.A. and we spent the whole evening hanging out. Well, not really an ex-boyfriend; more like an ex-lover. I can't tell too much of the story without revealing our identities, but the short version is that he's another writer and we met at one of these festivals where they invite all these writers to come and read from their work. And we ended up having this incredibly torrid three-day affair, which then accidentally started blossoming into a full-fledged thing over the phone, which then got really weird and intense and sticky and fell apart.

The problem is that he has a girlfriend in L.A., been seeing her almost four years, which is another reason I need to keep his identity pretty secret. And I swear to God, I don't know how to feel about that. It's hard for me to imagine getting involved in some kind of affair with someone here in town, trying to carry on a day-to-day infidelity. But the thing with him and I was supposed to be a lot different. It was supposed to be three days of late-night drinking and really good sex with no strings attached. It was after I got back to Chicago that I realized I had lingering feelings of emotion and intimacy, and that's where the stickiness started.

He has no illusions about what's going on, which is pretty cool but also led to me originally cutting off contact. Apparently his girlfriend and he worked out a way years ago to have a long-term NONmonogamous relationship, since apparently they both enjoy sex quite a bit and have both ruined relationships before over the issue of infidelity. It's a whole complicated set of rules they've worked out but basically boils down to: 1) Sex with other people only on the road; and 2) No having sex with the same person on more than one occasion. He does it, he claims, because he's really fond of his girlfriend and wants the relationship to work, and I believe him. He seems sincere about it and hey, just because a certain type of relationship doesn't work for me doesn't mean it's not going to work for anyone.

The problem is that he and I ended up bonding and connecting much more than we were expecting to, we ended up having sex again last March when he was again in town, and I found myself starting to have feelings of love and romance directed towards him. And I realized that I, the interloper, would inevitably be the one hurt in any kind of triangle situation, so I cut off contact with him last April and last night was the first time I'd seen him since.

God, it was so weird seeing him. I was planning on being real cool, you know, all modern and blase and like "Oh, it's good to see you again." But the moment we saw each other and hugged, I immediately started thinking "God, I want to have sex with him again." It was like the last four months had meant nothing, as we spent the entire evening holding each other and hugging and touching each other's knees and giving each other little kisses on the mouth.

He's a REALLY INTENSE GUY, which is part of the appeal for me. He's also one of the most incredible writers I've ever known (his new book is selling REALLY well and that's what he was doing in town

in the first place); that's also part of the appeal. I like to make jokes about the power of a writer to woo and seduce other people, but the fact is that it's true. Reading this man's words and hearing him perform has the power to sway me, and I found myself at a certain point last night actually weak at the knees from a piece he was reading.

But alas, alas, no sex for Margaret last night, as much I wanted it. There's a good reason I cut things off, and that's because I don't LIKE non-monogamous relationships and I know that if it comes down to me or his girlfriend, I'M the one who will end up getting hurt. It was really hard to kiss him one last time last night and send him on his way, but it was necessary. I don't need a relationship so badly as to sacrifice my happiness for it. Sometimes a torrid affair is just that, no matter how badly you want it to be something else.

Someone asked me in an email yesterday how "famous" I was, if they were in fact a fan of my work without knowing so. I've been thinking of a way to answer this without giving away my identity. I'd say I'm famous like the band Versus is famous, or the magazine Ben Is Dead. If you're a fan of either of these, there's a very good chance that you've also read my books before. If you haven't heard of these, then there's no WAY you've heard of ME.

Playing chess with Megan tonight, the woman I kissed at the party last Saturday night (see "Me and Kubrick"). I'm very nervous. Wish me luck.

Notes from readers :

Isn't it funny how all self-control flies out the window when you meet an ex-lover? The same thing happened to me with an ex-boyfriend and I hate myself for it. Despite the fact that he had broken my heart and [drama queen]

Oh dear. No wonder you told me to be careful. I'm not emotionally involved in my guys at all... if I were, I too would do the hard thing like you and stay away. Be proud of yourself, sweetie.

[LoveKitten]

Oh yeah... and good luck with Megan. ;) [LoveKitten]

funny I read this entry today since I just got an email today from my "never know what character your getting" art boy..he is on his way to taiwan to play tarzan..man I miss that guy [isobel divine]

It was the perfect date. Except.

7.21.99

Well, it would've been the greatest date of my life if I had actually been on a date.

I went over to Megan's last night. Megan, for new readers, is a woman I met at a party last Saturday while I was really high and in an intense mood after just seeing "Eyes Wide Shut." (For complete backstory see "Me and Kubrick.") She has a boyfriend but I ended up kissing her at the party and she impulsively invited me over for chess and beer on Tuesday, and this week my friends and I have been obsessively discussing why she would do that.

It turns out that Megan is lonely. Really lonely. She actually moved here with her boyfriend from another state and he's one of these guys who calls himself a writer, has penned a handful of short stories that he's terrified of showing anyone, and is a moody loner who hates going out. And they've been in Chicago about a year and she still has hardly any friends, definitely none outside the circle she must share with him.

I show up at her place about six and she's completely expecting me. We get really high (again) and she admits she never got around to picking up a chessboard, so we end up going to this dive bar around the corner and start drinking at 6:30 in the evening. After a few attempts at starting a longer conversation, I finally ask her why she invited me out in the first place.

Megan looks at her beer. "I had a really nice time talking to you," she says. "And we were both geeks when we were growing up, and that means a lot to me. And I've found in Chicago that if I don't specifically make detailed plans to meet someone again after a party, I'll never see them again the rest of my life." She pauses, then sighs. "I don't have any female friends. It's so hard. And I didn't mean to kiss you, I didn't. I love my boyfriend and I don't want to have an affair. But I just...liked talking to you so much Saturday night, and I was so high, and I guess my emotions got away from me."

And it just all suddenly clicks for me. I have a really hard time making female friends too. What is it about this destructive attitude we all take towards each other so much of the time? It doesn't seem that men are like that towards other men. (Maybe they are when we're not looking.) I know how frustrating and difficult it is. And I'm looking at Megan and I'm suddenly seeing someone who's very lonely, stuck in this city because of a boyfriend and unsuccessful at making new friends. I'll quote one of my favorite lines ever written about Chicago, and this is so true: "This is not a couples town." (from a poem by Greg) And I suddenly understand her compulsive desire to kiss me and I take her hand and say, "Yes. Yes, of course we can be friends."

So needless to say, once we declare that the night is not a date it becomes one of the best dates I've ever had. We end up eating dinner at the bar and getting into a huge discussion about TRS-80s and Commodore 64s. Then we go back and get high again, run into her boyfriend who, true to form, is being all sulky and won't come in and get high with us (he really is kind of a jerk). Then we head over to a poetry reading I was supposed to make, but I'm given the wrong time and we get there right as it's ending. And

it was so nice-acting protective of Megan and introducing her to everyone, all of my friends wondering what's going on between us and asking if it's okay to interrupt our conversation. And then all the poets want to go to Rainbo Club for some reason so we're left alone again. And we end up taking on these two guys at pool and we kick their asses, they're trying to hit on us but we're having nothing to do with it. Then she says, "Why don't you come back to my place again? I'll give you a ride home. I just don't want the evening to end yet." So we end up going back to her place and getting high AGAIN (that girl can really smoke some pot) and end up sitting around and laughing and talking until one in the morning.

God, it was so great. It occurs to me today that maybe the secret of finding female friends for me is to choose women who have that exciting edge of sexual tension on them. It made the evening lively and fun and exciting for seven hours straight. It was just...well. Imagine me holding my hand over my heart and dramatically pausing right now.

So...the strange and wonderful love life of Margaret continues into even weirder directions tonight. I have a DATE date! Like a dinner-and-a-movie, don't-really-know-this-guy date. I literally don't know what's happening to me. I go through long, LONG periods of not having sex at all, and then suddenly I'll have like three months where I can't seem to beat them off with a stick. Something smells fishy with this guy tonight-he is way, WAY too good-looking to be asking out someone like me. I sense disaster in the air, which is why I'm not so concerned about tonight. We're seeing "Eyes Wide Shut," and why I agreed to a date seeing such a creepy film again is beyond me. Oh well. It'll be interesting.

I only got one response to the idea of setting up a midwestern OD party in Chicago for September, and that response was anonymous too. So I guess there's not much interest? Shout out if it sounds like a fun idea.

Notes from readers :

Good luck tonight Margaret . . . sounds like last night was cooler than you thought it might have been . . . life's funny like that [bastasia]

Although rather *NEW* here, I'd be curious about an OD weekend in chicago. Any information would be great, there would be sushi, wouldn't there? - best mans fall [rough trade]

I'm glad u and girly hit it off..and you were all worried about a torrid love affair..silly girl ;) [isobel divine]

Moondust's survey

8. Would you rather be given an expensive present you don't like or a cheap one you adore? Much rather the cheap one. In fact, bad expensive presents make me feel incredibly uncomfortable.

9. Do you ever give your friends or family presents on "non-occasions"? Why? Yes. I don't know. It makes me feel good, I guess.

10. Do you feel guilty if someone spends more money on you than you think they can afford? I don't let it happen. I've refused gifts and offers many times when I thought the person couldn't afford it.

11. Do you feel embarrassed if someone gives you something expensive and you know you can't afford anything so flash in return? It depends on the person. There are some people, like siblings, who I've bought expensive things for in the past, and it sort of all balances out at the end. Mostly it depends on WHY someone's giving me expensive.

12. At home or at work do you have a cup or mug you consider "yours", and if so, do you get upset if someone else uses it? No.

16. Have you ever signed someone up for something without their knowledge (eg by sending in a coupon with their details on it)? Yes—great story. In the early '90s the sinus medication Sine-Aid did this really stupid promotion where you called an 800 number and signed up for "The Sine-Aid Society." My roommate and I sat around one evening and signed about 25 of our friends up. All our packages came in the mail the same time (a box of Sine-Aid, some pamphlets, a coupon) and the big talk of the town was which snotty little friend of ours signed us all up? We gleefully took the credit.

17. Have you ever had stuff sent to someone as a form of revenge (eg by getting funeral brochures sent to your ex)? No, but someone did it to me—signed me up to an adult bed-wetters mailing list. Har-de-har-har.

18. If someone offers to make you a coffee (or other drink) and doesn't make it how you like it, do you say so? I just volunteer the information before they actually make it.

19. If you could have the lifestyle of anyone in the world, with no obligation to behave like them, who would you be and what would you do? I'd be a king and I'd sit around and do nothing! Thank you! I'll be here all week!

20. How do you feel about very confident people? I'm attracted to them.

21. How do you feel about very shy or introverted people? Like if they really want to talk to me, they'll find the courage to do so. And if not, I'm not going to go out of my way.

22. What is the first lie you ever told? Why did you tell it? I don't honestly know. Something childhood-ish, said I'm sure to get out of something bad I did.

23. What's the most recent lie you told? Would you take it back if you could? I told an ex that I was breaking up with them because I needed more time for myself, when in actuality I just didn't like them that

much romantically. No, I wouldn't take it back, but I'd also make sure they didn't accidentally find out it was a lie (which they did).

24. Do you mind being lied to if you know it's to save your feelings? Again, it depends on the lie told. In general I appreciate it when a partner will lie about an infidelity to protect my feelings. If it was once and it's all over and you feel weird about it, fine. Keep it to yourself, because telling me will just upset me. Now, if you're seeing them on a regular basis and you're thinking you might like them more than me and a lifestyle change is in order, then you're darned TOOTIN' you better tell me about it. Anyway, that's one example.

25. What's the worst lie you've ever had told to you, and what effect did it have? Wow. I'm gonna have to think about this one. Probably the one I received at the only salaried job I've ever had. I worked at an ad agency right after college (copywriter) and I was having some personal problems with my immediate boss. The big boss (the one above her) told me that he was going to get it worked out, that I shouldn't stress out that she might fire me on a whim before it can be resolved. I was repeatedly assured that my job was not in danger. Sure enough, she fired me (on December 23, no less) and the same boss said, "Well, there's nothing we can do now that she's fired you. We can't undermine her actions in front of her peers." It had the effect of me never working a corporate job again, having a fairly large fear and anger at Corporate America, and to automatically hold corporate workers in contempt until they prove otherwise.

(Postscript: In the subsequent months, my friend and I (illegally) found out that my boss had a whole past life she was hiding, including missed alimony payments, check garnishes she was getting around by changing her name, and a history of reprimands at her former jobs. She threatened to sue the ad agency on trumped-up racist charges if they fired her. They ended up creating an entirely new "figurehead" department where she couldn't fuck anything up, and put her in charge of it. Then six months later they eliminated the department and downsized her. Pretty smart. Still left me completely fucked, though. My friend found all this out by hacking into the woman's email account!)

Notes from readers :

Good for you! I'd have loved to dig something up something like that about a former boss of mine (assuming I'd have held a job longer than for a summer...) Cool! [Youmna]

Random comments and follow-up notes

4 pm at work right now. Usually this is the time when I'm writing longer letters to my email correspondents, but my work kept me really busy all the way up to about ten minutes ago, so now I only have a little bit of time to kill. Thought I'd get some random, unrelated things written down that I've meant to say here at OD.

HERE IS THE funniest/strangest comment I've gotten this whole time keeping a diary. It's from "My dentist hates me," the story last week of having an abscessed tooth:

"I had the same kinda tooth problem. You poor baby. I am sending you all my sympathy. The pain almost drove me out of my mind. Poor little tooth-girl. --brian"

Poor little tooth-girl. There's something so absurdist about that comment that I can't help but to love it. :)

IN ANSWER TO riotgrrl's question about the time I had a chance to sleep with Kim Deal...Well, maybe I exaggerated a little. I got to HANG OUT with Kim Deal after a Breeders show back in college (Missouri) in 1993. We hung out behind the stage for something like a half-hour and Kim actually got to the point of asking me to go in the bus with her...I thought "Oh my God, this is it! I'm gonna fuck Kim Deal!" And then a roadie came up and said, "Kim, Kelley's doing it again." And Kim gets all pissed off and excuses herself and I lost her, never saw her again. Turns out "it" was Kelley's heroin problem that has now been well-publicized. It was weird to read about the Breeders' breakup and know that in some small way I witnessed some of it.

MY FRIEND GREG (who wrote the "This is not a couples town" poem I quoted) read my story about Megan. (Greg was also at the original Saturday night party and at the poetry show last night, so he knows who she is.) Here's something he has to say about it (excerpted from a longer letter):

"I've given quite a great deal of thought to this love refugee thing and here's what I think: Chicago has a high number of individuals who move FROM somewhere rather than TO Chicago. When these same sorts are scared to go alone, their need to flee has often alienated the safe choice of a friend or sibling. So they end up taking their latest fuckpal for an interstate hellride. Very few couples that move sit down and ask--am I going WITH this person, or they just a source of strength for MY move?"

Greg, as always, is a genius.

I MENTIONED A guy last week I met at a bar who's supposedly making an improvisational romantic comedy (ala Mike Leigh) who wanted me to be in it. Turns out it's total bullshit. Or, maybe he's SERIOUS about making the movie but the more I learn about him the less confidence I have he could do a decent job. So long, movie star career...

AND FOR MY regular readers, you might be wondering what's going on with Steve, the Corporate Guy I had a one-night-stand with a couple of weeks ago. (See "Slacker Confesses: 'I Had Sex With a Yuppie!'") I'm still temping where Steve's working (it's my last week) and Steve and I still run into each other in the hallways. He's very cool about the whole thing. Not cool as in great, but cool as in cold water. He's a much bigger frat-guy asshole then he let on at first...but hey, that's just fine. More power to him. He'll never be sticking his cock into ME again, though, that's for DAMN sure.

Okay, toodles everyone!

Notes from readers :

good you said he sucked anyhow [isobel divine]

and about the movie thing its so funny that we had the same experience this last week of "im making a movie" ..see bar fight in my entry..ahha..could it be the same man??!! [isobel divine]

meeting ex-is a real drain.I have one in my university ,meeting him all the time."hi how are you doing" and then waves of hate or pasion dependes on mood.. [~~She~~]

NEW EMAIL

Thu, 22 Jul 99 10:02AM PDT

From: XXX (female)

To: gadpub@netscape.net

Subject: chicago

Hey margaret!

Yes I am officially going to chicago...I will be there from sept 3-6th..Im flying into chicago to Midway at 6:45pm and was considering taking a cab into the city to go watch a belly dance troupe that I would love to see called Read My Hips..Have you heard of them?? It would be great if we could hook up and go together if you want..I also have a sister of the ex-date guy that said she would pick me up and go with me too..(OD entry Belmont) It would be great to get together...maybe even saturday or sunday day or night...XXX and I are playing everything by ear but he said he would do anything for me so that means XXX is in charge..ahahhahha...silly boys. I have never been to chicago before and XXX said he doesnt know his way around very well so any advice and recommendations would be great!! Lets keep in touch..you sound like you party like I do so I am sure we would have a great time...lets toast a shot of jameson to the OD and new friends...

take care margaret.. this email address isnt my primary email the one I always use is XXX but the server is down and I cant get too it.. so use this one for now ok sweetstuff.

Speak to you soon - XXX (female)

NEW EMAIL

Wed, 21 Jul 99 13:24PM PDT

From: XXX (male)

To: gadpub@netscape.net

Subject: Hi...a friend from the OD here...

This is XXX...I've been going over this and over this in my head, whether or not to write to you... I've been so captivated by your honesty and your openness with those at the OD that it pushed me to be more open. You write...very clearly and somehow I can tell that you are an excellent writer (if you are a novelist/playwright/screenwriter/etc.). Even more interesting have been the entries, to put it bluntly, about sex and sexual things. For years I've thought I was the only one who, for some strange reason, have found toilets and bathrooms to be oddly sexual places. There, it's out, I've said it and I feel nice and cleansed. If you feel as if you have any desire to respond to me, please feel free to do so...I just thought I'd drop you a quick note of appreciation/understanding? and whatnot...

Thanks again...

XXX (male)

Last night I went to a porn store

7.23.99

I for one believe that it is sometimes necessary to occasionally participate in an evening of self-destructive behavior. Like last night, for example. There is a certain small part of the human genetic code that must, at certain points, be destructive in order to be human. It's my belief that if one is to go through such a process, it is infinitely better to turn the destructive behavior on oneself as to spare other innocents from further harm.

He stood me up Wednesday night. Yeah, I can't believe it either. Let's call him *Dick. Dick is a bartender at one of the places where I go to these poetry shows. Dick is gorgeous. Dick is a perfect specimen of a man. Which of course is why I've known him for over a year and only spoke to him for the first time two months ago. I'm secure in my own objectivity. I have a short, straight punk-girl haircut. I wear clunky little black glasses and retro 1950s outfits when I go drinking. I'm almost six feet tall, most of that arms and legs. I know that combination is sexy for some, unresponsive for others. And Dick, I always thought, was one of the latter. He's just too good-looking to be interested in a little punk girl like me. This guy could be dating models. (This guy has dated models.) So, fine. No harm done. I understand the situation.

So then Dick starts talking to me more and more over the last two months. First a standard "How you doing, Margaret, life treating you well?" Then questions about my writing. Then questions about my life. Next thing I know I'm getting into a half-hour conversation with him at the end of the bar last week. Out of the blue he says, "Say, would you like to go see 'Eyes Wide Shut' with me on Wednesday?" I'm...cautious. I'm...flattered. I say sure.

So to try to finish this story up and get to the interesting one: 1) I stood outside the Esquire movie theatre for 45 minutes in the rain; 2) he never showed up; 3) he never called nor paged me; 4) I called over to his apartment and left a message and he never called back; 5) Fuck him, I went and saw "Eyes Wide Shut" anyway (for the second time); 6) I get all turned on and creped out (for the second time); 7) (The point of my story) I decide yesterday to have an evening of self-destructive behavior to punish myself for thinking that Dick would ever be interested in me.

The first thing I do is bring my pot to work.

The second thing I do is go get a haircut right after work. Really goddamn short.

The third thing I do is get completely baked in the womens' room at the Palmer House Hilton downtown. It was great. I must've been in there for fifteen minutes and not a single person came in. Getting stoned in public is always exciting and a little scary, especially inside an expensive hotel in the Loop.

I enter the street in a green haze, the sun piercing through my sunglasses against my will, my agenda open for the entire evening. Hmm. What kind of trouble should I get into tonight? What can I do down here that is self-destructive plus original? Hmm.

Oh, I know. I'll go to a pornographic store.

It was interesting. I've been to stores like that before a couple of times, but usually in the company of a friend or two, never in the early evening. (I buy most of my porn mail-order, or download it from the Internet.) This is the first time I've ever gone into a store like this by myself, while the sun is still out, so baked I hardly know my own name. It was...well, I'll just tell the story and not try to draw any conclusions until the end.

The store is in River North, a really rich neighborhood right next to the Loop, where all the Versaci boutiques and Urban Outfitters are located. It is clean and well-lit and largely stocked, and the air-conditioning is a blast of relief from the 90-plus day we were having yesterday. I stand in the doorway a moment, getting acclimated to my surroundings. I squelch the sudden urge to flee. I notice distractedly the row of anal dildos hanging on the wall right next to me.

The man at the counter, my age, looks nervous. "Um," he says. "Um. Would you like...tokens? Or are you browsing?" I pause for a moment. Tokens. Hmm. For the little booths in the back, for those who have never been to a store like this. There are private booths in the back half of these stores, where you can feed in token after token and watch pornography and masturbate in relative anonymity but within the context of a public space. I think about it, I really do. And then I think, nah, I'm not feeling that self-destructive.

I start looking around. About half the store is dedicated to videotapes but I don't own a VCR right now so go instead to the magazine rack. It is divided into roughly-equal sections by subject. There are all the brand-new softcore magazines, like "Hustler" and "Penthouse" and "Club" and "Swank." Next to them are the "just over 18" magazines with names like "Hawk" and "Rookies" and "Barely Legal." Under them are the big boob magazines, and under that are the bondage mags. The next shelf holds the hardcore mags, which can be roughly divided into three categories: cheesy '70s porn that's had a new photo slapped on the cover; contemporary European porn published digest-sized and ridiculously expensive (and ridiculously good); and the swingers' magazines, showing "actual hardcore photography of real loving couples!" which are fairly good but not as good as the same thing on the Internet in color, with better-looking couples, for free. On the other side of the shelves are all the gay porn, dirty novels and underground comics.

I look around. I kneel in front of the hardcore shelf and pick up a magazine, start flipping through it. It is a woman getting fucked by two guys. Oh boy. A male customer comes up and stands next to me. He is looking at the 'barely legal' mags on my left. I turn and look at him, which I immediately regret because he gets a look of such embarrassment and turns almost beet red. I'm not there to embarrass anyone or make them feel bad that they're in a porn store. I'm in a porn store, for God's sake. I'm there for the same reason anyone else is: to look at porn and get off.

OUT OF SPACE! CONTINUED IN NEXT ENTRY

Notes from readers :

...wondering what made you choose the name *dick* ;) [midnight insomniac]

Cheesy 70s porn... oh my!! Getting a laugh out of this, which is good. My mail server is STILL down and now I can't get mail either, but you WILL hear from me as soon as I can manage it. [Moondust]
maybe just maybe you are putting too much importance on "the man." [itsbreeze]

Last night I went to a porn store (part 2)

I keep flipping through the magazine. Four pages into it a third man joins the party. Now they're really going at it, one in each of her major orifices. I glance up. I look around the store. I walk back up to the counter. "Um, you know what?" I say. "Actually...I think I will take five dollars in tokens."

I go to the back half of the store. The hallway is narrow and poorly-lit. There are red lights outside each door to show which are occupied. There is a pegboard on the wall with empty video boxes tacked to it, displaying what's currently showing on the 35 channels available in each booth. There is a middle-aged, balding man hanging out in the hallway, scanning left and right, left and right, with his eyes. My heart jumps into my throat with fear. Then I realize he's probably gay and looking for another gay man. The fear doesn't go away. I slip into the first empty booth I come across and quickly lock the door. No one tries to come in.

It's a formica booth with a stool built right into the wall. A television pokes out from the opposite wall. The tokens in my hand are wet and hot from my sweat. They show a cartoon of a woman's naked ass, ringed by the phrase "Head: I win; Tail: You lose." I slip one into the slot on the wall. My timer reads 100 seconds. The television immediately snaps to attention. Sound starts blaring out of a separate speaker built into the wall, like a drive-in movie. It is really loud. I turn it down, then off. I plug another three dollars in tokens into the slot. By my stoned estimation, it should give me around twenty minutes.

I flip through the 35 channels available to me. It's quite an interesting array of choices, including B/D, S/M, gay, lesbian, spanking, come shots, interracial, double penetrations, amateur...wait. Back up. Double penetrations. I'm telling you, I don't know what my fascination with double penetration is right now, but it's a pretty overwhelming one. I watch channel 16 for awhile. Sit back. Relax. Think of Seth. Think of Scott. Think of Seth and Scott. Think of Seth and Scott together. And then I go to work.

After I'm done, my THC haze is starting to mellow out and I'm feeling a little weirder about being in a booth in the back of a porn store. Surprise, surprise. So I end up going home and drinking about five glasses of iced tea and watching a rerun of "ER" which was, as always, really good.

I knew disaster was in the air with Dick. This is only the second time in my life I've been stood up on a date. (The first was about six years ago.) Doesn't change the fact that it hurt my feelings. I don't have a nice and tidy ending to this entry like I usually do. That's just it. That's my story. I masturbated in a porn store last night because I was feeling self-destructive because a beautiful man asked me out on a date then never showed up. The end.

Notes from readers :

I got stood up *once*. I saw him 6 months later, I was dressed to the nines and he practically drooled. I led him on and left with someone else. That was very satisfying. You can play too! :)

[LoveKitten]

I went to a porn store with a girlfriend in high school and we went into the back booths and she got so grossed out she ran outside and threw up...I mostly go there now to buy nitrios [isobel divine]

Screw dick...yyyyyyay porn! [midnight insomniac]

thank you for being so entertaining. i really needed a good read. i am in your debt. [edpsrx]

damn. my week-nights aren't half as interesting as that. damn. [riotgrrl]

Maybe my last entry for a bit?

7.23.99

So today's my last day at my current temp job. They loved me, my agency loves me, it's a whole lovefest going on down here. I'm being sent to another ad agency next week for a five-day assignment, but I don't know if the computer they'll have me on will have internet access. Regular readers know that I don't own a phone so can't access the web from my apartment. So, I might be gone for a week or so! We'll see on Monday, I suppose.

I've really enjoyed my first few weeks on OD. I've met new people, gotten to talk about stuff I don't usually talk about, and have actually sharpened my writing skills, believe it or not. I thank everyone so far who have sent me comments and emails. It is much appreciated.

The work-week of August 9 to the 13 I'll be taking off because I'll be so busy with the National Poetry Slam. Gonna be there? Send me an email and we'll have a drink! So there's definitely a good chance I won't be checking in that week. Although maybe I'll go down to the library and check in periodically.

Well, that's it for now. I'll either talk to everyone again on Monday or two weeks from now.

Don't let yr meatloaf!

Margaret

Notes from readers :

Hi mag,comeback soon! I edure your enteries...and waiting for you to come back [~~She~~]

Heat wave!

7.26.99

(Yes, dear reader, Margaret indeed has internet access at her new temp assignment. This is an entry I wrote in my notebook on the el this weekend.)

HEAT WAVE! in Chicago. Not just uncomfortable-hot but more like lots-of-people-are-starting-to-die-again hot. (We had a scare a couple of summers ago when over 500 people died from heat-related incidents.) It's awful, simply awful. 110 degrees inside my apartment. Heat wave is expected to last 12 days. Awful.

I started this weekend sincerely wanting to have a quiet, stable couple of days, after the last three or four weeks of almost-daily craziness. 5 pm Friday greeted me with a surprise rainstorm, Margaret carrying all her spare papers from her just-finished temp job, and an entire empty evening lying before me. I called Megan to see if I could come hang out with her for awhile. Her boyfriend was home too and we ended up getting along much better this time. I wonder if she finally explained to him who I was. They had a friend in from Seattle too, and the four of us ended up hanging out until ten or so, eating dinner together and (surprise) getting really high.

Megan and I started figuring out Friday night why our original attraction to each other was so strong and quick. Here were our conclusions. Not all of them are that great.

--We're both very high-energy people who come off at first as manic.

--We both have an unusually large list of standards our friends must live up to. As a result, neither of us consider ourselves as people with a lot of friends.

--We both tend to be very aggressive, very exacting perfectionist-type people, when it comes both to work and personal relationships. As a result we've both been accused at various points over the years of being tyrannical, hard to get along with and lacking a sense of tact, both at work and in personal relationships.

--Both of us see these accusations not as insults at all, but rather compliments. We both consider ourselves strong, independent people who never apologize for our views or actions, who will never accept anything but maximum effort and maximum honesty from our peers.

Of course by the time I was high I was saying, "Fuck that stable weekend crap! I wanna go find trouble!" All of them went to see "Blair Witch" but I couldn't because that movie scared me so badly the first time I saw it. So instead I went to Metro to see Man Or Astroman? Well, it seemed like a good idea at the time. Instead it was 1,200 of the most pretentious "alt.rock" fuckers you'd ever want to meet, with their bowling shirts and their overalls and their goatees and their nipple piercings. And most of my friends and I are like this, don't get me wrong, but there's something about that live-rock subset of the creative slacker world that's just starting to rub me the wrong way, especially since putting five years between me and college radio and discovering how ridiculous some of it was. So everyone was stacked six-deep at the balcony, couldn't even see the band, so I went downstairs into Smart Bar but it was 10 pm, NO ONE was there (literally, I was the only customer) and I was starting to feel exhausted from the eventful week I'd just had, so I went home and went to bed.

Saturday I did nothing. Literally. I lied in my bed and watched TV from ten in the morning until two the next morning. I relish the few days I get to do something like that. I watched "Easy Rider" for the first time! (It was a lot different--and a lot better--than I was expecting.)

And Sunday I had sex. Again. With another new person. Again. But I'll save that for my next entry.

Notes from readers :

I'm so glad you're back! I didn't know WHAT I was going to do without your diary and comments...

My scene... generally the electronic/industrial one. Which is usually small, but in my town is TINY.

[LoveKitten]

easy rider - we snuck into the big lecture hall of the college in the summer and had our own film fest with their video projector. easy rider was the first movie we showed. [chloroquine]

I don't know Dick

7.27.99

So last night I ran into Dick, the guy who stood me up last week. He caught me the moment I walked in and sat me down.

The explanation: With all the heat/rain/heat/rain of last week Dick ended up getting really sick. Then he was going to call and cancel but he had lost my number. Then when I left my huffy message on his machine last Wednesday I didn't leave my number again, so he'd been waiting until last night to finally tell me what happened. And that he was very sorry.

Do I believe him? Yes. 1) He seemed pretty sincere about it; 2) It's a fact that it's really hard to get ahold of me. I don't own a phone and don't give out my pager number to very many people; 3) It's true that I didn't leave my number again on his machine; 4) Frankly, there's a part of me that's grateful he didn't simply forget we had a date in the first place.

I told him that it all sounded fine and that I accept his apology, but that there's something about waiting outside a movie theatre for 45 minutes that can't be erased, no matter how good the explanation, and that it probably wouldn't be a good idea to try to go out again. He agreed and then we both got really quiet and kind of sad. Hey. Sometimes bad things happen to good people. It's just a fact of life.

I ended up writing a performance piece based on my porn store experience from last week (see "Last night I went to a porn store"). When I got done reading it last night the entire audience was staring at me with blank looks on their faces. Oops. Augh. Well, except for one woman in the back who was like, "Margaret, holy shit was that great! I loved that piece! That was so funny! Ha-ha-ha-ha!" I wanted to say, "You know, it wasn't exactly meant as a comedy," but why alienate my only single fan of the night?

So my friend Shappy scored for me big time--two free tickets to a sneak preview of "Mystery Men" tonight. Shappy's the king of pop culture freebies--he even has one of the original "Blair Witch" Missing posters they sent out over a year ago as a teaser to the movie.

Notes from readers :

Cheers! And Poof! on Dick. Yes, I can tell you have sharpened your writing skills...Amazing what great and powerful rewards we can reap from allowing ourselves to be us!!! ;-) [Bipolar Carolyn]

Such enchanting prose about such guttural subjects...mmm, mmm...good! [Bipolar Carolyn]

I loved the title. Could I ask you a favor and change the diary layout. The color combination not only makes me ill but makes my eyes bleed. [BillW98]

Well, well, if I'm actually causing permanent internal hemorrhaging, I guess I WILL have to change the layout. No problem. [*Margaret*]

Are you the same Margaret as in 'Hello its me again, Margaret'? If so, are you schizophrenic or just playing with style?

No, I'm a different Margaret. I like the Judy Blume reference, though. I'll have to go check it out. [*Margaret*]

Plus I have been accused over the years of being schizophrenic by various ex-lovers. Among lots of other things... [*Margaret*]

Dick got sick...and spot smokes pot. :) I loved the old color, though the print was a bit small.

Anything the color of blood has a fan in me. About your note on my diary. I would be interested in (cont) [midnight insomniac]

hearing more about the topic of your comment...'when drugs go bad', perhaps you will write about it? [midnight insomniac]

The Pillow Book of Margaret

7.27.99

In case I haven't mentioned it, my very favorite diary at this entire website is by a woman named chloroquine. She's a hard scientist in the northeast who writes this absolutely amazing hybrid of laboratory journal and poetry. I find it really difficult to explain the power of her words; you just need to go and check it out for yourself.

Chloroquine has started a project where she's writing an entry based on the 45 chapter titles of the Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon. I find the whole thing so inspiring that I've decided to do the same thing myself, once a day on top of my usual diary entry for the next two months. Below is the original text from Chloroquine's diary explaining a bit about the book and listing all 45 chapter titles. Also in keeping with the majority of Asian poetry, I've decided to limit each of my Pillow Book entries to 150 words or less.

I hope you enjoy the upcoming chapters. They will focus on my childhood, the small quiet moments of my present life, and more reflexive thoughts than I usually express.

(Chloroquine's original entry, copied from her diary)

Explanation, via the back of the book, which is a 1967 translation by Ivan Morris:

Sei Shonagon was a court lady in tenth-century Japan at the height of Heian culture. In her Pillow Book she notes down all the things that attract, displease or interest her in daily life. She was an enthusiast for good manners and good taste - whether this applied to dress, servants or the correct behavior of lovers.

Different ways of speaking

Depressing things

Hateful things

Things that make one's heart beat faster

Things that arouse a fond memory of the past

Flowering trees

Festivals

Elegant things

Insects

Unsuitable things

Nothing can be worse

Poetic subjects

Things that cannot be compared

Rare things

Things that give a pathetic impression

Splendid things

Annoying things

Embarrassing things
Surprising and distressing things
Things that lose by being painted
Things that gain by being painted
Things that give a hot feeling
Shameful things
Things that have lost their power
Awkward things
Things without merit
Outstandingly splendid things
Things that give a clean feeling
Things that give an unclean feeling
Adorable things
Presumptuous things
Squalid things
People who seem to suffer
Enviably people
Things that one is in a hurry to see or hear
Things that are distant though near
Things that are near though distant
People who look pleased with themselves
Winds
Things worth seeing
Things which should be short
Things which fall from the sky
Clouds
Pleasing things
Times when one should be on one's guard

Notes from readers :

The most lyrical date I ever had was taking a ballet dancer to see "The Pillow Book". It silenced us. Later that night she lay on my bed as I got out my Japanese calligraphy set...She broke my heart anyway. [Johnny X]

Just thought I would drop you a quick note to let you know I really enjoy reading your diary! And give you a belated welcome to OD. :o) [Terri]

Could not agree more. Chloroquine is a very interesting writer. Soultrain.

Regarding drugs and the creative process

I received a rather random email yesterday, accusing me of constantly getting wasted as an attempt to not deal with my life, to bury the quest for enlightenment that all of us as humans strive for. This letter went on to accuse me of seeking fame in a way that entails the least amount of sacrifice, and concluded by the writer saying that they felt sorry for me that I haven't seemed to mature any in the last ten years.

I never thought I'd have to make the following kind of clarification about my diary, but apparently I do so here it goes: My drug-taking actually constitutes a very small percentage of my life. I'm working about eight hours every day, slaving for The Man so I can eat. Then after work (and before, and whenever I get a moment) I'm writing another three to four hours a day. EVERY DAY. If you can't write at least three hours each and every day, you stand no chance whatsoever of becoming a writer for a living. Another hour or so is spent working in organizations I can't name because it would give away too much of my identity, and of course I need at least six hours of sleep a night. Add this all together and you'll discover that I actually have very little time in my life to do drugs, have sex and generally get into trouble.

The reason my diary concentrates on these small periods of being social is that this is the only time interesting things happen to me. I'm keeping a diary online ultimately because I would like an audience. If that wasn't true, I'd keep my damn journal in a paper notebook like everybody else and I wouldn't have to deal with the threatening, accusatory letters I get on a daily basis. I have no interest in writing entry after entry of, "Went to work today. Went home and wrote for three hours. Saw my friends and had a drink. Went to bed." It would be any fun to write and I know it wouldn't be any fun to read. I say right in my diary description at the front that part of my mission is to be entertaining, and "entertaining" to me is the process of highlighting the more interesting and unique things in my life, the events and people that others might not have in their own lives. I had thought that my audience was generally intelligent enough to understand this. Obviously some of them aren't, which is why we're all getting to read this rather uninteresting journal entry today.

"Mystery Men" totally fucking rocked, by the way. (I saw a sneak preview last night--thank you Shappy!) Imagine combining "Buckaroo Bonzai," "The Simpsons" and the Three Stooges. There's about a million lines in the movie that 15-year-old nerds will be quoting to each other for decades to come. (God, we were already doing it last night--"I am Son of Pencilboy!" "You dress like a male prostitute!" "We fight evil. Call it what you will.") And Greg Kinnear is so funny I thought I was going to pee in my pants. You must go see this movie when it comes out.

AND ONE FINAL NOTE: Even if I did do drugs simply as an effort to deny my own life, I don't see how that is anyone else's business, save the hypothetical person in the future who may want to marry me, thus making my life half of their own. If the opinions of my parents, my priest and my therapist don't really matter to me, why would the opinion of some random person I don't even know affect me one way or

the other? I swear, sometimes I will never understand humans.

Notes from readers :

The hell with the random emailer. If you wanna get high, load the pipe with some green, find your lighter, inhale, exhale, repeat without mercy!

LOL!! I love it! [Terri]

Who the hell do they think they are to judge you and try to tell ya how to live your life? Margaret, just keep on doing what makes you happy and who cares what anyone else thinks. [judyblue31]

I am not very much concerned with your drug intake. What matters is that you write very well. Thank you. Soultrain.

Right on, sistah!! I'm new to this, and I have to tell you that you are the first diarist on my "favorites" list. And that's because you ARE entertaining....keep it up, I'm fascinated! [Rubi]

that is why I dont give my email out...If they have something to say leave a note for the whole freak-ing world to read...Im a exhibitionist just like us all on the OD [isobel divine]

I should be the last person to say anything about drugs, so I won't. Don't be appalled at the hateful small minds out there. It'll ruin you. And Mark Leyner is three way mirror with feet, baby. [Johnny X]

Another thing-the best way to irk Puritans is to ENJOY YOURSELF. Its the one thing they can't do. Be a hedonist, have fun, show that you don't have to STRIVE FOR PERFECTION and they will FLIP. [Johnny X]

On the contrary sir, your mirror is for way! [Bipolar Carolyn]

Hey girly girl---Mental Jim is indeed a reality....what takes place within his mind may be regretfully arguable to say the least! Cheers! [Bipolar Carolyn]

People reading this entry should read *Wendy*'s diary...

I wonder when would these hypocrites stop sticking their noses in other's business. When would they start realizing that we should only judge ourselves. I say if you have it smoke it. ;-)-60sKid

Losing Internet access...again.

7.28.99

Well, apparently my client is pissed at me and they've canceled my assignment two days early.

The story: When I originally signed with my agency they asked me what kind of work I wanted to do. I said, "I'll do just about anything as long as it pays what I've asked for...except for phone work. I hate phones and I don't want to be sent to any assignment that has phone work." And they said fine.

So my last job they asked me to work the phones and I said, "I'm sorry, I ask my agency specifically not to send me to assignments that contain phone work." And they said, "Oh, okay. No problem." And they loved me.

So at this job, today some person I've never met from the other side of the office comes over and asks if I'll sit on the phone and call about 65 people long-distance and ask for their current mailing addresses. And I said, "I'm sorry, I ask my agency specifically not to send me to assignments that contain phone work." And she said, "Yeah, but you're just sitting there with nothing to do." And I sort of shrugged and said, "I'm sorry. If you have any other work for me to do I'll be happy to do it. Just not phones." So then they called my agency and said something nasty about me and canceled my assignment two days early.

It burns my fuckin' ass that some random snotty little asshole I've never met has the power to cause me to lose nearly \$200 on my next paycheck, just because I wouldn't do something that I SPECIFICALLY TOLD MY AGENCY BEFOREHAND that I wouldn't do. Some of my friends ask me why I'm so stressed about temping again. EXAMPLES LIKE TODAY ARE WHY.

Anyway, I don't have a new assignment yet so I'll be off my email for awhile. Keep writing and I'll get caught up with my responses next time I'm on.

God, I FUCKING HATE CORPORATE AMERICA!
YUPPIES MUST DIE!

Notes from readers :

BASTARDS!!! riotgrll

Hang in there babe! [Frogger Jen]

Perhaps you should politely ask your agency to compensate you for the lost time (since the contracting issue wasn't your responsibility), or politely suggest you just might find another agency. Be well [Jane Says]

CORPORATE AMERICA SUCKSSSSSSSS!!!!!! IT STINKS WORSE THAN MY BOYFRIENDS...well, I won't go there. BUT IT DOES STINK!!! PEEEEEEEE UUUUUU!! :-(

Ah, it's not my agency's fault. They didn't know some random person at the company would ask me to do phone work. My agency's pretty cool, actually. [*Margaret*]

first you're assaulted by the puritans and the anti-sex league, now its the yuppies. maybe anarchy a(classical anarchy along the lines of "homage to catalonia") is a valid option after all. :) [edpsrx]

Margaret, darling, please DO SOMETHING about this new you've picked - it's all squashed and scrunched up on my screen and I can barely read it. ;) Go back to Arial or whatever, PLEASE!!!

[Moondust]

The CGI on this site hates me, I swear. There's meant to be the word " between "new" & "you've". Dammit! As for the way corps treat temps - I know firsthand it sucks more often than not. [Moondust]

Third time lucky... Ah, now I understand. It's a reserved word that doesn't print. font, I mean. Hahah, gotcha, you silly sucky CGI. Sorry, Margaret. But it's out to get me, you know... [Moondust]

Margaret...your does not disturb me...it's the lack of words. Cheers! [Bipolar Carolyn]

Sheesh--your Hee hee. [Bipolar Carolyn]

trying to type the word f-o-n-t....!! [Bipolar Carolyn]

Can I call you at work tomorrow?

hey! another twin peaks fan- yippee!- interesting diary- lots in common- just a quick note to say hi- drop by soon- take care [drama queen]

Reports of my death are greatly exaggerated

Hi everybody. Well, I'm back at work, this time at an insurance agency in the John Hancock building. The job supposedly lasts for two months but it's so busy that I'm not sure I'll have time to post a new entry every day. I guess we'll wait and see.

God, there's been so many things that's happened to me since I last wrote that it might be futile to try to get through it all. The National Poetry Slam just finished up on Sunday. That went very well. Actually, my friend Jason wrote a report on it at <http://poetry.about.com>, so if you'd like to know details I suggest you check there and read his article. I'm exhausted. And starting up this new job. Urgh. My brain's not completely working this week, so this entry's going to be kind of lame.

I have an interview this week with a magazine. I won't mention it for now in hopes of not jinxing the interview, but let's say it's one of the top-20 selling magazines in the country. I'm interviewing for a position with their website. I'd be in charge of going and finding cool unknown writers to write articles about fashion, music, cocktails, blah blah blah. More info after the interview.

Um, what else? I put my entire love life on hold for the last two weeks so I could get all the NPS stuff done. Now I'm ready to go back out and jump in the fray again! Ah-hah! Margaret is officially looking for trouble once again. Oh, and my brother visited last weekend and that was cool.

You know what? This entry is actually turning out really lame. I'm just going to end it for now and write again tomorrow when I have something good to say. It's good to be back on the web, and you can start sending email again to me. Toodles--

Notes from readers :

alerting the fine citizens of chicago, beware margaret's on the loose! [midnight insomniac]

Welcome back! We missed you [Viper]

good luck on the job! [gypsie38]

Hey margaret...so glad to see you are back...I have forgotten the name of that neighborhood that bello and I should wander in on saturday...coffee date sound good to you...email me sista [isobel divine]

Welcome back. I hope your job goes well [60sKid]

Welcome back! Cheers! [Bipolar Carolyn]

My ex-lovers haunt me on a daily basis

0.10.99

Well, I thought I'd have a nice exciting story for you this morning, but no luck-hung out with Jason and Greg, cleaned my apartment, got baked, went to bed. Hmmph. I think it's going to take me a week to recover from the craziness of the National Poetry Slam. Greg and Jason want me to be on the organizing staff of this first-ever Chicago Spoken Word Festival. They have some really exciting things in the works but I promised I wouldn't talk about them because they're trying to keep everything hush-hush until they have more details pegged down. Oh, okay, I'll mention one thing 'cause it's got me so excited-they're going to try to book Ani Difranco and Laurie Anderson to do a spoken-word show together!

Recent events have forced me to take a look at my love life and why it's the way it is. The fact is that I've been tearing through lovers this summer like a sick person goes through Kleenex. I'm being forced this week to remember that I was hurt very, very badly by two lovers in a row about a year and a half ago, something I never talk about with anyone and am hardly admitting to myself. I think it's that I feel so monumentally stupid about seeing the warning signs and deciding to plunge in anyway. It's left me with some serious issues concerning trust that manifest themselves in weird ways when I'm least expecting it.

What do I really want? I want to be loved. I want someone whom I can love. I want to get rid of this certainty in the back of my mind that every lover I ever have will someday stomp on my heart if I give them enough time. There's other things-now that I'm 30 I want this year to be the one where I finally start stabilizing my life a little more. A lover ties into this-I'd like to finally meet someone I could envision going into the long-haul with. I met someone like this a few weeks ago and I pushed them away last week because of these issues of trust, which is why the subject weighs on my mind so much. I wonder sometimes if I'll ever get over this. Maybe it's time to finally confront the events from a year and a half ago.

Ugh. Summer's ending and I'm afraid my sex life is going to dwindle down to a trickle again, which I don't want but sometimes seems beyond my control. I'm temping in the John Hancock building and on the ride up this morning the elevator was filled with eleven men and me. It was a very odd sensation.

Notes from readers :

An odd sensation? how?

Why does summer ever have to end? I ponder the same question. [midnight insomniac]

margaret it all begins with one word....FORGIVE [isobel divine]

margaret it begins with one word THERAPY.

Wow....I've known you a while, and this is the most emotion I've ever seen. -Your "Daughter"

For ultimate happiness, you need a bit more stability in your life. But will you be able to write as well? [Lee]

I have always told my three daughters that you need to find yourself before you find or have the love of your life. [itsbreeze]

I have had the pleasure of reading your last five entries. You keep on writing!!! Get angry!!! Be real!!! Don't take yes or no for an answer!!! Believe me, it's worth it!!! signed [*MR LOVE!!!*]

Not Ani DeFranco of the DeFranco family seventies fame, is it?! Ahh...Laurie Anderson...I once played her organ. Cheers! [Bipolar Carolyn]

jee-sus. ani and laurie together? i'd make the trip from montreal to check out that gig. welcome back margaret! [riotgrrl]

Laurie Anderson aaaahhh *nostalgic sigh* As long as you leave the hotel sausages out of it. Heh. Sorry, couldn't help myself. Welcome back. [Moondust]

Domo arigato, Mr. Roboto

8.19.99

Rain rain rain rain rain.

Rain!

Once again Chicago has become wet and cold, for what seems to be the one-millionth August in a row. I shouldn't complain--I could be in the deep South for August, after all. Still, the longer this week goes the more convinced I'm becoming that my days of getting laid are over again until next summer. It works in seasons here in the midwest; every winter I seem to barricade myself in my apartment and write a damn book and never go out and meet people. (There's nobody to meet, either. They're all in their respective apartments as well, doing God knows what.) I've felt this way ever since I moved here--"Better get a boyfriend by Labor Day or else you'll go the whole winter without one." It's kind of an absurdist statement, but true nonetheless.

I've forgotten to mention that since the last time I was writing in OD I've started taking St. Johns Wort. I'd always wanted to try some sort of medication for my depression but those pharmaceuticals scare the hell out of me--hundreds of side effects, loss of sexuality, etc. Always sounded like a chemical lobotomy to me. But I'd heard many times over how effective St. Johns Wort is without any side effects, so I decided to try them a few weeks ago when they went on sale at Walgreen's.

Here's how I feel about it--I still have a wide range of emotions, from incredibly happy to incredibly sad or angry. I can still get randomly upset over things. But now I feel like the extreme upper and lower edges of my personality--the happiness that makes me manic, the sadness that makes me suicidal--has been rounded off with the smoothest sandpaper possible. Ever since I started taking St. Johns Wort I've stopped feeling out-of-control of myself, out-of-control of my situation, and this is unusual for me. "I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul." Take it from someone who's had suicidal episodes about once a year since the age of 16--it's nice to feel in control of myself!

Side effects? None. In fact, I've discovered that St. Johns Wort also cures hangovers as well. (You never see that on the commercials.) Someone made a comment in yesterday's entry that I should try therapy. But as a person attempting to make a living writing confessional fiction, I don't like the idea of therapy--I'm too afraid of it sapping the energy I have to continue writing novels. In fact, I think the way we currently treat depression without even thinking--psychobabble and drugs--smacks very close to quackery. I think a hundred years from now they'll be looking at all the people our medical community put on Prozac and they'll say, "God, what were those heathens thinking? Oh wait, it was a long time ago. They didn't know any better."

I've got that Styx song "Mr. Roboto" playing over and over and over in my head this week. Damn that Volkswagen! Damn them all to hell!!!

Notes from readers :

dont go talking about my volkswagons now....tisk tisk...ah yes labor day..the weekend for love....hense my trip to chicago...email is on the way [isobel divine]

Thanks for the tip. I'll buy some of that for some people at work ;-). [60sKid]

st johnswort's active ingredient is an MAO inhibitor and is something that should not be considered lightly. there are side effects and possible frightening drug interactions with other meds. remember, its nonFDA regulated. [chloroquine]

talking to a qualified professional can be healthy. I suspect you will be fine without it, though.

Creative fiction on my sista! [midnight insomniac]

You are right to steer clear of therapy for your art's sake. As a bipolar woman who is happily medicated, rest assured that the side effects do not outnumber the potential benefits. Cheers! [Bipolar Carolyn]

My advice, for what it's worth, if you go single through winter buy an electric blanket and read Proust. I distrust yellow flowers!!! signed [*MR LOVE!!!*]

I just read all your entries - and damn if I'm trying not to stroke myself! You're just, agh, cool, crazy... I -still- don't get why I do the photo thing though. [Welcome To My Insane]

Suppose you have tried three icecold Amstels. No side effects either. Soultrain.

I love Hugh Hefner (and he loves me)

I will boil down this morning's rush-hour commute into two simple mathematical formulas:

MY ASS + SEAT = VICTORY

MY ASS - SEAT = SUCKAGE

Guess which theorem Margaret proved today?

Since I'm temping right now at the John Hancock building which is north of downtown, I decided to go have lunch the other day with my old college friend *Aaron, who works for Playboy around the corner. Can I just mention here how amazing it is to walk into the Playboy Building? It's this nondescript skyscraper along the Magnificent Mile, wouldn't know it from any other building just from walking by it. But you walk in the front door and there, hanging over your head, is a two-foot-high three-dimensional version of their bannerhead in silver. Then you take the elevator up and the main lobby upstairs is like this postmodern dream. There are these floor-length panes of glass behind the receptionist, all going in slightly different, deconstructivist directions. The lobby is filled with these real modern-looking gray couches with weird blue headrests. There is a ten-foot-high, three-dimensional sculpture of the bunny logo in burnished copper against the wall. And I'm not positive but am pretty sure that Playboy is the only corporate headquarters in America that covers its coffeetables with magazines full of pictures of naked women. It's very disconcerting! There I am, waiting for Aaron, and there's six issues of Playboy right there in front of me, looking like they haven't been touched all day. And I'm thinking, well, they put them out for a reason. They're inviting me to flip through a copy while I'm waiting. But do I really want to be sitting there in my business suit in the middle of the day, looking through what amounts to high-class softcore pornography, as busy executives hurry by me? Ooh, I was tempted...but I didn't do it! Ah-hah, Margaret the overanalytical worrywart strikes again.

There is something about the Playboy Mystique that's really tangible when you're inside their offices. Sitting in their lobby, I was reminded of the fact that my dad still has nearly twenty years of Playboys stacked in cardboard boxes in his basement, from the early '60s to the early '80s. I think every dad in the history of time has a stack of these in the basement, in fact.

For my dad, Playboy was a lot more than a dirty magazine. It's easy to forget that Hugh Hefner almost single-handedly loosened the collective sexual mores of a nation back in the 1950s and 60s. He did it by infiltrating nudie pictures into the popular culture-I mean, what other porn mag has had its own weekly series on network television? To me, this was the time period of Playboy that was the most exciting-Hef still based in Chicago, a string of clubs around the nation that supported controversial comedians like Lenny Bruce, Richard Pryor, the Smothers Brothers. All those great skinny Kennedy-era suits! If it wasn't for Playboy and its mix of drinks, fashion, cutting-edge fiction and celebrity interviews, we wouldn't have Details or Bikini or any of the other so-called radical pop-culture mags of today. Playboy has always been

much more about a lifestyle than nudie pictures. I guess that's why all our dads have stacks of them in the basement.

It's weird to think that 99 percent of the American post-Vietnam population saw their first nude woman through the pages of Playboy. That's a mighty big weight for Hef to carry on his shoulders. This was certainly my case-April 1974. (Yeah, I've been looking at porn since the age of five. Anybody got a problem with that?) This was right at the time when Playboy was into women with big hips who didn't shave their pubic hair. I'll remember that woman for a long time, not necessarily because I was attracted to her but more because I wanted to be her. To the bone-skinny, geeky girl I was even as a child, those hippy full-curved models of the '70s were an inspiration and point of jealousy. And as the years went on and I kept sneaking glances from my dad's Playboys each month, I became jealous not only of the wonderful figures these women had but of the pure hubris that allowed them to believe they were beautiful enough to have nude photos taken of themselves. (A hubris I myself finally caught nearly twenty years later - see "FAQ: Taking Dirty Pictures.")

Aaron's trying to get me some new job at Playboy, something to do with the website or something like that. I don't believe it's actually going to happen but, hey, I've already impressed the hell out of every man I've told this to, including my dad. I think my father's finding it hard to swallow that a member of his family even knows a staff member of Playboy, much less might become one. And yet, from a masturbatory standpoint, Playboy is the lamest thing on the entire market! It's nice to see that in an age of rising technology and loosening morality, when amateur internet pornography is starting to infiltrate almost every American home, that something so relatively sweet and simple as the Playboy Mystique can not only survive but thrive in our modern society.

I dreamt of LeRoy Nieman last night. I dreamt of Nagel. And I dreamt of Hef, all dressed up in a 1958 herringbone suit, pipe dangling out of the corner of his mouth, one eyebrow perpetually raised, telling me that he'll love me forever. And I will love you, Hef. I will love you forever and ever and ever.

Notes from readers :

Very Cool Entry. I hope you get the job. And if you do,.... remember us little people. [Viper]
hey there babe. hope you join the world of airbrushing and bad lingere. all funny stuff. [chloroquine]
Have a look at David Halberstam's "The Fifties". Heffners long road to pubic hair is analyzed in a
satisfactory fashion. Soultrain.

What I need is a guy friend who'll go check out the article titles for me, then buy the ones I'm interested in... I ~still~ get asked for ID. *sniff* Will Playboy still be with us in 100 years? [Moondust]

All hail the sexy co-worker

8.25.99

(Technically this is my entry from yesterday, but I was so swamped at work I didn't get a chance to type it in.)

Okay, okay, so I spoke too soon. Trouble may be brewing after all in Margaret's life.

There's this guy, *Ken, who I know professionally through some of the arts organizations in town. I've always felt a little odd around Ken, because he's an artist and I'm an artist yet our relationship is more like two corporate co-workers. We met while both attending a non-profit workshop last year and we both ended up belonging to this group that tries to match up young visual artists with young low-budget collectors. Our paths keep crossing like this, which keeps making us meet all around town I'd say about once every two weeks.

And see, Ken is gorgeous, just about the most good-looking man I've ever met through the art scene. But Ken's been dating someone for three years and knew them as friends for a previous three years before that. PLUS, his girlfriend lives out-of-state which as we all know sets up this martyr complex that makes break-up almost impossible.

Ken flirts with me at meetings, he definitely does, which has always been the reason I thought we had a good professional relationship. I don't know, Ken's the first person in my life with whom I've had to maintain a business relationship without really getting to know them personally. I've always assumed that the sexual tension between us is what helped us form such a great relationship and, by default, that this unspoken sexual tension is what must cause a lot of the great business relationships in the corporate world. I don't know if that's true or not; I just have my one example to go by.

So a month or two ago Ken lets it slip out that he's gotten engaged and I think, "Oh well, end of story. It was nice fantasizing I had a chance with you while it lasted." And yesterday we had a lunch meeting to discuss details of setting up non-profits, but I had had WAY, WAY TOO MUCH COFFEE and our conversation started meandering and I found myself starting to blab about my love life, the stuff I've been writing at OD this week, how I had all this sex this summer and won't have it again until next summer, blah blah blah. I don't know about you, but when I'm around someone I find truly beautiful, my gums start flapping of their own accord and I find myself just...saying stupid shit with apparently no way of stopping myself.

So then Ken said, "To tell you the truth, things aren't that great for me either. I broke up with my fiancée about a week ago." So of course now I'm in a moral dilemma. It's not every day two people break off an upcoming marriage, and I figure I need to respect that, let him have his space. On the other hand, it's not every day two people break off an upcoming marriage! You don't get many chances like this (I mean, he's gorgeous), so at the end of our lunch I said, "Ken, by the way, I know this is forward of me, but would you like to go do something...you know, like outside of this context? Something not...romantic, you know but

a...little more...intimate than this?" (I'm kicking myself, I'm kicking myself, I'm kick...) "You know, I know you'll need some time to get over your breakup..."

"Actually," Ken said, laughing sheepishly, "I've been out on two dates already since the breakup." He shrugged. "I don't know. I guess long-distance breakups are different. I'm not overwhelmed with sadness. Sleeping alone isn't weird because I was already doing it 25 days of the month anyway. I don't know, maybe getting out and casually dating for awhile is what I need right now. Sure, I'd love to go do something."

So now I'm really glad I said something, but today it hits me that I'm about to go on a date with someone I've known only professionally for the last year. I've never had a situation like this before and I don't quite know what to expect. What if it's awkward? What if he tries to kiss me? What if I try to kiss him? Should I let myself get drunk? Should I offer him pot? I have to work with Ken for at least the next year on this festival we're all putting together. What if things go horribly wrong? What if things go horribly right?

Argh, I'm full of confusion. Advice would be appreciated.

Notes from readers :

just take things slow..I have the awful habit of just plunging in...if you wanna get drunk get drunk, if you wanna get stoned get stoned...just wait on the sex part..I know he's gorgeous but you could be rebou [isobel divine]

damn damn notes.....you could be rebound...he says he isnt that sad about it but there is always a rebound stage..you know it and I know it...so be catious with that sweet heart of yours [isobel divine]

"Sweet heart"...Hmmm...I would have used a different phrase...:) [*Wendy*]

well, i think that many first dates are with guys we know from work, from the neighborhood, frinds roomates and so. You have the advantage of having a lot to talk about, so no awkward silence. As for being wild, my [Dagny_t]

cont my sis-in-law believes in being the wildest you can be on the first date, because if he can't take it now he'll never be able to handle her later. That's fun. However, she hasn't been [Dagny_t] on a second date for the last three years, so go figure. Have fun and good luck. [Dagny_t]

Who wants to be a millionaire?

0.25.99

How addicted am I to "Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?" Well, I skipped a free dinner last night so I could watch it. Fuck!

For those who don't know, this is a new game show on ABC that's been running every single night for the last week in prime-time and will continue to run for another week. The idea is deceptively simple-one host, one contestant, two chairs that look like something out of "The Matrix." The contestant answers a series of 15 multiple-choice questions, each roughly doubling in value from \$100 to \$1 million. At any point in the process they can use three 'lifelines:' once in the process they can ask for two of the wrong answers to be taken away; once they can ask the audience what they think the answer is (they've been right every time); and once they can call anyone in the world for 30 seconds to get advice on a question. Easy, right? Sounds a little boring, doesn't it? I've always had a hard time understanding the quiz show scandal from the 1950s. How could so many people get so addicted to a stupid game show, anyway?

Watching "Millionaire," I've realized that modern game shows are the way they are precisely from the fallout of the 50s. Game shows these days cannot even have a trace of possibility of rigging; therefore they're made the opposite way now, with dumb gimmicks and randomness and (with the exception of Jeopardy) really vapid, bottom-of-the-barrel contestants.

"Millionaire" is exciting precisely because it mimics the set-up of pre-scandal game shows. You stick with one contestant for ten to thirty minutes. It's not him against other players, it's him against his own nerves. The questions are easy enough so that anyone has a random shot of knowing them; difficult enough that you're completely fucked if you don't. ("Who kicked the winning score in the 1999 Women's World Cup finals? What is Juliet's last name in 'Romeo & Juliet?") You get to know the person and you get to agonizingly see how nervous they are. (A woman last night blanked on who won the 1996 Republican presidential nomination and almost got the question wrong.) Watching the show night after night after night turns the exercise into a nail-bitingly entertaining experience. Not to mention, in a full week of shows they've only had one person get past the \$64,000 question, and no one's gotten close to winning a million yet. Each new person takes on added significance as you realize that maybe no one is going to win a million dollars.

And one final note about this show before I leave today. Regular viewers have been complaining lately about the choice of Regis Philbin as host. What's the complaint? If Regis Philbin is not the patron saint of schlocky pop-culture iconography...well, he should be. Regis as host is funny, stupid, smarmy and very charming. What more could one want in a game-show host? I got hooked on "Regis and Kathie Lee Live" in college when I worked a night job one year, and I've been a fan ever since. It's nice to see him getting prime-time work, and I don't care what anyone has to say about it.

I might be getting a cable modem in my apartment! Email access from home for the first time in Margaret's life! Details later!

Notes from readers :

Wow....what a connection, we're both addicted to the same gameshow. [Lady Dimitria]

If I ever realise my dream of making a budget movie about a tacky 80s game show, you wanna be in it? [Moondust]

My very first Open Diary stalker!

0.26.99

First of all, let me apologize for not being able to keep up with everyone else's diaries recently. I'm at this great temp job right now but it keeps me busy every second of the day. This of course is what I prefer, but it does severely cut down on the free time I have on the internet. Speaking of which, I've been having this experience since coming back to OD that's been making me think again about my drug habits and why I abuse my body as much as I do.

Somebody out there (anonymous, of course) has been leaving exactly one comment at my journal every single day, making a disparaging remark concerning the amount of drugs I take. Really stupid, not very threatening things, like on my Playboy entry they said something like, "I'm surprised you even have the motivation to get a job with all the pot you smoke." And yeah, yeah, I know it's unfair to make critical comments about the lifestyle of someone else you don't even know, I know he's an asshole, whatever. I got used to anonymous hate mail years ago, believe me. This isn't my point. My point is that these comments have all focused on how if I do all the drugs I talk about, stereotypically I would be a big ol' stoner hardly able to get my ass off the couch. And he's right-this is a pretty good generalization to have about people who smoke pot every day. I've been spending the week thinking about why I'm not a stereotypical stoner and, more generally, why I do as many drugs as I do.

Something I've never mentioned at OD before is that the reason I like pot so much is because I'm so manic in normal everyday life. I really feel like my candle burns much faster than the average person, and the times I'm stoned are the few times I feel like I've slowed down to the pace of the rest of the world. I've been like this as long as I can remember-biting off more than I can chew, taking on multiple projects at once. An ex-girlfriend once complained that my problem was that every time I accomplished a goal I was unequipped to sit back and enjoy that moment, but rather immediately jumped right into the next challenge and obsessed over why that wasn't accomplished yet. And you know, she's absolutely right. I know I wouldn't have been able to have all the successes I've had without this over-reaching work ethic, but it also makes me a rather high-strung, stressed-out person virtually all the time.

I take drugs to shut off overused parts of my brain for awhile. I enjoy being drunk and not obsessively worrying about my next novel for a couple of hours. On the other hand, I also enjoy amphetamines for an entirely different reason. (I'm kind of addicted to coffee and I had a pretty bad relationship with speed in 1996.) In that case I think I simply enjoy being fucked up, being so manic that I feel like my head's going to pop off my body. I've been obsessed with different drugs, legal and illegal, for short periods throughout my life-acid, cocaine, sleeping pills, mescaline-but I think they were, and still are, for the same reason: a lot of time I get really sick of being in my particular brain and I just need to shut it down for a couple of hours.

Will this ever change? I don't know. After getting these hate mails from this guy and really thinking about

my life, I was shocked to see how much I actually accomplish while still doing drugs at least once every 24 hours. Sometimes I think it's the drugs that keep me from going completely insane with activity. Sometimes I get scared that I'm going to have one massive shut-down moment around the age of 40. But you can't worry about the future, right? I worry too much about the present already. I only know one way to live my life and that's at 100 fucking percent 24/7, which in my case means doing an insane amount of writing, fucking anyone with whom I get a chance, and throwing drugs into my system with complete abandon. (Well, okay, not complete abandon-I did quit cocaine. It was just too hard on my system.) This works for me. It doesn't necessarily work for everyone else. I just had to remind myself this week that I'm not everyone else, and that's just fine.

And one final note to my "secret admirer:" Yes, I will keep deleting your comments as fast as you can keep posting them. You seem to have this attitude that if you do it long enough you will eventually wear me down or finally get to me emotionally. Let me assure you that that's not the case. In college I had to deal for awhile with a stalker who hung outside my apartment with a knife. Believe me, once you go through an experience like that, no amount of anonymous smart-ass comments about my 'lack of morals' is ever going to rattle me. Keep setting them up and I'll keep knocking them down-it's as simple as that. I'll see you all tomorrow.

Notes from readers :

kee-rist! this was really hilarious. i guess it was the constant sarcastic tone. i've gone through a few other of your entries and they have the same "feel". you like a Cynical Muse and you probably don't even (c) [::Sappho::]

(c) you WRITE like a Cynical Muse and you probably don't even know it *s* [::Sappho::]

Ok...it took me a day, but I now have it. You don't have a "sweet heart"...you have a: KALEIDO-SCOPIC heart. :) [*Wendy*]

Loved this entry. Yup, f*ck 'em! [DP]

I am being stalked by the same exact thing...exactly except mine isnt everyday..Im beginning to be amused by it...I kept the good ones on there telling me they hate me..thats funny...oh yea write this!! [isobel divine]

maybe its the same person for both of us...I just switched to safe notes..if its someone within the diary then I will know who it is...if its outside then comegetsome divine intervention [isobel divine]

I get my share of disgruntled readers too, but I think everyone has a right to their opinions and I therefore leave the notes and typically respond to them. [Mark W Penn]

...And I still accept anonymous notes. I think this promotes more free thought and if they want to hide under an anonymous signature then thats their choice. [Mark W Penn]

I definitely like keeping my comment section open to everyone, whether or not they're OD members. [*Margaret*]

NEW EMAIL

Thu, 26 Aug 99 16:58PM PDT

From: Viper (male)

To: <gadpub@netscape.net>

Subject:

Hi there! Hope you don't mind, I got your address from diary on OD. I'm Viper. Just wanted to say Hi. And you mentioned once that your poems have been published. I was curious as to where? In print? Online? You have a homepage? Ok, enough questions at once? :)

And... I hate to admit it, but I'd be lying if I said I wasn't interested in some pictures you said you posted. :) BUT, if you would rather not, that is fine. Just a little email conversation would be great. And I would like to read some of your poems.

Hope to hear from you soon

Viper (male)

Why nice people annoy the hell out of me

Yesterday on the train this guy was listening to Pavement, "Crooked Rain Crooked Rain," on his Walkman across the aisle from me. He had it loud enough that I could tell what album it was, so I took my notebook out and wrote in big huge letters:

PAVEMENT!

and held it up so he could see it. He smiled and winked at me and shot me one of those "right back at ya" finger gestures.

This has been a week of waffling. The Playboy people won't write back about an interview; Ken hasn't written back about a date; this Chicago Spoken Word Festival I'm helping with has gotten moved back another five months to October, 2000. Isobel Divine, another OD diarist, is going to be in Chicago next weekend but is too busy to meet, which is disappointing.

Ah, malaise, my best friend. Remember Megan, the woman with the boyfriend I kissed at the party awhile ago? (See "Me and Kubrick, Kubrick and Me" and "It was the perfect date...except" for details.) She's having a party tonight. I want to go but first I'm going out with *Debbie. Debbie's a woman I've known for five years now, back when we were both in the IT department at this ad agency. (Yes, I actually used to have a salaried corporate job. It's that job that produced a lot of my fear and hatred towards Corporate America.)

What can I say about Debbie? She's really nice and very outgoing and caring. But she's...God, how do I put this without being insulting? Debbie was raised in the far western suburbs of Chicago, still lives there, and has no plans on ever leaving. A sincerely fun night for her is to go Dave & Busters or TGIFridays for frothy drinks and overbattered, overpriced onion rings. She has a \$3,000 car stereo. She's just...ugh. This is hard to talk about, because ultimately Debbie is a very nice person and tries harder than anyone else I know to get along with everyone and be friendly.

Okay, here it goes...Debbie's ANNOYING! Very, very annoying! I'm sorry! I feel bad about it! But the fact is that I don't want to take Debbie to this party because my circle of friends will be very annoyed by her and I won't have a good time because she's a very high-maintenance friend. Frankly, for years I've been trying to turn Debbie into one of those old-time acquaintances you get together with once a year. But Debbie's constantly calling me and wanting to go out, and she's so nice, and she's so earnest...sigh. I can be an asshole when I need to be, but I absolutely cannot be an asshole to someone who's nice, who's annoying despite how they act, not because of it. So that's how it is. Dinner and a movie with Debbie, party alone at midnight. There's worse lives to have.

I started my new novel this week. It's a love story about an edgy artist who marries another edge artist in their twenties when they're both heroin addicts. Then she dies from an overdose at the age of 30, and the novel takes place about a year and a half later as this guy is slowly and frustratingly getting back into

dating again. It's going to make people cry. Or at least that's the goal.

By the way, if you ever want to read any of my work, just send me an email and I'll pass my URL on to you. Computer nerd that I am, I've been maintaining a personal site for about two years now (all coding done by hand!) and at last count it was up to about 300 separate HTML documents.

I'm listening to this mix tape right now from five or six years ago. Veruca Salt, "Seether." God, whatever happened to Veruca Salt? They met Steve Albini and all became assholes and flopped, that's what happened to Veruca Salt. Take it from me - I used to live in the same building as them back before Wicker Park was turned into Yuppie Heaven. "When Good Bands Go Bad..." today on Jenny Jones.

Notes from readers :

im sorry for the disappointment...it is my fault [isobel divine]

pavement...crooked rain, crooked rain...have it...love it...the only decent thing i got out of my last relationship...:) [riotgrrl]

I'm liking the novel idea...

Have you ever thought about just getting away for awhile, say, moving to Tibet to become a monkess? :) [*Wendy*]

Debbie flicks a tape in her \$ 3000 car deck and thinks...eh I don't need St. John's Wort...and opens up the decibels. [Soultrain]

Amen! [*Margaret*]

NEW EMAIL

Sat, 28 Aug 99 06:31AM PDT

From: XXX (female)

To: <gadpub@netscape.net>

Subject: do you confess to being a nerd girl?

hi imreading the opendiary.compageand came upon YOU

You have a keen sense of humorand i bet many people are followers of you..is that said right?

i don't know if i can be as upfront and honest as you are. So far at least.

I wonder often about things and people.. you can read my entries at XXX in the opendiary.com pages

A letter to Ken

8.30.99

(For the backstory of Ken, please see "All hail the sexy co-worker." Ken and I ended up going out to Megan's party last Friday after Debbie and I saw the play earlier in the evening. As this letter I sent to him today will show, it was just a tiny bit of a disaster.)

Good morning, Ken. I'd like to apologize for the rather asinine and juvenile way I was acting Friday night. It's the first time since high school I've acted that way around a guy, and I've been spending a lot of time this weekend thinking about why I did it.

I think mostly it can be boiled down to the fact that I've never tried something like this before, asking out someone I already know fairly well from another context. I think much of my confidence regarding dating in the last few years has come from the other person not really knowing me at first, slowly getting to know me within the confines of an intimate relationship. I completely lost all confidence in myself the moment I asked you out, and unfortunately I didn't recognize that until about halfway through the evening on Friday. And then instead of accepting the info and calmly dealing with the rest of the evening, I decided to get really trashed and hide from you at the party.

There's a couple of things to know about me that will explain Friday night much better. The first is that my history of dating started at a later age than most people I know. (My first kiss was at 18, lost my virginity at 19.) I used to be pretty intimidated and scared by the opposite sex, and while I consider that pretty much a part of my past now, every so often that irrational fear will rear its ugly head and I'll do stupid things.

Second, I think I should've admitted to you before now that I've actually been attracted to you for a much longer time and with more intensity than I've let on. I didn't want to tell you these things because I was afraid they'd freak you out. (I'm still afraid of that, actually.) But now I think it's better that you know it, so that it helps explain why I acted the way I did. I've wanted to ask you out since the first time I met you (it's why I joined the Young Collector's Club in the first place) but I knew it was pointless because you were dating someone. Ever since you've become single again, I haven't quite been myself. You intimidate me a little bit, simply because for a long time you've been in a file in my brain of "men I'm attracted to who I can never go out with." And you were in this file for so long that I got very comfortable with you being there, and now that you've moved into another file it's taking me some time to get used to that.

I think at a certain point Friday night I simply convinced myself that you couldn't possibly be interested in me, that you were at the party because you were humoring me or wanted to be nice and not turn my invitation down. Not only do I not really have any information that would prove that, but once I was convinced of this I acted on the belief in the worst way possible.

I know this letter is a lot more intimate than you and I are used to being with each other. I also know this might contain more information than you particularly want to hear. (It contains more information

than I think I want to SHARE, as a matter of fact.) It's just that, now that the damage has been done, I wanted to tell you from a completely honest standpoint why everything happened the way it did. The one thing that could make all this worse than it already is if you believed I acted the way I did for a different reason than the truth. It's a little scary for me to send you this letter, but I think it's important that you know that I acted that way primarily because I got scared of my attraction to you, and that every so often in my life (not very often anymore) instead of handling that fear in a calm, adult way, I choose to act like a damn 14-year-old again. Like I said, this is the first time in a LONG time I've acted this way, and I'm sorry that it was you that had to bear the brunt of my immaturity.

My weekend just kept getting worse and worse, by the way. I spent all Sunday morning in the emergency room -- a root canal from about three months ago got reinfected this weekend and spread into my gums. I woke up at four in the morning with the entire left side of my face swelled out about a half-inch. I look like a goddamned chipmunk now, I swear. And I'm allergic to morphine so they have me on this new non-opiate painkiller (Vicodin) that's doing strange things to me -- makes me throw up once every four hours or so, makes my skin itchy and sensitive, makes me hallucinate when I take one on an empty stomach. God, I wish I could just take this entire weekend and throw it in a big hole and never see it again. Urgh.

I've never claimed that I'm an easy person to deal with. I'm about the most neurotic, over-analytical person I know, and this comes with its own baggage. I'd like to promise that I'll never act stupidly around you again, but I know it'd be a lie. I CAN promise that I will TRY to stay calm around you, not imagine things that aren't true, and try to deal with my emotions honestly and maturely. If you'd still like to come to Madbar tonight, I'd like to have a chance to spend the evening in a way that I'd hoped Friday night would've gone. Please let me know sometime today.

I'll talk to you later.

Margaret.

(Ken wrote me back today. He was shocked to find out that I had been attracted to him for so long. He had no clue I was being such a freak Friday night. To him, he said, he just thought he was out having a fun time with a platonic friend. Which of course is why I freaked out, because I could tell that was what he was thinking. I have made the decision today to NOT try to go out with Ken romantically again. All in Margaret's life have agreed that this is a wise decision.)

(More details on the gum disease tomorrow. Fuckin' shit, it hurts!)

Notes from readers :

do you wish you could take that letter back now...your just thinking oh man he didnt even notice??
what the hell?? [isobel divine]

[winsome]

So by the way, in case no one's told you before, don't get gum disease! It's one of the most painful experiences I've had in my life. And this medication (penicillin and Vicodin) is really screwing with my system. It's forcing me to eat four times a day so the medicine won't make me nauseous - but I'm so nauseous from the medicine that I have no appetite, and eating is like torture. I don't know why I in particular am cursed to have so many tooth problems - I brush and floss just as much as anyone else I know - but it does seem to be my fate in life. My mom and my brother have the same problem, so maybe it's something genetic.

I must, must, must get health insurance one way or another, SOON. A friend of mine gets his through the Writers Guild of America, a sort of "trade union" writers can join for a fee. He recommends this place for me. Any other ideas out there, dear readers?

Ken and I went to the Madbar poetry night last night. (See "A letter to Ken" for backstory of this disaster.) It actually went very, very well. Once I stopped thinking of him as a potential partner for a romantic interlude, we got along great. We rode the train together home and had a big talk about Friday night. He admitted something I've suspected all along, which is that he's having a lot more emotional problems over his previous relationship than he's been admitting. And who can blame him? He dated her for three years and was engaged to get married. I admitted how deeply uncomfortable it made me to be going on a date with someone who already knew me fairly well. I hear people say all the time, "Oh, it's so much better to become friends with someone first and then date them later if the friendship goes well." Well, fuck that. Part of dating me is not realizing my limitations until you are safely having sex with me and have good things to counteract the bad news. The same goes for me when I'm dating someone else. For the life of me, I absolutely cannot fathom how somebody could get to know someone else's neuroses, annoying habits, foibles, FIRST and then STILL want to go out with them anyway. It just makes no sense whatsoever. Maybe it's just me.

Chloroquine wrote to me yesterday. She reminded me that many times it's when we officially give up and think, "Okay, I'm not going to date again for a long time" is when we end up meeting that special someone. That'd be nice. The more I talk to chloroquine the more I like her. Except I had this weird experience yesterday - I told her that her writing and life remind me of someone from five years ago who used to be all over the web, who was also this really charming nerd and science-obsessive who was very athletic. I couldn't remember the person's name, but chloroquine knew the woman's full name, including middle - and then didn't answer my question about how she knew her. So now I'm worried that I accidentally stumbled across chloroquine's real identity without meaning to. Which makes me feel guilty because chloroquine treasures her anonymity more than just about anybody I correspond with at OD, and you got to figure she's probably feeling a little weird that I would 'accidentally' just bring up this person's name out of the blue. So, chloroquine, if you're reading this, please know that if you really are that person, it was a

complete coincidence that I even brought it up, and your secret is safe with me.

Since it's nearing Labor Day, I decided to go through my old entries and make a tally of the summer. Number of people I kissed: 6. Number of people I fucked: 4. Number of comically embarrassing rejections: 2. (Three if you count Corporate Guy's abrupt about-face after sleeping with me.) Number of jobs: 4. Number of tooth emergencies: 2. Amount of pot smoked: quarter of an ounce. Number of new internet friends: about 10. Number of new hits to my website: 700! All in all, not bad for four months' work.

Notes from readers :

Be lulled and rocked like a skiff on the sea. [Psychedelic Yogi Sam]

sweetheart: i looked her up online. i'd passed her page by before back in the era that still used mosaic to browse. the only identity we share is the same middle initial. ne pas stress chiquita.

[chloroquine]

Relationships need to start out as friendships because a friendship offers the foundation needed to sustain a long-term relationship. Haven't you learned that diving in to intimacy doesn't work?

[*Wendy*]

...cont It's sad that you refuse to change and that you expect the people who come into your life to adapt to your fears while you remain in denial. If you don't change...nothing in your life ever will.

[*Wendy*]

"Wishing you were somehow here again....wishing you were somehow near"

Ah yes, Wendy, but as they say, yours is one person's opinion. And not necessarily the objective truth just because YOU believe it... [*Margaret*]

you've beaten me on all counts... well, except the weed... [winsome]

NEW EMAIL

Date: Wed, 01 Sep 99 09:41AM PDT

From: XXX (female)

To: gadpub@netscape.net

Subject:

hey its XXX....

well midnight insomniac stumbled upon Vipers latest and he outed you to the OD...although you said you didnt care I personally am disappointed that the truth is out..I look forward to your stories and seeing what is going on the word will obviously get around...are you going to cease writing? open a new diary? what? if you do open a new diary I would certainly like to be told the name....you can go back into secrecy under a new character...

so I am going to chicago on friday....I want to thank you again for all of your help and information..could you please let me know again how to contact you if I get a chance...saturday night is up in the air again since I am not going to XXX at the XXX anymore... I wish I had more time in the city so I could get a riot *Margaret* time while in town but there will be others I am sure speak to you soon..

let me know what you will do with your diary and tell XXX to not pick on you so much...dont say anything but from the few entries I have read of hers she seems to be more involved in your life then what is going on with her...I dont know your relationship but that is just my view of it...unless I am totally off and Jason is not you its someone else...

XXX (female)

NEW EMAIL

Date: Thu, 02 Sep 99 11:57AM PDT

From: XXX (male)

To: gadpub@netscape.net

Subject: Homepage

Margaret..hey..I enjoy reading your diary. I admire those who speak whats on their minds, proly cos for MANY years I didnt feel secure enough to, so I'm learning. Ohh..HEHEHE...I'm XXX..not that you would know me, but just so you know. I also have a homepage..and since I dabble in that I'd love to see yours if you want to show it. So youre a writer huh ?? Coooolllll...rut rohh..gotta jamm...the chariot is calling...

XXX (male)

I've been outed! (part 1 of 3)

9.2.99

So yesterday, in the middle of what's been the busiest, most horrible day of work I've had in years, I started getting these panicky emails from my friends saying that someone at Open Diary had "outed" me - that is, revealed my real name at their own diary. I stuck around after work and checked it out for myself. It's not nearly as bad as people were making it sound - it's some guy who goes by the name "Viper" who's simply claiming that I'm a guy.

People are expecting a response from me on the subject, but I have a couple of political points to make today (surprise, surprise) so I will frame my response in the form of multiple choice, one of which is definitely the correct answer. Either:

(A) Viper is completely right - I am a guy; or

(B) Viper is completely wrong - his email to me yesterday was in actuality not a simple request for my URL, as he claims, but a request for a date that was so aggressive as to approach offensive. When I turned him down he got angry and made up this rumor to get back at me; or

(C) Viper is partly right - I really am a woman, but anytime I get an email from someone who seems like a vaguely threatening person, I tell them I'm a guy so they'll leave me alone.

Which one is the correct answer? Only I know, and I ain't telling. But I picked these choices for specific reasons, because they metaphorically illustrate the points I want to make today about Open Diary and the act of anonymously writing on the web. Let's examine them one at a time.

Let's assume for a moment that A) is correct. If so, Viper found this out through a private conversation that was meant for his eyes only. When two anonymous writers exchange real information over the internet, I've always assumed that this act of trust deserved special recognition. I've had people write to me about their deepest, most embarrassingly intimate sexual fetishes, asking if I shared them because of various comments I've made in my diary over the past several months. I've had people send me erotic stories that they've never shared with another human being. I know the real names and locations of approximately twenty OD diarists now, sometimes not by choice but because their email server automatically sends that info along in the header.

When I write to someone - no matter what it is that I'm saying - I expect that letter to be private information between me and the writer. If anyone should know this lesson by now it should be another Open Diary person, and it disappoints me to see that a person as popular as Viper would so casually break the trust of other OD people, almost without thinking of the consequences.

And still assuming that A) is true, I have another quick point to make. I have had long-running correspondences with scores of women now because of OD, some of them daily for the last two months. Not once has any female ever found it appropriate to include private information about myself at their own diary. (In fact, most of the women I write to respect our privacy so much that they don't even mention that we're correspondents. And neither do I.) When I looked up this so-called "outing" and saw that it was Viper, the only thing I could think was, "Of course, it's a man. How so fucking TYPICAL." Hey, any guys reading this, listen up a minute - you know how sometimes your female friends will get all disgusted and say how they'll never trust another man again as long as they live? And how you are automatically suspect just for owning a penis? And you get slightly offended and wonder what could've happened to make your female friends so reactionary? Well guess what, it's the fuckin' bullshit like this that makes us that way. Over and over and over again, men keep demonstrating how morally superior they really do believe they are in their own minds, how they believe that they have this divine right to do and say anything in the world that pops into their heads without the slightest consideration of anyone else's feelings or opinions. We may not live in a patriarchal world anymore, but sister, believe you me, we still live in a patriarchal world. And incidents like this just keep right on supporting this theory.

THIS ENTRY IS CONTINUED -- PLEASE SAVE COMMENTS UNTIL THE END

Notes from readers :

Hmmmmmm.... (that's not a comment, Sir, or Ma'm... just a hmmm =) [MsNoSign]

On behalf of all the emotionally bankrupted members of my gender I sincerely apologize...*bowing humbly* [RisingStarr]

I've been outed! (part 2 of 3)

9.2.99

Okay, let's move on to the second scenario and assume that B) is true. If so, then why is this entry you're reading right now still here for public consumption? When I signed up for my diary I seem to remember the OD Uberlords saying that they would be policing this site and automatically deleting entries that made disparaging remarks about other diarists or that made any attempt to reveal the identity of another member.

OD is a social experiment that's fairly rare on the internet right now - an attempt at creating a cooperative community where the normal "flames" of the computer world are not tolerated. Many of us are keeping diaries here specifically because of this attempt at creating a safe haven. I've talked to several people now who've kept online journals elsewhere on the web, who ended up shutting them down because: (1) The site degenerated into a series of petty and insular attacks between members which were ultimately annoying and interesting only to the two people having the fight; or (2) A conventional wisdom developed that said that, after a prolonged period of time, one is expected to start revealing personal info about oneself or risk seeming prudish or unhip.

These people, like me, are at OD as an attempt to get away from these things which are rapidly becoming the norm on the internet. It'd be a real shame to see OD degenerate into just another of an endless series of lame fuckin' clique sites, a glorified BBS where everyone spends every waking moment responding to childish little insults directed their way by the other obsessive members of the organization. Viper's act of talking about me in a way I didn't approve is the start, and it'll only go downhill from here if not checked. Do you want to be spending your time at OD worrying that other members are inspecting your every word for clues to your real identity, so that they can proudly broadcast the fact when they've figured it out?

There are certain rules we all need to live by to make OD the cool thing we all want it to be. The cardinal rule is to never reveal information about another diarist that they have not already posted themselves. When I refer to an OD friend and they haven't mentioned what city they're from at their diary, I don't mention what city they're from. The same goes for age, sex, and any other random little thing that may not personally matter to me. If they wanted everyone to know this information, they would've posted it themselves. It's not your job to do it for them.

It's called simple human respect, and I feel like mine has been violated this week. If we assume (as we are right now) that B) is correct, then I would be really guilty of the same, and this entry you're reading right now would not deserve to be here. Is B) correct? Again, I'm not saying. But it's something I hope you seriously consider when writing future entries at your own diary.

THIS ENTRY IS CONTINUED -- PLEASE SAVE COMMENTS UNTIL THE END

Notes from readers :

I absolutely agree with your privacy statement. I've known the truth for a while...I won't say A B or C but the truth is out there ;) [midnight insomniac]

Okay, third scenario. Let's assume that C) is correct. If so, then exactly what is it from me that one can trust? Viper speaks at length about how he, as the intelligent man he is, has never been "fooled" before now. (Right, and women never fake orgasms, either.) Assuming C) is true, what makes him now think that my admission of being a man is any more valid than my previous admission of being a woman? Just because my letter was addressed to him and not the public in general? Because it seemed more intimate and, by default, more "truthful?" Because it sounded like I was sharing some special tidbit of information that I don't "usually give out?"

This is actually a really serious issue right now when it comes to the internet. Millions of people these days seem to have lapsed back into this old school of thought that says that it must be true if someone has written it down. Manifestations of this in recent years have included bogus news articles that have sent Wall St. into a panic, child molesters who have successfully convinced teenagers to cross state lines, not to mention thousands upon thousands of creepy people currently passing themselves off as other entities on the web for personal/sexual/financial gain.

Why should you trust anything I say? I could be a 16-year-old boy in Omaha bored out of his skull. I could be a 52-year-old woman with three kids in Bethesda MD who wants to relive her glory days. I could be this 30-year-old male novelist that Viper claims I am, writing as Margaret to hone my writing skills when it comes to the female voice. Or I could simply be me, a 30-year-old woman from Chicago who drinks too much, has sex with the wrong people, always seems to find herself in trouble, and generally lives a comically pathetic, but ultimately happy, life.

The power, my friend, is with you. Yes, you. You are an intelligent person. You don't automatically believe everything you see on television and you have the power to be just as discriminating with regards to any medium. There is a real danger to blindly believing anything that someone tells you, whether it's that Jews were meant to be killed, Punky Brewster committed suicide, or that they're breaking up with you because they have issues. You have a rather remarkable thing called an independent brain, and you shouldn't let it go to waste. Examine. Explore. Question. Fucking question everything. If C) is true and I wrote back to Viper explaining how I'm really a woman and I was pulling his leg, would he then be "fooled" for a third time in a row if I actually was a man? God, I hope not. I like to think that someone with such an intelligent and entertaining diary such as his wouldn't be duped so easily. Use your brain. Believe what you want to believe, based on your own research and intelligence. Don't ever let someone else tell you what to think.

People have asked me if I'm going to keep writing here. Of course I am! People will believe what they want to believe. Some of you will keep having faith in me as a woman, others will think I'm actually pulling off an amazingly entertaining postmodern party trick, and yet others won't give a shit at all. People have also asked me if I'm angry. Of course not. Like Viper said, I tell the truth of who I really am to anyone who bothers to write to me. What disappoints me is that Viper took that power out of my hands and decided to print whatever he felt like about me at his diary. But I'm not angry.

And one final note: this entry today is not a discussion forum. Any comments that disagree with my opinions will be immediately erased. If you have a differing point of view about Viper's actions, my thoughts, or the subject of anonymity in general, by all means write them out at your own diary. A free and open flow of information is vital to the rise of any civilization. But my writing is not a democracy and never has been. Freedom of speech is applied to society in general, not my specific, private diary. Rude, snotty, or just plain dissenting comments will be deleted by me as soon as I see them. I just want to let you know that up front, so I don't get a million emails going. "Hey, what happened to my snotty comment?"

I never got to talk about the big news in my life, by the way. I've been invited to be in a porn shoot! Lots

and lots of details tomorrow! Bye, everyone!

Notes from readers :

I have had the same problem with note leavers criticising me for my morals or lack of them...I have been told I am hated..blah blah blah...I dont think it is the right of anyone to judge me for my life cont. viper was completely out of line to think that it was his right to say such a thing...I feel censored in this diary a lot due to the fact that it is not anonymous if you think aboutit...many people know me of [isobel divine]

A) I've never felt I've owned my penis, just sort of rented it. B) I am a refugee from one of those BS BBSs and know exactly what you mean. [DP]

C) I drink too much and have sex with the wrong people D) I love Punky Brewster E) I have been reading your diary since you started it and think you are a terrific writer. F) I don't care what sex you are. [DP]

This is quite an entry! There are good points which I agree with. I'm a frequent visitor at Viper's diary so I know what you're speaking of. I'm not gonna comment on anything other [MsNoSign]

if one is astute enough and is interested in looking for something beneath the surface... one will probably find enough clues to either confirm or repudiate something. Respectfully, [MsNoSign]

I think A) Viper is actually OJ B) Mark Furman is actually Viper C) fixing your dairy to not receive any notes, and deleteing your email address would solve all of these problems. [Axis]

LoveKitten makes a really excellent point today in her diary about trusting anonymous people too quickly. Check it out... [*Margaret*]

i don't have time to sign in now. i just wanted to add a note of support for margaret. there are no rules concerning writing about reality. readers choose to read what they want. i enjoy reading margaret's diary.-chloroquine

Ok--Don't know you--Never wanted to read your diary--Never have. The only reason so many have is because of the current "issue" with Viper, I'm sure. So I suggest you reassess your complaint.

[Darky]

First, those who are leaving negative notes with the alleged outed name are the real cowards.

Second, given the aggressiveness of Margaret's suitors, I'd pretend to be a guy to. [Wiley]

Third, some people take this forum way too seriously - the exhibitionist/anonymous nature alters even the most normal diary. Fourth, this is the most fun I've had with the diary in a long time.

Netheads are sh [Wiley]

sheep in need of someone to shake them up. This medium is limited as an outlet to make connections, especially mediated sites like this. You want real? Turn off the box and go outside. [Wiley]

Viper never meant any harm to you. He simply thought it was ok to say something because you stated that you didnt care if people found out. Viper is a very nice man who ads alot of joy to this site.You shouldnt fly off the handle until you k [Moiral]

yeah, Wiley, sure... outside is real, but at the moment it's not nearly as exciting as the marriage proposal that has just occurred in the OD! I'd say that's pretty real, too :-) [MsNoSign]

Let me assure everyone again that I am NOT mad at Viper, just a little disappointed for the reasons stated above... [*Margaret*]

...Viper and I have been talking and everything's okay with us. People shouldn't be using these entries as an excuse to yell at other people... [*Margaret*]

...and by the way, that marriage proposal really n' creeps me out! [*Margaret*]

NEW EMAIL

Date: Thu, 02 Sep 99 18:03PM PDT

From: XXX (female)

To: gadpub@netscape.net

Subject: spareherneckthehatchet...

Margaret or the author of said diary,

I've read some unkind and sophmoric remarks about you, or your work, on the Open Diary today. Its unfortunate that any of what the Nameless Many had to say matters to anyone other than yourself...

I, personally, enjoy your entries, and you have been on my favorites list for quite some time. Regardless of circumstance, you have authored an enjoyable tale. If you are indeed a Woman, than none of this matters anyway. If you are male, judging from the fact no one even noticed from your entries alone, you will probably have a long career ahead of you. If instead, you are just trying to pick up women, morals and principals aside, you've hatched quite a plan...

No matter this, I only hope to enjoy future entries from you...

XXX (female)

Hi, everybody. Well, since my outing last week my mailbox has become flooded with hate mail, and I am constantly having to patrol my entries for mean comments. Like I said before, I really have no interest in participating in some kind of flame war or even to say anything particularly bad about anyone else, which is why I've decided to shut down this diary and begin a brand new one under a different name, age and sex.

The truth of the situation is that yes, I really am a 30-year-old male novelist from Chicago. Every detail that you've read here at my diary was in fact true and had really happened in my own life, but simply written from a female perspective. Why? Because most of my novels are love stories and most of them are primarily written from the female character's point of view. I am on a lifelong quest to constantly get better at writing in a female voice and, after reading about the Open Diary in the Chicago Tribune at the beginning of the summer, decided that this would be a good place to learn more about writing as a woman.

People have asked why I had open comments and an anonymous email address if I was posing as another sex. The answer, of course, is that I needed feedback. There wouldn't have been much point in writing as a woman if I couldn't find out what people were thinking of my writing. However, I had no desire to try to "pull a fast one" on anyone or to attempt to "get something" from other readers while they were under the impression that I was a woman, which is why I wrote back to anyone who wrote to me and immediately told them the truth of who I really was and why I was really doing this.

The reactions have been varied and interesting. Of the men (most of whom were writing because they were attracted to Margaret), the average reaction was of embarrassed amusement, a sort of attitude that said, "Well, of course Margaret's a guy. She's way too attractive to possibly be real. Sigh." Of the women (again, most of whom were writing because they were attracted to Margaret), the reactions were more varied. Some felt betrayed, like they were indeed being taken for a ride for my personal amusement. Others really liked the fact that I was able to tap into the zeitgeist of the average strong, independent, artistic woman so convincingly. The best part of writing as Margaret for me was that not once was I ever accused of pandering, of showing an oversimplified or stereotypical view of a woman's life. Margaret was a complex person, at times equally amusing, sympathetic, sexy and pathetic. Personally, I feel like I succeeded at presenting a fully-fleshed, fully-believable female character.

So did it help my writing? Well, see for yourself at: <http://www.geocities.com/jpettus.geo>. Here you can find excerpts from my novels, poetry, essays and other samples of my writing. It's my hope that reading through some of this material will give people a better understanding of why I wrote as Margaret in the first place.

My history with computers is an odd one. I've been online in one form or another since 1979, yet it has always and will always remain nothing more than a fun hobby to me. I've written an entire novel about two people who meet online and fall in love, yet I personally feel that this scenario is almost completely impos-

sible in real life. In general I feel the same way about computers and the internet that I do about any technology, that it is a powerful and entertaining tool which can damage us when we spend too much time with it and not enough time in the real, physical world, interacting with our fellow humans.

I will reiterate something that I said in my 'outing' entry that I think is important to stress again: it is dangerous to blindly believe anything that anyone tells you, just because it is in print. The reason I was convincingly writing as a woman in this particular case was simply to become a better writer, but if I were just one ounce more evil I could've been using this deception to be getting people's real names and addresses, personal details about their lives, and nude photos. Other people are currently on the internet under false pretenses in order to rob you of your credit card numbers, your bank statements, lists of assets and your dignity. Buyer, beware.

I'm still on Open Diary, like I said. My new diary is as a male, but any more information than that you'll have to discover for yourself. I've gotten hooked for the first time in my life to the act of confessional journal writing, and it's something I would like to continue doing. But also like I've said many times before, I have no interest in supporting what I consider petty and juvenile bickering between individual members of an online community, something of which has unfortunately become a hallmark among regular internet dwellers. I have much better things to be doing with my time - like writing! To me it is much more worth my time to simply shut down Margaret's diary than to continue encouraging the overwhelming amount of discourse that has suddenly appeared over my real identity. I still encourage anyone who wishes to write to me and I will be happy to speak one-on-one over the issues this diary has raised. But frankly, I don't like anonymous group mentality, and given the choice I refuse to support it.

And one final thing before I go - the 43 entries I wrote as Margaret have been accepted for publication by a small press here in Chicago. The book will be entitled "My Summer as a Girl" and will be available in bookstores in spring of 2000.

Many thanks to the people who supported Margaret over the course of this long summer. My thanks also to the OD Uberlords for providing this free forum for us to do these things that we do. I'll talk to you all again.

This diary does NOT accept notes.



JASON PETTUS was the winner of the 1997 Pulitzer Prize for literature. His 1974 novel *The Dinner Party* was the basis behind Stanley Kubrick's final film *Eyes Wide Shut*, and his torrid sexual affair with singer Liz Phair was the inspiration behind her hit song "Supernova." Mr. Pettus contributes regularly to *The New Yorker* where he is a senior editor, and writes scripts under a penname for the wildly successful ABC television show *Boy Meets World*. He lives in Chicago with his wife Bridget Fonda and their five children.

END