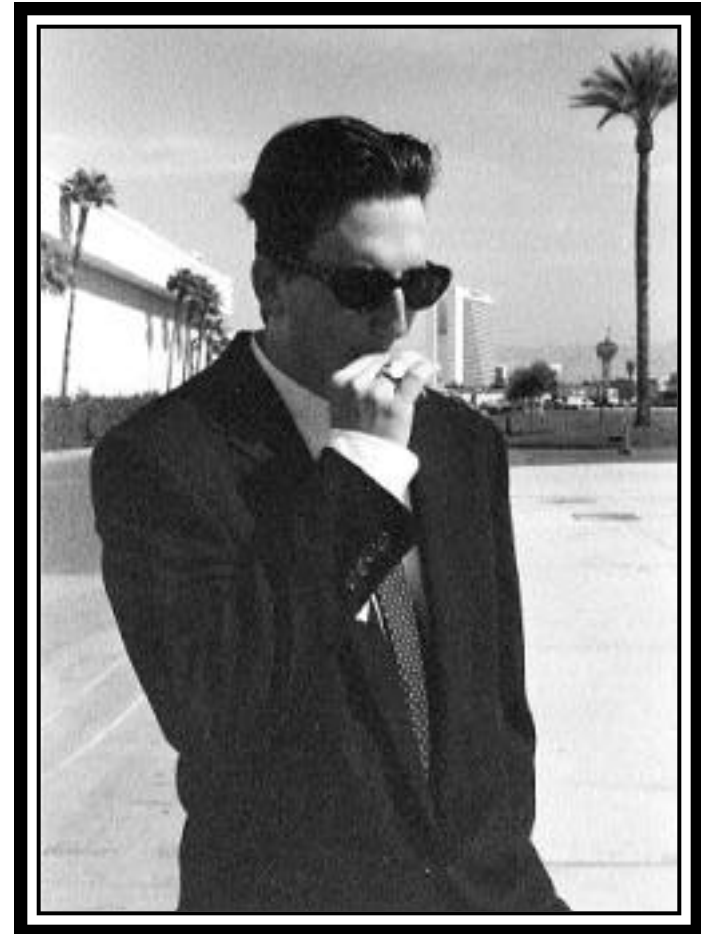


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my son was shot
now he lives in his wheelchair
I hear him creek as he rolls down the hall

he's a brave boy
it takes him such great strength to live
he always smiles

he can't feel from the waist down
but he works so hard
he is so proud

once I came home
and he was so excited
you see, he took a rope

and a laundry basket
filled them up with snacks;
now he could

drag his snacks to his room
this was an accomplishment
he was so proud of himself

I held back my tears
he shouldn't have to go through this
this is not how he should live

people don't understand
when he has a bowel movement
he has to

reach inside of him
and pull it out
he can't feel

this is what it means
for him to be in a wheelchair
to not feel

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January, 1995

One day a man decided to kill people.
A shooting spree. So he went into a
gun shop, picked up a pair of assault

rifles, a number of rounds, each of
one hundred bullets. And he bought
these things, he didn't need a

permit or a license. Just walked in
and out. And he went to an office
building to take out his revenge

on the world. My wife was there,
took five bullets in the back. I wonder
if she suffer before she died. We went

on a ski trip together last Christmas.
She looked so beautiful with the
snow in her hair. This man didn't need

a license, and yet I needed a permit to
retrieve my wife's ashes from the
crematorium. He didn't just do this to

her, you know. Or to the other victims.
He's tortured me, and our baby girl. Our
girl is darling. She's blond, like her

mommy. We have to live with
this trauma forever. This should not
be how we have to live.

As my girl's second birthday approached
this year, I asked her what she
wanted. She said she wanted

to see mommy. Guess what
she is going to want for her
third

g r o w i n g u p

Some argue that men and women have inherent differences - whether described as physical or genetic. However, a lot of the differences between men and women in general are taught to us by society, by all of the people and things that influence us daily.

When women are born, they are given pink dresses and bows in their hair. Little boys are given light blue jumpers. Even when they are infants, even if other adults can't tell what the sex of the child, this is done - precisely to insure that the rest of the world will know what the sex of the child is. As they are raised, they are given toys to play with - girls the infamous Barbie, and boys the popular G.I. Joe. Girls progress to baby dolls they can dress and feed and burp, with accessories such as baby bottles, strollers and blankets. Boys progress to model cars and trucks, then on to guns and weapons, then the prized bicycle, then sports equipment, then building and erector sets.

As they grow, parents decide what clothes the children will wear, and what their hair will look like, and what toys they will play with, and how they will go about playing. Girls are clothed in little dresses, fully equipped with tights and buckled shoes, and are given little bows to hold back their longer, more cumbersome hair. They are encouraged to have a best friend to stay in the house with, to play house with, to play quietly with, to put make-up on, and to maintain a one-on-one, more intimate relationship. They role-play, and even in their play define roles for themselves - or at least define that there are roles that exist in the world.

As boys grow they are encouraged to go outdoors, to be rowdy, to find new friends, explore boundaries, play sports where they learn cooperation and competition, and even learn to battle in play fights. They are dressed in comfortable pants and t-shirts and athletic sneakers. Their hair is short and manageable. They learn to get dirty. They learn to win. They learn to lead other boys in play - larger numbers of children than women are accustomed to dealing with.

Each sex interacts with other children of primarily the same sex, but these same-sex children have been taught like them to do the things their sex is supposed to do. They reinforce the behavior of other children - the behavior taught to them from their parents, their siblings, their toys, their television, their movies, their fairy tales. Each sex learns about interactions with others, but they learn entirely different things. The traits each sex take from these experiences are vastly different from the traits of the other sex.

Girls learn the importance of intimacy and trust, fostered by their female best friend. They learn not to be rowdy - they learn a more sedentary form of play. They learn the value of taking care of others. They learn to pretend and role-play the position of mother. They learn the value of their physical looks. They learn from their physical idol - the Barbie doll. If Barbie was a real woman, at 5' 10" her measurements would be ***38, 18, 32***, and she would weigh 110 pounds - an almost unattainable figure at best.

Boys learn the importance of working with other people toward a common goal.

They learn to get along with a large number of people. They learn to win - they learn the American notion of competition, and they also learn the harder lesson of not trusting others, especially when other children are working toward the same goal as they are. They learn to explore new things and not be afraid. They learn to stretch themselves physically. They learn to work toward their goals. They learn about pain, about losing, and about winning. And although boys do not necessarily gain close relationships in the same way girls do, they gain a common bond between other boys - any and all boys that can jump in and join the game with them.

Some of the values both sexes take from their childhood are valuable - in fact, most of the traits taught to both sexes are admirable. However, it is important to remember three things:

1. Both sets of traits are particularly one-sided. One learns the value of competition, but doesn't learn how to interact on a personal level. The other learns deep trust, which can be detrimental when in a battle, such as a sport. One learns to build and create, but not interact. The other learns to imagine, but only on the level of interaction with a significant other.

2. These differences are taught to us, given to us, by our parents, commercials on television, by other friends we meet, by our siblings, by the colors that surround us, by the toys given to us, by our idols from our toys - from the likes of Barbie and G.I. Joe, by our cartoon role models, by our clothing purchased for us. Boys are expected to go outside to play and get dirty. Girls are expected to keep their pretty clothes clean, even if they were comfortable in their dress, tights and patent leather shoes to go outside and play.

There may be genetic or physical differences between the sexes, there may not be. I won't even address that point; it is irrelevant. The differences that are present in the values the sexes distinctively possess are not exclusive to any one sex. They are taught to us by male and female role models everywhere in our society. They are imposed on us from the day we are born to long after we are adults.

3. These two separate sets of traits, when placed with each other, one on one, face to face, are suddenly in great conflict.

First of all, boys are taught to hate girls, and girls are taught to hate boys. Girls are taught to trust and develop an intimate relationship, boys are taught not to get close, but to win, whatever the cost.

As they grow up, the woman looks for a long-term relationship, the man looks for sex. The woman is taught to keep sex from the man, and the man is taught to feign a relationship to gain sex. The woman is taught to trust, the man is taught to use that trust against her.

•••

It is a power that society influences over each and every one of us. It is a power that each and every one of us as members of society play into and reinforce in each other, as well as teach to our children. It is taught, shown to us by ads in magazines, by commercials, by children's toys and clothes, by the way girls associate with their mommy and boys disassociate from their mommy and run to daddy. It is evident by the way women are taught to make themselves look beautiful while men are taught

to look rugged. By the want women are calming and men are forceful. It is taught to us and perpetuated in this society by everyone in it that accepts it - women as well as men. Our mothers teach us this as well as our fathers. But it is taught to us.

And these separations of personalities are not specifically inherent (genetically) to one sex or another - they have been arbitrarily placed in these positions because they worked for so long in keeping the sexes separated. And although women are making changes toward being more equal in this society, they are fighting not only against a work place that may not react to her so kindly, but they are fighting against everything they have been taught, against all the forces that have influenced them in the past.

And when some women do succeed in making these changes, they are looked upon by some (male and female) as strange because they do not possess what this society considers "normal" traits for a woman.

The problem is not with the people in this society. They are doing only what is expected of them, what has always worked in the past. That is to be expected. The problem is with what the society as a whole accepts as normal. They are created roles which further drive the sexes apart.

Only when we notice these things can we understand why we have been raised to differently, why there is so much conflict between the sexes. And only when we notice these things can we learn to accept that there are other choices for how to raise our children, and how we ourselves should live.

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Analyze this. Get yourself on track. All men are scum anyway, Christ, this was just your reaffirmation of it. None of these people really matter. Just get back to your work, get yourself focused again. That's how to demonstrate your worth.

You don't care about your work. Who are you trying to impress? Let it pile up. It doesn't matter. God, why does it always feel like this? Why is it that you have to depend on others for your worth, and when there is one little crumb of affection thrown at you, you savor it and pray that it's a sign for more and you hope and you pray and then when nothing comes it's all the same again except this time all of your hopes are shot.

Why are there times like this when you feel so alone? There are other times when you relish in your solitude. Look at the dishes pile up. You should be doing laundry. Slob. Bitch. Can't even clean up after yourself.

Why does everything have to hurt you so much? Why are you crying so much more

now? Why do you look for ways to feel bad, reasons to cry? What do you feel guilty for? Why do you go through this?

Oh, don't even try to daydream and get yourself out of this. It will always be the same, you have to remember that. You can try to dream that you deserve something better, but don't bother. You will always keep trying, with the hope that it will get better, and you will keep failing, every single god-damn time, and that's the way it will go, forever and ever, on and on. It won't stop, not until you do. Can you resign yourself to this? Can you resign yourself to not trying, or are you going to keep building your hopes up for nothing?

What is the good of anything that you've done? Are you any happier for it? God, how do you go through these cycles? How the Hell can you deal with it? There's got to be a way to get out of it. Try not to think of it.

You're so lonely. All you've got left to you is your mind, and it's destroying you, slowly. When will it destroy you altogether? When? It's only a matter of time.

Why do you dream? Are you trying to escape reality? Are you trying to create a new reality? I think you dream and dream until you think that it's all actually real, and then when someone in your life proves your dream wrong you whole world falls to pieces. Piece. Little pieces. Look, there goes a few now. Try to pick them up, you're going to lose them if you don't pick them up and try to piece them back together again, and then you'll be destroyed. Can you create a new dream with what you have left?

You want to slip into it again. It's what keeps you alive, keeps you going. It's the only thing that gives you hope. What the Hell do you need that hope for? You'll be let down, you know it, if you can step down from that dream of yours. Get out of it! Stop. All these good dreams keep reminding you of what it could be like, if only you were someone else, if only you were someone liked and successful and important. And those bad dreams, those are your way of punishing yourself for dreaming. Your mind slips them in there, when no one else is looking, and then, because you live in your dreams so much, you have to play it out, and then you'll cry and cry and there's nothing you can do.

You can't face up to it, can you? You'll be no better than this. Your life will be no better than this. Nothing will be better than this, better than dreams turned into nightmares.

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And she got out of her car, walked across her driveway, and walked up the stairs to her porch, trying to enjoy her solitude, trying not to remember that he had followed her once again. She thought she was free of him; she thought he moved on with his life and that she would not have to see his face again.

Why did he have to call her, on this one particular day, years later, while she was at work? Maybe if she could have been suspecting it, she might have been braced for it. But then again, she didn't want to think about it: she was happy that she was finally starting to feel as if she had control of her life again.

It had been so many years, why would she have expected him to follow her again? Didn't she make it clear years ago that she didn't want him waiting outside her house in his car anymore, that she didn't want to receive the hang-up calls at three in the morning anymore? Or the calls in the middle of the night, when he'd stay on the line, when she could tell that he was high, and he'd profess his love to her? Or the letters, or the threats? No, the police couldn't do anything until he took action, when it was too late. Why did he come back? Why couldn't he leave her alone? Why couldn't it be illegal for someone to fill her with fear for years, to make her dread being in her house alone, to make her wonder if her feeling that she was being followed wasn't real?

All these thoughts rushed through her head as she sat on her front porch swing, opening her mail. One bill, one piece of junk mail, one survey.

It was only a phone call, she had to keep thinking to herself. He may never call again. She had no idea where he was even calling from. For all she knew, he could have been on the other side of the country. It was only a phone call.

And then everything started to go wrong in her mind again, the bushes around the corner of her house were rustling a little too loud, there were too many cars that sounded like they were stopping near her house. Her own breathing even scared her.

I could go into the house, she thought, but she knew that she could be filled with fear there, too. Would the phone ring? Would there be a knock on the door? Or would he even bother with a knock, would he just break a window, let himself in, cut the phone lines so she wouldn't stand a chance?

No, she knew better. She knew she had to stay outside, that she couldn't let this fear take a hold of her again. And so she sat.

She looked at her phone bill again.

She heard the creak of the porch swing.

She swore she heard someone else breathing.

No, she wouldn't look up from her bill, because she knew no one was there.

Then he spoke.

"Hi."

She looked up. He was standing right at the base of her stairs, not six feet away from her.

"What are you doing on my property?"

"Oh, come on, you used to not hate me so much." He lit a cigarette, a marlboro red, with a match. "So, why wouldn't you take my call today?"

"Why would I? What do I have to say to you?"

"You're really making a bigger deal out of this than it is," he said, then took a drag. She watched the smoke come out of his mouth as he spoke. "We used to have it good."

She got up, and walked toward him. She was surprised; in her own mind she never thought she'd actually be able to walk closer to him, she always thought she'd be running away. She stood at the top of the stairs.

"Can I have a smoke?"

"Sure," he said, and he reached up to hand her the fire stick. She reached out for the matches.

"I'll light it."

She put the match to the end of the paper and leaves, watched it turn orange. She didn't want this cigarette. She needed to look more calm. Calm. Just be calm.

She remained at the top of the stairs, and he stood only six stairs below her. She sat at the top stair.

"You really think we ever got along?"

"Sure. I mean, I don't know how you got in your head -"

"Do you think I enjoyed finding your car outside my house all the time? Did I enjoy seeing you at the same bars I was at, watching my and my friends, like you were recording their faces into your memory forever? Do you think I liked you coming to bother me when I was working at the store? Do you -"

"I was."

She paused. "You were what?"

"I was logging everyone you were with into my head."

She sat silent.

"At the bars - I remember every face. I remember every one of them. I had to, you see, I had to know who was trying to take you away. I needed to know who they were."

She sat still, she couldn't blink, she stared at him, it was just as she was afraid it would be.

And all these years she begged him to stop, but nothing changed.

She couldn't take it all anymore.

She put out her right hand, not knowing exactly what she'd do if she held his hand. He put his left hand in hers.

"You know," she said, then paused for a drag of the red fire, "This state would consider what you did to me years ago stalking."

She held his hand tighter, holding his fingers together. She could feel her lungs moving her up and down. He didn't even hear her; he was fixated on looking at his hand in hers, until she caught his eyes with her own and then they stared, past the iris, the pupil, until they burned holes into each other's heads with their stare.

"And you know," she said, as she lifted her cigarette, "I do too."

Then she quickly moved the cigarette toward their hands together, and put it out in the top of his hand.

He screamed. Grabbed his hand. Bent over. Pressed harder. Swore. Yelled.

She stood. Her voice suddenly changed.

“Now, I’m going to say this once, and I won’t say it again. I want you off my property. I want you out of my life. I swear to God, if you come within fifty feet of me or anything related to me or anything the belongs to me, I’ll get a court order, I’ll get a gun, I’ll do whatever it takes to keep you away forever.”

“Now go.”

He held his left hand with his right, the fingers on his right hand purple from the pressure he was using on the open sore. He moaned while she spoke. She stood at the top of the stairs looking down on him. He slowly walked away.

She thought for a moment she had truly taken her life back. She looked down. Clenched in the fist in her left hand was the cigarette she just put out.

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It was a stupid point to argue about at 2 a.m., sitting in the lobby of the Las Vegas Hilton listening to the clink and whirr of slot machines and the dropping of tokens onto metal. You believed in God, I did not. Even after two rounds of Sam Adams and three rounds of Bailey’s I knew you wouldn’t change my mind, and I had no desire to change yours.

You told me of a dream you had: in it you and Christian Slater played a game of pool. You won. He looked at his hands and said, “I’ve got a beer in one hand, and a cigarette in the other. I guess this means it’s time for me to seduce someone.” And he walked away. You’re a funny man. You make me laugh. Your brother even noticed that. And you even spoke like Slater, rough, mysterious.

You were the optimist: yes, there is meaning to life. I was doomed to nothingness, meaninglessness. But to me you were the pessimist: you believed you were not capable of creating the power, the passion you had within you. I had control in my life, even if in the end it was all for nothing. You think we are so different. We are not.

It’s now after three and we listen to music: Al Jarreau, Whitney Houston, Billy Ocean, Mariah Carey. Natalie Cole, with her father. “That’s why darling, it’s incredible -” you mouth as you walk toward the washrooms - “that someone so unforgettable -” take a spin, watch me mouth the words with you as you walk away - “think that I am unforgettable too.”

I tell you about the first time I got drunk - I was maybe ten, and asked my sister to make a mixed drink mom had that I liked. She made me a few. So there I was, walking to the neighbor's house in the summertime, wearing my sister's seventies zip-up boots, oversized and unzipped, carrying my seventh drink and sticking my tongue out to see the grenadine. You liked my story. You laughed.

Passion is a hard thing to describe. Passion for life. You must know and understand a spirituality behind it. You do your work, the things in life solely because you must - it is you, and you could not exist any other way. It is who you are. It is a feeling beyond mere enjoyment. You said that the spirituality was a God. I said it was my mind. Once again, we lock horns.

All of my life I have seen people espouse beliefs but not follow them. Tell me you're not like them. Our values are different, but tell me we both have values and will fight to the death for them. I need to know that there are people like that, like me. We are different, but at the core we are the same. We understand all this. I'm grasping straws here as the clock says 3:45 a.m. and the betting odds for football games roll by

on the television screen. You don't gamble. Neither do I. Why must you be so far away? You reminded me that I have a passion in life, that I have to keep fighting. But I get weak and tire of fighting these battles alone. I, the atheist, have no God and have to rely on my will. When I am low, I struggle. You have your God to fall back on, I only have me.

And you looked into my eyes as it approached the morning. You stared. We locked horns once again. I ask you again what you were thinking. And you said, "I see God in your eyes." Later you said it to me again. I asked you what you meant. You said, "I see a God in your eyes. I see a soul." Whether what you saw was your God or just me, my

passion, well, thank you for finding it. "Good-bye, Ms. Kuypers," you said when you left for good that day. I said nothing. Good-bye, Mr. Williams, I thought, then I closed the door, walked to the window, started singing unforgettable. I was alone in my hotel room, and the lights from the Stardust, the Frontier, the Riviera were still flashing. I'm not alone. Good-bye, Mr. Williams.

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to the family of Jocelyn Burn

I found these letters, you see, and I didn't know what else to do with them. I just moved into an apartment on the lower east side, and there was a box of belongings left in a storage space in the back of my pantry. There was mostly old pots and pans in there, so I didn't think anything of it, but then I came across these letters. I assume they are from your sister, because I liked her music (I even saw a show of hers in Phoenix), and the date of the last letter corresponds with the day she passed away.

I didn't know what to do with these letters. They weren't in envelopes, so there was no address, and my landlord refuses to tell me who used to live here. Security purposes, he tells me. They haven't tried to get their belongings back, and I waited a while for them in case they did. I almost wanted to keep them for myself, they just seemed to say so much, I felt like I had almost felt these things. I didn't want to give them up. But I know your family would have wanted to read them. They belong to you.

Let me just tell you to prepare yourself for these letters. They are from the last month of her life. She was going a few shows... I don't know why she felt the way she did. Her band was starting to make it. The radios gave her air play in the last two months. These letters are sad to read.

I don't know who the letters are addressed to. Maybe you do. I wish I did. I suppose it doesn't matter now, though i would like to see the mystery revealed. I'm sure you feel more strongly about this than I do, but I would like to know why.

The fame and love she looked for she received partly because of her death. She is now revered. If only she could feel it.

I hope these letters answer some questions for you, or possibly bring you some peace. They are strong letters. I am sorry for your loss.

Joe Pagliano
New York, New York

•
September 23

i hate everyone and everything. why can't i find someone that cares about me? even a best friend? even someone who claims to want to spend the rest of their life with me? even if i can't stand them? why do i feel so worthless? why do people stab me in the back? i hate you all. i really hate the fact that you hurt me so much.

i really want to not exist for a while. i'm tired of people hurting me. i'm tired of people.

there are some times when i feel so lonely and unwanted that i want to die. i want it all to end. i just hate having to deal with the people in life that make life diffi-

cult.

when i start in this cycle i just know that i fall farther and farther down. who do i blame for this? i want to blame someone, so i can think it isn't my fault. that i don't have a terrible fault that brings all this pain on me.

i really need to get away from here. i need to find someone that cares.

i think i care about myself, but god, i want to know that i am not the only one. i feel so lonely, so betrayed. i have no friends.

everyone is so fucking fake. why can't i count on anyone? why can't i find someone to lean on, just once? Every time i try, every time i start to feel confident about myself, someone has to come along and shatter it all.

i hate feeling like this. i wish i had people i could count on, for once in my life. i hate crying. i hate feeling this way about myself. i hate it.

it's over

October 1

i keep getting screwed over. i'm supposed to do this show. i make plans for it. then i find out though the grapevine that i'm not going. my managers couldn't even tell me. i have to ask and pester and bother in order to find out what i'm doing.

then i'm not going. then four days before the show i find out that i am going, it's back on. how am i supposed to prepare for this?

October 3

i really don't like tom. he doesn't understand that i just want a little attention. he thinks i really like him. i couldn't like that. no, i just want an ego boost if i can't have someone real.

October 4

i just want to feel like i'm alive again. i don't feel that way now, and i don't know how to get that feeling back anymore. i was sitting in the hot tub yesterday evening, and it put me in the best mood ever. i was in a good mood all night, until i realized that i wasn't going to be going out, then i just went to sleep.

I like doing the shows, i guess. i like going to different towns for shows. it was nice for a few hours to be in another city, high up in the air in my hotel room, half dressed, thinking that i owned something. myself, maybe, or maybe just some ideas. for a little while i felt alive. i miss that. i want to feel alive all the time. i want to feel alive.

October 11

i hate feeling lonely. i hate feeling alone. i can't believe a one of the managers wanted to sleep with me last night. a part of me still doesn't want to have to deal with it. i wouldn't want to date him if he was single because not only do i work with him, but i also know what a woman watcher he is. it's not as if i should think it was because i was special, though. i think it was pretty much because i have breasts. what a joke. always me.

i didn't wait for tom to call me back yesterday, and he didn't. i thought at least he

would try to screw me. i didn't even get that effort.
and i'm sure todd won't ever want to call me back. i'm just sure of it.
and i'm sure jeff looks like a horror movie creature.
where is my soul mate?

maybe i have no soul. that's why i can find no one.

i think i should just start fucking everything that moves again. at least then i had
an ounce of physical satisfaction.
god, and i know my life is a self-fulfilling prophecy. the more depressed i get, the
more people don't want to be with me and then the more depressed i get.
why do i have

October 16

all of my true goals are destroyed by other people. i want someone to lean on. i
want someone who doesn't make me feel like shit. i want to achieve my goals. i
want to be successful. i want to be famous. i want to be rich. i want to make every-
one jealous and feel like they are worthless compared to me. i want to feel like i am
above everyone else.

everyone hates me. i am so worthless. i hate everyone. i am so worthless. everyone
hates me. i am so worthless. i hate everyone. i am so worthless. everyone hates me. i
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everyone. i am so worthless. everyone hates me. i am so worthless. i hate everyone. i
am so worthless. everyone hates me. i am so worthless. i hate everyone. i am so
worthless.

people are such liars. i hate them all. why did i let myself get like this? why did i let
people do this to me? i've just destroyed my future musically and it was all because
of someone else. some one i thought i could count on. someone i thought loved me.
some who i thought would always love me.

i was wrong. i was terribly wrong. no one loves me. no one loves me at all. i am not
important. i am not important at all. i am worthless. i mean nothing to no one. i
am worthless. i could just drop off the face of the earth and it would only matter to
the people who had to prepare my remains for the funeral. and to them it would
only be another client in their day.

why do i have to be so alone? why do people have to be so fake? aren't i talented?
aren't i successful? aren't i funny? aren't i important?

if you're so funny... why are you on your own tonight?

i can't do anything. i can't sing. i can't perform. i'm useless. i'm worthless. i'm noth-
ing. i wish i could be something, but i am only nothing, and i will always be noth-
ing.

i wish i could count on someone. i can count on no one. everyone i thought was
important to me, well, i was not important to them. i hate being nothing.
even the people i thought would always love me, well, i should know better, they

don't care about me either. every single person i thought was a part of my life, well,
i was wrong, they aren't. i mean nothing to them. i always thought i did things to
improve myself because i care about myself. i was wrong. i still do things because i
care about how other people think of me.

and i have failed.

i have no one. i have no talent. i have nothing - even in myself - to count on. i
have no one.

i feel so alone and i feel so incompetent. and i feel as if no one cares.

no one does.

October 18

life is so interesting sometimes. it's amazing how one conversation can change my
whole outlook on life. i need to be reminded sometimes of what i am doing, of who
i am, of what is deep down inside me. i have to be tested.

i don't know if i will ever get to sing - and be appreciated for it.

i don't know who i want to spend the rest of my life with. who they will be, when it
will be, anything.

it is almost nice.

here i am, in another country, sitting once again in some lounge with absolutely no
soul, drinking something. i figured i have \$27 canadian, oh, probably \$30 with my
dollar coins, that i won't be able to spend in the states. i could go window shopping,
but that would require motion, besides, david might be trying to get a hold of me,
and i don't know whether or not i should wait for him.

never have enough time. when i do, i do the same things - drink, and think too
much.

amaretto stone sours are particularly good.

and then i will get on the plane and... uh... mark will pick me up (yes, it really did
take me that long to think of his name).

david was laughing at how i throw men around. well, none of them are good
enough for me to keep.

show went okay tonight. i do like the travel. it makes me feel better for some reason
to be alone in another city than in my home town.

October 20

why am i that worthless to you? am i that worthless to you? i guess i am, since you
treat me the way that you do.

i came here hoping to get out of my depression. you only succeeded in sinking me
deeper. i want to die.

you succeeded in your mission. i hope you're happy. now i know that everyone
hates me.

i can't do anything tonight. tonight was supposed to be the beginning of the rest of
my life. i was supposed to start anew. you've destroyed that for me.

you've used me, that's all you've done. you've succeeded in making me feel even
more worthless than i already did. are you happy? were you looking to destroy me?

probably not, you were probably not even thinking about me, giving my a single thought in your head. that's how little i mean to people, and i know it.

don't worry, i guess you're not the only one, but i think you were the straw that broke the camel's back. i wanted to hear it from you because no one else would tell it to me. but you didn't either, and now i know the truth about myself and what people think about me. i guess i should almost thank you, for showing me the light. it is a painful light, but it is the truth nonetheless.

i've always said i wanted the truth out of people, and now i guess i've got it. no one cares for me. i am useless in this world. maybe i'll be more useful in the next. what a fucking joke. if there were a next world.

when i die, i don't want any ceremonies done. i don't want to be filled with any chemicals so my body can be displayed for people who claim to mourn, i don't want to be a part of that modern-day ritual. i want to die, and i want body to decompose that way it normally would so that maybe at least my remains may benefit nature somehow.

i feel like kurt cobain, except i've done nothing that would make me revered. i've done nothing. no one appreciates what i've done in my life. i've overcome so much, and it still isn't enough.

nothing ever works out for me. ever. i'm alone

October 22

my dreams are always just that, dreams. if i ever achieve anything, it is in a half-ass way that proves that i really can't achieve my goals after all. i feel so lonely. lonely even when i am in a crowded room. alone.

i want someone to know me and appreciate me for my talent. i want someone to feel as if they can follow me just because of the work that i do. i want to be accepted and appreciated in that realm. when that doesn't happen, i look for someone that appreciates me in a physical sense. then i find them and i realize that it is only temporary, that no one has any respect for me, that i have still lost. that no one really cares about me. that i am nothing. that i am worthless.

i wanted to think that you would always care for me. i should have known better. i should have known you were just like all of the others, even after all we have been through.

gone through? what the hell have we gone through? you followed me like a puppy dog. you have a small penis. i don't know, i guess other than the harassment i felt from you after we broke up, after the bout with arthritis after dating you again, you haven't brought me much. i want to think that i have happy memories in my life, but i can't think of any. with you or with anyone.

life will go on without me. i just wish a lot of the time that it would end for me sooner than later.

i've always said that i know that i will always lead a long life because i know that with my luck, i'll be forced to live this miserable life for the longest time possible. what i've never said is that that notion really depresses me. there are a lot of times when i just want to die. i just want to disappear and never have to deal with any-

thing - never even have to live - again.

sometimes even breathing seems like a chore.

i wish i could feel alive

writing used to help me, but it doesn't seem to anymore.

i don't even feel like getting drunk now. usually that is my answer for anything. i don't have the answers anymore.

October 23

when someone reads this, i will be gone. i want to die. no one loves me. i am worthless. every time i tried to reach out to someone they always failed me. i'm tired of being there for people when they are never there for me. i'm tired of being strained, i'm tired of being pushed around, i'm tired. don't you understand? i'm tired of crying. i'm tired of hating myself anymore.

i'm never going to make anything of myself. no one will let me. let me die.

i haven't felt like this since my father beat me. now i should be stronger, but i can't fight the whole world.

fuck my dreams. i can't achieve them. fuck the causes. fuck them all. i can't beat everything in this whole world. i give up.

give me some pills.

wait. i have some.

soon it will be over for me. don't let the world remember me. i want to die without a trace, the way i lived. i never found the answers.

why couldn't anyone love me? was i that difficult? why did everyone destroy me? i can't fight you.

why aren't these pills working? i'm so tired.

by the time someone reads this, i will be dead. i will die crying. i will die knowing no one cared.

i wish someone could have loved me, once.

f i § Λ

It's a pretty miraculous thing, I suppose, making the transition from being a fish to being a human being. The first thing I should do is go about explaining how I made the transition, the second thing, attempting to explain why. It has been so long since I made the decision to change and since I have actually assumed the role of a human that it may be hard to explain.

Before my role in human civilization, I was a beta — otherwise known as a Japanese fighting fish. Although we generally have a beautiful purple-blue hue, most people familiar with different species of fish thought of us as more expensive goldfish. I was kept in a round bowl, about eight inches wide at it's longest point (in human terms, that would be living in quarters about 25 feet at the widest point). It may seem large enough to live, but keep in mind that as humans, you not only have the choice of a larger home, but you are also able to leave your living quarters at any point in time. I did not have that luxury. In fact, what I had was a very small glass apartment, not well kept by my owners (and I at that point was unable to care for it myself). I had a view of the outside world, but it was a distorted view. And I thought I could never experience that world first-hand.

Previous to living anywhere else, before I was purchased, I resided in a very small bowl - no longer than three inches at the widest point. Living in what humans would consider an eight foot square, I had difficulty moving. I even had a hard time breathing. Needless to say from then on I felt I needed more space, I needed to be on my own. No matter what, that was what I needed. I lived in the said bowl alone. There was one plastic tree in the center of my quarters — some algae grew on it, but that was all I had for plant life in my space. The bottom of my quarters was filled with small rocks and clear marbles. It was uneventful.

Once they put another beta in my quarters with me — wait, I must correct myself. I thought they put another beta there with me. I must explain, but please do not laugh: I only came to learn at a later point, a point after I was a human, that my owner had actually placed my quarters next to a mirror. I thought another fish was there with me, following my every motion, getting angry when I got angry, never leaving me alone, always taking the same moves as I did. I raced back and forth across my quarters, always staring at the “other” fish, always prepared to fight it. But I never did.

Once I was kept in an aquarium for a short period of time. It was a ten-gallon tank, and I was placed in there with other fish of varying species, mostly smaller. I was the only beta there. There were different colored rocks, and there were more plastic plants. And one of the outside walls was colored a bright shade of blue - I later came to discover that it was paper behind the glass wall. Beyond the other fish, there was no substantial difference in my quarters.

But my interactions with the other fish is what made the time there more

interesting. I wanted to be alone most of the time — that is the way I felt the most comfortable. I felt the other fish didn't look like me, and I often felt that they were specifically out to hamper me from any happiness. You have to understand that we are by nature very predatory — we want our space, we want dominance over others, we want others to fear us. It is survival of the fittest when it comes to our lives. Eat or be eaten.

I stayed to myself most of the time in the aquarium; I occasionally made shows of strength to gain respect from the other fish. It made getting food from the top of the tank easier when no one tempted to fight me for the food. It was lonely, I suppose, but I survived — and I did so with better luck than most of the others there.

Then one day it appeared. First closed off to the rest of us by some sort of plastic for a while, then eventually the plastic walls were taken away and it was there. Another beta was suddenly in my space. My space. This was my home, I had proven myself there. I was the only fish of my kind there, and now there was this other fish I would have to prove myself to. Eat or be eaten. I had to make sure — and make sure right away — that this other fish would never be a problem for me.

But the thing was, I knew that the other fish had no right to be there. I didn't know how they got there, what those plastic walls were, or why they were there. But I had to stop them. This fish was suddenly my worst enemy.

It didn't take long before we fought. It was a difficult battle, all of the other fish got out of the way, and we darted from one end of the aquarium to the other. It wasn't long until I was given the opportunity to strike. I killed the other beta, its blood flowing into my air. Everyone there was breathing the blood of my victory.

Almost immediately I was removed from the aquarium and placed in my other dwelling — the bowl. From then on I knew there had to be a way to get out of those quarters, no matter what I had to do.

I looked around at the owner; I saw them walking around the tank. I knew that they did not breathe water, and this confused me, but I learned that the first thing I had to do was learn to breathe what they did.

It didn't take much time before I was constantly trying to lift my head up out of the bowl for as long as I could. I would manage to stay there usually because I was holding my breath. But then, one time, I went up to the top in the morning, the way I usually did, and without even thinking about it, I just started to breathe. I was able to keep my full head up out of the water for as long as I wanted and listen to what was going on outside my living quarters.

Everything sounded so different. There were so many sharp noises. They hurt me to listen to them. Looking back, I now understand that the water in my tank muffled any outside noises. But beyond that, no one in my living quarters made noise — no one bumped into things, no one screamed or made noises. But at the time, all these noises were extremely loud.

I then knew I had to keep my head above water as much as possible and try

to make sense of the sounds I continually heard. I came to discover what humans refer to as language only through listening to the repeated use of these loud sounds.

When I learned I had to breathe, I did. When I understood that I had to figure out their language, I did. It took so long, but I began to understand what they said. Then I had to learn to speak. I tried to practice under the water, in my dwelling, but it was so hard to hear in my quarters that I never knew if I was doing it correctly. Furthermore, I had become so accustomed to breathing air instead of water that I began to have difficulty breathing in my old home. This filled me with an intense fear. If I continue on with this experiment, I thought, will my own home become uninhabitable to me? Will I die here because I learned too much?

I decided that I had no choice and that I had to ask my owner for help. I had to hope that my ability to produce sounds — and the correct ones, at that — would be enough to let them know that I am in trouble. Furthermore, I had to hope that my owner would actually want to help me. Maybe they wouldn't want me invading their space. Eat or be eaten.

But I had to take the chance. One morning, before I received my daily food, I pulled the upper half of my body from the tank. My owner wasn't coming yet, so I went back down and jumped up again. Still nothing. I kept jumping, until I jumped out of the tank completely. I landed on the table, fell to the floor, coughing. I screamed.

The next thing I remember (and you have to forgive me, because my memory is weak here, and this was seven years ago) is being in a hospital. I didn't know what it was then, of course, and it frightened me. Doctors kept me in place and began to study me. They sent me to schools. And to this day I am still learning.

I have discovered one thing about humans during my life as one. With all the new space I have available to me, with all of the other opportunities I have, I see that people still fight each other for their space. They kill. They steal. They do not breathe in the blood, but it is all around them. And I still find myself doing it as well, fighting others to stay alive.

children CHURCHES & daddies

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