

## Do You Know What You're Getting Into?

A little bit of fun, for example, catching the reading bug, if you haven't been hooked already, can change your life forever and a few minutes could lead to a lifetime of commitment.

Enter: *Second Alibi: The Banality of Life*

The Banality of Enlightenment:

*Second Alibi: The Banality of Life* is the sensational prequel to the groundbreaking *Jonathan Harnisch: An Alibiography*. Harnisch's *The Banality of Life* handles the backstory of Georgie, Ben, and Claudia, further incorporating the invisible studio audience introduced in *Alibiography*. Ben's confessions flourish, written once more in his noteworthy and imaginative style. Harnisch seduces the reader by presenting a genuine, eerie sense of dissociation from the story, and once again conveys the feeling of what it is truly like to be mentally ill. There's an edge to *Second Alibi* that is beautifully countered by the author's personal story of how his writing helps him to rise above his own disorder, while allowing the rest of the world to understand what it is like to be mentally ill and how people with schizophrenia think and see their world.

—Editorial

## **The Outsider Artist**

Hidden beneath his meticulously cluttered desk covered in piles of books sits a frozen, mysterious, mosaic-eyed man in a tattered brown-and-yellow plaid suit. His thick salt and pepper hair is shaggy and mussed, his face unshaven and his demeanor disheveled. His name is Jonathan Harnisch. Already up all night and day, and onto the second batch of serialized Alibiographies, he just can't stop. This writer writes fast, and, as one reviewer on Amazon.com wrote, "It's for the masses."

Following is the stream of consciousness currently communicating inside my head:

The drug I take is called schizophrenia, among other labels, which I desperately want to put away. I want to put the drug of schizophrenia down, and I want to put down the stigma surrounding its label.

—BEN

## Author's Unabashed Introduction

*Second Alibi* is a pastiche of different storylines, genres, and writing styles. Per request, [Per whose request?] (Jump ahead to The Climactic Twist on the last page if it's killing you as it is for me to find out.) I respond to the process of my writing and style by keeping it raw, brazen, honest and real-deal; unabashed, uncut. Perhaps it's the genius of a mentally ill mind. No perhaps about it, truth be told. It most certainly is. It's the genius of a mentally ill mind, which one might or might not be able to feel. I present you with *The Banality of Life*. Love me, hate me, anger me, or shame me, but I hope you will be able to find your own enlightenment and begin looking at your own realities in a different way. Other than that, until my next number, I might as well sell out here with this one, but maybe that's the illness speaking.

Jonathan Harnisch

—The Author

## **Op-Ed: Introduction/Foreword/Preface**

I smile and scoff in favor of good fun, having just written the last line in the following sequel to *Alibiography*. The intro, foreword, preface, what-have-you, I am certain would entail unnecessary editorial hackwork in addition to my own considerable confusion about the difference between the three. But I will blatantly blame my confusion on the disorders, of course. I have several mental disorders. Mental illness and disease make my life that much more interesting than being diagnosis-free. But where's the truth? The truth! Truths! To journey into bitter bits and bites of the fictional back story, dispensing immaculate dissociations and the genesis of genius until the trilogy is due.

## Editor's Preface

To The Author: "This was a great sequel to the prequel. I really liked how you handled the "back story" of Georgie/Ben/Claudia by making it into a screenplay. Not only does it provide the needed background, but it also gives the reader a truly eerie feeling of dissociation from the story, which gives the writing its needed "edge" to convey the feeling of what it is like to be mentally ill. That edge is then beautifully countered by your own personal story of how your writing is helping you to rise above your own disorder and let the rest of the world understand what it is like to be mentally ill: to reveal how people with schizophrenia think and how they see their world. You have done a real service here, and have used the Georgie/Ben/Claudia story perfectly. This is another brilliant read and the perfect sequel to the earlier book. It explains so much about mental illness that needs explaining by someone who *knows*. For this reason, I have been very gentle in the editing. The book was actually in pretty fantastic shape and needed more of a proofreading than brutal editing. I thought it was essential that your own voice be retained, as a) you are an excellent writer in your own right and b) your own writing voice and style give the book such a powerful sense of authenticity that I didn't want to ruin by correcting colloquialisms or conversational sentence fragments just for the sake of grammatical correctness. It is important for the reader to get to "know" you, Ben, and Georgie by letting them speak in their own voices, even if wildly ranting in places, as this is a major part of the disorder and therefore a key strength of the book. Thank you for allowing me to work on this sequel. I found it truly inspiring and uplifting, and it dispelled much of the sadness and horror that I had been left feeling at the end of the prequel. Cheers."

—Anonymous Editor

## Author's Preface

Let's get the facts straight up front, to avoid any confusion later. I am a person first, a human being, just like anyone else. Maybe a little different, that's all. Years ago, I publicly disclosed my diagnoses with comorbid schizoaffective disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, personality disorder NOS (not otherwise specified), and Tourette's syndrome. One might argue that I have been dealt quite a handful of cards and have been put through the wringer. Maybe it's just the luck of the draw, or maybe it's not luck at all. But some time ago, when I felt internally trapped and suffocated and hiding all my inner demons (as I call them) while secretly writing about them, *it* simply grabbed hold of me, and boy did it grab hold.

I had made seven suicide attempts and had over 30 hospitalizations and addiction rehabilitation stints within a decade. Then, one day, I just made a choice. It felt like the sun smacked my face, allowing my mind, my experiences, and my altered sense of reality to burn, twist, deform, and coil. I am referring to a metamorphosis, which had taken place inside me.

I looked into the mirror and everything came alive—my delusions, my dreams were burying everything within reality as I experienced it. Now, I no longer saw impossibility in the mirror. My imagination ignited once again. I kept staring at my reflection. My delusions of grandeur formed a shape on their own in my reflection—in my double reality, if you will (not a multiple personality, which is one of many myths surrounding schizophrenia).

Within the depths of my mind and psyche, my imagination began to dream while awake. In short, the metamorphosis occurring inside caused me to begin my mission, exploiting all that I had kept buried inside for far too long, letting loose all my secret weariness of suffocation of and derailments from the truth, my truth.

I opened up: raw, unabashed, facing perhaps my hugest fear. I went public with my mental health conditions. One morning, I awakened for the day at midnight and was unable to think clearly, concentrate, or remember much of anything. I dove into my art, my work, my life purpose of productivity, but I couldn't concentrate. Growing more and more upset with myself, I felt a very familiar stinging sense of shame and disapproval. My thoughts, my executive function deficit, were askew along with my condition. My morning writing session had gone awry, at least at first.

This happens to be a part of my morning writing session.

My concentration had been thrown off, and an overload of stimuli within the silence of my home office frustrated me. I took a hot shower to ground myself, which often does the trick, and then returned to writing. At this point, the original thesis or subject of my words shifted with my thoughts, and that suited me just fine.

Earlier, I had been overcome, irritated beyond belief —mentally, physically, and perhaps spiritually too—by my role of being an artist, which is commonly known to involve, for example, my latest novel [\*Jonathan Harnisch: An Alibiography\*](#), my masterpiece. However, the point to my sitting at my desk began to metamorphose on its own. That's one thing I love about writing and writing therapy—how it helps me. It keeps things simple, and it helps my thinking become clearer.

Being a mainstream literary author is known to be 50 percent writing and 50 percent marketing, and it was the business aspect, the marketing, that ripped at my soul. At least that was how I felt. I felt defeated. While writing therapy is a tool I take quite seriously, perhaps I was not upset with the onslaught of internal difficulties. My own goal of being the best, being on the best seller list—that doesn't matter any longer, and that's not why I write. I write for therapy, and that is why I keep fighting my mental health condition, my mind, every single day, because I can overcome the demons, the delusion, and the distractions.

Perhaps this morning my cognitive behavioral therapist would have reminded me that my mind plays tricks on me, or that we all suffer in some way from cognitive distortions. He would remind me of how cognitive distortions and living with mental illness can take its toll on interpersonal relationships. After all, I believe we are all in the same boat in many ways. And it comes down to something very clichéd, yet entirely true.

We all have problems, but let's not kid ourselves: it's how we deal with them that makes the difference. I ponder on what the difference is. In my question, I see the answer. I see my self-confident smile once again. Relationships with family and friends have faded and deteriorated in my world, and then just the opposite occurs, sometimes at the drop of a hat. I am grateful for living on a mental roller coaster and not a merry-go-round.

My illnesses make me unusual, as I said, and sometimes I think we all just need to give ourselves a time out to be alone for a bit, simply to figure some things out. Usually, we can see a problem in a new way when we focus our eyes some place new. That's what the past hour has taught me. It's good. Good enough.

Realistically, things may not be as bad as they seem. Sometimes another perspective on distressing matters can help. I see it as my task, perhaps our collective task, to be resilient, even if some days we just have to be there for ourselves when we are feeling alone in the enterprise. We move on. There's no way around it. I ask myself now if I feel okay, and the smile is back. Thank goodness.

One last note: I've often doubted my abilities and my perception of my reality by fearing others and feeling myself withdrawing and going inside, losing hope of coming back to myself with any peace of mind. The future, that's not where I am; I'm right here in the now.

Katherine Hepburn once said, "If you obey all of the rules, you miss all of the fun."

I apply that to writing and writing therapy, as well.

## **Buffering Back to the Beginning for a Sec**

### **The Outsider Artist**

Hidden beneath his meticulously cluttered desk covered in piles of books sits a frozen, mysterious, mosaic-eyed man in a tattered brown and yellow plaid suit. His thick salt and pepper hair is shaggy and mussed, his face unshaven and his demeanor disheveled. His name is Jonathan Harnisch.

### **Second Alibi**

“Beware of artists. They mix with all classes of society and are therefore most dangerous.”  
—Queen Victoria



## **Instrumental: Digging Up the Past**

### **Conversation with Self**

*I woke up and set myself the goal of getting out of bed. I achieved it.*

*I set my next goal of getting washed and dressed, and I achieved this too.*

*Next, I successfully went to my first appointment of the day.*

#### **Am I afraid?**

*I was. At first.*

#### **Why?**

*Because I know I am dying, and I'm not finished.*

#### **With what?**

*I don't know.*

#### **Then why did you let yourself die?**

*I didn't know I had a choice.*

#### **Did it hurt?**

*Not in a way you will understand.*

#### **Well, what did it feel like then?**

*It felt like forgetting. Like my life was slowly pouring out of me as I lay there grasping for it with invisible fingers. I watched it fall out of me as if it had never happened. It was that fast, the undoing of it all. And, just like that, it was gone. I was undone. I saw you at age thirty-eight, my same age, and I understood your own forgetting and how difficult it was to keep a life going when there was no body anymore.*

*I understood my body was going. My arms were numb, my head heavy, my eyelids caked shut. I understood my body was disappearing, and I was afraid for what that meant.*

*I was afraid of who I'd be without my body. And how would my grandchildren know the sound of my voice? And—oh my God—they wouldn't.*

#### **So what did it feel like?**

*It felt like forgetting. Letting go of the body is an effortless thing, unless you fight for it, and that's what I did. I fought. I fought to bring my body back. But I was too tired. I gave up fighting when I understood.*

#### **What did you understand?**

*That you might forget small details, but that you'd carry on my legacy. And that you and your Mommy and your sister would know that I loved you and did the best I could. And that maybe I was finished. How can anyone really know, anyway?*

#### **Did you? Do the best you could?**

*I don't know. Yes. Maybe. No.*

#### **Why is it so hard to do our best?**

*Because we forget.*

[Smoke Break]

### **Statement of Internal Principle Laced with Arsenic**

The screen is black. Having faded to red, it blends directly into blue, and then back to black.

## Intrinsic Introductory Initiation

The fiction I write works for me, although not necessarily for all my readers.

I tend to dig deep into the closets of my psyche and the exaggerated wells within my own imagination, thus exposing myself in an often-disturbing fashion. Yet, I feel I do so with a heart buried underneath the gravel at its innermost core. I seek, inquire, and ever-search for the source—the missing pieces and the unanswerable questions of and reasons behind human nature—deep inside myself, yearning, sometimes suffocating and still ever-inquiring, over and over. For some, the content is just not for them, or they're simply not ready for it, as I see it. But I find pleasure and satisfaction in any book, and I will often say that if it looks good on my bookshelf, it looks good to me. I am happy with it.

*Jonathan Harnisch: An Alibiography: Book One*, otherwise known as *Lover In The Nobody*, is an apt example of how I strip down characters to their naked core, which, to me (and perhaps to Freud) is symbolic of the root of every aspect of the angel-demon-human dichotomy—ADHD—of life, in the way that I see it. How else to strip someone down to the core without writing about them as fully and actually naked, full of desire and even fetish? It surely seems to be the elemental metaphor for the roots of my own feelings, which are often quite extreme themselves. But this is an apology request from my bitter demeanor and what I feel was disrespectful to my readers—all of you.

I could be wrong. No harm may have been done after all. I'm self-critical, sometimes to a fault. At the same time, there might be another late evening when I am profoundly upset, and I can only hope that I will, next time, respect others, even when feeling, falsely or not, disrespected by others. I do my best to not miss my mark completely, but we win some and lose some. Letting my deepest fears attack anyone else's character or persona, mentally ill or mentally healthy, is not my cup of tea, after all.

I change, and I change again, like the good old chameleon effect. I believe, at my core, is someone who is looking to do right and can also become all too frustrated when feeling unloved, taken advantage of, or even disrespected. I do yearn for peace of mind, and that's my goal. It always has been.

Just for now, let praise be to God for stopping the rain, the storm, tonight, for I could resign from my public performance, instead letting it rip through the written word of the third, the third person, Georgie. I leave it up to him, for he is a shim. The lights dim, for baby Ben as a boy's *Second Alibi*. It's worth waiting for, at least in my eyes, as they open slightly in the heart of light and darkness. Thanks for stopping the rain so I can write, for I am Ben. I begin again, and again, and yet again, Georgie's on the other end. So let's play pretend. Perhaps.

Number one rule.

[Harmonious Hashtag] #WritingTip Don't stay in school, skip a thought or two, you'll make it through. No censor. We're all just babies. Time is unreal. Isn't it?

## Allowing the Alter Ego under the Armor Rip

I wake up with the image of Georgie in my head. Let's get the facts straight, to avoid any confusion. Georgie is an alter ego. It's a means of leaving some room in my experience not to be entirely sick of myself. I've even given Georgie his own P.O. Box so he can get mail. Sometimes I send him gifts and then I keep them for myself.

I pretend we're the same person. He takes a look in the mirror. Our face is all mangled up, theoretically, bandaged with thoughts of self-torture over all the torment and perplexity that Claudia has caused. My perplexity is Georgie's.

Georgie starts the morning, while I stay in bed longer. We're pretty sick and tired of the same pathetic routine of morning rituals every day. Georgie decides not to shave or clip his nails this morning. It'll all be okay.

I begin to glance upon what has happened.

I'm in the kitchen preparing breakfast. I dump a cup of unfiltered water in a bowl of oatmeal. I use the microwave well. You can cook anything in the microwave—anything, even lobster. I prefer cold lobster though, with melted butter.

The washer and dryer are in the garage unit. Georgie needs a clean shirt to wear and must step outside for a second to snag one from the dryer. He climbs into a white V-neck.

Georgie's got some cold cans of coffee in the fridge upstairs, in the guest unit. His office is up there. Sipping his java at the desk, he lights a fresh smoke. By the time he's ready to install some bullshit on the computer, he's tired again. Underneath the sounds of Duran Duran blaring through his headphones, he realizes the tin of smokeless tobacco is still downstairs in the main house. He requires the morning dip to suffice for his already-bruised inner dilemmas.

He requires slow death. A slow and legal suicide is in order.

[Smoke Break]

Outside, he can hear his heart thumping like the cylinders of a garbage truck. His perplexity, Claudia, is in a bathrobe outside, walking to her mailbox. She's the snake, the slow-moving serpent with the tongue of fire and the ass of a bombshell. The combustion of the planet is in Georgie's head as it replays in mine. This is the habit that won't go away. This is the bucket of slime, the waste of time that Georgie let manipulate him until the point of no return. He needs to find his way back to the mental state he was in before this all went too far.

Georgie met her on Halloween last year. Last year was 2004. It's the fourth. Why not offer some exposition of November? It's a year later now and the angst is still there, barely, but much less than before. Some things we don't fully get rid of within the time constraints of a certain plan to get over things. It's now the time to move on and—well, actually, Georgie is well on his way to putting the last wasted year to rest.

He remembers fucking her, dancing in the parking lot, watching her rip his heart out while she was high as a kite. She took pleasure in controlling his gut and cock, but now his cock is tired, and he's been meeting some new, promising, adventurous women; women who are more worth the while.

We could start looking at Georgie's life since the twenty-ninth of October, this year. That's just less than a week ago. He had left Los Angeles County and flown up to his buddy's place in Silicon Valley. He was feeling good. He remained up there through Halloween, so as to avoid any coincidental rendezvous with the girl next door.

She was a philosophical end herself, a dandy little disturbance in Georgie's life. He took her too seriously. A non-fictional wonder prize Georgie brought home from the world freak show. He still thinks of her imperfections that he came to love. Now he's got another date lined up for Thanksgiving.

She'll probably stand him up. Why not get over her now, to avoid any prolonged rebounding? This new woman seems like she might be the real thing. But then again, doesn't everyone?

My father said I could write the entire past year as some kind of sitcom. I never thought I'd sell any of my scribbles. Nonetheless:

Georgie and I might get along a little better and make some sense of things as we trudge through our recap with the same nightmare. She made my life miserable. She sparked the creation of Georgie as an idea just meant to quell some of the heartache. How does simplicity become so complex? Why is complexity so attractive? Why bother speaking in generalities when the main point is right before our eyes? Start explaining. Why not offer some exposition? Set up the scene. Tell it like it is and move on. Georgie, sometimes you frustrate the living shite out of me. You belong in a trash compactor. Overreacting? Georgie, fuck you! Goddamn it, here comes a little coprolalia. I begin to swear aloud and echo my manic thoughts out loud. My mood will shift again later. I'm a mess. Besides, I just lit this pathetic little cigarette on the wrong end. Am I drunk now, or what?

Please enjoy a five-minute break. Have a cup of coffee. Loosen up and breathe. Realize all that you're not and come to some kind of conclusion of what you might become. You used to have some kind of life. Read your own lips, okay? (Okay.) Some people have happy relationships. Some have alter egos they can relate to. I'm not sure if I'll ever have either, so I'll make the best of what I've got going on with the G-man: a trendy way of dubbing Georgie. Sounds stupid. Sometimes we circle jerk together. We play cookie. What's cookie? What's cold dookie, retarded? What's the matter with our minds today?

Listen. Let me tell you something.

But the thought just escaped me.

[Smoke Break]

## The Banality of Life

A la fin de l'envoi, je touché.

But not yet.

Who am I? Enter the literary disc jockey.

“What is your status now, Ben? Crack, speed, alcohol, and now what? When are you going to get straight? I cannot trust you anymore. How can you take a good life and screw it up so much? Get your life together before it's too late. This is crisis time. I beg you to rid yourself from your addictions and obsessions forever and resume our relationship. You keep choosing addiction.”

—Pops

(Parents just don't understand.)

(—“Pops,” I say, I write, “I'm sorry. Please forgive me. I love you. Thank you.”)

Glory untold, resonating class. It wasn't addiction necessarily. Please pick up the dictionary.

## **Sleep dep**

Synonymous with sleep deprivation, a crazy roller coaster on which one rides, feeling both half-awake and half-asleep, irritable, socially inept, and hyperactive due to lack of sleep. Sleep dep causes one to crack, fold, and often just topple over with a dreamy sense of reality. Common side effects include becoming sexually aroused and speaking aloud all thoughts, often using word play. Feeling like you have nothing to lose except more sleep. Getting a second wind is common . . . alterations in the perception or experience of the external world and self, where everything seems unreal.

“I am so crazy sleep depped, yo.”

“Man, I’m rocking the sleep dep.”

The screen is black. Georgie stands up and says, “Dr C, can we go for a walk? There are some things I want to tell you, some things I need to go over.”

## Composite Sketching

Maybe it starts with the first impression he likes to make before he really gets to know someone. Georgie's outer personality and image—that is, the part of his outer personality that expresses itself—are analytical. He is a perfectionist with a great talent for organizing things, furniture, and feet. He inherently knows the value of good work and service, charitable work; he buys bums cheeseburgers on weekends.

The trees are beginning to bloom again on the Wakefield campus, where students play on the lawn in short-sleeved shirts, no jackets.

Georgie engages in activity—classes—dining hall—library.

In class, he looks down at his notes, considering what he has scribbled down, while Ben narrates for Georgie, in his own imagination. Georgie is Ben's alter ego; the story begins again, of Claudia and Heidi. Ben fights to let go of Georgie but he cannot. No way in bloody hell. He is stuck, still making valiant attempts to rearrange the past.

Notations in shorthand:

Technology—System and distribution.

Information/Generation gap between young & old.

Young should live up to individual ideals.

Young have been deceived by hypocritical society.

Rebel—Sex and drugs.

Military—Learn to kill and destroy.

Our generation feels a sense of brotherhood—time to think.

Few wealthy. Many poor.

Raw Youth—Dostoevsky

('Introvert,' Jung)

Pastiche of public domain pieces . . .

Effects: decline of American morality, crime, violence, fraud, tax loopholes, deception, inflation, price rigging, generation x/generation y—who are we? Introversion. Transgression.

[Smoke Break]

Loneliness brings Georgie to recall his reminiscence of the world being encompassed within the universe and the whole incredible phenomenon of this and that.

Those from long ago, cavemen, could only imagine what existed beyond the things men knew back in the year 1000 . . . the things closest to them they knew, and what we don't know, we fear, and I fear . . . Georgie too.

Barbaric yells, Tarzan, gargoyles, devils, Japanese samurai warriors with shields and swords, sketches of an evil fairy and a fierce dragon dissolving into the still-living Komodo dragon, the largest living lizard in the world. It is as real as the drawn footage that Georgie animates over his drawn map of the Indonesian island of Komodo. As he said before, it is a strange mentality, but we are still around, and it got us to where we are now, so it all can't be that bad.

The fetus maneuvers in preparation to ejaculate from Rose, but Georgie's umbilical cord wraps around his neck next, nothing else near. What could have been such a start of the sketches? His mother's drug-induced conception day or the entanglement, perhaps all of it, maybe it has to do with me. (You, Ben?)

The umbilical cord . . . wrapped around the neck, in medical talk, the head doc arranges for the pumping of both lungs as standard protocol. Georgie remains calm, unlike me. I worry.

Two more doctors are called in by the PA—Drs Hase and Peterson, department and chair co-heads—but it is a boy and how wonderful; stillborn basically, but he turns out okay, just as he promised on the playground, the bright and beautiful day that Georgie the five-year-old former



freak plays with his real-life action figures in the sandbox Pops built in the backyard, the same collarless shirt and black boots, totally timeless. He sings his own variation of the Michael Finnegan nursery rhyme, in his own way, alone.

There was a little man named Michael Finnegan, first grew fat, then grew thin again, poor little Michael Finnegan, begin again. There was a young man named Michael Finnegan, who lost his friend and Ben came back again, poor old Michael Finnegan, begin again.

Everything cuts to black. His tics. His life. His world.

I open the curtains and begin the show. Ben, always to the rescue. Fucking always me, poetically, poetrusic, and blasphemy, but I better keep my cool this time. Sketchpad flipping pages, my planner, planned out to do it right, to do it better. (Help me Dr C. It's too much Georgie and I can't see. Dr C! Dr C! Please press the pause button.)

Dr C claps twice, and I am removed from the poetic dance of her trance. Hypnotism is not for kids.

"What happened?" I ask her.

"You're okay. I'm here. You are here. Dr Abrams has reassigned me to you. You had left off in a whole other time period and believed you had been healed. You've been here now for well over a quarter century."

Insanity is the mad world where we, the mad, are sane.

"How old am I, Dr C?"

"40, Ben, 37, 38 . . . 40, Ben," she echoes, on repeat in my head.

"Like Claudia," she responds.

I'd like to listen more. "Ben, take a deep breath. Breathe in, breathe out," I hear Dr C's voice vocalize internally.

"But, Dr C," I say, "I just can't, Doc."

"Laugh," Dr C encourages, while laughing. "Give it a shot because I give a shite. Nobody else has. Claudia is real, Ben, even if only in your vivid imagination."

(You mean Georgie's wild head?)

"No, I believe you, Ben. I believe in you. Let go, Ben. Just let go. Just like Georgie told you, over and over, and like you told me: you are fine. You are doing well." She hushes slightly. "You're going to make it out of here, Ben. You are going to walk and be completely free. It's the story. It needs you. Do you feel me?"

I feel her hand on my lap but nothing of any sexual nature occurs in my head, just Dr C's words, "Forget it and move forward. It took a very long time for your mind to create your so-so-called false sense of so-called sense of reality. Throw it all away. Start fresh, start over. You can do it. Let go. Begin again, Ben . . ."

Aye-aye, Doc, eye-to-eye, and the session is over.

Move forward.

Escorted out. Dr C grabs me, and I can't stop the story unfolding in my mind, sequentially; in real time, it's too slow to keep up with. "Go deeper, Ben, deep, way deep, Ben, go way the fuck way deep, Ben."

(I've never heard Dr C speak in swear.)

"Let the spirits swarm. Let loose. Grab hold. Take me for the ride. The real ride, no ropes, way deep inside, Ben—free Ben. Claudia is the impetus. Remember? She told you, Ben, she told you to write the story that the medical staff want, remember? She is real, Ben . . . Ben . . . Ben."

The officials try to pull me away, demanding Dr C stay put.

"Don't listen to them. Ben, I'll be here. I need to hear. I need to hear you."

[Smoke Break]

(Parenthetic Pet Peeve: When someone actually gives a damn, like Margaret, the national crisis line clerk from the grocery store; she cared too much, like she was holier than thou.)

That's different. I let go and let it rip. She, (Who?) Dr C, she believes in me, like Sister Clara, the soothing psychic from the Shoppe. This is my damn psych life, not medical advice, and I'm not taking any either. I'll stick around and dig deep as long as I can, and I will. And I will never stop. Fuck, since I believe in all this stuff, even reincarnation, it's real because I believe it, so all of it, everything, and I just keep writing. Dr C, Claudia, and Kelly, entanglements with all these fragmented folk; they see something in me, and I don't give a good goddamn what others think of it or me or anything. I sit back and pray for them, wishing they could live as much of a fucked-up, fascinating life as mine. I just offer pieces of it in spitting pitter-patter, easy pieces. That's what I do. That's what I am here for. The sensation of sensational sex and blue movies, the characters and chaos, onslaughts of sketches, prototypes . . . of expanding pounding putty and pus, some sex and violence. I'm built for it. A part of the whole and parts of it, whole, "Asshole . . . tears, fears, and phobias," I tell the security guard who removes my smoke.

The fire in my hospital corner blazes. I know it's only in my mind. I self-stigmatize, discriminate, and desecrate. I am who I am. Nobody can stop me. This is it. It's not all there is, but it's as much as I have time for.

I pass out from the distress, and Georgie falls into deep sleep, where my dreams are dreamless. The emptiness of the God source is all that Georgie hears, the silence of my heart, bleeding to get out if only I had the time. Manuscripts in the trash buried in the basement. Stolen. He still has it locked up here and there in his head (I know it), trying to keep up with it as it runs on and on. My hands can't scribble it all, so its fragments appear as they do. I dream now. Georgie's dreams of pickles take him somewhere else. How we love dreams, real or not.

For the last three days, there has not been one ray of sunlight. The sky is grey, flat, and still. The rain falls without a pause; in its absolute silence I whistle and watch the ticking clock. I tic, waiting for tomorrow to tack, and the day after then, when I will remember today?

Georgie becomes truly excited and impressive when he works himself ill. He's not been to bed for three or four weeks in succession—the bitterest fight he's had to wage, upset by his illness, consumed by his anger of having to make an idol of Claudia, an ideal I love and hate. Georgie feels sick and dizzy, in love again, but should recover, having burned all of my books in the maddening belief that he could refrain from writing things of that same, depressing nature. So far, there is no evidence otherwise.

During these moments, now on the train to New England, Georgie's mind becomes lyrical. Every transformation is a new loony tune, an overt overture to another great new piece of writing, ever-and-forever striving to gain some sort of solid shape within its hints of tints and tinsel toe, all but blurred in his brain but brilliant, like a Shakespeare sonnet of sorts.

Now Georgie glances upon what has actually happened, and again—it happened again.

Hiding underneath his meticulously cluttered desk, covered in piles of books, sits the frozen, mysterious mosaic-eyed man in an old, tattered, brown-and-yellow plaid suit. His thick salt-and-pepper hair is shaggy and mussed, his face's unshaven demeanor disheveled. Georgie once asked a woman out for dinner on the condition that she tell him "No," just to understand what rejection felt like. His appeal was so infectious that the government had created special laboratories to introduce vaccines in order to prevent the next worldwide plague, when his mystery will unfold itself for the lucky few. He's got one hell of an epic masterpiece that he wrote in one sitting, still sitting with his thinking cap in contemplation, as if he might have had such severe schizophrenia as to cause him to make up his entire life in his head, but in reality only I, Ben, with my now salt-and-pepper perm, was just living in this mental hospital called Mt. Shasta, where Claudia still seems to work and work out.

So still he still thinks of it, the whole world, at least our world, as encompassed within the universe, this universe that we can only imagine as seemingly having no end—the strange mentality!

[Smoke Break]

Fuck it, just notes. Diatribe diary notes of me, the madman, with no more poetrusic prose and deep structure. I'm disgusted. I pick my nose. Snorting out the snot, so fuck me for being mad; I am sorry. I am sorry once again for attempting some goddamn honesty. I am done and wasted, without any real care or compassion. I'll see if any compassion, not ridicule, comes out as I wrote and as I write. Shite.

Let me lose my mind. Let me lose myself, and my body, spirit, and soul.

I've stopped.

[Smoke Break]

Is genius crazy?

## No Longer Not Yet

"Breathe, Ben, everything is happening exactly as it should be. Ben, Ben, Ben, can you hear me? I can't hear you," says Georgie.

All right, then, I'll plaster the pages with the rules and randomness.

Random rules.

"It's obsession still, Ben," says Georgie, "so remember to make it good."

Fair enough. First allow me to end the obsession, and then go deeper, into the past and shite. I write imaginary letters to Claudia as it is, so I shall not send this that I wrote, now written below. I should otherwise have written it as I see it in my head already but to myself, the relection of Claudia Nesbitt, needing her in lighter shades of light and glitter, sun and snowfall. She is nobody, I am a lover in nobody and of nobody, and within nobody and within the nonsense, and Georgie, she will remember you the most when it comes to the end, for you shall become another lost, literary death. We've all already known that, all along, since the first page of day one. But you're innocent. I deliver this discourse to put the necessary end to the obsession and change it up some, at some point, to innocence and honor.

"Are you sure about that?" asks Georgie.

"Watch," Ben replies.

The screen is black, sizzling into silver, a cross dissolve. The singsong blue-silver movie, opening with a long shot of my heart bleeding out and onto the paper, then fingertips to screen, onto the electronic age, timeless, tying it all together then tearing it apart.

*Dear Claudia (Twinkle Toes),*

*You don't deserve this letter. It's obviously typed. I could get to the point quicker this way. I am attempting to explain something painful and delicate.*

*I told you that I loved you before. I won't deny it. I need you to understand why that is not exactly true. I meant it when I said it, but having spent this much time without a word from you (whether or not it would have been convenient or easy) I know now that what I felt was excitement, not love.*

*There's a world of difference between exhilarating infatuation, which engulfed me every time I would see you, and real love, which takes time to build, which survives separations and burrows deeply into the heart.*

*When we are apart, my feelings for you return more and more to mere fondness. The passion never truly lasted longer than our meeting, and I think that is the key to the way things are between us. This is not a romance, nor was it when the sensations were pleasant.*

*I approved of you entirely. But were we moved wrongly by some story we told ourselves?*

*I was crazy about you. But the love I had for you, however it showed or not, has cooled.*

*I'm sorry about the new responsibilities in your life. You have your reasons, and I understand and acknowledge them more deeply than you might realize. Besides, you've always had a lot going on, and trying to start another relationship (and with me)! What an imbalance!*

*I am still appreciative of your warm and gentle compliments.*

*I have lost this. Rather, I have given this back.*

*Loving what was not, might not be, nor is.*

*Not to be mine, yet always mine.*

—Ben

## First Encounter with Death

I walked the hospital corridor at a nervous pace, in a sad and dismal search for my Uncle Erick's room. I felt a constant twitch in my left eye and a ringing in my ear that I couldn't seem to control. I was terrified not knowing, not knowing what to expect or what I would find. I couldn't think straight. Fear overran my mind with tears, and sweat dripped down my forehead and face. I was in constant and conscious reflection about every step. I took time in my search. I was saying to myself, "Is this where he is? Am I there yet? Is that my uncle over there? Am I walking too fast? I don't know." I didn't know if he was still alive, I just didn't know.

Finally, my eyes met with his, bulging out and magnified behind his thick eyeglasses. He was eating dinner, a chicken and vegetable platter. He didn't seem to be enjoying it. I offered him help in cutting the meat since his arthritis hindered most of his ability to do it himself. The man's fingernails were long and dirty. His disease also caused tons of weight loss. My best friend, another temporary best friend, my best friend not for much longer, my best friend, Uncle Erick.

The few strands of hair left on his head were messy, and his ears were larger and more pronounced than in the old, semi-normal days of his life and mine. Now, he's just a filthy old clown. His dry lips pushed out, his tongue dangled between them. The old man had lost all feeling in his legs, which had cracked in several places because his bones were so brittle. My first encounter with death was purely disgusting.

He suddenly shouted, "Milk! I'm done! I want more milk! I dropped my fork. Get it!" I gave him another fork and brought him more milk from a nurse. He was so rude and stubborn. How could God turn my best friend, my uncle, into such a dirty old derelict? I knew I would never see him again. Who would want to?

With my uncle lying on his deathbed like a clown, eating chicken with his mouth open and eyes bulging, I wondered if I should be laughing or crying. Then tears rolled down my cheeks, and in a moment of clarity and with a slight sense of self-awareness, Uncle Erick reminded me in whisper, "I'm not going to make it much longer, Ben." He drifted off to sleep as I departed, and departed from my own sense of life and reality once again. My experience with these final hours of my uncle's life taught me that sometimes people are better off dead. Who would want to live any longer in such a ridiculous state?

[Smoke Break]

## Showtime

And yes indeed, the screen is black again. Having faded to red, it did blend directly into blue, but then back to black. The living, colorful sound of the mysterious telephone still haunts us, even me. It rings and rings, again and again. Blue movie or not, some sort of situation on the screen fades in. We notice and take note, longing for better bliss. We long more for Georgie to become better, to live, to be well. Hoping for him to realize that I need him. I always need him, for better or worse. Either way, I hope he is okay. However, the interior setting where I'm situated is on loop. This nearly palpable, possible, and probable nasty crack den, the house where Georgie's final funeral took place.

Georgie remembered such remarkable, daydreamed delusions of all the people and all the women in his life, in all of his lives and most of mine. Everything lives on, like the city bus on which Georgie still travels now and then, where all the love and grief eternally entwine. The bus never stops, nor does Georgie's life, which I do not create, though neither Georgie's life nor mine are ever the same. Everything in our immaculate world, our world and this world, encompassed within this universe, within all its composite sketches of the entire parallel world here that only Georgie knows. Georgie knows because I have created him. I am his God. He is mine, and nothing is perfect, so all is perfect. Imperfections are perfect just as they are—here in this, our place in the dead of night, wishing for a better tomorrow, alive. A life. Alone, he inhabits the nasty crack den where dim light flickers. Light illuminates the cramped living room piled high with filthy clothes and disturbing smells of stink and Claudia's perfume gone bad. Abandoned pizza boxes, crushed beer cans, half-eaten chocolate bars, and the like. He gets the picture now, bearing witness for all the cameras to capture, and yet he remains unsure. (Dr C, can you tell me why this nightmare continues? We left off in such a good-enough place, at least somewhere concrete within the life inside the concrete walls where he wanders. He wonders if I am alive. Can you tell me?) Silence now, not sure if Dr C is even there, for she had seen Georgie and I leave with our pom-pom hats in the taxi, dashing from her office. "Best guess," she says, so often that it is my story. Hoping things will be all right again, and in the end Georgie tells me over and over. (Is this the end, Doc?)

I am a crack addict. I am still. I am still 30, since day one, when I lost myself to struggle through the disaster, this huge mess—another stockpile of the past. I should let go, so I let go and things take place and form shapes on their own. (Dammit.) Georgie says that I'm in the middle of a self-aware, self-induced psychosis. Still in search of the ringing phone so I can pick it up for once. Georgie needs to say something, anything. "Hello? Hello? Hello? Is there anyone out there?" He crawls on the bland carpet. The mental institutions never have carpet, a good sign that we might not be locked up. But fuck the phone.

Through my eyes, Georgie sees the troop of wax figures and mimes, whom I have seen before. This time, one is a nurse. Another is a teacher. (Ben, a teacher from Wakefield?) She oozes out of more ashes, and we notice a construction worker, whom we hope will fix it all. They surround us; Georgie and I are frightened. I notice them too. Georgie sees them, here with them, with people, real people, and real hallucinations. Georgie can't stand self-awareness, even though I seem so sick and twisted. I am Ben.

They watch me. They watch Georgie. I move. He moves. They copy our movements. Georgie rummages through the pile of clothes, and the waxies mimic me again. I stumble upon an old umbrella. The phone stops ringing. (Thank God.) I pick up the umbrella and examine it intently while the wax figures copy me, copy Georgie, synthesizing. They pick up their own umbrellas and examine them. Duplicates. Damn. Photocopy machines mass-duplicating poor Georgie, and I cannot mass-delete my massive mind. The more massive it gets, the messier it makes me.

Thunder booms. Lightning crackles. The room glows. Rain begins falling here inside, deep inside this house. Georgie opens my umbrella and instantly he is covered in white powder, the crack, the coke, and the cola. Pop. The wax figures snap their umbrellas open wide, but none of the waxies are covered in powder, just wax. The rain spits onto the sheath held over my head; the waxen figures stare at Georgie, at my own paranoia, and then they look amongst themselves. We are as confused as they are. I wet a finger and touch the powder, bringing it up to Georgie's mouth, and I smile. Same thing with the waxies, and their dry, non-powdered, waxy skin touches their dry, cold mouths. Not only are they confused; rather, they seem rather disappointed. Georgie realizes the waxies are real, so I must deal with them and all else now, offering my powdered hands as if to share, as if I cared to share. But they back away, and the rain stops. The phone. It rings again.

I'm no longer covered in the white powder that Georgie puffed. Pulling himself up, he resumes his search for the frustrating phone, crawling over the piles of dirty clothes and across the discarded boxes of pizza. The waxies follow me. They follow Georgie. (Come on, Georgie. I am rooting for you, dear friend.) The phone rings. It is still ringing, and I've got to do something about it. So far, there is no communication, and I am beginning to miss, moreover need, Georgie. I can't help but leave the fucking phone. Georgie picks up one of the crushed and crumpled pizza boxes. I shake it. Something slides around inside. But the copycat waxies do not find a thing. Georgie opens mine, and revealed to him is a crumpled, crushed pack of cigarettes. At last. Pulling one from the pack, I insert the ciggie in my mouth, and Georgie inhales deeply. Indeed, very deeply, as I do.

The phone rings again. My past is calling Georgie's past. My memories and more of Georgie's traumatic and triumphant memories, no wonder, I wonder if Wakefield is where Georgie wakes up. I hear Dr C telling me to talk about Georgie, and my eyes open.

An imaginary substance surrounds us. It fills all space beyond the sphere of the moon. It makes all the stars and planets ethereal.

Georgie stares out the window of his cross-country railroad train, observing the green grass and blue mountains, where music heightens the spirit of loneliness, of Georgie's time alone with obscure and scattered thoughts. He bobs his head rhythmically with the music, holding a pad of paper and a Mont Blanc pen, but he is not writing anything down, so I do. He wears a collared shirt and tie, and a wedding ring is wrapped around his finger.

I think I'll call him Georgie—Georgie Bartholomew Gust. Rose, his mother, made him, named him, laid him, and created him, not me.

We fade in, journeying through the immaculate uterus. The beating of Georgie's mother's heart becomes louder and louder, thumping to the music. Then the bass line kicks in, and we move up through the lighted pathway towards the womb. There is the little foot of Georgie's fetus, which will run the root of the metaphor, my obsession in life.

Overlapping Rose's heartbeat is the pitter-patter heartbeat of Georgie the fetus. More of him is revealed; there is movement, flashing with pieces of my face, faster and faster, the puzzle connecting. One might otherwise wonder who this is.

Georgie wears his timeless, collarless white button-down shirt, bubbling, burping, churning, and gaseous sounds from inside, inside Rose. The occasional distant sounds of Rose, her murmur and the hospital ongoing, out there somewhere in the hospital, not a psychiatric one but a birthplace. The PA calls, and announcements alert staff. Waxies come to life as the staff of real people arrives employed to give birth to this guy called Georgie. He is. I am years ahead, his superior.

[Smoke Break]





## Prewriting/Free-writing

“I address the youth of the world in the name of liberty, in order to thwart the rise of repression and fascism, we must stand up to fight for what we believe in. We believe in freedom—freedom of thought, freedom of action, and freedom of speech. If you believe in this, and you are prepared to help the fight, then next time it comes around, you must make it your election day.”

—Simon Le Bon

Just a minute.

Just a minute ago, my wife asked the hostess, indicating as she pointed to the back of the restaurant, “Could you seat us right over here?” The waitress lets Kelly continue, “That OK?” She was referring to herself and me, her husband.

(Parenthetical Pet Peeve: When the hostess fails to acknowledge my presence.)

“Sure thing,” the hostess bubbled back, with a slight air of forced formality. (No bubble gum chewing in this place; this isn’t KFC.) After all, this particular restaurant is one of the few eateries around here—here in the whole state of New Mexico—that was created for the rich and the pretentious, the famous, and the infamous.

Back to the minute for now, our anonymous no-name-tag-wearing and no-introduction hostess. (Perhaps her introduction should have been required by her, yet not important, not in the least bit, for it leaves me room to guess, to make up her entire life’s story in my head, and thus to fantasize about later on in my life, when I end up missing her and the life, our life, how we would have otherwise spent it together, in fantasy, up through our imaginary marriage to our ultimate divorce, the same for most of the sketches of mystery lives with other random, brief encounters such as this one, with our hostess) As she was, she is, she is as she was, a hopeful minute or moment ago. I know now that in the far future, she is still on my mind and in my life, though it is no obsession worth writing about at length. Still, she could’ve just said “sure” and that’s it, but “sure thing?” That’s a generational thing, possibly a specifically cultural thing, but looking back on it, I’ve got this feeling that she heard others, maybe her father, maybe her mother, from whom she borrowed this kind of talk. She must have learned this use of that kind of shite-talk, that talk that exhibits a kind of performance. That’s how I see it.

What I’m saying is that whenever an extra word is added on the main point—the main word:

(Sure + thing = Sure thing)

(Bye + bye = Bye-bye)

(Parenthetical Pet Peeve: Whenever I overhear somebody on their cell phone closing the call with “m’bye” it gives me the willies, like fingernails down a chalkboard.)

(OK + then = OK then)

During the time that this hostess chick’s parents were running things, the whole relatively healthy economy among other things, back then they had more time to kill, before the computer age. The only thing that we (now) add onto words or stick between them is the word “fucking.”

(I + fucking + love you = I fuckin’ love you.)

(I’m so + fucking + in love with you = I’m so fuckin’ in love with you.)

Ms Hostess, the hostess of all hosts in this All-American bison & duck joint, this foie gras Shangri-La.

“In the back, it’s just a little more private,” continued my wife.

We sat, our feet on the floor. Grounded, if you will.

Besides that, my life, um, my wife, she left me, abandoned me. That's why I say it was a minute ago that she said anything, or even existed nonetheless. I remember it, I remember her as it happened, as she happened to be, not as it's happening, you see.

She left me with a huge financial mess; lucky that I have enough money to pay off the Willis Tower of debts she incurred. Willis Tower, she's from Chicago. I've never been there, heard it is freezing. Heard my wife was cold, was frigid, and was my wife.

Lucky that I am rich, even though I hate the rich; I despise them. I despise myself for being a part of them, the rich, as if part of me is Jewish, the other part Nazi, but I'm just mentally crippled. The Nazis would have had a field day with my ass, the mental cripple! Cookie-Jew-the-Nazi, I love cookies. Love white chocolate chips. You can get them at Subway, but can't lose weight at the 'Way like that Jared kid, the Subway spokesperson, did. I mean, if you eat their cookies, if you don't follow the fine print. Super-size me and see what happens.

So, now (we're in the present moment now), now I can start taking control of my life. And if I fuck it up, then I can (now that my wife is not here to control me) take responsibility for my actions. I am that which I think I am. Sort of a New Age term: I am that which I am.

We sat (or we sit—in time) close to the wall, in the corner. I take the booth (supposed to leave the booth for the woman, but . . .) and my wife sits on the chair.

But then I think better of it and switch seats with her.

So, "Sure," says the bubbly hostess who happens to be so good with her people skills. She is, because she makes me want to see her naked, and cuddle up with her, and tell her all of my fears and worries. We would lie, hell, we would live together on a plush red couch. I might even cry in her arms, but, "that's not a problem," she says. And poor me, poor her, we might never see one another again. She'll forget about me within the hour.

So, my wife and I are seated close to the wall in the corner. I do this intentionally, sitting as far as I can from reach of the waiter, so that the asshole waiter will have to extend his reach, and perhaps I can conjure up an internal laugh if he spills something or bends so far over that he slips and falls. I really just want him to have to say, "Excuse me, pardon my reach," and maybe "I'm sorry."

(Parenthetical Pet Peeve: When the menu doesn't list the prices in overpriced restaurants.)

I want him to call me either Sir or Mr Schreiber, as Mr Schreiber is who I am, even at this point in my life. (Georgie is still Georgie, of course, and Heidi, Claudia, Kelly, even Margaret, bloody Margaret, indeed.) I'm sick of service workers, especially when they are customer service workers; and most of all these kids, the guys who have their little 20-something quirks as they near the time when they're locking themselves into who they are, doing the whole college thing, maybe a little drugs and drink, maybe checking out the gay scene, even if they aren't gay, but they have friends who are gay, and they may not have gotten the chance to check out what it is like to be gay.

(Parenthetical Pet Peeve: My former college suitemates. They made me feel extremely on edge, and I am not sure why.)

Maybe they went to public school and the community college, which, by the way, I have no problem with. I just have a problem with my peers. The people working these days are still those 20-something swingers that I just can't stand.

I cannot stand the guys around here, whether rich or poor, although most are poor. Guys who watch football. They go to Hooters and they're all manly. When they're hanging out with other guys, they're hanging out by their motorcycles and talking trash about women, girlfriends, even their wives, and often getting all racist, as they just hang out. They wait for some high-end blonde to walk past them, so that the guys can talk about wanting to have flocked her or fucked her, and how the pussy, her pussy was cut with an ax—thus, its unnatural appearance. That's

just shite to me, and I hate my peers. I've never gotten along with them, in high school, whenever, wherever these kids are, my peers, and now I'm in my thirties. In school, they'd known of my huge creative and financial potential, as I was a big fan of Donald Trump, Mike Milken, and other billionaires. Creatively, even at that age, I'd been pretty good at—well, not at telling stories in a story form, but rather the way I could talk shite, and talk explicitly, so as to get a good shock out of someone, even anyone. The kids, my peers, often they'd remind me near the end of the school year, "Hey, don't forget about me," and say, "Put me in one of your movies or books," and so forth.