

MeatBalls

Fridge, oven, desk, bed, doorpost, car door, shelves, walls, traffic signs, people. There's nothing she doesn't bump into. With her arm, with her head, with her pinky toe. Around the clock, twenty-four hours a day. "Ouch!" "Ow!" "God dammit!"

And she, of all people, was the woman I fell in love with. What a terrible mistake.

Ever since I've met her, I just get more and more irritable. She walks around all day long, bumping into things, and I walk around all day long, getting irritated. If only she wasn't such a klutz, I would have been made in the shade. I would have been happy. But each time I come close, she bumps into something, and I get depressed.

But if you didn't bump into everything, you wouldn't be you.

This book is dedicated to you, Alona, love of my life.

In the pursuit of happiness, I was sentenced to slavery.

I've been to every continent, wakened to every kind of sunrise, dipped in every ocean. I've gone to bed alone and woken up alone and eaten in front of a mirror and danced alone and laughed at myself. Alone. Just me, myself, and I. I've surfed with Australian Annies, started bonfires with German Francescas, gotten drunk with American Christinas, gotten high with Japanese Sachikos, made Brazilian Arancias laugh. I've climbed, sailed, flown, dove, parachuted, surfed, sucked, opened, plowed. In daylight and moonlight, on the beach and in the desert. On ecstasy, hash, weed, alcohol, mushrooms, and all of the above, combined. In thickets, forests, airplanes, swimming pools, buses, caves, ravines, tents, suites. On the floor, on the table, behind the bushes, and in front of people. On the street, in alleyways, in barns, in pigsties, in dressing rooms, and in the chicken coops of Kibbutz Mishmar Hazorea. Inside, outside, in the mouth, in the ass, in the ear, on the stomach, on the face. With yelling, with moaning, with silence, with swearing, with slapping. At raves, in retirement homes, with two and three and eight at a time, with a buddy or two or four. Sandwiched or not sandwiched. What didn't I do? What didn't I do? I did everything and had everything. Except love.

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I eat my breakfast calmly. Darius is in the living room, making seating arrangement, exploding with stress. I pick up the cottage cheese and look at the expiration date, then put it down, pick it up, and look at the date again.

I can't believe it. The expiration date on the cottage cheese is two days after my wedding. Yes, this cottage cheese will expire two days after I get married. It's happening, god damn it. By the time this cottage cheese goes bad I'll have been married for two days. Are people in the dairy industry aware of this?

Hadar walks into the kitchen to make herself some coffee, agitated as usual.

"Babe, you're not going to believe this," I tell her. "The wedding is so soon that the expiration date on this cottage cheese is for two days *afterwards*."

"What brand is it? Tnuva?"

"Yes, Tnuva. What difference does it make?"

"When I bought Strauss cottage cheese you complained that you only like Tnuva. It made a difference then."

“I was just trying to demonstrate how soon it is.”

“And you needed cottage cheese to realize that?”

“No, I didn’t need cottage cheese. I’m just sharing this with you. This cottage cheese is going to expire two days after our wedding, and I thought that was cool.”

“Who cares about the expiration date on the cottage cheese right now? I’m in the middle of this seating arrangement craziness here, and you’re messing around with the cottage cheese?”

“Messing around with the cottage cheese? Shame on you. I spend all day long struggling with this series, writing, worrying, trying to promote the radiator business, and you tell me I’m messing around with the cottage cheese?”

“Then write already! Some writers make a great living, and you’re no less talented than they are. Just let go of this radiator importing nonsense. It’s always something with you. Since when are you a businessman?”

“You know what, you... you...”

“What about me? What am I, huh? What am I? Do you even know what I am, who I am? Do you even see me? You don’t see me, you only see yourself. It’s all you, you, you.”

“I don’t see you? I don’t see you?! Where is this even coming from? Do you see *me*? What do I keep asking you? What have I ever asked you in all this time? To take care of me and the place a little.”

“I can’t handle you right now, you moron. You’re such a nag. You don’t understand anything. The place is clean and tidy and you can’t even see it. You can only see what you don’t need to see. If you’re so unhappy here, I hear your old bedroom at your mom’s house is still available.”

“I can’t believe this is how you talk to me two days before our wedding. What are you going to be like once we’re married?”

“Like after the cottage cheese expires. Happy?”

Silence. Both sides are experiencing shell shock. Each side needs a moment to recover. A ceasefire. Stunned and mentally exhausted, they go about their own business for a few minutes, until she gets her second wind.

“What are you doing right now, daydreaming? Have you called Sharon yet to find out if the lounge cushions for the relaxation corner are ready?”

“I don’t know. I can’t handle this, I can’t handle you. I’m exhausted, I’m dying. It’s too much, I can’t do it.” I’m talking to myself, to her, to god, to anyone who will listen. I’m just letting all my emotions out into the world, no filter.

“What? What are you saying?” She comes threateningly close.

“I’m saying it’s too much.”

“It’s too much? What’s too much?”

“You’re too much.”

“I’m too much? I’m too much?! You asshole.”

“Yes, you’re too much.”

“Two days before our wedding you’re telling me I’m too much? What kind of a husband are you?”

“I’m not a husband yet,” I say, totally unaware of the repercussions of these words. All the attempts to control myself, all the giving, the compromises, all the efforts I’ve made so far to keep this relationship alive, are gone. I’m just sick of it. Sick of it.

“I can’t believe you. Do you want to call off the wedding?”

“I don’t know,” I say. “I just don’t know anymore.”

“You want to call off the wedding?” she asks again, and I detect a hint of hope in her voice.

“Do... do you?”

“I... I... I’m busy with the seating arrangements right now...” She seems to have grasped the consequences.

“So what? If you want to call it off we still can,” I say.

“Call it off? Now? Three days before the wedding?”

“Yes. Call the whole thing off.”

“But what about all the guests and the venue and everything?”

“We’ll cancel it. It’s better to call it off than to get married and then get divorced.” I don’t know where this decisiveness is coming from. I’m like a different person. I’ve never been more sure of anything than I am right now about calling off this damn wedding.

“You think so?”

“I *know* so!”

“Can we still do it?” she asks.

“I think so... yes, we definitely can. We haven’t signed the Ketuvah yet.”

She’s thinking about it. Then thinking some more. I see a smile twitching on her lips, but it quickly disappears. “But I’m thirty-four years old!”

“So what?”

“So I’m better off a thirty-four-year-old divorcee than a thirty-four-year-old bachelorette!”

“So you prefer to get married and then divorced right away? I don’t get it.”

“No, no, of course not,” she says quickly, but her brain is churning.

“Then we should call it off,” I determine.

“But *you’d* be better off getting married and divorced than calling it off, too. Don’t pretend like you wouldn’t. You know very well what people think of thirty-seven-year-old single men. It’s obviously better to be divorced. What do you want them to think, that you’re crazy? A thirty-seven-year-old bachelor! That way we can also get our parents off our backs, our friends, all this pressure!”

“But bringing everyone in from all over the world for a wedding when you know you’re going to get divorced? That’s not... right. It isn’t nice.”

“Is it nicer to cancel two days before the wedding? Can you imagine what they’ll say about us?”

“You might be right. You might be right,” I say, feeling the light at the end of the tunnel getting closer, traveling toward me at the speed of light.

“Of course I’m right,” she says. “A divorced guy has some style: ‘I tried it, I was married, I’m a serious guy, I’ve made some commitments.’ But being thirty-seven and not even divorced? Come on, give me a break. Of course getting married and divorced is better!”

“So what are you saying?” Now I’m starting to really take this all in. “We get married and then immediately file for divorce?”

“Yes.”

Yehuda Maccabi Street

Let me go back to the beginning, or at least what, for me, marks the beginning.

I remember myself driving in my car, a hundred thoughts going through my mind all at once. How do I silence this brain, how do I put an end to this mess, enough, I can't do it, quiet. Thoughts keep coming. Someone once told me that yogis learn to control their thoughts so that the thoughts can't just lunge in and throw them to the ground one moment, and the next lift them up into the sky, making them their slave, at their mercy. Maybe I should take a yoga class. As long as they don't turn me into a pussy, make me stop smoking, stop drinking, stop eating steak. That's my fear, that I might become indifferent, dispassionate, lackluster. My friend who does yoga says the exact opposite happens, but I'm still afraid. Being cool is kind of my thing, the justification for my existence, the reason people like me.

I can't afford to stop being cool. Even when I go to an event with friends, if I see two people having a riveting conversation, I have to be part of it. If two guys are laughing on the sidelines, I have to be there. I'm always afraid of missing out. I don't enjoy seeing friends having a nice time unless I'm there with them.

I drive by a building on Hen Boulevard and see the developer's sign. How did that piece of shit make the big time? How? He was always such a loser, and now he owns half of Tel Aviv. I had an opportunity to partner up with him when he first started out. We went to college together and actually connected, but I... I... where was my head? It was full of nonsense.

How am I going to make some money, how? How long can I go on mixing water with raspberry syrup, then pouring it into used bottles to save money on flavored water? How long before people stop believing raspberry is my favorite? How long before they stop believing the reason I won't get a new car is because I love my Peugeot 206 so much? How long before they stop believing I only like to wear shirts that have been washed a hundred times?

Enough of this. Everyone around me is beginning to succeed, big time. I'm thirty-six years old. When is it going to be my time to succeed? And what about a wife? I'm so trampled by loneliness that pretty soon I'll be too ashamed to even go out on dates. I don't even care who my wife is, I just want to get married already. I can't handle the pitying looks anymore!

I tell myself, *Enough thinking now, don't think*. But I can't stop. Besides, even telling myself not to think is a kind of thought. This head of mine is killing me. I can't get a moment's

peace. That yogi friend told me they say our consciousness is like a drunk monkey that gets stung by a scorpion. That's a funny image: a drunk monkey getting stung by a scorpion. Then I pay attention to my mind and realize it's the perfect definition.

Guy's wife is pregnant with their third baby. Third!

I'm hungry. I feel like having some shawarma.

I didn't handle the situation with Ronen well. I've got to go back and see him, otherwise he'll think I'm arrogant.

Why did I have to rub another one out with the internet porn after I already came once? Why am I such a pig?

Could everyone actually be as miserable as I am, or do I have it the worst? Could it be that they aren't lying, that they're actually happy, truly happy? If they're actually happy and I'm the only one who isn't, that would be a disaster.

In general, I want everyone to be unhappy. Not because I'm bad, but because I feel bad, and the better they feel, the worse I feel. Everything's relative, so is it any wonder that I feel happier when Rami gets a divorce, when Carmit is depressed, when Yuval and Danielle break up, or when Johnathan goes bankrupt?

It makes me sad, don't get me wrong. I hear their bad news and think, "Wow, that sucks, wow, poor them, wow, what a shame." And I really do think it's a shame and it sucks, but is it my fault that when they take a hit it means I automatically go up a notch?

It's like countries' credit rating: if a few leading countries become unstable, the countries lower on the list are instantly improved, because now they're on par with the strongest countries in the world! G8!

I glance at an old man picking through the garbage. Then I quickly look away. I can't handle this right now, this poverty. It makes me feel like shit. I drive around a run-over cat on the road. Someone in the car next to mine is picking his nose so hard that he looks like he's about to poke through to his eye. Two kids are walking hand in hand on the sidewalk, singing at the tops of their lungs. So sweet.

I reach Yehuda Maccabi Street, which for some reason I've always liked. I never even knew I liked it, but one day, when I was driving to Ramat Hasharon with a friend and turned right on Yehuda Maccabi from Eben Gvirol, he asked me why I didn't keep going straight, driving through Ganey Hata'arucha. It's shorter, he reasoned.

I said, “I don’t know, I just always drive through here,” and I realized it must be because I like going this way.

I drive past the hardware store on Yehuda Maccabi, which reminds me I have to get a coil heater. Have to. That radiator is messing up my living room, it’s this enormous white eyesore and I can’t stand it anymore. And I can’t afford to use the heating function on the air conditioner all winter long. It’s one of those enormous units that cleans the whole city out of energy in five minutes. Of course I tell my friends I don’t turn it on because I hate that dry electric heat, that it gives me a headache, and that in the summertime I prefer the fresh air of an open window. “Who needs an air conditioner? The air feels so nice.” It’s like two-hundred degrees and a hundred percent humidity outside, my underwear is glued to my ass, but sure, nothing beats fresh air. It’s the best.

That reminds me that my parents never leave the window open when they turn on the AC. They don’t understand that it’s the best combo. AC by itself makes the room feel like a freezer, but keeping it off and just opening the window spells certain death. It’s a winning combination. But they always, always, as if they’ve never said it before, come up to me and go, “But close the window! Why turn on the AC if you’re not going to close the window?”

It’s not like they’re members of Greenpeace or big fans of the atmosphere or anything.

Anyway, I’ve got the hots for a coil heater. I know it uses up lots of electricity, but I don’t care. I want to sit as close as I can to a bonfire inside my own home. I also want to get some of those nice memories of the heater toasts we used to make back in the army. They went so well with Turkish coffee in an orange cup and a snowsuit in the guarding post. I want that.

Where the hell should I park? Am I supposed to spend an hour looking for parking just to spend two minutes buying a coil heater? The parking officers work this street like nobody’s business, they’ll fuck me up in two minutes.

God dammit, who works as a parking officer? Who? Who? What pride do they take in their work? What kind of stories do they bring home to their wives? Or is it just a temporary gig for young people before they go traveling in Southeast Asia? Or is it a stepping stone on the way to becoming a police officer, like a prep course or boot camp or something? What happens to these people?

Fuck it. I pull up on a crosswalk, put on the emergency lights, and walk past her.

And walk past her.

She's standing by the bus stop, wearing jeans, a brown jacket, and brown boots. She's holding an orange umbrella. A fair, cheeky ponytail is hanging proudly from the back of her head, losing steam at the end and leaning against her jacket. The edge of her umbrella has a cute red-circle pattern.

I slow down. I remember just stopping altogether at some point. I just stand there, staring at her, unable to keep going. Her standing there threatens to bring down the entire bus stop with the power of her liveliness. I guess she could sense someone had started to pass behind her but didn't finish, and when she turns her head to check it out, our eyes meet. I smile awkwardly, and she smiles back. I've always saw this kind of thing in movies or read about it in books, but I've never truly considered this scenario, when a man just freezes in his tracks. I'm paralyzed. I try to walk away, but my legs refuse to accept the brain's authority. They won't obey. Then a bus rides into the station, and she lifts her right foot off the sidewalk, and while it flies through the air, her left heel, tucked into a magical boot, begins to rise, and when her right foot hits the ground, her left foot leaves it, hovering through the air. This kind of process is usually referred to as taking a step. That's what a normal human being would call it. But in her case, anyone paying attention can see it's a vision. The victory of mind over matter, a creation of something from nothing. What a step. What a step. Another two, and a marvelous process begins to formulate: she is climbing up the steps to the bus. The whole street seems to stand still. What energy, what flourishing, what vitality.

And then, when she's at the top of the steps, something happens that changes my life. She turns around and waves goodbye.

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I chase that bus for three kilometers. Three. Kilometers.

I remember the sound of the doors closing behind her back, and I remember her standing beside the driver, that part of the bus where all the passengers stare at you. By the way, I don't get how thirty to forty old people don't collapse there every day. That moment when the driver hits the gas pedal and you're just standing there, rifling through your wallet for small change, could shoot a sumo fighter right into the windshield. So she's standing there—poor girl, lonely, maybe a little wet, exposed to the eyes and perverted imaginations of the bus riders, who must have already invaded every orifice in her body with their minds, adding their friends and

girlfriends and all manner of accessories into the mix. I have to rescue her. I have to pull her into my embrace, into my home, into my life.

I begin skipping lightly after the bus. People know me in this city, and I can't very well let them see me chase a bus down in the rain. The image of her waving at me doesn't leave my mind. What a wave that was, what a wave. It was kind of like that picture of Sadat after signing the peace treaty, at the airplane door, turning to wave goodbye. That is definitely the closest approximation to her wave from those bus doors. What humility in a single wave. What modesty. What refinement. And yet, what power. The power of humility and the robustness of tenderness. Astounding.

So I run while pretending not to: I run for two steps, then skip for a while, run another two steps, then skip again. Like I said, people know me in this city. My skip-run brings me right behind the bus. I can already spot her, on the right side, as close to me as possible, one more second and I can bang on her window, but then the light turns green and the bus rides ahead, leaving me wallowing in black soot and the smell of gasoline. I feel a millisecond of despair, but then pull myself together with a determined decision: I am going to beat that bus. I am going to catch up with it, no matter what. No matter what.

I start running after it, turning left behind it, then noticing that the bus isn't slowing down at the upcoming stop the way I had anticipated. The stop is empty, and I guess none of the passengers pressed the stop button, which means the next stop, as far as I'm concerned, is at the next light. I run wild after the bus, hoping and praying for a red light at the intersection three-hundred meters away, that intersection that doesn't have an official name but is referred to as the Yarkon Gas Station Intersection, the station that's said to sell more gasoline than any other in the country, and has a restaurant that serves the best kebab pita in the country.

I run, panting, faster and faster. It seems that something in my brain has gone wrong, because usually I'd look at myself from the outside, and what I would see—an idiot chasing a bus in the rain, snot flying out of his nose and sticking to his jacket from all the cold and effort—wouldn't be something I would voluntarily participate in, but I guess... what other choice do I have? When you meet the love of your life, the woman you feel you could spend the rest of your life with, can you just give that up?

Because it's embarrassing?

No one runs on the street. No one. Even if they see their bus at the next stop, fifty meters away, they don't just run, all determined and fast and direct. No. They skip-run at best. Running and not running. Running, not running. Even a downtrodden man returning home from work would never be seen chasing down the bus. You might ask, what's so embarrassing about it? What does he have to be embarrassed about? It's not like he's Jeff Bridges or Bezos. What's the big deal? But he still feels embarrassed, so he runs, then stops running; runs, then stops running. He's got some style. And it doesn't matter if he's a balding old man carrying plastic bags or a middle school kid—they're the same. They see the bus, do a tiny sprint, then switch to a fast walk. What's the matter with them? How many buses are they willing to miss just to spare themselves the embarrassment?

That reminds me of this one time when I dated this uggo, but I'm talking a real fugly chick, God help me for describing a decent human being in these terms, but she really was born into an unfortunate body and face. I was so horny that after she refused to take a taxi over, even though I told her I'd pay for it, I gave in and offered to come pick her up in my car.

She needed to feel that I'd invested something in our hook-up before she could give over her body. From her point of view, she was totally justified. She detected my lack of intention to form any kind of relationship between us, and wanted to feel a little better before she spread her legs to gain some false confidence. So I went over there to pick her up, and I remember what I was most afraid of was that we might get into an accident and both die, and that the next day there would be pictures of the two of us in the paper, side by side, and everyone would wonder what the hell I was doing with her. Then the autopsy would find traces of my sperm in her throat... utter disaster.

By the way, the embarrassment market has given birth to an additional market of auxiliary products: the embarrassment insurance market. Just like the computer market led to the flourishing of the software market, the embarrassment market brought with it a market of solutions to alleviate and assist in living with embarrassment. People get embarrassment insurance constantly.

Why do you think on first dates girls are always saying stuff like, "I'm super clumsy, I bump into everything"? It's so that later, when they bang their heads into a doorpost while entering a dark pub in Jaffa, they can always say, "See? I told you, I bump into everything!"

Oh right, you told me. So it doesn't count.

“I suck at parallel parking,” she says on the first date while *you* park the car, so that on the next date, if she happens to be the one driving, she can pull out her insurance policy. “It’s the first time I’ve tried this recipe,” she’ll say, serving you a cake she’s baked a hundred times before.

“All girls say that,” you tell her. They all say they’re clumsy, they all claim to suck at parallel parking, and they all warn you it’s the first time they’ve baked that cake.

“Yeah, but when I say it it’s true,” she says.

That’s embarrassment insurance.

On the other hand, men—better known as gorillas—don’t have embarrassment insurance. For men, embarrassment insurance is embarrassing. A man can’t say, “I suck at manual labor, I have no idea how to drill a hole in the wall, I have no marketable skills.” The classic gorilla knows how to do everything. Everything. Any man, even the most disgusting, brainless, helpless man in the universe—claims to know everything. Everything. And when he finds himself in a situation where he *doesn’t* know something, and everyone knows he doesn’t know, and even *he* knows he doesn’t know—he somehow still knows. And if he fails in a task, it isn’t really *he* who failed at it. As far as he’s concerned, he’s done well. It’s just that this happened, and that came up, and the other guy didn’t do the thing... and really, in the end, it’s the woman’s fault, and also it’s raining. It’s like he can’t even internalize his lack of success, doesn’t acknowledge it. He’s just so stupid that there’s nothing more to say about it.

So here I am, running amok, no insurance policy. No insurance, no nothing. I don’t give a shit about them, the people who are now staring at me with marveling eyes, human burdens living besides the living, visitors in their own lives, people who have stopped dreaming, people with a company sticker next to their gas tank, sad people who compensate themselves with pricey toys, greedy people, agitated, panicked, with a skid mark in their underwear. Who are all these mean-hearted, narrow-minded, egotistical people, stupidity engineers and illusion carriers? Who are they to stop me from getting the woman of my dreams?

I start gaining on the bus, which is slowing down at the light. My heart is filled with hope. One more second and I’ll raise my hand to signal to her that I’m here, that I didn’t leave her, but then my mind is attacked by a highly motivation lowering thought: *Hold on, maybe this is embarrassing? Maybe she has a boyfriend?*

Maybe she's married?

Maybe she'll mock me for this desperate running?

And then my mind instantly comes up with a new thought—*True, one must never behave this way when trying to hit on a girl. Ever. But there are extenuating circumstances if she's the love of your life. If she's the love of your life, not only is it acceptable—it's mandatory.*

Otherwise, what kind of story are you going to tell your grandchildren? "We met on Tinder?"

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That reminds me that this desire to fall in love, and not only to fall in love, but to fall in love in a cool way, is the number one cause of bachelorhood. That's precisely what leaves those poor unfortunate souls at home with an empty fridge and a dog they're obsessed with. This fantasy of an extraordinary meet-cute, the butterflies, the delirium, the loss of appetite. Those are the true enemies of the institution of marriage. More importantly, they're the true enemies of love. The reason you're single is because you've read some idiotic books and seen some stupid movies and heard some fairytales about what your meeting with your heart's desire is supposed to look like, and what this heart of yours is supposed to look like during the first few months. Because you want it too. You want to fall in love that way too. And if you haven't, it must not be the real thing. You, who spent your entire life imagining your romantic and heart-sweeping meeting with the most incredible woman on earth, just by coincidence, out of the blue, at an event you weren't even supposed to attend but somehow found yourself at, and there she is, in a white dress, chatting with a friend, laughing softly, glancing over at you, reaching over to adjust her hair, and you run into each other again at the bar and smile, and start up a funny, intelligent conversation, and leave the party with butterflies in your stomach, and you hold hands and stroll on the beach in the magical sunset. And then instead you go on a blind date with someone you met online? Give me a break. You?!

Not you. That might be good enough for somebody else. But you, you'll wait another year, and another, and another, until it finally happens. Because you're special, and special people fall in love in a special way. And a special way means like in books and movies and fairytales. And in the meantime you get hunched, get older, get bitter, get hard and opinionated and self-involved.

One day, my therapist took things one step further, hitting me with the following gem: "If you fall in love with someone, you can know for sure it isn't the real thing."

“How can that be true? It’s the exact opposite?” I chuckled.

“No, that’s exactly right. You fall in love from a place of hurt, of trauma, of a subconscious desire to keep the fantasy going. That’s why you always fall in love with the wrong women, the ones who are all wrong for you, and then you either never get them at all, and carry on with the fantasy instead, or you do get them, and then instantly realize it isn’t a good match, so you break up with them and continue with your fantasy.”

“So if I fall in love with someone I should just bolt?”

“Definitely.”

I quit therapy right after that. Psychologists are infinitely stupid.

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So my hand is on its way up, and it’s all just about to happen. I start slowing down a little so that I don’t get there looking completely trampled. Then I swallow smoke again—the light turns green and the bus drives away. I’m shit out of luck. In one single moment, I lose the love of my life, my entire future, the secret to my eternal happiness. I lean my hands against my knees, let my shoulders slump, hang my head. I let out an over-exerted cough. I feel my pulse, not only in my heart but in my temples, too. I hyperventilate, trying to pull more and more oxygen into my lungs.

I start to cool down, my breath gradually settling. My eyes are still on the sidewalk, my entire being filled with despair. I’m just about to look up again when I feel a monster slap on my back.

“What’s up, Gastner? I haven’t seen you since high school. So, you’re famous now, huh? I saw your TV show. I wasn’t crazy about it but my wife is nuts about you. So, what’s going on, are you married already, come on, get married, I already have two kids the eldest is nine, forget about everything else, believe me, that’s true happiness, nothing beats kids, so what’s going on with you, talk, man, what, you’re not feeling well? What are you doing panting in the middle of the street? Don’t let your fans catch you looking like this.”

I swear to god that’s how it went. Word for word. Word for goddamn word.

“I’m fine, I’m fine. What’s going on with you?”

“Me, I’m good. I’m a network administrator at Amdocs. You know who works for me? Guetta. Remember Guetta? I’m happy with him, good guy. What’s up with you?”

“Fine, fine.” I breathe.

“Good. Listen, man, it’s great to see you, say hi to the family, oh, wait, you don’t have a family, never mind, say hi to the guys. Say, are you still in touch with Chubi?”

“No, not really.”

“Okay, so, see you man, I’ve got to run to pick up the kid from school.”

He waves goodbye and leaves.

Son of a bitch cocksucker motherfucker, in elementary school everyone beat you up all day long, you sat a row ahead of me in class and I dumped ants and itching powders on your head, and now you’re patronizing me? When I’m weak? Kicking me when I’m down? You asshole, just you wait, I’m going to get married and have four kids and then you’ll see what’s what you piece of shit you ass clown, go to your hi-tech cubicle, go on, go!

And why poke me? That douchebag poked the goddam bear. I only watched you getting beat up, I never beat you up myself. The rules of karma are just having a field day with me. What did I do, god, what did I do? Why am I so miserable, what do I get out of this misery? God, release me, release your son, let me find love!