

Hello

Jojo69@blacksails.net

To: bigcahuna@frioloco.com

**Hi Darren, or are you back to being Travis now?**

**The brouhaha has been quieting down lately, so you must be feeling better now that the spotlight has been turned off. Being famous can't be half as bad as being anonymous! (Not sure that came out right.) Everyone here is fine. Tosca did gangbusters once you hit the news cycle but business has been settling down . . . still pretty decent though. I'm seriously looking to raise some money to expand . . . big surprise, right? Not sure where . . . maybe on the peninsula . . . maybe Marin. Don't want the hassle of schlepping over to the east bay...and then on top of that have to dumb down the cuisine.**

**So. Just wondering if you'd be interested in a FABULOUS investment opportunity . . . ha! Course you are. It was YOUR baby, after all. Don't you want it to grow up big and strong? Not entirely sure, but you seem to be set up pretty fine over there on Planet Houston. I know what you're thinking, okay? Justine says she's willing, but doesn't want to get in too deep. So, I'm reduced to nickel and dimeing folks. Tech is still roaring here, but who wants to put their \$\$\$ into yet another Italian restaurant? Plus, I'm not Italian or a famous chef or YOU, so I got zero street cred. Sad. You can start feeling sorry for me any second now.**

**Justine, by the way, broke up with Camille. She not saying much, but I get the feeling you might have had something to do with that.**

**I saw Camille the other day . . . chirpy as ever . . . at Café Flore . . . arm in arm with a new butched-out pal, crewcut and all, looking like she's on shore leave and packing heat. Maybe she is.**

**Hope everything is fine with you and by now all your memories have come back, and life is just peachy keen, as we used to say. Jojo**

## Greetings

arvidpaternoster@ucfs.edu

To: bigcahuna@frioloco.com

Dear Mr. Quinn:

How nice to hear from you. Of course I remember you. From time to time, I would wonder what might have become of you and was pleasantly surprised to see that at last you were recognized and had returned home to Houston.

The fact that you have not recovered your memories since we last met indicates to me that you have suffered some sort of trauma perhaps induced by a pathogen or a chemical—in reaction to a drug, for example. My advice would be to have yourself tested by a neurologist. The tests we conducted here in San Francisco were simply not sophisticated enough to detect such damage.

This is not to say that your condition is beyond remediation. The brain is highly plastic and has remarkable powers of recovery, either on its own or through medication, therapy, or even surgery. I would not give up hope.

Best wishes,

Arvid Paternoster, M.D.

## Checking in

justine@fortuity.com

To: bigcahuna@frioloco.com

Hi Travis,

I heard from Jojo who gave me your email address. He wanted me to add my support to his plan to expand Tosca, but honestly, though I think expansion could be a good thing, I'm not sure Jojo's the one to make it happen. I gave him some money as a good will gesture. If the thing takes off, fine. If not, that's fine too.

I'm sure Jojo told you about Camille. There's no backstory to this. Too many fault lines in the relationship. Too many failures on my part to really understand her or be there for her. In the end, someone else came along and she decided it was time for a clean break, which ended up being reasonably amicable, but down deep probably not really. Lately things seem to be just a matter of plugging along. Where? To what purpose? Basically going through the motions. Waiting for something to happen. Trying to put on a happy face. I guess I'm in one of those funks required from time to time to make us appreciate our cloudless carefree happy days all the more.

How are things with you? I've been following your story. Suddenly you now have a wife, an Hispanic family and a big restaurant chain to run. That's got to be challenging especially if you still haven't recovered your memory. Pretty amazing. Take notes—there's probably a bestseller in your future, although given your aversion to notoriety, I can't imagine you ever doing it.

Justine

## Justine

Jojo69@blacksails.net

To: bigcahuna@frioloco.com

**Hi Darren,**

**Glad you asked. Yes, Justine was quite upset with your hasty exit out of her life. We all knew about Justine . . . that she was trans. Hey, you were just clueless. That's ok, a lot of people are. It's hard to understand . . . or maybe conceive . . . that a person's sexual identity can be different from the plumbing they were born with. It happens. Nature is like that. It fucks up. So, to put it plainly, Justine is a heterosexual woman everywhere but between her legs.**

**For some men that's an unacceptable difference, for others it's a turn on. You have to figure out which one you are, and if you're looking for a long-term relationship with kids, you have to be prepared for some issues. Basically, Justine can father kids but can't bear them. Modern science has a solution to the problem, but it's complicated. Remember from sex-ed class, that film about Mr. Sperm and Ms. Egg?**

**If you're in love with her, then none of this should matter very much.**

**About Camille. Not exactly sure how that relationship worked. I know Justine wasn't in it for the lesbian kick—or not entirely. I'm even less qualified to speak for Camille, but I suspect she was. In terms of sex, all the parts fit the way they're supposed to, so that was convenient! It was never anything more than that.**

**I know Justine is looking for a serious relationship. And I know she wants kids. I also know that she was quite taken with you. So there it is. Your move!**

**I hope all this answers your questions, my friend. Jojo**

## Re: Our last conversation

justine@fortuity.com

To: bigcahuna@frioloco.com

Travis, thanks for your kind note. I agree things happened much too fast, and at the worst possible time. We probably should have had that last conversation months earlier. My fault. It's always been a hard conversation for me, but it was especially so with you. Talking to you via email makes it somewhat easier, so this is as good a time as any for straight talk and honesty.

Sexuality is almost endlessly complicated, and endlessly confusing. It's not always just about men and women. Nature isn't so tidy. As for me, I have always identified as a female, although I'm not anatomically so. I'm a trans woman who is attracted to men, who prefers men. I consider myself heterosexual—which may sound funny coming from someone who has had a relationship with Clarissa. As I said, things are complicated. Clarissa identifies as a lesbian.

From my perspective it was a relationship of convenience. I can't speak for Clarissa.

In the end a sexual relationship is a sexual relationship. There is intimacy and sometimes love. Accommodations have to be made. We are all driven by the same instinct and we fulfill it in the best way we know how. What I've always aspired to is something more—love, companionship, a relationship that lasts forever. I understand the difference between body and spirit.

I felt something with you, as I sensed you felt something for me. But I'm a realist. I know I'm not for everyone. Generally, that means I need a trans amorous man—they're pretty rare. A trans amorous man who thinks like I do, who has the same aspirations as I do, who is looking for a long-lasting relationship as I am—they're the rarest thing of all.

What I needed to know was whether or not any of this made a difference. But then you left, and you didn't have to deal with it. I assumed your leaving without telling me was your answer. I'm pleased to know that my assumption was wrong. Thank you. And thanks for your insightful thoughts on my funk. There's an upside to everything, and the upside of a funk is that it somehow stimulates my creative side. See below for a recent poem.

Justine

-----  
Black and blue skies  
    like the silken skin  
        of grapes  
    like the night  
    seas off Crete, like  
the inkblot aura of a bruise,  
like the descent of stone doors  
    in a fairytale dream  
        or in the room  
        after anesthesia  
    when the mirror steel  
and murmuring Halloween  
faces are sucked swiftly  
    into your arm  
        and in the upsurge  
        and drowning  
    conch-shell roar become  
black and blue skies.

## Coming your way

justine@fortuity.com

To: bigcahuna@frioloco.com

Travis,

Thanks for your comments on the poem. I'm not sure what it "means." It was just an attempt to describe a complicated emotion.

Sorry to hear about your problems there and how unhappy you are—thinking you were victimized a second time when you were kidnapped and brought back home! Is it that bad? You're right, there are too many answered questions. Knowing you, I'm sure you'll get to the bottom on them.

I got a frantic text from my brother Ethan today saying he's in some kind of medical trouble and needs my help. He's an artist living in Marfa, Texas. Doesn't have many resources, which is probably why he needs me. But we are close and he's the only family I have. I have a flight to El Paso later today, then I'll rent a car and drive the rest of the way. Staying at the Hotel Paisano.

Justine

## Re: Follow up

junebertrand@alice.it

To: bigcahuna@frioloco.com

Dear Adam,

I understand you're currently and officially Travis now, but, with your indulgence, let me call you by the name of the good friend I once knew.

Yes, I too enjoyed our brief time together in Assisi, and I hope I was helpful in resurrecting your past. Did you manage to meet up with Sylvia? I don't think I mentioned it when you were here, but I had a huge crush on her—she was everything I wasn't, but of course she had no interest in a romantic relationship with a woman. I was the shy, retiring type, and she had that big personality that just lit up a room when she walked into it, and yet I don't think she ever realized the power she had over people or ever had the least interest in putting herself over others—in fact just the opposite.

Regarding your question about Cripps: He was entertaining in the way people often are who are cut from an exotic piece of cloth, but his personality quirks could be a challenge. No question he was smart, perhaps even brilliant, but he could also be obtuse and self-defeating. You never knew where you stood with him. He saw the world very differently from us and always had his own agenda. For all his faults he certainly had a high opinion of himself as well as a low opinion of others, which he could easily mask and, if required, turn on whatever charm was needed to get his way. I pretty much lost touch with him.

It sounds like you're hot on the trail, now that you're back in the Boston area. I'm sure there's much to unearth regarding your family. It was largely a mystery to us when we were together in Cambridge; you were clearly trying to put it all behind you.

If you have any questions, send them along. Let's keep in touch.

Best,

June Bertrand

## Auld lang syne

dholloway631@ohio.net

To: bigcahuna@frioloco.com

**DUDE, GLAD I COULD BE OF HELP. AND GLAD U WERE ABLE TO CONTACT AND HOOK UP WITH DeSHAWN. HE'S DEFINITELY THE MAN. NICE TO HEAR HE'S GOT A GIG THERE IN CAMBRIDGE — POLITICS, SMART MOVE. GOTTA LEVERAGE WHATEVER YOU GOT. FUNNY HOW WE ALL THOUGHT HE WAS GOING TO BE THIS BIG TIME HOODLUM. WHO KNEW? CLASSIC RACIST THINKING OF THE TIME. STILL A LOT OF THAT AROUND.**

**WISHED U COULD'VE STAYED LONGER, MEET THE MISSUS, SEE MY MODEL TRAIN SETUP IN THE BASEMENT, ONE OF THE TOPS IN THE STATE. GUARANTEED TO BLOW U AWAY. LAST YEAR I WON THE OUTDOOR CHRISTMAS LIGHT COMPETITION. ALWAYS REACHING.**

**SAY HI TO THE REST OF THE GUYS IF YOU SEE THEM.**

**DUNCAN**

## Re: Coming your way

justine@fortuity.com

To: bigcahuna@frioloco.com



Arrived in Marfa yesterday morning. Lovely hotel, somewhat charming town trying to be a Texas version of Taos, but awfully rundown in places and not apparently succeeding. Their claim to fame is being the place where the movie “Giant” was filmed and the home of the supposedly mysterious “Marfa lights.”

There’s the town water tower on the left. I’ve been roaming around taking pix. See attached for some of them.

My brother Ethan has been having fainting spells and the local doc here wants to send him to the nearest hospital in El Paso for evaluation. But Ethan has the family aversion to doctors and hospitals, and doesn’t want to go. There’s also the issue of his inability to pay for any evaluation or treatment. As far as the doc can tell, there are about half a dozen reasons for the

fainting spells—from the trivial to the serious.

I’ve decided to spend some time here with Ethan. It’s been a while since we’ve been together. This way I can see for myself what his condition is and maybe influence him to have it evaluated and if necessary take him and pick up whatever medical expenses he incurs. This is turning out to be very therapeutic for me. Amazing how taking on the problems of others, trivializes our own. Finally the sun has come out.

How was your trip to Italy? Was your old friend helpful?

Justine

## Re: My visit

sylvialaurengerou@comcast.net

To: bigcahuna@frioloco.com

*Hi Adam,*

*No need to thank me. I was happy to help. Yes, it was nice getting together, and it was nice seeing you again after all these years. My parents, especially, loved catching up and spending some time with you. They were always disappointed we never ended up together. I must say you totally dazzled Michel. It made me realize how important a father is in a child's life. I was happy to see how well you two got along, then sad to see it all come to an end.*

*Yes, he is a special child, and I feel so blessed to have him.*

*Obviously we've both changed a great deal. Or at least you have, and in a fundamental way. I've changed too—graduated into adulthood and motherhood, less sure of myself than when I was younger and willing to take on anything. To an extent that means being more comfortable with where I am and wary of changes but also feeling like I've shut myself in, thrown up walls, been less willing to challenge myself and do what I should, rather than do what I want.*

*In many ways I envy you, being forced to start over. Were it not for my son, I would welcome the chance to do that.*

*As you could probably see, it was very hard for me to say goodbye as we stood on the porch. The old conflict between the heart and the head. And what to do when there's a stalemate? It was odd realizing that no such conflict was going on inside you, since I was essentially a stranger to you. So how I felt, what I was going through, was totally irrelevant. I could only wonder how you might feel when, if at some future time, you regained your memory. I'm sure that thought was passing through your mind as well.*

*If you would like to keep in touch, I'm happy to reciprocate. Not so much to keep options open as to maintain a friendship. If you would like a referral to a neurologist, I can do that. The doctor I have in mind is one of the best in New England. He's both a practitioner and a researcher at Mass. General.*

*Best,*

*Sylvia*

## Re: Update

justine@fortuity.com

To: bigcahuna@frioloco.com

Sounds like you're making lots of progress. I don't know what to tell you about Sylvia. I know you feel bad. How couldn't you? Clearly she still has feelings for you, but really there are only two options for her: (1) wait and hope your memory comes back and you decide to start up the relationship, or (2) hope that you like her enough to attempt to reignite the fire all over again. Right now, though, you have a quest you have to finish. When that's done, who knows what your circumstances will be?

I've spent a week with Ethan. It's been wonderful and horrible. We have always been best friends as well as siblings, so that part has been good for both of us. I'm really coming to appreciate his art work. He does these very big panels of scenes of the town and the countryside in a kind of impressionistic style. One he just finished is called "The Doors of Marfa," which is essentially a collage of 10 doors that gives you a feeling for the town, or his feeling, anyway—beautiful and ugly at the same time.

The other part not going so well are the frequent fainting spells. He can feel them coming on, so he can somewhat prepare himself, but, really, he can't do many things like drive a car or go out alone. I'm not a doctor, but it's clear to me that the spells are not going to go away on their own and that there is something seriously wrong. I'm getting closer and closer to getting him to let me take him to El Paso, but I think he's so afraid of having something dreadful being detected that he'd rather die than go to a hospital.

The two of us have been driving about, exploring this part of Texas, which is desolate but beautiful—not in the exalted category of the high deserts of New Mexico or the canyons of Utah, and certainly not the spectacular wastes of Death Valley—but a more spare and prosaic beauty. One night we went to see the Marfa lights from a fancy viewing area. These little dots of red and white are supposed to be mysterious and inexplicable, but in fact, it's been well documented they are just car headlights and taillights from a distant highway. Much more impressive are the star-filled night skies, which I haven't seen since I was a little girl. I was so moved, I wrote a poem about it.

Justine

Even the stars in their courses  
have no clue where they're going:  
hurrying to some splendid apotheosis  
or merely winking out?  
Integral to some grand scheme  
or just props in some grand show?

Does the ant question what or when?  
Does the quark wonder why?

Peel back the light and under  
its refulgent skin there is only night  
as far as it's possible to go.  
But who can say what treasure  
might be hidden in its depths  
what dark ember about to glow?

## Name of the Game

scott@archnidgames.com

To: bigcahuna@frioloco.com

Cuz,

You're racking up names faster than you can accumulate points, Jared Luddin. Wear your name with pride—at least till you get to the next one. It's like those Russian dolls—one person inside another.

Actually, we're all like that without getting renamed every once in a while.

No need to thank me. It was a pleasure. Primo conversation. Most of our relatives, sad to say, are pretty much antediluvians. Need to keep away from politics or religion, or it all turns into a screaming match, and these people are armed.

You seemed a bit bummed out when you left. It was a huge mistake to give you that pamphlet by Ludovico Verro. Don't bother reading it. In fact, just dispose of it. Rip it up into little pieces and dump it. Guy who wrote it was a whack job.

Hope you don't mind, but I've been sketching out an idea for a new game based on your predicament. Players are afflicted with sudden memory loss and have to either get others to fill in the blanks or manage to stimulate their brains in just the right way to have their memories returned. I'm in the prototype stage and it looks promising. Or maybe not, Not sure what promising means anymore. Words themselves seem diminished in meaning, or even totally empty. Sometimes, it's the opposite of what we think. It's astounding the lies we tell ourselves! No escaping the self. It's there always, like an infection that just won't go away. It's infuriating. You've managed, though. Good for you. My advice is to be thankful and not mess with it.

I envy you, Cuz, really. Maybe it's time for me to do something else. Maybe open my own pizza place. Something easy that doesn't involve a whole lot of thinking. Anyway, food for thought. Gotta go.

Your favorite cousin,

Scott Luddin

## Trouble in Marfa

justine@fortuity.com

To: bigcahuna@frioloco.com

Travis, amazing! You've finally homed in on your family. I think at this point it's only a matter of time.

Things are not going so well here. This morning Ethan collapsed and when I revived him, he was blind. Of course I immediately called the doctor, who didn't even bother to look at him: get him to a hospital immediately, he said. At this point, Ethan offered no objection. I loaded him in the car and headed off for El Paso as fast as I could go.

The emergency room of the Hospitals of Providence took him immediately. Still it was an agonizing six-hour wait. A brain scan showed a mass. That was enough to get him admitted. Later I talked with a doctor who said that the only course of action was surgery. I asked about the prognosis. The doctor said he couldn't say until they opened him up. "It's a big tumor," he said. "It's been growing for some time. A lot depends on the kind of tumor and its location. We won't really know till we can examine it directly."

Now they have to run more tests, and depending what they find, they may have to bring in a neurosurgeon. I booked a room at the Ramada Inn. I've found myself in a very dark place, as if the world was coming in for the kill. So many mistakes of the past, so many failures to make the right choice, so much animosity from some powerful, nameless spirit playing cruel games with my life. Gloucester in King Lear had it right: "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods. They kill us for their sport."

All of which has inspired another poem.

Justine

There are worse things  
than having behaved foolishly.

There are worse things  
than betrayals committed or endured.

There are worse things  
that you hope to do but never have and never will.

There are worse things—  
unthinkable things that you just can't stop thinking about  
at four am when the undead  
stagger out from the pit of night looking worse and worse and worse.

## Re: Trouble in Marfa

justine@fortuity.com

To: bigcahuna@frioloco.com

Thanks for your concern, Travis. Today, it was back to the hospital. This isn't exactly a world-class institution. Things move very slowly. More waiting. Ethan was in a sullen mood, made worse by being constantly taken out for one test or another.

By the afternoon I had had enough. The room was suffocating me. I told the nurse that I had to get some fresh air. She said there was a nice garden in the back of the building and pointed down a hallway.

I eventually found the door and went out, squinting in the bright light, surprised by what I suddenly saw before me. The late-afternoon sun looked like honey collected in pools on the ground. The air was warm and fragrant with the musty smell of earth and growing things. The quiet was near absolute—no TV or radio sounds, no distant rumble of the freeway. Just the hum of insects and birdsong. I sat down in a kind of trance on a stone bench along a gravel path, blissfully estranged from the world. I was overcome by a deep sadness and started to cry—something I don't usually do. Then I saw something move at the other end of the garden and realized I wasn't alone. I quickly wiped my eyes as an old man rose from a crouch next to a distant flower bed. Seeing me, he waved and slowly ambled in my direction. He was a short, mostly bald man with thin long wisps of white hair, bad teeth, crooked hairy hands caked with dirt, and thick yellow nails. He wore work clothes—a faded flannel shirt tucked into baggy khaki pants pulled up high.

"Hello, there," he said. He had the trace of a middle-European accent. Curled wisps of white hair blew in a breeze.

I said hello and he introduced himself. "Izzy Green," he said. I started to rise but he waved me back down. He and would've offered me his hand but for the dirt on it. I introduced myself and asked him if he worked here. He laughed and shook his head, neither a yes or a no. Then he went over to a spigot, rinsed his hands and dried them on his trousers. He came over to the bench and sat down. He squinted his eyes in the sun. His sagging face was covered in brown spots. I guessed his age at somewhere in the mid-eighties.

"Beautiful day!" he said. He held up his two palms like he owned it. I politely agreed that it was—at least weatherwise. He said, "A day don't get much better than this." I politely agreed that it didn't. He said the garden was all his own work. It was the only thing he did now. He did it for free, a labor of love, he said. Then he went off on this long monologue about plants, soil, insects, weather, the intricate cycle of death and life. Quite impressive. I told him I'd never heard anyone talk about gardening like that before.

He told me I probably never would again. He said he had what I might call a unique perspective.

"Why is that?" I said. Being a little cheeky, I said, "Are you God?" He stared at me for a bit, then, totally serious, said, "Yes, as a matter of fact. I know I'm supposed to be dead, but—knock on wood—I'm still hanging on."

I had no intention of wasting my time talking to an old coot, so I excused myself and headed as quickly as I could for the exit.

Justine

Izzy Green

justine@fortuity.com

To: bigcahuna@frioloco.com

My apologies, Travis, for burdening you with my troubles. It's been very stressful here and it's a relief to have someone to talk to about this. I always thought I was pretty tough, but now I'm not so sure. I appreciate your concern and counsel.

This morning was a big consultation with the medical staff. Ethan's tumor is operable but it's in a difficult spot and would require the kind of expertise not available at the hospital. They said they would need to bring in a neurosurgeon from San Antonio. They had someone in mind willing to come to El Paso to perform the surgery, but it could be several days before arrangements could be made.

I told them to go ahead and do it.

So more waiting. Idle chit-chat. Reading magazines. Walking up and down the hospital corridors. Then something unexpected. Ethan was asleep (He's been sleeping a lot—something related to the impact the tumor is having on his brain.)

A nurse's aide saw me pacing the corridor and told me about the garden. I said I'd been there and loved it but was uncomfortable with the old man who was tending it. She laughed and said he was harmless and was quite nice once you got to know him.

So I went back to the garden. Almost immediately all the poisonous stress seemed to drain from my body.

The gardener I mentioned previously saw me. He stopped in his work and said, "Scared you off?"

I apologized for my behavior. He waved it away as unnecessary. He said he perfectly understood. In a place like this, he said, people claiming to be God, wasn't unusual, "specially the old folks, the ones with a couple of screws loose."

I played along, thinking to spare his feelings. I told him I was a pretty open-minded person. "Good for you," he goes. The main reason I had a brain, he said, was to use it to question things. Monkeys were not supposed to questions things. People were. "How many folks hold that against me," he said, "I can't tell you! They hate it!"

I said, not me. But I did have issues. "Oh, boy," he goes. "Here it comes. Go ahead. You won't hurt my feelings."

I told him I was sorry, but I never believed in God. Even as a little girl. It wasn't that I didn't want to, just that I never found I could.

He shrugged and waved my problem away. Didn't seem quite in character, I thought. I said, "You say you like people to question things, but when we go ahead and do it, you come down on us like a ton of bricks."

He was offended that I would question his motives. I said, "Why were you so tough on Eve? What did you expect her to be, your own personal Barbie doll? She shows a little initiative, and—wham!—she's out of there."

He was rubbing the top of his head and didn't seem to know who I was talking about, so I said, "You know, the first woman. Garden of Eden. Forbidden fruit. The talking snake. Married to Adam."

He said he thought I was talking about the movie, the one with Bette Davis. "You believe all that other stuff, you might as well believe in the Fairy Godmother and those UFOs people talk about." He said it was just a story which portrayed him as "some guy in a tux and top hat, pulling rabbits out of a hat." That wasn't the way it happened. Creating things was hard work. It took years and years. Lots of trial and error. Lots of patience. Starting small and building on one improvement after another. Going from little "creepy things," he said, "to something like Albert Einstein. Now there's someone who knew what brains were for!"

Not wanting to let him off the hook, I said, "So did Hitler, Ted Bundy, Richard Nixon."

He said something like, "I just make them, I don't tell them what to do."

I said: His responsibility though. That got him a bit worked up. "What am I, General Motors?" he said. People wanted him to take responsibility for everything. It wasn't fair. He did the best he could. He never said he was perfect. The ones who said that were "folks like you."

I came back with: "Not me. I said I didn't believe in you, remember?"

He smiled and gave me a wink! Just a wink but it said everything and made my day!

OK, I have to stop here. Much more to talk about, but the doc on the case just came into the room and I have to go.

Justine

## Just touching base

moongoddess1881@citynet.org

To: bigcahuna@frioloco.com

Hey, Cousin Travis (assuming you're not interested in calling yourself Jared Luddin or Jeremy Sedgwick): it was so great to see you. Sorry you couldn't stay for dinner. Had a nice treat I was ready to cook up for you, but I understand you were anxious to get back on the hunt. No question, your going to succeed. That's just you. Never stop till u get what u want. It's in the family genes. Oh, wait, you're not really family!

Like me, your searching for answers. Little or big questions, don't matter. You got this itching to know. That was once the story of my life. And you know what really helped? Wicca. It's the only thing that makes sense. You got your two controlling deities, your Moon Goddess and your Horned God, which covers everything, since Nature is basically divided between the male and the female powers. Over those two, there's a more powerful pantheistic deity, kind of like the Force in Star Wars. Pretty simple. Easy to understand. People refer to Wiccans as pagans, but really all that mean is that everything originates in Nature, which seems friggin obvious when you think about it. Wicca goes all the way back to the stone age, so you know they must be on to something. The oldest known sculptures are of the Moon Goddess. The pic on the left is called the "Venus of Willendorf," but they have been found all over the world, not just Willendorf, wherever the hell that is. Course, you hear fools and naysayers say they were just jack-off dolls, but that's been pretty much debunked.



Anyway, you might want to check it out. Interesting stuff.

Lately I been thinking of becoming a full time priestess (we don't like to use the word "witch"). I got 25 years in the hospital, so I can retire with a pretty decent pension, and what with organizing and leading rituals and casting spells, I can do pretty well for myself—which does NOT mean its all about the money. Plus, I pretty much had it with nursing. Health care these days is nothing but all about the money. Standards are for shit, and all the worse kind of people are getting into it.

Just last week one of our surgeons—lets call him Dr. Asshole—who is a total lush, was performing a pneumonectomy, removing a lung in plain English. Patient was a 40 year old male. Prognosis excellent. Except Dr. Asshole was sloshed. Operation was routine: lung removed, pulmonary artery tied off, patient sewed up. Dr. Asshole is in a hurry and goes home, patient goes to the recovery room. Half hour later, there's a code blue announced for the recovery room. I get there fast as I can, just in time to see the resident cutting open the patient's chest. Blood pours out. The pulmonary artery is squirting like a garden hose. The resident quickly gets a hemostat on it, but its too late. The patient dies. Nothing is written up. Nothing happens to Dr. Asshole, even tho, as everyone knows, he was too drunk to properly tie off the artery.

I got a lot of those stories. By that's enough. Time to get my butt into spiritual healing. Lot of hurting people out there. I think I can make a difference.

Hope you find what you're looking for, cousin. Lets not lose touch, okay? Send me your snail mail address, and I'll put you on my Yule greeting card list (Yule is the Wiccan holiday for the winter solstice, observed elsewhere as Christmas).

May the Moon Goddess lead you to the truth,

Bernice Grossman

## Re: Izzy Green

justine@fortuity.com

To: bigcahuna@frioloco.com

Just picking up things from my last post, Travis. Not sure you appreciate all this, but I've been totally hooked! Not sure what to make of it. Even Ethan has noticed a change. "What's up with you?" he asked me. I said I was being confident and upbeat because I wanted him to be confident and upbeat. I believe he's going to be okay, and I wanted him to believe that, too.

So, this was yesterday back in the garden, right after Izzy Green gave me that wink. He says, "Tell me something, you got a mother and father, right?"

I told him I didn't (both deceased), but my brother was there in the hospital with a tumor in his head and the prognosis was highly uncertain.

"Don't worry," he goes. "He'll be okay. You're lucky to have him." He'd once had a brother, he said. But he lost him when he was seven years old. Lost his sister and parents as well. This was in Poland during the war. He'd gotten separated from his family while disembarking from the train. He tried looking for them until a man pointed to a big chimney where black smoke was coming out. "There," the man said, "there is your family."

"I'm so sorry," I said.

"Yes, me too," he said. He said he saw people cry out for God, his own people, suffering so terribly. They looked up to heaven and they cried for God to do something. "But I was there," he said. "I was with them. And I could do *nothing*."

He said he was saved. Good people helped him. Hid him from the guards. He was lucky, he said No other reason. "One of my trickiest inventions—luck. Maybe too tricky." In a better world, he would fix that, he said, get rid of leaving your fate to the numbers, do things differently. Then he told me how after he was liberated, he came to America, married, had children, and lived a good life. "But even today," he said, "I'm still sorry. It never goes away—the feeling in here," he said, putting his fist in the middle of his chest.

I didn't know what to say.

Justine

## Subject

thelindstroms@netblazr.com

To: bigcahuna@frioloco.com

Dear Mr. Sedgwick,

It was such a pleasure having you suddenly drop into our lives last evening at 777 Elm Hill Road, completing a story that has been open ended for nearly forty years. Amy said that after you left with your mother's journal, she could sense a change in the house, like a rainy morning turning to blue skies and sun in the afternoon. I'm not sure about that. Amy has always had the most active and suggestible imagination in the family. I think it was more of a change in the feelings of the human inhabitants of the house, which over the years since we discovered the journal had become such an important part of family history and lore. Your sudden appearance validated all that with a satisfying and dramatic final chapter.

I wish you the best of luck in your in your investigation. I hope you can let us know how it all turns out. You're welcome in our house any time.

Sincerely,

Brian Lindstrom

## Surgery scheduled

justine@fortuity.com

To: bigcahuna@frioloco.com

Once again, Travis, thanks for your encouraging posts. In many ways you are my only lifeline to the world outside this hospital. Without you I would have been alone and embattled, doubting every decision. You have given me the strength to be strong and decisive, and I'm very grateful for that.

Things are finally coming to a head here. The neurosurgeon has arrived from San Antonio and sat down with me to discuss what he plans to do. He sugar-coated nothing. It was going to be a challenging operation. The tumor had "insinuated" itself deeply into the structure of the brain. Success is not guaranteed. It's possible, even likely, that something will go awry. It's possible that there might be only partial success, or that the operation will itself cause problems or even make things worse. He was saying, in effect, to prepare myself for disappointment.

The surgery is scheduled for tomorrow.

Instead of returning to Ethan's room, I went down to the garden. Izzy Green was there. He could tell I was upset and that I was looking for solace. Instead of providing me some, he was more interested in explaining why he was not the kind of Supreme Being everyone expected him to be. He was singing the same sad tune as the surgeon but in a different key.

Basically, it's a matter of being caught up in the tangles of logic he himself had created. There were things he couldn't do, he said, because of the things he had already done. He gave as an example his presence here with his creations. He'd come to check things out. But he didn't work out the details of his return trip—a case of poor planning, he admitted—and now he was stuck in human form. "I'm hoping death is going to set me free, but, who knows, maybe death will be it, and I'll just wink out."

I wasn't expecting that. I said, what about the afterlife, and he goes, "What afterlife? Are you kidding? You people are really something. Talk about wanting your pie and eating it, too."

He said not to worry. He'd made everything so it would run by itself—not forever, because nothing would last that long, not even him. The only thing we wouldn't have, he said, would be all the little improvements he liked to make from time to time. Fine tuning. Like the dinosaurs. They just hadn't turn out. He made big ones and little ones, flying ones and swimming ones, walking ones and crawling ones. All a big mistake. He'd been forced to wipe the slate clean and start over.

"I know what you're thinking," he said. "If he was God, why didn't he get it right the first time? "That's a good question," he said. "More people should ask that question." And now he was going to tell me why. "Because nothing's as you want it to be, including me," he said.

So what was the point? I asked him. What was the point of a God who was basically inept, who couldn't be bothered to plan things out before he set to work, who didn't even have a plan B for doing something risky like taking on human form? But I didn't have the heart to say this, to question his expertise, so I said: "Of anything."

He wagged his finger at me and said something like, "Why's there got to be a point? Ever think there might be more than one point? Or maybe none at all? Look up at the stars. I made those. Billions of them, more than anyone could count. Each one is a point. So what? Maybe the point is I make mistakes. Ever think of that? You people are too much!"

On that querulous note, I'll sign off. It's late. I'm emotionally exhausted, but exhilarated. I need to calm down, get myself ready for tomorrow.

Justine

## End of waiting

justine@fortuity.com

To: bigcahuna@frioloco.com

Travis,

So you have arrived at River Run. Point zero. You must be terribly excited, or maybe terribly apprehensive and worrying that even though you're so close, you might still fall short. Or is that just me projecting my fears onto you? I'm good at that. As for me, it was a total and profound apprehension I was feeling, waiting for Ethan to come out of surgery and knowing that the odds were not in his favor. Somehow I had to prepare for the worst. I just didn't know how to do it.

It was going to be a complex operation and therefore a long wait. I went back to the garden, hoping the gardener would be there, and he was. He smiled and waved as soon as he saw me. I got the feeling he enjoyed my company.

I told him I was thinking about what he said the day before—how the human race was “too much.”

He laughed and goes, “Young lady, I'm Mr. Pussycat.” He said not to believe what people said about him—especially “those angry TV preachers.”

I said, they seem to know all about you.

He waved his hand like he was swatting away a fly. He said he was sorry he didn't create a Hell, because that's where he would like to ship them. Then he says, “I'm gonna tell you something. I don't usually do this, but I could drop dead tomorrow, so what's the point? I like you. Did a pretty good job on you. Don't worry, everything'll be fine.”

“Is that a guarantee?”

He goes, “Sorry, dear, no guarantees. I wish there was.”

There was this awkward silence—just the drone of insects and the disappointment of no guarantees. It was getting dark. The sun was setting—this red fireball blazing through the trees. A kind of biblical omen, I thought. I heard my name called. I turned around and saw the nurse in the doorway, waving for me to come. Izzy Green held out his hand. I took it, standing there, saying nothing, my hand in his, feeling its warmth. It felt like the heat of the afternoon sun, traveling up my arm and filling my body with a frankly erotic desire! We both knew this would be it.

“Pleasure meeting you,” he said.

I said the pleasure was mine and hoped that maybe we'd see each other again another time.

He said, “A lot of people say that but they never do.”

. . . later, got to run.

Justine

## No subject

justine@fortuity.com

To: bigcahuna@frioloco.com

Travis,

Had to talk to the nurse. I'll finish up now.

On a whim and a sudden impulse, I said to the gardener, "Look, you wouldn't happen to know the meaning of life, would you?" Never hurts to ask.

He laughs and says, "Hey, if I don't know it, who does?"

So would he mind telling me? Or was is something we were not supposed to know? He said he could tell me, but it would just sound stupid, and I'd be disappointed. It was much better, he said, if I figured it out for myself. He looked at me and could see that I was already disappointed. "Okay," he goes, "A little hint."

What he said was just a few words, but at that moment my name was announced over the public address system. I was requested to return immediately to my brother's room. Izzy Green gave me a crooked-tooth grin, then he winked.

I'd missed what he said, but I was in a rush to get back, or maybe I lacked the courage to ask him to repeat himself. So I didn't. Meanwhile, I'm wondering if he planned it that way, or did I really not want to know? Or, realistically, did any part of our conversation really mean anything? Just him pretending to be God, and me playing along. In the dark corridor, as we headed to Ethan's room, the nurse said to me, "Did you enjoy your conversation with God?"

I said I had very much.

"He's a character," she said.

I said, "You mean he's not God?"

"I mean he's a character," she said. "I can't seem to make up my mind if he's God or not."

We got to the room. The surgeon was there next to the bed where my brother was lying. His head was all bandaged up. He was unconscious, wires and tubes everywhere "It's me, Justine," I said and squeezed his hand. Ethan squeezed back.

"Your brother is going to be all right," the surgeon said. "He's going to be fine. He's a very lucky man."

Without even thinking, I said, "Thank God for that!"

Justine

## Still there?

justine@fortuity.com

To: bigcahuna@frioloco.com

Hey, Travis, what's up? I haven't heard from you. Is everything okay? Getting a bit worried. I'm still in El Paso. Will be here for several more days. Then it's back to Marfa. After that—who knows. Any ideas?

Justine