

## Part I: Dr C, Meet Benjamin J Schreiber

### *Unfinished Intro—Buffered Off a Thought*

“Ben, what are your goals in therapy?” Dr C asks.

I should have known she would ask me that. I should have guessed. It’s always the first question. It’s the first session, but I really can’t answer her yet. (Why not? She would probably ask the next thing, and I would have to say, “Because, because”.)

Because I’ve got a big fat gut full of hatred (Yeah, I know, I know), and all those New Age self-help audio books I’ve downloaded to help me cope really aren’t doing shite. I guess I thought (or Dr C thought, maybe. Somebody thought.) I might be able to grab onto one of those brand-new self-help ideas and believe that we are all secretly psychically interconnected; we have an innate power of intention that creates our reality, or some such shite, and that just thinking those noble bullshite New Age thoughts would help me, heal me, make me a better, or at least give me a decent reality to start with. Better than this whole sick psych-ward bullshite I’m stuck with. This whole schizoaffective, neurotic, borderline psychotic whatever. (You call that reality?)

But the more I complain (I’m a hypocrite, I know . . . I hate complainers), and the more I bitch and moan, the more the “Divine Field” (or whatever it’s called) just bounces that sick shite right back at me. Besides that, it adds anxiety, fear, and cramps—every symptom in the book. As if I didn’t have enough shite to deal with, already. (But why me, Dr C? That’s what I want to know.)

Dear Diary:

Today, I value myself for separating ability from inability with my unspeakable daily hallucinations, voices, paranoia, and trauma that schizophrenia presents. See? My heart does fucking speak.

### *Sling-backs—Out of My Deepest of Pockets*

The first time I met Dr C, I just knew I was going to like her. She was wearing a pair of sling-back, open-toed, fuck-me sandals, even though she knew (she had to have known, she just had to) that I'm a foot fetishist. (Big Secret #1. So what else is news?) Plus, she had on a clingy, low-cut shirt that showed off the top of her breasts, and she kept leaning forward provocatively as she told me she was going to help me learn to love myself.

Yeah, "love myself." That's what she said. She was going to make me love myself. So, I said I didn't think it was possible to love myself (You going love me, too, Dr C? That's what I want to know). But I said if she wanted me to, what the hell, I'd give it a try. So she said yeah, she wanted. (Wanted what?) Do you think I believed her? What else could she say—that she didn't even want me to try? No psychiatrist is ever going to say that. And believe me, I know those psychos. Psychiatrists, I mean. I've been seeing them, off and on (okay, mostly on) ever since I was 12 years old. That was the year my mother decided I had ADD (The Number One Psychiatric Disorder of Choice for That Fucking Year) and she marched me off to see Dr Nora Epstein, who promptly told mother that ADD was just a fantasy disorder, and nobody really had it, not even me.

As it turned out, what I really had (so they say) was Tourette's (Big Secret #2), which was a real thrill for mother. I was the one and only kid in the county, or maybe just in the town of wherever, or at least in my middle school, anyway, to have actually been diagnosed with Tourette's, right up front. And so mother paraded me in front of her friends (and my friends, too) like some big freak show. "Show them, Benjy, baby. Show them how you twitch," she would say. Yeah, that's my mother. (You've got to love her, don't you? Because she's your mother?)

So. Dr C said she would help me love myself, and I told her I would try—to love myself, I mean. The emphasis here is on the word "try," because there are at least two real problems with Dr

C teaching me to love myself. The first problem is: I can't remember ever even liking myself, even before the Tourette's. And second: I think Dr C really doesn't like me, no matter what she says. She secretly fears and dislikes me. (So what else is new?) I can tell, say, from the curl of her lip when I walk in to her office.

I might be crazy, like they say, but still, I've got an IQ over 140, and I know delusion when I see it. And I'll tell you, Dr C was just deluding herself thinking she'd ever be able to help me love, or even like, myself. Still, I'm likeable enough. Really, I'm a really nice guy, so I don't confront her. I just say, "Sure, Dr C, why not?"

And then I walk out. I go back downstairs to my limo and driver, and tell him I want to go home right away. Then, I sit there in front of the computer, iTunes playing Chubb Rock and Coldplay on a continuous loop.

I try to write.

(But what?)

Not surprisingly, I can't. I can't write.

Dear Diary:

I seem to win or lose the greatest battles in my crazy fucked-up life all within the own little lunchbox of my mind.

## *Retirement?*

My guess is writer's block is the worst place for a writer to be. Ever. For most writers—most other writers anyway. I don't know for sure. I don't know any other writers, and I don't read them and I don't read about them. I don't need to read to be a writer. That's just the way I am. I'm a rebellious, outlaw writer: Fuck the Norm, I say. But I've got writer's block. I've had it really bad for the last year and a half. In fact, I haven't written a damn thing in that whole time. (Yeah, that's writer's block.)

Sometimes, though, when I'm in love, I'll stop writing. I know it won't last forever, and I might as well love it while it lasts. But that's not writer's block—it's lover's lock. (So am I in love? Am I? You know what I say.)

"Yeah, right. I'm in love," I say. "With myself, maybe." And I scoff. "Me? In love? Yeah, baby."

(Parenthetical Pet Peeve) Writer's block.

I think of writer's block as a pleasant break from my whole bullshite psycho routine. Only this time it's almost a full-on retirement, or something. So anyway, I'm lying there, spread out lazily on my lopsided bed, and Heidi (Big Secret #3), Heidi whispers that it's just my discontent, my malaise, my perplexity. And I listen, even if I can't quite make out what she's saying, so I know Heidi's there. And I know Georgie's out there, somewhere, too. Where the hell is he, though? Where's Georgie, baby?

I glance down at my Billy-Baloney nightlight. It's turned on, my kooky little nightlight, and it flickers when my eyes meet the little plug-in plastic lamp, like it knows something I don't. I've saved that little kiddie nightlight all these years. I don't know why; maybe because I don't like total darkness, and I don't like white light, either. I mean, I like colors—blue, red, pink—I think. But I can't think straight if the light is too bright. The see-through shades in my room are drawn; the small wooden door won't stop creaking.

And Georgie, what about Georgie? Where's Georgie?

Georgie, Georgie Gust, my alter ego. Where are you, Georgie-boy?

"The Great Perfectionist" meets "The Great Imperfection."  
Mr Casanova and Mr Me.

I'm calling you, Georgie-boy. I need you, Georgie. Georgie Gust.

Come to me, baby.

Dear Diary:

I just learned that in Chinese, the word 'crisis' contains two characters. One represents danger and the other represents opportunity. I suppose crisis is the same thing as opportunity.

*Georgie Writes Back*

God, I think. I've been sending out my work for so damn long, I just can't stand it anymore. And what do I get? Rejection, rejection, and nothing but (and I can't take rejection, either)—still, I'm okay with that. I don't even know what I'm doing here, anyway. But maybe Georgie knows.

Georgie tells me to just hang in there.

Just go to sleep, now, Ben, Georgie says soothingly. In the long run, Ben, he says, you'll be fine.

That's easy for him to say. He's just a figment of my imagination, a literary device, or a delusion (who knows? I know I don't). Dr C won't even tell me who Georgie really is. And so I'm stuck here with this in-between shite, in-between diseases, in-between personalities, on the scary borders of some multiple personality disorder, or who knows? (But whatever it is, I know, I got it.)

Dear Diary:

I took some time off, not much though, and I came to realize that so many people will just forget what I said and all that I've fucking done, but they will never forget how I made them feel. That hits me hard, come to think of it. Anyway back to this book I'm cooking.

*Dr C Meets Ben (A Written Account from Dr C)*

I've got to say, I've never had a client like Ben Schreiber. Or should I say Benjamin J Schreiber, as he prefers to be called (he's still just Ben to me.)

The first time I met him, he was late; dressed in Armani jeans, a USC sweatshirt, Hugo Boss loafers (no socks), and an oversized blue stovepipe hat with an orange pom-pom on top. What a kooky get-up! (I can't help it. That's what I thought. What would you think if it were you?)

Okay, okay. So I reacted negatively. I admit it. Clients who show up late for their first appointment give me a bad first impression (and first impressions count!) So I prepare myself for the worst. I figure they won't be cooperative in treatment, they won't take their meds, and they won't discuss their issues. They just won't.

And besides all that, I like punctuality. Rich clients who show up late, who have limo drivers and trust funds, and see me only because they have fathers who pay to keep them out of jail, those creeps set my teeth on edge. I admit it; I'm honest. Like it or not, first impressions matter, even in therapy. Especially in therapy. And when Ben didn't even shoot for a favorable first impression, well, he just set me up to not like him. (Of course, a psychiatrist doesn't necessarily need to like her clients but it doesn't hurt. It might just even help, you know? Just maybe.)

First impressions count, and Ben made a bad impression. Being late was bad enough. But the way he entered—hopping into my office on one foot and then the other, like he was some kind of overgrown, kooky child without a care in the world—drove me crazy. (I admit it.) It's not often that a client drives his psychiatrist crazy. But Ben did that first day. Later, after I'd read his file, I felt ashamed, and maybe a little bit negligent, because Ben has Tourette's, you know. The hopping is involuntary, like the sniffing and brow-raising, and all the other twitches and tics—and dances.

And I'm also ashamed to admit that I didn't pick up on the symptoms. Ben was referred to me by the police department,

and the police department hadn't sent over all the paperwork. So, that's my excuse—but still, I should be able to make an unbiased diagnosis without papers or, at the least, I should have refused to see him until the papers came through. Seeing the files might have made a difference. It still might not have been love at first sight, but at least I might have liked him better. So I confess, I admit—I let my bias against the rich and privileged get the better of me, and it showed. And I guess Ben picked up on it, too. (Yes, of course he did, I know he did.)

So Ben just sat on the couch with his legs crossed, the stovepipe hat in his lap, and smiled. He told me about how he tried to hold up the Pasadena City Bank with a cell phone. (Which is why he's in therapy. This time, anyway. It was either therapy or prison.) And then he stopped. He uncrossed his legs and then leaned forward, putting his elbows on his knees, and stared right into my face. He seemed earnest and engaged, maybe even slightly shy, and then he said: "You don't like me much, do you?"

My first instinct was to lie, to say something like: "Of course I like you, Ben." Instead, I tried to respond professionally. I smiled and said, "It's not my job either to like or dislike you, Ben. My job is to help you." And he nodded like he understood, although I couldn't tell, really, what was going on in his mind.

"It would probably be easier," he said, "if you liked me. Don't you think?"

I blushed, revealing my embarrassment. It was like Ben could read my thoughts, and I can't say that I liked it, being read like a book by some kook.

"It's okay if you don't—like me, I mean. If I were you, I wouldn't like me. Hell, sometimes I don't even like me."

By then, I had managed to get my distance and my professionalism back. I leaned forward and smiled (reassuringly, I think). And I said, "That's exactly what I am going to do, Ben. I'm going to help you love yourself." And he smiled this sad, slow smile.

Finally he looped his hands behind his neck and said, "Loving



myself isn't something I know how to do. But if you want, I'll try."

So, of course, I said I wanted; he said okay.  
Then he walked out.

Dear Diary:

I visited the cemetery down the street about an hour ago with some paper and a pen. I just sat there. Then I did it, I wrote down everything I don't like about myself. I ripped it up. And when I returned I burnt it. Felt fucking good, watching the burn and the blaze turn to ash. Ah.

### *Cutting Class*

At our second session, Dr C asks me to tell her what I remember about my old school days. (What's she really after? Whatever it is, I don't want to tell her. I got this creepy feeling that Dr C's really after me.) Instead, I tell her about Georgie. (Georgie will tell her about me.)

I cut through all the crap that's happened between now and then, and I go back to my past, in search of my past, where I find Georgie hiding out. My dreams take me back to Georgie's past, too. They take me back to school. Unlike Georgie, I went to public school, even though I'm rich. Georgie went to private school. Georgie made some incredible friends there. One of them died. (And who's that, now, huh? Don't you remember, Benjy? Don't you want to remember?) One of them is dead—unlike me.

"Who's that, Ben?" Dr C wants to know. "Who's dead? Who died?" She waits, a pregnant pause. "Was it someone special? Someone very important to you?"

I ignore her, like I ignore all her bullshite questions. I just lie there on the couch, thinking about Georgie; drifting, dreaming, and free-associating about Georgie, and about her—Georgie's girl. Claudia.

Where is it? Where am I? Who am I now? Sheltered in the Quad's ivy and brick walls is a small fishpond. Its surface reflects the moonshine like clear glass, dispersing its light through the whole white-light spectrum. Georgie Gust sits on his favorite wooden bench. He's still in boarding school, posh and preppy. I'll always remember him that way; he sits there with his back straight, with good, erect posture, so he can digest everything he takes in. But I'm more of the sloucher type, the slacker type. An idler. I'm rich and spoiled—and I'm lazy.

Perplexity is my perpetually confused condition—my perpetually entangled situation. This is the kid I remember, the Georgie who's 18 and introverted, nervous. His intense slouch. His high IQ. No one can see him, but I know he's got a black eye and he's been in a couple of fights. Fighting for me—fighting for

my protection. I really don't deserve him—he's a luxury item.

*(Parenthetical Pet Peeve)* People who think that introversion is a "bad attitude."

Georgie wears large round horn-rimmed glasses (when they're not broken) and a designer tie, lavender or yellow, or maybe orange and raspberry-blue, loosely fitting around his neck (like a noose.)

We're nonchalant, casually indifferent, Georgie and me. We're of little importance to anyone but ourselves, to anybody but me, and maybe Dr C.

We make no effort. We take no turns. It's just Georgie and me. There's nothing we really have to do, anyway.

We make excuses. We're taking excuses apart and digesting them in parts. We're fragmenting reality.

Dear Diary:

Normal people simply and completely baffle me. What's with all the body language, social cues, pettiness, and looking people in the eyes when we speak from our mouths?

### *Flashing Forward to Yesterday*

Where am I? Who am I now? My reflection in the bathroom mirror wears some awfully feminine blouse with a black bow tie and ruffled white sleeves. This is Georgie, this is me—this time he's in the mirror, malfunctioning.

The two of us picked up an amazingly useful skill, a talent. Since we're both in our heads, in our fucked-up, full-time fantasy life, we've tried doing some fun stuff. Cool stuff with our heads, with our minds. For example, levitation—but we failed, we couldn't do it. Time travel—yes, by just putting our thoughts there, in any time we wanted. We couldn't master remote viewing, necessarily, but we were able to resonate morphologically, ourselves—this means that Georgie and I have been able to put ourselves in another place—because all of this Life shite isn't real anyway. You know, the whole notion that none of us are born, none of us ever die. Everything is infinite and eternal and circular, or maybe evolutionary. Probably all of the above. So, instead of only being able to see, or view some other place—Georgie, without a second thought, is able to place himself anywhere. The Seraphim angels alter everything else so that our presence—wherever we might be—seems natural and logical to the rest of the world—sort of like a parallel universe. This is how we escape. But Georgie will only put himself in one of two places: Long Beach, California—after all that's where Claudia is. She's still alive and well, as far as Georgie's concerned. Then there's New Mexico, the vast plateau of serenity, sometimes, where he and I can get away from the rest of the uppity fake-tits, fake-ass, fake-minded people in Los Angeles County. I just follow Georgie there—wherever he goes. The only time he'll follow me is when I go back to school. We use our immaculate imaginations to get us there—this blast to the past, of course—this inner need to go back—has a lot to do with my incomplete childhood. When I go back—back, back, back—I will sometimes make up with the bullies who used to taunt me, beat me, Mom-&-Pops-style, way back when.

Oh, Long Beach, overpopulated with those god darn fart-

fetish types.

(We just have to laugh at that kind of pornography, doc—they do that shite out in the Valley. They film that shite there. Usually \$1,000 a shoot—I mean the pay to the porn stars, rather, porn actors and actresses—to hell if there are any stars in porn. Everybody knows there aren't.)

Georgie and I, we pull that kind of shite right at home. A fart in the face followed by a giggle and a waving of the hand, in order to disperse the putrid smell, and responding to such a poo-toot, verbally perhaps, quietly uttering to the farter, "That was a quiet one." The receiver is taking it in as he longs for that particular hard and agitating feeling of shame, the kind of which only a good stinky fart in the face has the means. The fart, and the shame, fills an important space, the space within us where it really hurt. We can find a sense of relief—on both ends—from this kind of behavior, you might say. A relief from the physical pain as it is replaced with olfactory sabotage and humiliation.

So, yes, Georgie and I are basically bi-bisexual, that is. Still, I often think of my mother, my father, and my poor little inner child who seems to have lost his childhood because of them.

"Mommy, stop tickling me. I mean it!" I'd yell—she wouldn't stop.

My father and his emotional abuse, not to mention the sexual and financial abuse of which, these days, I don't hide the fact that I WANT PITY. Long live the Living Colorful Rich, the self-made millionaires, billionaires, fucking thrillionaires. "Ben," they say, "You're the wealthiest 30-year-old in all of New Mexico. Buy yourself a nice little jet plane, why don't you. You have the money, you know—why don't you live a little, boy?" Until the time when I actually ask for it—he, being the strict trustee of my beautiful inheritance—close to \$100,000,000, replies, "Oh, Benjy, we need to talk about this, you know."

The next week, I receive a shite, little, put-it-together-yourself, model airplane. I find it crushed inside the little compact PO box.

See why I can get so angry? They'd call it a lie—those rich

parents of mine. When I confront them about this stuff, they, like all other abused and abusive parents, they threaten abandonment. And I just love it.

So, in place of my own internal parent who might otherwise take care of that inner child, now that I am 30, so that he may be able to grow up again, Georgie becomes that parent. A single father. Fuck the mother, motherfucker.

New Mexico is flat and hot and dry—symbolically cold. It's the perfect place to just chill and smoke the Peace Pipe. The Pagans and Nudist Communities do their thing. We do ours. I just follow him there. I just follow Georgie. His sense of direction is better than mine.

We're staying at the Sea Port Hotel in Long Beach, California. And Georgie's current situation, as petty as it may be, has me captivated. We're in the most pressing circumstances. Something here deeply concerns me, I don't know what. So we check out, again and again, from this cheap seaside hotel, and we walk back, again and again, to our place just down the shore a ways.

Maybe there's no more sex with that woman, Georgie thinks to himself. Have I just come to that realization? Then Georgie scoffs. He's always scoffing.

Georgie and I wander home, and we watch a Jerry Springer marathon until Bobby Banks calls. Georgie forgets he has any friends, but they call him anyway. And, for sure, Bobby wouldn't be calling me in the first place, unless . . .

Were on non-com—you know, having a communication breakdown. It's a falling out—as if we didn't already have enough static already to break up the friendship. Bobby took advantage of me, fucking con artist.

Georgie picks up the line and gives Bobby the Typical American Greeting: "Hello. How are you?" etc.

I can hear Bobby's boisterous blabber even when I'm not on the phone myself. It's that loud.

"Hey, you still fucking around with that chick next door? The Long Beach Diva. That chick. Claudia, right?" Bobby finally asks.

Georgie hasn't seen his best friend Bobby since he was in boarding school, coming up 20 years ago. What a shite 20 years in-between, might I say and say again. Bobby came out to visit him there, and they've kept in touch ever since. Georgie seems to think he cares. I seem to think he wants something. The only thing I want is Georgie's girl, though. The only thing I want is Claudia.

Through the night, Claudia sleeps patiently, soundly, under her teal-colored dream-catcher, sprawled across the bed. Her slim white arms and pale legs sprawl seductively as she makes a crooked cross. Her chin presses to her chest, she's resting peacefully. But she's no more peaceful than a dead white dove—she's the amateur sex diva, her big soft breasts attest. Her breasts are heavy, like the morning dew falling on the green grass lawn outside. The same lullabies she remembers as a little girl hum from the same clock radio she keeps on her antique night table—a hypnotizing Annie Lennox ballad wafts through the stifling bedroom air and almost gets caught on the slightly-drawn, white-silk veil over her California king. (Who am I now? Am I dreaming? Am I, somehow, in Claudia's dream?)

I like to think that she's gotten fat, like Georgie (like me.) Maybe her breasts have gotten heavier, and heavier, and heavier, and now they sag, the poor things.

Georgie used to be skinny, but that was before I started to binge on the new meds.

I'm looking to understand myself, through Georgie. (You see, Dr C?

I see, Ben. Please go on.)

So, how did he get there? I meditate, not medicate, on his sordid past.

I think back to when he was posh and preppy, back to when his past might have meant something more. Really, I think, it doesn't. It most definitely does not. It never has meant anything.

I can see him with his parents, my parents, and I feel empathy for him. How could I have wronged this poor little guy?

He's my own soul, so to speak, my soul-within-a-soul. It's been a long, long road. There was less traffic in the beginning, but the traffic became heavier; the road became crowded, crooked and narrow. Somehow, we got lost along the way, Georgie and me.

Dear Diary:

I'm pretty sure "normal" people are equally baffled, but better at faking it.



*Long Beach: The Hub of the Warp*

At our third session, what's happening now? I wonder. Dr C's picking my brain. She's trying to get inside me—wants to know more about Georgie and me. Or maybe, maybe she wants to know more about Georgie's girl and me. Georgie's girl; what's her name? Claudia. Claudia Nesbitt. (Even the name makes me shiver, sometimes, and other times I get hot, just thinking about her. Thinking about me and Georgie and Georgie's girl, Claudia. Claudia Nesbitt.) Dr C asks me what I remember about Georgie's girl, what the name Claudia Nesbitt means to me. I'm not following her. This is between Georgie and me—it's none of her business.

Where am I now? When I wake up, it's Wakefield again (isn't it?) But who, what, when am I? All I know is that time flies and the years go warping by while Georgie sleeps. He is wrapped in time's embrace. When Georgie's asleep, all he can think of is sex and satin. But he dreams about escaping, like a wild animal in some crazy human zoo; but when all the cages break open the screaming, hungry beasts stampede him like vicious predators, kicking up dirt with their hooves and claws.

He's splayed out underneath the sky, while a thousand daggers and swords fly overhead. In this hellish wonderland of waking dreams (nightmares), the circus angels sing of dirty money, poverty, court hearings, testifying monks. Never-ending canals of blood, excrement, delusion, and terror fill up my nightmare dreamscape. And I lay there with Georgie, with me, living out my fears, my mistrust, my fucking brain tumors, and who knows what else.

Dear Diary:

I just came back from my best therapy session ever. Primeval latent core emotions volcano to the surface with centeredness, tears and elation made visible via the hour-long therapy session: Priceless. I suppose I could write more about it, but then back to my book. . . . My therapist encouraged me to talk about my thoughts and feelings and

what's troubling me. I was not worried. It was not hard to open up about my feelings. I have trusted my cognitive behavioral therapist for years now. We talk about daily life, challenging traumatic issues, and music, all boiling down to mindfulness and problem-solving, often working simultaneously. My CBT therapist often helps me gain more confidence and comfort in general. And some days we reach a point where we really dig deep, and through expression of fears and inherent emotional conditioning, for example, when asked, "How would I have preferred, realistically for [such-and-such] to have happened instead?" Ah. I just had such a breakthrough, which seems to only have room to broaden its scope and range in the newly discovered primeval traumatic root. It was finally brought to the surface, after so many years. My therapist and I can only Q&A more and use today's breakthrough to enhance my quality of life in so many more areas. It was like I was an infant being parented by his adult self, being my own parent, letting the little boy in me know that this is what this means, that is what that means, and he is loved. He has me—he has and is loved by me. My therapist was only bearing witness, and prompting, encouraging and allowing me to feel safe as the little child in me learned, for example, that the raising of a hand does not mean I love you. In fact, the raising of the hand with a whack is wrong and any child will only get better and better. You always have me. Cool shite. Oh yeah!

### *Housekeepers Are a Blessing*

Even the pack of people unloading a room from an SUV just outside his window fails to startle Georgie awake. His alarm has been snoozed, again. Georgie's half awake, half asleep, drifting somewhere between dreams and nightmares. He tries to rise, falls back, falls asleep again, and dreams.

*(Parenthetical Pet Peeve)* When people call me on the phone in the middle of the night, only to ask, "Are you still in bed?"

He finally wakes with white-hot sunlight in his face. He's sweating hard. He grabs his hard on. But no—he couldn't cum. Or maybe he could.

He could. He really could. He just knows he can do it. Maybe if he wasn't such a goddamn nice guy. It's his perennial problem. It's his peculiar condition, his pet pathology. He's too goddamn nice for his own good. People take advantage of him.

*(Who takes advantage of you, Ben?)*

Dr C wants to know. She doesn't know. She doesn't know me. It's Georgie, Georgie's girl; she's Claudia. Claudia Nesbitt. Claudia, who told him she loved him and then started fucking Sara and Sara's husband, Greg, sometimes at the same time. Who'd call Georgie afterward, or during the fucking, and tell him it was his cock she was riding, his dick filling her pussy. And she was sorry, but she just couldn't be with him, like that, ever again. Not anymore. Not like that. Not when his peculiar conditions, his pet pathologies, were so much worse than her own. Like he was fucking contagious or something.

Maybe Claudia's right. His own brand of craziness, his own peculiarities (or a better word than pathology, which reminds him of a forensic pathologist, televised), maybe really are worse than anybody else's, everybody else's.

He doesn't feel crazy, but then, maybe nobody crazy ever does. Who knows? You would have to be crazy to know, now, wouldn't you? But if you were crazy, you wouldn't know. Especially if you didn't know who you were, where you were, who's who. Who's he, anyway? I'm me! I'm him! I'm Georgie!

Finally, Georgie swings his legs out of bed and pulls on his boxers. It's his first big day on Wakefield campus, and he really must get up and get cracking, now, mustn't he? Why does he keep having these creepy little sex fantasies? Half-awake wet dreams? Why does he keep thinking about Claudia Nesbitt? It seems like she was, and is, a real person—a real human being, like Miss Heidi Berillo. But only Georgie can see how easily Claudia bruises, can see the little black-and-blue marks on her arms and ankles that confirm her reality. Georgie collects those details. He keeps her real in his mind. He remembers the scar on her anklebone, the left one, and he remembers what she told him, in bed, sitting up, her legs spread wide, letting him see all the way up her pussy.

Georgie remembers. (Doesn't he? I know I do.) Georgie remembers how impossible (fucking impossible!) it was to take his eyes off her pussy; her clipped pubic hair, the folds, the recesses. The smell. He loved that smell, loved burying his nose in her pussy, breathing her smell. No douche—no spray. Pure Claudia. Or maybe not so pure.

Georgie doesn't remember Claudia pure, or clean. He remembers the smell of her, how horny, how wet she'd get before her period, how milky, how sticky she'd be, how always her pubes would tangle, clump together, before her period, and she'd always want him to go down on her.

*(Parenthetical Pet Peeve)* That "time of the month."

"Clean me off," she'd say, and Georgie would.

Only before her period. Never after. Never during. Just before. She drove him crazy. (Didn't she? Or did she really, Dr C? Is Georgie crazy, or is it really just me? Georgie, Claudia, me.)

Claudia always sat with her legs spread, letting Georgie look—knew he was looking—while she told him stories. Stories about her scars. About her life. About her ankle. Claudia lifted her leg high above her head, showing Georgie her pussy, her asshole, and then she told him about her father—how abusive he was. What a drunk he was. How he threw his buck knife at

her.

"Because my father is a hunter," she said, "and needs a buck knife to skin rabbits." She said if Georgie ever wanted to buy a knife, ever needed a knife, she'd go with him, because she knew all about knives. "On account of my father," she said.

Georgie wishes that Claudia said "Because of my father." He doesn't like the sloppiness of, "on account of." (She said. He said.) But he was in love with her then, and so, of course, he didn't correct her. Besides, he remembers (she remembers) the story of the knife her father threw, and how she needed 13 stitches to close the wound.

"Can you believe it? Thirteen stitches on that little tiny bone?" she said. And, no, Georgie didn't believe it, still doesn't believe it. But Georgie was in love, and maybe still is, and it seems rude to say he thinks she's lying. To say, "Thirteen stitches are what you get for big cuts, Claudia. Not for little bitty nicks on the ankle." So he just kept his big mouth shut and let her lie. Let's her lie.

"And who's lying now, Ben?" Dr C wants to know. He ignores that, too. Georgie does. He's just thinking about Claudia again. And how much he wants her, how much he loves her, wants to fuck her, yet, he wants to love her.

And now he hates her. He fucking hates her.

He remembers her scar, her legs, and her taste (in love with Claudia. Claudia Nesbitt.) He hates her, hates her, hopes she dies, hopes he can stop being such a nice guy, a good guy. He hopes he gets the balls to kill her, drown her, electrocute her, and cut her. Something. Anything. To make her die. For himself.

"Who hates her? Who wants her?" Dr C asks. "And who died? Try to remember. Is it you? Are you awake in there now, Ben? Ben? Do you hear me, Ben?"

A knock on the door. It's a student from the next room over, checking on him, making sure he's okay. Has he been talking to himself? Maybe. Probably. His Tourette's, his bipolar, his schizoaffective disorder make it normal for him to. Georgie collects symptoms and diagnoses the way some people collect

stamps, or coins, or butterflies. He has books explaining every condition he's ever had—he understands his conditions better than he does himself (or is there any difference?) Now he worries that he's talking to himself again. Really, Georgie doesn't wonder if he's going crazy—he wonders just how crazy he has become. ("How crazy is crazy, anyway? How do you know? Can you tell me, Dr C? Just how crazy is crazy, anyway? That's what I want to know.")

Dear Diary:

I had been writing another short chapter of my book but had a shite day otherwise. So I start today without the broken pieces of yesterday. Every morning I wake up is the first day of my life. I know that's deep. But hey, it has to be. And again, back to the book. Hell, I've got to give myself a breath sometimes, ah.

## *Restaurant Love*

(Where am I? Who am I now?) I sleep. Still. Snoring and gasping in turns. Holding my breath—choking in my fucking sleep. Ben's choking, coughing up little pieces of food. The smell of wine wafts throughout his dream sensations—expensive wine, on the house. He's sleeping.

My dream takes place in the past. ("But who's past? What past?"

Why don't you tell me, Dr C?)

Claudia stands outside and watches a well-dressed, elderly couple enter the Fusion Restaurant. Violin music wafts into the night air as the outside door opens, then fades, as the couple disappears inside and the door swings shut. Claudia pauses at the threshold; she enters, in step to the music.

She's shown to a seat at a table in the main dining area. She has a good view of the string quartet but she's disappointed. As she waits for the waiter, the string quartet packs up their sheet music and instruments ready to head home. Maybe she ought to leave, too. *No*, she thinks apathetically. *I need to eat something.*

A few minutes pass. Finally her waiter arrives with a bottle of the house wine. He bows slightly and offers her a glass.

She accepts the wine bottle.

"It sure is dead in here, isn't it?" she says, expressionless.

The waiter acknowledges her comment with a nod. "It might pick up later, but I doubt it."

As he finishes pouring the glass, he looks straight into Claudia's eyes and gives her a weird, college guy smirk—a grin that smacks of awkward, frustrated desire. She pretends not to see. He's dissatisfied, of course, but he shows no sign.

"I'll be back for your food order, in a minute," he says.

(I return to her, as her waiter. I come back to her in this fantasy. I'm him and he's me.)

"Do I know you from somewhere?" she asks me, quizzically smiling.

(We must've met some other time. Sometime when I was

Georgie.)

Claudia is moved by Georgie's quick, subtle charm. She can enjoy him, but she can't fall in love as fast as he does. Claudia acts less impulsively toward Georgie than he'd like. She already has her sexual needs taken care of. Georgie doesn't. (And neither do I, for that matter.)

Georgie will do anything for me as long as I'm a good citizen, free and clear of drugs and booze, so long as I don't give in to temptations of substance. As long as I act like Pops wants his only son to act. So I stick to the sugar stuff and the occasional whipped cream whip-it. I'm keeping myself perfect, pure and clean, for him—for Georgie.

Georgie obsesses on people, mostly. He loses himself in a fantasy world for as long as he's obsessed with them. However long that is and however interesting they are to him. Georgie thinks about things a little too much. But still, it's a beautiful process, isn't it?

What's Georgie really like? He makes careful decisions. He's only horny when he's tired. He sweats like a pig. He works hard at sex.

"Hold me," he says. "Just hold me."

"Why?" Claudia wants to know.

It's their first official date; they're in bed together.

"Because. I've never been held before," Georgie answers. "Not like that."

But what does she think? What's Claudia feel? Claudia feels sorry for Georgie. She thinks he's an unloved hermit, so pitifully deserving. She helps him realize he can relate with others, even if they're still in high school, in Special Ed. Claudia calls herself Snicker Doodle (SD). She dubs Georgie with the out-of-place nickname "Princess," or else calls him "Corners" (referring to the dimpled corners of his mouth), or generically, "Beautiful."

(She's just naming herself with all these nicknames, I think. Probably she hands out titles to everyone she dates. They're replacement placeholders. Throwaways. Like the men she gets involved with, the men she uses. Like me. Or maybe she just



gives them to the people she really loves.)

She doesn't consider herself to be Georgie's, or my own, SOB—"Subject of Bewilderment" (i.e., obsession, delusion, star model of lust and passion, bad habit.) Georgie loves her little antics and imperfections. She never says or thinks anything bad, and she doesn't seem to mind her own flaws. Life is so easy and so casual for her. ("She does, however, have a knack for fucking with people without them knowing anything about what she's doing. Doesn't she?"

"I don't know, Ben. You tell me."

"Don't fuck with me, Dr C."

"Who's fucking with you, Ben? Is it me? Georgie? Is it Claudia? Or is it really just you, Ben?"

"Okay, okay. I'll make a coerced confession. I'm going mad, I think. I don't know how to say what I want to say. The main point is that I love somebody in some strange way. Or I think I do. Call it love. Call it hatred, obsession, or madness, but I love someone. That's how I feel, as fucked up as I am. I love someone who can't love me."

"Who can't love you, Ben? Is it me? Or is it—"

"—me. And I have no greater need in the world, nothing. Just a certain requirement to remember all I am. I'm trapped within some eerie, itchy-bitchy spell, cast by somebody who can't really love me back. That somebody is me. Is that what you're looking for, Dr C?")

"Let's go and watch the sunset, Claudia."

"Yeah, sure," she says.

Leading in, leaning in, I'm hoping for a kiss. And when we get home, I smell my fingers, nervously, but I don't smell Claudia. I look in the mirror and whisper a soft hello. (To who? To whom? I wonder.) The church bells outside chime with Georgie's own song—the song he plays in his head. His psychosis starts to overcome him, the same way as last time, but different—different, but the same. This time.

(Okay, okay. I have a coughing tic, a coughing tic and a big dick. Big like a pickle. The coughing tic tickles and I like pickles.

Georgie likes pickles. Claudia likes pickles.)

I wake up with the image of Georgie in my head. He's checking his mail. I've given Georgie his own PO box so he can get mail without me reading it first. Sometimes I'll send him gifts and then keep them for myself. Sometimes I pretend that we're the same person.

Georgie starts the morning with Claudia, but I stay in bed a while longer, sleeping and snoring, and thinking of her—of Claudia. We're pretty sick and tired, Georgie and I, of the same pathetic routine of morning. So Georgie decides not to shave or clip his nails.

It will all be okay, someday, sometime.

I wake up to check back on what's happened already. I'm in the kitchen making breakfast. I dump a cup of unfiltered water into a bowl of oatmeal and heat it up. I'm a microwave professional.

The washer and dryer are in the garage. Georgie finds a clean shirt in the dryer. He steps outside to put it on. He prefers dressing in public. Georgie does, he does. He climbs into his white, V-neck t-shirt, presenting himself beautifully, showing off his outstanding dance. The smooth, silky cotton polishes his waxy, college-boy skin and vintage nipples, puffy nipples, his hurly burly-boy A-cups, miniature UFOs. Bug bites. Bee stings.

*(Parenthetical Pet Peeve)* Seemingly deaf parents of children emit ear-splitting shrieks in public.

This peculiar collection of moments is crucial to Georgie's every day.

He hates to hang his clothes, so the dryer is constantly running. Lint piles up and the fabric softener smells like allergy.

Georgie's allergic.

He sniffs and remembers the smell of Claudia. (I cough.) We tic. We twitch. We do circus-tics, we're circus-freaky. We are just a big circus freak show, aren't we? Georgie and me.

The gray skies dull away and yesterday's rain has stopped. The dew rubs coldly against Georgie's bare feet, grounding him.

He's burning a fire in his mind. Everybody's watching (aren't we?)

He's alone and invisible. He doesn't feel. He doesn't exist—he's not needed. He breathes. He thinks. But he is not. Georgie wants to say he doesn't care about this, but he does.

He wishes he could record all his thoughts and hallucinations. He wants to matter, more and more. But he's distant, far-off, aiming a spotlight down at the stage. The play goes on down there and Georgie watches unseen.

He's always the last one picked, the charity case, and the delinquent. He's just a rich kid with a big heart, and a heaping side of rage and anger, too.

He's often depressed and his moods swing in kaleidoscopic circles. The fibers in his mind vibrate and images are formed. (What images form today? The perfect, beautiful, and pure woman? Or some sinister, creepy, alter ego?)

Oh, Georgie Gust. . .

Dear Diary:

Plain and simple intermission, for once again, I've got to stop this hating myself garbage and really start to love myself for all that I am, not hating myself for what I'm not. Anyway . . . Onward bound.

## Part II: From Wakefield to Rehab

### *Dr C Made Me Do It*

Name-calling: Georgie Porgie, Mr Twitchy, Georgie, Benjy, Georgie and me, Tourette's, Borderline Personality Disorder, schizoaffective, neurotic, psychotic, blah, blah, blah.

Speaking of which, I've had two cups of coffee this morning and nothing to eat. Routine, routine, routine. Now I've got an appointment with Dr C.

I ramble way off the subject. (What is the subject? Georgie, Claudia, and me.)

Dr C just listens as I run on and on and on.

I've got another doctor's appointment today—another second opinion. (Or a third opinion? Fourth? How many opinions do I need to know I'm fucked up? I know!) Yeah, and some of these shrinks are fucked up, too. I swear. One doctor says I've got Tourette's, another says schizophrenia, and another says blah, blah, and more blah. Am I in between these diseases? I can live with that. It's cute to be an in-betweenener. But who can I trust; the one on the right or the one on the left? Which am I more like? They're all puppets, Muppets, gonzo, sex-o. I'm going crazy. Going, going, gone.

(Parenthetical Pet Peeve) Cold coffee.

Two cups of coffee, and I'm all over the place. A couple of years back, I would've reacted differently, but I've changed. I skim through My Junkie Memoirs. I was such a good little kid. How did I get so fucked up? I want to swear, but I know better words. I'm choosing not to use them. I don't want to end up in hell.

(Do I, doc?

"I don't know. Do you, Ben?")

In the end, I wander and wonder.

Dear Diary:

My best friends and I—the few that I have—we have conversation that I doubt anyone else would understand. Just had one of them on the phone. I was eating a bag of chips.

### *What Really Happened*

Dr C seems to think that dredging up the past will somehow fix my present (but are we going forward or backward? That's what I want to know.)

I'm not in therapy because Dr C wants to teach me how to like myself. (Correction: love myself. Right, Dr C?) I'm in therapy because I robbed the Pasadena City Bank. Well, no, I didn't really rob it. More like, I pretended to rob it. It was kind of a joke, really. At least, I thought it was a joke. I was high on crack at the time. On Chivas Regal, marijuana, and Klonopin, and I thought the whole goddamn thing was a fucking riot. Bankers really don't have a sense of humor; neither do cops—at least, not the cops in Pasadena.

I'd just met with my business manager about trust fund stuff. Pops was still dishing out a little cash at a time, a little scratch, here and there. I'd just learned, that day, that he'd made a \$1.2 million profit on a huge position. (I couldn't tell you which one.) But the dividends they paid me were being kept, without any hold (I was told), in the Pasadena City Bank in the San Gabriel Valley. I knew then—after the meeting was over, when Ron, my manager, pulled out a few joints—I knew I needed to get that million-two in cash, run off to Vegas with a couple of Mafiosi (“Professional Baccarat Players”, “Investment Managers—Gaming,” they're called) and win-win-win, then die of crack smoke in my hotel room. This was one of the highest manias I'd ever gone through. (“Or that's gone through you, Ben?”