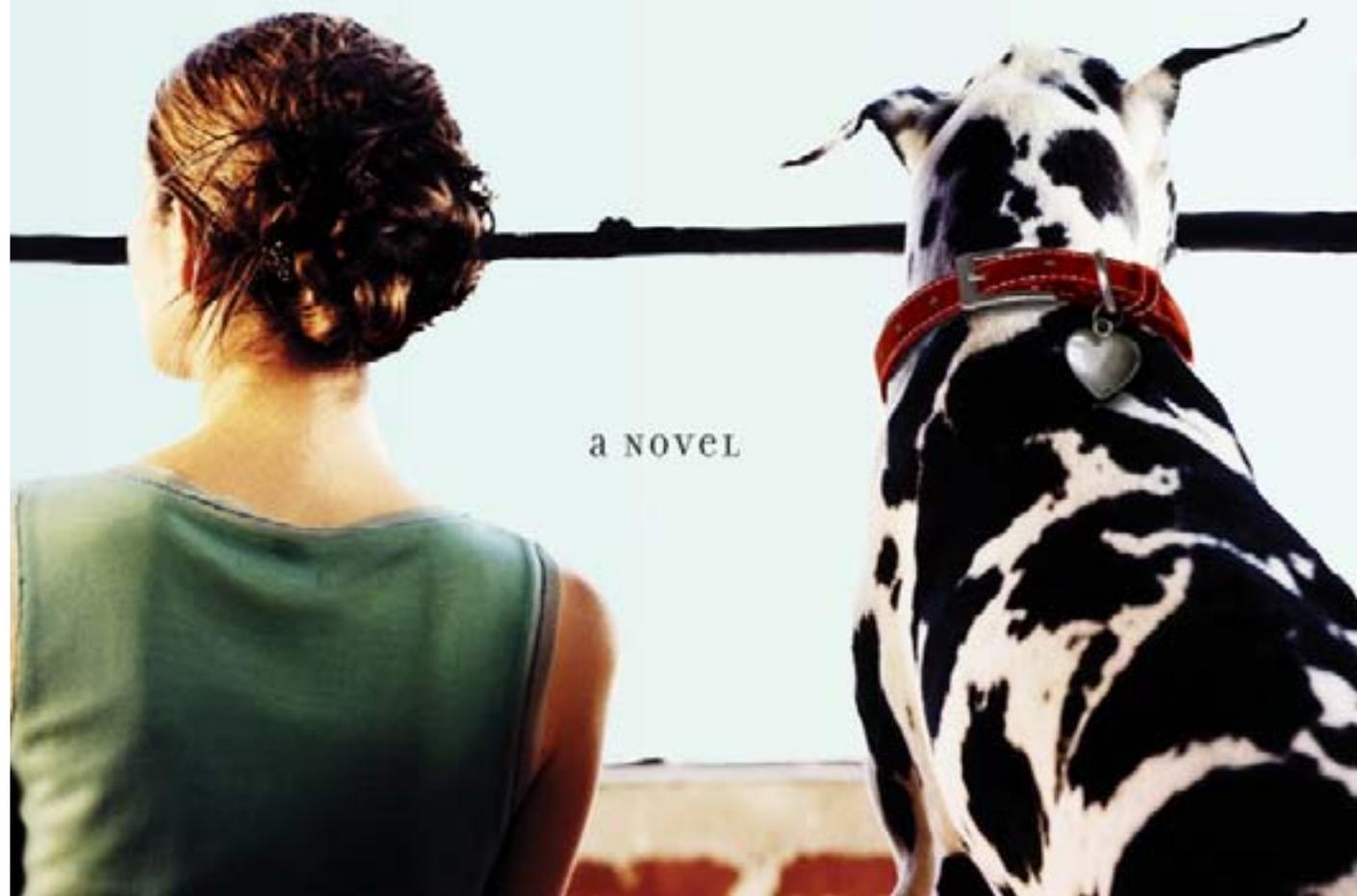


THE BOY NEXT DOOR

"A fast, addictive read."—*Fort Worth Star-Telegram*

MEG CABOT

#1 *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR



a NOVEL

To: Mel Fuller <melissa.fuller@thenyjournal.com>
From: Human Resources <human.resources@thenyjournal.com>
Subject: Tardiness

Dear Melissa Fuller,

This is an automated message from the Human Resources Division of the New York Journal, New York City's leading photo-newspaper. Please be aware that according to your supervisor, managing editor George Sanchez, your workday here at the Journal begins promptly at 9AM, making you 68 minutes tardy today. This is your 37th tardy exceeding twenty minutes so far this year, Melissa Fuller.

We in the Human Resources Division are not "out to get" tardy employees, as was mentioned in last week's unfairly worded employee newsletter. Tardiness is a serious and expensive issue facing employers all over America. Employees often make light of tardiness, but routine lateness can often be a symptom of a more serious issue, such as

alcoholism

- drug addiction
- gambling addiction
- abusive domestic partner
- sleep disorders
- clinical depression

and any number of other conditions. If you are suffering from any of the above, please do not hesitate to contact your Human Resources Representative, Amy Jenkins. Your Human Resources Representative will be only too happy to enroll you in the New York Journal's Staff Assistance Program, where you will be paired with a mental health professional who will work to help you achieve your full potential.

Melissa Fuller, we here at the New York Journal are a team. We win as a team, and lose as one, as well. Melissa Fuller, don't you want to be on a winning team? So please do your part to see that you arrive at work on time from now on!

Sincerely,

The Human Resources Division

The New York Journal

Please note that any future tardies may result in suspension or dismissal.

To: Mel Fuller <melissa.fuller@thenyjournal.com>

From: Nadine Wilcock <nadine.wilcock@thenyjournal.com>

Subject: You are in trouble

Mel, where were you? I saw that Amy Jenkins from Human Resources skulking around your cubicle. I think you're in for another one of those tardy notices. What is this, your 50th?

You better have a good excuse this time, because George was saying a little while ago that gossip columnists are a dime a dozen, and that he could get Liz Smith over here in a second to replace you if he wanted to. I think he was joking. It was hard to tell because the Coke machine is broken, and he hadn't had his morning Mountain Dew yet.

By the way, did something happen last night between you and Aaron? He's been playing Wagner in his cubicle again. You know how this bugs

George. Did you two have another fight?
Are we doing lunch later or what?

Nad :-)

To: Mel Fuller <melissa.fuller@thenyjournal.com>
From: Aaron Spender <aaron.spender@
thenyjournal.com>
Subject: Last night

Where are you, Mel? Are you going to be completely childish about this and not come into the office until you're sure I've left for the day? Is that it?

Can't we sit down and discuss this like adults?

Aaron Spender
Senior Correspondent
New York Journal

To: Mel Fuller <melissa.fuller@thenyjournal.com>

From: Dolly Vargas <dolly.vargas@thenyjournal.com>

Subject: Aaron Spender

Melissa--

Don't get the wrong idea, darling, I **WASN'T** spying on you, but a girl would have to be **BLIND** not to have noticed how you brained Aaron Spender with your bag last night at Pastis. You probably didn't even notice me, I was at the bar, and I looked around because I thought I heard your name, of all things--weren't you supposed to be covering the Prada show? --and then **BOOM!** Altoids and Maybelline all over the place.

Darling, it was precious.

You really have excellent aim, you know. But I highly doubt Kate Spade meant that adorable little clutch to be used as a projectile. I'm sure she'd have made the clasp stronger if she'd only known

women were going to be backhanding the thing around like a volleyball.

Seriously, darling, I just need to know: Is it all over between you and Aaron? Because I never thought you were right for each other. I mean, the man was in the running for a Pulitzer, for God's sake! Although if you ask me, anyone could have written that story about that little Ethiopian boy. I found it perfectly maudlin. That part about his sister selling her body to provide him with rice...please. Too Dickensian.

So you aren't going to be difficult about this, are you? Because I've got an invite to Steven's place in the Hamptons, and I was thinking of inviting Aaron to mix Cosmos for me. But I won't if you're going to go Joan Collins on me.

P.S. You really should have called if you weren't going to come in today, darling. I think you're in trouble. I saw that little troll-like person (Amy

something?) from Human Resources sniffing around your desk earlier.

Dolly XXXOOO

To: Mel Fuller <melissa.fuller@thenyjournal.com>
From: George Sanchez <george.sanchez@thenyjournal.com>
Subject: Where the hell were you?

Where the hell are you? You appear to be under the mistaken impression that comp days don't have to be pre-arranged with your employer.

This is not exactly convincing me that you are columnist material. More like copy-edit material, Fuller.

G.

To: Mel Fuller <melissa.fuller@thenyjournal.com>
From: Aaron Spender <aaron.spender@

thenyjournal.com>

Subject: Last night

This is really beneath you, Melissa. I mean, for God's sake, Barbara and I were in a war zone together. Anti-aircraft fire was exploding all around us. We thought we'd be captured by rebel forces at any moment. Can't you understand that?

It meant nothing to me, Melissa, I swear it.

My God, I should never have told you. I thought you could be mature about this. But to pull a disappearing act like this....

Well, I'd never have expected it from a woman like you, that's all I have to say.

Aaron Spender

Senior Correspondent

New York Journal

To: Mel Fuller <melissa.fuller@thenyjournal.com>
From: Nadine Wilcock <nadine.wilcock@thenyjournal.com>
Subject: This isn't funny

Girl, where are you? I'm really starting to get worried. Why haven't you called me, at the very least? I hope you didn't get hit by a bus, or something. But I suppose if you did, they'd call us. Assuming you had your press pass with you, that is.

All right, I'm not really worried that you're dead. I'm really worried you're going to get fired, and I'm going to have to eat lunch with Dolly again. I was forced to go to Burger Heaven with her since you're MIA, and it nearly killed me. The woman had a salad with no dressing. Do you get where I'm coming from here? NO DRESSING.

And then she felt compelled to comment on every single thing I put in my mouth. "Do you know how many grams of fat are in that fry?" "A good

substitute for mayonnaise, you know, Nadine, is low-fat yogurt.”

I'd like to tell her what she can do with her low-fat yogurt.

By the way, I think you should know that Spender's going around saying you're doing this because of whatever went down between the two of you the other night.

If that doesn't get you in here, and pronto, I don't know what will.

Nad :-)

To: George Sanchez <george.sanchez@thenyjournal.com>

From: Mel Fuller <melissa.fuller@thenyjournal.com>

Subject: Where the hell I was

Since it is apparently so important to you and Amy Jenkins that your employees account fully for every moment they spend away from the office, I will provide you with a detailed summary of my whereabouts while I was unavoidably detained.

Ready? Got your Mountain Dew? I hear the machine down in the art department is fully operational.

Mel's Morning:

7:15--Alarm rings. Hit snooze button.

7:20--Alarm rings. Hit snooze button.

7:25--Alarm rings. Hit snooze button.

7:26--Wake to sound of neighbor's dog barking.

Turn off alarm.

7:27--Stagger to bathroom. Perform morning ablutions.

7:55--Stagger to kitchen. Ingest nourishment in form of Nutrigrain bar and Tuesday night's take-out kung pao.

7:56-- Neighbor's dog still barking.

7:57-- Blow dry hair.

8:10-- Check New York One for weather.

8:11-- Neighbor's dog still barking.

8:12-- Attempt to find something to wear from assorted clothes crammed into studio apartment's single, refrigerator-sized closet.

8:30-- Give up. Pull on black rayon skirt, black rayon shirt, black sling-back flats.

8:35-- Shoulder black bag. Look for keys.

8:40-- Find keys in bag. Leave apartment.

8:41-- Notice that Mrs. Friedlander's copy of the New York Chronicle (yes, George, my next door neighbor subscribes to our biggest rival: don't you agree with me now that we really ought to do something to draw more senior readers?) is still lying on the floor in front of her apartment door. She is normally up at six to walk her dog and takes her paper in then.

8:42-- Notice that Mrs. Friedlander's dog is still barking. Knock on door to make sure everything is all right (some of us New Yorkers actually care about our neighbors, George. You wouldn't know

that, of course, since stories about people who actually care for others in their community don't make for very good copy. Stories in the Journal, I've noticed, tend to gravitate towards neighbors who shoot at, not borrow cups of sugar from, one another).

8:45-- After repeated knocks, Mrs. Friedlander still does not come to door. Paco, her Great Dane, however, barks with renewed vigor.

8:46-- Try handle to Mrs. Friedlander's apartment door. It is, oddly enough, unlocked. Let myself inside.

8:47-- Am greeted by Great Dane and two Siamese cats. No sign of Mrs. Friedlander.

8:48-- Find Mrs. Friedlander facedown on living room carpet.

Okay, George? Get it, George? The woman was **FACEDOWN** on her living room carpet! What was I supposed to do, George? Huh? Call Amy Jenkins down in Human Resources?

No, George. That life-saving class you made us all take paid off, see? I was able to tell that not only did Mrs. Friedlander have a pulse, she was also breathing. So I called 911 and waited with her until the ambulance came.

With the ambulance, George, came some cops. And guess what the cops said, George? They said it looked to them as if Mrs. Friedlander had been struck. From behind, George. Some creep whacked that old lady on the back of the head!

Can you believe it? Who would do that to an eighty-year-old woman?

Anyway, I wanted to go with her in the ambulance, but there was the little problem of Paco. Or should I say the big problem of Paco. Paco is Mrs. Friedlander's Great Dane, George. He weighs a hundred and twenty-nine pounds, George, which is more than me.

And he needed to go out. Badly.

So after I took him out, I fed him and watered him and did the same to Tweedle-Dum and Mr. Peepers, her Siamese cats (Tweedle-Dee sadly expired last year). While I was doing this, the cops were checking her door for signs of forced entry. But there were none, George.

Do you know what this means? It means she probably knew her attacker, George. She probably let him in of her own volition!

Even more bizarrely, there were two hundred and seventy-six dollars in cash in her purse that had been left untouched. Ditto her jewelry, George. This was no robbery.

George, there is a story here. That's all I'm telling you. Something is wrong. Very wrong.

When I finally did get to the hospital, I was

informed that Mrs. Friedlander was in surgery. Doctors were frantically trying to relieve the pressure on her brain from a giant blood clot that had formed beneath her skull! What was I supposed to do, George? Leave? The cops couldn't get in touch with anybody from her family. I'm all she has, George.

Twelve hours. Twelve hours it took them. I had to go to her apartment to walk Paco twice before the surgery was even finished. And when it was, the doctors came out and told me it had only been partially successful. Mrs. Friedlander is in a coma, George! She may never come out of it.

And until she does, guess who's stuck taking care of Paco, Tweedle-Dum, and Mr. Peepers?

Go on. Guess, George.

I'm not trying to get sympathy here. I know. I should have called. But work was not necessarily foremost in my mind at the time, George.

But listen, now that I'm finally here what would you think about letting me write up a little something about what happened? You know, we could hit it from the Be Careful Who You Let in to Your Apartment angle. The cops are still looking for Mrs. Friedlander's closest relative--her nephew, I think--but when they find him, I could interview him. You know the woman really was a wonder. At eighty, she still goes to the gym three times a week, and last month, she flew to Helsinki for a performance of *The Rings*. Seriously. Her husband was Henry Friedlander, of the Friedlander twistie fortune. You know, those twist-ties that go on garbage bags? She's worth six or seven million at least.

Come on, George. Let me give it a try. You can't keep me doing gossip for Page Ten forever.

Mel

To: Mel Fuller <melissa.fuller@thenyjournal.com>
From: George Sanchez <george.sanchez@thenyjournal.com>
Subject: You can't keep me doing gossip for Page Ten forever

Yes, I can.

And do you know why? Because I am the managing editor of this newspaper, and I can do whatever I want.

Besides, Fuller, we need you on Page Ten.

Would you like to know why we need you on Page Ten? Because the fact is, Fuller, you care. You care about Winona Ryder's dating status. You care that Harrison Ford's had a chemical peel .You care about Courtney Love's breasts, and whether or not they are silicone, and did they or did they not explode last month when she was in Aspen.

Admit it, Fuller. You care.

The other thing ain't a story, Fuller. Old ladies get bonked on the head for their Social Security checks every day.

It's called a telephone. Next time, call.

Capice? Capice.

Now get me the copy on the Prada opening.

G.

To: George Sanchez <george.sanchez@thenyjournal.com>

From: Mel Fuller <melissa.fuller@thenyjournal.com>

Subject: I do not care about Courtney Love's breasts....

...and you'll be sorry for not letting me run with the

Friedlander story, George. I'm telling you, there's something there. I can smell it.

And by the way, Harrison would NEVER get a chemical peel.

Mel

PS And who doesn't care about Winona Ryder's love life? Look how cute she is. Don't you want her to be happy, George?

PPS And they didn't explode, they leaked. Because of the altitude, George. God, don't you even READ my column?????

To: Human Resources <human.resources@thenyjournal.com>

From: Mel Fuller <melissa.fuller@thenyjournal.com>

Subject: My Tardiness

Dear Human Resources,

What can I say? You caught me. I guess my

- alcoholism
- drug addiction
- gambling addiction
- abusive domestic partner
- sleep disorders
- clinical depression

and any number of other conditions have finally caused me to hit bottom. Please enroll me in the Staff Assistance Program right away! If you could hook me up with a shrink who looks like Brendan Frasier, and preferably conducts his therapy session with his shirt off, I'd appreciate it.

Because the primary condition from which I am suffering is that I'm a twenty-seven-year-old woman living in New York City, and I cannot find a decent guy. Just one guy, who won't cheat on me,

doesn't live with his mother, and isn't turning to the Arts section of the Chronicle first thing Sunday morning, if you know what I mean. Is that asking so much????

See if your Staff Assistance Program can handle that.

Mel Fuller
Page Ten Columnist
NY Journal

To: Aaron Spender <aaron.spender@thenyjournal.com>

From: Mel Fuller <melissa.fuller@thenyjournal.com>

Subject: Can't we discuss this like adults?

There's nothing to discuss. Really, Aaron, I'm sorry for throwing my bag at you. It was a childish outburst that I deeply regret.

And I don't want you to think that the reason we're breaking up has anything to do with Barbara. Really, Aaron, we were over a long time before you ever told me about Barbara. Let's face it, Aaron, we're just too different: You like Stephen Hawking. I like Stephen King.

You know it never would have worked.

Mel

To: Dolly Vargas <dolly.vargas@thenyjournal.com>

From: Mel Fuller <melissa.fuller@thenyjournal.com>

Subject: Aaron Spender

I did not throw my bag. It slipped out of my hand when I was reaching for my drink, and accidentally flew through the air and hit Aaron in the eye.

And if you want him, Dolly, you can have him.

Mel

To: Nadine Wilcock <nadine.wilcock@thenyjournal.com>

From: Mel Fuller <melissa.fuller@thenyjournal.com>

Subject: Where I was

Okay, okay, I should have called. The whole thing was just a nightmare. But that's not what's important. This, you're never going to believe:

Aaron cheated on me in Chechnya.

That's right. And you'll never guess who with. Seriously. Try to guess. You never will.

All right, I'll tell you: Barbara Bellerieve.

Uh-huh. You read that correctly: Barbara Bellerieve, respected senior ABC news correspondent, most

recently host of the television news magazine TwentyFourSeven, and voted one of People Magazine's 50 Most Beautiful people last month.

Can you believe she slept with AARON????I mean, she could have George Clooney, for God's sake. What would she want with AARON????

Not that I didn't suspect. I always thought those stories he kept emailing in during that month he was on assignment there were way too smug.

You know how I found out? Do you? He TOLD me. He felt he was "ready to reach the next level of intimacy" with me (three guesses as to what level THAT is) and that in order to do so, he felt he had to "make a clean breast" of it. He says ever since it happened, he's been "wracked with guilt" and that "none of it meant anything."

God, what a putz. I can't believe I wasted three months of my life on him.

Are there no decent men out there? I mean, besides Tony. I swear, Nadine, your boyfriend is the last good man on earth. The last one! You hang on to him, and don't let go, because I'm telling you, it's a jungle out there.

Mel

PS Can't go to lunch today, I have to go home and walk my neighbor's dog.

PPS Don't ask: It's a long story.

To: Mel Fuller <melissa.fuller@thenyjournal.com>

From: Nadine Wilcock <nadine.wilcock@thenyjournal.com>

Subject: That Jerk

Look, the guy did you a favor. I mean, be honest, Mel. Did you really picture a future for the two of you? I mean, he smokes a PIPE, for crying out loud. And what's with all that classical music? Who

does he think he is, anyway? Harold Bloom?

No. He's a reporter, just like the rest of us. He's not out there writing fine literature. So what's with that bust of William Shakespeare he keeps on top of his monitor?

The man is a big phony, and you know it, Mel. That's why, in spite of the fact you two went out for three months, you never slept with him.

Remember?

Nad ;-)

To: Nadine Wilcock <nadine.wilcock@thenyjournal.com>

From: Mel Fuller <melissa.fuller@thenyjournal.com>

Subject: That Jerk

I never slept with him because of that goatee. How was I supposed to sleep with someone who looks like Robin Hood?

He didn't want me enough even to shave.

What's wrong with me, Nad? Am I really not worth shaving for?

Mel

To: Mel Fuller <melissa.fuller@thenyjournal.com>
From: Nadine Wilcock <nadine.wilcock@thenyjournal.com>
Subject: That Jerk

Give up the pity quest, Mel. You know you're gorgeous. The man is obviously suffering from a psychiatric disorder. We should sic Amy Jenkins on him.

Where are we going for lunch today? And do NOT

say Burger Heaven. If I don't get down to a size 12 in two months, the wedding's off. Every girl in my family has worn my mother's dress to her wedding. I am not going to be the first Wilcock to schlep out to Klinefeld's.

Nad :)

To: Nadine Wilcock <nadine.wilcock@thenyjournal.com>

From: Mel Fuller <melissa.fuller@thenyjournal.com>

Subject: Lunch

Nadine, you know I can't go to lunch. I have to go home and walk Mrs. Friedlander's dog.

Did you hear the latest? Jared Leto and Winona.

I'm not kidding.

That girl has all the luck.

And the men.

Mel

To: Mel Fuller <melissa.fuller@thenyjournal.com>
cc: Nadine Wilcock <nadine.wilcock@thenyjournal.com>
From: Tim Grabowski <timothy.grabowski@thenyjournal.com>
Subject: CONFIDENTIAL

All right, girls, hold on to your hats. I got the information you requested, the salary increases for next year. It wasn't easy.

If you tell anybody where you got this information, I will accuse you both of having gambling addictions, and you'll be yanked into the Staff Assistance Program before either of you can whistle Dixie.

Here goes:

Name: Position: Salary:

Peter Hargrave Editor in Chief

\$120,000

George Sanchez Managing Editor

\$85,000

Dolly Vargas Style Editor

\$75,000

Aaron Spender Chief Correspondent

\$75,000

Nadine Wilcock Food Critic

\$45,000

Melissa Fuller Page Ten Columnist

\$45,000

Amy Jenkins Human Resources Admin.

\$45,000

Read it and weep, girls.

Timothy Grabowski
Computer Programmer
NY Journal

To: Mel Fuller <melissa.fuller@thenyjournal.com>
From: Nadine Wilcock <nadine.wilcock@
thenyjournal.com>
Subject: CONFIDENTIAL

I can't believe Amy Jenkins makes as much as we do. What does SHE do? Sits around and listens to people whine all day about their dental plan.

Please.

I'm surprised about Dolly. I'd have thought she made more. I mean, how does she keep herself in Hermes scarves on a mere \$75,000 a year?

Nad ;-)

To: Nadine Wilcock <nadine.wilcock@
thenyjournal.com>

From: Mel Fuller <melissa.fuller@thenyjournal.
com>

Subject: CONFIDENTIAL

Are you kidding? Dolly comes from money. Haven't you ever heard her talk about how she used to summer in Newport?

I was going to ask Aaron out for an I-forgive-you drink after work--NOT to get back together with him, just so he'll stop with the Wagner already-- but now that I see how much more he makes than me, I can't even bear to look at him. I KNOW I'm a better writer than he is. So what's he getting \$75,000/yr, while I'm stuck at \$45, doing fashion shows and movie premieres?

Mel

To: Mel Fuller <melissa.fuller@thenyjournal.com>
From: Nadine Wilcock <nadine.wilcock@thenyjournal.com>
Subject: CONFIDENTIAL

Um, because you're good at them? Fashion shows and movie premieres, I mean. I loved the bit you did on Monaco's Prince Albert yesterday. Pure genius. Though I'm not sure he's right for Winona.

Nad ;-)

PS I have to do that new Peking duck place on Mott. Come with me. We'll grab lunch.

To: Nadine Wilcock <nadine.wilcock@thenyjournal.com>
From: Mel Fuller <melissa.fuller@thenyjournal.com>
Subject: Lunch

I can't. You know I can't. I've got to walk Paco.

Mel

To: Mel Fuller <melissa.fuller@thenyjournal.com>
From: Nadine Wilcock <nadine.wilcock@thenyjournal.com>
Subject: Lunch and That Dog

How long is this going to go on? You and that dog, I mean? I can't be going out to eat by myself every day. Who's going to keep me from ordering the double patty cheddar met?

Nad;-)

To: Nadine Wilcock <nadine.wilcock@thenyjournal.com>
From: Mel Fuller <melissa.fuller@thenyjournal.com>
Subject: Lunch and the Dog

What am I supposed to do, Nadine? Let the poor thing sit in the apartment all day until he bursts?

I know you aren't a dog person, but have some compassion. It's only until Mrs. Friedlander gets better.

Mel

PS This just in: Pam Anderson and Tommy Lee? On again. I swear it. His publicist just called. Apparently, she's dumped the surfer dude.

I'm just glad for the kids, you know? Because that's what it's all about.

To: Mel Fuller <melissa.fuller@thenyjournal.com>

From: Nadine Wilcock <nadine.wilcock@thenyjournal.com>

Subject: It's only until Mrs. Friedlander gets better

And when is THAT going to be? Earth to Mel. Come in Mel. The woman is in a COMA. Okay? She is COMATOSE. I think some alternative arrangements for the woman's pets need to be

made. You are a DOORMAT. A COMATOSE woman is using you as a DOORMAT.

The woman has to have some relatives, Mel. FIND THEM.

Besides, people shouldn't keep Great Danes in the city. It's cruel.

Nad :-)

PS You are the only person I know who still cares about Pamela and Tommy Lee patching things up. Give it up, girl.

To: Mel Fuller <melissa.fuller@thenyjjournal.com>

From: Don and Beverly Fuller <DonBev@dnr.com>

Subject: Debbie Phillips

Melissa, honey, it's Mom. Look, your father and I got the Email! Isn't it great? Now I can write to you, and maybe you'll answer for a change!

Just kidding, sweetheart.

Anyway, Daddy and I thought you'd want to know that little Debbie Phillips--you remember Debbie, don't you? Dr. Phillips's little girl? He was your dentist. And wasn't Debbie Homecoming Queen your senior year in high school? --Anyway, Debbie's just got married! Yes! The announcement was in the paper.

And do you know what, Melissa? The Duane County Register is on the line now. What? Oh, Daddy says it's ONLINE, not on the line. Well, whatever. I get so confused.

Anyway, Debbie's announcement is ONLINE, so I am sending it to you, as what they call an attachment. I hope you enjoy it, dear. She's marrying a doctor from Westchester! Well, we always knew she'd do well for herself. All that lovely blonde hair. And look, she graduated *summa cum laude* from Princeton! Then she went to law school.

So impressive.

Not that there's anything wrong with being a reporter. Reporters are just as important as lawyers! And Lord knows, we all need to read some nice gossip now and then. Why, did you hear about Ted Turner and Martha Stewart? You could have knocked me over with a feather.

Well, enjoy! And you make sure you lock your door at night. Daddy and I worry about you, living there in that big city all alone.

Bye for now--

Mommy

Attachment:

(Glam photo of wedding couple)

Deborah Marie Phillips, the daughter of Dr. and

Mrs. Reed Andrew Phillips of Lansing, IL, was married last week to Michael Bourke, the son of Dr. and Mrs. Reginald Bourke of Chapaqua, NY. The Rev. James Smith performed the ceremony at the Roman Catholic Church of Saint Anthony in Lansing.

Ms. Phillips, 26, is an associate at Schuler, Higgins, and Brandt, the international law firm based in New York. She received a bachelor's degree from Princeton, from which she graduated *summa cum laude*, and a law degree from Harvard. Her father is a dentist and oral surgeon in Lansing, operating the Phillips Dental Practice.

Mr. Bourke, 31, received a bachelor's degree from Yale and an MBA from Columbia University. He is an associate at the investment banking group of Lehman Brothers. His father, now retired, was the president of Bourke & Associates, a private investment firm.

After a honeymoon trip to Thailand, the couple will reside in Chapaqua.

To: Mel Fuller <melissa.fuller@thenyjournal.com>

From: Dolly Vargas <dolly.vargas@thenyjournal.com>

Subject: Mothers

Darling, when I heard all that anguished shrieking from your cubicle just now I thought at the very least Tom Cruise had finally come out of the closet. But Nadine tells me it's just because you received an email from your mother.

How well I understand. And I am so glad my mother is far too drunk ever to learn to operate a keyboard. I highly suggest you send your doting parents a case of Campari and have done with it. Trust me, it's the only way to shut them up on the dreaded subject of "M." As in, "Why aren't you M yet? All your friends are M. You aren't even trying to get M. Don't you want me to see my

grandchildren before I die?”

As if I would EVER give birth. I suppose a well-mannered little six year old would be all right, but they simply don't COME that way. You have to TRAIN them.

Too tiresome. I can understand your anguish.

Dolly XXXOOO

PS Did you notice Aaron shaved? It's a pity. I never realized what a weak chin he has.

To: Mel Fuller <melissa.fuller@thenyjournal.com>

From: Amy Jenkins<amy.jenkins@thenyjournal.com>

Subject: Staff Assistance Program

Dear Ms. Fuller,

You might think it amusing to make light of the Human Resources Department's Staff Assistance Program, but I can assure you that we have helped many of your co-workers through dark and difficult times. Through counseling and therapy, they have all gone on to lead meaningful, profitable lives. I find it disheartening that you would belittle a program that has done so much for so many.

Please note that a copy of your latest email has been placed in your personnel file, and will be available to your supervisor during your next performance review.

Amy Jenkins
Human Resources Administrator
The New York Journal

To: Amy Jenkins <amy.jenkins@thenyjournal.com>
From: Mel Fuller <melissa.fuller@thenyjournal.com>

Subject: Staff Assistance Program

Dear Ms. Jenkins,

What I find disheartening is the fact that I reached out to you and all the other Human Resource administrators, and instead of being given the aid I so desperately need, I was brutally rebuffed. Are you saying that my chronic status as a single woman is not worthy of assistance? Do I have to tell you how demoralizing it is to buy Lean Cuisines Fiesta Meals For One every night at the Food Emporium? What about having to order my pizza by the slice? Do you think that isn't whittling away at my self-esteem, slice by disheartening slice?

And what about salad? Do you have any idea how many pounds of lettuce I have ingested in an effort to maintain my size 6 figure, so that I might entice a man? Even though it goes against every fiber of my feminist being to cater to the misogynistic more that exists in western culture that insists that

attractiveness is parallel to one's waist-size?

If you are trying to say that being a single woman in New York City is not a disability, then I respectfully submit that you visit a Manhattan deli on a Saturday night. Who do you see crowded around the salad bar?

That's right. The single girls.

Face reality, Amy. It's a jungle out there. It's kill or be killed. I am merely suggesting that you, as a mental health expert, accept that truth, and move on.

Melissa Fuller
Page Ten Columnist
The New York Journal

To: Mel Fuller <melissa.fuller@thenyjournal.com>
From: George Sanchez <george.sanchez@thenyjournal.com>

Subject: Cut it out

Stop teasing Amy Jenkins down in Human Resources. You know she doesn't have any sense of humor.

If you have so much free time, come to me. I'll give you plenty to do. The obit guy just quit.

G.

To: Mel Fuller <melissa.fuller@thenyjournal.com>
From: Aaron Spender <aaron.spender@thenyjournal.com>
Subject: Forgive Me

I don't know where to begin. First of all, I can't stand this. You ask what "this" is.

I'll tell you: "this" is sitting here all day, seeing you there in your cubicle, knowing that you said never want to speak to me again.

“This” is watching you walk towards me, thinking you might have changed your mind, only to have you pass by without so much as even glancing in my direction.

“This” is knowing that you’ll walk out of here at the end of the day, that I will have no idea where you will be, what you will do, and that an abyss of time will elapse before you walk back in here the next day.

“This”--or should I say, “these?”--are the countless, uncountable hours during which my mind leaves me, and pursues you out the door, following you in an imaginative journey that leads nowhere, right back where I started, sitting here thinking about “this.”

Aaron Spender
Senior Correspondent
The New York Journal

To: Aaron Spender <aaron.spender@thenyjournal.com>

From: Mel Fuller <melissa.fuller@thenyjournal.com>

Subject: "This"

That was really moving, Aaron. Have you ever considered writing fiction for a living?

Seriously. I think you've got real talent.

Mel