



# A POET FROM HOLLYWOOD

*love, insanity,  
stephen gyllenhaal,  
and the creative process*

**CANTARA CHRISTOPHER**



# CHAPTER ONE

## “So, This Isn’t Some Kind of Joke”

**T**his is the story of how I tried to turn Stephen Gyllenhaal into a famous poet, then fell in love with him, then fell out of love with him—and how Team Gyllenhaal came to its own end after that and how other things found their beginnings.

I’ll begin in New York early December 2005 with the main dilemma I had to face when my brand-new small press decided to publish Stephen’s poetry collection. I was in a Brooklyn bar having beers with Andy Laties—who’s known in the book trade as the Rebel Bookseller—where I explained it to him.

“Suppose I do manage to get a reading for Stephen at some bookstore. What I’m afraid is that the room will be packed with girls expecting to get a glimpse of Jake and they don’t buy anything.”

“Who’s Jake?” he asked.

“Stephen’s son. You know, that hot young movie actor. They’re very close. The whole family’s very close. If his dad gave a reading, Jake would come to support him. Stephen says they all would.”

To give you an idea of the time, *Brokeback Mountain* was about to open that Friday.

“Oh yeah, that guy. Well, that is a risk,” said Andy. “What do you think you’ll do about it?”

At that point, I didn’t know what I’d do about it. I didn’t even know if we were even going to publish his book. I’d sent Stephen the contract to sign back in September, but he insisted he never received it and that week I’d just sent him another. The only thing I knew is that from the moment we first talked on the phone a few months earlier, I’d entered into a strange relationship with him.

That was back in July when my husband, Michael Matheny, discovered three of his poems in a batch of submissions to the

literary annual I'd been employed to edit.

"Get in here and take a look at these. This guy's actually good," he called to me from our kitchen, where he'd set up a makeshift office at the table to help me get through the stack of manuscripts. I came in and read them. Yes, they actually were pretty good. At least they were head and shoulders better than anything else that had been submitted. They were written in a youthful style but addressed somewhat mature issues, which made us both wonder about the author.

We looked at the name but didn't recognize it. "I think it's Swedish," I said. (I was born and grew up in Minneapolis.)

Michael and I read the cover letter, but it was only superficially informative. It mentioned about a half-dozen literary quarterlies that had published the author's poems. It also mentioned the fact that the author worked in Hollywood and that his two children were actors. We still didn't recognize the name. The letterhead, however, was one for a motion picture company called Rollercoaster. I decided to Google the name and found it.

"There's a phone number," I called out to Michael, who was still at the kitchen table reading through the poetry submissions.

"Great. Why don't you give him a call? Maybe we can find out about this guy." Michael thought he might

be an unusually mature grad student. Because of the address on Hollywood Boulevard—which I recognized because in the 1970s I'd lived about five blocks away—I thought he might be some middle-aged but established independent filmmaker and manqué man of letters.

"And as long as you're at it, ask him about the fourth line in 'Blindside'," added Michael.

"What do you mean, the fourth line?"

"I've read the poem again and it doesn't make complete sense. I think there's a line missing. Ask him about it."

I reread the poem as well and agreed. So I called the number and got the recording: "You have reached the office of

Rollercoaster Productions. We're not open now, but if you want to leave a message..." Since it was a Saturday afternoon in Los Angeles, this made sense. "Hi, we're the editors of (here I mentioned the name of the literary annual). We're reading the poems you sent and one of them doesn't seem to make a lot of sense. It's the one called 'Blindside' and it appears there's a gap between the third and the fourth line. Do you think you could call us back at your convenience and give us the missing line, or explain your intent? Thanks."

I left our phone number on the recording and hung up, assuming that the best response we'd get would be some assistant who'd either supply us with the answer or put us in touch with the author. And we pretty much forgot about it for the moment.

Three days later the phone rang. I picked it up and a young-sounding man said, "Hi! This is Stephen Gyllenhaal."

The brightness and familiarity in his voice threw me, so instead of replying in a professional tone, I answered back just as brightly, "Oh hi, Stephen!"

"I understand you're reading my poetry," he said. I explained to him that we were considering his submission for publication for the literary annual we were editing. "So, this isn't some kind of joke," he said, laughing nervously. "Which poem did you say you're having trouble with?" he asked. I told him. "Oh, I changed that one slightly." And over the phone he proceeded to recite an entirely different poem with an entirely different title. I pointed this out to him. "No no, I just changed one or two words." That should have been my first tipoff that Stephen was not going to be the clearest communicator.

But just as swiftly he turned the conversation to other matters. He explained how he got into poetry writing—it had been prescribed to him by his analyst, more or less, as therapy. I suppose I was a fresh new audience, because he went on to talk about all sorts of things, from Socrates "that old fraud" (he was taking some sort of long-distance course in Philosophy from

Columbia University), to the movie business. “Dinosaurs! They’re all dinosaurs!” he exclaimed.

I was as impressed as a freshman listening to a professor speaking off the record. We discussed all sorts of topics without mentioning the literary annual or his poetry again. After forty-five minutes he asked me, “Can I call you sometime?” Of course I said, “Sure.” We said our goodbyes and I spent the rest of the day walking on air.

When Michael came home from work that night I told him excitedly, “You’ll never guess who I got a call from!” Who, asked Michael. I said the name.

“So,” asked Michael, not as impressed as I was, “did you find out who he is?” I said no. So right then and there I proceeded to look up more about him when I made a delightful discovery.

“*Twin Peaks!*” I called out to Michael, who by this time was in the kitchen fixing dinner. “He directed an episode of my favorite TV show of all time, *Twin Peaks!*” True, it was from the dismal second season, but it was the episode where I won a dollar bet from Michael that the misunderstood bad girl, Audrey Horne, was still a virgin.

“Hm!” said Michael. “So what’s a big director like him sending around his poetry for?”

We both stopped for a moment to wonder about that.

A week later Stephen called again. He said he’d written another poem he wanted to share, and he did. I listened to it and praised him, and asked him what his inspiration was. He went on, I suppose by way of explanation, to tell me a little bit about his early life and his early career.

This time I was ready for him. “I looked you up,” I told him, and I mentioned almost all his directing credits I found online.

He was impressed and flattered. As I wanted him to be equally impressed with my background, I mentioned my old theater days working alongside playwright-cum-actor Sam Shepard.

Then seemingly out of the blue he asked me, “Did you ever see *Losing Isaiah*?”

I suppose it was the mention of Sam’s name which triggered that remark, as his longtime partner Jessica Lange starred in the movie. But before I could even answer he exclaimed, “I hated directing it! But I did it anyway. I saved my marriage, but I wrecked my career. And I haven’t worked since!”

Of course, this was not entirely true. Since directing that movie, Stephen had gone on to direct several made-for-TV movies and series episodes. But *Losing Isaiah* was the film his wife, Naomi Foner, not only had written but produced as well—she’d been his boss, in other words. I would learn much later what a donnybrook the making of that movie had been.

Then he asked me, “Are you married?” I said yes, for twenty-five years. He said he’d been married for twenty-eight. “We’ve got a couple of kids, you know about them?” Yes, I said. “And I hope to be a grandfather soon,” he added.

I thought he might be talking about his son getting back together with his off-and-on girlfriend, the actress Kirsten Dunst (because of Stephen I’d just started to read the gossip columns), but I didn’t mention it. I wanted instead to gush about my favorite Jake Gyllenhaal film, *Donnie Darko*, but he plowed on.

“You know, Jake’s coming out in a new movie soon.” I knew it was *Jarhead* and told him. “Yeah,” said Stephen, “He’s been bulking up for that movie. His mother doesn’t like it, but he’s at that stage where boys like to rebel against their mothers. But don’t worry, he’ll come back to her.”

Then he asked me, “You got any kids?” I told him I had a son Jake’s age. “So you know all about it,” he said. Actually, Rob had never given me that kind of grief, but I didn’t want to disagree with him so I let it go.

That second conversation got to be a little deeper and more intimate than our first because I knew more about Stephen from my research on the net. I wanted to know how to pronounce the

name of his hometown in Pennsylvania, Bryn Athyn. He pronounced it for me, “brin-a-thin”. I asked him about his name. “It’s jill-en-hall,” he said smoothly, as if he’d had to do this many, many times before. I had already learned that he was a fifth-generation member of a refined Christian sect called Swedenborgnism, and I wanted to hear more about it from him. “Oh, I’m not a believer anymore,” he said curtly, and I dropped the subject.

After about an hour, he told me he was going up to Vancouver to direct a TV movie, so I probably wouldn’t be hearing from him for a while. I said fine. I hadn’t expected even this much familiarity, but I didn’t tell him that. Then he finally mentioned his poetry. I told him I’d strongly urge the publisher of the literary annual to include his work in the next issue. We said our goodbyes and I didn’t expect to hear from him again.

Let’s skip ahead a few weeks to late August. The publisher of the literary annual had been talking my ear off on the phone about his big plans to bring out his own book.

“You know, you ought to publish it,” he told me.

“But I don’t have a publishing company,” I told him.

“Well,” he said, “what about that dream of yours? Cantara Christopher Books or Cantara’s Books or whatever you called it?”

“Cantarabooks,” I said.

Earlier that year at the New York Small Press Book Fair (now defunct) I’d revealed to him my secret dream to start my own publishing company. Now he was urging me to make my dream come true.

“Great! Where’s the money going to come from?” I said.

“Just start it. You’ll publish my book, you’ll publish Michael’s, and to make it look legit you’ll publish another one by someone else. Maybe some poetry.” I found out later that the publisher had a seriously larcenous streak. But naïvely, I leapt at this opening.

“Poetry? How about that poet I’ve been telling you about, Stephen Gyllenhaal? Do you think you could accept some of his

poems for the magazine?”

I'd spent most of July and August pleading with the publisher to include Stephen's poems in the literary annual. They were brilliant, I said. Their quality would only enhance the issue. I didn't mention this, but my career goal at the time was to be known as an editor responsible for a true "literary find".

"No poetry!" he snarled. I have to tell you at this point that in its submission guideline his magazine expressly welcomed poetry.

I decided to play my last card. Knowing how he loved to fawn over the famous and influential (he was at the time a hanger-on in the Long Island artsy set), I told him, "Stephen's a big Hollywood director, you know. His kids are movie stars and his wife is a famous screenplay writer. She was even nominated for an Oscar."

"Well, find out if this Gyllen-whatever has any more poems. Maybe you could publish 'em in a collection."

And that's pretty much how Cantarabooks started.

It was around that time in late August Stephen called me from Vancouver. "I can't talk long. I'm in the middle of shooting a TV movie." I asked him what it was about. "Oh, it's silly." (I found out later it was a terrorist thriller called *Time Bomb*.)

"How's your paper on Socrates going?" I asked.

"Oh, that. No time anymore. I'm concentrating on my poetry now." Then he asked me about his submission. I told him that, unfortunately, the publisher was going through an anti-poetry phase. But on the bright side, I said that I was starting up my own imprint and might be interested in seeing more of his work. If he had, say, a dozen poems, we might publish them as a little chapbook.

"Well, that sounds intriguing. Why don't we—" And here he paused to listen to a distant voice. "Look, they're calling me back to the set. Why don't you email my assistant at Rollercoaster. Have you got the email address?" I told him I did. "Great. We can talk—" He paused again to listen. "Nope. Gotta go." We said our goodbyes



and I promptly began to compose my request.

In my email I explained that Cantarabooks was a brand-new imprint that planned to bring out limited runs of poetry and literary fiction by emerging and under-exposed writers. We were a shoestring operation but could pay our authors a nominal advance plus royalties. Realistically, though, dealing as we were with poetry and literary fiction, none of us stood to make a fortune. And because I wanted time for Cantarabooks to sign and develop other authors, we probably wouldn't be able to bring out his chapbook until the following June.

When I reread my email I saw what a two-bit proposition it would probably look like to a major Hollywood player like Stephen Gyllenhaal. I pressed the send button and never expected to hear from him again.

A week later a thick manuscript arrived.

Michael, of course, was eager to read it but decided to wait until the weekend to be able to focus his concentration on it. So the following Saturday I left him for the afternoon while I went out to do some chores. When I came back that evening we had dinner, and he then sat me down for a talk.

"There are about thirty-nine poems he sent us," he said. "A few are passable, three-quarters are publishable just as they are, but there are a couple I want you to sit down and read with your entire focus. I haven't read poems as good as these in a long time. He has some trouble with line breaks, and some of his phrasing is maybe a little too ambiguous, but on the whole it's brilliant. I would really love to work with him."

"I don't even know if he really wants to be published by us," I said. "He could've just sent us these poems out of some sort of mid-life crisis or something."

"I don't know anything about that. You've talked to him, I haven't."

"He's from Hollywood," I protested. "His whole family's from Hollywood. He's got a production company and probably a big

staff. He's probably got a publicist too. If we do this book I'm a little scared his people will take it over and turn it into a freak show. You know, turn him into a 'celebrity poet', like Jimmy Stewart on *The Tonight Show* reading verses about his dog."

Michael looked at me square in the face and said the most serious thing he'd said to me in years. "You can't use who he is as an excuse either to publish or not publish his work. This is good literature and it deserves to be read. If we don't take this manuscript, we have no right to call ourselves literary publishers. But it's up to you."

The next day, Sunday, I took the manuscript into the bedroom and began to read it for the first time.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **"My Family's Behind Me 100 Percent"**

**T**he poems didn't hit me all at once. Some of them, like Michael said, were just passable. A couple were only aphorisms. A handful were short and very clever comments about the state of the world, the kind of poems that would easily find acceptance in the better literary quarterlies. A quick look at the cover letter confirmed that these particular poems had, in fact, been previously published.

But interspersed in the manuscript were other poems, still unpublished. Poems of confident style and immense feeling about his family, his father and mother, his son and daughter, his wife. The ones about his wife were the most emotionally complex, mixing as they did tenderness and fleeting joy with bitterness, loss, regret. These spoke to me at the deepest level.

So, Dear Reader, here it is, the first irony in this story: I began to fall in love with Stephen Gyllenhaal through the poems he had written to his wife.

That afternoon I finished the manuscript and, handing it back

to Michael, said something like, Wow.

He gave me a look of satisfaction at our shared discovery. “You see?”

“What I can’t understand,” I said, “is why these poems haven’t been collected into a volume before. I mean, look at all his resources. Almost every article I’ve read about him and his family brings up the artists and writers they know, all those famous people they entertain at their house. With all those connections, you’d think they could get a friend to publish his work.”

Michael thought for a moment. “That doesn’t mean he was ever nurtured. Or let’s say encouraged on that path. Because it can happen, you know.”

“I’d like to think if you have a talent, it’s always going to be nurtured and encouraged.”

“You more than anyone should know better than that,” said Michael.

The next day I wrote a letter of acceptance and sent it snail-mail to him, saying, “Stephen, I think you’re on the brink of something in your writing, and I’d like to be one of the people around you when you get there.”

A week later he called. For the first time there was hesitation in his voice. “Um...it seems I got this letter, allegedly from you, that says you want to publish my book.” He sounded as if we’d never spoken before.

I said, “Yes, that’s right. To tell the truth, we weren’t prepared for such a large collection. But your poetry is so good, and there’s so much of it, we’re going to have to devote more time to it than we originally planned. But I know we can do it.”

“Well, it’s an intriguing thought, and I’m extremely honored and flattered. But tell me, how did you get the idea to publish my book?”

“Um...you sent us the manuscript...?”

“Oh yeah, that’s right!” He laughed nervously. “So, you think you can publish it?” I reassured him that we could and would, and

repeated the information I'd sent him in our acceptance letter. "Okay, so what do I have to do now?" Nothing much more, I explained, except to read contract I'd be sending, sign it and return it to us. "Well, I'd like to have my lawyer take a look at it first."

"Yes, please!" This was an opportunity to see if the contract I composed would stand up to the scrutiny of a high-powered entertainment attorney. I told Stephen I was eager for his lawyer's input.

"Anything else?" he asked.

This is where I explained the division of labor. "From here on end if you want to talk about your poetry, talk to Michael," I told him. "He's the senior editor. I know poetry, but Michael really knows poetry. And he's got a real feeling for your work. So you talk to him about literary stuff. Anything about publishing and promoting your book, talk to me."

"Well, that's great! Sounds like I've got a whole staff there working for me. So when's a good time to call?"

"Anytime," I said. "Anytime at all."

I didn't realize that with that invitation I'd be opening the floodgates.

From September until the end of November Stephen called me numerous times during the day and night while emailing Michael directly about the edits on his book. He was filled with ideas of where to read his work. He knew people at the Getty Museum in LA. Of course he'd get to read there. And Columbia University. His wife Naomi had graduated from Columbia and they had friends on the faculty. Of course he'd get to read there too. Naomi, he assured me, was behind the project. And so were his son and daughter. "My family's behind me 100 percent!" he assured me several times.

I got to know him more and more with each new exchange between us; our acquaintanceship became deeper and deeper. He told me more stories about his life, his family in Bryn Athyn, his early attempts at novel writing, his boyhood dreams of becoming a

rich and famous writer.

The only thing he hadn't done was to return his signed contract, which he insisted he'd never received.

After the second time I sent it and he told me he still hadn't received it I suggested, "Maybe it's still in the mailroom. Your assistant ought to go down there and ask about it."

"No, that wouldn't work. My assistant is very organized," he said. Much later I learned that the address for Rollercoaster was only a mail drop on Hollywood Boulevard, nothing more.

I sent the contract a third time and, early in December, he called to say he received it. "I agree to everything except one or two changes," he told me.

"Shoot," I said.

"I want final say on the exact wording of the poems and final say on the title."

"Not a problem," I said. The usual clause in our contract specifies that our press, through our senior editor, meaning Michael, has final say on text and title of the books we acquire. From the very beginning, we both wanted Cantarabooks to be a showcase for our editorial talents. But Stephen's insistence on having the last word made me finally believe that he was serious about his work. Up to then I hadn't been entirely certain that the whole enterprise wasn't just a lark to him, just a way for him to be known as a "celebrity poet".

"And," he went on, "I think I've got a great title." He laid it on me. "'Claptrap: Notes from Hollywood'. What do you think?" I said it was catchy. "You like it? I think it's kind of theatrical," he said. "You understand the reference, right?" I told him I did. Claptrap refers to a bit of frivolous business an actor performs on stage solely to get applause.

The ambiguity Stephen felt toward his poetry was blatantly evident in that title. Michael wasn't too thrilled by it, but he said he'd let it pass. I hadn't seen him as intellectually stimulated as he was during that autumn when he and Stephen exchanged ideas. It



made my growing irritation with Stephen's almost daily calls and emails to us and his outrageous declarations ("This book will make us all rich and famous!" he'd regularly exclaim) almost worth it.

Meanwhile I was making a fool of myself around the New York literary scene talking up Stephen. I praised him to the skies to my publishing mentor and role model Barney Rosset and babbled on and on about him at the Small Press Center. "He's really good," I told anyone who would listen. "He's gotten a late start in writing, but he's just now finding his voice. He doesn't come out of an MFA program, he writes from his own experiences, his own feelings. You've got to hear his work."

People would ask his name and I'd tell them. "You mean that Donnie Darko guy?" they would say. And I'd have to correct them, "No, that's his son Jake. Stephen's been a Hollywood director for over twenty years." They'd ask me to name some of his movies, then shrug at most of the titles until I got to *Losing Isaiah*, the story of a bitter custody battle between two women over an adorable little boy. At that title they'd brighten. "Oh yeah, Jessica Lange and Halle Berry. My mother loves that movie." It seemed that *Losing Isaiah*, despite how much he hated it, was his one and only notable Hollywood achievement.

Then in December 2005 the media storm began. It was heralded by a story in the magazine section of the Sunday *New York Daily News* with the title, "Find Out Why Jake Gyllenhaal is the Hot Talent You Should Know Now." The story was accompanied by a photo of a cute, smiling, brown-eyed young man. When I saw Jake's picture I decided to buy a copy.

I devoured the article, which was full of information about his upcoming movie *Brokeback Mountain*. In it he was playing a part that was sure to make him a household name. There was more: Jake had been taught to drive by Paul Newman; Jamie Lee Curtis was his godmother; he had a friendly artistic rivalry with his older sister Maggie. But what interested me most was the tiny photo insert on the last page, under which was the title "Team

Gyllenhaal” and identified the figures with their arms around each other as Stephen, Jake, Maggie, and Naomi. “The Gyllenhaal clan is as close as any family in Hollywood,” said the subtitle. It was the first time I saw what Stephen looked like.

He was handsome, mouse-haired, tall—about an inch taller than his son—wearing a white shirt buttoned the wrong way, and he was grinning a goofy boyish grin. How do I explain this? I was a little disappointed. From what I knew about Coppola and Spielberg and all those distant mysterious types called Hollywood Directors, I’d assumed that Stephen would look like them, the current cliché of a short, dark, balding, brooding, bearded middle-aged man wearing a backwards baseball cap. When he and I talked on the phone, that’s what I imagined he looked like, and it made me enjoy being a little in love with him, believing I was one of the few people who knew how truly artistically refined he was.

But when I looked at that photo I realized I’d gotten it wrong. Here was no camera-shy, introspective artist. Here was a worldly husband and father, a proud multi-talented member of a proud, close, talented and very photogenic family. The media was a mere plaything for Team Gyllenhaal.

And for the first time since I’d known Stephen, I was cowed. I couldn’t have been more cowed if someone had told me the Royal Family had deigned to confer their notice on my insignificant little press.

From the holidays through most of February 2006 we didn’t hear from Stephen, but he told us to expect this as he would be busy working on various projects. Actually it was a nice break which Michael and I needed in order to attend to our other projects.

Michael and I aren’t in the habit of watching the Oscars, but we did that year. We were rooting particularly for two young people that night, a publisher friend’s daughter whose documentary had been nominated, and for Stephen’s son Jake.

*Brokeback Mountain* had been a controversial but phenomenal hit that winter and almost everyone predicted it would not only win awards for the two leads, but for the director, the screenplay, and for best picture. It was certainly far and away the most beautiful and artistically ambitious film in the running.

But you know what happened because it's history now: *Brokeback* failed to win awards for the two leads and for Best Picture.

A few days after the Oscars we received a message on our voicemail.

"Michael, Cantara, this is Stephen... I don't know what to say... I feel so guilty... I've just been swamped, swamped... I'm so sorry I've left you with this project... I say let's work on this together."

I asked Michael, who had never heard his voice before, "Well, how does he sound to you?"

"He sounds like a teenager," he answered, frowning.

The next week we got a package from him in the mail containing seven more poems.

Michael took them into the kitchen to read and when he came out again he was very serious. "I told you before that Stephen's a good poet. He is not. He is a great poet. I haven't encountered a poet with his vision in thirty years, not since—"

"Sylvia Plath?" I offered. "Anne Sexton?"

"Yes, Anne Sexton. Exactly." Michael understood why I had brought up her name—one of Stephen's poems from the first batch he sent us was titled "Dinner w/Anne Sexton and You".

"Right, it's confessional poetry. Which makes it a hard sell," I said. "Confessional poetry makes people uncomfortable. I think we should concentrate on his political poems. It would make it a lot easier."

"I don't care about that," said Michael. "Listen. I see what he's doing, he's trying to put it all together. His past, his present. Everything's personal. Forget his political poems. They're just all

attitude with him. Politics aren't the most important thing for Stephen, it's the family—his family. It's always going to come back to his family." He handed me one of the pages. "Read this."

I went over and sat in the corner chair and read it. It was a poem entitled "At 25". As I read it, I saw that the title obviously referred to Jake's age. When I was finished, I gave it back to Michael. He asked me how I liked it. I told him, shaking my head over the strangeness of it, "It's like he's anointing his own son."

Michael nodded gravely. "That's the problem," he said. "Some of Stephen's best poems are about his family. What we have to do is try to present them, and him, in such a way that people will see something in them other than just Jake and Maggie and the whole Hollywood circus. This is what we have to work on."

I didn't know it then, but Stephen himself wasn't going to make it easy for us.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **"How Did You Get This Number?"**

**A**t the beginning of our relationship Stephen had blithely assured me that his family and friends were behind his book. The friends he rattled off were an impressive and varied lot: Alan Dershowitz, the famous lawyer; the Danson-Steenbergens, an acting couple; the Woodward-Newmans, another acting couple; the Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist William Styron; the Booker Prize-winning novelist Michael Ondaatje; Graham Swift, another Booker Prize-winning novelist; Hugh Ogden.

Now understand this. I'm a publisher. This is what that list of celebrated people meant to me: Seven possible unit sales.

And who the hell was Hugh Ogden?

"My mentor, Hugh Ogden. He's an English professor and a poet," Stephen told me over the phone early in March. I had to

confess that I hadn't heard of him. "We have to bring Hugh on board," he continued. "He helped me a lot when I was at college. He's excited to hear about the book." When I asked Stephen what he meant by bringing him on board, he suggested that Ogden write the Introduction.

An old poet introducing a younger, emerging one in the younger one's first collection—that would be dignified and very traditional. I approved of this plan.

But Stephen for some reason could not stop pitching. "I can get you Graham Swift. I can get you Michael Ondaatje. Did you ever see *The English Patient*?" I told him I'd only read the book. (I thought it was a little pretentious.) "Ondaatje's a good friend. He'll do it. And Graham owes me for *Waterland*." Stephen directed the film version that starred Jeremy Irons and Ethan Hawke. I much preferred the book.

"Well, who do you want to write the Introduction?" I asked.

"All of them!" he exclaimed.

We finally settled on Hugh Ogden to write the Foreword, while either Ondaatje or Swift would write the Introduction. In a spirit of non-cooperation, however, both refused. (It was Swift's refusal that prompted Stephen to blurt out "Fuck him!" to me over the phone.)

In the end, actress and Gyllenhaal family friend Jamie Lee Curtis wrote the Introduction. She did it at Stephen's personal last-minute request, writing it in a few minutes and delivering it to me by email via Stephen the next morning. It's a generous, intuitive piece of writing and it sounds just like her. I'm still so glad to have it in the book.

If you look at the front matter of *Claptrap* you'll notice there's an Editors' Preface as well. That, too, was a last-minute job. Thirty-six hours before we were to send the *Claptrap* file to our printer, Ogden's Foreword still hadn't arrived, and we had to have it or something similar. Jamie Lee's Introduction was wonderful but it was from a "celebrity".



An introduction from a genuine poet and professor of English would have been best, as it would have given the book the weight of seriousness. The publisher's endorsement would be second-best. But I wrote it anyway because it looked like we were going to need it in place of Ogden's. Of course the minute I was finished Michael got an email from Stephen containing Ogden's copy. It was atrocious stuff, vague, rambling and incoherent, and Michael spent a couple of hours that night editing it until it was readable. We put Ogden's Foreword in the book so that he could remain, in Stephen's words, "on board with the project".

So that's how we ended up with a Foreword, Preface and Introduction to this slim little volume of poetry. I like to think that they add to the off-kilter charm of *Claptrap*.

As I said, from the beginning of our relationship Stephen had assured me that his "amazing" wife and kids were ready to help out with promoting his book. I wasn't sure that the kids would be willing but he couldn't stop talking about them. He announced to me his plans to read *Claptrap* on a national tour with Jake and Maggie. It would have been fun, though with their movie-star schedules I strongly doubted that this would happen.

Still, as the mechanical aspects of getting *Claptrap* published, formatting its interior, creating the cover and so on, were taking up most of my time, I could see I was going to need help with the promotional part. I took it for granted that his amazing and accomplished wife (and fellow writer, I might add) would help out on that score, at the very least throw him a book launch party. In fact I began to get a little apprehensive that at some point she'd somehow try to take over the whole project.

But let's briefly cut away to a "Little Did I Realize Then" moment when I was sixteen years old and a freshman at the University of Minnesota. The time being the early 1970s, rather than study I preferred to hang out with my friends and smoke weed, and one thing we liked to do when we smoked weed was

watch *The Electric Company*. Remember *The Electric Company*? It was Sesame Street for older children and had among its permanent cast Rita Moreno, Morgan Freeman, Paul Dooley, Irene Cara, and Skip Hinnant. Hinnant was my favorite. He was in two recurring sketches, one a spoof of hard-boiled detective serials called “Fargo North, Decoder”, the other a spoof of old-fashioned soap operas called “Love of Chair”. “Love of Chair” I remember most vividly. It’s the sketch that always ended that day’s episode. The premise was simple: A boy, played by Hinnant, sat rocking in a rocking chair, pondering, and we were invited to watch him ponder. “The boy’s socks are missing,” the narrator would intone. “The boy ate a peanut butter sandwich before he looked for them. And now the boy’s feet are cold.” It would go on in this manner until the narrator ended by posing the traditional cliffhanger questions that used to conclude typical soaps: “Will the boy ever find his socks?” Sting. “Will the socks be brown or blue?” Sting. “Should he have had grape jelly with his peanut butter sandwich?” Sting. “And—” Sting sting stinnng — “What about Naomi?”

It was the “What about Naomi?” part we’d all say aloud before collapsing in a heap of brainless laughter. It was just a funny non sequitur line. Give us a break, we were stoned.

As I said, little did I realize then that Naomi of *The Electric Company* would turn out to be—you guessed it—Naomi Foner, who was at the time the show’s producer.

Now to the Phone Call.

The exchange of words that completely altered my plans and sent my life on this weird and wacky journey of discovery occurred on Tuesday, April 4, 2006 at about 12:30PM New York time, 9:30AM on the Coast. An hour earlier Stephen had called and failed to reach me (I’d stayed up late and was still in bed when Michael left for work), but he had left a message for me to call him back.

I supposed that he was calling to thank me for the cards announcing the publication of his book that I’d sent him a few days

earlier for his own mailing list of friends and colleagues. On them I'd written a few words of copy: "Only Stephen Gyllenhaal can tell it best, what it's like to be citizen, artist, husband—and Jake and Maggie's dad—in the City of Illusions." I don't remember the exact wording but it was something like that. Originally I hadn't wanted to put in the reference to Jake and Maggie because I knew that Stephen knew that at the moment his greatest claim to fame was being Jake and Maggie's dad. I wanted to try to separate him as a poet from that narrow identity as much as possible.

But once when I'd asked him if he minded being known as the father of famous children, he said he was proud of his son and daughter, proud to be known as their father. Given the opportunity, he would tell the funniest stories about his bemused parenthood that made me smile in sympathy. And of course there were several poems about his children in the book.

"Bring them in," he'd told me. "They're ready to help out."

I reassured him that using the phrase "Jake and Maggie's dad" would be for irony's sake. So off went the announcement card to the printers.

I dressed, put the sofa bed up, got some coffee and then pressed the callback button. After a couple of rings a woman answered. I'd never heard her before but by the imperiousness of her voice I could tell it was Naomi Foner.

"Ms. Foner?" I asked, ultra-politely. "This is Cantara from Cantarabooks."

A beat. Then in a shocked tone she asked, "How did you get this number?"

Whoa. As obsequiously and apologetically as I could muster, I explained that Stephen had just called me from that number and I'd just pressed callback.

"This is our home!" she wailed.

Once again, I apologized.

"Don't ever call here again!" she continued, quite upset. I assured her I wouldn't, and she hung up.

I sat on the sofa bed for nearly an hour, not moving, utterly deflated, feeling like I'd been made a fool of. I even began to doubt my sanity. Did we really intend to publish a book? Did Stephen Gyllenhaal—famous husband of a famous wife and famous father of famous children—really send us his poems to publish? Or was I just living in some pathetic fantasy world populated by rich celebrities to make myself feel important?

About two that afternoon Stephen called again, but this time I was around to answer the phone. “I tried to reach you this morning,” he told me mournfully. “Look, something’s come up. We, uh, we’ve just had a family conclave—” I swear he used the word conclave— “and we’ve come to a decision. We want you to remove all your references everywhere to Jake and Maggie.”

There was a stony silence. Then I said, “O-kay...”

He pressed on. “The thing is, you don’t know what it’s like for us here. It’s insane! The kids can’t go anywhere without being mobbed! It’s like nothing we’ve ever seen before! Our friends Joanne Woodward and Paul Newman tell us it’s like nothing they’ve ever seen before!”

“It’s cell phone cameras,” I said. “It’s the internet.”

“No, it’s not that,” countered Stephen. “People are insane. When you’ve got people in this administration who can start an illegal war and rob this country of billions of dollars, you know that everyone’s gone insane. You know, right after the Oscars these people would come up to me and say things like, ‘Well, you’ve got it made now! Just put Jake in a movie and you can have any deal you want.’ But you know what?” he paused, then intoned darkly and intensely, “I would rather starve in the streets than take that money! That’s not my money. That’s my children’s money, and their children’s children after them.” He sighed and seemed to calm down. “So, the family just took a vote. I think I said something about that...?”

“I think so.”

“We made a decision never to be photographed together in

public ever again. The kids have got to be protected, you know.”

Well, I did know two things. I knew that the “kids” were 25 and 28 years old, and that Maggie at the moment was in New York, as there was a paparazzo picture in one of the gossip websites that morning of her walking through Soho. I wondered if she had faxed her vote.

There was absolutely no need to, but I apologized to Stephen for the misunderstanding and assured him that it wouldn’t happen again. He seemed to soften at this.

“Look, I’m going to be in New York in two weeks,” he said. “Why don’t we go out to dinner or something and strategize? I’m sure we can figure out other ways to get *Claptrap* out there.” I took this to mean that together we’d discuss places where he could read his poetry, giving particular attention to his all-important debut reading. I told him to call when he got in and we’d set a time and place. “All right, my darling,” he told me. “See you soon.”

That night after dinner I told Michael all about the phone calls as we were sitting watching TV. He looked thoughtful puffing on his cigarette, like Sherlock Holmes. Then he said, “Just as I suspected.”

“What? What did you suspect?” He only repeated, “Just as I suspected,” which only exasperated me more. I swatted him across the knee and told him to stop it.

He took another tack. “So. You’re going to see your boyfriend in two weeks.”

“He’s not my boyfriend. He’s a pain in the kiester. And you’re coming too. In fact I think he’d rather see you than me.”

“Ha!”

“You’re his editor. You’re obviously giving him something he’s never had before, a dialogue about literature and writing that centers on his own work. What writer wouldn’t love that?”

Michael shrugged. “I just guide the way for him.” He stubbed out his cigarette. “But that doesn’t answer the question. Now that Naomi and the kids are out of the picture, what are you going to do



about Stephen's book?"

"I haven't got a clue," I said.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### "We Have a Lot of Power in Hollywood"

**V**irage is a lovely quiet Mediterranean bistro on Second Avenue in the East Village that looks like it belongs in a little town in the south of France. After Michael and I found it by chance we adopted it as our special restaurant for birthdays, anniversaries, and other special occasions. I asked Stephen to meet us there.

It was the Tuesday evening after Easter. We snagged the corner booth, the best seating in the restaurant, ordered some drinks and an appetizer of hummus and pita, and waited.

"Are you nervous?" asked Michael. I had trimmed Michael's beard, washed his wavy long hair and made him wear his good pants for the occasion.

I admitted that I was nervous. But I was also still righteously angry over the Phone Call and the realization that I was going to have to promote Stephen's book of poetry all by myself. His celebrity friends weren't going to help. His movie-star children weren't going to help. His own wife, an award-winning writer, cut me, his publisher, dead in our only conversation! There still were a few words I wanted to have with him over that.

Anxious as I was about finally meeting him, though, I wanted to look nice. I put on my most attractive outfit, a cream-white angora sweater with a smoke-ring neckline and a black miniskirt. Oh, and a beret. It's a look that's a little young for me but Michael likes berets.

As the time for Stephen's arrival drew nearer, I began to fold and unfold my napkin distractedly.

Noticing my distress, Michael told me comfortingly. "Don't

worry, he'll probably be more nervous than you are.”

“I doubt that,” I said. “He’s Mister Big Hollywood Player.”

“You just watch,” said Michael.

After another agonizing twenty minutes, Stephen finally strolled through the door. He was as cute as his magazine picture, wearing jeans, oxblood loafers, and a short brown suede sports jacket. Underneath the jacket was a blue button-down shirt covered by a yellow V-neck pullover. Slung over his shoulder was a plain flat Jack Spade bag. Wire-rimmed glasses and a Rolex watch completed his polished, boy wonder look.

But Michael was right; I caught a worried expression on his face before he stared straight in our direction. Remember, at the time we knew what he looked like but he’d never seen us before.

I wagged my fingers at him and he bounded to our table. “Well, hello,” he murmured.

I rose and he gave me a brief, tight squeeze, then reached across the table and gave Michael a firm handshake as they introduced themselves.

“Michael,” he said. Then he turned to me. “And how do you prefer I call you?”

I laughed. “Mrs. Matheny. No, you can call me Cantara.”

“Mrs. Matheny. I like that,” he said with a little nod and continued, seemingly apropos of nothing, “Naomi used to like being called Mrs. Gyllenhaal, now she wants to change it back.”

He sat down right beside me on the banquette, so close that our thighs were pressed together. “So, Cantara,” he said slyly, “I just finished talking to Tom Baum about you.”

I was stunned into silence by this remark. With the first words out of his mouth he’s trying to embarrass me, I thought. I know I’m sounding oversensitive so let me explain.

A few months earlier, I’d struck up an online acquaintance with a young LA-based novelist named Henry Baum. Henry had just self-published his second novel *North of Sunset* after he couldn’t get the publisher of his first book—Richard Nash, a

mutual acquaintance—to pick it up. The book had been reviewed in a widely-read literary blog, and it was also on that blog where Henry read that I was publishing a book of poetry by the film and TV director Stephen Gyllenhaal.

There was a connection. Henry's father, screenwriter Tom Baum, had worked on a TV movie with Stephen and they still kept in touch. Henry took advantage of this connection by sending me an email in which he asked me to review his book. I ended up giving it a glowing recommendation and also urged him to enter it in a local book competition. He did, and *North of Sunset* won first prize and got a mention in *Entertainment Weekly* as well.

Grateful for my advice and, I suppose, interested in learning a little more about me, Henry started reading my personal blog. He soon discovered that I'd acted in porn in the 1970s, which is what made me believe that his father Tom and Stephen might have been gossiping about my past as men often do.

So is that why Stephen's thigh was pressing just a little too aggressively against mine? Was this his way of flirting? I couldn't tell. I was an old married woman and had lost my instincts.

"Well, shall we order?" said Michael.

At first Stephen begged off, saying he'd already had dinner. Then he glanced down at what I was nibbling on. "Mmm, looks good." He took a piece of pita from the breadbasket, dabbed it into the hummus on my plate, and chewed on it. "You know, I think I will get something."

Michael ordered the beef bourguignon, Stephen ordered the chicken tajine, and I—well, I had promised myself before we got to Virage that I'd try to dine like a lady, but after Stephen's remark I didn't feel like being so dainty after all. So I ordered the house specialty, a very rich ravioli stuffed with minced walnuts sautéed in truffle oil. Michael ordered a bottle of red wine for the table which Stephen at first declined, but within a few moments helped himself to a glass and proposed a toast. "Here's to a loooong relationship!"

It didn't take long for Stephen to relax and open up. He started off talking about Jake and Maggie, of course, how brilliant they were, how much more on the ball they were than their parents. "You know, we've given thousands and thousands of dollars to the Democrats. Thousands and thousands! But when we wanted to support Howard Dean, the kids saw right through him," he said, disappointment still clear in his voice. Then he continued in a confidential tone, "But I need to tell you, I've been invited to write a political column for The Huffington Post. You know, Ariana's newspaper on the internet. What do you think?"

Michael and I looked at each other quizzically, then shrugged.

He ignored our noncommittal response and went on, dropping names. He dropped the name of actor and fellow author Ethan Hawke. Hawke had recently written two novels to tepid reviews. He had also been the juvenile lead in *Waterland*, and had once lived in the garage of the former Gyllenhaal residence in Hancock Park, a wealthy neighborhood in the heart of Los Angeles. "But we will never forgive him for what he did to Uma," Stephen muttered darkly, shaking his head, referring I suppose to the adultery that caused the breakup of Hawke's marriage to actress Uma Thurman.

He also dropped the names, once again, of fellow liberals Joanne Woodward and Paul Newman, as well as the names of a few politicians on the national scene. He spoke admiringly of Bill Clinton, who at that time had a summer home close to theirs on Martha's Vineyard. Stephen hinted that Jake and Chelsea had been something of an item when they were teenagers. Perhaps it was reminiscing about mingling with influential people that prompted him to remark to us with a kind of wonderment, "You know, we have lot of power in Hollywood." The "we", I guessed, referred to Team Gyllenhaal.

Finally mellow from the wine and the good food, he got around to a subject close to his heart. He spoke about "putting it all together"—his family experiences, how he felt about the

Hollywood rat race, his struggle with his writing.

“You’re talking about artistic integration,” suggested Michael.

Stephen answered non sequitur, “I think I’ve got twenty, thirty more years.” Then he leaned toward us with a look of concern on his face. “Listen, are you sure this thing is going to go through?”

Michael and I exchanged puzzled glances. “What do you mean?” he asked.

“I mean the book.”

This unexpected question exasperated me. “Stephen,” I said, “we’re publishing *Claptrap*. We sent you an advance (a nominal sum, he never cashed the check) and after editing’s finished and we get a cover and your author photo it’s going to the printers. And after it goes on sale, you start collecting royalties. And reviews, we hope.”

“It’s just that Naomi and I have been burned before...” he said, trailing off.

I didn’t know how to reply. There was an uncomfortable moment of silence. Then Michael broke the tension.

“Look, Stephen,” he said earnestly, “we’re a legitimate publishing company. You have a copy of the contract which we both signed which clearly states our terms and conditions. We are totally committed to publishing your book and getting it out there to the people as best we can with our limited resources. Either you trust us or you don’t.”

Thus reassured, Stephen said, “Good. I have a couple of questions.” He reached into his Jack Spade bag, pulled out his manuscript, and went to sit down on the opposite side of the table beside Michael.

Michael eyed the manuscript. “If we’re going to do this,” he said, “I’m ordering another bottle.” Which he did.

I realized then we wouldn’t be “strategizing” with Stephen about his reading debut after all, and just went with the flow. I poured myself a glass of wine from the new bottle and lay down on



the banquette, letting the sound of their two voices wash over me.

They went through the manuscript poem by poem, from the political ones, to the ones dedicated to friends, to the ones about his family. I could hear Stephen murmur one line and Michael going over it again with him, sometimes suggesting where to put a better line break or find a clearer word, but most times just letting him read the poems out loud. I got a particular satisfaction when Stephen began to read aloud his poem, “Democracy”: “Dear god, she wears no thing.”

“No, not ‘no thing’,” said Michael patiently. “The word is nothing. Nuh-thing.”

“Nuh-thing.”

“Nuh-thing,” said Michael. “Emphasize the first syllable.”

“Dear god, she wears NUH-thing!”

When it got on to ten-thirty, Stephen excused himself and rose to go to the men’s room. Once he was out of earshot Michael leaned over the table and said to me, “You see what I was doing.”

I laughed. “You were directing the director!”

“I was doing that for your benefit,” said Michael.

“Oh baby,” I told him playfully, “I am so gonna sleep with you tonight.”

After a few minutes Stephen came back. “Michael, Cantara, this has been an interesting evening.” The bill was already on the table and he put his hand on it tentatively. “Sooo...how should we divide this?”

I don’t want to give you the impression that Michael and I could afford it, but we picked up the check for this meal. We wanted to honor the company of an artist who in many ways was more vulnerable than we were.

Getting a good reading venue in New York is never an easy matter, although Stephen kept telling me in subsequent emails, “Use my name!”—a name which, of course, meant nothing in the literary world. I contacted the big bookstores and the independent

ones. The big ones had stipulations as far as guaranteed sales and/or distribution a tiny imprint like ours simply couldn't satisfy. The small indies had fewer stipulations but offered practically no publicity. The only bookstore that boasted the combination of having a great venue, a prestigious reading series and the best mailing list in town was Housing Works in the trendy lower Manhattan area of Soho, and it looked as unattainable as the moon.

The problem of where *Claptrap* was to have its reading debut was solved two weeks later, when I was speaking on a panel on the future of small presses at the annual New York Round Table Writers Conference run by the Small Press Center. It was at this conference that I first met Chaya.

A new girl in town, she was eager to make contacts. I liked her the moment I laid eyes on her. She had an eclectic retro style that I admired. The day we met she was wearing a late-50s blue print crepe summer dress with a fitted bodice, tight waist, and full skirt without a crinoline, so that it swished as she walked.

My own panel session having ended, I spent the day attending other sessions and was just coming out of one when I spotted her coming up the stairs. She called out my name. I called out hers. We met on the landing and, even though we were new acquaintances, I felt a rapport.

I'm still not sure how she was able to recognize me. Possibly she could read my nametag from far off. But she already knew who I was because she was one of the many, many people I'd contacted in my quest to find Stephen a place to debut his book. As I said, I'd contacted every single possible bookstore in Manhattan and Brooklyn. Not to mention emailing a query to every single name I could find that was on the staff list of Housing Works. Out of all of them, Chaya, the new Volunteer Coordinator, was the only one who answered me, but only to ask if I might be attending the Round Table Conference. I emailed her back that I was a panelist. She emailed her reply that she was going to be working there for a

day in exchange for free attendance, and maybe we would meet.

So there we were at the conference. “You know,” she told me, “I think you should go straight to Jason.” She was talking about the president of the nonprofit that ran the Housing Works bookstore. “Right now he’s looking for crossover talent for the reading series. You know, like musicians who write novels. Stephen’s a film director who writes poetry. You could get him with that hook.”

As it turned out, that was the hook which got Stephen into Housing Works. When I began to exchange phone calls and emails with Jason a few days later, he also seemed impressed by the fact that I was publishing Stephen’s book not because we were longtime family friends or anything of the sort, but simply because Cantarabooks believed in his writing. Still, Jason and I agreed that Stephen was not enough of a name to attract the discerning New York literati. After a few candidates were mentioned who might provide the literary weight for a joint reading, the two of us settled on Mary Gordon who, wouldn’t you know it, was an old college chum of Naomi. Gordon was a known quantity, a well-established novelist and beloved East Coast teacher of creative writing. She’d certainly be a contrast to Stephen the Hollywood director with a just-published slim volume of verse.

Crowds of people were bustling up and down the stairs as we stood on the landing, but Chaya and I were so intent on our conversation that neither of us made a move to take it elsewhere. She told me she was new in town. I asked her where she was from, she said from Massachusetts. Recalling what Stephen had mentioned at Virage about his summer home among influential friends, I asked her, “Do you know anything about Martha’s Vineyard?”

“Matter of fact,” said Chaya, “I grew up on the Vineyard.”

My heart leapt at the coincidence. I asked her if she knew the Gyllenhaals. “They have a house in Chilmark they come to every summer,” she said. Close to the Clintons? I asked. “No, nowhere close!” she exclaimed. She went on to describe the kind of

neighborhood Chilmark was, as well as neighborhoods like Oak Bluff and Vineyard Haven, and the differences between them.

Did she ever meet the family? “I used to see the parents around the island a lot,” she said. “Sometimes Jake and Maggie. I think Jake used to be a lifeguard.”

“So, what do you think about them?” I asked, my heart starting to race a little.

She shrugged her shoulders. “Hm.”

By that simple shrug of her pretty shoulders Chaya had, in a single moment, cut Team Gyllenhaal down to life size for me. I could have kissed her.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **“I’ve Got a Few More Changes”**

**T**here was a mad flurry of activity before June 28, the date Housing Works and I had scheduled for the reading, and Stephen wasn’t making things any easier. In two months the books had to be ready and on hand, and we hadn’t even gotten his final edits yet.

I quickly regretted agreeing to the clause in his contract that gave him control over the final wording of his poems. Still not quite satisfied with his poetry, Stephen was calling and emailing Michael more often, sometimes twice a day. When his communiqués seemed to be on the verge of interfering with our personal lives I told Michael so, but he assured me that Stephen’s almost constant need for attention was something he could handle.

“The thing is,” said Michael, “all these changes and reconsiderations are making him a better poet. His word choices are improving. He’s stopped trying to be precious with line breaks. His ideas are clearer. It’s time well spent working with him.” Michael’s devotion to Stephen’s poetry made me feel at certain moments that I was dealing with a single two-headed creature who

spouted confessional free verse.

There was one day coming up though, that I thought Michael and I would have just to ourselves. Surely Hollywood's number-one poster family would be taking time off for this very special holiday.

Mother's Day 2006 was a beautiful spring Sunday. It was also a great day for mooching free food and wine from *The Bellevue Literary Review* which was holding its semi-annual reading. Of all the literary magazines in New York, their readings were the most lavishly catered. The wine was excellent and the platters of cheese and crudités were plentiful enough to make a meal of, which we did. We feasted, bought two issues of the *Review*, and listened to a few of their authors read from their work.

At the reading we ran into an acquaintance who invited us to an artists' open house in the East Village. Surrendering to serendipity we went there, drank more wine, and bought whatever was for sale. By seven in the evening we were pretty tipsy. We didn't want to go home to Queens quite yet and decided to have dinner at nearby Virage.

We found a table near the bar and, once settled in, phoned our son in San Francisco to wish him a Happy Mother's Day. Then from my purse I took out a picture of Stephen, a printout of the .jpg he sent me for his author's photo. (I own this picture and a few others I'll be mentioning.) I taped it to the menu holder on our table and Michael and I saluted it.

"Let's call him up," said Michael, grinning boozily. "Ask him to join us."

"Here's not here," I said. "He's back in LA. In fact, he and Jake and Naomi just spent the afternoon walking down the beach at Malibu."

Michael asked me how I knew—I told him that the gossip sites had posted paparazzi pictures of the three of them on the beach just that morning. He was shocked to find out how little time it took for even the most low-key of the family's activities to be

broadcast across the internet. Personally I liked it. Wherever Jake went, the paparazzi were likely to be lurking about, so that when his dad was with him there were sure to be pictures. Yes, it was a pleasure seeing pictures of Stephen. But I also needed to know where he'd be at given times. During the months of May and June he was constantly flying back and forth between the coasts at the same time I was trying to line up interviews for him, which was the only kind of publicity we could afford. All through those months Stephen continued to play coy with me concerning his whereabouts. He even hinted that he might not show up for his own reading at Housing Works.

But there was one thing I counted on: on Mother's Day he was sure to be with his wife and son and not bothering us with emails or phone calls.

"To Stephen!" we toasted the photo, eliciting some odd looks from the dinner crowd.

When we got home we were well-fed and drunk and I was feeling frisky, but like a fool I turned on the computer to check emails to see what might be in store for us the next day.

The subject of the very first email was, "I've Got a Few More Changes." The email address showed that Stephen had sent it from his Blackberry cell phone, the one he always kept in his back pocket.

I thought back to all those paparazzi photos which I'd seen that day and wondered how he could have been so lovey-dovey with Naomi on the beach, and at the same time be revising "The Nasty Pink of Sunrise" and "The Enron in My Face", two of his most finished poems.

Michael sat down at the desk. "I'll be just a minute," he said. Half an hour later, Michael was still working on Stephen's poems and I toddled off to bed alone.

On the last morning in May I was waiting for Stephen at the General Society Library, which also houses the Small Press Center,

on West 44th Street. Once again he was late. As I sat on the lecture platform waiting, making sure I'd be the first thing he saw when he walked in, I found myself trying to arrange my legs in a sexy pose while at the same time thinking, Why am I doing this? The man is an idiot.

About quarter to ten he came in and spotted me. He was flustered and apologetic as he came over, saying he'd just been in a meeting at CBS trying (unsuccessfully, as it turned out) to get them interested in one of his projects, a TV series. We still had over a half-hour until Michael was to join us. I'd wanted the extra time to show Stephen this historical library and to show Stephen off to the library staff.

The library staff, all the way up to the director, seemed to be heartily impressed with him, and we were offered a tour of their collection of antique locks and the usually closed meeting room with its portraits of staid library officers through the years. Stephen in turn seemed to be just as impressed. He announced one of the portraits reminded him of his grandfather. I'd never heard him speak about his family in Bryn Athyn except through his poetry. It was probably the closest Stephen and I ever had to a date, although it was more like taking a precocious kid on an outing.

At ten-thirty Michael arrived and we all went across the street to a coffee shop called The Flame, where we ordered a late breakfast. I ordered the bacon and eggs, Michael got toast, and Stephen settled for a bowl of oatmeal to go with his daily fistful of vitamins. We were all feeling free and lighthearted at that meeting, which we all considered to be a sort of wrap party. Stephen had let go of the book at last only a week earlier and without any further hesitation I'd sent it to the printers.

With the book now positively "going through", he was filled with all sorts of new plans. Although he'd stopped bringing up the possibility of "touring the country" with Jake and Maggie, he now talked about doing joint readings with Ethan Hawke. "I'll read with



Ethan everywhere—except in LA,” he told us. “They don’t understand this kind of thing in LA.”

I figured that Stephen meant poetry. “I thought you said you didn’t like Ethan Hawke,” I reminded him.

He answered with a nervous laugh, “I don’t. But we’re still friends.”

As a wrap gift, I presented Stephen with a bagful of goodies we’d gotten from the national book business convention, the American Book Expo, that past weekend. There were badges, clips, squeaky toys, and one special find, a giant and very lifelike gummy rat—a reference to one of his poems in *Claptrap*. Gleefully he took it out of the cellophane and dangled it high by the tail, scaring the waitresses.

“He’s a big kid, just a big kid,” I remarked to Michael later when Stephen went to pay the bill.

“And you’re his mother,” said Michael.

“No I’m not,” I protested.

The books arrived three Thursdays later and they were beautiful. I called Stephen the minute they came in and he told me to send a few directly to the family home on Mulholland Drive. I could charge the shipment to him.

“I know this isn’t in the contract,” he said, “but how about you send me ten copies, for friendship’s sake.” It’s true, our contract only required us to send one free copy per title to the author. But at that point, I figured building a friendship with Stephen was worth the cost-per-unit price of ten copies and agreed to it.

(Oh, who am I kidding? I was smitten with the guy and he knew it. Of course I’d send him a lousy ten copies.)

Two days later was Father’s Day, a beautiful summer Sunday in New York. A warm summer day in Manhattan meant only one thing to us: draft beer. We took the subway from our place in Queens to the Upper West Side and went to our favorite Irish saloon on Amsterdam Avenue. On this afternoon their doors had

all been flung wide open and the place was especially airy and inviting.

About fifteen minutes into Michael's and my first round at our usual table, Stephen's special ring, David Raksin's theremin dream from Hitchcock's *Spellbound*, emanated from my cell phone. I was sure that he was calling to thank me for sending the books. Assuring Michael that I'd only be a moment I went outside, leaving him with our two pints and my fried zucchini.

(Patrons of Kiely's, if any of you were unduly bothered on Father's Day 2006 by the sight of a short middle-aged Filipino woman pacing maniacally up and down the sidewalk swearing into her cell phone, let me belatedly apologize.)

When I returned to Michael twenty minutes later I couldn't hide it from him that I was upset. He asked me what was wrong. I spat it out in acid little bullets: "Jake—doesn't—like—the—cover."

Michael, not quite understanding, asked me to repeat what I'd just said, which I did. According to his father, 25-year-old Jake Gyllenhaal, Oscar nominee, star of major films and therefore someone eminently qualified to offer his opinion on book aesthetics, had informed Stephen of his displeasure at the cover of *Claptrap*.

I recounted more of our conversation. "First of all, I reminded the idiot that he was the one who gave me the photo to use in the first place. In fact he insisted we use it. He told me to trust him because, being a movie director, he had a great eye for these things."

"You mean that fuzzy picture of the back of that guy's head," said Michael.

"Yeah," I said. "That's Peter Sarsgaard on the red carpet at the LA premiere of *Jarhead*."

"How do you know this?"

"Because way back when Stephen told me over the phone he was sending me the jpg, he said it was Peter Sarsgaard on the red carpet at the LA premiere of *Jarhead*."

“And now he’s telling you that the picture he not only sent you, but the picture he insisted you use for the cover of the book, is a picture that Jake doesn’t like.”

“Oh, it’s worse than that,” I said. “He’s now denying that it’s Peter. You know what he just said? He said that he’ll ‘never reveal the true identity’. He said, ‘My lips are sealed forever.’”

Michael asked me what else was discussed. I told him that Stephen informed me that he had been in the movie business for twenty-seven years and that his wife was the recipient of the PEN/West Award for Best Screenplay of 1988.

“What the hell has this got to do with the book cover!?” he exclaimed.

“How the fuck should I know?” I said.

I remembered the insanity Stephen had put me through with that damn book cover back in May, all the times I had to convey to Joe, our mechanicals man, “The author wants it fuzzier. The author wants more negative space on the left. No, more on the right.” That photo passed back and forth between Joe and me so many times he threatened to charge me double if I sent it back to him once more.

So I told Stephen that this was it. This was the book and he was going to have to live with it and if he had a problem with it he could come back to New York and slug it out with me.

I reported to Michael, “He said, ‘Don’t be too sure. I’m bigger than you are.’ I said, ‘Yeah, but you’re fatter.’”

I didn’t mean his physique. He may have been fifty-six but he was still built like a quarterback. I meant his head.

Michael was not amused. “What are you, his sister now?”

The feelings that sprang up were not sisterly. “I—I just want to strangle him!” As I blurted out that very unprofessional statement two simultaneous and startling desires came over me. One was to strangle Stephen Roark Gyllenhaal. The other was to drag him to bed and jump him.

“I think you need dinner,” said Michael consolingly. I

protested that it was my turn to buy him dinner, but after finishing his beer he led me out of Kiely's down the street to an inviting seafood eatery. There we called our son to wish him Happy Father's Day, and Michael fed me more shrimp and lobster than we could afford until the urge to commit rape and poeticide left me.

I mentioned Grassroots Tavern in the East Village to Stephen as a place to meet a week later because it was the one bar in New York that made Michael and me feel totally grounded—our turf, as Michael put it. It's a garden-level bar that smells of old wood and dusty sunlight, a perfect place to drink and people watch. When the big power outage of 2003 killed all the cell phone signals and brought the city to a standstill while we were both stuck in Manhattan at our separate jobs, we both just knew that if we each made our way down to Grassroots we'd find each other, and we did.

I met Stephen who was already waiting at the steps, talking on his Blackberry. We stood there punching each other's arms until he finished his conversation, and went in together.

It was four o'clock and the place was just opening up, John already behind the bar. John was used to seeing Michael and me come in regularly and gave me a familiar but knowing glance. Maybe he thought I was working a sideline.

I sidled up with Stephen to the bar.

"This is great," he remarked brightly, looking around. "Jake would love this."

"No one cares about Jake here," I muttered embarrassedly.

"What'll you have?" asked John.

Stephen ordered a Perrier. This is a saloon, you Hollywood moron, I felt like yelling at him. The bartender told him they didn't serve Perrier, so he ordered a club soda. I got my usual pint.

We went over to the little table near the only window. "You know," said Stephen, "I was thinking about it in the shower this morning. It's really not a bad cover."

I glared at him, but he was totally oblivious to the fact that for over a week I'd been steeling myself for a major battle. Instead I said, "Okay, so are you happy now? You know the reading's in two days—it's really going to happen." He laughed nervously. "Are you ready?" I asked. He said now that it was inevitable, he couldn't wait. His nervousness was so palpable I started to soften toward him.

"I just spoke to Anders, he said he'll be there. And Max," said Stephen. I recognized the names of his two brothers from our previous conversations. When I asked him about his three sisters though, he was noncommittal. "I don't know anything about that." Instead he spent the better part of our meeting telling me stories about himself and his two brothers and some of the scrapes they all got into as boys. "And now he's been managing the newspaper in Minneapolis," he said of Anders. "I forgot the name."

I told him, the *Star-Tribune*. Of course I knew the name. I reminded Stephen I was from Minneapolis.

"Well, Anders and his family are coming," he said.

This led to a last bit of business, a question I'd been putting off. Chaya had said to me a week or two earlier, "Listen. My volunteers are going to be overworked with Mary Gordon's fans and students showing up, so if there's going to be a big media circus the night Stephen reads, I have to prepare them for that as well. So ask him if you-know-who is coming."

As nonchalantly as I could I asked, "By the way, is Jake going to be at the reading?"

Stephen pressed his lips together and smoothly answered, "No. He has to stay in Los Angeles to do pickup shots for his new movie, *Zodiac*."

I breathed a sigh of relief. "Good," I said quietly but still audibly enough, I'm afraid, that he heard. I regretted this immediately as I was turning over that pickup shots excuse in my mind. And while I was looking and looking at Stephen, searching, I guess, for some expression on his face that would tell me positively whether or not it was the truth, it hit me: Jake was planning to stay

away for his father's sake. And Stephen knew it.

It was then my heart went out to him completely and unreservedly and I thought, Anywhere you want, I'll go, anything you want, I'll get you.

The meeting took a little over an hour and the after-work customers were starting to fill up the place. After a short exchange of "So Wednesday at seven, don't be late" and "I guess we'll see you there" he and I got up together, went out and walked up the steps to the sidewalk. When I was a step higher and we were eye-to-eye I turned around and kissed him on the corner of his mouth. His breath smelled of fettucine alfredo.

## CHAPTER SIX

### "Oh No, My Darling, This is Just the Beginning"

**I**t was Wednesday evening June 28, 2006 at Housing Works Bookstore and Café. Chaya and I were looking down from the mezzanine at the rows of folding chairs that her volunteers had only just finished arranging in front of the platform stage.

"You see those ladies down there, the ones who just sat down?" said Chaya. "They've been here since two o'clock."

They were easy to spot—two women in early middle age, dressed neatly and casually but lacking flair. Their whole appearance cried out Tourists From the Midwest. With their shopping bags and purses, they settled into the third row, right in back of Michael, who had come in with me some time earlier and had taken his seat.

"How do you think they found out about tonight?" I said.

"Oh, didn't I tell you? We got listed in *Time Out* and *The New Yorker* and a couple of others. In fact *The New Yorker* called it 'Recommended'."

That was pleasing to hear. Those listings might even get us a

decent turnout, I thought. “I’ll go down and give them some Cantarabooks buttons,” I told Chaya. I was holding a fistful of more buttons to give away.

“Go get ‘em,” she said. I hurried down the curved staircase toward the seating and brushed past Stephen, who was chatting with a couple of chic Manhattan types, who turned out to be filmmaker Mirra Bank and her doctor husband. Stephen hadn’t said hello to me yet and I didn’t want to bother him while he was working his charm on people who appeared to be old acquaintances.

“Hey, Cantara, wait right there,” he called out. He left the couple, came and gently took me by the arm, and pulled me over to the folding seats in back. No one was sitting near us except a middle-aged man who appeared to be dozing. It turned out he was eavesdropping and would later report our private conversation on a celebrity gossip blog.

Stephen leaned close to me. “I want to introduce you to my wife,” he said.

“What should I call her?” I asked.

“Naomi, of course.”

“What should I compliment her on? What’s she proudest of?”

“Her children.”

“I meant her work.”

“*Running on Empty.*”

“Hm.” I had a few questions for Naomi about her screenplay and about working with director Sidney Lumet on the film that got her an Oscar nomination. Unfortunately that night I never got to ask them.

Incidentally, the man who was eavesdropping couldn’t see was that as we were talking, Stephen was stroking my bare shoulder with the back of his fingers.

“Shall we go?” Stephen said. I let him steer me by the arm again as I mentally prepared myself for the Great Encounter.

We went up toward three women, all only a few years older

than me, all very soberly and impeccably attired. Their dresses were mid-calf and their jewelry tasteful. Being braless, I suddenly felt self-conscious.

Then wouldn't you know it, without another word Stephen walked away and left me with them.

They stopped their conversation and glanced at me. I recognized two of the women, the featured novelist of the evening Mary Gordon, who was standing directly in front of me, with Naomi on her right. None of them made a move to break the ice.

Then I felt the buttons in my hand. I offered one to Gordon. When she held out her hand the others did as well.

"Body of Christ," I said, placing a Cantarabooks button in it. I repeated this with the others, as serious-sounding as I could. "Body of Christ. Body of Christ." Then I grinned and left them staring into their palms.

I went over to Michael and sat down beside him. "So," he said, "you finally met her."

I knew who he meant. I said yes, I finally met her, but failed to impress her with my peace offering. Feeling the buttons still in my hand, I remembered the two ladies Chaya and I had seen from the mezzanine. They were sitting right behind us. I turned around and asked them if they'd like a couple of souvenirs.

"Sure!" said one. I gave them each a button and asked them where they were from. "Ohio," she said. I asked them if they were here because they were tourists in town looking for something to do for free and had seen the listing.

"Oh no," said the other. "We came to New York for this."

I wasn't sure I heard them right. "You can't mean," I said slowly and deliberately, "that you came to New York just to attend this reading."

They brightened. "Oh yes!" they both said. "We looove the Gyllenhaals!"

It took a moment for this to sink in. Then I had a flash of intuition. "So...are you with JakeWatch or IHeartJake?"



“IHeartJake,” said one. The other nodded in agreement.

Let me freeze this scene and go back to the photo of Stephen that Michael and I toasted in Virage back on Mother’s Day. Remember that photo? I have to go back and talk about that one and a few others in order to explain what the exchange with the ladies from Ohio was all about.

This interlude begins a few weeks earlier in April 2006. The book was nearing completion and I had told Stephen that he needed to supply me a headshot photo for the back cover as soon as possible. I told him that this should present no problem since Hollywood was filled with photographers who specialize in actor’s headshots. But Stephen told me he’d go me one better—he’d ask a friend with a camera to take his picture.

Well, the “friend with a camera” turned out to be Oscar-nominated, and eventually Oscar-winning, cinematographer Robert Elswit. Elswit had been the Director of Photography on two of Stephen’s movies, *Waterland* and *A Dangerous Woman*.

Obligingly, Elswit dropped in at their home on Mulholland Drive one Sunday afternoon and took some pictures of Stephen. I have to tell you, when I got the disk in the mail from Stephen and proceeded to check out one picture after another—there were about thirty—I got a real frisson. It felt like I was viewing objects of art in an exclusive gallery. Elwit’s photos were the work of a master, beautifully composed, but fresh and candid. And they made Stephen look sexy in his brown corduroy jacket, yet very intellectual, very literary indeed. It was going to be difficult choosing the one that would be Stephen’s “official” portrait.

Finally I came to the last four pictures. Michael, who was looking over my shoulder, said, “What the hell is Jake doing there?”

I wondered that myself. When I called Stephen later to tell him I got the disk, I asked him why he’d also sent me pictures of him with his son.

“Oh, you like them?” he said. “Jake was over at the house that day so Bob included him. He looks great, doesn’t he?”

I was still smarting from the Phone Call and Stephen’s subsequent explanation of the Family Conclave in which it was voted that they “keep Jake and Maggie out of it”. So I asked him as clearly as I could what I was supposed to do with the photos of him and Jake.

He said simply, “Oh, they’re yours.” I repeated my question. “Do anything you want with them,” he insisted. “All these pictures are for you.”

When I got off the phone I turned on my laptop screen and looked at them again. I did my best to empty my mind of any associations the photos had and just looked at them as if they were, in fact, masterworks in a gallery.

And in viewing them this way, they became more beautiful than ever, quintessential portraits of a father and son, all evoking a quiet tenderness and unspoken bond that felt universal, which is the hallmark of great art.

Stephen had said that they all were a gift, that they were mine. I was deeply touched by his gesture.

And then a sudden chill came over me. I wondered, Does Naomi know about this?

I have to confess that even though I hadn’t yet encountered Naomi face-to-face she had me spooked. I began to wonder what kind of vengeance she might wreak if she discovered that Stephen had given me private pictures of their son.

Still, I was proud of owning them. I planned to keep them to myself and look at them often. I put them up on my website to view them in private, but I must have messed up the HTML code because the next afternoon I got an email from a woman who worked at the New York Public Library. “I hate to tell you,” she wrote, “but the HMTL code for your password gate is visible on your web page. If you meant to hide that page, we can see it and we can see the pictures. In fact, they’ve been copied and they’re now at

the fan sites JakeWatch and IHeartJake.”

My heart sank to my knees. My first thought was, How the heck did they find the page? My website was about Cantarabooks, not Jake Gyllenhaal. Or were Jake’s fans scouring the net from minute to minute, searching for every slightest reference to him? As it turned out, the most rabid of his fans were doing just that.

My second thought was, Naomi is going to kill me.

So, swallowing my feelings of dread, I visited the fan sites. IHeartJake was an elaborate site that was difficult to negotiate. I skimmed through some of the forum postings to get a sense of what was going on, but I couldn’t find my pictures. In contrast, JakeWatch was a straightforward blog and easy to read. My favorite portrait of Jake and Stephen was prominently on display at JakeWatch all right, the lovely one with both of them in profile. An amusing caption had been added, and the comments ranged from exclamations of praise—“Wow, I can’t believe you got this yummy new pic of Jake! JakeWatch rocks!!”—to remarks of concern—“What did you use, a telephoto lens? This looks like a private moment in their home and I don’t feel comfortable looking at it.” Oh yes, I was surely going to be on Naomi’s death list.

Nevertheless, intrigued by the devotion of the fans, I started to read other entries and comments at JakeWatch. A lot of them were funny, thoughtful and well-informed. The fans were aware of the more public comings and goings of the family, but they were also familiar with their body of work, on screen and on stage, and discussed it intelligently. Most of the postings concerned Jake of course, but some were about Maggie, one or two were about Naomi, and a surprising number were about Stephen. “There are some of us here,” said one entry, “who think Stephen is even more attractive than his son.”

A little light went on in my head.

That evening I emailed the administrator of JakeWatch a formal message. Identifying myself as Stephen’s publisher, I informed her that I was the owner of the photographs she’d posted,

that by posting them she was in violation of international copyright law, and I demanded that she take them down. I figured that if Naomi learned about her son's family pictures being made public, perhaps she'd also see that I tried to rectify the situation in a Naomi-type way and be merciful. If the administrator ignored me, or replied with a fuck-you attitude, I was sunk.

Fortunately, the administrator was a young student living in northern England who was very apologetic. Not only did she take the picture down from her site, she contacted the administrator of IHeartJake, who took down all the pictures from her site as well.

But I didn't want to leave it at that. There was interest in Stephen shown by a handful of JakeWatch fans and I wanted somehow to tap into it. When the administrator emailed to tell me the pictures had been removed, I replied to her in a milder tone, thanking her, which prompted her to ask the question that gave me my opportunity: "Does Jake know about us?"

I emailed her back, telling her in so many words that the Gyllenhaals were familiar with what was being said about them on the internet. Of course they all took the high road, ignoring the sites that attempted to pry into their private affairs and pander to the crudest opinions. But they also appreciated responsible, respectful sites like JakeWatch and their friendly rival, IHeartJake, where fans were obviously more interested in Jake and Maggie's careers rather than their personal lives.

Reader, I confess to a minor deception. No such appreciation by the Gyllenhaals existed. In fact, to hear it from Stephen, he and the whole family regarded any reference to them at all on the internet as an intrusion and an insult. There were official fan sites for Jake and Maggie, but they were run by their respective publicists and were consistently incomplete, out-of-date, and of course offered their fans no opportunity to interact with the objects of their admiration.

With this in mind, I went on in my email to offer JakeWatch a proposition: If they were willing to get together with IHeartJake

and assemble say, a dozen questions for Stephen, he'd agree to an online interview with them. The administrator jumped at the chance.

Frankly, I offered this without clearing it with Stephen first. But I was sure that I could get him to change his uninformed opinion of JakeWatch and IHeartJake.

"They're not like TMZ or E! Online or any of that gossip trash," I told him over the phone. "They're run by true fans, and true fans are the people you really need to connect with."

"How do you know they're true fans?" he asked.

"They're already reading your poetry," I said. This was a fact. One of the fans had managed through an exclusive academic database to access an earlier version of his political poem "Land of the Free" from a college literary quarterly and had posted it.

After he was convinced that they were actually interested in his work, Stephen was easily persuaded to give the fans of JakeWatch and IHeartJake his very first interview in his new role as a man of letters. Because of this interview, these fans believed that they had established a special relationship with Papa Gyllenhaal, and they had every right to believe it. Remember this when you read in chapter eight about the notorious falling-out between Stephen and his admirers at the Zinc Bar a few months later in October, forever to be known to Jake fans as "Babygate".

But on this warm June evening, all was still rosy in the Gyllenhaal fan world, and that was how two ladies from Ohio came to be sitting behind Michael and me at Housing Works. Their devotion was so touching I felt honor-bound to tell them, "You know, Jake won't be able to make it tonight."

The one on the left piped up immediately, "Oh, that's okay, we love all the Gyllenhaals."

"Besides," said the one on the right, "We hear Maggie and Peter are coming. They live here in Soho, you know."

"And I saw Naomi Foner, Jake's mother, as we were coming

in,” added her friend, pointing to the other side of the room.

Ah, Naomi. I turned around and saw her putting the finishing touches on what appeared to be a canapé table. The allure of free food was too great—I excused myself and went over.

It was quite a nice selection, Greek-themed: olives, the really fancy expensive kind, several types of cheeses including feta, and loaves of crusty bread cut into bite-sized pieces. Right in the middle of the table was a centerpiece, a cactus plant with a card attached that read, “Good luck with your poetry tonight!” It was signed, “Jamie Lee”.

Obviously the spread had been supplied by the Gyllenhaals because Naomi was fussing with the table, being very proprietary. She was intensely involved in smoothing out the linen-like tablecloth and didn’t notice me when I approached. I was on the verge of complimenting her on the array, when one of the young volunteers I’d asked to take pictures of the event came up to ask me a few questions about it. At the sound of our voices Naomi raised her head, glared at me, and abruptly walked away.

I took some olives back to Michael and we ate a couple. It was almost showtime. We could see Stephen walking toward us when the host for the evening approached and directed him to his reserved seat in the first row on the aisle. The seat next to it was to be for Naomi. Then beside her, the host told us, would be Michael and me. Michael told him thanks but we’d prefer to remain in the second row.

After a couple of moments the host went up to the lectern and tapped on the microphone. The crowd quieted down. He gave the usual kind of modest, amusingly self-deprecating introduction that heads of nonprofit art groups like to give. He thanked everyone for turning out for a literary event when there were better things to do in Manhattan on a beautiful summer evening, which provoked polite laughter. He went on to explain the mission statement of Housing Works, the organization which ran the bookstore, and encouraged people to support their free reading series by

becoming customers.

Then he announced the featured readers for the evening: the headliner, internationally-renowned novelist Mary Gordon, for whom there was polite applause, and second on the bill, a newcomer to the world of literature, film and TV director Stephen Gyllenhaal.

The response to his name was so thunderous that it startled me. It wasn't just applause, but whoops and whistles, a very un-literary reaction. I turned and half-rose to take my first good look at the crowd. I'd been to a few readings at Housing Works before, but never had I seen it as packed at this. It was a moderately diverse crowd, leaning more to young people and slightly more female than male. Those who couldn't get seats were standing in the mezzanine; those who couldn't find room in the mezzanine stood on the twin curved staircases; and those who couldn't find room on the staircases stood in the back almost toe to toe.

Michael leaned close to my ear so I could hear through the applause what he had to say. "You see what just happened."

"What?"

"He didn't mention Jake or Maggie."

Michael was right. Nowhere in the introduction had Jake or Maggie's names been mentioned. This applause wasn't for "Jake and Maggie's dad" but for Stephen as Stephen. That did my heart good. I wanted so much for this to be his night.

Then I noticed that the seat beside him, the seat that had been especially reserved for Naomi, was vacant. It was to remain vacant the entire evening.

During the enthusiastic response Mary Gordon, on the other side of the aisle, gestured for the host to come over and exchanged a few private words with him. When the applause died down a young lady, one of her students I presumed, went to the lectern to give her a short introduction. Then Gordon herself ascended to the lectern. Although technically she was the "main event" and should have gone on after Stephen's warm-up, Gordon obviously realized

that she was being outshone and just wanted to get her reading out of the way. It was a passable reading of a passable excerpt from one of her passable books, and the applause for her was warm but polite.

She'd taken only about fifteen minutes. Then as she stepped down to resume her place in the audience, I seized the opportunity to go over and sit with Stephen for a moment. With an odd frisson, I noticed that I'd taken Naomi's designated seat. I offered Stephen a Cantarabooks button.

He accepted it from me and pinned it to his shirt. Like a trouper, he seemed to be taking all this unexpected adulation in stride. "So you're going to introduce me, right?" he said with a big smile.

This caught me by surprise. "No one told me I was going to be up there!" I said. In fact the thought never entered my mind that Stephen would need me to provide his introduction. Right up to that evening, I still believed that somehow Naomi could be called upon to publicly support him.

But he thrust his copy of *Claptrap* in my hands and practically pushed me toward the lectern and there, with whatever dignity I could muster, I read the Editors' Preface. It took less than three minutes. There was applause, and I stepped down and went to sit beside Michael.

Then Stephen stepped up. And from the first moment he walked onto that stage, he suddenly transformed into something more than a mere poet. He became part rock star, part preacher, part politician. He was scintillating, charming, witty, goofy, compelling, boyish, and beguiling. In his light short-sleeved shirt and fitted jeans he looked and sounded like a muscular adolescent.

His reading was unique, closer to a cabaret performance. Each poem was almost like a musical number, and between each poem he joked, he pattered, he mock-apologized for his lack of professionalism. At one point he expressed his initial distrust of our desire to publish his poetry.



“I carried their letter around for three days, I was sure it was some sort of scam. You know, the one where they ask you to pay three thousand dollars and they’ll publish your book. But I guess that wasn’t the case after all.”

The crowd laughed, but I was stunned. For the past year I’d been very, very careful to make it clear to anyone who would listen that Cantarabooks was a legitimate publishing company. I was well aware there would always be people convinced that we were somehow exploiting the Gyllenhaal fame or somehow being bankrolled by the Gyllenhaal fortune. Even to joke about such a possibility I felt could compromise our reputation, and I was hurt that Stephen could make such a joke so offhandedly. I made a mental note to bring it up with him at the next opportunity.

But apart from that slip, his reading was a resounding success. With a couple of encores it lasted forty-five minutes.

After more wild applause, there was a short break and the Q&A part of the evening began. Mary Gordon was invited back to the stage to join Stephen in answering questions from the audience. At this point I decided to get up and mingle. They could still be heard from any area of the bookstore, and I knew that Michael would fill me in on whatever I might have missed.

Besides, I sort of wanted to see what Naomi was up to and perhaps have a nice conversation with her. With a little sleuthing I spotted her behind a bookcase alone, sitting in one of the plush armchairs. But when I approached her, she deliberately got up and walked away.

Do I have cooties? I wondered. Or maybe she thinks Stephen and I...? The idea was so preposterous I laughed out loud. Anyone could tell that Stephen was a faithful husband.

I also spotted, a little farther back, Maggie and Peter Sarsgaard with a group of women and kids and a couple of guys who looked suspiciously like Stephen. I guessed they were his brothers and their families.

The Q&A, which Stephen was obviously the star of, also lasted

long enough for me to schmooze with some enthusiastic girls who identified themselves as JakeWatch and IHeartJake fans.

After the Q&A came the book signing, which took over an hour. Every copy of *Claptrap* on display was sold, and everyone who bought a copy wanted an autograph and a little time with the author. There was a constant crowd around Stephen, and it took me awhile to be able to have a couple of words with him.

When it was finally down to one fan I decided to break in. “You did a great job putting this together,” the well-dressed man said to Stephen. “You ought to read at the Bowery Poetry Club.”

“That would be cool,” Stephen answered. As I came up he grinned and distractedly put his arm on my shoulder.

“I have to have a word with you,” I said as firmly as I could, and mentioned his joke.

“Just, just calm down,” he said genially. Actually it felt like he was being just a wee bit patronizing, but it was probably just my irritation with him at the moment. “We’ll discuss this later.”

“Good,” I said. “How about we step outside?” With a laugh he waved me away.

Still irritated, I went over to Michael and told him about Stephen’s joke but he told me to forget it. “It’s his night. Let him joke about what he wants to. There’s no harm done.” I wasn’t so sure about that, but I said no more to Michael on the subject.

The crowd was rapidly thinning. “Well, looks like everyone’s clearing out,” he said. “Let’s go so they can clean up and lock up.” I agreed to meet Michael out on the street once I said goodbye to Chaya.

Almost everyone had left but Chaya was still there supervising her volunteers. They’d worked an especially long and hard shift that evening. I went over and stood by her as she watched several of them fold up and carry to the storage room the long heavy table that just a short time earlier had held the array of Greek canapés. Naomi, a few feet away from us, had retrieved her tablecloth and the cactus plant and was now wrapping and packing into a

shopping bag the remaining olives, cheese, and bread.

“Good,” said Chaya. “She’s probably leaving that food with us. Now I can feed my volunteers.” But it turned out not to be the case, for as we watched Naomi with great solemnity went over to Maggie and presented the bag of remaining delicacies to her.

Chaya held her tongue, but I could see it was an effort.

I found Michael standing outside the bookstore with all the Gyllenhaals. I didn’t get a chance to continue my discussion with Stephen, however, as he promptly announced, “We’re going to Balthazar.” The place he mentioned was an expensive French restaurant a few blocks away that was famous for its celebrity clientele.

He smiled down at me. “So you want to come along?”

“So are we invited?”

“Of course.”

“Should we press our noses against the glass, or do we get to sit inside with you?”

“Shut up,” he said, grabbing me playfully in a headlock.

It was about eleven on a still-warm summer night when over a dozen of us walked in a sprightly pack down the narrow Soho streets to Balthazar, Stephen at the lead with Anders, then Michael and me, then his brother Anders’ wife and teenaged children, brother Max and his wife and children, Naomi, an elderly woman who I later learned was her Aunt Frieda, and bringing up the rear Maggie and Peter. Stephen was still high from the success of his reading and we were benefiting from his upbeat spirit.

The restaurant was fairly crowded, but the maitre d’ led us to a long table in the front. Obviously they were prepared for the arrival of our party. This time the tab was on Stephen. I set aside my momentary irritation with him and ordered lavishly for Michael and me. We split a filet mignon—we were both suddenly ravenously hungry—and drank the cabernet which flowed freely. Unlike at our dinner at Virage, Stephen kept to club soda and

hardly touched a drop of alcohol.

It was a lively table but the conversation was mostly taken up with family matters. You know, the usual fare about Uncle So-and-So and Cousin Whatsis and who's graduating school and who's in the hospital, that kind of thing. Naomi spent almost all her time with her Aunt Frieda and with Anders' wife. Michael and I observed this with interest. Not until the very end of the party did Stephen go over and spend any time with Naomi, and then it was only to ask her if she was ready to leave.

Mostly we kept to ourselves because practically no one came over to say hello, and the close family atmosphere didn't encourage us to try to break in and make small talk. But it didn't matter, we amused each other. We got tipsy, arm wrestled, and watched other people in the restaurant. Actually someone did come over to say something friendly to us. It was Peter Sarsgaard, who reached over the table to shake both our hands.

"This is a great thing you're doing," he said with a big smile. I asked him if there was anything in the world that would bring together his own family like this. "Elvis," he said.

"Elvis?" I repeated. "You mean Elvis Presley?"

"Yeah. He was a melungeon, you know," replied Peter, in a strange non sequitur. I would have liked to pursue the topic, but Maggie came over and, with only a perfunctory greeting to us, took him back to other side of the table where Stephen was standing.

She was very pretty and five months pregnant—you could see the bulge beneath her retro 40s-style black crepe sheath. Yet throughout the evening she maintained an almost regal bearing and placid composure. She was the most actressy woman Michael and I had been in close proximity to since our days together in theater, and we took some pleasure in observing her and the way people related to her. Naturally Peter beamed and beamed at her all night. It was easy for anyone to see how completely in love with her he was and with the baby. Every so often, even while they were chatting with others, he'd reach over and gently pat her belly.

As for Stephen, his daughter was obviously the apple of his eye. We watched them together during the few minutes he and Maggie were sitting together, talking with the wives of Max and Anders. Stephen was stroking her shoulder with the back of his fingers, his hand gradually making its way to her bare back, which he casually caressed through their conversation.

It was getting on toward two in the morning. The party was winding down, and I needed to visit the ladies room. When I returned, I was amused to find Michael and Stephen in the middle of what appeared to be a serious exchange. Stephen was sitting in my chair, staring deeply into Michael's face with a childlike wonder. To look at Stephen you would think that Michael were revealing to him, and him alone, the Secrets of the Ages.

As I approached I heard Stephen murmur in a heartfelt voice, "Thank you, Michael. I'll always remember that." Then, as if in a daze, not even acknowledging me, he rose and slowly walked away.

I leaned over to Michael and asked, "What did you say to him?"

He answered with studied precision, "I have no fucking idea. I am completely wasted." Then he asked me if I had returned. I assured him that I indeed had. "Good. Because I've gotta go. I've been holding it in ever since he sat down." I pointed him toward the direction of the restrooms. Then as I picked up my purse and started to rearrange its contents (I have a habit of doing this in restaurants), Anders' wife came over and sat down beside me.

"So, you're Stephen's publisher, he didn't make you up," she said in a conversational tone.

It was strange way to put it, but I acknowledged the fact.

"Do you know Liza? It's strange that Liza didn't come."

"Who's Liza?" I asked.

"Liza Bennett, Stephen's sister. She lives in Manhattan. She's a writer, you know." I said I didn't know that. "In fact, she's on the Board of Directors of the American Academy of Poets."

"What!" I exclaimed. Even mildly drunk, this bit of news

managed to stun me. Stephen you fathead, I silently yelled at him. All your promises to me to get Alan-fucking-Dershowitz and Ted-fucking-Danson and all your other useless celebrity friends behind your book of poetry and all the while your sister is a board member of one of the most well-known poetry organizations in America?

“Oh, you didn’t know that,” said Anders’ wife with a sheepish grin, and went back to sit with her son and daughter.

I sat there alone, my thoughts still reeling. What the hell was really going on in the mind of Stephen Gyllenhaal? Just what was he trying to show his wife, his children, his siblings, the whole damn world? And what exactly did he want from Michael and me?

Stephen, who had evidently snapped out of his daze and was once again the genial host, had finished chatting with his younger brother Max and was coming around to my part of the table again. I wished that Michael were back from the men’s room so that he could stop me from blowing up at Stephen. I felt dangerously close to it. But when I saw the satisfied glow on his face my heart melted again.

He was holding his Blackberry. “I think I’ve finally got a spare minute to call Jake and tell him how I did.”

“Yes, tell him all about it,” I said. Then, trying to suppress my soft and fuzzy feelings toward him, with all the vehemence I could muster I blurted out, “Tell him you did it all by yourself! Isn’t this what you wanted? You did it all by yourself! Are you happy now?”

Stephen laughed, an easy laugh this time. “Of course.”

“Great! Now I’ll never have to hear from you or see you ever, ever again.”

He bent down, put his hand on my shoulder and gave it a squeeze. “Oh no, my darling,” he said intimately, as if he were talking to a fellow conspirator, “this is just the beginning.” And off he trotted towards the nearest vestibule to make his call.

As I watched him leave, all my efforts, all my emotions of the past year started to overwhelm me. There hadn’t been a day in all that time when Stephen wasn’t in my thoughts and plans; there

hardly had been a moment when I felt that Stephen's hopes and dreams didn't coincide with mine.

At that moment I understood how deeply, deeply I had fallen in love with the idiot. Here we were, both of us in middle age, discovering each other as we both were starting on our separate roads to self-discovery. I felt that we were somehow alike, that our minds matched. And there was something about his incompleteness that touched and fascinated me. In many ways being in love with him was deliriously wonderful. It was like being in an unpredictable world that held me in a strange enchantment. But it was also like drowning.

I was startled out of my reverie to find, of all people, Peter sitting directly on my right. Maggie was now talking with her mother and he had, I suppose, just for a change, moved several places down the table. With his head slightly cocked, his cheek resting on his hand, he was gazing at me with a dreamy look.

I leaned over and asked him more earnestly than I realized at the time, "Tell me, once you enter the Gyllenhaal circle, do you ever get your life back?"

Sighing contentedly, he said, "No."

But I couldn't share his contentment. I had to break the spell, I had to get my life back. If I didn't, I'd go under and never come up again.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **"I'm Reading for All of Us"**

**W**hen Stephen left with his family for Martha's Vineyard a few days later I was certain I wouldn't see him for a while. I hadn't managed to schedule any more readings for him but, frankly, I was grateful to regain my peace of mind. Housing Works had been fun, the crowd loved him and the staff said they'd be glad to have him back anytime. It was

an unusually major debut for a poet with, let's face it, barely four dozen poems to his name, but I figured with that under his belt perhaps he'd find the confidence to drum up his own subsequent gigs.

It had been made pretty clear that Naomi wanted to have as little to do with his poetic career as possible. But that didn't seem to matter. Stephen had the book and he insisted he had his own literary friends to cheer him on. It looked like he could get along without either of us.

Therefore it was with some surprise that I got his email around the second week of July, asking me, "So when are my books coming?"

I emailed him back, "What books?" Then I called him. Over the phone, he told me that they were for the garden party where he was giving a reading. "We planned this weeks ago."

Who did he mean by "we"? I wondered.

"I told you about it," he continued. "You know Joanna Coles? She's a famous journalist. She's English." I told him I hadn't heard of her. "She's the new editor of *Marie-Claire*, that fashion magazine. She's one of our neighbors now so she's throwing together kind of a big garden party to say hello. I feel in many ways that I have to read. She put Maggie on the cover. Besides, Ted and Alan are going to be there."

Ah, I thought, as the other shoe dropped. "Okay," I said, "so how many do you need?" I had a few on hand I could send him.

"Um, how about a hundred?"

"A hundred!"

"I think you told me I was entitled to author's copies at cost."

"Yeah, but that's—that's—" I began, consternated. Let me finish here. There's a clause in our contract that allows an author to purchase up to twenty copies of his or her book at cost, foregoing royalties. This was specifically meant for our struggling authors (Michael and I once imagined we'd be dealing only with actual struggling authors) so that they could buy cheap copies of



their book from us and resell them at their readings, and be able to pocket a few dollars right away.

A glimmer of hope shone. “So,” I said, “are you trying to tell me you’ve found a vendor?”

“Vendor?”

“I mean, which store will you be selling them through? I could just sell them outright to your vendor on a fifty-fifty split. And you’d still be getting your royalty from the sale.”

There was a pause. “Well, I wasn’t planning on royalties. I think my friends deserve this book.”

At that point I had to sit down. I was on the verge of shouting something at him like, “You mean your precious Alan Dershowitz and your precious Ted Danson and all your other rich friends on that island can’t even cough up fifteen lousy dollars for a copy?”

Instead I told him as calmly as I could that Cantarabooks was in business to sell books, not supply him with little trinkets to give away to his millionaire neighbors on the Vineyard.

He seemed bemused by this. Then finally he asked if he should find a bookstore to sell his books. We’d gone over this before but I went through it again as if it were the first time. I told him yes, that’s how it has to be done. As the first-time author of a slim book of poetry with a limited print run, he couldn’t realistically expect to automatically see his book on the shelves of every bookstore in the country. A writer nowadays had to find ways to promote his own book. I got him off to a good start reading and selling at Housing Works, but if he had any ideas at all on where to read and sell, he should investigate them.

And besides, after the ten free copies I’d sent him and the thirty copies I had to donate to Housing Works to secure his place as a featured reader, it was time for Cantarabooks to start making back some costs. Only the brisk business our order fulfiller in Baltimore was doing with *Claptrap* was making us any money. And that was chiefly because Ally, the fifteen-year-old girl who ran the online fan site IHeartJake, put a link to Stephen’s order page on

her website. His book was selling like hotcakes to fans of Team Gyllenhaal.

Stephen offered to find the names and numbers of bookstores in Martha's Vineyard and told me to call them. He assured me that there'd be no problem, all the bookstores knew him. "Mention my name!" he said.

Then I asked him when the garden party was. He said Sunday, July 23.

My God, that was only thirteen days away. Would our printer be able to do another run and deliver it on time? And what bookstore would be foolhardy enough to order a hundred copies of Stephen's book with such an uncertain possibility of selling them? Every sensible fiber of my being was crying out, Don't get suckered again! Just say no!

And then I remembered Stephen's look—that sad needy puppy look. His son inherited that look, you know, it was on full display in *Brokeback Mountain*. Oh yeah, you know what I'm talking about.

"All right," I sighed. "I'll see what I can do."

"You can do it. You're amazing," he said.

No I wasn't. Just stupid.

That very day I contacted Chris our printer and ordered the books, pleading with him (a little over-strenuously, I'm embarrassed to say) to rush them as a personal favor to a long-standing customer. There was no point in using Stephen's name with Chris, he never went to the movies. Then I had to call around Martha's Vineyard to see if some bookstore would take his books. Of course none of them had ever heard of him. I thought of Chaya, that Vineyard native, shrugging her shoulders indifferently at the clannish, snobbish summer people who came and went with the warm weather.

In the end a friend of Naomi came to the rescue. "You know Carly Simon?" Stephen asked me over the phone. Well, that name I

had heard of. I said yes. She wrote that song called “You’re So Vain” I thought to myself.

“Carly co-owns a store over in Vineyard Haven called Midnight Farm,” he said. “She’ll buy our books.”

I asked him if it was a bookstore. “No,” he said, “more of a general store.” I had a mental picture of bolts of calico on the shelves, a cracker barrel and a potbellied stove, but of course it consisted of none of those things. As I saw later on their website it was more of a faux-folksy, extremely high-end boutique.

“In fact,” he said, “they invited me to read in the store next month.”

I asked him if it was a public reading. “Of course,” he said.

That was actually a bit of good news I could put on the Cantarabooks website calendar. Maybe some of Stephen’s fans near the area would show up.

So, right after I got off the phone with Stephen I contacted Midnight Farm’s other co-owner and full-time manager, who sent us an order for the books as well as a check. I was pleased with the possibility that we might soon be able to break even on the costs of publishing *Claptrap*.

At this time, however, there were pressing matters we had to attend to in Queens, where we had been left in the dark. Literally. Shortly before Stephen was to read at that swank party in the Vineyard, an especially strong thunderstorm soaked through some ancient rotting underground cables, which took out virtually all the power in the borough. It started on a Tuesday afternoon with a short brownout, then a brief return of power, then it went out completely and stayed out for eight days.

Of course it messed up life for everyone in our neighborhood. In the middle of the most sweltering July in years, air conditioners were dead. People were sending their children to sleep out on the fire escapes. Food spoiled, meat turned bad, non-working traffic lights confused drivers and pedestrians alike, and nighttime turned our street into a dark unfamiliar foreign country.

Miraculously one outlet did work in our apartment, the outlet where our refrigerator was plugged in, and as we had a gas range Michael could still cook dinner. We also dragged our floor lamp over and plugged it into the working socket, and spent our evenings amusing each other at the kitchen table.

We were also, of course, without the internet. Since almost all our business correspondence was by email, it meant that I had to find the most convenient place to get online. As the first day of the outage went into the next and we got the news filtered down to us that it would take till the following week for the city to fix the problem in Queens, I decided that the most convenient place to get on the internet would be Manhattan. I still had some prepaid time left at a cybercafé there.

So I shlepped over every day on the 7 train to use one of the cybercafé's computers for an hour or two. As early as Wednesday afternoon our inbox was already crammed with unanswered emails. I answered all the others before getting to Stephen's. For some strange reason, Stephen had decided that his emails to me would also serve as some sort of personal diary. Here were a few of the items:

*~ Played Scrabble with my amazing daughter. She beats me every time!*

*~ Got the invite, going to Bill Clinton's birthday bash in August.*

*~ Disaster—had to bail water from our sailboat!*

*~ I just woke from a nap.*

In each email he added the question, When are my books coming?

With all his emails to answer I decided to call Stephen on my cell phone from the cybercafé and I left him several messages without getting a reply. It wasn't until I was already on a packed subway train headed for home during rush hour when my phone

began to vibrate.

Of course he wanted to know “the status of his books”. I explained that I had just emailed our printer an hour earlier. He had promptly emailed me back that the books would get to Martha’s Vineyard by Friday.

“It has to be Friday. They don’t deliver shipments here on Saturday,” Stephen told me petulantly. Then he started to laugh nervously and went on to say, “Anyway, don’t worry about it,” as if he were trying to smooth things over. “We’re all doing great here. Did I tell you about the sailboat? It’s so funny. Maggie—”

As he hadn’t asked me how Michael and I were, I interrupted to tell him that we were in the middle of a power outage. He completely ignored this bit of information.

Instead he said, “Okay, look, I won’t keep you from it. Why don’t you call me back tomorrow to let me know about the books?”

I replied that what I’d already told him was pretty much what was going on—the books would be there by Friday. But I also said I’d call him.

Thursday I was back at the cybercafé answering more emails. A couple of friends had heard about the freak power outage on the national news and asked if we were all right. Even our son sent us a “hang in there” email. It really did help my increasingly depressed mood. I saved Stephen’s email for last. He’d sent me a message to call him as soon as possible when I had the chance.

Once again I called him on my cell phone. Once again nothing else was on his mind except his precious books. Once again I assured him that they were on their way. Then he asked me about our backup plan.

Our backup plan? For a private reading I found out about only nine days ago, a reading I had absolutely no part in? Then I remembered that our fulfiller had about twenty in stock.

“Only twenty?” whined Stephen. “Well, I guess that’ll have to do.” And he asked me to send them. I explained that I couldn’t send them because they weren’t in my possession. “So can you call

this guy and explain the situation? Tell him to put a rush on it and he can charge it to me.”

Stephen’s nervousness was really starting to be disheartening. “And what about the hundred I ordered from our printer?” I reminded him. “Half are going to you in Chilmark, the other half to Midnight Farm. Think a hundred and twenty books will be enough?” I ended with a vehemence he ignored.

“Yeah, that should cover us.” He laughed aloud. “Whew! That should do it. Now to sweat it out. You know, I think you should call that printer, what’s his name?”

“You mean Chris?”

“Yeah, Chris. Do me a favor and call Chris after you call the other guy—” I offered his name. “Call them both and get them to coordinate.”

As calmly as I could, I explained to Stephen that this was not a case of moving people around like on a film set, our printer and our fulfiller didn’t even know each other. He ordered me to call Chris anyway. I told him I would, once again taking the opportunity (although this time a little more sullenly) to remind him that we were in the middle of a power outage which was making it just a little more difficult to get things done. And once again he ignored what I said.

Reader, I did call Chris, all the time wondering why I was bugging an honest and reliable businessman who had never let me down in the past. I apologized to him for sounding like a hysterical lunatic but this was for one of my authors, Stephen Gyllenhaal, and that it was for a Very Important Garden Party in Martha’s Vineyard. Of course Chris had never heard of him, and mentioning Martha’s Vineyard didn’t seem to impress him either. He repeated to me patiently, as he’d done the day before, that the shipment was already in transit and was scheduled to be delivered before 7PM Friday.

There was nothing more to be done or said on either of our ends. Feeling like a fool I apologized again. “Hey, don’t worry

about it,” said Chris. “We heard about that outage. How’re y’all doin’?” Grateful for his concern, I told him it was a little crazy here in Queens but that basically we were okay. I thanked him and then called our fulfiller and explained to him the whole situation, which he seemed to take in stride. He asked me affably about the outage and if we were all right. I think I broke down at that point and started babbling about the spoiled meat and the lack of internet. I didn’t know what was making me babble on like that. It was only a power outage. Michael and I had been through a lot worse.

No, I knew what was getting to me. It was Stephen’s obtuseness.

At any rate, when I got off the phone with our fulfiller I went home, shared a dinner by candlelight with Michael, went to bed and dreaded getting up the next day, Friday, because I knew I’d have to deal with Stephen one way or another.

Back at the cybercafé I saw that he’d left me yet another email that morning, letting me know that the books still hadn’t come, already proclaiming the garden party a disaster and writing rather nobly, “I take full responsibility.” And he asked me to call him.

This time I didn’t. Late that afternoon I trudged home. The moment I came in Michael held up the landline phone (which still worked) saying, “He couldn’t get you on your cell phone so he called here just now. Call him back.”

“I’m not calling him back.”

Michael looked very irritated. “Look, I’ve been on the phone for nearly an hour. First he called here sounding pretty frantic, asking about his books. When are they coming, when are they coming. He even asked me to call our printer.”

“And did you?”

“I did. I apologized to Chris for bugging him, and Chris said they were already shipped. Then I had to call Stephen back to tell him the books were on their way.”

I think I actually stamped my feet. “I can’t believe he called you about this too!”

He thrust the phone at me again. “Call him!” I said no. His voice became stern. “This is business. Call him!”

Resentfully I took the phone from Michael and dialed. Stephen picked up at once. “Cantara, is that you?” said a familiar voice, now cheerful. “Just wanted you to know that The Eagle Has Landed!”

Bewildered and irritated I said, “What?”

“The books! They came!” he crowed. “Two beautiful boxes, first from the printer, then from—”

“You know,” I interrupted in a voice so loud it surprised me, “it would have been nice, you know, nice, if you had said something about the power outage we’ve had to go through this week, which I’ve told you about twice and which was also on national news so it was pretty hard to miss. You know where we live, you could see on TV what we’re going through! Because I really could have used a couple of kind words from you. I really could have. And I still got you your books!” I took a deep breath, then quickly added, “Call me later and tell me how it went.” Then I hung up on him.

I turned to Michael and said with an edge to my voice, “Oh, by the way, he got the books.”

Michael stared at me. “So what the hell was all that about?” I admitted to him that I’d told Stephen about the power outage, hoping to get some words of sympathy from him. “Well, you know he might have said something if you’d have shut up and given him a chance.”

“I doubt very seriously that would have happened.”

“So why did you even go looking for it?”

“Because I’m an idiot, that’s why!” And on the pretense of washing for dinner I went into the bathroom, had a good cry, splashed water on my face and felt better.

During dinner Michael asked me if I planned to apologize to Stephen for blowing up at him. “No,” I said so firmly he didn’t try to talk me into it.



“You know you may never get back to the way you were with him,” he said grimly. “And I know you want that.”

Saturday was shopping and chores day, which wasn't easy as we still didn't have any power. That evening I checked my voicemail. Stephen had left a couple of calls, each consisting of two minutes of dead air. Sunday I went back into Manhattan to check my email. Almost as soon as I sat at the computer and put my cell phone on the table it began to vibrate. I saw who the call was from and let it continue to vibrate while I settled down to other business.

When I got home the lights were on, the power was back. “Stephen called while I was out and left a message,” said Michael. “I didn't listen to it, I left it for you.” I told him he'd left a message on my cell phone too, and that I'd listen to them both after dinner. We didn't speak about it again.

But late that night when Michael was sleeping I crept out into the living room and in the dark I dialed the voicemail on my cell phone and listened.

*Cantara, it's Stephen calling... I left a message on your other service as well... Just headed over to do the reading, hoping you got my message also from yesterday and listened to the message on the other service... Just noting really clearly that this reading wouldn't be happening [garbled] if it weren't for you and how I understand, I'm really understanding why you felt the way you did yesterday... It was a crossing [garbled] because I had called you, though I realize that I should have done what I'm doing now, leaving messages everywhere as I'm doing now and emails and everything else, because I really was that grateful, you were beyond anything anyone would expect, have been all the way all along in this process, believe me I am [garbled]...other people about you...[garbled]... You know how terrific I think you are and how much affection I have for you and how*

*aware I am of what you've done for me... So I'll be reading shortly, as I said in the other message, "our poems", because they wouldn't be as alive as they are now if it weren't for you and for Michael... So I just wanted to say that I'll be reading for all of us and hope that this message will get through. Take care. 'Bye.*

A little over a week later I got in the mail from Stephen a disk of photos from the private garden party—his way, I supposed, of sending me a part thank-you, part conciliatory gift. The set appeared to be taken by a professional photographer and consisted mainly of dynamic sexy shots of him reading from his book as he weaved in and out of the crowd. There were also some nice pictures of the other guests, including a couple of Naomi. One of them was mighty strange—in it, she appeared to be lustfully ogling a neighbor of theirs, a well-known young chef named Chris Fischer. I wondered if that had slipped past Stephen's directorial eye.

When I called to thank him he told me, "Ted was thrilled! He said, 'You know Steve, I was prepared to be bored, but your poetry is really good.' How about that?"

Yeah, how about that, I thought. He was more thrilled over some TV actor's offhanded compliment than the serious five-thousand-word essay that a literary blogger, David Herrle, had written about the connection between Stephen's creative work in films and in poetry. Back in April even before *Housing Works* I had painstakingly sent out 143 pdf copies of *Claptrap* with an individual email message attached to each one. I got back seven reviews. Herrle's, the most favorable, was such a comprehensive and insightful analysis that I sent a copy to Stephen urging him to read it. He never replied.

He went on. "The garden party was just the beginning!" he exclaimed. "Now onto Midnight Farm. They're planning an event for me in two weeks."

I reminded him that I already knew about Midnight Farm, in fact I'd been publicizing the event at the Cantarabooks website. He said he was looking forward to meeting all his fans. Secretly I doubted that any of his out-of-town admirers would come as Martha's Vineyard is not an easy place to travel to and from for daytrippers.

As it happened, a couple of stalwart fans of Team Gyllenhaal did make the trip, and they were well-rewarded with an appearance by the entire family. It was the only time I ever read about Naomi, Jake, and Maggie all turning out for one of Stephen's poetry events. Apparently subscribers to journalist Dave Cullen's online Ultimate Brokeback Guide were there and later wrote reports for the Guide's news forum under the category "Gyllenhaal". It was good to read their vivid reports of Stephen's performance and see the photos they posted, even though the most newsworthy item seemed to have been Jake's new tattoo.

All in all it looked like Stephen got what he wanted out of his new poet persona on Martha's Vineyard: to be, in a world of ordinary celebrities, an extra-special celebrity.

I remembered what Michael had said to me a few weeks earlier, "You may never get back to the way you were with him. And I know you want that." Well, I did want that. I wanted him to return to doing serious readings. I wanted to be by his side when he did, and I wanted him to acknowledge my behind-the-curtain contribution to his growing literary reputation.

Then, a day or two after his Midnight Farm reading, seemingly out of the blue I got an email from the producer of a series of poetry readings in New York. Jim Behrle had seen Stephen read at Housing Works and wanted to schedule him for an appearance in the middle of October at a place in Greenwich Village called the Zinc Bar.

No more celebrity gossip, just the world of pure art, pure literature! I felt that Stephen and I were soon to get back on track together.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### “You Are Kings and Queens of Your Own Lives”

**L**ike everyone else in the world, I expected to read about the birth of Maggie Gyllenhaal’s child in the newspaper. So it was a surprise to get the following email from Stephen, via his Blackberry, a little after eight o’clock on the evening of October 3: “I’m a grandfather! Her name is Ramona Bell. All else pales.” That last cryptic statement aside, I thought that Stephen couldn’t have been any clearer about what had just occurred, and I was deeply touched that he wanted to share it with me. I replied with my congratulations then promptly emailed Becky and Susie, the administrators of the Jake fan site, JakeWatch, with news of the birth.

I thought they deserved to be one of the first to know because they’d been such faithful fans of Stephen. They were the ones, remember, who had organized Stephen’s first online interview. As Susie was a student who lived in Northern England where it was after two in the morning, it was Becky, who lived and worked in Memphis, who responded to me first. She of course was thrilled, and asked me if she could share the news with the readers of JakeWatch. I said of course. In no way had Stephen asked me to keep it a secret. As I later learned from him, he had emailed me within a few minutes of the delivery, informing me before contacting his own brothers and sisters.

I have to explain that it wasn’t just news of the birth which was such a coup. For several weeks Maggie had been playing cat-and-mouse with the press over what she and Peter intended to name their new child. In the past she had freely given interviews on almost any subject to almost any newspaper or magazine, but when it came to answering questions about the details surrounding her pregnancy she played coy. Page Six, the gossip page of the *New*

*York Post*, had asked her only a few days earlier what she intended to name the baby. “You don’t think I’m going to tell you, do you?” she’d slyly answered.

There had been speculation among her fans about her reticence: some thought that her answer was merely a snarky brush-off; others posited the esoteric theory that she was following an old Jewish superstition (Maggie being Jewish through her mother Naomi) about bringing bad luck to an unborn child by revealing its intended name. Whatever Maggie’s reason, the revelation of baby Ramona’s name was major news in the Gyllenhaal fan world, and JakeWatch had the scoop.

The next morning I answered a phone call. “This is *Us Weekly*,” said a brash-sounding young man. “We were wondering if you could confirm the name of Maggie Gyllen—” Shocked, I hung up the phone.

A little later that morning I got an email from Stephen. “I think we blew it. But not to worry, let’s move on.”

I replied to him, “*Us Weekly* just phoned me. I told them to go jump in the lake.” Which of course I hadn’t, although if I’d had the presence of mind not to hang up, I probably would have.

In the following days I pieced together what had happened with the help from Susie at JakeWatch. A minor online gossip monger who regularly trawled the amateur fan sites for juicy leads found the information on their website and promptly claimed it as his own exclusive news item. Almost as promptly *Us Weekly* found the item on the monger’s web site and claimed it as their scoop. And because JakeWatch had attributed it to me, a little research by *Us Weekly* dug up my personal telephone number, thus their call.

It was an extremely unsettling experience to have been approached by the magazine. But Stephen assured me, “No harm done, I’ve already forgotten it.” And I believed him.

The Zinc Bar is an old-fashioned garden-level bar in

Greenwich Village. While the front room is not out of the ordinary for an establishment of its type, the room in the rear is unusual, almost a throwback to the old coffeehouses of the early 1960's, with low cushion seats, pillows on the floor, subdued lighting and bare brick wall. One can almost imagine Alan Ginsberg reciting "Howl" to a bongo drum accompaniment here. It continues to be a well-known and well-respected venue for poetry readings.

Stephen was scheduled to be a featured reader with local poet-professor David Shapiro. Shapiro was a celebrity in his own right, having achieved fame for being one of the demonstrators during the Columbia University student uprising of 1968, as well as for his longtime friendship with Yoko Ono. As Jim Behrle conceived it, Stephen was once again supposed to be the "opening act" for a more established figure, but I didn't care. Unlike Stephen's appearance at Midnight Farm, this was going to be a legitimate literary event. Like Housing Works, Jim also had an extensive mailing list, and I was hopeful that Stephen's second reading in New York would attract an audience with a more serious appreciation for poetry. Although I dutifully publicized the upcoming event to Team Gyllenhaal fans, in many ways I felt that the Zinc Bar would be his true literary debut.

It would also be a social event for me. The co-administrator of JakeWatch, Becky Heineke, emailed to tell me that she would be coming up from Memphis to visit New York for the first time to attend the reading, and I looked forward to meeting her in person and showing her the best of the city. Because her one-day visit would fall on the Sunday of Stephen's reading, my first thought was to organize a brunch, which I did, at one of the most expensive and crowded brunch spots in town. The main advantage was that it was only two blocks from the Zinc Bar.

And so at three o'clock on that crisp, sunny Sunday afternoon, five literarily-inclined ladies were seated at Jane on Houston Street. Besides me and Becky, there was Chaya from Housing Works, an NYU instructor-writing coach acquaintance named Jill

Dearman, and a novelist friend named Carol Hoenig, who now blogs on the *Huffington Post*. We all had a fine time, enjoying that restaurant's rich delights, getting mellow on mimosas, and even dishing Naomi (Chaya had introduced that topic of conversation). When it got close to six, we parted company with Jill and Chaya, and Becky, Carol, and I strolled up Thompson Street to the Zinc Bar. Carol, who hadn't been able to make it to the reading at Housing Works, was looking forward to finally attending a performance by the Poet from Hollywood I'd raved to her so much about.

Once we arrived we saw that although the bar door was open, a small crowd was hanging out at the entrance. The three of us went down the stairs and inside. The bar area was empty except for the bartender. But in the back room we found Michael speaking with Jim, the vendor setting up display copies of Shapiro's books as well as *Claptrap*, and a couple of middle-aged women already claiming their places in the upholstered booth in the corner.

I got Michael's attention; he came over and greeted Carol, who we knew from the Small Press Center, and then introduced himself to Becky. While Carol and Becky found seats on the side of the reading area, I went over to the women to say hello. Instinct told me they were Stephen's fans.

But before I could even begin to introduce myself, the shorter of the two came right up to me with a worried yet determined look on her face. She asked me if I was in charge. I asked how I could help her.

"We made reservations," she explained in a slight southern accent. "But no one here seems to know anything about it."

Taken by surprise, I was a little slow in figuring out what she was saying. After a moment, I tried to assure her. "You can sit anywhere you want. Reservations aren't needed at all."

"Are you sure?" she asked. "Because I called weeks ago and the man who answered took our reservations."

I paused another moment to wonder about that, then asked if

she was sure she had called the right number.

“Well, you know,” she said, “I called a few times to make certain because people kept telling me they didn’t know anything about it. Finally I got someone who sounded like he knew what he was talking about, because he took our names and said we had firm reservations. Now, is this enough? He didn’t tell me.” She offered me two ten-dollar bills. I told her that there was absolutely, positively no charge for this event. “Because we’re ready to pay,” she insisted. “We don’t want to have to move. We’ve already put our things down there and we want to stay.”

I assured her again that there would be no problem, she and her friend were welcome to keep their seats. When this brief exchange was over she smiled and seemed to relax. Intrigued by her accent, I asked her where she and her friend were from. She told me they’d just come in from North Carolina that afternoon.

This sort of flabbergasted me. “You...just came in...from North Carolina?”

“Yes, and we’re driving back tonight,” she said cheerfully.

I stood there in genuine awe and admiration of the determination of these two women. After all, this wasn’t a rock concert, this wasn’t the Grateful Dead. This was a little poetry reading in a basement. Not to mention that while Stephen might be a charismatic poet, he was no Yevtushenko.

By this time it was nearly 6:30, the time Jim had asked both readers to arrive, and the David Shapiro contingent was already beginning to gather. They were mostly young people in worn jeans and carrying backpacks, an obvious contrast to Stephen’s older fans who were drifting in either singly or in couples. Within a few minutes Shapiro himself briskly strode in carrying a briefcase.

Shapiro was a warm, very approachable-looking man. It was easy to see how as a professor he could attract a coterie of loyal students. I regretted that Stephen wasn’t there to meet him right away. In fact I was starting to get a little anxious over the fact that the reading was at seven, he was the opener, and he was nowhere



to be seen. I introduced myself to Shapiro and apologized for Stephen's lateness. Then I asked him if Stephen could read second rather than first so as not to delay the reading. Shapiro graciously said of course.

The rest of Stephen's fans who had gathered outside were now coming in, finding seats, squeezing into the now-crowded booths or finding pillows on the floor. I saw a brisk, housewifely woman claiming a place on the raised platform on the other side of the reading area. I wondered if she, like the North Carolina ladies, had also planned to attend this event weeks in advance. I went over to ask her.

"No, just found out about it this morning on the internet," she said brightly. "I told my family, 'So long, I'm going to a poetry reading!' and hopped in the car. And you know, when I was pulling out they yelled after me, 'What's a poetry reading?' and I yelled back, 'I'll tell you tonight!'" We both laughed easily at this, and I asked her if she was from New York.

"Oh yes, I'm from New York. Albany."

I stared at her in amazement. "You...you can't mean you drove down...all the way from Albany...on the spur of the moment...for this?"

"Sure!" she answered, grinning.

I walked away from her in a kind of daze. The ladies from Ohio at Housing Works...the women from North Carolina...Becky from Memphis...this housewife from upstate... Something remarkable was happening that felt like a groundswell. I thought of Barney Rosset and how much I envied his lifelong association with literary luminaries like Beckett and Joyce. Now here I was, embarking on a lifelong association with my own literary star. I was beginning to get excited, thinking about the possibilities.

I was also beginning get impatient. It was 6:40 and my star still hadn't shown up. I told Michael I was going outside to wait, and made my way through the growing crowd of Stephen's and Shapiro's fans, up the stairs and out onto the sidewalk.

It was a chilly evening. I was in a flimsy silk blouse and a miniskirt and I'd forgotten to put on my jacket. But I didn't care. If I was going to give Stephen a piece of my mind for being late, I also wanted to look pretty for him.

At 6:50 I saw a familiar figure striding up the street. "Stephen Tobolowsky!" I yelled out playfully, calling him by the name of an actor friend.

Stephen Gyllenhaal approached me a little out of breath. "I got lost," he said sheepishly. I wondered how a man who proclaimed Manhattan to be his longtime second home could get lost walking to the heart of Greenwich Village.

He slipped his arm around my waist and gave me a long squeeze. I said, "I forgive you." Oh golly, he was so nice and big and warm.

We descended the stairs into the bar together. "I've got some great news," he told me. As we proceeded toward the reading room he exuded the nervous energy of a newborn puppy.

"Have you decided what you're going to read?" I asked.

"Read what? Oh no, not yet. Too many other things to think about."

We went in and I sighed. It was clear that Stephen didn't have his mind entirely on the evening. But I was interested to hear what his big news was. As he made his entrance into the reading room—recognized at once and longingly eyed by his female fans—he went right up to Michael, said hi, gave him an effusive hug, then immediately reported to both of us, "I just got a call from my agent so I'm flying back to Los Angeles tomorrow. Showtime just gave me a TV pilot to direct." Michael said congratulations. "Yeah, looks like I'm finally going to be bringing in some money. God!" he exclaimed loudly with obvious relief.

This was our first indication that Stephen might be experiencing financial problems.

I said congratulations as well, then asked him if I could introduce him to the other reader, pointing to Shapiro. He said

absolutely and just as we were about to go over, a good-looking young man walked in, spotted Stephen and approached him.

“Mr. Gyllenhaal,” he said, hand extended, “I came up from Maryland just to see you. I’ll bet you don’t remember me, but I was in one of your movies.”

Stephen smiled broadly and shook his hand. “Josh Wheaton,” he said without a moment’s hesitation. “How’ve you been doing?”

“I can’t believe you remembered me,” said Josh in amazement. “It’s been fifteen years.”

“Of course I remember you. You were one of the kids in *Waterland*.”

From then on, he had Josh completely charmed. They exchanged a few quick reminiscences about making the film, and Josh told him about his plans to visit Hollywood to restart his show business career. Stephen urged Josh to “use my name” and promised to meet up with him again once he got back to Los Angeles.

At this point I reminded Stephen about the time and about Shapiro. Obliging he cut it short with Josh, but not before reassuring him that he’d “try to do something for him” in Hollywood. Then he went over to introduce himself to his fellow poet while Michael and I struck up a conversation with the young actor.

It was wonderful to get to know Josh and hear his stories about the filming of *Waterland*, most of all how impressive a director Stephen was, how sensitive he was with his young inexperienced cast and how he inspired Josh, just a teenager then, to pursue a career in the movies. As he and Michael and I conversed, out of the corner of my eye I noticed a pretty young girl walk in with an older man. Both of them approached Becky, who got up from her seat at the booth to greet them. I guessed who the girl was, excused myself from Michael and Josh’s company, and joined them.

“Cantara, this is Ally,” said Becky as I approached. When Ally

smiled I could see her braces. I shook her hand. “And this is her dad.” I shook his hand too.

“So, you’re the one who started IHeartJake,” I said to Ally. “It’s a great fan site.” That past spring I had discovered Ally’s impressive fan site and how popular it was with the fans of all the Gyllenhaals. I was also beholden to her for supporting Stephen’s work by putting a prominent link to the order page for *Claptrap* on the front page of IHeartJake. It was that link which got his book the most sales.

“That’s my daughter,” said Ally’s father with pride in his voice, putting his arm around her shoulder. “And you know today’s her sixteenth birthday.” This made me smile broadly and I clasped her hand again, this time more warmly, and congratulated her. At that point her father kissed her on the cheek and told her that he’d pick her up in a few hours to take her back to her sweet-sixteen party that was already in progress at their home a couple of neighborhoods away.

Ally had actually left her own birthday party to come to Stephen’s reading. As with the out-of-town women, this provoked in me another moment of amazement.

By then it was about ten past the hour and the room was filled to capacity. Becky and Ally made me promise that I’d join them again as soon as Stephen’s reading was over, as they had something very special they needed to discuss with me. I assured them that I would, and returned to my seat next to Michael. But to my chagrin I saw that Stephen had taken my seat and was deep in conversation with Michael and Josh. There being nowhere else to sit, I took a place on the floor between him and Michael, stretching my stockinged legs out in front of Stephen in a way I thought would be provocative in spite of my annoyance.

The crowd quieted down when Jim went up to the lectern. He was brief and to the point as he introduced himself, the reading series, and the featured readers of the evening. I was gratified that in introducing Stephen he barely touched on his film and TV

career, concentrating instead on his credits as a poet.

Shapiro went up first. An old hand at readings, he was wonderful. He read selections from his several volumes. Some of the poems seemed to contain private references that elicited laughs of recognition and approval from his fans. After he read from his published books, he modestly asked if they'd be willing to hear some poetry he was still working on. The crowd loudly answered in the affirmative. At that, he went over to his briefcase, took out a sheaf of papers, apologized for the delay, and began to rummage through them.

During this pause one of Shapiro's students passed around a plate of tiny chocolate chip cookies. I took one and began to nibble on it. As I nibbled, I felt the strange sensation of being stared at. I looked up, and in the dim light I saw Stephen gazing down at me. Uncertain as to what to make of this, I quickly finished my cookie but after a couple of seconds I looked up again. He was still gazing at me with a strange, soft look on his face that shot right to my heart.

Shapiro cleared his throat, drawing our attention once again to the lectern. At that point Stephen reached down, took my hand, and squeezed it in his. In turn, I opened his hand, pulled it around me and deeply kissed his palm. I scooted closer to Michael and nestled in between his legs, resting my head on his knee, leaning toward Stephen. Then, in a supreme act of daring, I reached over and placed my hand on Stephen's inner thigh, and to my joy he made no motion to remove it. Throughout the second part of Shapiro's reading there my hand rested, with Stephen occasionally giving it a light pat, or casually reaching over to stroke my hair. I wanted the moment never to end.

Shapiro read for about twenty minutes more. After his gracious thanks to the audience and their warm applause, there was a short break. People got up to stretch and so did Stephen and I. "I'm, um, sorry I sat down in your seat," he said to me, "but I had to think about my poems." For the second time that night I told

him I forgave him.

The break wasn't long, as within a couple of minutes everyone had returned to their places. I had regained my seat beside Michael, and Stephen was at the lectern holding his well-thumbed copy of *Claptrap*.

He began well enough. Almost without introduction he launched into a few of his provocative poems about selected fellow citizens of Los Angeles, adequately reading "Careful There, Pardner", "My Neighbor to the South", and "The Man" before proceeding to his more politically-charged ones, "Land of the Free" and "Crescent Moon"...

But after that his reading took an odd conversational turn.

"Boy, how about this asshole Bush?" was how he started his commentary after reading his political poems, continuing the sentiment in a long diatribe on what was wrong with America. His opinions were nothing this sophisticated New York audience hadn't already encountered in the media, but Stephen seemed to imbue his viewpoint with an obvious personal anger and frustration. Suddenly deviating from his previous train of thought, he uttered the puzzling non sequitur that he was a grandfather and asked everyone, with no trace of irony, if they knew about it. Then without pausing he advised the audience, "It all goes by so fast! Hang on! Hang on!" He continued, "And you know right after this I have to fly back to LA tomorrow. I'll be directing a pilot for Showtime. I'll be directing Kevin Smith in an acting role for once. You've heard of Kevin Smith the director?" Most of Shapiro's students nodded. "And it looks like I'll be acting too. A friend's doing a movie and he's asked me to be in it." Now that was news, I thought. "And, I've just started writing a novel!"

Now that was definitely news. I exchanged looks of intrigued surprise with Michael.

For about five or six minutes he continued to talk directly to the audience before he opened his book again. He selected two of the several poems he'd written about his children. The first one

was “At 25”. The second, explained Stephen, was inspired by watching Maggie doing a sexy nude scene in a stage drama and was written in praise of (his phrase) “the journey of the feminine”. It was titled “Watching You Strip/My Daughter”.

He read that poem with a good deal of passion that seemed to energize him even more. When he was done he expressed his pleasure by stretching wide his arms and waving them for emphasis as he spoke. “Jake and Maggie! Aren’t they incredible? I have no idea where the hell those kids came from! No idea!”

Up to this point and beyond, although his performance remained engaging, it also seemed to leave certain members of his audience a little bewildered. Carol Hoenig in fact wrote an online article about her own bemusement.

Stephen read a few more poems which were less emotionally charged, then launched into more asides, alternating between his views on the morass of politics and working in the morass of Hollywood. He had done the same thing at Housing Works to great effect and there the audience loved it, but here at the Zinc Bar his nervous energy seemed to be getting the better of his ability to focus and his confidence seemed to wane.

His ramblings were eventually punctuated by a strange occurrence. In the middle of what was actually shaping up as an interesting story about the casting call for his last movie, *Homegrown*, a sudden change seemed to come over him. He stood stock still and silent for a second. Then, in an unconvincingly nonchalant tone, he called out over the audience, “Naomi, is that you?”

A small but distinct voice from the crowded doorway answered, “Yes it is.”

I craned my neck to look but couldn’t see her. Without missing a beat, Stephen went back to telling his story, ending with, “...But of course you know who that actor turned out to be—Billy Bob Thornton!” Then he wondered aloud to seemingly no one in particular if he had time to read a final selection. Without

waiting for an answer, he launched into one of his best poems, “Shoe Polish”, a loving tribute to his father and his grandfather, and about the simple satisfaction he, Stephen, took in polishing shoes in the guest room of his family’s former home in Hancock Park. He had concluded his reading dramatically at Housing Works with this same poem; now here he seemed to regain the same power and conviction reading it that he had back in June.

After he had finished there was warm prolonged applause and a sudden flurry of activity. Some people got up to leave, but most stayed to buy copies of Stephen’s or Shapiro’s books and cluster around the two authors to get an autograph or simply chat with them. I thought that overall it had been a successful evening and that it could well be a harbinger of other successful evenings to come. My optimism though was gradually becoming clouded by the anxiety that a second untimely entrance by Naomi might have another chilling affect on Stephen.

As it turned out she never returned. I heard later that she had been lingering unobtrusively out on the sidewalk with Jake, who was hiding behind a hoodie, waiting for Stephen to meet them.

Across the room I saw Ally and Becky chatting with the out-of-towners. A few of them, I thought, seemed to be treating the two fan site administrators with special respect, almost as if they were celebrities themselves. It was certainly adding to the girls’ upbeat moods. As I approached, Becky formally introduced me to the fans and let them know, if they hadn’t known before, that I was Stephen’s publisher. The fans congratulated me on his fine performance and assured me that they would buy his book that very night. Then they shyly asked me if it would be all right if they went up and asked him for his autograph.

“Absolutely,” I said. “In fact he’d love it if you could spend a few moments to talk with him.” The idea thrilled them though they seemed a little skeptical. However, I had learned by now that unadulterated praise made Stephen magnanimous. I urged them to go over and introduce themselves. The line for Stephen’s



autograph had already started; without another word of prompting they went over to buy his books and joined it.

When the fans had left us I asked Ally and Becky about the “something special” they wanted to discuss with me. They broke into conspiratorial grins. I saw that Becky had in her hand a couple of envelopes and immediately guessed that she and Ally might have gotten a birthday card for Stephen, whose birthday had been on the fourth, and perhaps even a card of congratulations for Ramona’s birth. Becky told me I was almost right. Then she asked me if I could make sure that Stephen stuck around long enough for her and Ally to make a special presentation to him.

I assured them that that wouldn’t be a problem. The three of us watched with some amusement as Stephen received his many fans, signing his book and posing for photos with the out-of-towners, who looked positively starry-eyed to be in his presence. He was obviously going to be hanging around for awhile.

Shapiro and his students had left, Jim had gone to the bar, and it took about a half hour for the crowd around Stephen to thin out, but finally when it was close to nine o’clock it looked like Ally and Becky would have him all to themselves. I took Stephen aside just long enough to let him know that they were the two young people who ran the fan sites that had interviewed him the previous spring, and that they had something special they wanted to share with him. Then, wanting to give Ally and Becky their time, I went over to sit and take up the conversation again with Michael and Josh.

I watched the three of them out of the corner of my eye and at first it seemed to be going well. They were standing all together at one side of the room and Stephen, although he appeared to be smiling, was talking to them quietly but intently. Ally and Becky, on the other hand, were gradually losing their smiles as Stephen spoke, and barely uttered another word after they introduced themselves. The whole encounter took only a few minutes; I knew it had concluded when Stephen finished loud enough for me to

hear, “So you see that I’m right, right?” They nodded silently and walked away, looking deflated. Becky, a strikingly fair, tall young woman, nearly as tall as Stephen, seemed to lose some of her stature.

As they gathered their things I went up to ask them how it went. “Oh, it was okay,” said Becky without emotion. She held up the two envelopes and asked me if I’d give them to Stephen. I expressed surprise that they hadn’t given them to him themselves. “He started talking and I guess we forgot.” I took the envelopes and put them in my handbag. Ally, meanwhile, was on her cell phone, presumably calling her father to come and pick her up, while Becky was joined by a few of the out-of-town ladies, who had waited patiently for her and seemed to notice her suddenly dispirited mood. They all called out to me their farewells. I gave Becky a hug and promised to stay in touch, and they all left together.

Still at the other side of the room, Stephen was putting on his jacket and slinging his Jack Spade bag over his shoulder. I walked over to him, intending to give him one last bit of praise for a job well done, and casually reached up to pull his lopsided shirt collar over his sweater. He caught my hand and stopped me a little too firmly.

“So,” he said, for some reason not looking directly at me, “I understand you’ve also got some congratulations to Maggie on your blog. You’re going to take that off, right?”

“Oh yeah, you bet,” I amiably agreed. I thought he was joking.

“Okay, then! So that’s that.” He called out goodbyes to Michael and Josh on his way out and brusquely told me he would email me, then quickly left.

Michael and I put on our coats and picked up our belongings. We walked through the bar with Josh, said so long to Jim, and went up the steps onto the sidewalk. The night was cold and no one lingered at the entrance. As we parted company with Josh and walked to the subway, I couldn’t escape the vague feeling that

somehow, something had gone wrong. But I had no idea how it had happened, or who might be responsible.

For a few weeks I held onto Becky and Ally's cards, intending to give them to Stephen the next time I saw him in New York, but time passed and I didn't hear from him, not by phone, not by email. I wasn't in the mood to initiate a conversation with him, though. Sales of *Claptrap*, which had remained steady all summer, had unaccountably dropped to zero in the past few weeks and I didn't know how to explain it to the author.

I hadn't heard from Becky for a while either. I made up my mind to contact her just to touch bases but first, as a courtesy, I emailed JakeWatch's co-administrator Susie in England. I apologized to Susie for not letting her know right away how the Zinc Bar reading had gone, gave a brief, upbeat report of the evening and, in an aside, confided to her my plan to promote Stephen as an eccentric but loveable literary personality.

Susie emailed me back, "Stephen Gyllenhaal may be a lot of things, but he is most definitely not 'loveable'." And she proceeded to tell me that the story of how Stephen had insulted and belittled Ally and Becky at the Zinc Bar had already rapidly circulated around the fan world.

This piece of news was a stunner. I asked her for more information. Susie wrote back to let me know that it had hit Becky especially hard, but that I wasn't to bring it up with her as she felt too humiliated to talk about it.

I promised Susie that I wouldn't, but the next time I saw that Becky was available on text chat I sent her a quick message on the pretense of asking her if she still wanted me to give Stephen the cards. She texted me back: "Things have been pretty rotten for the past few weeks. We've gotten into a real battle with (and here she named a notorious fan blog known for its crude and salacious innuendos concerning Jake's sexuality)." I asked her what was happening. "They're calling us all sorts of names, like stupid little bitches. Or sell-outs. Or worse. They've got a name for you too—

Cunt-ara.” Well, that’s witty, I thought grimly. I asked her what it was all about; she texted back, “It’s all about what Stephen said to us at the Zinc Bar.” I asked her for more info. “It was about the leak. He called it a leak. He blamed us for it.”

“What! What did he say?”

“He said Maggie was furious. Peter was furious. And he said most of all Jake was furious.” Go on, I said. “He said he thought we were smart girls, nice girls, and that he believed we really didn’t mean to cause damage to Maggie and Jake.” My heart sank as I thought of Ally. It was well-known in the fan world how much the sixteen-year-old worshipped Jake.

“Did you tell him that you’d gotten permission from me to print the story?”

“We did,” said Becky. “But he just said he didn’t like to see us get exploited by the media. He said that he’d been in the business for twenty-seven years and that Jake’s mother was the winner of some pen-something award, so he knew what he was talking about.”

A chill shot through me as I recognized that familiar phrase. Then I asked, “Anything else?”

“He said that we shouldn’t be wasting our time thinking just because Jake and Maggie were movie stars they were better than we were. He said, ‘You are kings and queens of your own lives!’ or something weird like that. Cantara, I’m an adult. I’m out of college. I’m an office administrator. Stephen had no call to talk down to me like I was a child. Susie and I started JakeWatch for fun. She wanted something to take her mind off working on her thesis and I wanted to meet new people. But it’s getting to be no fun anymore. This battle with WTF is really taking it out of us. We’re thinking of calling it quits.”

I told her I hoped they wouldn’t and promised I would try to help. When we both signed off text chat, a sudden awful thought occurred to me. I quickly went to IHeartJake to look for the link to *Claptrap*.

It was gone.

I spent about fifteen minutes pacing up and down the room, clenching and unclenching my fists. Then I realized that Becky had never answered me about the cards, so I decided to open them myself. I was right, one was a birthday card to Stephen, not a store-bought one, but a handmade one with a picture of Stephen's head Photoshopped onto the body of Wordsworth. Even though I was upset, the card was so clever it made me laugh.

The other card was a little more puzzling: It was addressed to Maggie's new baby and had a picture of a red panda on the front. Inside was a strange message, something about how beautiful and unique creatures belonged with each other, with the information that the "adoption certificate" was to follow.

I went over to JakeWatch, entered the phrase "red panda" into the searchbox and was quickly sent to a recent posting from Susie. In it, she thanked the fans for their contributions and for their time and effort on the project that had brought JakeWatch and IHeartJake together, and said that regardless of the outcome, that that alone had made it worthwhile.

At the bottom of the posting was a photo taken at Chester Zoo, an internationally-renowned zoological garden close to Susie's home. The photo was of a large engraved stone tablet entitled "Red Pandas—Plaque 1" with columns of names, presumably of the "adopters" of the lovely creatures. The name third from the top in the second column was Ramona Sarsgaard.

I imagine it's still there, and if any of you ever visit the lovely walled English city of Chester near the border of Wales, take an afternoon to go to the zoo and find the plaque, if you want to see what the memento mori of the affection and respect fans once had for Team Gyllenhaal looks like.

## CHAPTER NINE

### *“We’ve Had Quite an Adventure”*

I spent the rest of November and December brooding over what had happened in October. I couldn’t figure it out—all the elements for Stephen’s success were there for the taking. He read in a respected poetry venue, in the company of a popular poet, with his own loyal audience in attendance. He was on his way to settling into the kind of literary life he’d been telling me all along that he really wanted, a life that would be more artistically satisfying and genuine than the one he was leading in Hollywood. There was absolutely no reason why his appearance at the Zinc Bar couldn’t have been a sort of welcome home for him.

In fact, he was so much on his way it didn’t matter that Naomi and Maggie and Jake weren’t there. Maggie excusing herself I could understand, she’d just had a baby. Jake, lurking in a hoodie with a three-day growth outside the bar, might have believed that his presence in the bar would set off some erotic riot and prudently decided to keep a low profile. But Naomi’s absence was worse than her not taking her rightful place at her husband’s side at Housing Works. She hadn’t even shown up at the Zinc Bar to offer support. She had only arrived after the event, as if she were some fretting mother picking up her errant child at a birthday party.

But if it were true, as Michael and I suspected, that with Stephen’s premature announcement of the baby’s name Naomi had started to connect his growing audience with the (to her) distasteful ways which Jake’s rabid young fans celebrated his fame, then her absence spoke of a mindset that was much more troubling. It seemed to be consistent with the puzzling decision back in April not to mention Jake and Maggie’s names in promoting their father’s book. Were they the glamorous yet close-knit family I and countless other fans had idolized? Or was Team Gyllenhaal merely a shrewdly manufactured image of that glamor?

It was getting very wearisome trying to figure out the Gyllenhaals. I was fond of Stephen, but it just didn't seem worth dealing with all the problems and inconsistencies surrounding his literary talent. We had other projects to think about.

And then came the Phone Call. No, not like the one in chapter three. This one was much more dire.

It was from our son in San Francisco. "Hey Mom," he said. "You know your guy with the poetry book? I think his kids were just in a fire up in Marin."

This is how he got the news. On Wednesday morning after Christmas as he was getting the restaurant ready for the workday breakfast crowd—he was a restaurant manager at the time—his boss Wayne got a call from a former co-worker, a waiter, looking for a job.

"I thought you already had a good job over at Manka's Lodge," said Wayne.

"Not anymore," said the waiter. "The place burned down this morning. It should be in the paper."

Before we get into the newspaper accounts and what Stephen himself told us, let's take a look at the infantile heading in the awful WFT blog mentioned in chapter eight: "Our Jakey-Poo Survives a Fire!"

Now here's Jake retelling of the story some weeks later on Letterman's talk show:

*~ Letterman: But now listen, tell me about this. Did this happen this Christmas? The family's all at a retreat, a kind of a getaway in Marin County, and there's trouble?*

*~ Jake: Oh that... My family got... We were in a fire.*

*~ Letterman: You're entire family?*

*~ Jake: My mom, my dad, my sister, her fiance, his parents...*

*~ Letterman: Wow, this is horrifying, terribly frightening. How did that happen?*

*~ Jake: I don't know. I think a branch of a tree fell on a propane tank and it exploded and the whole lodge caught on fire.*

*~ Letterman: God. And everybody was evacuated all right?*

*~ Jake: No... We woke up in the middle of the night and I heard this crackling. We were staying in a lodge... My friend and I were staying in a lodge just next to the main lodge... And I woke up and I heard this crackling and I thought, Sounds like there's something... Was it raining or something? And I looked out the window and the lodge was on fire that my parents were in, which terrified me... And I ran outside and I started screaming for them, and they came out and everyone was safe, everyone was okay... But it's so odd the things that people take with them when they leave a fire.*

*~ Letterman: When they have to leave a burning building.*

*~ Jake: Yeah, my...my, my mother...took these two necklaces, one that my sister gave her and one that I gave her... And my father...like, he grabbed an empty suitcase which [audience laughter]...was awkward because... I don't know what he did in the room, he was like, "I gotta grab something!" and he just grabbed a suitcase... And then when he walked outside, I asked him what was in the suitcase and he didn't know, and then he opened it up, and he realized there was nothing in the suitcase. But I'm glad he took something with him, because if he didn't, I would've been worried. But then my parents, also... I said something to them, I said, you know, "Are you guys okay, do you have clothes?" and my father said, "No, I have no underwear on," and that was an awkward moment for me too, because he had clothes on, and I didn't need to know that. [audience laughter] My father going commando is not something I want to know.*

The Marin County newspapers, being real newspapers, were



a little more accurate.

*Winds that gusted to hurricane force toppled a tree onto Manka's Inverness Lodge and Restaurant early Wednesday, breaking a gas line and starting a fire that gutted the 81-year-old wooden building. The tree fell onto Guest Room 7 and went through it into Room 4 where it hit a hot-water heater and broke the gas line ...*

reported the blog of the emeritus publisher-editor of *The Point Reyes Light*.

*The fire was reported at 2:43AM. Firefighters from Inverness, Marin County, Bolinas and Skywalker Ranch responded. The first crews found a blaze in the back of the two-story wooden lodge. They tried to extinguish it but were forced to retreat and instead isolate the flames so they did not spread to nearby structures. It wasn't contained until 7:30AM ... No injuries were reported, but several dozen employees may be out of work.*

wrote the *Marin Independent-Journal*.

When I first got the local news on the internet the headlines read, "Jake and Maggie Gyllenhaal in Hotel Holiday Fire" or some such business, which sounded oddly incestuous, but that's today's celeb-centered news for you. There was barely a mention of the other guests, except here and there of actress Frances McDormand and her husband, filmmaker Joel Coen, a fellow ex-Minneapolitan.

But in those days, if it was a holiday, where Jake and Maggie could be found, so could their parents. So I texted a short worried message to Stephen, "Are all of you all right?"

To which he answered from his Blackberry, "We're all fine. We've had quite an adventure."

Which was a pretty larky attitude coming from someone surviving a bizarre yet potentially dangerous freak fire that could have asphyxiated him and his family or burned them alive in their beds. I wondered if any of the staff or other guests had discerned the Hand of God in all this and vowed to change their lives for the better.

This certainly didn't seem to be the case with Stephen. A week and a half after the fire we saw him again for the first time since his infamous Zinc Bar reading.

We were in LA by this time visiting friends, and were waiting at a venerable old sports bar/restaurant/pool hall called Hollywood Billiards (now closed). Beers in hand, we'd found a secluded room off the main area filled with funky mismatched couches, tables, and chairs. Before sitting down with Michael on an old couch in front of a low table, I went over and told the hostess that if she saw a good-looking, well-dressed, middle-aged man who appeared lost, she should direct him to us.

Stephen arrived about twenty minutes late for our meeting, his usual habit. "Well!" he exclaimed, strolling up to us with a big smile. "Did you hear what happened to us?"

I reminded him that I'd texted him asking about the fire just before we left New York.

He asked how long we'd been in town. I told him four days.

"And you already found this place? I never even knew it existed. You guys sure know how to get around." He went over and grabbed a big rattan chair and plunked it down in front of us, then thrust his wrist out.

"Look at that!" he crowed. "Timex! Fifteen-ninety-five!"

I asked him, "Did you lose everything in the fire?"

"Everything," he said. "Naomi's jewelry, my Rolex, the one she gave me for my birthday..."

"Did you lose your jacket too?"

"Oh, it's gone."

I silently mourned the loss of his brown corduroy jacket; it

was the one in his Robert Elswit portrait.

“Did you get any warning?” asked Michael.

“No!” Stephen exclaimed with a sort of wonder. “No alarm, nothing. We were fast asleep, then I heard Jake shouting outside... So I grabbed my jeans, grabbed my laptop, and ran out. I didn’t even have shoes! You know it had the only copy of my novel!”

“And we almost lost you,” I said quietly.

He gave a short laugh. “Nah.”

Within a minute the waitress came over and took his order of a soda. When she left us he stretched out his legs and put his hands behind his head, leaning back with a sigh. “So, how are you finding LA?”

We told him about the places we’d seen so far and the people we planned to meet up with: filmmaker Robert Brinkmann, the friend of an actor friend from our old San Francisco theater days; the screenwriter Tom Baum who I mentioned in chapter four; and Gary Walkow, writer-director of the movies *Beat*, about the novelist William S. Burroughs and his wife, and *Notes from Underground*, based on the novel by Dostoyevsky.

“So you know about Gary’s new movie,” said Stephen. “It’s showing in Park City in a couple of weeks.”

“At Sundance?” I said.

“No, that other one. I forget the name.”

I asked him the name of the movie.

“I forgot the name. But I’m in it.”

“That’s the movie you were talking about last October?” asked Michael.

“That’s the one.” He leaned over and confided to us, “You know, I haven’t acted in a movie in maybe thirty years. Not since New York as a favor. I think it was...” He searched his memory.

“Jill Godmilow? Martha Coolidge?” I offered.

He grinned at me nervously. “How’d you know about them?”

I just grinned back.

The movie Stephen made his acting debut in is in the Internet Movie Database. I started checking the IMDb regularly after I stumbled onto the fact that, under my real name and screen name Simona Wing, I was in it, too. This served me in good stead when I went on my own to meet Gary Walkow, which was toward the end of January after he'd returned from the Slamdance Film Festival. Over sushi at a sushi bar in Santa Monica we talked about Burroughs, Dostoyevsky, and existential literature in general. But he also wanted to know about my porn career and seemed impressed that I'd worked with Bob Chinn and Gerard Damiano.

"That first movie I did, it's called *Playthings* in the IMDb," I told him. "But originally it was *Dork and Sindy*. Sindy with an S."

He groaned over this awful pun on the name of the well-known TV sitcom *Mork and Mindy*. Hey, so did I.

"You know," said Gary finally, "Stephen, the one you're involved with—"

"I'm not involved with him," I protested. "We're friends."

He continued, "I used Stephen one morning last September for *Crashing*."

That was the name of the film, *Crashing*, meaning when you sleep over at someone's place for a few days. It had two very pretty, funny starlets playing roommates, plus Campbell Scott. Yum.

"How was Stephen?" I asked.

"Nervous. He flubbed a line. But we had to keep going. You could call it a sexy scene."

At this I perked up. "Sexy?"

"Well, kinky. It got a laugh at Slamdance anyway."

Of course I was curious. I asked Gary if he could lend me a screener. He told me he possessed only two copies and suggested I ask Stephen first.

Shortly after that I linked up with Stephen again. We'd planned to have at least one meeting before his reading at the University of Colorado in Boulder next month. The place I chose for our tête-à-tête, the 101 Coffee Shop, was suggested to me by

Brinkmann and I suggested it to Stephen. It's that stylish 1960's-type diner that's been featured in dozens of movies and TV shows, plus the food's pretty good. Stephen countered that suggestion with one of his own—the cafeteria in Studio City where he was meeting with CBS execs yet again. But when I asked him if he knew the name of the nearest bus stop he was completely thrown.

“I'm taking public transportation,” I explained.

“You're taking public transportation!?” he fairly shouted into his Blackberry. And then, deflated, he finished with, “Oh, all right, make it the 101 Coffee Shop. But that means I'm going to have to take the Freeway.”

I should tell you, the 101 Coffee Shop is near Highway 101, better known as the notoriously congested Hollywood Freeway. Like most places in Los Angeles, the coffee shop is actually pretty easy to get to by car but a little tricky to approach on foot from Hollywood Boulevard, where Michael and I had temporary lodgings. Still, it was a short walk.

When I got there I entered the place the way apparently almost no one does, not by the back door from the parking lot, but through the front door. Standing in the main room and looking around wearing Foster Grants and a strapless black jumpsuit I must have cut an intriguing figure, because at that moment people looked up at me from their laptops, trying to determine whether I was Anybody. A split second later when they decided I wasn't, I walked over unmolested to the section where the secluded booths were. I chose one and settled down to wait for Stephen, who I knew was going to be late again.

Twenty minutes later he arrived and found me straight away. I'd already gotten my order of silver dollar-sized buttermilk pancakes and was tucking into them when he sat down on the banquette opposite me, looking like he had a lot on his mind. However, he wasn't too preoccupied to notice what was on my plate and picked up his fork to spear a pancake from it, leaving a trail of syrup on the table before he popped it into his mouth.

“How was your meeting at CBS?” I asked as I took back my fork.

“Hm,” he answered glumly. “They’re just—they’re just silly people.” He waved his hand like he was shooing away a fly.

“Oh, I’ve got something for you.” I tried to smile as brightly as I could and started rummaging deep in my big handbag. It took me several moments to find what I was looking for, during which he flagged down a waitress and ordered a glass of fresh-squeezed orange juice. “Here you go. Open them!” I placed on the table, the clean part, the two envelopes that Becky and Ally had meant to give him at the Zinc Bar.

He opened the first envelope and took a long time gazing at the birthday card. I’d hoped the picture of him with his head Photoshopped onto the body of Wordsworth might give him a laugh or at least make him smile, but it didn’t.

The second card, the one meant for Ramona, I had to explain to him. I told him about the red panda adoption the girls had organized and their disappointment when they were unable to give him the cards personally. I also went on to explain to Stephen what a mistake he’d made by lecturing them that night, how much they were hurt and even offended, and urged him to make things right by 1) letting Maggie and Peter know about the girls’ gift and 2) emailing them an apology.

He didn’t seem to understand the point I was trying to make, even though I went through the story a couple of times. As it turned out, it took seven months of gentle and then not so gentle prodding to persuade him to send the girls an apology. When he did, it was in the “Let’s all work together and solve this thing” vein. I still don’t think he ever told Maggie and Peter about the red panda that was adopted in their daughter’s name.

Well, at the moment I suppose he had more Hollywood things on his mind. Trying to get on his wavelength, I asked him when the pilot of the series he shot for Showtime, called *Manchild*, was going to be broadcast.

“Never!” he announced dramatically. “Showtime never picked it up! They’re going with a show called *Californication* with David Duchovny!”

I made a girlish squeal, remembering what a cutie-pie he was in *The X-Files*, until I realized what the price of seeing David Duchovny in a brand-new sexy-sounding show would be.

Stephen shook his head slowly. “I don’t know what I’m going to do. I’ve got to work. Our two houses, our debts... We’re up to our eyeballs in debts...”

I asked him how much he owed.

“Oh, millions! Millions!”

I was pretty sure he was exaggerating a little, so I asked him if he and Naomi had lost their money in some kind of project.

“No,” he said sheepishly, “we just spent it.”

As he leaned over I reached across the table and gently took his hand. “I’m so sorry, Stephen. First the fire, now this.”

He straightened up. “Hey, that fire was lucky. The insurance on my Rolex paid this month’s bills.”

I refrained from congratulating him on his financial planning, choosing instead to discuss his upcoming reading in Boulder. Seeing as this was going to be his first combined poetry reading/movie screening, I reminded him to send a DVD of *Waterland* to the coordinator, and while he was at it, could he also lend me a screener of *Crashing*?

He laughed nervously. “I’ll ask my assistant to send it to you.” He was on his third assistant in fourteen months.

Without much more to say, we finished our meal—that is, he drank his juice and downed his usual fistful of vitamins, then helped himself to the last half of my espresso milkshake while I finished my pancakes. After he paid the bill and came back from the men’s room, we left the restaurant. In the parking lot I asked him for a lift just down to Hollywood Boulevard, wanting to avoid having to walk under the 101 overpass again. He casually grabbed me in a loose headlock and said of course.

“So, you take public transportation,” he remarked. “How’s that working out for you?” I let him know that the bus lines in LA were actually pretty good and the Metro was first-class. “Have to try it one day.” He remote-beeped his black BMW to unlock it and we opened our doors.

The interior was littered with folders and papers, most of which were piled on the seats. He unceremoniously tossed the girls’ cards I had just given him toward the back seat and I did the same with the pile on the passenger seat, then got in and buckled up.

“Tell me,” he asked as he drove out onto Franklin, “do you drive?”

“Yeah I drive. I even owned a car once. I got it after my dad died. A Buick.”

“Really? What model?” When I told him Skylark he seemed thoughtful. “My dad owned a LeSabre,” he said wistfully.

Stephen pulled over at the corner of Wilcox and Hollywood to drop me off at my bus stop and I turned to him with mock effusiveness. “I can’t begin to thank you for this. This is the greatest thing you could possibly have ever done for me—”

“All right, all right,” he replied, smiling, in mock impatience.

I remember kissing him on the cheek before I got out. As I passed his car while crossing the street I noticed that his was following me with his eyes, a distracted look on his face. I couldn’t imagine what he was thinking.

## **CHAPTER TEN**

### **“I’m Making This Place My Spiritual Center”**

**W**aterland, which Stephen directed in 1992, I think is the only one of his films I ever saw on the big screen, and I only went to see it because I had a crush on Jeremy Irons. I later read in Graham Swift’s memoirs that Stephen had



been last on the producers' list of choices for director, but just as filming was about to start their top choice had bowed out for reasons that were unclear, and Stephen was the only replacement available at the last minute. No matter how he got the assignment, Stephen made the most of it. It's a lovely film, not as richly textured as the book, but a prestige picture all the way.

Clips from *Waterland*, as well as clips from a few of his other movies and TV shows, were planned to be featured at the University of Colorado campus in a two-day retrospective of Stephen's work. Yes Reader, two days. What had begun as my plan for a nice little reading in a church basement somehow turned into an elaborate event—elaborate at least for the upper middle-class, academically oriented yet sophisticated town of Boulder.

For this I had Barbara Sorensen, a poet and the Events Coordinator for a local poetry magazine which had published one of Stephen's early poems, to thank. Barbara and I had started corresponding six months earlier, during the time I was sending out review copy after review copy of *Claptrap*; she was one of the few people who actually responded. Barbara turned out to be one of those tireless individuals who, once they get teeth into a project, never let go until it's brought to fruition.

Here was her idea: That Stephen's poetry and films were artistically connected—rather like the opinion held by the literary essayist David Herrle, whom I mentioned in chapter seven—and they would both be best understood and enjoyed if experienced in tandem.

Barbara had asked in the beginning if I thought Stephen would prefer a big audience of say 300 rather than the 50 tops which the basement of St. John's Church could hold. I replied to her that Stephen emailed me this comment: "A big audience always seems cool." With that presumed go-ahead, she secured two nights in the big auditorium on the University campus, Wednesday February 21 and Thursday February 22, 2007, and scheduled other

activities for Stephen, which she included in the comprehensive itinerary she sent me.

Michael and I hadn't planned to be there originally, but a friend and fellow publisher named Sandra Sanchez, who owned and ran a small press of politically-centered fiction called The Wessex Collective, invited us to stay with her at her home in Nederland, a mountain town a few miles from Boulder. The opportunity for Michael to show me the Rockies, his old stomping ground (he had been an instructor at the University of Colorado in nearby Denver back in the early 1970s after his Army discharge) was too good to pass up. Plus we figured we'd sell a few copies of *Claptrap*.

So at the last minute we booked a flight and were met by Sandra and her husband Ed at the Denver bus station. Sandra and Ed's daughter, by the way, is a documentary filmmaker and the other person we were rooting for in the Oscar race the year before.

The first few days of our stay before Stephen arrived were peaceful and heavenly. We hiked the mountains, explored the little shops of Nederland, and on Wednesday morning they drove us down into Boulder where we all had breakfast at a genuine Persian teahouse called Dushanbe.

After breakfast we split up, agreeing to meet that evening at 6PM on campus for the University's reception for Stephen. It being only ten o'clock when we left Dushanbe, and the weather being unseasonably warm with the temperature already in the 60s, Michael and I decided to spend the next few hours exploring that section of Boulder near the campus, concentrating on its many restaurants (for me) and its several fine pubs (for Michael). Then, as it was nearing one o'clock, we walked the few blocks to the Boulderado Hotel, where a luncheon for Stephen had been organized by a local magazine writer and sometime documentary filmmaker.

As we approached, to our surprise we saw Stephen sitting on

the hotel steps, his shoulders hunched, his knees drawn up under his chin. His Blackberry was pressed to his ear and he was engaged in an animated conversation. Beside him stood a man we didn't recognize.

Just then Stephen looked up at him and said, "They've put me on hold."

The man nodded, then turned to us. "Don Downey. Stephen's staying with me this week."

We introduced ourselves and shook hands.

Don pointed at Stephen. "He's arguing with his credit card company. He's been arguing with them all morning."

At that, Stephen, finally noticing us, stood up, his Blackberry still pressed to his left ear, and gave us each a hug with his free right arm before sitting back down again.

I asked Don if he was joining us for lunch. "No, I've got things to do. But I'll be at the campus tonight for the reception." He walked over to his car, then turned and gave us a mock salute, saying, "He's all yours," and drove away.

Stephen still had his Blackberry against his ear, evidently still on hold. I gave him a pat on the shoulder and we went up the steps into the Boulderado, which is one of those charming, somewhat ornate, late-19th century hotels common to the region.

The restaurant, called Q's, was easy to find. As we entered the lobby we noticed a sign to our right which read simply Q's and an arrow pointing the way. We followed the arrow and found ourselves in the restaurant. Once inside we spotted two women sitting at a long table in the corner. One of them, a woman with short blonde hair and glasses, immediately waved to us.

"Michael? Cantara?" she called out.

We went over, introduced ourselves, and sat down on the long bench opposite them. Barbara introduced her table companion, Debbie Beaucoeur, the luncheon's organizer.

"Um, Stephen should be joining us soon," I told them

sheepishly. “He’s on the phone with his credit card company.”

“Oh, we know,” said Barbara.

The four of us made small talk and tucked into our food until about twenty minutes later, when Stephen appeared, surrounded by three very attentive females. He bent down, brush-kissed me on the cheek, crooned, “Hello there, my darling,” and sat down beside me on my left. His companions took places on the bench opposite us, causing Barbara and Debbie to move over to the point where Debbie was nearly off the bench. She gave them an obvious look of annoyance but said nothing.

There was another round of introductions. Two of Stephen’s admirers were young film students, while their slightly older companion, a woman with a light island complexion, was their teacher, Kathleen Man. Her looks so were so intriguing I wondered if she were Pinay like me.

“Stephen was just telling us about his new movie,” said Kathleen, beaming.

“Oh, it’s nothing,” he demurred. If Stephen had been able to blush on cue, he would’ve done so at that moment.

The two film students urged him to tell us what it was about.

“We-ll,” he began with a modest little smile, “it’s a suspense thriller, only the heroes are homeless!” As the girls sighed in admiration, Stephen warmed to his subject. The movie he went on to describe, as their lunch orders were served and they all began to eat, sounded similar to the plot of a recent Ruth Rendell mystery (not one of her best) but with his own personal slant. I asked him outright if he was, in fact, adapting Rendell’s book and he merely nodded. I was tempted to go on and ask him practical questions. For example, who had written the screenplay, or had it even been written at all, was the movie in production or pre-production, who was producing it, et cetera. But he looked so pleased at the worshipful attention he was getting I decided it was best to hold my tongue.

Debbie, for her part, seemed to be trying to channel the conversation into a more personal exchange with Stephen, and addressed him as an old friend. From what I could make out, it appeared that she and her husband had met Stephen in Los Angeles a short time earlier and she seemed to be trying to capitalize on that meeting in order to dominate the conversation. But Stephen wasn't having any of it and gave her comments terse little replies. His attention was obviously focused on the younger females at our table.

"Before we came in, Kathleen here was just telling us about her films," said Stephen.

Barbara asked her about them.

"One of them is in development," she said. "I plan to shoot it back in Hawaii. The one I just did is about child brides in Nepal."

As she went on at length to describe their plight the girls shook their heads and Stephen shook his too, seemingly in sympathy with exploited womanhood. Not to be outdone, Debbie started to tell Stephen about her own recent film, a short documentary about male prostitutes in Brazil.

"And do you know what these poor men do," she said, making an awkward attempt to lean toward Stephen and continuing in a sort of confidential tone, "they get breast implants. They say they get more clients that way."

The girls gasped at this and Stephen again shook his head sadly. Noting with approval the effect this revelation had on the group, Debbie leaned back, nodding with satisfaction.

For my part I wasn't impressed—I'd been in the sex business and I'd known sex workers who had gone to much greater lengths. But Stephen gravely intoned, "We are all corrupt."

The girls gazed at him respectfully as if he possessed some innate moral authority. But he was starting to irritate me again. I nudged his knee with mine and looked up at him, sharply whispering, "Stephen, I'm not corrupt, and neither is Michael."

He looked down at me somewhat distractedly. “Hm?” he murmured, before looking up again and continuing the conversation. After that, I decided to confine myself to the role of listener and observer, so I turned to Michael and in quiet tones we began to discuss what we’d do that afternoon before the reception.

After lunch we broke up into little groups, Stephen with the girls and Kathleen, Barbara with Debbie, while we set out to explore the delights of the nearby pedestrian mall, Pearl Street. So we thanked Debbie for the luncheon and exited the hotel into the atypically bright warm February sunshine.

At around five-thirty, after slaking our thirst at a local brewpub, we ambled over to the campus. The reception was being held there at the Museum of Natural History in the Paleontology Wing, which we found without too much trouble.

Once we entered the wing we saw right away that Sandra and Ed had already arrived. Sandra was busy helping Barbara lay out the buffet while nearby, Ed was already deep in conversation with Don Downey. There were also a few other people milling about whom I didn’t recognize, but there was no sign of Debbie or the girls from the luncheon and their teacher.

As we approached Ed and Don, Michael got Ed’s attention. I went up to Don and, after a few minutes of chatting, asked him if he knew when Stephen planned to show up.

“He’s already here,” Don told me. “He’s in the cloakroom, talking to his analyst on his cell phone.”

I thought he was joking and asked him to repeat what he’d said, which he did with the same seriousness, pointing to a small door near the entrance of the wing. I excused myself, went over to the door, leaned close to it and heard a muffled voice. As quietly as I could, I opened the door slightly, peered inside, and saw Stephen sitting on a low bench in a room not much bigger than a church confessional box. He was hunched over his Blackberry in the same position I’d seen him earlier at the Boulderado.

I carefully closed the door and returned to our group of friends clustered around the buffet table.

“Well?” said Don.

I could only shake my head in wonderment. “Do you think he’ll ever come out?” I asked.

He shrugged. “Who knows?”

At that point I glanced over at the entrance and noticed a middle-aged owlish-looking woman pacing around the entrance of the wing and studying the open door as if trying to ascertain whether or not she was in the right place. I waved to her to catch her attention and she smiled and strode in.

“You must be Moonbeams,” I said as she came up to me.

She looked surprised. “How did you know?” she breathlessly asked.

I must confess that about an hour earlier I had received a call on my cell phone from a person who preferred not to be identified, but asking me for directions to the place where the reception was to be held. When I saw this woman wandering about hesitantly outside the door, I guessed right away that she was the caller.

Moonbeams, whose real name was Rebecca Manley, was one of those women who would post comments on practically all of the Jake fanblogs and forums, including JakeWatch, which I kept up with because of Becky Heineke. After the Zinc Bar debacle, Moonbeams even went so far as to post a comment on my own blog in which I’d explained that Stephen had revealed his granddaughter’s name to me but utterly neglected to tell me to keep it a secret. Her comment: “How dare you hide behind the Gyllenhaals to cover up your own crime! For shame!! For shame!!!” Nevertheless, since I had blogged about Stephen’s appearance in Boulder and the reception, she had emailed me to ask if she might attend, since she lived nearby in Denver. She also said that she had a very special gift for Stephen. If it were possible to shrug online I would have, but instead I settled for a simple

reply of “Why not”.

So there she was standing in front of me holding out a clear plastic envelope in which I spied a number of colorfully printed sheets. “And you must be Cantara,” she said. “Would you give this to Stephen when he’s got a moment? Go on, take a look.”

“Sure,” I said, taking the envelope, opening it and pulling out the sheets, which were pictures of figures I didn’t immediately recognize. I slid them back inside and returned the envelope to Moonbeams. “I don’t understand though. What are these for?”

“Well, you’re a publisher. You ought to recognize them. They’re illustrations for a magazine!” she announced.

Then Moonbeams went on to tell me the story of her friend Lakshmi and the magazine they hoped to publish together. Lakshmi, apparently, was an IT worker in India who had recently begun frequently posting on the numerous Gyllenhaal fansites worldwide and was now well-known in the fan world for her devotion to the entire family. Moonbeams had in fact met her through those very fansites. Lakshmi had even created a sort of pantheon in which she had placed each Gyllenhaal according to the characteristics she had assigned: Naomi was “The Pale Nurturer”; Jake was “The Handsome Prince”; Maggie was “The Wise Princess”; and Stephen was “The Warrior Priest”. Or something like that.

On closer inspection, each of the pictures contained the head of one of the Gyllenhaals Photoshopped onto the body of its respective deity.

I tried not to show my astonishment as Moonbeams continued her story. Lakshmi was very proud of the pantheon she had created. She had even made an altar, complete with votive candles, above which she had tacked the aforementioned Gyllenhaal pictures. By her own account she would frequently sit for hours before it in rapt contemplation. So convincing was the world she had created for herself and her family that her aged



mother, on her deathbed, cried out in her delirium, “Will Stephen be here soon?”

When Moonbeams revealed this to me with a perfectly straight face it was too much to believe. As calmly as I could I excused myself, marched over to the cloakroom and rapped firmly on the door.

“Stephen, come out of there!” I yelled. “It’s six-thirty and there are people out here you have got to meet!”

I went back to the buffet table. Five minutes later Stephen emerged, looking none the worse for wear from the session with his analyst. Immediately he gravitated to a cluster of well-heeled academic-looking types near the dinosaur egg display case and began chatting with them.

I leaned over to Moonbeams. “Now’s your chance,” I told her.

“Aren’t you going to introduce me?” she said nervously.

“Believe me, you don’t need an introduction. Go on, go on!” I prompted, almost nudging her toward Stephen. “He’s just a person!”

Shyly, Moonbeams walked up to Stephen and waited patiently near him until she got his attention. I watched as he finally turned to her and, with one of his most charming smiles, listened to her intently and patiently as she spoke with obvious fervor. I couldn’t hear everything they were saying, but after a few minutes Moonbeams did a puzzling thing. She took out her cell phone, pressed a number, apparently listened until someone picked up, then spoke a few words into the phone and handed it to Stephen, who began talking cheerfully to the person on the other end.

Walking over to me, Moonbeams said excitedly, “Do you know who that is?”

I shook my head.

“It’s Lakshmi, long distance!”

My eyes widened. “You’re calling India?”

“Cantara, you have no idea what this means to her,” said

Moonbeams, and went over to rejoin Stephen.

When she was out of earshot, I turned to Don Downey and informed him in the most serious voice I could muster, “Do you know that in India some people worship Stephen as a god?”

He stared at me speechless for a moment. Then he shook his head slowly and muttered, “Well, I guess there’s always room for one more.”

After Stephen ended his conversation with Lakshmi I noticed Moonbeams attempting to give him her envelope, but Stephen waved it away with a laugh. He returned to chatting with his new acquaintances and Moonbeams came back over to me saying, “He told me you’d take care of this.”

I promised that I would, then reached under the buffet table and placed it in one of the shopping bags containing copies of *Claptrap* which Sandra and Ed had brought. We were there to sell books, remember?

As for Moonbeams, she went off on her own toward the auditorium, once again to bask in the presence of the Indian god.

For the next half-hour or so Michael and I had a good time goofing around the exhibits taking pictures of Sandra, Ed, Barbara, and Don. From one of the shopping bags Sandra took out a souvenir I’d bought in Nederland the day before, an extra large t-shirt emblazoned with an illustration advertising Nederland’s most famous festival, Frozen Dead Guy Days. (Apparently there really was a frozen dead guy in the town’s past. It’s a great story but a little long for this book, so you can look it up if you like.)

The illustration showed a wizened old man in a coffin with an icicle dangling from his nose. Above him were the words, Frozen Dead Guy, 2007. When I’d seen this t-shirt at the store, my first thought was, Stephen has got to see this, so I bought it.

I went up to him, gift over my arm. He ignored me as he was still busy charming the well-heeled academics. I tugged the back of his shirt like a little sister.

He looked down at me with a big smile and put his arm around my neck. “And what can I do for you?”

“This is for you,” I said, holding it up. “It’d be great if you could wear it tonight. You need a little local color.”

He laughed loudly and held it up to his chest, modeling it. “What do you all think?”

“You’re beautiful,” said one of the women he’d been talking to.

“Well, I think I should wear it. I feel like a frozen dead guy sometimes.”

As he slipped it over his button shirt I asked him to stand near one of the dinosaur rib bones and took a picture of him. I still have it somewhere.

Soon it was nearly time for Stephen’s film clip show in the auditorium to start. I gave him a significant look and pointed to my watch, but he had resumed his conversation with campus notables and made no move to join our little group.

“Don’t worry,” Don assured me as we picked up our things. “I’ll make sure he gets there.”

On our way out we passed Stephen and I patted him on the arm to gently remind him that the time was approaching, but he was laughing at something someone was saying and didn’t seem to notice me.

Once we got to the lobby of the auditorium Michael, Sandra, Ed, and I began to stack the books and selling materials on a long table on one side of the wide auditorium doors. On the other side was another long table at which a couple of young people, obviously student volunteers, were sitting behind a stack of programs. I went over, introduced myself to them, and was rewarded with their friendly smiles. The young lady also graciously offered me a program. I accepted it and took it to our table where I folded it and put it in my pocket without looking at it.

After I had arranged the books nicely on the table, I asked

Sandra and Ed if they planned to sit in on the clip show. Sandra tartly remarked, “Actually, I really don’t like his work, and I really don’t like him.” At that moment I was still irritated at Stephen not only for his remark at lunch but his cloakroom antics, so instead of defending him I merely answered her with a shrug. Ed told us that he and Sandra would stick around anyway in order to give us a lift afterward to our new guest accommodations in town (Barbara had managed to find us a place closer to the campus for the next couple of nights). And, they also offered to man our table while we took a peek at the clip show.

Through the door we could hear a voice at the microphone and determined that Don must have spirited Stephen into the auditorium through the back and that the show had started. We went inside and stood near the door as Kathleen at the podium in front of a large movie screen introduced Stephen, who was sitting in the front row. Her praise for Stephen’s directorial abilities was, to say the least, effusive—you’d think he was Jean Vigo, Akira Kurosawa, and Stanley Kubrick all rolled into one. As Kathleen listed Stephen’s credits he nodded modestly, stopping only to remark after she mentioned a made-for-TV movie called *A Killing in a Small Town*, “Hey, did I direct that?” This got a laugh from the audience and a smile from Kathleen.

“So get up here Stephen, it’s your show,” she went on.

Stephen rose, went up to the podium, and settled into the chair that had been provided for him. Then Kathleen detached the microphone from its stand, handed it to Stephen, and took Stephen’s seat in the front row.

“Thank you ladies and gentlemen for coming to my little retrospective. I hope you’ll, uh, humor me by letting me go down memory lane a bit while I recall some of the fun we had directing these movies. So, uh, now, could someone please do something with the lights?”

At that point we went back out to the lobby, as we’d already

seen most of Stephen's movies and TV episodes on cable by that time. Besides, we hoped to sell a few books. We relieved Ed and Sandra, who left to take a walk around the campus while waiting for us.

During the next two hours we could faintly hear Stephen's voice from time to time, often followed by laughter. Meanwhile, the only interesting thing that happened at our table was meeting one of Stephen's old girlfriends. She was a shy, small woman, even smaller than me, and her name was Sandy Locke. As luck would have it, she'd spotted the interview with Stephen (which Barbara had arranged, God bless her) in the town newspaper. Since she lived only a few miles away in the mountains where she raised llamas, it was no problem for her to attend. We had a nice long conversation in which she told me about some of Stephen's eccentric behavior when they'd known each other in New York. I was so thrilled to hear her talk about Stephen's youthful days that I gave her a copy of *Claptrap* on the house.

After we talked a little she went inside to catch the rest of the clip show, but came out before it was over so we could continue our conversation. She was in the middle of a great story (apparently Stephen had gotten so fed up with his tiny, shabby Lower East Side apartment one evening that he punched a hole through one of the walls) when the auditorium doors opened and the audience began pouring out, including Moonbeams, who merely nodded to us before making her exit.

We quickly sold some books to the exiting crowd. After most of the auditorium audience had dispersed I noticed Stephen himself finally emerging, chatting with Kathleen and seemingly oblivious to anyone else.

I waved my arms at him vigorously for several seconds, finally getting his attention. Kathleen gave him an understanding look and went off to join a small group of people while Stephen approached our table.

“You have to sign some books,” I told him. “Why don’t you start with the lady right here?”

With a nervous smile, he took Sandy’s copy of *Claptrap* while I gave him a pen.

“Steve, don’t you remember me?” she said in a light sweet voice.

He looked down at her. “Oh my God.”

They hugged, and it was a delight to witness their reunion. Then they went a short distance away from us chattering to each other like old friends, while Kathleen from the other side of the lobby eyed them furtively.

After a bit, when Stephen began to busy himself signing books for whoever approached him, Sandy returned to our table. With a satisfied smile she told me, “He said we’d get together soon, he even promised to write a poem for me, but I’m not counting on it. Still, it was great to see him again. I knew he was going to turn out to be something special,” she finished wistfully.

The crowd was thinning out, leaving only the students at the other table, Michael and me at ours, and Stephen, Kathleen and Barbara chatting with each other a short distance away.

I asked Sandy Locke if she wanted to join us for a drink. She said thanks, but she had a long drive back. I told her I was glad she came and even gave her another copy of *Claptrap*. She left unobtrusively, just as we spotted Sandra and Ed returning.

Michael and I placed our remaining copies of *Claptrap* into a shopping bag except for a couple of copies which I gave to the two students at the other table.

As Sandra and Ed were walking out with us, discussing which late-night watering hole to head to, Stephen’s group, apparently noticing us leaving, headed toward the exit nearest them.

As we passed Stephen’s group outside, Sandra said to Barbara, “We’re going to Bacaro’s Tavern.”

“We’ll meet you there,” she answered.

Ten minutes later we all arrived at the tavern. Immediately we found a huge booth in the corner that we could all cram ourselves into, and there we spent a pleasant hour or so drinking our drinks and engaging in lighthearted conversation about this and that.

When it getting was close to twelve, Sandra proposed we call it a night and we all agreed. We divvied up the bill, gathered our belongings, and left the pub and stepped out into the cool night air.

Barbara offered Kathleen a lift but she declined, saying that she lived nearby and that Stephen had offered to walk her home. At that, we all bid each other goodnight.

As we watched Stephen and Kathleen stroll away down the street, their arms around each other's waists, Barbara leaned close to me and asked in a confidential voice, "Say, you don't think the two of them...?"

I laughed. "No! He's just being friendly. And besides, he's married to Naomi."

"You mean he was married to Naomi."

"No, he still is."

Barbara frowned. "Well, it looks like we've got a typo." I asked her what she meant. "Haven't you seen the program?"

Remembering the program the student had given me, I took it out of my pocket, unfolded it and read until I got to the part that said,

*Stephen Gyllenhaal was the second husband of Oscar-nominated screenwriter Naomi Foner.*

Was? Was? My heart sank as once again I got that Naomi-is-going-to-kill-me feeling.

My thoughts quickly went back to the moment I'd planned the dates of Stephen's engagement. I wanted him to be in Boulder a week earlier, February 14. I'd assumed that booking him for Valentine's Day would prompt him to want to bring Naomi along

for a romantic holiday, maybe even make up for the fire at Manka's.

But he had emailed me back: February 14 is out—the wife, you know. Although I wasn't sure what that meant, I asked Barbara to change the date to the following week.

I turned to Barbara. “Did Stephen have a chance to see the program?”

“Oh yes, first thing,” she said. “He didn't say a word.”

I looked down the dark street again. By that time, they were out of sight.

After waking up in the sumptuous bedroom in the large house which Barbara had been able to secure for us, the family being away for a few days, I left Michael at about eight in the morning and took a bus back to the campus. Kathleen was showing *Waterland* in its entirety to her class that morning, with Stephen scheduled to give a talk afterward.

I got there before Stephen arrived. The classroom was dimly lit as a film clip was being shown—not Stephen's, a foreign film I didn't recognize, which bothered me. I sort of pride myself on my knowledge of foreign films.

I quietly took a seat at the end of the front row near the door and watched the film clip. It was a black-and-white scene of a man on a roof, running. The sequence was confusing to me because not only was it shown out of context, but repeated over and over while Kathleen, who was in front of the classroom manning the DVD projector, kept instructing her students to pay attention to the scene's POV.

As I wondered why Kathleen was using this particular technique, I noticed on the seat of the desk next to me a printed page of teacher's notes. Curious, I picked it up. In the dim overhead lighting I was barely able to make out the page's contents. It identified the scene as being from an Argentinian film



by a director whose name I barely recognized. Also, according to the notes, the title of this course was Film Production. Not Screenwriting or Film Aesthetics, but Production. This was even more bewildering, considering Kathleen's emphasis on POV. Anyway, it obviously wasn't focused on entertainment.

As I was mulling this over Stephen unobtrusively crept in through the same door I had entered and sat down beside me. When the lights were turned up again, Kathleen was in front of the class finishing the lesson. Spotting Stephen, she broke into a broad smile and said, "Well, glad you could make it."

I looked closely at Stephen's face as he smiled back at Kathleen. In its innocence was a seeming denial that anything had happened between them the night before.

Up front, Kathleen and a student began to fuss with the DVD projector until they were able to get *Waterland* running. Kathleen introduced the film, then went to the opposite side of the front row and sat down. The classroom lights dimmed again and the entire film was played.

It was a treat to see it once more on a big screen. I was reminded of how masterful a job of cinematography Robert Elswit had done on this film. When Maggie made her brief appearance in an early scene Stephen murmured, "There's my girl."

The students seemed to enjoy it too, although the sequence dealing with the heroine's unwanted pregnancy seemed to affect the female students more. There were audible groans behind us during the abortion scene (which incidentally was beautifully lit).

After the film ended the lights were turned up and there was applause. Kathleen got up and returned to the center of the room, where she introduced Stephen. Up he bounded and quickly joined Kathleen with barely-concealed enthusiasm.

I think it was around this time that I was starting to realize that these talk portions of his appearances had somehow become more important to Stephen than discussions about his poetry or

even his actual films themselves.

As Kathleen resumed her former seat, he began a talk to the class that would continue for almost an hour. “I’m sorry, I seem to have left my notes at home. So I hope you’ll forgive me if I can’t answer all your questions.”

Then without further ado he launched into a description of his Hollywood career, becoming even more candid than he had been at Housing Works or even the Zinc Bar. He talked about his failures but also his hopes—“I’ve made mistakes, I could’ve taken better jobs, but I could just retire now, I’ve got my DGA pension”; his son and daughter—“People ask me why I won’t work with Jake and Maggie now that they’re grown. Well, frankly I’m just too emotionally close to them”; and had some words of encouragement to budding young filmmakers, which over these past years he’s come to repeat—“Just do it! Go work at Jamba Juice if you have to, just do it!”

He also offered some particular advice for adapting literary material. “If you want to make a movie out of any book, you have to rape and pillage. Rape—and—pillage.” He repeated those last words with an odd relish, then added, chuckling, “The author will hate you, but you’ll have a better movie.”

I wondered at this remark because as far as I knew he’d never written an adaptation of anything before, certainly not *Waterland*. I was to learn a few days later just what had been on his mind.

He went on to field a few questions during the hour though not many, because his answers were so long. When one young man asked him if he had any special advice for working with children, he began a long story about, of all movies, *Losing Isaiah*, the one movie he had vowed never to bring up. He started the story with a description of Samuel L. Jackson’s professionalism, then began to ramble on about what made him choose one special little boy for the title role. “What was his name, I forget?” he mused aloud.

Instantly I piped up, “Marc John Jeffries.”

Stephen looked over at me with a scowl that immediately made me feel self-conscious. “Thanks. That’s right,” he said grimly. “Marc John Jeffries. I don’t think he’s done anything else since *Losing Isaiah*.”

I wanted to scream at him, He’s a teenager now! He’s been in movies and TV for thirteen years! He just did a movie for Garry Marshall! But I decided to keep my mouth shut for the rest of his talk.

Finally was it was close to noon, at which time Kathleen was forced to remind Stephen that the class was over. With an embarrassed smile he thanked her for the opportunity to discuss filmmaking. The several students who remained applauded; a few of them even came down to say hello and chat with him.

As Stephen was occupied with the students, I went over to Kathleen to help her organize the DVDs. “I’m sorry he wasn’t better prepared,” I said.

She shrugged and assured me that it was all right, nobody noticed.

“I’ve learned from experience,” I confided to her, “that if you want to work with Stephen, sometimes you have to pin his mittens to his jacket.”

She looked at me quizzically. “What does that mean?”

I remembered that she was from Hawaii. She probably doesn’t understand the reference, I thought. “Oh, nothing,” I said aloud, giggling, and with a wave to Stephen, who didn’t notice, I left the classroom.

I met Michael at a pub on Pearl Street as we’d arranged, and we whiled away the time having lunch, window shopping and enjoying the pedestrian mall until it was late afternoon and time to return to the auditorium for Stephen’s poetry reading.

As we approached the auditorium we ran into Don Downey, who was getting out of his car. Immediately he asked us for a favor. He’d brought his film equipment and needed someone to watch the

rest of it while he went to fetch a student to help him carry it to the auditorium, as it would take a couple of trips. Michael told him that that was ridiculous, he'd help him right away.

I asked him what the equipment was for and he answered, "It's for your film."

This took me aback. My film? Then I remembered. At the reception the evening before I'd gotten into a brief discussion with Don about moviemaking once he let slip that he too was a documentary filmmaker. At that moment I had a great idea: Why not make a film of Stephen? So I asked if it would be possible for him to shoot some footage of Stephen's reading and how much it would cost.

I'd forgotten all about it once Stephen's phone session with his analyst, his Indian godhood, and his unexpected relationship with Kathleen Man took precedent in my mind. I told Don that I planned to call my film "A Poet from Hollywood".

Now here he was, ready to shoot. After a couple of trips he and Michael finished taking the equipment to the auditorium and were setting up Don's Sony XL on its tripod several rows back on the left of the two center aisles. While they were setting up, Stephen strolled in wearing his Frozen Dead Guy Days t-shirt accompanied by Kathleen who took a seat on the right about halfway back from the reading area, though not before making a quick survey of the audience.

Stephen, who was standing by a table that had been placed in the center of the area in front of the seats, was taking papers out of his Jack Spade bag. He called over to Don and Michael asking them with a little laugh if they needed some help. Busy with the setting up, the two of them just shook their heads.

As for me, I was too engrossed in watching what they were doing to pay much attention to him. I was also getting involved with people who recognized me as his publisher and came up to ask if there were any copies of *Claptrap* left. Fortunately I was able

to make a few sales from my backpack. Meanwhile, many of the people who were already seated in the audience seemed eager to meet Stephen and hurried up to the stage where they formed a tight group and began to burble excitedly.

After a few minutes a student came up to clip a lavalier mic on Stephen and they spent a few moments testing it. Then without much further ado Stephen introduced himself with a little anecdote.

“You know, when I was growing up I wanted to be one of two things, either a writer or President of the United States. And now here I am reading my poetry to you. Poetry is writing, I guess, sort of...”

After that he immediately began to read the first of his poems for that evening, one of his political ones.

It had been almost exactly four months since we last heard him at the Zinc Bar. This evening, though, he was even more energetic and dramatic than he had been then as he paced back and forth across the floor. Maybe because a camera was rolling? I wondered at the time.

He also added a new element to his patter. This was the first time I had ever heard him talk about his upbringing in what he called a “weird little religious town”. This patter turned out to be a segue to his first public reading from his novel, the one he saved from the fire at Manka’s. He was calling it “Liquid Motel”.

“I think it’s going to be pretty good,” Stephen announced to the audience before starting to read the first few pages of manuscript aloud.

“I’ll be the judge of that,” called out Michael from our seats in the front row.

I’ll discuss the novel in chapter twelve. For now I’ll simply say that after he read from *Liquid Motel* Stephen went back to his poems to conclude the evening. I think he finished with the poem about his father, “Shoe Polish”, which he frequently saved for last.

Then, after he spoke the final line, he shut his copy of *Claptrap* with a dramatic flourish.

During the applause immediately following, Don and Michael began to break down the camera equipment and carry it out, while I went up to the stage to congratulate Stephen.

He was pretty jazzed after the exercise of his reading. I wanted just to shake his hand, but instead he wrapped his arm around my neck and held my head in a tight embrace just long enough for me to get a strong whiff of his manly underarm sweat. Actually I kind of liked it.

After I broke free, the audience members again flocked around Stephen while I went back to my seat and became involved in a conversation with a young poet named Marj Hahne. In a few minutes Don and Michael returned.

Then Don handed me two small video cartridges in their plastic cases. When I asked him what they were he told me that they were the tapes he'd just shot.

I was amazed. "You mean they're done? Just like that? How much?" I asked.

"Just take them," he answered, shrugging and shaking his head.

I thanked him profusely and put them into my backpack. Eight months later I finally got to see what he had shot, after I got the tapes converted to digital files on a disk.

Over an hour after his reading the crowd began to thin out. To the remaining few of us Stephen abruptly waved his hand and blithely ordered, "Come on! Let me take all of you someplace nice."

So off we all went, chattering animatedly among ourselves as we walked in a group through the campus and down the quiet streets until we came to a newish hotel as opulent as the Boulerado. We went inside and found ourselves in a swanky bar called T-Zero.

The back room at T-Zero is set up in an interesting manner.

It's a circular room with a long low continuous couch that stretches all the way along the wall, and soft ottomans in the middle.

We all claimed our places and ordered drinks. Then for the next couple of hours we engaged in some lively conversation. There were I think twelve of us there. Stephen and Kathleen were huddled close together on the couch surrounded by Stephen's admirers, while Barbara and Don chatted together and Michael and I, sitting on a couple of the ottomans, were deep in a conversation with Marj about spirituality and the creative process.

"Have you been to Naropa?" she asked Michael.

Michael told her he'd had a look in during his time in the Denver-Boulder area soon after it was established in 1974. If you haven't heard of Naropa, I should describe it here as an institute for the study of alternative ways of thinking and seeking spirituality, including many practices which are still strange to the Western mind.

While we were discussing the esoteric ways of Naropa, Stephen came over and sat down beside us. "And what are you two up to?" he slyly asked.

I brought him up to speed with our conversation.

"That's interesting. The guy I was just talking to was going on about how spiritual a place Boulder is. In fact he wants me to come back next year and give a lecture for his alternative energy political action committee."

I asked him what his topic would be.

He smiled. "You pick one for me," he said.

Off the top of my head I replied, "The ecosphere." I paused a moment to consider it further, then had a flash of inspiration. "The artistic ecosphere."

"Well...alternative energy's a major issue around here," said Marj. "But I don't think that's quite the right subject for the PAC. It sounds intriguing though. How about you come over to my poetry circle and talk about it?" I told her that Michael and I would be

glad to give her poetry circle a talk anytime.

At that point the cocktail waitress came over and handed Stephen the check; without looking at it he slipped her his credit card. A few minutes later she returned and whispered something to him we didn't hear.

But Michael was paying attention to this. Murmuring to me, "I'll be right back," he then unobtrusively accompanied the waitress to the front of the bar. In a few minutes he returned, telling Stephen before he rejoined me, "It's been straightened out."

At that, Stephen stood up and stretched. "Great! So, are we ready?" he said, yawning. "It's been quite a day."

As if taking their cues from him, the rest of the group got up, picked up their things and prepared to leave. On our way out, several people thanked Stephen for the great evening. I don't remember who Stephen walked out with—I think it was Don Downey—but Barbara drove us back to our guest house.

That evening in bed I asked Michael what exactly had been straightened out.

"His credit card was rejected," he told me. "So I paid the bill."

"You paid it? How much?"

"About a hundred seventy-five dollars," he told me.

Since at the time our total living budget was an extremely tight fifteen hundred a month and Michael was pretty strict about it, I was stunned. I asked him why in the name of God would he do a thing like that.

He snuggled under the covers. "Because I know you love him," he said matter-of-factly. "And because I know you didn't want him to lose face."

I sighed. Michael was right. I turned off the lights and snuggled next to him.

The next morning around eight we were dressed and waiting for Stephen to pick us up to take us to breakfast. Twenty minutes late, as usual, he came for us in Don's car and off we went to the



Pearl Street Mall, where we drove around and finally picked out an unprepossessing place to eat called the 15th Street Café.

None of us had had a full night's sleep, but Michael appeared rested and Stephen, despite not having shaved that morning and looking (and smelling) pretty grungy, seemed full of energy. I was energized too, having spent a good deal of the night awake in bed, going over in my mind the inspiration that had come to me at T-Zero about the artistic ecosphere.

For all his grunginess Stephen was still appealing, or perhaps all the servers recognized him from his picture in the paper (one of the Robert Elswit portraits that I'd cropped and color-toned myself). As the rather large and roomy café was nearly empty, we had no trouble in seating ourselves at a large table near the window. We had scarcely settled ourselves before a beaming young waitress hurried over to take our orders. Or rather Stephen's order, for he was the only one she seemed to notice. As she did so, I noticed three other female servers gazing adoringly at Stephen from their stations near the kitchen.

After our food was served Stephen grinned at me. "Now, tell me about your idea," he said.

I'd gone into it a little in the car while we all chatted on the way to Pearl Street. I'm afraid I had given Stephen the impression that I was going to outline a solid subject for him for his talk at the alternative energy PAC. But once we were sitting down at the café it all came out in a torrent.

"The artistic ecosphere," I announced, "is a mental and spiritual state that encompasses each individual artist—sort of their personal artistic turf. The goal is to recognize and expand this ecosphere. The only provision is that as an ecosphere it has to allow you to thrive and allow you to let the ecosphere itself thrive."

Michael nodded his head vigorously, a sure sign that he had something to say. I gestured to him that it was okay to speak. "I'm with you so far," he said, "but there has to be more to it than that.

An ecosphere, after all, is something located in the real world. It has physical boundaries. It's a space that basically provides a favorable environment for certain species of animal and plant life. You can't really call what you're talking about an ecosphere if it can't be geographically located."

"I don't think in this day and age with all the new technology that that's absolutely necessary," I answered.

Michael shrugged his shoulders. "I was taking you at your word. Ecosphere. If you want to call it cyberspace or something similar like that, fine, but you can't call it a geographical location."

"I think the word ecosphere is entirely appropriate," I retorted. "After all, the creative impulse is bounded by physical limitations—the limitations of our physical bodies, where we live. The way we think, what our memories are, are bounded by the physical limitations of our brains. Memories come from the physical and organic—which authors we've read, paintings we've seen, actors we like, whether they're living or dead." I was on a roll now. "Barney Rosset, he's part of our ecosphere, and he's alive and living on Fourth Avenue. James Joyce, even though he's dead. The writers group we started when we lived in Paris. And you know?" I turned to Stephen. "Even that woman in India with the magazine, Lakshmi, she's part of our ecosphere. And Barbara. And the girls who made up that birthday card for you where you looked like Wordsworth."

Stephen was sitting there with the usual wide grin which I had come to realize meant nothing but a desire to be affable. "Sounds like a great idea," he finally said. "Go for it! But let me get this straight." A puzzled look came over his face. "Just what is an artistic ecosphere, anyway?"

I gave him a disapproving look. "Stephen," I said patiently, "I've just spent the last five minutes trying to explain this concept to both of you."

Stephen gave me another of those grins. "Oh, sorry," he said

contritely, “I guess I wasn’t paying that much attention. I was thinking about what a fantastic experience I’ve had the last few days. The people here are so cool and really seem to have this stuff together. In fact I’m making this place my spiritual center.”

We went on this way back and forth for the next few minutes, but I knew that the moment had passed. Stephen was never really going to buy this concept, even if he could understand it. So a short time later, Stephen paid for the brunch (in cash this time) and we left the café, Stephen waving regally at the servers as we left.

As we were walking through the parking lot, Stephen turned to Michael and said rather casually, “You will take a look at my novel, won’t you?” Then he whipped out from his pocket an electronic car key, pointed it at Don’s car, and pressed it several times without success before remarking, irritated, “Wait a minute, this isn’t my Beemer...”

Michael and I exchanged glances. Then he said with a smile, “Sure, Stephen, glad to help. Just send me an email attachment of the entire novel so I can get it in context, and I’ll read it and give you my opinion and suggestions.”

“Great, that’s a load off my mind,” said Stephen, apparently closing the subject, and we all got into Don’s car.

And that was effectively the end of our stay in Boulder. By the next morning the weather had turned freezing cold again but we didn’t care, we were boarding a plane back to Los Angeles from Denver International before noon.

A week later back in LA I read in the trades that Stephen had optioned the film rights to a memoir called *Zioncheck for President*, about a failed run for the Seattle city council. His seemingly non sequitur remark in Boulder about book adaptations now took on a new meaning.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### “Since Her Father’s Here, I Won’t Read This Poem”

**T**he morning while I was watching *A Dangerous Woman* for the umpteenth time on basic cable (“Directed by Stephen Gyllenhaal—Jake and Maggie’s dad” intoned the announcer) my new cell phone rang. I thought it might be another one of those strange phone calls from Stephen, so I didn’t pick it up at once. Let me explain.

Back in January when we arrived in LA I got the first of these calls, coincidentally enough late one evening while we were watching *Saturday Night Live* guest-hosted by Jake. My cell phone rang with the insane theremin ring I’d assigned Stephen and I immediately picked it up. On the other end I heard a conversation, faint but distinct, between someone who definitely sounded like Stephen and a young-sounding man. The young man was laughing and Stephen (for it could be no other) was nattering on about something, I couldn’t tell what. The young man laughed again. It sure sounded like Jake.

“Stephen? Stephen?” I loudly repeated into my phone, but no one answered. This went on for about five minutes before I hung up in bewilderment.

Over the next three months I got these calls almost every week. They were all similar—when I picked up, instead of being greeted by someone on the other end I got faint snatches of conversations between Stephen and someone who sounded like Jake or someone who sounded like Maggie. Once it was an eight-minute conversation (yes, I listened that long) between Stephen and the Maggie voice about which was the best restaurant to go to that night, and once, I swear, I could hear Stephen crooning a lullaby and the sound of a baby cooing. His granddaughter Ramona, maybe? For awhile there I remembered the melody of that lullaby and could even hum it.

Although this wasn't Stephen's theremin ring, I was still suspicious—he could be making a joke call to me from anywhere. But when I reluctantly decided to take the call, on the other end was a real live person who wanted to talk to me.

“Cantara? Is that you? This is Harold. Remember? From *Sadie*?”

Sadie wasn't a girl, it was a movie, in fact the last one I ever did in the San Francisco porn scene. It was a soft-core, modern-day version of *Rain* by Somerset Maugham (I kid you not).

I recognized the voice at once. “Harold, how are you?” I said brightly.

“I was on IMDb just the other day looking through the cast list for *Sadie*, you know, trying to keep up contacts. You're the only one there that's got a local phone number listed,” he explained. “How are you doing? How long have you been in LA?”

I told him that my husband and I were in town for a few months to visit old friends.

“That's great,” he answered, and immediately invited us to breakfast the next day, which was Friday the last day of March.

Early the next morning Harold picked us up at our hotel in Hollywood. He hadn't changed much, still tall and lean with curly brown hair and wearing a plaid flannel shirt and jeans like I remember him from the late 1970s. Although he was about my age, early fifties, he looked and sounded like a man of thirty-five. A really yummy man of thirty-five.

We hugged, I introduced Michael, and we took off in his little red Honda down Western, to a little breakfast place off Wilshire he highly recommended.

“This is great,” he told us in the car. “I'm not working this weekend, so we've got all this time to catch up.”

And so we did during breakfast, with Michael as our good-natured audience.

(I was living in Michael's hippie commune in the Haight back in the late 70's. Although he knew about my porn career, he wasn't

a part of it.)

We caught each other up on news about our other colleagues in the business like Bob Chinn and Annette Haven, plus a few co-workers who'd died of AIDS during the almost thirty years since we all last worked together. Harold also told us about what he'd been doing since our days in porn, which was mostly minor but steady work in legit movies and TV.

Then after breakfast, on the way back to the car, he casually asked, "You got time today? You want to go sightseeing?"

He was offering us an unexpected treat. Michael and I both grinned at each other and quickly told him yes.

So that was how we got to see the LaBrea Tar Pits and the house where they shot *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* Harold informed us that the wealthy neighborhood we were cruising through at the moment was called Hancock Park. It wasn't a particularly large neighborhood but very well laid out, with large picturesque houses.

"And that's where Nat King Cole used to live," he announced, acting as our tour guide while we drove around. "And that's where Howard Hughes used to live—"

"How about more recent residents?" broke in Michael, who was sitting in the back.

"Yeah, sure!" said Harold. "You like boxing? Over there, that's where the welterweight champ Manny Pacquiao lives."

Seeing the house of one of the most famous Filipinos in the world—now that impressed me.

"And I think Kathy Bates lives around here, and Antonio Banderas... Hm, let me see..."

"How do you know so much about this place?" I asked him. "You're from Iowa."

"Hollywood is living history," he said solemnly while making a turn. "I think it's a fascinating place. And not just because I work here. Also, it pays to know where to find the really important people." He looked around. "Okay, I can't seem to find where

Antonio Banderas lives, but look over there.” He pointed to a two-story English-type country house with vines clinging to its brick walls. “You know who used to live there?”

I shook my head.

“Jake Gyllenhaal.” Michael and I stared out of our windows. “I mean when he was a kid,” Harold continued. “With his sister and his parents.”

I turned and asked him as innocently as I could, “Do you know him?”

“Nah. Different league,” he said with a laugh. “Why, do you know him?”

“Well,” I said modestly, “we know his father.”

Harold brightened. “Really? The guy who directed Dennis Hopper in *Paris Trout*? Wow. Hopper was so great in that movie.”

(Reader, I wasn’t trying to brag. I was working an angle here. I had suddenly remembered that a couple of weeks earlier Stephen had told me somewhat casually in an email about his upcoming poetry reading—which just happened to be that night—for a nonprofit corporation called Tebot Bach. His casual mention annoyed the hell out of me at the time, not only because it was a reading I had had absolutely no hand in organizing, but also because it was being held in Huntington Beach in wealthy Orange County, a place so far from Los Angeles that Michael and I, being carless, had no hope of getting to. Now here was an old friend, an actor, who had a car...)

“How do you know him?” he asked.

I briefly explained about Cantarabooks and publishing Stephen’s poetry, which I hadn’t mentioned earlier—Harold was too busy telling us about his career.

“Well, I’ll be,” he remarked after I finished.

“You know,” I said, “we could arrange for you to meet him if you’re interested.”

“That’d be great! When?”

“Um...how about tonight?” I answered, and explained about

the Huntington Beach reading.

“Hey, I’m game,” said Harold. “Just give me directions.”

Now secure in the certainty that we had a ride, I asked Harold to take us back to our hotel room so I could pick up some books and print out the Tebot Bach announcement and a Google map, while he and Michael waited in the lobby. Then, with a backpack loaded with copies of *Claptrap* and the two printed sheets in my hand, we returned to his car and prepared for our Great Road Trip.

“The reading’s not till 7:30,” I told Harold as we drove down Hollywood Boulevard. “What do you want to do till then?”

“Let’s tool around some. I like driving.”

Musso & Frank was coming up on our right and it suddenly occurred to me that we were in my old neighborhood. I asked him if we could swing around to the back of the restaurant—there was a place I wanted to show the both of them. In a few moments Harold had stopped the car and we were looking out at the front of a decrepit old four-story SRO adjacent to the Musso & Frank parking lot. There was a faded sign that said, “Hotel Las Palmas”.

“That’s where I used to live,” I announced.

To my surprise, Harold actually seemed impressed. “You know all about that scene, don’t you?” I shook my head. “*Pretty Woman!* That’s where Julia Roberts was living at the end of *Pretty Woman!* You know, when Richard Gere goes back for her!”

I looked at the decrepit old hotel again. I’d never seen the Garry Marshall movie—it had been shot after my time at the Las Palmas—but the place had now taken on a kind of luster for me.

“Anywhere else?” Harold asked.

Michael asked if we could pass by Hollywood High School so we did, marveling at the enormous mural on its side which depicted many of its illustrious graduates, including a smiling John Ritter who was painted three times larger than Judy Garland.

Then I had a brainwave. “Hey, why don’t we go see Stephen right now!” I said. “I’ll bet he’s still in his office and I know just where it is.” I gave Harold the address and after a few minutes’



drive we were back on Hollywood Boulevard and stopped at the corner of La Brea.

I peered out of the car window for a few seconds, puzzled. It was the address, but there was nothing there that looked like a big office building, just a couple of storefronts.

“Looks like it’s just a mail drop,” said Michael finally.

“That doesn’t mean anything,” said Harold. “A lot of people here use mail drops for official addresses.”

When I didn’t answer, Michael could see how upset I was so he leaned over to me and said gently, “How about some more personal points of interest? I’d like to know more about your life here in the seventies.”

“Yeah, sounds good,” shrugged Harold.

At this point I asked them both if they’d like to visit a truly historic location, this one in Beverly Hills. Of course they were both game, and traffic being light we soon found ourselves turning up Sunset onto a tranquil leafy little residential street called Schuyler Road.

“So who lives here?” Michael asked me.

“He’s dead now. Rouben Mamoulian. I was his amanuensis before moving to San Francisco.”

“Amanuensis...?” repeated Harold slowly.

“He dictated his memoirs to me but they never got published. Mamoulian knew everybody—Gershwin... Garbo... Marlene Dietrich...”

“Oh wow, yeah, Mamoulian, I think I remember him,” he said. “Hey, didn’t he direct *Cleopatra* with Liz and Dick?”

“He was about to, but he found out the producers lied to him,” I replied. “It’s quite a story. I’ll tell you about it one of these days.”

We couldn’t see much of the house because it was hidden by low thick trees. But the gate to the path was still there as I remembered, and so was the mailbox. After a moment in which I contemplated my old relationship with Mamoulian, we were driving away. Reminiscing about my time with this classic film

director had lifted my spirits.

“Where to now?” asked Harold.

“One more place,” I told him firmly. “7302 Mulholland Drive.”

“Aha,” said Michael, and explained to Harold the significance of that address.

Harold, obviously a knowledgeable LA driver, made a few expert turns that brought us to the Hollywood Hills. As we drove further up into the hills I noticed smoke rising in the distance just behind the Hollywood sign.

“First fire of the season,” he said nonchalantly.

“Do you get these all the time?” Michael asked.

“Only when it’s dry.”

As it turned out, the fire was less devastating than scary, covering as it did only about a hundred and fifty acres of brush but threatening the Hollywood sign itself. As we drove up the hill on Mulholland the smoke got so thick that we had to roll up our windows. Still, to the left and right of us there were people perched on their roofs and on top of cars, their cameras pointed at the rising plume. I have to admit, I got out and took a picture myself.

Traffic was diverted for the fire trucks but we easily got back on Mulholland and soon we approached a huge green area.

“Let’s stop here,” said Harold. He pulled into a small parking lot and stopped in front of a sign that read, Runyon Canyon Park.

“Why are we stopping here?” Michael asked as we got out of the car.

“Because the address right here is 7300 Mulholland,” answered Harold.

“Oh, so you think—” I started, and pointed across the road.

“Yeah, I think their place might be just over there. You want to go see if they’re home?”

I felt suddenly shy and shook my head. “No. No way.”

“I thought you had a standing invitation,” teased Michael.

It was true that way back when Stephen and I first started talking over the phone he would say things like, “You’ve got to

come over to the house,” but I never took him seriously.

Harold looked at me, slightly irritated. “Well, since we’ve come all this way, I’m going up to take a look. Coming?”

So together we entered Runyon Canyon, which I suddenly recognized as the dog park that Jake fans kept referring to as the place where he takes his German Shepherd, Atticus. Apparently it’s also a place for celebrity spotting, but at that moment I was feeling particularly self-conscious and embarrassed for being up there in the first place, and hoped we wouldn’t run into Jake (with or without Atticus) or, God forbid, Stephen.

Harold led us on an uphill path on either side of which strolled a number of men, mostly young, in sport clothes accompanied by their canines off-leash. He seemed to be looking for something on his left. Finally he made a gesture for us to stop, then waved us over to where he was standing, which was close to a wire fence that was mostly covered with branches.

“Over here, over here, I think I found something,” he said, peering through a deliberately-made opening in the branches. He helped me step up on a stone and pointed to the opening. “What do you see?”

Well, I could clearly see across Mulholland. In fact I could see all the way into a neat open yard with a swimming pool that apparently was being cleaned at the moment. Through the glass doors of the ranch-style house I noticed a figure moving inside.

“What you think? Is that the house?” Harold asked me.

I remembered an old photo posted at a fan site of Jake and Maggie as teenagers sitting on the side of a pool very like this one. “I think so.” I got down from the stone. “Want to look?” I asked Michael.

With an expression of distaste, he declined.

Our task completed, Harold, Michael, and I started back down to the parking lot.

“Hey, how’d you know to look for that peephole?” I asked Harold.

“Look at these guys,” he answered, making a face. “How do you think that hole in the branches got made?”

I furtively took in the atmosphere of the park. Of course, I realized. If I knew the movie star I dreamed about and slavered over were only a couple of hundred yards away wearing nothing but Speedos, wouldn't I want a peek?

“Yeah, I get you.”

Michael took me by the arm. “What do you want to do now?”

“Let's go eat,” I suggested.

“Great,” agreed Harold. “But let's get on the 405 first. It's Friday afternoon and there's going to be traffic to Huntington Beach like you wouldn't believe.”

A couple of minutes before 7:30 we were pulling into the parking lot of Golden West College, a building complex somewhat far from the beach that would have been utterly undistinguished if not for the rows and rows of shiny black BMWs (rather like Stephen's) in the parking lot.

Well, I thought, at least we won't have any trouble finding Harold's red Honda when we leave.

We hadn't meant to cut it so close but we'd stopped at a sports bar just off the interstate for a long lingering late lunch of burgers and beers, and by the time we got back on the highway the traffic was really getting heavy. Hurriedly we got out of the car to look for signs of the Tebot Bach reading. The reading was supposed to be in a place called the Community Room, but we hadn't a clue as to its location. There was, however, a short distance away a pair of glass doors through which we could see a sort of lighted lobby.

As we headed toward the doors I heard a familiar voice behind me call out amiably, “And what are you doing here?”

I turned. It was Stephen, once again late to his own reading.

“We were just in the neighborhood,” I chirped as he caught up with us. “And we thought we'd drop in.”

We all stopped in front of the glass doors. After he said hello to Michael and I briefly introduced Harold to him, Stephen asked,

“Is this how you get in?”

“I was about to ask you the same thing.”

He took out his Blackberry. “My father-in-law should be in there,” he said. “I’ll call him and find out.”

“Oh for heaven’s sake,” said Michael, and pushed open the doors.

We strode into the lobby, immediately hearing the sound of activity coming from a room close by, and went in. It was indeed the Community Room—as annoyingly bland a place as its architecture indicated—and filled with the most boring-looking people I’d seen since my girlhood in Minneapolis. In fact the atmosphere had all the literary scintillation of a board meeting at an assisted-living condo.

There were some scattered chairs and near the dais was an unoccupied card table. Michael and Harold went over and claimed the table and pulled over some nearby chairs, while I made my way around the other tables and chairs and clusters of people to the other side where there was a long table, on which were stacked some slim paperback copies of a book titled *Poems by the Homeless*.

Stephen had gone over to talk to a plain middle-aged woman, presumably the head of Tebot Bach, and then an older couple, his in-laws I guessed. After a few minutes with them he ambled towards me.

I was stacking copies of *Claptrap* on the table near the other paperbacks. On the other end of the table was an urn from which the acrid odor of overbrewed coffee was emanating. “Buy me a cup?” I said to him mock seductively.

“Of course.” He smiled, stuck a dollar bill in the donations can, then pulled out two cookies from an open package of a cheap brand that lay beside the urn and handed me one. I nibbled on it; it was hard and stale.

“So tell me,” he said, after gobbling down his cookie, “how are you and Michael getting along in LA?”

I told him fine and asked him how he was doing.

“Oh,” he sighed, “spent all day today running around scouting locations for *Numb3rs*.”

*Numb3rs* (yes, with a 3 in the middle of the name) was a “brainy” TV cop show for which Stephen was directing a few episodes.

“You do look a little tired,” I said.

“I am. Exhausted. Exhausted!”

I might’ve gone on with light conversation about, say, the gorgeousness of the *Numb3rs* stars (of course I’d seen the episodes he directed) but that lost-little-boy expression of Stephen’s that I knew so well was starting to touch my heart again. It had been a hassle getting to the Tebot Bach reading, and once here the chintziness of the venue thoroughly annoyed me, but with one look from those sad gray eyes all my annoyance melted away.

In fact I think I apologized to him for the chintziness of Tebot Bach, adding as gently as I could, “Next time, let me find you a place to read.” And even though he had pretty much ordered me a year earlier not to try to get him readings around town because, as he told me in an earlier chapter, “they don’t understand this kind of thing in LA,” I told him I’d do my best in the future to get him a local prestigious gig or two.

Then I asked him if he’d sit down with us and he answered, “Of course.” So I grabbed a cup of disgusting coffee and together we went over and sat down with Michael and Harold.

The reading, despite its late start, proceeded in an orderly and very dull fashion. The head of Tebot Bach, the middle-aged woman Stephen had been conversing with, stepped up to the lectern and made a little introductory speech about the aims of the poetry organization and exhorting the audience to purchase a copy of *Poems by the Homeless* (without mentioning whether royalties would be paid to the homeless). Then she finished up by welcoming everyone to this open mic (which was news to me) and calling for a round of applause for the featured reader of the

evening, Stephen Gyllenhaal who, although being a famous Hollywood movie director and a sensational poet, was also “a modest man”.

As soon as the woman relinquished the lectern Stephen stepped up to it with his well-worn copy of *Claptrap* and began with one of his shorter, lesser poems. It was the most spiritless and unfocused reading I’d heard him give. The audience was attentive enough, although I noticed a few people busily glancing through their papers and notebooks—obviously they were poets who had signed up to read for the open mic.

“And now,” he said, almost in a sigh as he thumbed through *Claptrap*, “I, um, don’t think I’ll... Since her father’s here, I won’t read this poem about Naomi, about stabbing her to death with a kitchen knife.”

No one laughed, but I don’t know if Stephen meant them to. I glanced at Michael and Harold, but they were only gazing up at Stephen on the dais with respectful attentiveness. Then I glanced over at Stephen’s in-laws who were a few tables away. Their expressions appeared equally as impassive.

I glanced over at Michael again, getting his attention with a “What gives?” look, but he only smiled and nodded at me ever so slightly, as if we had just shared an in-joke.

Stephen read for only about a half-hour this time. When he was finished, there was polite applause, and then he stepped off the dais to sit down at our table between Michael and Harold. The Tebot Bach head went up to make more brief announcements. After that, what was apparently the most important portion of the evening commenced—the open mic.

Had Stephen made his polite excuses and left, we would have left as well, but he gamely stayed on and so did we. I think it was the most tedious reading Michael and I ever sat through. After it was over, Stephen and Harold stayed at the table chatting a bit while Michael and I got up and went over to the long table, where people were already browsing through the copies of *Claptraps* I’d

brought. I sold a few, pointing to Stephen and instructing the buyers to go over and have him sign their copies. I noticed that Stephen was already autographing for Harold the copy I'd given him. Soon he was surrounded by more fans who occupied his attention.

After several more minutes I packed up the rest of the books and we went back to the table. Stephen turned to us. "Listen," he said, "before you go, I'd like to meet Naomi's family."

Since Harold, still sitting on his left, seemed to be engrossed at the moment in a conversation with a very well-dressed older woman who had just sat down beside him, we agreed. Stephen got up and led us to the older couple who were standing in one corner of the room, casually chatting with some other people.

And that's how we met Naomi's father and stepmother. Dr. Sam Achs, I have to report, was the spitting image of his daughter (or perhaps it was the other way around), while Naomi's stepmother Sharon was a warm, intelligent woman, a hospital administrator near Naomi's age. I liked both of them immediately, and it was only a subtle nudge from Michael that stopped me from blurting out an apology for Stephen's insane utterance.

As we returned to our table I said to Michael quietly, "I have to ask you about that." He asked me about what. "The poem he didn't read. Isn't it 'While Cutting Carrots for Dinner?'"

Michael nodded.

"Is that really what it's about?"

He nodded again.

"So he did change it," I said. In a few paragraphs I'll explain what this exchange was all about.

Meanwhile, at the table Harold was finishing up his conversation with the well-dressed woman, who he introduced to us as his new friend Paula, whose husband was on the board of directors of Tebot Bach.

We shook hands. "I understand from Harold that you used to know Rouben Mamoulian," her voice sounding somewhat



businesslike. I told her yes, fairly well, when I was young. “That’s very interesting. You know, I’m a big fan of Greta Garbo.”

“Queen Christina herself,” I replied. (Garbo played the title role of the legendary queen of Sweden in one of Mamoulian’s first movies.)

“In fact I have the largest collection of Garbo memorabilia in Orange County.”

“That’s fantastic,” I said.

At this, she leaned over and put her hand on my arm. “You know, as long as you’re here,” she said in a confidential tone, “there is something I must ask you.”

I smiled and took a breath. “I’ll bet you want to ask me about Garbo and Mamoulian.” This was the most common question people asked me once they learned I knew Mamoulian.

“Um, yes, among other things.”

I leaned down to her and crooned seductively, “Well, take me to lunch and I’ll tell you the whole story.”

I really didn’t expect her to take me up on it, but Paula said firmly, “Of course! I’m in the city at least once a week. Let me have your number.” I shrugged and wrote down my phone number in the little leather notebook she produced, figuring nothing would come of it.

By this time the crowd had thinned out. “Ready?” asked Harold.

I went over to Stephen, who was still talking with his in-laws and gave him a hug, and Michael, Harold, and I headed to the car for the long drive back to Los Angeles.

Now to the poem that Stephen decided not to read. Remember that poem I described in chapter two, the one entitled “Dinner w/Anne Sexton and You?” Well, approximately thirty-six hours before *Claptrap* was to go to press Stephen emailed Michael what he called “a few minor changes” to that particular poem—changes which turned it into a completely different poem with a completely different title and theme: Not suicide, but

murder.

Since I first read it, I hadn't wanted to believe it was actually about Stephen murdering Naomi, but here were Michael and Stephen himself confirming it.

"I thought you already knew," Michael said to me as we were walking out the door of the Golden West College Community Room.

I could kick myself now because it was so apparent. But judge for yourself. Here are the first few lines of "While Cutting Carrots for Dinner":

*How easy  
could my rhythmic crusade  
shift its wooden blade  
and slide the steel and double-hone  
through fleshy her  
as grimace lost bewilderment  
in those dazed eyes and fingers  
tremble with the why  
"Oh!" now and all of it quite over  
though she still stands steel rod straight  
  
with blood across the floor,  
a tidal wave for ants,  
  
and her tight gasp, the "Oh!"  
as fingers scrabble for  
the handle boned  
  
and once it starts my knife  
now moving Mozart-like just wants  
to go on. Just wants...*

The following Sunday was a bright and beautiful Easter as

Harold, Michael, and I pulled up in Harold's car near a little white house on a quiet cul-de-sac in Pasadena, an old-fashioned Spanish-style bungalow which would have been rather undistinguished except for the giant 20-foot tall hopping bunny topiary on the front lawn. It was the residence of Candace Frazee and her husband, otherwise known as The Bunny Museum.

Candace's Bunny Museum is pretty popular, having been featured on international TV and in tourist guidebooks of Southern California. In fact that cute actor Elijah Wood made a series of silly, sweet video spots for it on the popular website Funny or Die which you can catch to get an idea of what The Bunny Museum is like. It's referred to there as "The No. 1 Place Friends Bring Friends As a Surprise!"

But back in 2007 when we first met Candace, The Bunny Museum was only beginning to get famous. It was already attracting people from around the world, although media stars like the flamboyant radio talk show host Adam Carolla or Elijah Wood hadn't yet shined their particular light on it yet. Still, even then the Museum had enough caché to attract visitors looking for the offbeat and unique, and Candace herself had extended an invitation to Michael and me to spend Easter afternoon with her there.

How we met Candace has to do with Stephen, of course, although in a roundabout way. Candace, you see, is also the founder of an organization called SILA, which is short for Swedenborg Information of Los Angeles. Unlike Stephen though, she's a still a faithful adherent to the religion that he abandoned years ago. She also lectures, writes books, and runs an annual outdoor event called The Angel Festival—a lovely lady.

Having gone to school in Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, where Stephen grew up, Candace is acquainted with his large family. Her sister even works in the music department of Bryn Athyn Cathedral under one of Stephen's many cousins. The history of the Swedenborgians (who in America call themselves the New

Church) is closely intertwined with the history of the Gyllenhaal family, as I was to learn later from my extensive research.

But all we were concerned with then was spending a lovely afternoon in a delightful and strangely comforting place surrounded by representations of all types of bunnies and rabbits and even hares. Stuffed bunnies were everywhere. Chocolate bunnies in their original boxes, cellophane windows still intact, were perched on top of high glass cabinets. And inside the cabinets were the daintiest little ceramic figures of bunny families in quaint outfits. Harold seemed just as delighted with Candace and with The Bunny Museum as we were, especially when she showed him her special corner devoted entirely to Bugs Bunny memorabilia.

“We encourage people to send us, or better yet bring us, their bunnies for our collection,” Candace told us. “Any kind, dolls, toys, whatever. As long as they’re not real living bunnies—we’ve got six of our own already.” She pointed to the small hutch in the kitchen. “We’d prefer it though if each of the bunnies has a story, if you could tell us something about it, its history. All of our bunnies here have stories.”

For most of the afternoon we were entertained by Candace’s stories of the items in her collection, where they came from, how old they were, and who owned them last.

We weren’t the only visitors that afternoon. A group of Japanese tourists had just departed that morning, and soon after our arrival a trio of performance artists from downtown Los Angeles came in: a pretty blonde wearing bunny ears who went by the name of Poptart Sprinkle, her companion, a young man in a wheelchair who called himself The Goddess Bunny, and their cameraman, who was making a documentary about them.

Since it was a mild and sunny day, while Candace entertained the new group, Harold, Michael and I went out and rambled around the backyard, posing for each other’s snapshots among the huge clay bunnies there. After they had left and the house had become quiet again, Candace invited us to sit around the table in

what apparently was the tiny dining room. She brought out a Lazy Susan of vegetable crudités and dip and a bottle of white wine, and after we had all served ourselves and Candace had poured us each a glass, we began a relaxed conversation.

“I found out about Stephen’s book from one of his cousins so I got it, and that’s how I found Cantara,” she explained and turned to Harold. “Do you know Stephen too?”

“Oh yeah, we’ve met,” replied Harold diffidently.

“I was hoping there’d be something in his poetry about Swedenborg,” she continued with a sigh, “but there wasn’t.”

“Stephen told me himself that he wasn’t a believer,” I said.

“Well, I can understand that. When our father on earth disappoints us, it’s easy to be disappointed by Our Heavenly Father too.” She looked at me as if waiting for a signal to go on. Then she said, “I suppose you know about Stephen’s parents.”

I shook my head.

“I sort of got a sense of them in his poetry,” said Michael.

(What Michael didn’t reveal to Candace and Harold then was that he had received the first draft of Stephen’s novel a couple of weeks earlier and was busy editing it. He told me later, after our day with Candace, that it contained passages of such a frank and graphic nature that they could only be scenes of Stephen’s own childhood.)

“Then you know all about their drinking and their affairs,” said Candace.

“No!” Harold and I gasped at the same time, Harold I suppose anticipating juicy gossip as much as I was.

“Ah.” She shook her head sadly. “It was pretty well known when he was growing up. I can understand why he wouldn’t tell you about it.”

Michael remained silent.

After that brief exchange about Stephen, Candace went on to talk about her own life and experiences. They were fascinating, but I was a little disappointed that she didn’t go on to reveal more

about the Gyllenhaals of Bryn Athyn.

Harold though was held spellbound by Candace's stories of working on the classic comedy sketch show *SCTV*—she'd even made a very brief appearance in the famous sketch "Polynesiantown" with John Candy. Candace, however, rather than talk about her career in show business, preferred to discuss Swedenborg and Swedenborgianism. She told us that she was in the middle of writing her first book about the religion. And as the founder of SILA, she sent out a quarterly newsletter to all Swedenborgians in Southern California and beyond.

"I even sent out newsletters regularly to Stephen years ago. But I had to stop." I asked her why. Candace lowered her voice as she confided, "I got a phone call one day. You know my phone number's on the newsletter." I asked her who from. "Well, it was his wife."

"Naomi? What'd she say?" I said, almost anticipating the answer.

"She said, 'How did you get this address?' And I told her from the church registry in Bryn Athyn. Then she told me, 'This is our home!' and 'Don't ever send anything here again!' So I apologized and she hung up."

At this, Harold laughed unexpectedly. "That bitch!"

"That's exactly what she did to me," I told Candace.

"Well, I hope you didn't take it to heart."

"I didn't," I lied.

At this point, Candace's husband Steve Lubanski came in from his workshop in their garage, walked around behind Candace and gave her a big hug around the neck. Candace introduced him to us, we all said hello, and she went on. "Do you all know how The Bunny Museum started?" Without waiting for us to answer she told us, "We'd just been married, and one day Steve gave me a little stuffed bunny with a card that read, 'To My Honey Bunny'." And then I gave him a little stuffed bunny, and then he gave me another one, and we did this every day, and then we realized we had started

this collection and we wanted to share it with everybody as a symbol of our love.”

“You know what Swedenborg said about married couples,” said Steve.

I asked him what Swedenborg had said.

“Swedenborg had a vision of heaven,” Candace continued for him. “He saw that the true couples of the earth never part in death. Instead, when they enter heaven they become joined forever and each couple becomes a single angel that watches over the souls of earth.”

“That’s beautiful,” I sighed. I think I even squeezed Michael’s hand under the table.

We spent a few more hours with Candace and her husband, and when it was late afternoon and the bunny topiary in the front yard began to cast a long shadow, Michael, Harold and I said our goodbyes and headed back to the car and back to LA.

Candace had given me a few back issues of the SILA newsletter, plus a list of the main books written by Emanuel Swedenborg. In the car I glanced at both of them.

“So, I guess that’s what a Swedenborgian couple is supposed to be like,” Harold remarked as he drove onto the highway.

I thought of Stephen and his poem about stabbing Naomi to death with a kitchen knife. “Guess so,” I answered. “Anyway, they were a great couple to meet.”

I have only a short coda to our Easter weekend adventure. In the weeks to follow I started reading the works of Swedenborg; not only that, I visited the website that Candace had suggested, [gyllenhaal.org](http://gyllenhaal.org), and found the family genealogy it outlined so fascinating that I began corresponding with the website’s administrator, Ed Gyllenhaal, one of Stephen’s cousins. As was made clear on his website, the Gyllenhaals of Sweden and the Gyllenhaals of America are all part of a singularly distinguished family that goes back to the 17th century. Stephen’s direct

ancestor, in fact, was made a member of the landed nobility by none other than Queen Christina herself, the subject of the Greta Garbo movie I mentioned earlier in the chapter. As for the family connection with Swedenborgianism, evidently it began with Leonard Gyllenhaal's conversion to the religion, Leonard being Stephen's great-great-great-grandfather and one of the most distinguished entomologists of his day.

I'm mentioning Leonard Gyllenhaal in order to close this chapter with a cheap Hollywood anecdote. For a while back then I was regularly blogging on Swedenborgian history, and a few Decembers ago I posted a nice long article about Leonard, along with a .jpg of the cover of his most famous book, *Insects of Sweden* (*Insectica Suecica* in Latin). Well, a few days after my posting I got an email from a young lady on the staff of *Jimmy Kimmel Live*—you know, that awful talk show that broadcasts from Hollywood Boulevard. She asked me if I had a copy they could borrow of the actual 200-year-old book.

What immediately flashed through my mind was the TV listing I had just read—Jake was scheduled to appear on the show that week. What also flashed through my mind was the disgraceful way host Jimmy Kimmel had treated Maggie when she appeared on the show a few months earlier, how he'd ridiculed her when she attempted to recount her family's distinguished background.

I imagined what Kimmel would do—surprise Jake by showing him Leonard's book with a lame joke like, "You say your family's pretty buggy?" or some such.

I emailed the young lady back and told her to get in touch with Ed. I didn't have the right to blow her off, I decided, but I figured that Ed should be the one to tell this girl to go to hell. Only, unlike me, he'd do it in a nice way, because Swedenborgians tend to be nice people.



## CHAPTER TWELVE

### “I’ve Been Sleeping on Skid Row”

**T**wo weeks later my cell phone rang. “Hello, this is Paula, do you remember me?” said the brisk voice on the other end.

I had to think a few seconds before placing her. She was the woman at the Tebot Bach reading with the Garbo collection. Her call surprised me; I had thought she was only being polite when she asked for my number.

“Oh hi, Paula!” I said.

She came right to the point. “So, how about that lunch?”

We agreed to meet the next day, Tuesday, at a restaurant she suggested on Sunset Boulevard called the Cat & Fiddle close to where Michael and I were staying. When I got there at one-thirty I found her already sitting at a table in the courtyard sipping an iced tea, looking quite smart with a new hairdo. As I sat down, she told me that she came into town every Tuesday to get her hair done by her favorite Beverly Hills stylist.

I ordered an iced tea as well and we engaged in some small talk. I told Paula about our stay in Hollywood; she told me about her background. It seems that about forty years earlier she was an assistant to a producer at MGM, hence her interest in Garbo and Mamoulian, who were both under contract to that studio way back in the Golden Thirties.

We had a lovely lunch of shrimp salad, after which at her urging I recounted everything I remembered about my old boss, although I’m afraid I couldn’t give Paula what she really wanted: a definite answer as to whether Mamoulian and Garbo had actually planned to marry after the filming of *Queen Christina*. Mamoulian had opened up to me about a lot of incidents in his life, but that wasn’t one of them.

“Personally,” Paula confided to me, “I never believed all this

lesbian nonsense about Garbo. I think she was in always in love with John Gilbert.”

I nodded my agreement, actually knowing nothing about this aspect of Garbo’s personal life. “Anyway,” I continued, “Mamouljian told me that he ran into John Barrymore in the MGM parking lot, and Barrymore almost started a fist fight with him because he wanted the part John Gilbert got. Barrymore always hated Gilbert for that.”

Paula brightened. “Wonderful! I had no idea!”

With that, I felt I had repaid her for the lunch. Now feeling more comfortable, I went on. “This is a great coincidence, by the way, but did you know that Stephen got his name from the real Queen Christina?”

She asked me who Stephen was. When I reminded her of the reading at Tebot Bach and that he was one of my authors, she asked me to go on.

“Well, you know, he comes from nobility. His family’s original name was Haal. Then about three hundred fifty years ago Queen Christina of Sweden made a nobleman out of one of his ancestors and he took the name Gyllenhaal (and here I pronounced the name in Swedish—yuell-in-haal).”

Paula sat back and looked at me strangely. “You certainly know a lot about the Gyllenhaals. But I’ll bet I can tell you some things you don’t know.”

I felt my heart beat a little faster in anticipation. “Tell me,” I said.

As it happened, by the mid-90s Paula had risen to a fairly high position in the office of another producer, this time at Paramount. “It was a good time then,” she told me. “Paramount had their first female CEO, Sherry Lansing, and we hoped that our upcoming slate of films would attract more women in the 35-49 bracket. So, the studio purchased several likely novels they hoped to adapt. One of them was called—oh, I forget the name, something biblical...”

“Not—not *Losing Isaiah*.”

“That’s the one.”

Omigod. Omigod. My head was starting to feel light. “Did you see them filming it?” I fairly gasped.

“They were on a soundstage that was very close to ours...” began Paula. “Oh dear, I forget which number, one of the smaller stages, I think...” She went on. “Never mind! Well, my dear, it wasn’t a closed set, you could come in and observe if you were quiet.”

“Well, what did you see?”

“Actually it wasn’t what I saw. It was what I heard.”

“What?” I said loudly.

“Some fracas or other going on between the producer and the director.”

“Producer? You mean Naomi Foner?”

“Yes, I think that’s the one. Never met her. But she and the director—that’s your Stephen—”

“He’s not my Stephen,” I protested.

She continued. “Your friend Stephen and she were having the row of rows. He was following her all over the set, yelling at her, ‘Why didn’t you tell me? Why didn’t you fucking tell me?’ and getting in people’s way.”

“And what was Naomi yelling back?”

“Nothing. She was being a lady. Anyway, I heard from a friend that this had been going on for weeks. Their fighting was getting on everyone’s nerves and affecting the shoot. I hear Halle and Jessica still haven’t spoken to each other since then.”

I had been leaning forward, listening intently to Paula’s story. “But is that all there is to it? I mean, nobody got fired.”

“No, nobody got fired, but if you wonder why your friend’s never gotten another job with one of the big studios, that’s why. Nobody wants to work with a director who can’t control himself.”

After a moment I leaned back and breathed, “Wow.”

Paula smiled a tight little smile. “That’s not all. Now, this isn’t

coming from me, you understand. But I have a dear friend, a director who shall remain nameless but is a shameless gossip, who told me that Stephen has been—these are his words—‘persistently unfaithful’ to Naomi for at least the past eleven, twelve years. My friend said his conquests were little nobodies, ‘waitresses with screenplays’ he called them. There was also one particular woman he was seeing pretty steadily until Naomi found out and—how did he put it?—‘made him pay’. What he meant by that I can’t tell.”

I did a quick mental calculation. “Twelve years... So this sounds like it began just after *Losing Isaiah*.” I remember what Stephen had told me the very first week of our friendship about his disastrous experience filming that movie: *I saved my marriage but I wrecked my career*.

Paula looked like she was pondering something. “I can only wonder how Naomi found out.” She laughed. “Maybe she put a tail on him.”

At that moment I had a flash of clarity and answered quietly, “No. Stephen told her.”

She smiled. “Why do you think that?”

“Because,” I said, “he has a big mouth.”

Usually I love Hollywood gossip. It has nothing to do with real life, until it does have something to do with real life—that is, your own. Paula’s revelation about the true nature of Stephen and Naomi’s relationship wasn’t really Hollywood gossip the way my ancient story about Mamoulian and Garbo was. I’m sure she just meant it to be inside information from one colleague to another.

And that’s the way I took it. In essence, Paula was telling me that Stephen Gyllenhaal, a man whose devotion to his family and emotional honesty I had touted all over New York while trying to promote his book, was in fact a philanderer and big fat hypocrite. The image of his arm around the waist of that young film instructor in Boulder passed through my mind. I remembered my absolute trust in him as a faithful husband and family man. His

attention to her, I was sure at that time, was only a friendly gesture.

Did I feel betrayed? You bet I did.

That was my state of mind when I left the Cat & Fiddle, although I think I was successful at hiding my distress from Paula who, on the way to her car, shook my hand and said we should do this again sometime. I'm sure she had no idea of the enormous emotional investment I'd made in the idiot, and I had no desire to burden her with that knowledge.

But once I got back to the hotel room I was ready to explode to someone, and fortunately Michael was there. He was at the desk, reading a manuscript on his computer screen.

"How did your lunch go?" he said without looking up.

I launched into a diatribe against the hypocrisy of Hollywood generally and the hypocrisy of Stephen specifically. I would have gone on for minutes, except that it didn't appear that Michael was really listening.

"What are you reading?" I asked irritably.

He turned away from the screen. "*Liquid Motel*. And you know, I think there's something there."

Michael had had possession of Stephen's novel for over six weeks. Stephen had sent it to him a few days after our café meeting in Boulder. On our first glance, the voluminous manuscript he had sent in Word appeared to be an incomprehensible mess that made us both groan. But Michael had gamely offered to give it a serious reading, which he had been doing slowly but faithfully since late February.

"What do you mean there's something there?"

"I mean that if you can read it with an open mind and can get through all his insane garbage, he's expressing something truly unique. I'm willing to take a crack at helping him with it. But once again, it's your call."

It was like a replay of late 2005, when Michael had read Stephen's poetry manuscript.

“What do you mean, it’s my call?”

“Well, after everything you found out at lunch—”

“Aha. So you were listening.”

“I listen to everything you say,” intoned Michael gravely. “Now, think very carefully whether or not you still want to have anything more to do with Stephen. Me, I’m totally neutral on the subject of whether or not you’re in love with him.”

I took a moment to consider. “But...you say his book could be good.”

“I say it could be great.”

I considered for another moment. Despite my rage at Stephen, I still wanted to give him a chance at greatness. “All right,” I said finally. “Michael, if you love me, you’ll do it.”

“That’s settled then,” he said, and turned back to the screen.

This was in the middle of April, I remember. For the next month Michael toiled diligently on Stephen’s manuscript, cleaning up his misspellings and his grammar, smoothing his prose style, and making notes as to improving the structure of the novel as a whole.

It was my policy in those days to leave Michael alone with an author’s raw manuscript; his method of editing was to attempt to determine what the author meant to say and then to help him say it more clearly, and it was best that he did this on his own. Of course I was dying to read Stephen’s book in whatever shape it was in. But I was respectful of Michael’s editing process. Sensing my impatience, Michael did make one concession: He let me read Stephen’s first draft just as he had received it without any changes.

So for the rest of April and into May I read the very first version of *Liquid Motel*. This had been the manuscript that was on the laptop Stephen was clutching as he rushed out of the fire barefoot at Manka’s lodge that night in December.

And what did I think of it? Oh dear. Where do I start?

First of all, a brief description. *Liquid Motel* tells the story of a middle-aged failure named Henry Synnesvedt as he deals with his

daughter's pregnancy and his son's election to Congress, while remembering his fraught childhood in a small religious town in Pennsylvania. The scenes alternate between present day and the 1960s and are interspersed with seemingly irrelevant digressions in which the protagonist muses at length on subjects as far-flung as the Secret Service's failure to prevent the assassination of JFK; RFK's speech on the death of Martin Luther King Jr. after King's assassination; and a rather incoherent drunken rambling by Henry in the New York subway as to the origins of land mammals and their evolution from fishes. All this, I repeat, written with hundreds of misspellings, grammatical errors, and bewilderingly mangled phrases.

But, at least for me, the story was not without interest. Candace had hinted about Stephen's alcoholic parents. They appear in the novel thinly disguised as Henry's rambunctiously drunken mother and father. Even his father's Buick LeSabre is mentioned. As for Stephen's brothers and sisters, they appear in the book as Henry's siblings pretty much as they are except for their names being changed. Henry also has a wife named Helen, while his son is called Zeke and his daughter is named Molly.

Zeke. Molly. For crying out loud.

The scenes of repressed sexuality really stood out for me though. There was a scene early in the book where Henry has a fraught conversation with Molly about her pregnancy that to me seemed to have creepy incestuous overtones, not to mention a scene later in the book where teenaged Henry, along with his brothers and sisters, gang up on their mother in the ladies room of a restaurant and grope her mercilessly to recover the money she had stolen from them and hidden inside her girdle. But the scene I think I shall always remember is the one of adult Henry lying in bed next to his sleeping wife, masturbating into a dirty sock.

"I'm going to talk to him about that scene," Michael told me as he prepared to meet Stephen one sunny morning the middle of May. "Philip Roth he's not. He's underwritten the part of the wife

anyway. I don't think it's necessary. And that whole relationship with his daughter sounds creepy to me too."

So as I stayed in the room and watched TV Michael went for his editor-author meeting with Stephen. On my recommendation they were to meet at the Cat & Fiddle. Several hours later Michael returned.

I sat up on the bed and turned off Oprah. "Well, how did it go?"

Michael sat on the bed next to me. "I thought it went pretty well, considering. He was for once amazingly focused. We sat there at the table in the courtyard eating lunch and discussing the book for over three hours, and I don't think there was as much as five minutes of discussion about anything else."

"How did he take your recommendations?"

"On the whole, surprisingly, he seemed to be pretty much in agreement with them. The upshot was that he said he'd do some revisions and email me the revised version in a few weeks."

"So, the masturbation scene is out," I sighed.

Michael frowned. "That's all you care about."

A few weeks after Michael's editorial meeting at the Cat & Fiddle I found myself in Hartford, Connecticut on the campus of Trinity College, Stephen's alma mater. Trinity isn't mentioned in *Liquid Motel* as the school Henry goes off to toward the end of the book, but it's a sure bet that it was meant to be the one.

Going up to Hartford hadn't been part of my plans when I originally decided to fly to New York to spend a few days there and take care of some business as well as see some old friends. (This time I was going solo, as Michael had made his own plans to go up to San Francisco and spend some time with our son.) But out of the blue around the second week in May I had gotten an email from a very young man named Tim Griggs, who said that he was the Volunteer Coordinator for Cinestudio, an independent film society



housed on the Trinity campus, and who wanted me to give him an introduction to Stephen.

The first time I'd heard of Trinity was that same week in May from Stephen himself. He was planning to attend Alumni Weekend in June, in fact had been called upon to give a short speech at a memorial service for his old mentor Hugh Ogden. Remember Ogden, the nutty poet from chapter three? Well, apparently what had happened was that, on New Year's Eve less than three days after the fire at Manka's, Ogden went out to do a little skiing near his home and ended up skiing right onto a semi-frozen lake where he fell through the ice and drowned.

As I said, I wasn't planning to go up to Hartford, and certainly not for this event. Stephen had also told me in no uncertain terms that he was not going to read his poetry and that there'd be no reason for me to come, I'd just be bored. And now here was this young man inviting me to be his personal guest during Alumni Week.

I couldn't figure out at the time why Tim thought he needed me to introduce him to Stephen, or even how he'd gotten my email address. But then again, for about the past year I'd been receiving unexpected emails from various people who wanted me to help them get closer to Stephen for various reasons: they had a script they wanted him to read; they wanted him to cast them in his movies; they wanted him to hook them up with Jake.

So I was curious but game for anything when I took a couple of days off from my New York sojourn to travel up to Trinity where Tim was waiting for me. After giving me a brief tour of the place, he took me to the student union where I bought us both lunch.

Over sandwiches Tim confided, "I thought that a big Hollywood director like Stephen Gyllenhaal would have a big office with tons of assistants I'd have to work my way through to get to him. So I figured if I got in touch with you, you could help me."

"Shouldn't he have arrived today?" I said. "That's what he told me."

“I don’t know whether he’s here yet or not, but I’d feel better if you could give me a formal introduction when we find him.”

Then Tim went on to tell me about his plan. “Listen, first let me bring you up to speed with what I’m thinking: A Stephen Gyllenhaal Film Festival! A two-day showing of his films right over at Cinestudio, his old stomping ground.”

“That’s a great idea,” I said without much enthusiasm, remembering Boulder.

After we finished our sandwiches and sodas, we walked across the campus toward the auditorium. The school year was over, but Alumni Weekend had attracted scores of former students to their old college. When we reached the auditorium and went inside, we saw many more alumni clustered around the long table that was the check-in station.

“Let’s go find out if he’s signed in yet,” said Tim.

I went over to scan the names in the A-H guestbook and immediately noticed a familiar scrawl that read, Stephen Gyllenhall, with two l’s at the end.

“The idiot can’t even spell his own name!” I blurted loudly.

I could hear Tim clearing his throat. “Uh, I think he’s standing right behind you.”

I turned and there was Stephen staring at me. He was looking quite presentable and clean-shaven in a light sports jacket over a Banlon shirt and pants that weren’t jeans for a change. With a mischievous grin I thrust out my hand. “Well, hello there! Glad to meet you again. You remember me, don’t you?”

Stephen laughed nervously and pulled me close, hugging me and murmuring, “Cantara, what are you doing here?”

“This young man invited me,” I told him, gesturing towards Tim. “Stephen, this is—”

Tim introduced himself and offered his hand.

Stephen shook it. “Cinestudio, right?” he said. “Let’s find some time to talk.”

We were still standing near the check-in table continuing our conversation when a handsome well-dressed woman glanced at Stephen, looked away, then did a double-take and called out his name.

Stephen turned and answered her, “Hey, how’ve you been?”

“I’m here with my husband. Are you going to the memorial?” she said.

“They asked me to make a speech,” said Stephen, trying to sound modest.

Stephen had his arm around me as he and the woman began to chat like old friends and we entered the auditorium together, Tim following close behind us. Once we were inside, Tim scurried down the aisle to find seats for us close to the stage while the woman led us to a seat in the front row of the second tier. I could see that it was occupied by an attractive dark-haired man in his late 60s who stood up and greeted us with a charming smile. I recognized him at once.

“This is my husband, Tony Bill. We’re partners in Barnstorm Productions.”

Of course I knew who he was from the movies—he was that extremely cute actor I had a girlhood crush on when I saw him play opposite Frank Sinatra in *Come Blow Your Horn*. But I decided not to bring that up, over four decades having passed. Instead, after introducing myself, I asked him about his latest project.

One thing I learned about Stephen from our brief association was that he finds it boring to be part of a conversation about someone else’s work. So while Tony was telling me about the big-budget film he recently directed in Europe called *Flyboys*, about World War One aviators, starring Jean Reno and James Franco, Stephen discreetly excused himself and found a seat in the front row next to Tim.

After a few minutes the auditorium doors were closed and the lights started to dim. Tony graciously gave me his business card and asked me to keep in touch, and I went down to join Tim and

Stephen.

I squeezed past Stephen, who was in the aisle seat, and sat down between the two of them. At first I was slightly annoyed with Stephen for abandoning me to strangers as he'd done at Housing Works and was about to bring it up when he leaned over and whispered, "Do you remember her name?"

Before I could reply No, because you never told me, he said out loud, "Helen Bartlett—of course! We met at Alumni Weekend I think..."

"Were you in school together?"

"No, I'm class of '72, she's '83. But we email from time to time about Trinity things."

Stephen was telling me this slowly and deliberately, as if he were expecting me to take notes.

At that moment a man stepped up to the dais on the stage, signaling the start of the memorial service for Hugh Ogden, and we sat back quietly and respectfully as he started the proceedings. Then one by one students and teachers went up in the order listed in Stephen's program.

After about an hour it was getting close to Stephen's turn. Mumbling "Excuse me," he got up and went over to the stage right stairs clutching the sheaf of papers that had been in his lap throughout the service.

Up till now the memorial had been pretty normal—young people, obviously former students, spoke glowingly but briefly about Ogden's patience and humor, while various faculty members reminisced about his good fellowship and dedication as an educator.

Then Stephen bounded up the stairs. After a long moment of shuffling his papers, clearing his throat, and adjusting the mic, he began. "I feel very privileged to be here today to address all of you. And all of you should feel very privileged too. You know, I once had a friend who went to Harvard..."

Stephen then went on to recount an anecdote about a wealthy

and influential man he knew who, no matter what the situation was, couldn't refrain from reminding people that he had gone to Harvard. I thought, Okay, somehow he's going use this to segue into talking about Hugh Ogden, right?

Nope. For the next ten or so minutes Stephen continued in the same vein. "So I kept trying to bring up ideas with him that had nothing to do with Harvard. Woodworking. Swimming. Whatever!" He mugged to the audience who tittered obligingly. "But he always managed to work it in. 'When I was at Harvard...'"

Then suddenly Stephen went on to exhort the audience, "But you! You're the lucky ones! You can make anything of yourselves you choose to be! You're lucky that you went to a second-rate school—" I swear he said second-rate— "that you can't brag about. You don't need that crutch!"

Surprisingly, no one threw rotten tomatoes at him over this last remark.

There was more rustling of papers at the dais. Then Stephen announced, "Now I'm going to read my latest poem, which I'm dedicating to Hugh. It's called 'The New World'." And without further ado he began to recite from his notes a long, pretentious poem that used the Conquistadors as a symbol of the decadence of modern-day America. I tell you, Archibald MacLeish he was not.

As Stephen read, I leaned over to Tim and whispered a half-hearted apology.

"Oh, that's okay," he whispered back almost cheerfully, "I don't go to this school." He went on to briefly explain that his real job was over at Simsbury public TV.

After about fifteen minutes Stephen ended his speech and stepped down from the dais to rejoin us. As he settled back into his seat Tim reached across me and, patting his arm, told him, "Good job!"

We dutifully sat through the rest of the program. When the lights came up Stephen stood and stretched and so did Tim and I.

Turning to me, Stephen asked how I liked Trinity.

“It’s a beautiful place. I’d love to explore it more,” I replied.

We left our seats and on the way out, Stephen and Tim began to converse in earnest. After a couple of minutes I broke in and asked Stephen if he would give me a lift to my hotel.

“Of course,” he said, then looked at Tim. “So, want to head over to Cinestudio? We can talk while we walk.”

Tim replied with an enthusiastic “Absolutely.”

As this wasn’t a conversation I really wanted to be a part of, I told them I’d meet them there. I knew where Cinestudio was; Tim had pointed it out to me on our tour that morning.

As they left the building I lingered behind and wandered around. Soon I came to a room with a long table covered with rows of books that were obviously for sale. On the edge of the table was a long hand-lettered banner that read, “Books by Our Alumni”. As I searched the titles I soon realized that *Claptrap* was not among them.

Finding out that Stephen had once again robbed me of an opportunity to promote and sell his books pissed me off almost as much as the rambling speech he had just given “in honor” of Hugh Ogden. I wondered yet again why a ceaseless self-promoter like Stephen would not take advantage of every chance to impress his fellow alumni with his poetic prowess. And after all, Ogden had written the introduction to *Claptrap*!

The one coming on the heels of the other did nothing to improve my mood as I left the building and spotted Stephen and Tim ambling slowly towards Cinestudio at a distance of about fifty yards. Tim noticed me but Stephen seemed to be oblivious to my rapid approach. They continued on, then paused at a bridge. Waiting for me, I thought. But before I could reach them they continued on.

By the time they reached the Cinestudio building I was only about ten yards behind them but Stephen was still apparently not aware of my presence. Then he and Tim joined a group of several men who were standing outside the entrance seemingly waiting for

something.

Wondering what they were doing, I sat down on a stone bench to see what would happen. Almost immediately I heard an older, bearded man say to Stephen and Tim, “We’re waiting for the key.”

Stephen spoke to the bearded man familiarly, and I gathered from the men’s conversation that he was James Hanley, the head of Cinestudio and one of Stephen’s former classmates. All of them were chattering away about the Stephen Gyllenhaal-related event they were planning for the film society that fall, with Stephen doing most of the talking. Though the bench I was sitting on was only three feet away from the group, all of whom immediately noticed me, Stephen still showed no awareness of my presence. One or two of them even gave me sympathetic smiles whenever Stephen made a bizarre comment.

“You know,” he said, “we could bring the kids into this. After all, Jake and Maggie got their start at Cinestudio. In a roundabout way, of course.”

At this particularly weird statement I couldn’t help rolling my eyes, which got me winks from some of the group.

He spent a few more minutes relating to his listeners some of Jake and Maggie’s latest cinematic exploits. Then he suddenly glanced to his left and right, saying in a plaintive tone, “Uh, I don’t see Cantara around. She must be really pissed at me right now.”

James chuckled and gave me a sidelong glance. Noticing this, Stephen whirled around, stared down at me in apparent surprise, and exclaimed rather loudly, “There you are!” He stepped toward me arms outstretched, but I held up my palm to stop him and he froze.

“You know,” I said sternly, “I think you like Michael more than you like me.”

“That’s not true! I do like you,” he insisted, waving his arms. “But you terrify me!”

At this, the men laughed. I didn’t—it was a thoroughly

embarrassing remark for Stephen to make in public. I was also surprised at how much it stung.

He turned back to the group. “So, um, listen, I’ve got to be going. But Tim, your plan for the Gyllenhaal Film Festival in November sounds great! Give all the information to Cantara here. You’ve got her email?” Tim nodded. “You can coordinate with her.”

“Will do,” said Tim, half-saluting.

Stephen and Jim hugged, saying that it was great to see each other again. Then Stephen started striding down the path toward the parking lot.

I jumped up and shrugged apologetically. “I’m sorry,” I told everyone, “we do this routine all the time.” Then as I picked up my backpack and hurried after Stephen, I could hear the men laughing behind me.

As I scurried toward him I called out, panting, “Slow down, would you?”

“No, no,” he answered loudly, almost cheerfully, as he continued his stride. “You’re going to have to keep up if you want to be with me.”

When I did catch up with him he had already reached his rented SUV. We got in, and as he began to drive out of the parking lot he gave me a big smile. “I have no idea what you’re doing here,” he said, his tone betraying his irritation. “What are you doing here, anyway? You’re insane!”

I didn’t mind him forgetting that Tim had invited me. I didn’t even mind him calling me insane, I was in good company. Once in a previous conversation about *Losing Isaiah* (he seemed not to be able to let that one go), he accused Jessica Lange of being “insane”. In fact Stephen said so many disparaging things about her, had I been Sam Shepard I’d have punched him in the nose.

But I did mind him announcing in front of strangers that he was terrified of me. “Look, are you embarrassed to be seen with me?” I said, trying not to sound hurt. “Is it because I’ve done porn?”



Still looking straight at the road and not at me he vehemently replied, “No, that’s not true! I celebrate that you’ve been in porn! I *celebrate* it!”

That almost fierce emphasis on the word *celebrate* was so odd it unsettled me for a moment.

Then, abruptly changing the subject, he asked me, “Have you got a place? Maybe I can get you a deal at my motel.” When I told him I had already made an online reservation at the Goodwin, he made a “Mm!” sound, evidently impressed.

“Well, it was close to the campus,” I said half-apologetically. “I think it’s just past that park over there.” In point of fact I hadn’t yet registered at the Goodwin, having gotten a ride directly to the campus shortly after stepping off the bus from New York.

Stephen insisted that, since the hotel was a historical landmark in a town he’d spent four years of his life in, of course he knew where it was, although after a few minutes it appeared that he was circling Bushnell Park over and over and over again.

The third time around I timidly piped up, “I think you turn here. At least that’s what the Google map says.”

With a grunt of agitation, he turned where I indicated and in less than a minute we were on a main street obviously heading toward the downtown area where the hotel was located.

As he still appeared to be agitated I tried to make some light conversation while he drove. “So, how are things going with you? How’s that *Zioncheck* project coming along?”

“Okay, I guess,” he sighed. He never told me about his plans for making it into an indie movie; as I said earlier, I’d read about it in the trades. But he didn’t seem surprised at my question.

There was a moment of silence between us. Then out of the blue, while we were still in traffic, he suddenly banged the steering wheel with the palms of his hands, loudly declaring, “I’ve got—to get—some money!”

Well, this sort of alarmed me. It was not so much his evident distress, but the fact that he abruptly braked barely a foot from a

car that was waiting at the stop light.

As the light turned green and he started driving again I tried to comfort him with some friendly problem solving. “Have you got anything coming up, maybe a TV show? Listen, there’s an agent I know in New York who asked me last summer to rep you if you ever decided to write a humorous book about being a parent. You know, ‘Life with Jake and Maggie’. You’d probably get a great money deal and I think people would love it.”

Stephen stared at me as if I’d just suggested that he eat a worm. “Nooo, I don’t think so,” he muttered, shaking his head.

By this time we were approaching the Goodwin, which I recognized from the photos on their website. I pointed to the fine old building and Stephen pulled into a parking space across from it.

We sat there quietly for a moment. I suppose I was waiting for the other shoe to drop. Finally I murmured, “Well, I guess I’ll be going.”

But when I leaned across the gear shift between us to give him my usual peck on the cheek goodbye, he suddenly giggled nervously and, putting his arms around me and moving his face close to mine, began covering my cheeks and forehead with little audible kissy smacks. Charles Boyer he’s not, I decided. I put my arms around his neck and we sat there just holding each other for several moments until I gently broke away and picked up my backpack from between my feet.

“You’ll email Tim about that stuff,” he said, suddenly all business again.

“Um...sure,” I answered, wondering what had just gone on between us. I opened the car door and slid out. “I’ll let you know what’s happening,” I told him as I shut the door, then ran across the street to the tranquility of what turned out to be a lovely little room at the landmark hotel.

Back in New York a couple of days later, I had lunch with

Carol Hoenig, the novelist and Huffington blogger from chapter eight. I told her the story of my Trinity adventure with Stephen, starting with his weird inappropriate speech at the Hugh Ogden memorial and continuing with his real or feigned obliviousness to my presence as I stalked him across the Trinity campus. When I got to the part where he said, “You terrify me,” she grinned and held up her thumbs.

“Good job!” she exclaimed.

When I returned to Los Angeles an interesting little package was waiting for me in the mail. It was a DVD of Gary Walkow’s film *Crashing*. Since Stephen had for months ignored my request for a copy, I’d had to appeal to Gary himself to send me one. I put it on that evening after dinner, and Michael and I enjoyed Gary’s quirky, sexy, somewhat intellectual film about writer’s block, the writer being played by Campbell Scott.

As we watched this no-budget but surprisingly well-made movie we waited impatiently for Stephen to make his appearance, which he did near the end. In a short two-minute scene, dramatized from a story written by one of the sexy girls, he plays a suave writer visiting a college, supposedly the fictional alter ego of the Campbell Scott character. In the scene, he walks across the campus with a pretty chestnut-haired coed, then leads her into one of the buildings. Once inside, he dares her to enter a men’s room with him where, with a leer, he attempts to seduce her in one of the stalls.

I think it had something to do with the “writer’s block” theme of the movie, but I’m still not sure. As for Stephen’s acting—oh dear. Not only did he speak his lines unconvincingly, his business was clumsy and awkward, making the seduction scene unbelievable. The result was acting as bad as any I’d ever done in porn, though perhaps this was a deliberate choice by Walkow.

Stephen’s turn in *Crashing* was on my mind when a few days later I read in a notice in *Variety* online that he’d just changed

agents. No longer was he with William Morris, he was now with Gersh, an agency that intended to represent him, said the notice, not only for “helming” gigs (which means directing—I love showbiz terms), but for acting and writing ones as well.

I intended to bring up the new direction his career seemed to be taking when Michael and I went out with him for dinner one evening in August. It was to be more or less his farewell dinner for us; our son had found us an apartment in San Francisco and we were preparing to move into it within the week. Stephen picked us up in a Prius this time (“My wife’s car,” he informed us) and off we drove to one of Michael’s and my favorite areas, the main drag of Pasadena, East Colorado Boulevard.

Stephen parked the car on a side street and we got out to leisurely stroll. It was a warm and pleasant evening with throngs of people going into bars and fancy eateries. I was looking around for a nice place for our dinner when Stephen pointed to a family restaurant across from us.

“The Cheesecake Factory,” he intoned mournfully, shaking his head. “We can never, never go back there again.” I asked him why. “Well, Naomi and I took Jake and Maggie there once when they were smaller. They were running all over the place yelling and making a disturbance so the management asked us to leave. But not before I had a few words with the manager!” He finished his story with that crude Italian gesture that men make, hitting the crook of their elbow with one fist while thrusting the other into the air.

Almost immediately after Stephen finished his anecdote about defending the Gyllenhaal honor, I turned and spotted Il Fornaio and announced to my companions that this was where we should eat. I suppose Stephen’s weird unexpected version of Tony Soprano put me in the mood for Italian food.

We went in and found it a big place but terribly crowded. The hostess at the door regarded us with a forced smile—Michael and I looking very post-hippie and Stephen, unshaven and in a sweat-

stained t-shirt and jeans—and told us there'd be a half-hour wait. While Michael and Stephen patiently sat on the waiting bench and chatted, I went up to the young woman and whispered confidentially, "That's Jake Gyllenhaal's father."

Her eyes lit up as she checked out the big lug again. Within five minutes we were seated at a lovely large table on the patio.

Here's a tip if you ever want to dine with Stephen Gyllenhaal: Keep the table talk focused solely on him. During the entire dinner he didn't once ask us about our incipient move to San Francisco or, really, anything else about our sojourn in Los Angeles. But I managed to keep the conversation going by asking him about his own doings.

He told us, "It's been a real trip. I've been sleeping on Skid Row."

Well, that got our attention, though I doubted he could do a convincing impersonation of a bum—his fingernails were always impeccable. "For a project or something?" I asked. "Are you still planning to make a movie of that Ruth Rendell mystery about the homeless?"

"Oh, I'm done with that. Actually I'm writing my own book about the homeless. I'm calling it *Shining City*." He turned to Michael. "Of course you'll take a look at it."

Stephen completely failed to notice that Michael paused a beat before answering in a nonchalant tone, "Of course."

It was a good dinner and seemed to put us all in convivial spirits. Plus, the fact that Stephen appeared to be going back to literary work—in other words back on ground familiar to me and Michael—made me comfortable enough to ask him directly about about what was going on in his life in the real world.

"I'm changing my whole lifestyle, scaling down," he said. "You know, I realized that we could rent our house on Mulholland when we're not using it, like now, and get some money coming in that way."

"How much are you asking for rent?"

“Twenty thousand a month,” he answered.

I gasped. That was more than we lived on in a year.

“But if it’s being rented out, where will you live?” said Michael.

“Well, I’m thinking of getting a little apartment in town.”

“Do you think Naomi would like that?” I asked.

He gave us a little smile. “Oh, it’s not for Naomi.” Then he leaned back in his chair with a look of satisfaction. “Yeah, it’s all coming together.”

Neither Michael nor I took this opportunity to ask about Naomi or the state of their marriage. Instead I boldly changed the subject and asked him about what really went on during the making of *Losing Isaiah*. I could say that talking about Naomi put it in my mind, but the fact is Michael and I had a bet going.

To my surprise Stephen’s reply came good-humoredly. “Oh, that! You know, I got about a third through the shoot when I realized, ‘I’m fucked! I’m fucked!’ They just weren’t going to let me do the kind of movie I wanted to make.” He waved a hand. “So, let it go. They’re all losers anyway.”

I didn’t reveal to Stephen Paula’s account of what had actually happened on the set at Paramount. But I did tell him, “You know, Seth Margolis is pretty satisfied with the movie. He gets compliments for it all the time.”

“Who’s Seth Margolis?” asked Stephen, leaning forward.

“The man who wrote the novel *Losing Isaiah*. I thought it was a good book so I emailed him and we struck up a conversation.”

Stephen leaned back, apparently losing interest. “Oh. Well, I never read the book.”

After dessert he excused himself to go to the men’s room and Michael and I exchanged some private words.

“Well, you were right,” I said to Michael. “When I brought up *Losing Isaiah* he really did say, ‘I’m fucked!’ His exact words.” I handed him a dollar.

As Michael took it, he said, “Now, what do you think of that

story about Jake and Maggie and the Cheesecake Factory? Do you think he told off the manager before or after they were thrown out?”

“After,” I said with a grin.

“In fact I’ll bet you he actually made that rude gesture from across the street,” said Michael.

“You’re on,” I answered. “But I doubt we’ll ever get that out of him.”

Then, noticing Stephen returning to the table, we looked at each other and laughed.

He tried to join in our merriment. With a nervous little laugh of his own he asked us, “What’s so funny?”

## **CHAPTER THIRTEEN**

### **“It’s a Multimedia Thing—With Action Figures”**

**T**he apartment in San Francisco our son chose for all of us turned out to be a small but very comfortable place near the beach—so close, in fact, that we could see the ocean from our window. Plus it was near one of my favorite cafés in the city, Java Beach, several nice bars for Michael, and Golden Gate Park. I took a lot of lovely pictures during our time in the neighborhood.

While we were just settling in Stephen sent Michael the first hundred or so pages of his new novel, *Shining City*. This time Michael quickly shared his impressions with me.

“His writing’s getting better,” he told me. “He’s beginning to create totally imaginary characters not drawn from his own life. Even his prose is getting a little clearer.”

This was music to my ears. Apparently Michael’s gentle but persistent literary coaching of Stephen was starting to take. “So how far has he gotten with the story?”

Michael said he thought about twenty percent, which meant

we were looking at a projected 150,000-word tome. Stephen's ambition was beginning to impress me. I went on to ask what the book was about.

"Well, it's about King Arthur, and Merlin, and the Knights of the Round Table. Only they're living in the present day, and they're a bunch of homeless guys in Los Angeles."

I suddenly remembered the line Stephen had tossed off in Boulder: "It's a suspense thriller—only the heroes are homeless!" as well as what he'd announced to us in Pasadena: "I've been sleeping on Skid Row." Yes, it was all starting to come together for Stephen. Even his nutty forays into the demimonde were starting to make sense.

"So you think *Shining City* could be good," I said.

"If he sticks with it, it could be better than *Liquid Motel*," Michael told me. "He's working with some actual universal themes here. He's not writing just about himself anymore."

At last, Stephen was stretching himself to become the kind of novelist I always believed he could be. So it was with a great deal of excitement that I greeted the news he would be coming to visit us in October, when we could get together and really indulge in some serious literary talk.

One morning a few weeks later Michael and I watched from the door of our apartment house as Stephen emerged from his rented car. As usual he was about an hour late. He came up the walk and exchanged a round of hugs with us. Then he asked, "Is this still San Francisco?"

We assured him that it was.

"Great. Lemme go get my Mac so Michael and I can do some work."

Michael accompanied him back to the car and took his canvas briefcase. Then we all went upstairs to our apartment.

We didn't have a lot of furniture in our tiny living room although there was a card table against the wall on which Stephen set up his Mac. There were no chairs, but without a moment's



hesitation he kneeled before his laptop and turned it on.

“Have you got a printer?” he asked. When I told him no he said, “Never mind. I’ve already got some brochures here.” He pulled them out and handed them to me and Michael. What he called brochures were actually just some badly copied printouts. “Just thought you should look at my recent improvements.”

Improvements on what? I glanced down at the papers but they looked like sketches; I couldn’t make head nor tail of them. Michael quickly surveyed them and gave me a sidelong glance.

“Michael,” called Stephen as he stared intently at his screen, “come over here and take a look at my changes.”

Michael went over to his Mac and they started discussing his novel. I supposed I’d have to find out what those weird sketches were all about from Michael later on.

In order to keep out of their way I went over to the couch and watched TV without the sound—a Kevin Costner movie about the US Mail I think. Soon, however, Michael and Stephen’s voices were growing pretty loud, and since Rob was in the other room sleeping—he’d worked the late shift at the restaurant the previous night—I asked Michael to take Stephen someplace for the rest of their meeting.

“Tell you what, we’ll head over to Java Beach for a couple of hours until we’re done,” said Michael.

“Then we’ll all go to lunch,” added Stephen.

As soon as they left Rob blearily ambled into the living room. I told him excitedly that he was going to finally meet Stephen that afternoon.

“Whoopee,” he said, yawning.

When Michael and Stephen got back Rob was dressed and I was more than ready for a seafood salad at the Park Chalet in Golden Gate Park. I also hoped the guys would talk more about *Shining City*, but it was not to be. Once we got to the restaurant Stephen was more interested in discussing politics—in particular, he wanted get the young person’s point of view from Rob. I got

the strong impression that Stephen was more impressed with Rob for simply being a young person than Rob was impressed with him for being a Hollywood director. Plus Stephen's political viewpoint seemed to all of us to be surprisingly facile.

A couple of hours later lunch was over. Stephen drove us home and we all waved goodbye as he sped away in his rented car toward the airport. Fifteen minutes later he called us saying he'd gotten lost.

After we hung up, having explained to him how to get to SF International, Rob retreated to his room, still snickering over our Hollywood director's apparent obtuseness in all matters. Michael and I sat down for what turned out to be a frank discussion.

"First of all," said Michael, "I have to ask you if you want me to continue working with Stephen."

I laughed out loud, he sounded so ominous. "Sure, why not?"

He paused, then showed me the printouts Stephen had left us. "Okay. Take a look at these. Know what they are?"

I looked at the sketches again. "Illustrations for his book?"

Michael shook his head and told me slowly and deliberately, "Designs for action figure dolls."

"Say that again?"

He sighed. "Stephen explained to me at Java Beach what he's planning for *Shining City*. He said, 'It's a multimedia thing—with action figures!'"

Now I paused. "You're kidding."

"Word for word. He wants to turn *Shining City* into a billion-dollar enterprise complete with book, big budget special effects movie, TV cartoon, and action figure dolls." He pointed to one sketch. "See that figure there?"

I looked at it. "He's got to be one of the knights, right? And he's holding—" I peered closer—"a broom handle for a sword...and a garbage can lid for a shield...?" I put down the printout and shook my head. "This has got to be a joke or something. He can't

possibly be serious.”

“He’s perfectly serious. This is supposed to be a rough draft of some kind of prospectus he plans to send to film and network executives.”

I pondered this for a moment. “You don’t think that this could somehow take off, do you? I mean, it is Hollywood, after all...”

“The largest concentration of hard-headed businessmen in the world is in Hollywood. What do you think?”

It was my turn to sigh. “I wonder—I wonder if Stephen plans to talk about this at Trinity next month.”

“Not unless he wants to be laughed off the campus.”

I sighed again. “I suppose all the more reason for me to go up there and sort of keep an eye on him.”

“Actually, you don’t have to worry,” Michael mockingly reassured me. “If they’re young and naïve enough, they’ll believe anything he says about moviemaking. After all, he’s from Hollywood.”

I could tell Michael was taking this new development seriously and he could tell that I was as well. Stephen’s growing disconnect from reality was becoming worrisome to both of us, but I doubted anyone else would feel the same way we did.

A month later on my way to Trinity for the Gyllenhaal Film Festival I stopped in New York just as I had in June. Once in town, I got the contact info for Phil Campbell, the author of *Zioncheck for President*, from a mutual acquaintance, the literary blogger Maud Newton. Phil, who prides himself on his Chicago working-class background, was currently employed as an ordinary office worker near Eighth Avenue and 28th Street, so I invited him to lunch at a deli nearby. Over sandwiches I congratulated him on getting his memoir optioned by Stephen.

He told me earnestly, “Yeah, I can’t believe that Hollywood came knocking at my door. I’m thinking of writing a screenplay now.”

I asked him what he knew about Stephen's plans for the movie.

"Well, one thing he told me was not to worry, it wasn't going to be political. He said it was going to be more of a buddy movie."

"You mean a comedy?"

"Yeah."

I'd read Phil's book and believe me, it had some light moments but it was no shrewd political memoir and it certainly wasn't a buddy comedy. In fact, he and Grant Cogswell, the flambuoyantly eccentric city council candidate whose campaign he ran, had a sad and messy falling out when Cogswell lost.

A remark Stephen had made that was printed in a Seattle weekly newspaper had been on my mind so I asked Phil, "How about what it said in *The Stranger*, that he was planning to do a movie that was 'DIY seat-of-the-pants Sundance-worthy'?"

"Oh, that was just something he said as a signal to Hollywood about what kind of movie he was going to make."

I paused. "A signal?" I considered this, then asked, trying to make light of it, "So you trust him then?"

Phil shrugged as he wrapped up the other half of his sandwich to take back to work. "Sure. I'm gonna be there for the whole process. He told me that."

I remembered Stephen's cheerful remark at Boulder: If you want to make a movie out of any book, you have to rape and pillage. Rape—and—pillage. The author will hate you, but you'll have a better movie. I wanted to scream at Phil, "You fool! He's going to gut your precious *Zioncheck*! Don't you realize that? Don't you care?"

But I held my tongue. I knew that his wife was expecting twins and I couldn't bear to rain on his parade. He'll find out soon enough, I thought.

That conversation with Phil was on my mind a couple of days later when I was sitting in a classroom at Trinity, listening to

Stephen tell the students what it was like to work in Hollywood. But first let me mention some of the other events that took place during the Gyllenhaal Film Festival.

I made it to Hartford ahead of Stephen and was welcomed by Tim Griggs, who managed to secure for me an air mattress in the third-floor common room of the co-ed dorm, which was spacious and comfortable with a sweeping view of the campus. Also, the students were very kind and helpful. All the elements were combined to make it a memorable stay for me.

I spent that Wednesday strolling around Trinity taking photos, and the next morning I went to the first event listed on Stephen's itinerary: a class on narrative in film and literature. It was conducted in a small room with a blackboard covered with diagrams indicating "cause+effect" and other literary dynamics.

After about a half-hour of dutifully listening to the instructor I texted Tim, who I knew was with Stephen, "So where is he?"

To which Tim texted back, "He's eating dessert. He'll be there."

Fifteen minutes later Stephen came strolling in followed by Tim. He enthusiastically shook hands with the instructor, then sat down on the desk and looked around at the expectant students. Noticing me sitting at the back, he smiled at me wistfully and said with tenderness, "Hi Cantara."

"Hi," I said back just as tenderly. In those days, no matter how much he annoyed or bewildered me, a smile from Stephen could always melt my heart.

And this is pretty much how it went the next three days—Stephen would guest lecture classes in the mornings and afternoons, Thursday and Friday evenings and all of Saturday were taken up with the showing of films he directed for TV and the big screen. I was there for every showing and almost every lecture.

I have to say it was a representative selection of his work: his prestige picture *Waterland* of course, *Homegrown* with Billy Bob Thornton, *Paris Trout* with Dennis Hopper, and that rather lurid

CBS TV movie called *A Killing in a Small Town* with Barbara Hershey and Brian Dennehy. There were also episodes of *Evergreen* and *Felicity* he directed that were shown during his classroom lectures.

The *Hartford Courant* printed a nice picture of Stephen with the schedule of movies to be shown at the Gyllenhaal Film Festival (free admission to all), and the following Monday the student newspaper published an interview with him:

*“My shrink told me to write down my thoughts. Poetry made me sane,” he told students at the Fred... “I wrote some poems about my kids, but I don’t like to read them because it makes me uncomfortable. Fame and all that is so fucked up. I don’t recommend it to anyone.” ...Later, he moved on to reading some prose, excerpts from a few novels currently in progress, a semi-autobiographical story about the trials of a family of eight, and a modern-day retelling of the Arthurian myths.*

The “Fred” is an informal student meeting room on campus, where late that Friday night Stephen read his work to about forty attendees. I’d worked hard to get people to come to that 11PM reading, putting up flyers all over and talking it up to every single person I could buttonhole. As it was Homecoming Weekend when hundreds of alumni were on campus to watch Trinity play against their rivals in football, Wesleyan University, I hoped that some former students around his age might attend.

In the end, though, the poetry reading was a bust. In fact it was the worst turnout I’d ever promoted for Stephen. About half the attendees, practically all of whom were students, left in the middle of his reading. I even heard a few derisive comments from people on their way out about the quality of his poetry.

None of this seemed to faze Stephen though. Despite the prominent display of *Claptrap* at the Trinity bookstore, the

weekend obviously wasn't about his writing or his poetry—it was about his movie career.

But back to that class on narrative where I'm listening to Stephen. He didn't talk about his movie or book projects as I'd hoped. Instead he started off recounting his days as a student at Trinity, almost bragging about how he graduated close to the bottom of his class. Then he went on to talk about his first girlfriend (“She broke my heart when she dumped me”) and how he hated the dorm so much he'd take his sleeping bag out at night to sleep on the Commons.

Many of the students had been poised with pen and paper to take notes on Stephen's talk, but no one I could see was writing anything down. They did perk up a little when he started dropping names. He didn't mention Jake or Maggie, but with obvious relish he did refer to the big actors he'd directed, such as Jeremy Irons and Ethan Hawke. He also gave his opinions of other directors, such as Stanley Kubrick: “An arrogant perfectionist—I could never be like him”; Martin Scorsese: “When *Mean Streets* came out, I didn't think it was such a big deal”; and Francis Coppola: “You know, I saw Coppola on the streets of New York directing *Godfather II* ordering the extras around and I thought, What a little dictator!”

Only the last comment gave me a little frisson. Back in '73 I'd been in the same crowd of onlookers in Little Italy watching the making of *The Godfather II*, and it was one of the most thrilling things I'd ever witnessed. Realizing the difference in how we both regarded that experience, I think, made me wonder for the first time about Stephen's cinematic judgment.

He went on to reveal that he regularly visited an analyst to maintain his inner well-being. But then everyone in Hollywood does, he insisted. “They're all fakes and charlatans,” he said. “Only, my analyst is eighty-five years old. A post-Freudian. Everything starts in the womb with him. You know, I dream every night. And I always remember them. Bernard Bail. Interesting man.” It seems

that Bail was helping him interpret his recurring dreams about swimming in an endless ocean. “I talk to him five times a week!” announced Stephen proudly.

The incident at Boulder of Stephen hiding in the cloakroom to call his analyst while people were waiting for him at his own reception briefly flitted through my mind.

He ended his talk by railing against the powerful billionaires of Hollywood who held creative types like him in a vise-like grip, describing Sumner Redstone, principal owner of the parent corporation of Paramount, and president of CBS Leslie Moonves, as crass and pigheaded.

“My wife included,” he said, though he didn’t mention Naomi by name. “I wanted to go to England to direct *Waterland*. She pretty much ordered me not to go. Said the producers were already having money troubles, that I didn’t have a contract. So there I was flying to England with no contract and an angry wife! But I went anyway,” he finished, grinning smugly. “I think I made the right decision.”

Later that weekend, Stephen seemed much more at ease giving practical instruction in filmmaking. With a camera borrowed from nearby Wesleyan University—Trinity has no film department—he had the kids collaborate on first scripting, then shooting, a two-minute movie, which we all viewed later at Cinestudio. Its plot was practically non-existent, but I liked the way Stephen was able to impart his knowledge of film editing to the kids. It was all just basic mechanical stuff, Production 101, but he seemed to be in his element.

Seeing him with young people was definitely bringing out a side of Stephen that was new to me, that of solicitous big brother. He was freer and easier with this group than with any other I’d seen him with before. With the black students he attempted to show off his knowledge of hip-hop. With the female students—there were only two—he slowly and patiently instructed them on how to hold a camera, speaking to them as if they were very young children. Chatting with Tim Griggs, who was obviously taking



Stephen on as a role model, he spoke like a mentor, actually telling him, “Look me up when you get to Hollywood.”

Tim confided to me later, “My goal is to become a director. Stephen pretty much promised to help me.”

Although it wasn’t as well-attended as the event in Boulder, all in all the Gyllenhaal Film Festival was a success, at least for its organizers. There were a couple of sour notes, however. One of the female students who was a recipient of Stephen’s tutelage seemed a little disappointed when the festival came to an end.

“It was great,” she told me listlessly. “Only...”

“Only what?” I prompted her.

“Well, I sort of thought Jake would show up. They’re supposed to be some sort of close family. And Jake’s supposed to be in New York, which is like only a few miles from Hartford.”

I think I said something half-heartedly about the busy schedules of movie stars, but I don’t think she bought it.

A little later a new acquaintance from Trinity seemed to echo the girl’s disappointment. It was when he was giving me a lift to the bus station. In the car he confided to me, “You know, we rather expected that someone in his family would send us some word of congratulations, if not his son and daughter, at least his wife. It would have been a nice gesture and it might have helped us immensely in our fundraising.” He shrugged resignedly. “I guess we’re simply not important enough.”

This time I had nothing to say. But I was thinking, Well. So much for Team Gyllenhaal.

## **CHAPTER FOURTEEN**

### **“In a Flash, All is Darkness”**

**T**he year 2008 began pretty grimly. Some of you might remember that on the January 22 that wonderful young actor Heath Ledger unexpectedly died of an overdose of prescription barbituates.

Ever since Rob had gone with a group of friends to see *Brokeback Mountain* a couple of years earlier he had been a big fan of Ledger. He'd even papered his room with pictures of the actor in his role of The Joker in the upcoming Batman movie *The Dark Knight*. I remembered Ledger from his earlier roles in *Monster's Ball* with Halle Berry and Billy Bob Thornton and *The Patriot* and was convinced he had the potential to be another Marlon Brando. We were both devastated when we heard the news of his death—in fact Rob and I cried in each other's arms.

Then I text messaged Stephen, “My God, he was only 28!”

To which Stephen answered a few seconds later, “Terrible. In a flash, all is darkness.” Strangely enough, this time his twisted poeticism made sense.

All through the rest of the winter Stephen kept contact with me and Michael. With Michael he exchanged emails concerning “slight revisions” he'd made to *Liquid Motel*. It seemed he'd abandoned *Shining City*—at least for the moment. With me his exchanges were of a more personal nature. For some reason, Stephen started phoning me regularly, at least once a week, for no particular reason other than “just to say hi”.

This sort of threw me for a loop at the beginning but I soon got used to it. We were old and intimate friends by then after all. There was a lot I already knew about him and a lot he knew about me, and each new conversation only served to deepen our relationship, I felt. In fact it got to the point that I knew he was going to call right before my phone rang.

It happened once while I was in the car with Rob when he was on an errand for the restaurant. I took out my cell phone, stared at it and announced, “That's Stephen.” A second later the theremin ringtone sounded.

“Hi honey,” I cooed.

Out of the corner of my eye I could see the look of disgust on Rob’s face as he sped forward.

Stephen asked what I was doing right then. I told him I was with my son in his car. “Oh, I don’t know if we should be talking like this with your son there,” he said in a low fretful tone.

I had no idea where this was coming from and just put it down to more of Stephen’s wackiness. “Stephen, I don’t know what this is about, but I have a very open relationship with my son. Besides, you’ve met him. And he knows you. Is there something special you want to discuss in private?”

He paused before answering, “I...um... No. No.”

Then we went on to have a half-hour conversation about, of all things, the nature of being. Existential stuff. It was weird. It was almost like talking someone down from an acid trip.

Another time he called when I was at the DMV studying to take the written test in order to renew my license. Same thing—I picked up my cell phone a second or two before it vibrated. This time the subject was God, and this conversation lasted about forty-five minutes. It took a little while for me to get my head back into the drivers manual after he hung up.

There were other phone calls too, not as long or as fraught. At these times Stephen called to say he was “touching base” or “catching up” and by golly, he actually let me talk about my life for a change. It was almost as weird as discussing with him the nature of being.

This lasted into late March, when I eventually learned that Michael’s email time with Stephen wasn’t as profound or productive. One afternoon when he was at his desk working on *Liquid Motel* I casually asked him how it was coming along. He turned from the screen and said, “Do you know what your guy’s done with his book?” Without waiting for my usual protest that he wasn’t my guy, Michael went on. “He’s changed it. Gutted it. And he’s turned the ending into a happy Hollywood-type ending.”

I asked him to explain.

“First of all, grown-up Henry reconciles with his mother in an incredibly sappy scene out of Hallmark or Lifetime,” said Michael, shaking his head. “It just doesn’t fit with the rest of the book. Plus, oh, you’ll love this. He wants to make it into a movie. *Liquid Motel* is now no longer his metaphor for the womb. He’s rewriting it to make it into a motel literally. A real-life motel that his parents run.”

Thanks to Stephen I was stunned speechless. Again.

“But...they didn’t really run a motel in real life.”

“Of course not! They were a couple of messed-up drunks in Bryn Athyn! We know that. But Stephen thinks the motel idea would—how did he put it?—‘play better’. In fact he’s going to frame his movie around that whole ‘warmhearted’ kite flying scene with the father and his six kids and downplay the drinking.”

I don’t think I could even recall the kite flying scene, probably because it seemed so at odds with the rest of the book (at least the version I remembered), which detailed with lyricism and insight the story of a raucously dysfunctional family who could never quite reconcile with each other.

“I thought Stephen was going off the deep end with *Shining City*. But this is worse.” Michael balled up his fists. “I thought we’d all agreed on the final version of *Liquid Motel* back in October.”

I had too. In the end I came to believe that the edited version was a true literary achievement. In fact at Stephen’s urging I’d sent the full manuscript of that version to literary agents I knew in New York. I’d told him I stood by his novel, and that if they weren’t interested I’d publish it myself.

“It’s just like Bill Talen all over again,” Michael muttered.

Bill Talen was a performance artist we’d known during our San Francisco theater days. Michael thought he was so promising he helped him develop and run his show, gratis, and even supplied him cash—which amounted to over a thousand dollars—when he needed it. Michael never really expected to be paid back, although

Talen used to go on and on about how grateful he was and that he'd not only pay Michael back with interest, but that he'd take him along in his career. None of this ever happened, of course. Bill Talen eventually morphed into a performance artist/quasi anti-corporation activist called Reverend Billy. Last I heard of him he was in New York entertaining the Occupy Wall Street crowd.

"I don't understand. How is this like Bill?"

"First, you know how many hours I put into *Liquid Motel* alone? A hundred and twelve, it's in my records."

I did a quick mental calculation. Even at the lowest going rate for a rookie freelance editor—and Michael was no rookie—he'd put in several thousand dollars' worth of work on Stephen's novel.

Michael could tell what was going through my mind and broke in. "Look, I don't want you tell me what you think it's worth. It was never about the money, you know that. Stephen told me a dozen times how grateful he is for the work I've put in, and a dozen times I've told him I wasn't doing it for him, I was doing it for you. Then at Java Beach he had to nerve to say to me, 'You know, I really can't pay you...'" He pointed to the screen. "And now this!" He took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. "I've got to take a break. I'm having trouble focusing on the screen anyway. Want to take a walk with me?"

It was a foggy day but we went over to the beach. As we walked on the sand without saying much to each other, I pondered on Michael's comparison of Stephen to Bill. Then I realized. Each of them had made a promise—not to Michael, but to their talent. And each of them not only broke it, they threw it in his face.

The next time Stephen called I'm afraid I was a bit cool towards him. He sounded unusually subdued, and even though he prompted me to tell him about my day, where I was, what I was doing, et cetera, I was in no mood to be entertaining. Instead I asked him rather flippantly, "So where are you, by the way, and what are you doing?"

He answered, “I’m in Bryn Athyn. I’m at my mother’s deathbed.”

After pausing to draw a breath, I asked him how long he’d been there.

He told me, “Since January. On and off.”

Well, that would explain all his philosophical musings the past winter, I thought. Then I went on to ask how his mother was. He explained that she was in a lot of pain and in the last stages of dementia, at times either not recognizing him, or mistaking him for his late father. I asked him if he was there alone.

“My sisters are here. And Max and Anders should be coming up soon.”

I wondered if Naomi would be joining him, but something told me not to mention her so I kept this to myself.

“Anyway,” he told me with a sudden briskness in his voice, “I’m going back to LA tomorrow, then I’m coming back here. On the way I was thinking of swinging around to your neck of the woods in a couple of weeks so Michael and I can do some more strategizing.”

More strategizing. Hm. In many ways Stephen was still the same.

When I told Michael about Stephen’s incipient visit in April he was less than thrilled. I promised him though that when Stephen got here I’d try to get him to change his mind about what he was doing to *Liquid Motel*.

Unfortunately Stephen’s plane was late so we had only a few hours before his connecting flight to Pennsylvania. Gamely though, when he pulled up at our door, he insisted we still have lunch at nearby historic Cliff House. It lasted only an hour but it was still a memorable meal, although the conversation was limited to inconsequential topics.

Still, I was frustrated. There was going to be no time to talk seriously about his book. After he dropped us off at our apartment and was getting back into his rented car I offered to ride with him

to the airport and help him with his luggage. I could take the BART back to town, I explained.

Without a moment's hesitation he said, "Sure, hop in," so I did.

On the way we spent a few minutes in polite conversation, and then I brought up the subject of his novel. Stephen still had the notes Michael gave him at lunch in his back pocket and I told him as firmly as I could that he ought to take those notes seriously—reinstate crucial scenes; take out the unconvincing dialogue; not try to sugar-coat the ending.

To all this he nodded noncommittally as he drove.

"You're not listening," I said.

He protested that he was.

I went on to tell him that so far there'd been no nibbles on the book from any of the New York agents I'd sent it to, but not to let that concern him. As Michael had repeated to him at lunch, *Liquid Motel* was very distinctly a literary work, one that probably wouldn't get the best reception in the commercial book world. We were seriously considering publishing the novel ourselves and introducing it to the more discerning literary sphere we knew so well.

To my chagrin, Stephen smiled at this and said softly, "No."

I thought he was just kidding around, so I kidded him back. "C'mon, Stevie, let us publish your book. You know you want to."

"Nooo," he answered, shaking his head like a little kid refusing medicine.

Once I realized that he was being serious (as serious as Stephen can be) I started to get annoyed. Then I said what was quite probably the stupidest thing I ever said in our relationship: "What is it—do I have to marry you to get you to listen to me?"

At those words, a chill ran through the car. Stephen didn't reply, but stiffened straight up in his seat and became more intent on his driving.

I sat back, immediately regretting my words and desperately

wishing he'd come back at me with some lighthearted remark like, "But what would your husband say?" or something like that. But of course he wasn't about to. This is Stephen Gyllenhaal we're talking about.

Instead we sat side by side in silence. I didn't even comment when it appeared that we were no longer on the road to the airport, nor did I say a word when I noticed that Stephen had driven into a place that was not only familiar to me but to almost every other resident of the Bay Area.

He stopped the car, turned off the ignition, and looked around. "Where is this?" he muttered irritably.

"Colma Cemetery," I told him.

At that he started swearing profusely and put his head down on the steering wheel.

This was the most distraught I'd ever seen him. "Stephen..." I said as soothingly as I could, and reached over and laid a hand on his arm.

He jerked away. "No!"

"Stephen..." I repeated.

"Don't touch me, you're my publisher!" he exclaimed almost hysterically.

Without another word I removed my hand from his arm.

Then with a snort he sat up, started the engine and proceeded to back us out of the cul-de-sac. He did this so distractedly I was surprised he didn't knock over a gravestone.

Based on what I remembered about how we got into the cemetery, I gave Stephen instructions on how to get out of it and find the highway to the airport, but he ignored me, preferring to consult his map. We managed to escape Colma Cemetery, and once out on the main street again Stephen flagged down a motorist going the other way. The motorist stopped and rolled down his window.

Stephen leaned out of his window. "Say," he called out with mock humility, "I'm just another stupid driver from LA, but I was



wondering...”

They had a long moment of friendly banter while cars piled up behind both of them. Then the man pointed in the direction we were going—the way I’d already told Stephen to go.

So Stephen continued down the same road and soon I began to see San Francisco International just ahead of us. He quickly found the Hertz rental parking lot and parked the car.

We got out and he opened the trunk, grabbed his carry-on, and pointed at the larger bag. “Come on!” he exclaimed. “I’ve got to make that flight!”

Steadying myself, I pulled the rather heavy nylon bag from the trunk and slung it around my shoulder.

Without waiting for me Stephen began to hurriedly stride towards the waiting airport monorail. When I caught up with him we boarded the shuttle. Since there were no seats, I put the bag down beside me and grabbed a pole, Stephen doing likewise.

I rubbed my shoulder and looked up at him. He still had a distraught expression on his face. With the most comforting smile I could muster I said, “Stephen, you know I love you. Michael loves you—”

I swear, he actually thrust his palms up in front of my face and interrupted me loudly, “No!”

“But Stephen—”

“No!” he said again. “Don’t go there!”

His bizarre reaction threw me and, needless to say, annoyed the hell out of me. What the fuck did he think I was trying to convey to him? I wondered. I didn’t utter another word until we got to the terminal.

After he checked his nylon bag we raced over to the passengers-only entrance. There he finally looked down at me with a relieved expression. Although I was disappointed by not having been able to have a meaningful conversation with him all afternoon, I let him hug me. It was a strangely effusive hug, complete with loud “Mmm-mm-mm!” sounds.

When he finally let go and went over to the security people to show his ticket, I told him, “Remember, you were the one who called me!”

He just laughed nervously and disappeared down the corridor.

Early in May Stephen’s mother Virginia finally died at the age of 84. It wasn’t Stephen who informed me but Candace, who kept up with all the news from Bryn Athyn. Also, as we learned in chapter eleven, her sister Terry worked in the music department of the Cathedral; therefore she was to play the organ at the funeral service.

To my surprise, word also spread about Virginia’s funeral in, of all places, the more respectful Jake fan sites like journalist Dave Cullen’s Ultimate Brokeback Guide. Understandably there was talk of dispatching someone to Bryn Athyn for a possible Jake sighting, but there were also some moving comments in the forums by young fans who had lost beloved grandparents and expressed to Jake their sincerest sympathies.

Apparently, however, none of the rest of Team Gyllenhaal showed up in Bryn Athyn to join Stephen and his brothers and sisters. A day or two afterward I discovered a recording of the complete funeral service on the Cathedral website and listened to it in its entirety. The music was lovely, and I swear I could hear Stephen singing the hymns along with the congregation, but that’s probably my romantic imagination. The minister had many kind things to say about Virginia, noting her patience with her small pupils—in later life she had been a kindergarten teacher; her battle with alcoholism; but most of all her long marriage to Hugh, Stephen’s father who, the minister was certain, was “waiting for her in Heaven, where they will be joined as angels”.

Hearing the funeral recording made me weep a little. I immediately sent Stephen an email saying, “I would have given a

year in Paradise to have been there and put my hand on your shoulder for ten seconds.”

But of course he didn't answer. However, some weeks later in early June Stephen sent Michael by email a 15,000-word manuscript entitled “The School for Angels”. This time I didn't hesitate to take a look at it myself.

A quick read-through showed that it was a long essay about Stephen's fraught relationships with his wife, mother, siblings, religion, and hometown, exploring most of the same terrain as *Liquid Motel*. Only, this work was more obviously autobiographical—raw, angry and, in its way, honest. In it he candidly described his strained relationship with Naomi; their money troubles; how she finally asked for a separation; his decades-long alienation from his brothers and sisters; his struggle to emulate his alcoholic businessman father; and most of all his futile and almost cruel attempt to reconcile with his dying mother in the final stages of her dementia. Except for the lengthy and bizarre digressions, it was the bravest, most un-Stephen-like piece we'd ever gotten from him.

I was dying to take a crack at editing it myself. For one thing, I persuaded myself that it was a gift from Stephen to me to make up for his refusal to let us publish *Liquid Motel*. I also persuaded myself that it was his special way of answering all the questions I used to pester him with about his early life. For another, I thought that by this time I knew his writing voice as well as Michael and I wanted to put myself to the test.

This new burst of creativity from Stephen seemed to show that he was weathering the recent storms in his life. This essay, I felt, after a thorough edit, was strong enough to warrant inclusion in the latest issue of *Cantaraville*, my literary magazine that served as a companion to Cantarabooks.

Other good things seemed to be on their way as well. My friend from chapter one, Andy Laties, emailed to inform me that he was now the booker for the venerable Bowery Poetry Club and to ask if Stephen might be interested in being a featured reader. I

recalled Stephen remarking at Housing Works two years earlier that it “would be cool” to read his work there so I immediately replied, Yes. Andy asked for a date; I said I’d ask Stephen and get back to him.

And there was yet another poetry reading in the offing. Since Boulder I’d kept in contact with Kathleen Man, that young film instructor, and when she let me know that she had taken on a new position at prestigious Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York, I asked her if she could arrange in the fall a combination film/poetry presentation there featuring Stephen.

Call me naïve, but in those days I didn’t write anybody off. Even if she’d had an inconsequential fling with Stephen (and I still wasn’t completely convinced of that, although Paula’s revelations about his womanizing made the possibility easier to accept) she was still a legitimate contact, one with ties to the world of impressionable young students that Stephen seemed to thrive in.

Kathleen, in turn, seemed to be especially solicitous in our email conversations. She wanted, she said, to make sure that whatever she arranged with Stephen would be all right with me. Moreover, she wanted to make sure, when she contacted him, to let Stephen know that I approved.

I was touched by her concern for proprieties and emailed her back in so many words, I trust you. Go ahead and make arrangements with Stephen. Just make sure to keep me in the loop because I want to come up and sell some books there.

Fairly certain that I’d secured a reading for Stephen at Vassar, I now set my sights on getting him a reading in nearby New York City, specifically at the Bowery Poetry Club where he could get some great exposure, and I could not only sell a ton of *Claptraps* but perhaps talk up some of Cantarabooks’ other poets and strengthen my ties to the New York poetry scene. Once Kathleen or Stephen let me know about the date of his Vassar event, and once I could persuade Stephen to give me a date for the Bowery that would be near the time of his appearance at the college, I could

start to plan his second “East Coast reading tour”.

And there was another matter. His current contract with Cantarabooks was about to expire at the end of June and I wanted to send him a new one for an expanded version of *Claptrap* that would include some previously unpublished poems. (Despite his enthusiasm after *Housing Works*, in the two years since, he failed to produce enough work to warrant a new volume, even though he did propose a title for it: *Still Life*.) He told me over the phone when I called him about it, “Sure, I’ll re-up! Just send over the contract.”

I sent the contract and waited a couple of weeks. Nothing. It was dismayingly like our first contract dance in 2005.

I emailed him again about the contract and about the Bowery Poetry Club, and this time because I had the feeling my stupid remark back in April about marriage had somehow caused him to be distant with me, I added a PS: “I don’t care who you fuck, I just want us to be friends.”

To which he emailed back several days later, “Something’s come up. Get back to you. PS—I am not fucking Kathleen Man.”

I let the situation ride for another couple of weeks. Finally around the last week of July Stephen called.

I’d never heard him so angry with me before. “What the hell is this I hear about you coming to Vassar? Do you think you need to hold my hand? Do you think I need looking after? Do you think I need my mittens pinned to my jacket?”

I was not intimidated. For one thing, his anger sounded manufactured, almost forced. For another, I knew that he’d been perfectly aware for nearly two months that I was planning to be at Vassar.

In fact, as Stephen spluttered on trying to maintain an indignant tone, I was feeling a cold, resolute, and genuine anger come over me. I said to him as calmly as I could, “This is what we were planning in June.”

“Yeah, well, this is the first I’ve heard of it,” he fumed.

“Look,” I told him, “you can have your Gyllenhaal film festival at Vassar because I know you’d like that. But there’s going to be a poetry reading too, and I need your books there.”

“What are you talking about? There’s—there’s not going to be any poetry reading.” He spat out the words poetry reading almost with derision.

I continued as businesslike as possible. “I’m also going to do another print run for *Claptrap* for the Bowery Poetry Club. Can you please give me a date?”

Pause. “I don’t know about that.”

Now I beginning to lose my cool. “Okay, how about the contract?”

He didn’t answer. It seemed as if he was off the script and didn’t know how to improvise.

After a few seconds of waiting for him to break the silence I said, “Okay, listen.” Then I told him slowly and deliberately, “We no longer have a business relationship.”

His voice turned querulous. “What do you mean?”

“Your contract expired last month. We no longer have a business relationship. Goodbye.”

He burst out frantically, “No, wait! I’ll sign anything—”

I hung up on him mid-sentence, and I didn’t give a damn whether he’d call back.

Of course it was that remark, *Do you think I need my mittens pinned to my jacket?* that did it for me. He could only have gotten that from one person. (Oh, go back and read chapter ten if you’ve forgotten.)

Since Rob had left for work and Michael had gone over for a couple of pints at Pittsburgh’s, the neighborhood bar, I had the opportunity to pace up and down our tiny apartment alone with my murderous thoughts.

If he wants to have an affair, fine! I thought. But why lie to me about it and then practically confess it with his next breath? He knew I loved him, he knew that despite his almost hysterical

selfishness I was there for him as a friend. I'd told him often enough.

But now I wondered just who the hell was pulling his strings. And why that should have anything to do with his literary work. I still believed that with a little more promotion on my part and a lot more discipline on his, he could go on being a good poet and soon become a fine writer as well. He still could win some genuine recognition in the world of literature, there was still time.

My ire was now roused to new heights. Who the hell was this little tramp to interfere with his progress? And why the hell should she want to? But more importantly, why was he letting her?

About two days later I got a very contrite email from Stephen:

*I have to apologize for my behavior [he wrote]. I know I reacted badly. In many ways, I feel that I owe a lot to you and Michael. But if you're pissed at me, it's because you don't know me. Please, please be patient. Naomi is being brutal.*

*PS—In many ways, you may be the greatest artist of us all.*

Even his apology was full of puzzles. I had no idea what he meant by calling Naomi brutal or saying I was an artist, great or whatever. All I knew was, he flat-out said he was sorry and I believed in his sincerity.

Still, I wasn't going to leave it at that. I waited a day to email him back a long message, proposing that we return to strictly business at least for a time. I told him that if he wanted to go on with me that he had to keep up his end of our author-publisher relationship: make good on the appearances I booked for him; have regular editorial meetings with Michael; have regular meetings with me to work on his promotion. I gave Stephen a week to think it over and reply. And, I decided not to discuss the situation with Michael until it was resolved one way or the other.

Well, a reply came sooner than a week—but it wasn't what I

expected.

It was the following afternoon. Michael, who had been working on his laptop, suddenly came over to me at the couch where I was working.

“Did you send out *Cantaraville*?” He asked this question with a lot more sternness than it deserved.

I told Michael yes, on schedule. He asked me if Stephen’s piece was in it. I told him yes, of course. He probably didn’t recognize it when I ran the cover past him because at the last minute I’d changed the title: “The School for Angels” was now “The Seminary of Heaven”, a phrase from Swedenborg’s writing which I thought sounded more elegantly appropriate.

Michael glared down at me grimly. “He just sent me an email. Go and look at it.”

I went over to the desk, sat down, and began to read.

*This is a stunning violation! I just discovered that you published the story I sent you. This violates the trust I had in you Michael, and in Cantara. I cannot understand her vindictiveness. Or why she had to drag my family into this. I doubt I will ever be able to trust you again.*

I felt a cold sickness in the pit of my stomach which soon turned into a hot fury.

“Did you publish it?” Michael fairly shouted at me.

“Yes, I published it! He sent it to us to be published, didn’t he?”

“He didn’t send it to us, he sent it to me!”

“He didn’t just send it to you, he sent it to *Cantaraville*!” I shouted back. “It was a submission! He was not about to get more free editing that wasn’t going to lead anywhere.” I took a breath to explain, “Look, I sent him our standard acceptance agreement, the same one I sent when we published the excerpt from *Liquid Motel*, when he said he was ‘honored’ to be in our magazine. I sent him



the same agreement and this time I didn't hear one peep out of him since I sent it weeks ago. And you know what the agreement says specifically: 'Unless we hear from you otherwise, your submission will be published in our next issue.' Anyway, I had other things to deal with. Like his readings. His goddamn contract!"

Michael calmed down enough to ask, "But you didn't publish it in the form he sent it."

"No, I edited it."

"And you didn't run the edits past me?" he said, aghast.

I didn't reply.

"Did you at least run the edits past Stephen?"

I didn't reply to this, either.

"Why the fuck not?"

"Look," I answered, "I didn't want to bother you. You sounded like you already had enough of him. And I thought—I thought Stephen and I had this special relationship... And you know how much he goes into these wild digressions in his writing. And I thought I could catch them as well as you."

"How much did you cut?"

I paused, then said reluctantly, "Five thousand words."

"Five thousand words!?" he exclaimed.

"They were good cuts!" I protested. "You'd agree with them! He'd agree with them too if he could pay more attention to his work!"

"But we don't know that! And we'll never know that because you didn't give him the choice! How would you like this done to your work? You did what every editor we hate does! You didn't place his needs as a creator first and foremost! Instead, you got it into your thick head that you have the last word. Well, you don't! Always remember who the author is. Always!"

He went over to the coat rack and took down his baseball cap. "That's it. I'm done," he said stonily. "I don't ever want to hear Stephen mentioned in this house again."

“But—”

“That’s it.” I had never heard him speak with such finality before. “I’m going to Pittsburgh’s. Want to come?”

Flushed with indignation and humiliation, I stood in front of the door. “Hey listen,” I said, “do I read anything there that he was unhappy with the edits? Nope—just that he’s been violated because we published his stupid story in the first place! Even though he sent it to us! And now he’s accusing me of ‘dragging his family’ into this!”

“Move aside,” Michael ordered grimly. Defeated, I did, and he hurried down the steps and walked out to the street.

“Fuck him! Fuck him to hell! And you too!” I yelled after him. Then I went back to the couch, crashed down on it, and bawled loudly like the idiot I was.

Blindsided! I’d been blindsided—but this time it wasn’t by Naomi.

## **CHAPTER FIFTEEN**

### **“I Thank My Father for Choosing My Mother”**

**Y**ou’ve probably gotten the idea that I was a little intimidated by Naomi Foner. Nothing could be further from the truth—I was terrified of her. Women of her class and Ivy League education have always terrified me, and hearing stories around Hollywood of Naomi’s insistence on perfection and her daunting ability to control any situation didn’t make it any easier. As one acquaintance told me from experience, “There’s just no pleasing that woman.”

What rid me of my terror of Naomi once and for all was a startling discovery I made a little over a year after our non-encounter at Stephen’s first reading: We worked in the same building in New York at the same time in the early 1970s. The building was One Lincoln Plaza, right across the street from

Lincoln Center—you know, with the big fountain you see in the movies.

I was a solfeggist on the seventh floor at ASCAP—the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers—while she produced programs for the Children’s Television Workshop, which had its headquarters on the fourteenth. Specifically, she was the producer of *The Electric Company*. Remember in chapter three my telling you about the PBS show my friends and I used to watch while we got high? And just two years later there Naomi and I were inhabiting the same city, in the same era, quite probably dining in the same Upper West Side restaurants at the same time. Naomi, were you that chic woman with the blonde flip eating lunch with Bob McGrath from *Sesame Street* in the cafeteria under Lincoln Center? I was the little Asian teenager in a red kerchief at the next table having a BLT, which was what I always ordered along with a Coke and a kosher pickle. If I went back in time and waved to you, would you wave back?

Realizing (as I did in chapter thirteen) that I was probably in the same crowd on the street as Stephen watching Francis Ford Coppola direct *The Godfather II* wasn’t as much of a jolt as uncovering the criss-crossing of my life with that of Naomi Foner. I tallied up our similarities: We were more or less of the same generation; we were not too far apart in age; we were both in decades-long marriages; we both had babies born in Greenwich Village; we both had refined tastes in music and literature; we both still believed in the progressive traditions of our youth and we were both sometime political activists. If only my association with Stephen hadn’t caused her to see me as an intruder, instead of deliberately ignoring me at Housing Works, Naomi might have found in me another sister under the skin.

But since it has been pretty much impossible for me to know her in person, I’ve gotten to know Naomi through her screenplays. There are many, many writers of fiction out there whose works reveal very little to nothing at all about themselves—and then there

are writers like Naomi and me.

I'm not saying that she's the kind of writer who dwells on personal neuroses or childhood trauma or anything of the sort (like the Poet from Hollywood, for example). But throughout her career she seems to have focused so much on one particular concept—the essential unbreakable bond between parent and child which is even more essential, more unbreakable than the bond between husband and wife—that you can't be blamed for thinking this is probably the one overriding theme of her life. You can see it in all of the five movies produced from her screenplays. It's pretty obvious in *Losing Isaiah*, in *Running on Empty* it's in your face.

*Running on Empty* was the film that got Naomi an Academy Award nomination, which allowed her not only to become an Academy member but nominate for membership anyone she wished. This is how she got her husband in, and in a less direct way how she got Jake and Maggie and Peter in too. And make no mistake: The Motion Picture Academy is the most political game in town.

The story of how her family rose in Hollywood is as thrilling to me as the struggles of Irish immigrants or the Corleones. From public television drone to becoming a major player working with Sidney Lumet took drive on Naomi's part, and having to raise a couple of kids while needing to scare up work for hubby at the same time didn't make it any easier. Pushing the kids, pushing Stephen, pushing Stephen to include the kids in any of his journeyman directing gigs, producing movies herself in order to include Stephen and the kids—I admire that drive. Even though it included deceiving the press about how little "Team Gyllenhaal" actually supported each other professionally.

Okay, I admire her, but it does get to me how Naomi taught her kids and her husband to constantly exaggerate the unity of the family. During the years that the Gyllenhaal children were making their names in pictures they had been taught to mention their parents in almost every interview they granted. For instance,

Maggie had disclosed to a women's magazine, *Marie-Claire* I think, that her "feminist" mother never shaved her legs, while Jake solemnly declared to *Esquire*, "I thank my father for choosing my mother." Even now in their thirties they each still manage to drop a reference to their mom or dad when the opportunity arises.

Nevertheless, Naomi's little deceptions managed to maintain the sterling family image of the Gyllenhaals to the general public. In fact she was so effective that I was just as floored as everyone when, on a bright morning in October 2008, I opened my Google Reader to find this headline in a gossip site: "Jake and Maggie's Parents to Divorce!"

I took a moment let this item sink in. There had been a lot of hints during the past year: Stephen telling us about renting out his home on Mulholland Drive and taking an apartment; his remark that Naomi was "being brutal"; her non-appearance at his mother's funeral; his outright admission that they'd broken up in "The Seminary of Heaven". But I never believed for even a second that they would divorce. For heaven's sake, they'd been married longer than Michael and me.

But I had no one to discuss this with. Michael, you remember, forbade me back in July to ever mention Stephen again. And after my falling out with Stephen, I wasn't optimistic that he'd want to speak to me.

So I kept the news to myself. Our relationship was in the past, I figured. Since I wasn't going to reprint *Claptrap*, there'd be no more reason to have anything to do with him again.

Then about five weeks later in late November another gossip item appeared in my Google Reader with the lame title, "Forget About Brokeback—Just Broke!" This wasn't a surprise to me considering all the times that Stephen kvetched about his financial situation. What did surprise me was that this information had been made so public. How had Naomi been unable to keep such extremely personal news from the press?

I read the gossip item and understood. It was evident that an

informant at Los Angeles City Hall had leaked to the gossip rags Naomi's Petition for Divorce as well as her Declaration of Income and Expenses. Sure, technically court filings are available to the public, but still...

Reader, I confess. The gossip site had .pdf links to both documents and I downloaded and read them both. The Divorce Petition was only a four-page affair and told me very little I didn't know already about Stephen and Naomi's marriage. It was her Declaration of Income and Expenses that was the eye opener.

*During our marriage [said the Declaration], our expenses tended to outpace our income. Accordingly, we accumulated a certain amount of debt. I have repeatedly asked Stephen to pay his one-half share of our bills, and he has refused to do so... [He has stated] "I can't be clearer that you can't expect me to help any more with this situation. I have been clear that worse comes to worse, I will let all of this collapse into ruin, just as I believe letting the markets crash and burn are the right approach. Pain now for clarity later."*

Whoa. Was that really Stephen who said that? The husband who wrote such loving tributes to his wife in *Claptrap*?

The Declaration went on to enumerate Stephen's ability to generate more income than his wife. As I read further, I found the one particular remark which was calculated to piss me off:

*Adding to his accomplishments, Stephen is also a poet, having published a number of original poems in nearly two dozen quarterly magazines over the years, as well as a book collection.*

The first thing that went through my mind was, Lady, I published that collection. That's *my* book you're talking about.

Quite obviously the Gyllenhaals couldn't even keep something

as innocuous as a book of poetry out of their royal battles. I had to vent to someone. So I took Michael to the little park outside of Java Beach and sat down beside him on the log bench and told him everything.

“So,” he said after a moment after pondering. Then he asked me what he usually asks me in times like this, which is, “What do you want to do?”

“Well...I’d like to give him another chance,” I answered.

Michael stood up, agitated. “Another chance! He’s had all the chances in the world! He’s had more chances than you and me put together and he’s blown them all! He had a chance with Naomi to make it as a power couple in Hollywood! He had a chance with Paramount to make it as an A-list director! He had a chance with you to turn himself into a serious writer! Not to mention the toll this has been taking on you, don’t think I haven’t noticed.” He sat down again. “So what is it you want to do?”

I just sat there silently, feeling like a real dope. I knew that Michael was remembering that we were going down to Los Angeles in two weeks.

“You want to see him again, don’t you,” Michael said to me tenderly.

My feelings were a mixture of regret at the way Stephen and I parted, a lingering concern for him, and (yes, let me say it, and imagine my teeth clenching as I say it) a huge dollop of indignation at how *Claptrap* had been batted around by Naomi and Stephen like a mangy pet.

Still, I told Michael, “Yes, I’d like to see him again.”

We were going down to LA for a few days because Tom Baum had invited us to come to closing night of his latest stage play, a funny number called *Shock Therapy*, which by a delightful coincidence was starring a theater colleague from the old days, Scott Paulin. Most generously, Tom also invited us to stay in his guesthouse while we were in town.

His Brentwood home was close enough to the Sunset bus that we could go into Hollywood and entertain friends at our favorite bars. One friend, a screenwriter named Walter, had actually written a teleplay Stephen directed (“He kept tinkering with my dialogue, to no purpose,” he once told us) and was eager to fill us in on the latest gossip surrounding the divorce.

“I had a few words with Naomi back during a strike meeting,” he told us, referring to the Writers Guild of America strike that had occurred the previous winter. “All I did was casually ask her, ‘How’s Stephen?’ and she got up and announced loudly, ‘We’re separated!’ and walked away.”

“Wow,” I said. “I mean, we kind of knew about the separation last year—”

Walter broke in. “Whenever I saw her after that, she was telling everyone within earshot that she was having money troubles, that she had to borrow from the Strike Fund to get along—those were her words, ‘get along’—now that Stephen had moved out and wasn’t paying the bills.” He made a snort of disgust. “She made him sound like a real deadbeat.”

Michael brought up a good question. “How about that movie company of theirs, Rollercoaster? What’s going to happen to that?”

Walter shrugged. “Beats me. They haven’t made a movie together in years.”

Then I paused before asking him, “Do you think there might have been a woman involved?”

“Well, I wouldn’t know anything about that,” he answered. “I think it’s all about the money.”

Michael gently nudged me under the table. “What happens between couples is one of life’s great mysteries,” he said, sounding like a mystic sage.

Walter just nodded.

While we were in San Francisco I had sent Stephen a short but polite email about our visit to LA, and to my surprise about a



day later he actually emailed me back an equally short but polite answer, offering to take us to lunch.

Michael and I were sitting in Tom's garden the afternoon Stephen was to pick us up. While we waited around, Michael advised me to be polite but not pushy. We were never, ever going to get the real story of the big breakup from him.

"So don't introduce the subject," he said. "Let's just take it easy on him and have a good time."

And that's what I resolved to do.

I was fooling around with my pocket video camera when Stephen walked in. In his green t-shirt and stonewashed jeans he looked so much like a vulnerable teen-aged boy that my heart went out to him once more.

It wasn't a BMW or Prius that he picked us up in but it was still a nice little domestic auto. He took us to Venice, to an airy casual restaurant called the Rose Café. Unlike the previous times we'd been together, instead of Stephen the bouncy puppy he was now Stephen on automatic pilot, charming and pleasant but distant. I remember thinking during our lunch about how much I used to be irritated by his bouncy-puppy routine, but now I missed it. For dessert I ordered a milkshake, but unlike our lunch at the 101 Coffee Shop, this time he made no move to grab it. I was surprised at how much I missed his stealing my food.

We lingered after they took away our dishes and chatted about nothing in particular. As usual, he didn't ask us about our own doings but went right into his usual complaint about lack of money.

"But I just saw an episode of *Numb3rs* you directed a few weeks ago," I protested.

"Well," he said, shaking his head, "they might not be renewing it."

"Are you kidding? When they've got David Krumholz? He's sooo cute!" And hoping to make him laugh I started in on my squealy-girl fan routine, extolling the virtues of the young star of

the show and scrunching up my face in mock ecstasy. Michael giggled, but Stephen just sat there looking at me with a tight little smile.

In a few minutes we got up to leave, and here I want to relate my last strange story about Stephen:

When we arrived at the Rose Café, Michael stayed in the car with Stephen to help him find a parking space, while I went into the restaurant to find a table. Just inside the door I saw a large man also waiting who I immediately recognized as John Carroll Lynch, the actor who played Jake's father in that silly sweet movie *Bubble Boy*. I smiled and just as I was about to say hello and tell him I was one of his fans (he was also in the Coens' movie *Fargo*), in walked Stephen and Michael.

I don't know why, but I sort of assumed that Stephen would recognize any actor who had played Jake's dad in a movie—from Dennis Quaid to Chris Cooper to even my friend from chapter eight, Stephen Tobolowsky. I mean, I certainly made the connection. So I waited for Stephen to recognize Lynch, say hi, and maybe introduce us.

But Stephen just looked straight ahead and headed down the steps to the main dining area. I saw Lynch raise an eyebrow as we passed him.

For the rest of that lunch I was aware of Lynch sitting five or six tables away from us dining and chatting with his own group of friends, although Stephen continued to appear oblivious. However, when we got up to leave and as we were making our way around the tables, Stephen suddenly stopped in his tracks.

Michael and I were already up the steps and near the exit when Stephen called to us, "Just a minute, I seem to recall there's some sort of door or something over there..." And he looked across the room directly at Lynch.

Sensing that Stephen was staring at him, he looked up expectantly. For a moment their eyes were focused on each other.

Finally, as if coming out of a spell, Stephen heaved a sigh and

announced, “Nope, it’s not there.” Then he turned away and came up the steps to join us.

As we exited the restaurant together, Michael and I were once again left to wonder about Stephen’s state of mind.

## **CHAPTER SIXTEEN**

### **“Pain Now for Clarity Later”**

**N**ow that it’s all done, now that I’ve not in love with him anymore, I’ve spent the last three and a half years trying to pinpoint where it all went south between Stephen Gyllenhaal and me. More important, I’ve been trying to figure out where it all went south between Stephen and his muse.

Was he a good poet? Michael thought so from the first, and there are certain lines of Stephen’s that will stay in my memory for a long time:

*Oh, to be that kind of young again  
when every oyster spreads its legs for you  
and the nails you hit on two by fours  
sing out your praise and you can sell  
those god damned trees to a guy  
your brother knows and drink till three  
and roam the roads for other trees  
and slide back down deep into that warm salt sea...*

These are from his earliest poem entitled “Photosynthesis” in which he laments the loss of the vitality and careless power of his youth. Reading it again now, I’m struck by how this very loss soon came to be a persistent theme in his writing. Judging from his romp with the film students at Trinity, it’s pretty likely to be subconscious on his part. In fact, I’m wondering if it’s the one and only real theme in his life.

After that December afternoon I never saw Stephen again but I still kept track of him from a distance. In March 2009 the house on Mulholland Drive was sold to Max Weinberg, Bruce Springsteen's drummer, and in December 2009 Stephen's divorce became final. In July 2011, after having made Kathleen Man a co-producer of his film-in-progress, he married her, and in September 2011 they began a whirlwind tour of colleges to promote the movie based on *Zioncheck for President*, which they titled *Grassroots*.

Of *Grassroots*, which finally opened in June 2012, the kindest review from the film blog The MacGuffin had this to say: "Taken for what it is, the film is entertaining," but that "the film could probably use a larger female role ... this definitely feels like a 'guys' movie." *The Stranger*, the Seattle weekly that first broke the story of Stephen's movie plans in 2007, wasn't impressed: "It's not particularly well-shot, but it's home. The bad news is everything else," and went on to mention "an unremarkable Jason Biggs" and "the worst movie conclusion in recent memory, a nightmare of pacing and performance that hinges on the director's apparently fervent belief that a man in a polar bear suit is the funniest fucking thing in the world." But it was NPR, that bastion of liberal attitudes, which gave it the most negative but insightful review of all: "...It's clearly designed to champion the theory that anyone who challenges the political machine is automatically on the right track... Cogswell has no idea what he's talking about and has no concept of how to make civic dreams a reality. [The movie] roots for Cogswell to win without ever acknowledging the dangers of his incompetence... Passion, not practicality, is all that matters in *Grassroots*, and instead of bracing, the movie's posturing becomes tiresome... Gyllenhaal doesn't know what to do with his actors... [His] interests aren't particularly cinematic: That would be too bourgeois. *Grassroots* is a movie where bad ideas, because they're the ones championed by the 'correct' side, are king. It never acknowledges that sometimes idealism is just another kind of manipulation."

Phil Campbell, in turn, wrote a piece for The Huffington Post entitled, “Hollywood Guttled My Book, But That’s Okay.”

Well, the movie had been a long time coming. After optioning *Zioncheck* in February 2007 with a very public burst of enthusiasm for the low-budget indie spirit, Stephen then spent the next three years dragging along co-writing the screenplay (with one of his young ex-students from Sundance, incidentally). He didn’t begin the actual shooting until June 2010 (punctuating the production schedule with several “morale-boosting” parties paid for by his wealthy producers) and wrapped the shooting four months later, only to spend the next twelve months in post-production.

Evidently it was only through the intervention of the movie’s billionaire producer Michael Huffington—who brought *Grassroots* into the fold of his own production company and sold the rights to indie distributor Samuel Goldwyn—that the movie was released at all. When it plays on cable will the announcer intone “Directed by Jake and Maggie’s father”?

Stephen’s attitude toward *Grassroots* pretty much resembles the way the treated *Claptrap* when we published it in 2006. First there was his initial burst of enthusiasm and ego-boosting celebration, followed by a seemingly endless period in which he kept making minor then major arbitrary changes to the material, until finally someone had to step in and take control of the project (Huffington on *Grassroots*, Michael on *Claptrap*). There’s definitely a pattern here.

The *Grassroots* promotion, however, entered into an unexpected and entirely loony phase back in September 2011. As I said, last year Stephen and his new bride had begun a tour of colleges around the country ostensibly to create interest in his as-yet unreleased movie. They began to tout *Grassroots* not as a buddy movie or cautionary tale, but as a film that would inspire young people to run for political office. In fact, every campus screening of *Grassroots* included a post-viewing seminar (conducted by Stephen, of course) on how to act in front of a

camera while campaigning: the right way to pose, to speak into the microphone, what to wear, how to act sincere, et cetera.

Michael, who as a college student marched in Selma, Alabama with Martin Luther King Jr. and thousands of others to physically protect the beneficiaries of the new Voting Rights Act of 1965, shook his head in consternation when first hearing this news. Consternation then turned into contempt. “Do you mean to tell me he’s attempting to exploit the electoral system of our country—just to sell a lousy ‘buddy picture’?”

I agreed with him about our favorite filmmaker’s blatant attempt at exploitation, and when Michael calmed down we pondered together the psychological depths of Stephen’s motives. These kids, these students, I put to him (and to you, Dear Reader) are just a substitute for Zeke, the fictional twentyish politician son in *Liquid Motel*, who himself is a thinly-disguised version of Jake. Not his real son Jake the mere movie star, you understand, but his ideal son—a successful young politician with star quality.

Michael thought about it for a moment, then solemnly pronounced, “All right, that’s it. I’ve put up with his insanity over his poetry and his books. I’ve put up with the way he’s treated you. No more. This isn’t about creativity or imagination or art, this is about manipulating people.” He added simply, “I’m done with him.”

This was the second time he said it, but this time I agreed with him completely. I wasn’t too crazy about how he’d treated Michael either, although I’d been too ashamed to bring it up. We hardly talk about Stephen anymore, though when we do we try to recall, rather than his destructive tendencies, his fascinating bizarreness.

As long as we’re at it, there’s more flotsam from *Liquid Motel* floating out there. Stephen has another movie in post-production that he’s labeled a documentary and entitled *The Exquisite Continent*. If you watch the clips Stephen has posted online for this strange little film, it might dawn on you that it’s not a documentary

at all. Instead it's a series of rather dreary dream reenactments, played by professional actors, which are interspersed with the bizarre interpretations and pronouncements of a superannuated psychoanalyst named—you guessed it, Bernard Bail, the everything-starts-in-the-womb post-Freudian Stephen mentioned in chapter thirteen.

And—like the main character in *Liquid Motel*, the main character in *Exquisite Continent* is named Henry.

As for his unfinished book about modern-day Arthurian knights: After it was advertised in the trades that Frank Wuliger, the maverick agent at Gersh, was ever so briefly shopping around *Shining City* as a screenplay (with the log line “Written by Jake and Maggie Gyllenhaal’s father”) it just seemed to disappear into a black hole, like so many other of Stephen’s screenplays. So I’m afraid the disenfranchised citizens, the poor homeless bums of that promising story, are no longer a part of Stephen’s imaginary world.

In fact, what’s been taking up most of Stephen’s time lately—that is, when he’s not touring the art capitals of Europe, relaxing at his wealthy new in-laws’ spread in Hawaii, or directing TV commercials—is the internet. He’s treating the internet like a new toy on Christmas morning, regularly posting on Twitter (“Tax the Rich!!” with double exclamation points seems to be his favorite signoff there), as well as on Facebook and The Huffington Post, to his “friends” and “followers”—the foolish, the lost, the half-assed, the sycophantic, the downright unsavory—as if he were afraid to be alone with his own thoughts, as if he needed to be defined by the casual interest of strangers. But isn’t that the case with so many people nowadays?

I won’t call him an artist—in fact my final assessment of Stephen is that he would be a toxic addition to any artistic ecosphere. It makes it all the worse for him because he has no other arena. He’s a man without vision, a man who lacks bravery and genuine regard for the day-to-day struggles of ordinary people, who wants nothing more out of life than to be well thought of. And

if he believes that being on the internet is providing him with the approval he craves so much, where will those so-called friends and followers be in days to come? I was close to him when his blurts and disconnected ravings were amusing, even loveable; I was also there when they became troubling in their incomprehensibility. I don't think I'd like to be around when his mind goes completely, but I have to ask: Who *would* be there for him?

It's this lack of simple human connection that's going to get my beloved Stephen in the end, not age. There are a lot of people for whom age brings a richness to their lives—he's just not one of them. Take a look at his ex-wife for instance. I recently read in the tonier New York gossip columns that she's been seen around town dating not only a hotshot young director half her age, but an executive at Sony Pictures as well.

Good job, manang! I'm still a little pissed over that reference in your court papers to *Claptrap*, but let me take you to lunch anyway, anywhere you'd like. We can order the fish and you can tell me what it was like to work with Sidney Lumet.

As for the rest of Team Gyllenhaal, it didn't actually come to an end when it cut loose its weakest member. The kids are still close to their mother and all are doing very well. Jake's coming out this September with a buddy cop movie, Maggie just opened in a period sex comedy, and this summer Naomi is directing her first picture titled *Very Good Girls*, from her own screenplay, for a major new studio. Her screenplays may suck, but I do admire her ability to adapt and move on.

My friend Stephen Tobolowsky, who's a professional storyteller as well as actor, once shared this life lesson in a podcast in which he described his recent surgery and subsequent hospitalization for a triple bypass:

*The only thing we have left is the next moment. You can do whatever you want to do in the next moment. But there are only two things you can do that matter. You can tell someone*



*you love them, or you can try to undo a regret from the past, but that's it. In the end that's all that's going to matter anyway.*

I arrived at this lesson myself last year when I was diagnosed with congestive heart failure and spent twelve days in a South American hospital, drugged, hooked up to tubes, and bedridden in a ward filled with other women on whom harsh conditions and too much housework had also taken their tolls. When I got out I had a new appreciation for the quotidian and the human connection, and over the following weeks I emailed people in my life I hadn't contacted in years—old friends, relatives, some literary colleagues...and Stephen. Of the people I emailed, almost everyone answered with promises to get together or at least with some words of sympathy. You can probably guess who was the only one who didn't respond at all.

So, I suppose that afternoon back in December 2008 is the last time I'm probably ever going to have anything to do with the big lug. As I said, he was on automatic at our last meeting, just going through the motions, being charming but distant.

I do have a souvenir from that day though, a short video, the closest thing to that documentary I'd planned to make and call *A Poet from Hollywood*. I made it while Michael and I were waiting for Stephen to pick us up. He was late again, of course, so I decided to shoot a short pan of Tom's garden to fill the time. I pointed my camera at the gate and turned it on—and wouldn't you know it, there came Stephen strolling in as if on cue.

"Nice little world," you can hear him say in the video as he goes to Michael and gives him a big hug, and "No!" as he walks toward me with a lurch and I direct him to stay in frame, and "Turn it off!" with a nervous laugh as he puts his hand over the lens of my camera.

Goodbye, Stephen. Thanks for the ride on your rollercoaster.

