

2009

## Cease to Exit

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CEASE TO EXIT

By

Eric Edwin Joseph Benac

THESIS

Submitted to  
Northern Michigan University  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
For the degree of

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Graduate Studies Office

2009

SIGNATURE APPROVAL FORM

This thesis by Eric Benac is recommended for approval by the student's Thesis Committee and Department Head in the Department of English and by the Associate Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies.

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## ABSTRACT

### CEASE TO EXIT

By

Eric Edwin Joseph Benac

This thesis is an exploration of various writing ideas and themes that have bounced through my head ever since I began doing my graduate studies at Northern. There are three sections each of which employs a different writing style and a different character perspective. The three characters are united by a machine called the Large Hadron Collider which will attempt to re-create the Big Bang that theoretically created our universe. The Large Hadron Collider is an actual machine, and it will run later this year in 2009. The thesis is a reflective piece, as the dramatic events of the story have already taken place and are being written about in retrospect from the year 2017. Each character is telling their story from memory. One character is the leader of the project, a man named Joseph Collins. His is the first section, and it uses scenes he had attempted to integrate into a book he was writing. The second section involves his co-worker of his named Marian who has become his lover. Her section is written in the format of personal letters. The last section is an interview between my fictional editor, Frederick Durkin, and Gilly, Joseph's ex-wife.

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2009

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents Kenneth Benac Sr and Bonnie Benac, and to all people who have struggled to finish a major project.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to thank his thesis director Rebecca Johns for helping me craft this thesis into something worth writing. I also wish to thank Kia Richmond, my reader who is always supportive and never far with a kind word. I also wish to thank Ray Ventre for his last minute help in fine tuning my thesis. Thanks also go to Carly Pehrson who gave me valuable support when things seemed insurmountable. This thesis was written using the MLA style book.



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## Introduction

The Hadron Collider, one of the largest particle accelerators in history, was seventeen miles long and located in a tunnel more than five hundred feet underground in Southern California. It was built in collaboration with 10,000 scientists and engineers. It was designed to re-create the Big Bang that created our universe. It was hoped that by studying this miniature creation, we could more greatly understand the physics underlying our universe more. It was a hotly debated idea in the science community. Many were excited by the opportunity it would give them. Many were opposed and frightened by the collider. Many articles were written opposing every attempting to run the collider.

Those opposing the collider feared that it could be deadly. There existed in the use of the machine the possibility of the creation of objects called black holes and gray matter. Black holes are a spot in space where gravity has folded in on itself. Nothing can escape them—not even light. Theoretically, a black hole opening up in Los Angeles would suck up the earth and condense it into an area smaller than the head of a pin.

Gray matter is different than anything that exists in our known universe. There are moments when it blinks into our universe and then disappears. Scientists theorize this could happen thousands of times a day worldwide. It enters and leaves our universe more quickly than it is even possible to comprehend.

If gray matter were to stabilize and exist in our universe permanently, many scientists theorize that it could convert any matter it touches into gray matter. And this infected matter would then spread to all matter it touched. It could even spread throughout the entire universe. A single particle of it could, essentially, destroy our universe in a time span of less than ten years.

It's not known if gray matter would be caused by such a large scale project as the Hadron Collider, but as in any aspect of quantum physics, the unknown is impossible to predict. Even the known can be impossible to predict. It's very possible that gray matter could have sprung up from the Hadron Collider, and the possibility was frightening for many people.

But all these issues are merely speculative, because the Hadron Collider was never actually put into use. Its trial run was cancelled moments before it was to begin. No attempts to re-open it have been made, and any other attempts at a similar project have never moved forward.

Though the collider was hotly debated in the scientific community, very few people in the wider public knew or cared about its existence until a very human story caught the public's imagination. At the heart of this very human story were lead scientist for the collider, Joseph Collins, his wife, Gilly Hun, and his lover and colleague on the project, Marian Lopez.

Lead scientist Collins started an affair with a younger colleague whose job it was to simulate trajectories on her computer and see if there were any incidents of gray matter or black hole creation. On TK date, Collins and Lopez finally thought they had their trajectory. The possibility of gray matter and black holes was eliminated with only a few months before the trial run. However, a week before the run, one of Lopez's simulations again came back with gray matter. When she told Collins he decided to go ahead with the run anyway. His attempt to blackmail Lopez into silence failed. She revealed everything to the public moments before the run was to commence.

Afterwards, the collider became a celebrity itself, with websites devoted to it, songs written about it, and even two movies released about it. The Collins' divorce proceedings were broadcast to millions, who were captivated by the bitterness. Joseph's later trial for attempted

blackmail and negligence was broadcast to an enraptured audience. The Hadron Collider had become as famous as the moon landing, but for much different reasons. While the moon landing was a triumph of human will and science, the Collider was a colossal failure. Human stupidity and the lack of scientific ethics killed it and made it famous at the same time.

Many books have been written about the incident, both by those who participated in it and those who did not. This book presents, for the first time, the experiences and words of the three main participants on that infamous day. I have found and collected a series of writings by Collins for a book he had been planning before he disappeared. This is the first time they have seen publication anywhere.

This book also includes letters Lopez wrote to Collins and her mother during the affair. Although Lopez published her own book about the incident it was in retrospect, and it was highly criticized for the way she downplayed her role at the Hadron Collider. Now, we have documents that show what one of the participants was thinking at the time the Hadron Collider Affair was occurring. It is a rare and illuminating chance to step into the mind of Marian Lopez.

The last section is an interview I conducted with Gilly Hun in 2017. Her role in the Hadron Collider affair was the most heartbreaking, and it's easy to see she hasn't fully recovered even ten years after it occurred. The normally reserved and secretive Hun opens up and reveals more of her emotion and feelings about that time than she ever has before.

After reading the three sections of the book, the reader can, I hope, achieve something I believe few people have: a complete and complex understanding of the people behind the incident.

Frederick William Durkin

June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2018

## Part One: Joseph

*The following is a collection of brief passages written by Joseph Collins for Cease to Exist. They were found in his apartment a few days after his disappearance. I have left them in the order in which he arranged them. It's hard to tell what he was doing because there's so little of the manuscript left. This is all that he had written.*

*Collins disappeared before this book could be finished or published. It is uncertain where he went, and nobody has seen him for five years. He was allegedly seen in an airport two days before he was officially declared missing. The list of possible flights and schedules didn't turn up a Joseph Collins on any plane, but the flights that day were to Mexico, Brazil, Germany, Florida, and Russia. A tantalizing list of possibilities.*

*This is the first time these notes are available to the public. Spelling and grammar errors have been fixed – ed.*

I'm at the restaurant first. It's a Japanese steak house. They make the food on the grill right in front of you. While they cook, they make jokes, juggle the food, toss eggs into their hats. The place is huge, with about ten grills, each of which is surrounded by tables on three sides. Each table has room for about four people. I've eaten here before, with Gilly. It takes about an hour to feed everybody at a grill. If you figure that out, that's twelve people per table. And that's ten grills times twelve people. That's one hundred and twenty people, if the place is full. Each dish costs anywhere from ten to twenty dollars. That's an average of \$1,800 an hour. No wonder they can afford the full size bar to the right of the door. Twenty bar stools there. There's an arcade off to the left. It looks to have about fifteen to twenty machines in it. The decorations in here are the kind of cliché things you see in any kind of Asian restaurant. Gold gongs hanging from the

ceiling, paintings of samurais, hanging red and brown rugs. The place isn't lit as bright as McDonald's, but it's not as dim as a bar. The whole place is just comfy as hell.

I called three hours ahead of time and had to haggle for twenty minutes to get all twenty of us in here. The logistics of a party of twenty was a nightmare. They wanted to stick some of us over on another table, but I eventually argued them into grabbing a few chairs to stick on the end of each table. It will be a bit crowded, but I want everybody to be able to talk and enjoy themselves. This dinner is a celebration, but it's also a morale booster. Got to keep everybody happy and working towards our almost impossible-to-imagine goal. We've been at this too long, and it is so easy to get depressed and bored, but we can't afford to let that happen. I can't afford to let that happen.

I sit down on the seat by the door. The wind is blowing outside, but at least it's not snowing tonight. There's a couch next to me and a few folding chairs. There's a big clock on the wall across from me. 4:57. People should be getting here soon. They'd better start showing up. I didn't dress up to eat by myself. Look at these shoes; they cost me one hundred and fifty dollars. I still have the receipt. These khaki pants aren't bad either; surprisingly, Gilly ironed them for me before I left. This shirt doesn't fit that well, though. It's kind of bunched up on my shoulders and a bit tight on my arms. It's a sweater, a brown one, and fairly ugly. Mom got it for me last Christmas, and this is the first time I've ever wore it.

Somebody is standing outside the door. It's that new girl, the young one, the one we hired about a year ago. It's funny to call someone I've worked with for a year "new." She's in charge of simulating the atom smashing. I really only see her once or twice a week, after they run a simulation. She's fidgeting in her high heels and finishing a cigarette. She's a bit hefty perhaps, but that dress looks nice on her and clings to her curves. Glasses help accentuate her pretty face.

Her hair is pulled back into a pony tail. Red scarf. White gloves. Winter jacket. I think she's Mexican. Finishing up her cigarette, she comes in the restaurant. Her heels hit the door frame and she stumbles a bit. I reach out to help steady her. I grab her arm and hand. Her skin is smooth. She smiles at me. The cold rushes in behind her, and I shut the door. The scent of cigarettes and perfume is strong. She smells just like Gilly.

"Hi," she says, "am I the first person here?" She takes off her gloves and puts them in her purse, and then takes off her coat and scarf and hangs them up.

"You sure are. I was a bit early to get everything figured out." I put my hand out to shake. "Thanks for being early...uh..." I can't believe it, but I've forgotten her name. Having her boss forget her name ought to keep her morale high.

"Marian. Marian Lopez." She shakes my hand and grins but she only lifts the right side of her mouth.

"I'm so sorry. I do remember what you do with us."

"Oh?" She leans away from me and arches her eyebrows.

"You're in charge of the simulations."

She smiles for real this time. "I thought you were going to say I was the coffee girl."

I laugh. "No, see, I remember her name."

"I'm rather offended. Is she more important to our work than I am?" She isn't smiling. I can't tell if she's being funny or if she's serious.

"Oh, of course not," I stammer. "I just...I'm just used to saying 'Hey, Karen, this coffee is awful. Make a new batch.'" I wink, without knowing why.

She frowns. Another person comes in and lets in a fresh batch of cold air. The cold hits hard. "That's not very nice."

“I’m really only kidding. You understand, right?”

She rubs her hands on her arms to keep warm. “I’m sure she works hard on that coffee, Doctor Collins.”

“She does. And please, none of that ‘Doctor Collins’ stuff tonight. Just call me Joseph. I hear enough ‘Doctor Collins’ at work to drive me nuts.”

“You don’t like being called doctor?”

“Well, not all the time.”

She doesn’t respond, but instead picks up her purse and gets out a stick of lipstick. She puts it on and puts her purse back down. “I love being called doctor,” she finally says.

“Well, would you like me to call you Doctor Lopez?”

“Call me Marian.” She smiles.

“Well, that sounds good to me. How about you call me Joseph tonight and then call me ‘Doctor Collins’ tomorrow? Deal?” I extend my hand.

She takes it into hers and shakes it up and down, hard. “Sure,” she says.

She sits on the couch and leans back. She looks around the restaurant. Her shirt bulges in the center, like two mountain peaks. I watch her, but she keeps looking through the restaurant. The silence grows longer until it’s officially awkward. She whistles by inhaling through her teeth, and then she stretches her arms up through the air. She turns to the restaurant again, and her ponytail sails through the air as she moves her head. Suddenly I imagine grabbing it and pulling it. A flash of naked skin, we’re inches apart, I’m behind her, pulling her ponytail while she hollers and we move in unison. I shake my head to clear it of the vision, but it lingers.

Finally, she picks up her purse. “Let’s go sit down.”

“That sounds good.” I stand up.



She picks up her purse, opens it, and pulls out cigarettes. “I’ll be back.” She leaves.

I walk up to the maître’d and he takes me to our table. Little “reserved” signs are in front of every seat. He clears them while I take a seat in front of the grill. After all, I want the best seat in the house. What they do with the food is so interesting. It’s even more interesting that I find it interesting. Such simple toying with gravity shouldn’t impress me. I was one of the youngest quantum physicists to receive his doctorate. I’m working on one of the most important scientific projects this century, the re-creation of the Big Bang that created our universe. I’ve computed untold numbers of algorithms that would make the chef drop his eggs and flee the restaurant if I tried to explain it to him. I’ve made deals with businesses, governments, and private citizens for money-making purposes, and have helped keep the funding of this project going on a day-to-day basis for the last ten years. And yet, when a guy throws an egg into the air and then spins it with his spatula into his hat, I clap. When he throws a little bit of rice into some customer’s mouth, I don’t sit down and compute the arch of his throw or the effect inertia had on the rice as it flew through the air. I just hope I’ll get to be the next customer to get some rice thrown in my mouth.

Suddenly the scent of cigarettes and perfume engulfs me. Gilly, young Gilly, wore that perfume. I’d recognize that scent anywhere when we were first dating. It used to surround me when we made love those first couple of weeks. She’s never really known how to under-utilize perfume. She just splashes it on, almost like a man and his aftershave. The whole apartment would reek of it for days after she left. The cigarette stench was always there too. The scent combination gets to me; it just smells like pure, undiluted, raw sex. In those early days, Gilly was that kind of sex. I couldn’t keep my hands off her. Now, she doesn’t use that same perfume anymore. I don’t even know if she uses perfume. If she does, I’ve never noticed.

Marian puts her hand on my shoulder and squeezes. It's a friendly gesture, nothing more. She sits next to me amid that smell. My God! I wonder if it's just the scent of the cigarettes and perfume that gets me, or if it's the pheromones of the kind of woman who gives off that kind of smell. It hardly matters. I wonder what the odds are that she likes my smell. I'm not a statistician, but I'd bet the odds are high. I think people like pheromones that are similar to their own. Or is that the opposite? I should have paid more attention in biology. Or anatomy. She's looking at the menu and seemingly ignoring me.

Commotion by the entrance. It's the rest of my colleagues showing up. Apparently they car pooled and followed each other over here. They all sit down and we begin ordering. The chef does his little song and dance. Everybody claps and cheers. The food is fabulous. We chat, drink, and debate. Things are very lighthearted. Mark, the fat guy who does a lot of the raw computing in figuring out the trajectory of the particles, is balancing his plate on his head. His wife or girlfriend is laughing at him. She's cute, brown hair, slim figure, and nice tits. I don't recognize her. Nobody else brought their spouse.

It's been about two hours, and we move up to the bar. Marian sits next to me. Slowly but surely, people start filing out. Another hour passes, and it's just Marian and me. I'm getting drunk. She is definitely drunk. She's funny and smart. We start talking about our old doctoral study days. I tell her about my Schrodinger's Cat experiment.

"It's amazing," she says, clutching my arm. "You did something groundbreaking even before you graduated." She finishes her drink and orders another. I move my stool closer.

"It was something, I'll admit. It was pretty bold to actually go through the experiment in that way. To actually put a real cat in the box, to pull the trigger, and open the box. I'd never do anything like that again. I'll tell you, though, my professors were astonished when there were

two cats in that box: a living one, and a dead one.” I grab her hand. For a moment I’m shocked that I’ve been so bold. Her hand is warm and smooth, like it was earlier when I grabbed it to keep her on her feet. That was a helpful and not intimate hand grab. This one was intimate. A second passes while I wait for her to push my hand away.

She doesn’t. She squeezes it tight, and begins rubbing my fingers. I rub hers as well. Her finger nails are long and sharp. “You only put one cat in though, right?”

“Well, of course. It wasn’t like a magical trick. It was an honest-to-God, once-in-a-fucking-lifetime scientific miracle, you know. It’s never been explained, but even the fact that I did it was enough. I got my doctorate early, and that’s how I got here.”

“That’s so amazing. You’re a genius.” She means it. And in that moment I feel like I am. I feel like I’m the king of the world and capable of anything. I look into her eyes as she smiles and I can feel the rush of female appreciation that I have missed for so long. It feels close to love.

“No, no, I’m not a genius. No more than anybody else who works with us, you know. We’re all geniuses in our way. Your simulations are great.”

“They’re easy. I’d like to do what Mark does.”

“That guy is a genius, now, I’ll tell you. He does half that stuff in his head.”

“So can I.” She smiles wide. She lets go of my hand and picks up her purse. She opens it and pulls out her cigarettes. “I hate that you can’t smoke in here. Let’s leave,” she says. “I’m bored here, but you’re fun.” We stand up. She puts her cigarette in her mouth. Then she hooks her arm in mine. I pull her close with my arm and begin walking towards the door.

“That sounds good, Doctor Lopez,” I say. “Where would you like to go from here?”

We leave the restaurant and she stops for a moment to light her cigarette. “We can hit up other bars.”

“That’s always fun.”

“Or we could go eat more,” she says.

“Well, I couldn’t eat another bite. That place gives you way too much great and filling food.”

“Or,” she says, “we could go watch a movie.” She squeezes my hand.

“Sounds good. Any theater around here?”

“No. You live around here?”

I almost stop breathing. “No, not really.”

She squeezes my hand. “Your wife wouldn’t like you coming home with a woman?”

“Well, no. No she wouldn’t.”

“I live close.”

“That might be our best option,” I say. “You got booze there?”

“Plenty.”

“Well, it’ll be cheaper to drink your booze. And if we get hungry, we can eat your food. It saves us quite a bit of money, this way, you know.”

“I’m not really hungry or thirsty. I want to lie down. With you.” Her hand slips round to my ass and gives it a quick squeeze. I grab her nice thick Mexican ass hard and squeeze it. She loses her balance and stumbles a little and then falls into me. I can’t stop us. We both hit the pavement, hard. She lands on me and I feel my hip almost give. Her head lands right in front of mine, and I grab it and start kissing her. We try to stand while kissing but fall again. I let her go and stand up. I watch her struggle to stand. She makes it up with a queasy look on her face. She turns away from me and vomits. I go behind her and pull her hair out of her face. I turn away while she pukes.

She finishes. "I'm sorry," she says. We walk down the street to a gas station and she buys water. She uses it to wash her mouth out in the parking lot. I'm leaning against the building watching her. Somehow, it hasn't killed the mood for me. It's only made it stronger.

She comes up to me. "I'm sorry," she says again.

I grab her and pull her close. I kiss her.

She pulls me close again. "I don't taste like puke?"

"Just a little." I smile.

She laughs. "Okay well, I'm sober enough to drive now." We walk back to the bar where her car is parked. I follow her to her apartment. We get to her apartment, and when we get inside its only seconds before I cheat on my wife.

\*\*\*

I drive the car down the street with the flowers on the passenger seat. I'm going to be late getting home. And for once, it's work-related. The flowers were ostensibly for Marian, but I might have to give them to Gilly tonight. The smell of the roses make me sick. The smell combines with my car exhaust (a small amount gets in here, so I leave the windows open a crack, always, even in the winter) and what smells like a fish rotting in my car.

I'm driving fast, too fast, and the street lights pass by me like UFOs heading to a convention out of town. The car shudders; is it going to break down on me right now, while I'm on a mad rush home? No; it's just a persistent issue with the shifter. It bobs up and down while I drive, trying to shift into a new gear, struggling, not quite making it. My vision blurs. The clock on the radio is a blur of green, and I can't make out the time. Finally, the gears snap into place, and I'm driving smooth. My house is on the left. It looks like all the rest on this street, hell, in a five-mile radius: medium-sized, one story, square, garage on the right, house on the left, twenty-

foot driveway, black mailbox on the left side, red shingles, door in the middle between garage and home, brown brick. It's not so much of a house as it is an atom, one of millions. Sure, on some level, atoms differ from each other, just like these houses. Some atoms have more protons, some have more electrons. Some of these houses have slightly wider garages; some of them are a little taller. Some atoms spin faster, or combine with different atoms. The houses here have different things inside, different belongings. The same basic idea applied but with endless variations. In my head, the houses interact, float in a void, and spin hundreds of miles apart. The average distance between atoms is so great that they never interact, except electrically. What a perfect model for a suburb!

I pull into the driveway and there she is on the porch smoking a cigarette. She waves. I think she's smiling, but it's dark and the porch light is out. The only light is from the street lamps and the cherry of her cigarette. I don't want to get out of the car. The porch seems far away, too far to walk. I grab the flowers and the groceries she asked me to pick up (ground beef, grated cheese, taco shells, tomatoes, lettuce, sour cream, a copy of *Rolling Stone*, a fifth of vodka, and a carton of cigarettes) and get out. As I get closer to the house, I can make her face out. She is smiling. She blows smoke off to the right to avoid blowing it in my face.

"Get it all?" she says, throwing her cigarette onto the ground, stomping it out, and then grabbing for the paper bag. Somehow, she hasn't seen the flowers yet. She puts the bag on the ground and feels through it. "Hmm...there's the beef...the cheese...the shells...my cigarettes, good...the vodka, excellent...there's my magazine...wow, they really packed this bag full!" she says. She stands up and puts her hands on her hips.

She stretches her back and shouts, "Fuck, that felt great!" She picks up the bag. She still hasn't seen the flowers. I marvel at how small she is compared to Marian. Tiny, really. Only five

feet tall, and she can't weigh any more than ninety pounds. No curves. So different. You could probably fit one and a half of Gilly into Marian. No, maybe two. I don't think Marian is two hundred pounds, but she's close. Tall, full. Thick. Curvy. Her hips form a complimentary sine wave to my own. Marian is still on my mind from earlier, from work. She snuck me off downstairs to the basement where nobody ever goes. She pulled me close and kissed me for a long time. I ran my hands up and down her legs, her back, and her ass. On Marian, there's so much to hold, so much to love, not like Gilly at all. Gilly has the boney embrace of a skeleton. With Marian there's no overbite knocking into my teeth. Most importantly, there's no stares, no guilt, no underlying feeling of anger or resentment. There are just two bodies together, in passion and even in love. I shake my head to get myself out of the clouds and walk into the house.

She's already in the kitchen pulling things out of the bag. She's making tacos tonight for me, my favorite. We're celebrating the successful elimination of gray matter from the test run. Gray matter is a strange substance. It exists in our universe only for brief, sporadic periods of time, and never stabilizes. Technically, its qualities are unknown. But there are theories. One theory states that, were it to stabilize in our dimension, the gray matter would convert all other matter in our universe to gray matter. This conversion would happen exponentially and completely universal conversion would only take years. Considering that we're talking the length and breadth of the known universe that's faster than the speed of light. Our main goal in the preliminary planning stages was to make sure that the simulations showed no gray matter. Not even a "pop and back" where the gray matter doesn't stabilize. It had to be gray-matter-free. And this night was the first time that there was no occurrence of gray matter. It seemed like our trajectory was ready and set. The hardest part was getting the trajectory down. It seems like it shouldn't be hard, but we're talking increments that are almost impossible for the layman to

imagine. The size is less than the width of an electron or even a quark. Hell, even getting the two atoms to hit each other was hard. Their small size makes them hard to manipulate. Essentially, we were playing God on an atomic scale.

I sat down in the living room and turned on the T.V. A drone of CNN comes on. The light from the set lights the whole room. The kitchen is just down the hall, so close I can hear Gilly humming to herself. The smell of the meat is so strong, I actually feel myself salivating. She's making tacos, my favorite meal. She's a vegetarian and rarely if ever cooks meat. In fact, I think this is the first time she's cooked me meat in about five years. It smells fucking delicious.

After about ten minutes in front of the television I hear Gilly shout: "Come and get it!" It's obvious she's happy. Great; she thinks things are going to get better between us. That's almost painfully depressing. I walk into the kitchen and she has a big grin on her face. The table is set up with candles and the vodka sits between them. Two empty glasses sit across from each of us, and a bottle of orange juice is nearby. She has a salad and a few vegetarian tacos. There's guacamole, salsa, cream cheese, tomatoes, and onions. These vegetarian tacos don't look appealing to me. I've never eaten one.

She throws her arms apart and walks towards me. I try to smile and open my arms for her, and we embrace. She pulls me tight and rubs my back. I'm much taller than she is and my head rests on top of hers. She can't see my face, which is for the best. She pushes me back and looks at me straight in the eye. Her eyebrows curve down and she tilts her head, slightly, almost like a dog.

"What's up?" she says.

"I'm fine. Why?"

She steps back and sighs. "Nothing."



I sit down and pour myself a screwdriver. She sits down and does the same. I start eating my first taco. She's watching me.

"What?" I say, through a mouth of taco, most of which falls back onto the plate.

"Nothing. Congratulations. Hard work is paying off right now."

"Yeah." I use my fork to pick up the fallen taco. I'm looking down and trying to avoid the stare that I know is there.

She sighs. "I mean that."

"Well, yeah, I'm sure you do."

"The fuck does that mean?"

"Well, it doesn't mean anything, Gilly. Everything doesn't have to mean something." I shove more taco into my mouth. It still tastes good, and it gives me a second to think. We're on the verge of a fight, and it might be possible to avoid it. I'd rather avoid it because it's the same old fight we always have every night. But it might be impossible.

"Damn you, what does that mean?"

It's begun.

"You know what it means. Everything has to mean something with you."

"Everything you say is meaningless?"

"You're twisting logic here. Of course it means something when I say something. All words mean something, and language combines them to make coherent sentences. In this way, we humans can communicate."

"Don't fucking patronize me." She stands up and grabs her cigarettes.

"Don't smoke in the house."

"Fuck you."

She lights her cigarette. I finish my tacos and get up to make some more. “I hope those taste good,” she says.

“They are. My victory is your loss, you know.”

“What’s that mean?”

“Well, isn’t it obvious? I win and you lose. I succeed and you fail. My project, the one you’ve spent the last two years fighting against, is successful. I win, you lose. End of the story.”

It was only two years ago when Gilly read about gray matter. I had come home from work and she was reading from a science journal of mine. I forget the name, but the cover story was the Large Hadron Collider and the potential for gray matter.

“Joseph,” she had said at the time, “what’s gray matter?”

I turn to look up at her. “Where did you hear about gray matter?”

“I was reading this journal. It says it could fucking destroy the universe, and that your collider has the potential to create it. Why are you working on this if it could blow us all to hell?”

“It only has the potential, Gilly. The potential is so small that it’s almost impossible to predict. And all the work we do on the project is to make sure that it doesn’t happen, you know.”

She closed the book and frowned. “Don’t fuck around with me about this. You can stop that from happening, right?”

“Yes, I can,” I said and kissed her forehead. I thought her doubting and our fights were over that night. But it was just beginning.

A few months later she read another article and the subject came up again. I was watching TV after work when she came into the living room with the journal. “Joseph, this says the chance of gray matter is almost ten percent. Why didn’t you tell me that?”

“Honey, that article was written by some guy who hates me. It’s not true.” I changed the channel.

“He’s a scientist. He knows what he’s talking about.”

“What, and I don’t? Don’t listen to him, he’s been against the collider from the start. He’s inflating data, I think.”

“But…”

“I told you not to worry. Everything’s okay, do you understand?”

She left the room. About two weeks after that she came up to me in the living room with another journal article about the collider.

“Joseph, your machine makes goddamn black holes!”

“There is a small possibility, yeah. Why are you reading these journals all of a sudden?”

“I was curious. Now I’m scared.”

I stood up. “Don’t be scared! Don’t you trust me?”

She lit a cigarette. “I looked online. A lot of people are saying this stuff.”

“Yeah, well a lot of people thought the world was flat three hundred years ago.” I sat down.

“Don’t yell at me.”

“Well then just trust me, okay? Don’t trust some guys you never even met. I’m your husband, don’t forget that.” She left the room. It went on and on like that and each fight got worse.

Now here we were, again, in the kitchen fighting about the same thing.

She sits down hard on her chair and sighs. “You think I’m just a bitch.”

“Well, why else were you against it?” I’m still trying to make tacos and the fact that I’m actually spooning meat into shells while fighting almost makes me laugh.

“Because it’s fucking scary. It has nothing to do with you. Why do you have to make it?”

“Why did you have to make my project about yourself? About us? I didn’t start it.” She rolls her eyes and finishes her cigarette. She grabs another and lights it. I take a bite of my taco. She blows smoke right at me.

“I don’t want to fight. I cooked meat for you. I’m happy for you and I’m happy that the collider works. I don’t want it to blow up. I just wanted to celebrate. And you give me an attitude. It’s not right.”

“After everything that’s happened in the last two years, you thought you could just make me some tacos and everything would be okay?” I walk out into the hallway by the front door. I grab my coat and put it on. She follows me. “I’m going to stay at a hotel.”

She’s leaning against the wall, with her arms crossed over her waist. She has tears in her eyes. I almost reach out to touch her. “Don’t.”

“I have to go. I think things will only get worse between us right now if I stay. We need to calm down a bit, you know.” I’ve done this before when we were fighting. But tonight I’m not headed for a hotel.

“Fine.” She turns around and leaves. I hear her lighting another cigarette.

I turn around and walk out the door. I get in the car, start it up, and leave. I pick up the phone. “Marian, I’m coming over tonight. Gilly and I had a fight and I need a place to stay. I got a surprise for you too.”

“When will you be over?”

“Well, I’d say about half an hour.”

“See you then.” I hang up the phone with a smile. It’s going to be a good night after all. But then I remember that I left the flowers in the house. Fuck. Now I’ve got to go get more!

\* \* \*

*This is the last scene Collins wrote – ed.*

I wake up with a headache pounding heavy on my temples. Throbbing. It is seven in the morning and the first real run of the collider is at nine. The sun was shining through the window and over the bed. The sun only made my headache worse. I throw the red blanket off, and it shines briefly in the sunlight as I roll to the end of the bed and sit up. I bend at the waist and cough. I am at home, but Gilly is already out of bed. It is the first time in our whole marriage she is out of bed before me. She doesn’t have to go to her health store until ten, and she usually gets up at nine for a quick shower, granola bar, and then bikes to the store.

I stumble into the bathroom. The mirror is steamed, and towels lay on the floor. It smells like her perfume, the kind she started to wear after we got married. I don’t like it. She thinks it makes her smell more high-class. I miss her old perfume; it was exciting and trashy. I grab a towel and wipe the mirror off. I look like a stroke victim. I get ready for the day.

Downstairs, the scent of toast is in the air. She must have taken more time to cook today. Normally a granola bar is all she eats. But toast? Now that’s a feast. The kitchen hasn’t been cleaned in a few days. What the hell has she been doing? I haven’t seen her in a few days. It’s almost like she’s the one having an affair. Knowing her, there’s more than one man. She’s probably been cheating on me this whole time.

I open the fridge. Some leftover hamburger. I put a patty in the microwave, set the time, and push the button. It doesn’t start. I push the button in hard and hold it. Finally, it kicks into action. About thirty seconds later it stops and an “error” message pops up on the display. I have

to unplug it, wait a few minutes, and try again. We've had this microwave about ten years; never been able to afford a new one, or when we could, just never bothered. I don't understand why she's trying to stop me from finishing my work; if I finish it, we can get a new microwave. A new house. What am I saying? A new house? A new microwave? With her? Not likely.

Finally, it's done. I get a bun out and pile on the works: onions, relish, pickles, ketchup, mustard, lettuce, and cheese. Three bites later, it's gone. I've been eating like crap lately. I look down at my gut; it's pushing through my shirt farther every year. Gilly still looks more or less the same as when we got married: a few wrinkles around the eyes, but nothing to be ashamed of, and I'm getting a gut. I still got Marian. I still picked up a new woman. That's something, isn't it?

I throw my dishes in the sink and put on my shoes. I look around the house thinking it might be the last time I ever see it. I have to leave Gilly after this first test. We have to get this first run to go. We need the money. A good run will pave the way for more runs and give us more time to fine tune everything. I have to do this, even if it's against the wishes of Marian, the woman I love.

I get there, and the media is crazy. I didn't expect this. I guess the controversy about the gray matter got them more interested in this experiment than I anticipated. I pull around the back, ducking down a little so they won't see me. I go in the back door, which is where I usually park in the first place. There's a guarded gate there. Nobody who doesn't have a pass card can get it. Not even reporters. They go in the front into our meeting room. We've turned into a press room for today. We'll meet with them there, discuss what we're going to do, and then lead them through to the collider. Taking people backstage like this is normally off limits here. It's a rarity

in the science community and might explain the media attention. That's good, though; I'm desperate for some good media.

Once everyone's in the press room, I'll give a little speech. Nothing fancy, short and to the point. Then I'll punch in the coordinates, get everything lined up, start the machine, and see what happens. Hopefully, everything runs smoothly, and we get that big bang we've wanted. However, the molecules might not behave the way we need them. They might not do anything we want. There's a good chance none of this will amount to anything. I can't even think about that possibility without making my headache worse. So I don't.

When I open the door, there's a small coat room and another door leading into the rest of the building. I hang my coat up. I open the other door and there's the picture hallway. All our pictures are on the wall. Mine's in the front: Joseph Collins, head scientist. Way down the line from me is Marian. She looks good. I do too, in that picture. It's nearly ten years old at this point. Slim in the face, slender in the right places. I looked good then. Well, now I am puffy, fat, and old. And I'm only in my forties.

When I get into the main floor of the collider, it's complete chaos. People are running everywhere. Some are shouting. People are frantically punching in numbers. Some notice I've arrived and turn their head towards me with imploring stares. I smile to put them at ease. It almost works. They move frantically, like planets falling out of orbit and I almost laugh, but I don't. I know the feeling; I feel that impulse to run around screaming, pushing buttons and praying to God. I just suppress it, keep a smile on my face, and keep talking to them patiently, fatherly, and perhaps even courageously.

Mark comes up to me with graphs. "Joseph, what about this potentiality? It's small but..."

“We’ve been over this,” I say, interrupting him. “If we waited for every single instance to be perfect, we’d be working on this thing in the year 10,000. Be a quantum physicist, man. You know so much of this is beyond our control. We just have to suck it in and go for it, you know.” How inspiring!

He smiles at me. “I know. I’m just excited and scared.”

“Well, we all are, but we can’t let that get control of our mind. Focus on your task, do what you’re supposed to, and we’ll get this thing going.”

“Right.” He doesn’t shout back how I wanted but I’m not going to press that. Not today. I’m not in the mood to shout either, and I won’t force them to be as overly enthusiastic as I’ve always wanted them to be in the past. We’ve got to be precise, and we’ve got to get everything right. If we screw up the little things, we screw up the big things.

I make it to my office and settle down in my chair. The place is a mess: papers all over the floor; mail in the Inbox and Outbox that I haven’t gotten to, piled two feet high; old computers that couldn’t keep up with our experiments anymore; a few awards, including “Most Exciting New Scientific Idea” from “Popular Science”; my doctorate, still in the original frame. It’s dusty, though. I haven’t really looked at it or paid much attention to it in the last ten years. I’ve always just taken for granted that I had it, that I had earned it, and that I had every right to be where I was. It’s amazing how dusty it is, like an old bike that’s been sitting in the back yard, rusting and decaying with disuse. You never forget how to ride a bicycle.

It’s nine-thirty. Everybody should be gathering in the news conference room. Make them sweat it out a little. It won’t hurt them to wait. I’ve waited ten years for this. There’s an old ash tray on my table, a gag gift from Gilly. It’s a smokeless ash tray, the kind that’s supposed to suck up all the smoke from your cigarette while it sits there. She thought that was about the funniest



thing she ever saw. Right now, for the first time in my life, I want a cigarette. Or maybe even a fifth of vodka.

I haven't seen Marian yet. I'm not surprised. We haven't talked in a few days, and she's probably still upset about the fact that I'm still going through with the test. That's fine. She can deal with that after the test is done. Then she'll see how silly it was to worry. How silly it was to doubt me. I had everything under control. Then she'll run into my arms, and then I'll leave Gilly and move in with Marian. I don't even care if I have to pay her alimony or give her the house. That doesn't matter to me. I won't fight it if it comes to that. The house and almost everything else were paid for with my money. But I don't care. I'll live in a two-person apartment with Marian for the rest of my life if I have to just as long as this test is successful. Hell, I'll live on the streets with her, in a shopping cart, if the test goes right. I'll live waist high in a disgusting polluted pond, hand in hand with her, knee-high in mud and frogs. I have to get this run done, and I have to be with Marian. It's as easy and as straightforward as that.

It's nine-forty-five. Maybe I should start heading over to the conference room. I leave the office, and sure enough, only a handful of people are still in the main area. They're racing around, frantically trying to get everything ready. Finally, I make it to the conference room. Dozens of reporters are there, and all the scientists are lined up. The podium waits for me, and I walk up to it and smile. Flash bulbs go off and in this small room they're almost blinding. I look down the line of scientists. Marian is at the end. She gives me a grim, determined smile. Things are going well. This is going to work.

## Part Two: Marian

*The following is a series of letters sent by Marian Lopez during her affair with Collins. They are split almost evenly between letters to Collins and letters to Lopez's mother. She has supplied all of these letters, and they have been arranged chronological order. She stated that "...these letters show what really happened." Lopez, in her early fifties, has become something of a minor celebrity since the Hadron Collider affair. In some circles she is highly criticized for her seemingly opportunist actions, while certain feminist groups find her to be an advocate for women's rights.*

6-5-09

Dear Joseph,

I've never been with a married man. I've been with men, yes. Some. But they were always single. It was fun, more fun than I've had in a long time. You were great to wake up to you the next morning. I woke up at about five in the morning with a headache. I watched you sleep. You had most of the blankets. I had a sheet. It was warm, though. Only your head stuck out of the blankets. I watched you for awhile. You looked like a little kid. You stirred and I closed my eyes quick. I felt you sit up in bed. I knew you were looking at me. I'm surprised when you lay back down. Even more surprised when you move closer to me and wrapped your arms around me. It's been a long time since I've fallen asleep in somebody's arms. It's a great feeling. It was the kind of feeling that could make a woman fall in love.

I can't fall in love with you. We can't continue this.

You understand that it is nothing personal, right? It's not that I don't like you. I do. You're a funny guy and you seem sweet. I respect you and your work greatly. I'm just not sure that I can deal with this kind of thing. It's a moral and ethical issue. You're my boss and you're married. Conflict of interest. I'd like to talk to you about it in person sometime. I think it's vital that we get this done and over with as quickly as possible. I don't want it to become a problem at work, nor do I want it to become a problem with your home life.

Marian

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*The following four letters were given to Joseph in about a monthlong period. They detail the rise and fall of the first stage of their affair – ed.*

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6-9-09

Joseph,

Thank you for the letter. I'm glad you want to talk. I was afraid you'd be mad. It isn't easy to break off a relationship. But we have to. You said you wanted to meet this weekend. That sounds good. How about Saturday? We can get a coffee? There's this place to die for by my place. It's called Tony's Coffee. Great coffee and bagels. I should be available after six. The address is 1250 West Fifth Street. Mapquest it. It's on there. I'll just meet you there around then.

Marian

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6-15-09

Joseph,

Okay if we're going to do this there has to be some rules. Rule 1: call me before you come. You can't just stop by unannounced. I don't like that. Not from anybody. I value my alone time.

When you stopped by yesterday it really bothered me. Here I was trying to watch, China Syndrome, where the nuclear power plant isn't safe, and the reporter tries to let the world know. It's my favorite movie. I try to watch it once a month.

When you knocked on the door, I was already irritated. When I answered, you were there grinning. Of course, you noticed I was irritated. I didn't even put the flowers in water. And then you sat next to me trying to figure out what was wrong. Kissing me. Touching me. That didn't help. At all. It just made me angrier. And you left confused and upset yourself. I can't say you're only to blame. It's my hang up. But it is a hang up. Please avoid stopping by like that. I like to see you. I want to see you more often. It has to be done right. It has to be done the way I want it to be.

Rule 2: I'd rather not be seen in public with you. Not right now. We have to keep it a secret. This can't be like a high-school thing. We can't be cute about it. It has to be controlled and planned. We can't be stupid about it. I'm still confused about everything. The last thing I need is to fend off questions from friends and co-workers about us. And I have to avoid your wife knowing. We both have to avoid that. Too much to lose here. You lose everything. I might lose you, and maybe my job.

Rule 3: there has to be a decision made eventually. I'm not somebody who can sit and wait. I have to know if this is going anywhere. This is the most important rule right now. You have to let me know whether or not this is going to be long term or short term. I want to see you. I enjoy it. But I hate not knowing. Those are the big rules. There might be more rules later. I

want this to be on my terms. We have to keep this simple. Avoid any unnecessary complications.  
I hope you understand that.

Marian

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6-25-09

Joseph,

I'm having some issues with Mark. He's getting a bit too friendly with me. We were in the break room. I was smoking and enjoying a coffee. He walked in and smiled at me. He went to the fridge and got out a sandwich. There were three tables but he sat down at my table. There was a strange look in his eye.

He leaned closer and said, "Things are getting really close to the mark." Then he laughed. "Mark, mark, get it?" I just laughed to be polite and tried to finish my coffee and cigarette more quickly. I looked at the clock. I wanted to sit there five more minutes. But not if he was there.

He reached over and touched my hand and said "You're single, right?" I didn't know what to say. This was kind of out of nowhere. I couldn't say "No, I'm fucking our boss."

He squeezed my hand. "That's okay if you're not. That doesn't really matter to me."

I stood up. I put out my cigarette and chugged my coffee. I started to walk towards the door but looked over my shoulder at him one last time.

I must have looked angry because he said, "Hey, don't freak out, I'm just asking."

"Don't. Just keep it to work, okay?"

"Whatever. Jesus. I thought you might be the flirty type."

"Not at work."

He smiled. "Maybe later, then?"

“No.”

“Why not?”

“You’re not my type.” I left. My face was hot. I took out my makeup mirror. I was blushing. It was so embarrassing. I can’t deal with that. Can you transfer him? Or demote him? Or promote me? Any one of those sound good. I don’t need that kind of attention. Not now. Not since I have you. Normally, I wouldn’t mind. Flirting is okay. But I’m with you. So please do something about it.

Marian

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7-3-09

Joseph,

I’ve been working out. Let myself go too much. I know I’m not fat. Not yet. I want to catch it while I can. I know you said you like how I look. Don’t worry. You didn’t say anything to make me go. I just wanted to go.

I decided to try the yoga. I’ve read about how healthy it is. I got there and the class was just starting. I threw the matt on the floor and started to stretch. It was a little hard for me. I hadn’t done much exercise in awhile. This woman comes up to me and starts talking to me. Distracting me really. I’m just trying to touch my toes. And she’s over there going “Come on, you can do it!” Of course I can. I was just going to touch my toes. I got a little irritated. It was distracting, so I kept stopping. Finally, I finished. I turned to her, annoyed. She was smiling. She gave me a hug. I didn’t know what to say or do, so I hugged her back.. She was real small and in good shape.

“Good job. You’re doing a good job,” she said.

“Uh, yeah, thanks.”

“Did you just start?”

“Yeah. I haven’t done this in years.”

“It takes time to get good at it. God damn if it didn’t take me years to get good at yoga.”

She picked up her purse. She opened it and pulled out a pack of cigarettes. “Do you smoke?”

“Yeah.”

“Care to join me? I feel like talking to somebody new.”

“Sure.” I got my cigarettes. We went outside and lit up.

“So,” she said, “what’s your name?”

“Marian Lopez.”

“That’s a nice name. I’m Gilly Collins.”

I almost fainted. It was your wife. I smiled at her to keep my cool.

“What do you do?” she said.

“I’m a scientist.”

“Oh? Wow, that’s cool. So is my husband. He works on the collider.”

“Me too. Who is he?” I was really straining to keep calm.

“Joseph Collins. He’s actually the head of the project. Do you know him?”

“I think I’ve met him,” I said. She continued talking, but I couldn’t pay attention. I was freaking out inside. I kept up my smile. Couldn’t let her know I was upset.

I don’t think I can do this. It was easier when I didn’t know her. Had never seen her.

When she was just an abstract name and concept. Now that I’ve met her and know her, I don’t

think I can do this. I like you, but I don't think I can do it anymore. Let's just try to keep things amiable between us, okay?

Marian

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7-28-09

Dear Mother,

I am not doing well these days. I know you prefer to talk over the phone. Especially about important things. My phone was turned off, because I couldn't pay my bill this month. And this is the kind of thing I need to write down anyway. I need to arrange my thoughts on paper. On the phone it would ramble. I just need to set it down so that it comes out easily.

I'm seeing a married man. I know you raised me to be smarter than that. Don't tell father, please. I don't know who else to talk to about this. None of my friends know. And they are all far away. So are you, but you're my mother, and you'll know what to say.

I work with him, too. This makes it worse. I see him five days a week. But we're together only one or two. It's all we can really do to see each other. It's hard to see him at work. I know every day he goes home to her. Every day I go home to an empty apartment. All I have is my computer and my books. And I fall asleep alone every night.

It's just so hard. I want to let him go. I have to let him go, really. I'm a mess. I've been trying to lose weight, so I go to the gym. But his wife works out there. It's incredible. It seems like I can't go anywhere without some aspect of him being there. I feel trapped and alone. I love him but I can't have him.

He came over yesterday. He brought some Chinese food. It was great to see him, since it had been nearly a week. We ate our food and he stayed for a few more hours. I had to keep up a



smile. I hate that we don't go out to eat. We agreed that we can't be seen together. It was my idea, but this sneaking around is bad. It's all a secret, all hush hush. Nobody at work knows. Nobody knows but him, myself, and you. The only person I can trust. I want you to pray for me. Pray that I have the strength to leave him. Pray that I'm strong enough to let him go. That I'll find somebody. I pray every night, but it hasn't helped. I think I need the help of your prayers. Can you do that for me? Please?

Marian

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8-20-09

Joseph,

Your wife started coming back to yoga. She hadn't been here in a month and didn't look happy. Her shoulders were slouched and she seemed to go through the motions. When we finished I waved at her. She smiled. I gestured towards my purse and made a smoking gesture. She nodded her head. We went outside. I asked her, "Where have you been? What's wrong? You look like your best friend just died."

"I just had another fight with Joseph yesterday." She inhaled deeply on her cigarette, leaning back against the building. Her non-smoking arm was across her chest. She looked defenseless, and yet guarded. I don't like that pose.

"What about?"

"Same old, really. One thing he's been really weird about lately is the yoga classes. He doesn't want me coming here. He acts like he wants me to stay at the house all the time, to shut myself in and cook his meals. I don't think he even wants me working, even though we do need the money."

“Why?”

She took another long drag on her cigarette. “I have no idea. And anyway, I think he thinks I’m having an affair on him.”

I took a hard drag on my cigarette. “You’d never do that though, right?”

“No, but apparently Joseph just won’t let my past die.”

“What do you mean?”

“Nothing, nothing. Let’s go back in.” She put out her cigarette. I wasn’t finished, but I put mine out, too.

What was that all about? Is what she said true? Don’t you think that’s suspicious? She isn’t thinking anything yet, but she eventually might. It doesn’t make sense. Try to act normal. If you’re divorcing her, like you promise you will, you can’t let her know about us. They’ll give her everything if you do that. Don’t be stupid. Divorce her and then come live with me. Don’t throw everything away.

In spite of all of that, it is good to see you at work more often. We need our boss around. It’s weird without the lead scientist around. Who else will take credit for all our discoveries, and get famous? I’m joking. That’s just a cliché. But there’s often a little truth in a cliché.

I missed having you around. I don’t get to see you much. Two days a week tops? Work is the only time I can see you. And even then, we have to act formal and important. Can’t let anybody know what’s going on. This is getting hard on me. Remember Rule 3? Remember what you have to do.

Marian

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9-25-09

Dear Mother,

Again I write to you upset. I tried to leave Joseph a few weeks ago. It was a Thursday. We were at work, and it was stressful. We had to work hard to get everything right. It has to be so precise. I hadn't seen Joseph all that day. In fact, I hadn't seen him in a week. I've been smoking more again. I tried to quit, but I just couldn't. I did lose twenty pounds since I started my diet. That's the only good news I have.

It was the end of the shift. I went to his office with some reports. Just some simulation stuff. The door was shut. I listened in at the door. I couldn't hear anybody. I was in a hurry, I wanted to go home. So I just walked in. And there was Joseph with another woman. They weren't doing anything. Just sitting there. She was about my age. Same color hair, long and smooth. She was thinner than me. They both looked up at me. They looked surprised, taken aback. I recognized her. It was Janet Burroughs. She worked in accounting. My stomach fell. Horrible thoughts went through my mind. He's fucking her, I thought. He's cheating on me. I was being used. He'd been fucking her this whole time. My mind went a million different ways.

I must have looked upset because he said, "Marian, what is it? What's the matter?" He said it business-like. Boss to a co-worker. Which he should have. He didn't start throwing apologies around. That would have been dumb. I tried to keep my mind straight.

I tried to collect myself. "I didn't mean to interrupt," I said. "I have some reports, is all. I didn't know you were in a meeting."

"Well, I was just discussing some accounting matters with Janet here." He smiled. She smiled at me. I couldn't tell if it was sincere. There might have been sarcasm or irony there. Did she know about us? I was going to have a breakdown.

“Thank you, Marian,” he said. “Is there anything else you need?” He was keeping a good straight face.

“No. I’m going to go home.”

“Is everything finished with the collider?”

“Yes.”

“Sounds good,” he said and patted me on the shoulder. “Go home and get some rest. Every day is a struggle, you know?”

“Yeah.” I left his office and stood outside the door. I listened. They started to talk but I couldn’t hear. I left the building and went home. At about seven that night I got a call from Joseph.

“Hey, sorry about earlier. Janet had some important things to discuss.”

“Yeah.” I wanted to yell.

“You seemed surprised to see us.”

“I didn’t expect it.” I wanted to scream.

“Well, can I come over?”

“You don’t have anywhere you’d rather be?” I said. I knew what was coming. I couldn’t stop it.

“What?”

Tears rolled down my face. “You know what. Maybe Janet’s.”

“What? Are you serious?”

“I don’t know. Are you?”

“Serious about what? I’m very confused.” I heard a door shut on his end. Must have gotten into his car. Or maybe she was getting out. Or in. Maybe he’d already got out and in.

I couldn't think about that. "Me," I said.

"Serious about you?"

"Yes. Do you love me?"

He sighed. "Yes of course."

"And you want to be with me?"

"Yes." He sounded like a third grader answering his teacher. I ignored it.

"You're going to leave your wife, right?"

"Yes."

"So," I said, my voice building to a scream, "why are you fucking Janet?"

He didn't say anything.

I finally broke the silence. "You are, aren't you?"

"No, I'm not."

"Why didn't you answer right away?"

"I didn't consider it worth answering."

My anger surged. "Well, you better. You better explain."

"Explain what? Explain a work meeting? Explain that I sometimes have to talk to other people in my office? Explain that I run an organization and I have to have meetings? Sometimes without you? What do I have to explain?"

I was trying to calm down. It wasn't easy. "Why was the door closed?"

"For privacy. I do it every time I meet with anybody, including you."

"I listened at the door. You weren't talking."

"You were listening?" he said. He was yelling now. "What is wrong with you?"

"What were you doing in there?"

“It was a pause in the conversation. They happen from time to time.”

“Yeah. Okay.”

“This is ridiculous, Marian. What is wrong with you?”

“I haven’t seen you in a week. And when I do you’re in your office with another woman.”

“A co-worker.”

“I’m a co-worker.”

“Yes, but I haven’t had to have meetings with you nearly as much because you tell me about everything when we’re together. You’re upset at me for doing my job. It doesn’t make any sense.”

“Maybe not,” I said, sighing. “Maybe this just isn’t working.”

“You tell me that three times a month. ‘This just isn’t working.’”

“We’re going nowhere.”

“I have to divorce my wife. Then we can be together.”

“But you haven’t.”

“I’m waiting till we’re done with the collider. It’ll be too hard to divorce her and go through this at the same time. For both of us.” He sighed. So did I. I was starting to believe him.

“Okay,” I said. “I’m sorry. Why don’t you come over? We can talk about it easier.”

“I’m not sure I want to.”

“Please?”

“Okay. But give me a few hours. I have to go home for awhile.”

That stung. “Okay fine, see you then.” I hung up. He showed up a few hours later. I hugged him. He held me. It was over. The big fight was done. I’m still drained from it, still

upset. I've had more time to think about it. I'm not sure if he's telling the truth. The only way to test it is to follow him around. But I don't want to do that. I just want everything to be normal.

Why can't everything be normal?

I'm sorry for venting. I'm sorry that I had to ask for money again. Thank you for it. It paid off that phone bill. The next one is coming soon. I might need help with it. I'm sorry.

Love,

Marian

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9-30-09

Joseph,

Thanks for the flowers. They were sweet. But please don't send more. What did I tell you? You can't do things like that. You're drawing attention. It was great coming to work and seeing them on my desk. It was, really. I couldn't believe it. Never got flowers. Who expects that at seven in the morning? I got in my office tired. I hadn't slept well the night before. And there they were. Red, yellow, blue. Nice colors. Nice flowers. Too many. I sneezed. A little allergic. You didn't know.

I picked them up. "From J with love." From "J"? That was dumb. Don't do that. Don't put your initial there. I knew who they were from. Who else would they be from? My mother? My other boyfriend? It's just stupid.

They were nice. I put them in a vase. An hour later there was a knock on my cubicle. It was Mark. You never did anything about him. Just to remind you. He had papers. It was some reports. He noticed the flowers. His eyes got wide. He stood there. He didn't come in or leave. He just stood there.

“What is it, Mark?”

“I have some reports,” he said, looking at the flowers.

“Simulation stuff?”

“Yeah.” He walked in and gave them to me. He stood by my desk and stared at them.

“Is that all?”

“Who sent those?”

“None of your business.”

“Can I see them?” he reached out.

I pulled them away. “No.”

“Got a man, eh?”

“Don’t worry about it.” He was acting weird. After a few seconds, he left. Later more people showed up. He told. A lot of comments:

“Mark says you got flowers. Who are they from? Oh, they’re nice!”

“Keeping a secret, are we?”

“Marian has a man? Who would have thought?”

“Kind of ugly, really. Doesn’t think much of you.”

“My husband doesn’t give me flowers. You’re very lucky Marian. Very lucky. Who is the lucky guy? When are we going to meet him?”

It was awful. All that attention brought on me. I had to avoid and lie. Tell people it wasn’t a big thing. Just an admirer from my past. They didn’t believe me. Why should they? Nobody got a hold of them. The “J” would be a tip off. Maybe not. Don’t do that again. Nice, but stupid. There are enough problems right now without that, okay?

Marian



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10-18-09

Joseph,

It's 4:30 in the morning. I'm naked in my bathrobe. I wish you were here. I'd let you slip it off.

Then I'd let you take me to bed. I'm at the computer writing this with candles burning. I'm in a funny mood. You're still asleep next to Gilly. Are you dreaming about me? I want to be sexy.

It's hard to be sexy in a letter.

I miss you, but I can't do anything about it. I woke up and reached for you. I only got my pillow. I hugged it tight. Why would I expect you to be next to me? That's only happened once. I miss you being here with me. I hate waking up alone now. It never bothered me before. Now it does. A lot.

Don't get me wrong. It's not an emotional neediness. Right now I mostly miss you sexually. My need for you is much more complex. Women are complex. My feelings for you run from love, lust, and loneliness. That last one is the hardest. I never felt lonely before. Now I do. It's funny I was never emotionally difficult before you. Now I cry myself to sleep most nights.

Right now I want you in a way I don't think you can understand. Sex is different for women. We crave it like men. But it's not the same. Men crave it intensely usually for moments in a day. But then it's gone in a second, drained right out of their bodies like discarded and wiped up sperm. I want it on a low level all day. I'm not saying I want sex constantly. Some women do. Some women get that need. It's an addiction. I'm no addict, but that need is always there. It's more than just a physical act for me. For a man sex feels good and is fun. It's like eating a good sandwich. Or maybe doing a good work out. Pleasant for the moment. Not worth dwelling on.

For us, it's not like that. The difference lies in the act. A man penetrates but a woman is penetrated. For a woman, it's an act of trust. More is at stake. Their body is being invaded by an outside force over and over again. It's a violent action. Almost by definition. This is why rape is so loathed and yet why it's intriguing. Men don't understand the way it feels for a woman to be invaded against their will. It's weird enough when you want it. Even when I want sex it still feels like my body is under attack. But it still feels good. It feels better than anything. It's all so ridiculous and terrifying. Porn is not sex.

Have you ever really looked at yourself while you were having sex? Went outside your mind and watched yourself? Are men capable of out-of-body experiences? Do you have the self awareness of women? I have to bite my tongue sometimes so I won't laugh when I imagine it. It's like an out of body comedy. While doing it, it seems like the greatest thing in the world. But if you were to watch videos of yourself you'd either throw up or laugh till you did. The real act of sex is ridiculous to observe if it's not you.

For a man sex is almost nothing compared to what it is for a woman. Is it funnier for you then? I can't imagine it's at all terrifying. I know it's awkward the first time. But that's a "performance" issue. "Will I be any good?" you wonder. It's all a competition, right? Got to be top dog. Got to be the best. It's all cock size. Everything men do. Are you so simple? So predictable? You could never understand what it's like for a woman. To want that invasion. To be terrified of it, but to want it. It's not your fault. You can't help it.

Marian.

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10-22-09

Dear Mother,

Things are worse. I told you I was exercising. Did I tell you I exercised with his wife? We go to the same gym. She helps me out, like a personal trainer. I wouldn't care that much if she didn't think we were friends. It's been a few months and we talk a lot now. She talks to me about Joseph. About how she thinks they're having troubles. She will say something like, "The bastard probably wants to leave me, but I'll fight him if he goes. I'll fight him with everything I got. He's not leaving me without a fight."

I just nod. She goes on and on. This is when we're outside, smoking. She gets really agitated. She'll smoke two before I finish one. Her eyes get really wide. It makes her look wild. She's so small, thin. But her eyes scare me. She looks at me like a cornered animal. Like I'm about to pounce on her. But she gives so much of herself to me. It's scary to see her like that.

I try to reply with something nice. I might say, "Good idea. Take everything you can. Get him for it." What else can I do? She has asked me to talk to him. To figure out what's going on. I've refused. She keeps trying.

"I really don't see him much." A lame excuse, I know. I can't do a fake dialogue between the two. I can't be the middle man, even if I'm the other woman. Sometimes she breaks down.

This conversation has happened a few times. She'll say, "Am I pretty, Marian? Am I a good-looking woman?"

"You're beautiful."

She starts to cry. "He hasn't touched me in weeks. Not even a kiss goodbye. Am I ugly or something? I always thought I was hot, but maybe not." She usually opens up her purse here. Pulls out a little makeup mirror. "I'm getting old. I'm almost forty, Marian. You're still so young. Look at you. You have that beautiful dark skin. That long dark hair. Those curves. Those tits. I don't have a body. Look at me, I look like a little boy." Heavy crying.

I'll grab her for a hug. "You're beautiful. Maybe he's just stressed. Maybe it's just work. He still loves you. Don't worry. It's okay. It's okay." It usually calms her down quickly. Sometimes she can't go back in for an hour. When we go in, everybody looks at her. They know. They don't look at once. They don't look in unison. Just little looks here and there. She has to notice. She has to know that they know. They don't know what I know.

It has become almost unbearable Mother. My love for Joseph gets stronger. He's a good man, a powerful man. A man like him could help me. A lot. But that's not why I love him. There is a lot to our love. I can't leave him now. Not even if I wanted. I've become entwined with him. I want to be with him and only him. But I can't be with him as long as she is his wife. And here I am comforting her. How can I live with myself? How can I comfort the wife of the man I'm in love with? How can I smile at her and tell her everything will be all right?

Am I a bad person? I would have said no before. Now I'm not so sure.

Marian

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10-31-09

Joseph,

Some of the simulations have gray matter. Nothing that you could see with a microscope, almost infinitesimally small when compared to the amounts of matter that is not gray matter. But it's more than is safe. The trajectory is wrong. We don't have time to change it. You can't do the trial run now. That's not long from now. But our trajectory is wrong. All our work for nothing.

What now? What about us? You said you'd leave Gilly after the first trial run. The only way I could stay with you. It was a promise. Will you keep it? I don't know. I'm starting to doubt it. I feel like you would have already. I know it's hard. I know you're scared. So am I. I

can't be the other woman. I can't be your mistress. I have to be your lover. No strings attached. I can't wait. You have to choose. I'm sorry, Joseph.

Make a decision now. Before you cancel the run. If the run is cancelled, it's over. I can't do it anymore. I just can't. This is the ultimatum. Be a man. Choose. Everything is in your hands now. I can't wait any longer. I expect you to choose soon. By tomorrow. Any longer and I'll already be gone.

Marian

*It's interesting to see this threat in her letter. Would she really have left him if he cancelled the trial run? It's impossible to tell. She doesn't explicitly ask him to go ahead with the run. But the implication is there.*

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11-01-09

Joseph,

You think the gray matter isn't a big deal? You want to keep up with the schedule that we have? Use the same trajectory? The risk is low enough for you to accept? You're probably right. The risk is very low. But it is there. You promised to leave Gilly. And to marry me if I kept quiet. I liked your letter. Desperate, but you made your point.

“Marian, baby, I love you. I'm sorry that I haven't done the things you think I should or been the man you want me to be. I can only be as good as I can, you know? You understand how hard it is to be in my job, in my position? This machine has to run. It has to. There's really no choice either for me or for you. I want to make a decision just as much as you. I'm running the machine. You have to make the decision to keep quiet. You have to. There's no other choice.”

That was a great one.

Or how about this one? “I want to grow old with you. I want you to have my children. I want to take care of you and give you all the things you want. You are everything to me. There isn’t a moment on Earth that I don’t exist for you...” Sweet, I’ll admit. But the next line is a bit transparent. “...And if you want me to keep on loving you, you have to make the right decision. This is the only way we can be together. It’s a very important decision you have to make now. Make the right one. Stay quiet. And I’ll be yours.” A bit less sweet.

You are right, though. It is a very important decision. You are essentially blackmailing me. Your love for my silence. I’ve thought about it for two days. I haven’t slept for two days. I’m a bit off right now. You stay awake two days straight thinking about something like this, it does weird things to your mind. I’m not hallucinating yet. I think I’ll go to sleep soon. After this letter. But here’s what I figure.

Let’s say it works. Great. Then you go through a long messy divorce. This could make you bitter. Resent me. But maybe not. After the divorce, you move in with me. We save money to buy a house. Then we get married. Or one of us leaves the other. Maybe for another person. Why stop with one affair? Go all the way.

Sorry. I’m being negative. It’s a lot of pressure. I’m in control again. Normally I’d like that, but not now. The decision is so big. But I love you. I need you. I’m sure the machine is safe. We’ve tested it for years. Done dozens of simulations. None of them came up with universal conversion. Let’s do the run. It’ll work. And we can be together.

Marian

## Part Three: Gilly

*It's August fifth, 2018. It is the first day of my interview with Gilly Hun, Joseph Collins' ex-wife and renowned environmentalist. Miss Hun is well known throughout the world for her humanitarian and ecological projects, including the shutting down of the Large Hadron Collider in 2008, and another collider in Alaska four years later.*

*Today Miss Hun is dressed in long jeans and a light sweater with a vest. The clothes hang off of her body. She is in her sixties but doesn't look it. There is a youthfulness to her that is hard to explain. As she walks into the room she smiles at me on the hotel chair. The hotel room is cheap, with a painting of flowers above the queen-size bed. The wallpaper is white with flower trim. The carpet is wet in places, and it's not my wetness. I haven't seen any cockroaches yet, but I'm looking. I get a complimentary continental breakfast, and my bed will vibrate if I put enough quarters in the machine on the bed head. The air conditioner is rattling and loud, but it's cold air is necessary to keep the room livable. There's no pool. If you look out the window, you can see a wide expanse of desert sand, with wind blowing it up and around. It's wild and rugged and this hotel is essentially the same. She sits down, puts her purse on the bed, and puts her hand out. I shake it.*

Editor: Thank you for taking the time to do this interview today, Miss Hun.

Gilly: You're welcome, and thank you for giving me the chance to discuss my new activities.

Editor: What is your latest project?

Gilly: Since 2024, there has been an increase in nuclear reactors in South America. The number of reactors has jumped nearly 150% in the last four years. I've been down there

protesting this and attempting to get as many of them shut down as I can. We don't need nuclear power. Solar and wind are good. It's just fucking carelessness, fucking carelessness.

Editor: Four years is a long time to work on a project.

Gilly: Hell, yeah, it is. I'm so tired. I've gotten death threats. People have mailed me letters, cut out from letters from a magazine, saying things like, "Bitch, you die tonight" and, "Leave it alone, or we won't leave you alone." And lots of fucking heavy breathing on the phone, and some guy who talks like goddamn Donald Duck telling me he's going to rape me and things like that. It's nasty. I don't sleep as well as I used to, but it's worth it. It really is.

Editor: Have you gotten any police protection after receiving these phone calls?

Gilly: No. I just try to live like normal. I ain't letting some fucking government-funded scumbag keep me from living as normal as I can. I sleep like shit, but I sleep in my own bed.

Editor: That is brave.

Gilly: Some would say it was stupid.

*(An awkward silence comes between us. She watches me and then grabs a cigarette from her purse.)*

Editor: This is a non-smoking room.

Gilly: Really? That's a shame. You don't smoke?

Editor: I quit about two years ago.

Gilly: You still want one, don't you?

Editor: Every day.

Gilly: *(laughs)* Why I never quit. I tried, but I always went back, and these fuckers have kept me sane throughout the years. Only thing that's never let me down.

Editor: I understand.



Gilly: But yeah, that's my big project these days. Keep busy even as I get older. Any ambitious person has got projects. You got this book you're trying to do about my husband and me and his lady friend.

Editor: Yeah, I do.

Gilly: How's that going for you?

Editor: I got his section finished, and I'm working on hers.

Gilly: I'm last?

Editor: Afraid so.

Gilly: Ain't that a bitch?

Editor: It just worked out that way. Your husband left all these papers from his book, and Marian let me use all these letters. You're busy and hard to get a hold of and didn't really leave behind any kind of, well, memoir about the time.

Gilly: I just tried to ignore that and move on, you know.

Editor: Understandable.

Gilly: And now you want me to go back?

Editor: Yes.

Gilly: This is going to be hard for me, I hope you understand that. I might not be able to give you all that you want. Ten years is ten years, but it's still fucking hard.

Editor: I understand.

Gilly: Do you? You understand ten years of marriage down the drain because your husband is fucking someone else? You understand what it's like to know that your husband was moments away from pushing the button on a machine that could have exploded and destroyed

everything in the universe? Do you really understand that? *(She stands up)* I'm sorry. I need a cigarette, okay?

Editor: Sure.

*(She walks outside to smoke. About fifteen minutes later, she returns.)*

Gilly: I had a few.

Editor: I'm in no hurry.

Gilly: Ah, see, I am. So we better get going.

Editor: Yes, we better.

Gilly: What do you want?

Editor: I just want to state a few basic facts here, for the sake of the reader who may not know much about you. Such as where you were born, and things like that

Gilly: Ah, well I was born May 4<sup>th</sup> in Peoria, Illinois. I have two brothers and two sisters. I went to college and eventually became a nutritionist. Took awhile, but I got it.

Editor: Rough childhood?

Gilly: Tough parents. Catholic.

Editor: You don't seem Catholic.

Gilly: Not anymore, but it fucking sticks with you.

Editor: Were you the rebel?

Gilly: I guess, in a manner of speaking.

Editor: How so?

Gilly: Did things my parents didn't approve of.

Editor: Such as?

Gilly: Is this about the fucking Hadron Collider, or is this about my fucking past?

Editor: I'm sorry, I don't mean to pry.

Gilly: Then don't.

Editor: Maybe we should talk about Joseph for a bit.

Gilly: Sure. I met him when I was about 27 at a coffee house where I worked.

Editor: What was he like back then?

Gilly: Sweet, cute. Wasn't a coffee house kind of guy. This wasn't fucking Starbucks. It was a old hole-in-the-wall. Jesse, who owned it, was a Vietnam nut job who spent most of his time watching old war movies and playing guitar. He could talk about anything for hours. Like rock and roll. Or nuclear fusion. Nuts, but nice. The store was a lot like him. Sacks of years old coffee lying around. He thought he was an artist, so his shit hung on the walls. He had what you'd call a "unique" style. It was the kind of stuff that would give H.R. Giger nightmares.

Editor: Who?

Gilly: Giger, you know the guy who did the alien in those "Alien" movies?

Editor: Oh sure.

Gilly: Giger drew a lot of robotic stuff with dicks and vaginas. Jesse was worse, so the place could be fucking freaky. He built all the furniture. They were uncomfortable and filled with splinters. He painted shit on the tables, like "don't live for nobody but yourself" and "love everyone, if you can." It was a washed-up-hippy kind of place. I loved it. I practically lived there.

Editor: And your husband came in here?

Gilly: One day, yeah. I never figured out why he chose that place out of all the places he could have gone. I mean, we had our regulars who mostly paid the bills. Failed artists, writers,

and townies with no jobs and nothing better to spend their welfare checks on. Strange drifters came in and out every day with cigarette hair and rotten clothes. Real deranged fuckers.

Editor: Your husband didn't fall into that type then?

Gilly: No, no. He was a preppy fucker, a college guy. But he didn't look rich. Those rich college pricks were awful. Acted like they owned the fucking place, and tried to pick me up. Joseph was preppy, but his clothes were cheap. Unlike those frat boys, he looked like a serious college student. I had been one of those once, and I knew the look. Bright, curious, and determined. Not one ounce of hipness or asshole in him. He had a fucking Moe Howard, haircut for Christ's sake! To be totally honest he looked like a dweeb. But I was interested. Why would a guy who dressed like that come in here?

Editor: And then what happened?

Gilly: He came up to the counter and smiled. He said, "Hey, what's good here?" I suggested tea.

"No, no, I want a coffee, or a cappuccino. Something with caffeine. I'm working on something big right now, and I feel like doing it out in the public."

"You want to do homework here?"

"Yeah, this looks like a neat place. Kind of quiet."

"The fuck are you going to pay attention?"

He laughed. "I got my laptop and my headphones. Going to zone out."

"Whatever floats your boat, man." I made him his cappuccino. He sat down in the corner and worked for a few hours. He bought a couple waters, and talked.

"So, are you from here originally?" and "You went to school too, huh?" followed by a "How long you worked here?" Stupid shit, but I smiled and answered. It doesn't pay to be a bitch

at a job like that. Just before we closed he put five dollars in the tip jar. He rang the bell and shouted. The regulars all laughed. He turned and left. I was blushing.

Editor: Love at first sight, right?

Gilly: Fuck no. I was embarrassed.

Editor: Why? A nice guy gives you a good tip.

Gilly: Wasn't used to that. Figured it was a ploy.

Editor: What kind of ploy?

Gilly: To fuck me. I've fallen victim to them before. I made a lifestyle out of it. Meet a guy, take him home, he's an asshole. I knew when somebody just wanted to fuck, and I figured he was the same. I didn't hate him or anything. It was mostly disinterest.

Editor: But you married him.

Gilly: Yes, I did.

Editor: And how did that come about?

Gilly: I'm working up to it. Don't be an impatient patient. *(She laughs at her own joke.)*

Editor: I'll try not to be.

Gilly: Good.

Editor: So tell me what happened.

Gilly: It was a slow process. He started to come in almost every night. The second time he came in, he tried to pull to be smooth with me again. He put five dollars in the tip jar before I even served him, rang the fucking bell, and hooted. That was it.

"Listen," I said, "that's cute and all, and thanks for the tip, but if you ever ring that fucking tip bell and yell like that again, I'll have you banned from this place. Do you got me?"

He just laughed. “Sure, of course. I’m just trying to be nice and thank you for a job well done.”

“I haven’t done a damn thing yet, sir. Please, give me a five-dollar tip if you want to. Just don’t make a fucking spectacle of yourself.” He just took his coffee and sat down without answering me.

After that, he started to become a regular. He mostly made small talk. My opinion of him changed a little. He wasn’t pushing to get me alone. He wasn’t trying to get into my pants. He was a genuinely sweet guy. He wanted to know about my life. There was a lot I couldn’t say.

Editor: Like what?

Gilly: That’s really none of your business.

Editor: I don’t mean to pry.

Gilly: I know. It’s just, fuck...it’s just one of those things. I don’t talk about that time anymore. Just know that I had to keep a lot of secrets from him, and it helped create an atmosphere of secrets and lies between us.

Editor: From the very beginning?

Gilly: Yes. That’s important. People need to understand that.

Editor: Okay, I’ll make sure to get it all down.

Gilly: Thank you. I need a cigarette.

Editor: All right.

Gilly: Can I just smoke it in here? It’s so goddamn hot out.

Editor: Yeah, I suppose. *(Here Miss Hun takes a break to smoke a cigarette. We do this in silence. She rubs her temples and sighs frequently. Ten years have passed since the incident, and she has aged noticeably from the pictures that exist of her at that time. Her hair is getting*

*gray, and it's long and straggly. Her small frame has gotten thinner to where her ribcage is easily visible through her t-shirt. She wears wire frame glasses that distort her eyes. Her clothes are small and somewhat revealing but not out of taste. Her jeans are cut short, but just above the knee. Her t-shirt hangs off of her like a rag. It looks like a child's shirt. Her face has become wrinkled around the eyes and forehead. She is almost old beyond her years. But when she smiles, it's shocking how much different she looks. Her wrinkles pull up, her eyes focus, and she becomes, in an odd way, beautiful. She is a striking woman to look at, and a striking woman to converse with. After a few minutes, she finishes her cigarette.)*

Editor: Okay, Miss Hun, continue.

Gilly: After awhile, I started to like him. He got under my skin. He would always say the wrong thing but make it the right thing. He came up to the counter and said, "Bar wench, get me my coffee or I shall smite thee!" Normally that would bother me. But with him, I laughed. I can't explain it, but it was funny. Or there was the time when he noticed my gut. I didn't work out then, so I had a gut. He said, "I never knew you had fat on you!" He was lucky. Any other woman would have slit his fucking face. But I was thin when I was young. Fat jokes didn't bother me, but thin jokes did.

Editor: That's pretty amusing.

Gilly: Really was. He was a charming guy, accidentally.

Editor: How long did this go on?

Gilly: Three, four months. It took me awhile, but he finally, he came in one day. The door opened, and the wind flew in. It was cold, it was winter. He had a red scarf on. Surprised me. I never thought I'd see him in a damn scarf. But he was shivering, really hard. I got his usual coffee ready for him.

He comes up to the counter. “Hey, Gilly, how are you doing?”

“I’m okay. It’s cold so that sucks. It’s winter and I hate winter. Yourself?”

“Oh, you know, doing okay. Just trying to get all my homework finished up. End of the semester.”

“Oh, yeah, got any exams?”

“No, no, just a few papers. I have to write about the trajectory of stray particles in the dark matter of space.”

“Oh.”

“So my weekend might be all filled up.”

“Okay.” I was really confused. The conversation was really awkward in a way it hadn’t been in awhile.

“Well, what are you doing this weekend?” The words fell out of him like he dropped them to the floor and was waiting for them to smash.

“Dunno. I might go to the bar or something. No fun lately.”

“Oh, do you go out to the bar a lot?”

“No. I haven’t been out in weeks.”

“Do you drink a lot?”

“I drink some. Why?”

“I’m just curious. Because you’re an interesting girl, and I bet you do a lot of interesting things.”

“Not really.” I looked over at the clock. Three more hours to go. His coffee had to be getting cold in his hands. He was clutching it tight, warming his hands. They were shaking. I looked at his face. He was frowning and his eyebrow was twitching. It hit me.



“Are you asking me out on a date?”

“Well, uh, yeah I’m trying to, you know.”

I smiled. “It’s so cute the way you’re...you aren’t doing a good job of it.”

He frowned. “Oh, well then, I’ll leave you alone.”

“No, no, I meant. Just ask. I’ll go.”

He smiled. We set the date for Friday, and he said he’d come pick me up and surprise me with what we did.

Editor: And the date went well?

Gilly: Not at first. He wanted to go to a Japanese steak house. Made reservations and everything. I didn’t want to go.

Editor: Why not?

Gilly: I’m a vegetarian. He came to the trailer park. God, I didn’t even think to meet him somewhere else. I got embarrassed and ran out of the trailer. I had on a blue jean skirt, a red tank top and a red bow in my hair. I must have looked incredibly trashy.

He looked me up and down and said, “You look great.” He was serious. I gave him a hug. He picked me up and spun me on the lawn. I kicked and shouted and then laughed. Sitting me down, he then opened the car door for me. So polite, he even let me smoke in his nice new car. I was nervous. Never been on a real date. Mostly they started in a bar and ended in bed. Joseph was different. Conversation was easy. Then we got there and things got bad.

Editor: What happened?

Gilly: I said, “I can’t eat here.”

And he said, “Why not?”

“I’m a vegetarian.”

“I made reservations here.”

“I’m sorry.”

He got an exasperated look on his face. “I paid good money to get those reservations.”

“You don’t pay to reserve a spot in a restaurant.”

“I exaggerated.” He smiled. “Look, can’t you just eat meat one night?”

“No,” I said. “I’m against meat.”

“Fine, fine. Where would you like to go?”

“How about a movie?”

“Which one?”

“You choose.”

“You’re not going to shoot me down?”

“No, I already screwed your dinner idea up.”

“Okay, I got just the movie.” So we went to “Jaws 3D.” One of the stupidest movies ever.

But things calmed, and we even chatted. We laughed at the movie, mostly. He grabbed my hand about halfway through the movie, and moved his fingers up and down mine. It was very romantic.

Editor: So, then the night ended better than it started?

Gilly: He took me home. We stood outside the trailer, awkward. He kept looking around, and shifting up and down on his heels.

“This is a nice place,” he said.

“It’s a dump.”

“No, it’s cute. I like the flowers you put up here.” He pointed to some flowers that were planted along the window sill.

“Landlord put those there.” I lit a cigarette. Some smoke floated into his face.

He sniffed the smoke in deep, with his eyes closed. Kind of weird. “I don’t know how to tell you this,” he said, “and it’s so hard to just do it.”

“What?”

“I just want to grab you and kiss you.”

“Oh.” I inhaled on my cigarette. More smoke floated in his face. Again with the sniffing.

He moved closer. “I don’t know how to do it.”

I threw my cigarette on the ground. “Just do it.”

He grabbed me and pulled me close. Some of the left over smoke drifted through the air. He smelled my neck and collar. “You smell beautiful,” he said and kissed me.

Editor: You smell beautiful?

Gilly: That’s what he said. Nobody ever called me beautiful before. I don’t think I thought it was weird, then. Now it seems weird though, eh?

Editor: A little. So he treated you really well on that first date?

Gilly: Except for our fight, yeah. He treated me like a princess mostly.

Editor: And that was how the relationship began?

Gilly: Kind of. At first, I avoided him for awhile.

Editor: Why?

Gilly: I didn’t think I deserved it. To feel like a princess.

Editor: But you went out on more dates?

Gilly: Eventually. I gave him excuses. Tried to push him away. Thought he was “weird” and that he wasn’t my “type.” But that was bullshit.

Editor: What was the real reason?

Gilly: Self destruction. Pushing away a good thing. What I always did.

Editor: What happened to change that?

Gilly: He came into the coffee shop one day. He ignored me. Came in, and bought his drink and sat down. Acted like he didn't know me. I didn't like it. So many guys had done that to me. Just blown me off. I didn't want him to be like that. I wanted him to be different, special. So I went and sat down with him.

He looked at me and said, "Yes, can I help you?"

I winced. "Look, I'm sorry."

"What are you sorry for?"

"For ignoring you."

"I just figured you didn't have a good time when we went out."

"Of course, Jaws 3D was a masterpiece."

"You didn't seem like you did. At the time, especially, but I figured you'd give me another chance. But you couldn't even bother to do that."

"I'm not used to nice guys."

He laughed.

"Everybody I've ever dated treated me like I existed solely for my vagina. But you were nice. I figured you were like a rapist or serial killer."

"Really? You thought I was a rapist or a serial killer?"

"Not like on purpose. More like unconscious."

"That doesn't make any sense."

"Look," I said, getting exasperated, "I'm sorry. That's the important thing. Can you give me another chance?"

He arched his eyebrows, leaned back, and pretended to think. Finally he said, “Yeah sure. Let’s go out tonight.” And we did.

Editor: How was that night?

Gilly: After I closed he followed me home. My hands were white on the steering wheel. I didn’t want to take him here. It was a trailer. Trailer trash. But we got there, parked, and I finally let him in.

He looked around the place for awhile, and finally said, “This is kind of cute. Real cozy.”

“Oh yeah, it’s a mansion.”

“No, I like the way it’s decorated. It’s different, it’s kind of cool. It’s definitely you.”

“Definitely me? That’s almost an insult.” The place was a sty, filled with pizza boxes, filled ashtrays, books, magazines, booze bottles, guitars, amps, keyboards and clothes. “What’s so cute about it? Tell me that.”

“Well, it’s lived in. So much of you is in here, it’s just a cozy place. Comfortable. Different. I’ve never been in a house like this before.”

“You mean a house this messy?”

“No, I mean like a trailer. It’s kind of exciting for me. You know?”

“Real exciting, I’m sure.” I lit a cigarette, but then angrily snubbed it out.

“What’s wrong, why are you giving me the third degree like this? I thought you wanted another chance, or whatever?”

“You’re just, you’re judging me. I know you are.”

“Why would I judge you?”

“I live in a fucking trailer.”

“I don’t care about that.” He moved closer. I tried to move away, but he caught me. He kissed me. We had sex that night. He was gone when I woke up. It hit me; he was just like all the others. He was just better at hiding it. Then I heard a sizzling noise. Was the place on fire? Then I smelt smoke. I jumped out of bed, threw on my bra and underwear and got ready to run. But then I smelled the smoke again. Eggs. Bacon. Pancakes. Somebody was cooking breakfast. I lit a cigarette. Never could start the day without a smoke.

The whole place was filled with smoke. Food smoke, my cigarette. It gave the place a creepy feel. I wasn’t awake yet and wondered who was in here cooking breakfast. Then I saw Joseph in the kitchen. He was wearing nothing but his underwear and a smile. I was so sure he left that I didn’t think of him.

He heard me, turned, and smiled. “Hungry?” he said.

“Uh, yeah, sure.” I went to the table against the wall. I pushed some papers out of the way, tax shit mostly, junk mail. “Why don’t you open a window?” I said.

“Good idea.” He left the food cooking on the stove. I jumped up to watch it. He opened windows and the smoke filtered out. He came up behind me at the stove and put his arms around me. Kissed me on the neck. And I won’t go into any more detail.

Editor: So it was a lot different for you, then, to have a man here in the house who actually seemed to care about you?

Gilly: You got that right. I never had a man stay the night with me. Let alone cook me breakfast. I always woke up alone. I didn’t wake up alone after that.

Editor: You started to see him more often?

Gilly: Almost daily. I was in love. He helped clean my mess and helped me quit drinking and smoking so much pot. I tried to get him eating better. After months, I left the trailer to live with him. We got married three months later.

Editor: Three months later?

Gilly: It was quick. Too quick. But we were in love.

Editor: What did your family think about such a quick engagement?

Gilly: They didn't even know about it.

Editor: You were estranged from them even then?

Gilly: I've been estranged from them for decades.

Editor: Was it a romantic proposal?

Gilly: He tried. We were riding off to my favorite restaurant, Seva's. It was a vegetarian place. He was trying out vegetarianism for awhile.

Editor: How long did he last?

Gilly: About one trip to Seva's.

Editor: Just not his style?

Gilly: No. But anyways, we were driving there. He was driving. It was about six at night. The sun was going down a bit. It was getting late in the year. I was listening to the radio. I think it was "Don't Let The Sun Go Down On Me." I know it was. Such strange song to hear while he proposed. I could never forget.

Editor: Was it a quick proposal or...

Gilly: It surprised me. We weren't talking. No fight or anything. Just enjoying silence. Like two people comfortable with each other. It was nice. Do you know that feeling?

Editor: Generally.

Gilly: It was nice. The restaurant was about half an hour away. In a different town. Halfway, he puts his right hand over by my chest. I looked over at it. He had something in it.

“Here,” he said. “This is for you.”

I opened it up. It was an engagement ring. It sparkled in the flashing headlights.

“Joseph...”

“Why don’t you marry me, Gilly? I love you. I don’t want anybody else. Let’s get married.”

Editor: Not the most romantic proposal I’ve ever heard.

Gilly: For me, it was. I said “Yes” and leaned over to kiss him. The car swerved. I was practically in his lap. He stopped the car and kissed me. We didn’t make it to the restaurant. Instead, we ended up parked at a roadside park, down a side road. To me, this was romance.

Editor: Not the textbook example of romance.

Gilly: Didn’t matter. It was great.

Editor: How long did your marital bliss last?

Gilly: The first five years were great. Perfect. Still an irritating couple to have around, I’m sure. The three after were comfortable and nice. It was only the last two years that were awful.

Editor: Was that when you started to have fears about his job?

Gilly: Yes.

Editor: What caused this fear?

Gilly: When I learned it could destroy everything. Before that, I had no idea. In a simple way I knew what his job was. But he didn’t tell me about the bad things, like gray matter. He just said that some things needed to be fixed. Very secretive about everything.



Editor: So he minimized the risk when he talked to you?

Gilly: Yeah. I know why. He didn't want me to worry. To him, there wasn't a need to worry. It was under control. He could fix any problem. (*Laughs.*) He probably didn't think I would understand gray matter or black holes. He didn't think I was smart. My fault, in a way. When he met me, I was living in a trailer and working at a coffee house. I had a degree in Dietary Sciences. I'm sure I was boring to him.

Editor: Where did you hear about the risk of gray matter and black holes?

Gilly: I was bored at home one day so I read a journal article about the collider. One of his science journals. I was bored, but I also wanted to know more. He never told me anything, like I said. The guy in the book wrote all about black holes and gray matter, and it scared me.

Editor: Do you think it was just scare tactics, or fear mongering on the part of the writers?

Gilly: If it was, it definitely fucking worked on me! All these horror stories about gray matter and black holes. A lot of it was over my head. I'm no quantum physicist. I got the basic idea, though, that gray matter would convert all other matter to gray matter. And that it could potentially spread throughout the universe. So much of the science is guesswork. None of it was one hundred percent. No way to test it. I had no idea Joseph's job was so uncertain. He always said everything would go perfectly and exactly the way he wanted.

Editor: But that isn't the case?

Gilly: Hell, no. In quantum physics, even a single stray particle, like an atom or whatever, can throw everything off. There's no way he could know it would work perfectly. That scared me, the not knowing. Working with a few unknowns is one thing. I was a dietician. You never know what's going to happen when you give someone new foods. Or if that food is going to

good for them. But even then, it's a lot easier to understand food than it is quantum physics. It's a bit silly to compare quantum physics with what I did, but whatever.

Editor: So did you confront your husband about your worries?

Gilly: We had one discussion about it. (*lights a cigarette*) Nothing too serious. I didn't want him to worry or to cause a fight. Knowing him so well, I knew how he'd take it. Sensitive little bastard. Criticism was out with him, that's for sure. He always needed my support for everything he did, like a stupid little fucking happy wife. I tried my best, but this time was too much.

Editor: What happened?

Gilly: As time went on, our fights got worse. And then one day he came home depressed. Shoulders slouched, head hanging, and with his arms behind his back. That was his thinking pose. It was cute. It made him look like a kid, like he just got caught doing something bad. He came in and paced the living room. I was trying to relax with some yoga. He threw me off, so I figured I'd better talk to him.

"What's up?"

He looked at me, half smiled, and sat down on the couch. "Nothing."

I finished my stretch and sat down across from him. "Is something wrong with the collider?"

"Just some complications. Nothing too serious."

"Is it gray matter?"

He looked up at me and he was pissed. His eyes were slit. His forehead was all wrinkles, his mouth frowning. "You're still talking about that?" he said.

"It scares me, and you know me. I'm not scared of anything."

“Well, it isn’t anything to worry about.”

“The hell it isn’t.”

“Gilly, don’t concern yourself with it, I got it under control. You know that.”

“But how could I not worry? It’s something that could destroy the universe.”

He got up and paced quickly. He stopped and looked at me. He twiddled this thumbs.

“Theoretically, but there’s no way to know that it would do anything at all. For all we know, it might not even exist.”

“But all these scientists are afraid. There have been protests.”

“Yeah, I’ve had to walk through some of them to get to work. Sometimes, they line up outside the door with picket signs and yell. Horrible things, too. They call me a murderer, Gilly. That doesn’t even make sense. I’ve never killed anybody, or hurt anything with these experiments, not even a rat. But somehow I’m a murderer? Because, theoretically, my experiments could kill somebody? Why isn’t somebody who owns a gun branded a murderer? His gun could, theoretically, kill somebody. You know?”

“But you did kill a cat.”

“What?”

“In your experiment in college. You killed a cat.”

He turned and stared, his right hand running through his hair, his left stabbing through the air at me as he speaks. Never seen him so mad. “That’s irrelevant. And besides, I hear enough about this shit from other people. I don’t need to hear it from you. I just hoped you’d support me in this. Apparently, I was wrong.” He went upstairs, and slammed the door to his study. I didn’t see him again that night.

Editor: Did things ever cool down between you two?

Gilly: I slept on the couch. Funny how that worked, eh? Usually it's the man on the couch. But anyway, he woke me up the next morning. He put his hands on my shoulders and shook. I woke up and looked at him, still sleepy, barely functional.

"I'm sorry that I got mad at you, Gilly. It's just been such a hard time for me, and I know you're afraid, but you really don't need to be okay? I love you, and I don't want you worrying, and I need you to support me. Supporting me now will help support our marriage in general. Do you understand that?"

I nodded. "I'm sorry too," I said. I didn't mean it. Just trying to keep things cool. I don't think he really accepted it. That was the beginning of the end. More fights broke out, and he spent more time at work. I should have known he was having an affair. I guess you're just always the last one to know. *(She sighs, lights another cigarette off her last, which has burned down to the butt, and stubs the butt out. She puts her head in her hands and is quiet.)*

Editor: Are you okay to go on?

Gilly: I think so.

Editor: I just have a few more questions anyways. I don't want to keep you if you're upset, or...

Gilly: No no, it's fine. I just need a minute. *(She smokes her cigarette and is quiet. Two hours have passed, and the sun is starting to dip below the horizon. I can see a lizard on the window sill. He's staring at me. He blinks. I watch him as he moves up the frame of the outside window. He licks the window. He seems to be trying to find a way inside. He pushes at the glass with his feet. He climbs up the side of the window higher and higher as he disappears under the eaves. I look over at Gilly. She is staring at me, smiling. She has finished her cigarette.)*

Gilly: Were you watching that lizard?

Editor: Yeah. I've never seen of those in Michigan.

Gilly: Don't suppose you would. Kind of weird little buggers. They're actually hard to see. They don't make it towards civilization as much. Like to stay out in the desert. I'm not surprised he went up the window and under there like that. He definitely wants in here for some reason. I'd be careful while you sleep. You might wake up with a lizard on your face. *(She laughs, and lights another cigarette.)*

Editor: I hope not.

Gilly: I'm sure he won't. What else you want to know?

Editor: I just have a few questions regarding the friendship that developed between you and Marian Lopez.

Gilly: *(frowns)* Why does that matter?

Editor: It's just to help understand how you two interacted. She had written about a friendship between you two developing at the gym...

Gilly: Marian Lopez is a fat whore.

Editor: You don't want to talk about her?

Gilly: No, I really want to. *(She inhales the rest of her cigarette in one burst and blows the smoke out. It fills the air, and I can barely see her as she talks.)* Marian knew who I was. She came into that gym and maybe she was trying to lose weight, get into shape. She needed to. She was a big woman, and she breathed heavy. She smoked, sure, but so do I. Do I breathe heavily? No. I stay in shape. I work out. Marian was just fat and lazy. But she was in my yoga class. I didn't teach it, but I was in the class. I've done yoga for most of my life, so it's easy. But I saw this fat bitch fucking struggling to even touch her fucking toes, so I tried to be nice and help her. *(She lights another cigarette, coughs.)*

Editor: I'm sorry, you don't have to continue.

Gilly: Don't fucking interrupt me. You asked about her. You're going to get it. So here she is, this bitch, trying to touch her toes. I stop my exercise, and I help her out. I help her touch her toes.

"Don't push if you can't do it. Just go as far as you can."

"I want to touch my toes." She pushes hard and grunts.

"Don't hurt yourself. It's not worth hurting yourself. Keep it slow, you'll get there."

"I want to touch my toes." I knew she was going to keep trying, so I just cheered her.

"Come on, you can do it, come on!" Her knees start to bend, and she locks them back into place. Sweat is pouring off of her. It's incredibly how that fucking pig sweated. Just touching her toes. I know it's easy to get out of shape. Not everybody has time. This slob could barely touch her toes. I can't get over it. But she was trying, and I didn't know her, so I helped her. I cheered her. Jesus, I feel bile in the back of my throat thinking about that. This blimp was humping my husband, and here I am cheering her. Eventually, she reached her toes. She stood up and she was pretty exhausted. I'm surprised she didn't collapse.

She smiled at me and held out her hand. "Thank you."

"No problem," I said, shaking her hand. "You haven't exercised in awhile, have you?"

"Not since high school."

"It can be hard to get back into it. What's your name?"

"Marian Lopez."

"I'm Gilly Collins." She didn't react at all. She knew who I was, but she didn't react. For fuck's sake, she knew who I was. But she didn't react.

Editor: That was the beginning of your friendship?

Gilly: We were never friends. We were acquaintances. Workout pals. Nothing more at all. She try to play up a buddy angle or something?

Editor: In her letters she discusses you and...

Gilly: Fucking bitch. I bet she did. Probably called me lots of things.

Editor: She actually seemed upset to know you, and that she was potentially hurting you.

Gilly: Didn't stop her though, did it? Of course not. I threw up when I found out she was fucking Joseph. Imagining that whale riding my husband was too much. It almost is to this day.

Editor: Is that as much as you want to discuss her?

Gilly: I got a good one. She tried to apologize to me. Did you ever hear about that? This was after the incident. I was trying to move out of the house. I had a place rented like three miles away. Most of my stuff was over there, but a lot was still at the house. I slept there most nights. Joseph wasn't there. I'd kicked him out the day of the incident. He was under investigation, but I don't think he was in jail. I was packing. In the driveway comes this little car. I didn't notice until I heard the door slam. I looked out the window and it as her. She had some business suit on. She was smoking, of course. I could tell she had been crying. Makeup was smeared around her eyes, and she didn't see me. The door bell rang. I dropped the box of books and went to the door.

I opened it up and there she was. Face to face with her. Great, you know? Just great.

“What do you want?”

“I want to apologize.”

“You want to apologize?”

“For everything. I'm sorry about Joseph, and sorry about us.”

“You think that's good enough? Just coming her and saying that?”

“Not really, no.” She finished her cigarette and threw it on the ground.

“Don’t you dare leave there here. I don’t want anything of yours here. Why I kicked Joseph out.”

She flinched, and then picked up the cigarette butt up. “I left him. Or he left me. I’m not sure what happened.”

“How sad.”

“I’m sorry. I didn’t come here to fight.”

“How could you expect me not to? I hate your fucking guts.”

“I know. I understand.”

“Do you? Do you really?”

She stepped back a few steps. “I...understand you’re upset...but not the pain...”

“You understand that you fucked up and you think you owe me something. That’s all this is.”

“Maybe.” She walked back a few more steps. She was afraid.

“Marian, I wish I could say I appreciate what you’re trying to do. But I don’t. It’s condescending and pointless. You want to try to make things better between us? Why? What do you have to gain?”

“Maybe a friend.”

“I’m not your friend. I never will be. You are nothing to me.”

She stared at me for a few seconds.

“But in the gym...”

“What about it? We were friends because we worked out and chatted? We were friendly. Not friends. You were nothing more than a chatting partner. Never anything more. I guess I don’t even hate you. You’d have to care about somebody for that.”



She turned around and walked back to the car. She shut the door. I watched her. She lit a cigarette. Her eyes were wet. She pulled out of the drive way and then stopped. Right in the middle of the road. I had to squint, but I could see her mouth opening and closing in the car. She was yelling. She hit her head with her hand. Cars started stopping next to her, beeping their horns. She backed up all the way and then left. I went back to packing.

Editor: It obviously didn't go the way she wanted it to.

Gilly: You think? I still don't understand why she did that.

Editor: Maybe she felt guilty?

Gilly: You need a soul to feel guilt.

Editor: That's harsh.

Gilly: Okay, maybe not a soul. But at least a conscience. I don't think she's ever shown one.

Editor: What about when she stopped the collider from running and revealed her affair with Joseph?

Gilly: Selfish. Look at her now. She's famous isn't she? Nothing moral about that. She's a user, plain and simple. She used Joseph. She used me. She's using the media to get powerful. She's barely even human, in my eyes. Put that in your fucking book.

Editor: I'm sorry to agitate you.

Gilly: Not your fault. It's hers. (*Lights another cigarette*)

Editor: Do you want to stop here now, or is it okay to continue?

Gilly: Any other questions?

Editor: Just a few. I was also curious as to whether or not you've talked to your husband since he was incarcerated?

Gilly: No.

Editor: Have you heard anything about him since he was let free?

Gilly: He e-mailed me and told me he was writing a book.

Editor: Really? I'm surprised that he would do that, considering the way you two have discussed each other in the past.

Gilly: I was pretty shocked. Never expected that.

Editor: What was the tone of the e-mail? Was it angry or mocking?

Gilly: He said, "I just want you to know I'm writing a book about everything. You're in it. I'm going to try to be as fair as I can, but I hope you understand if I have a few negative things to say about you." I didn't even bother to reply.

Editor: Was that the last you heard from him?

Gilly: Yes. You know some exes try to stay friendly, or work things out? We never even tried. I had no interest in seeing him. He blamed me for Marian leaving him.

Editor: They didn't stay together after the incident?

Gilly: No. She tried to make things good between us. No interest.

Editor: Have you heard anything about her since?

Gilly: I seen her in some book, talking about it. She's made a career out of it. Kind of a celebrity. Even fatter than she used to be. She has to be close to three hundred pounds.

Editor: What book was that?

Gilly: I don't know, some science journal, why?

Editor: Must have been old. She's lost one hundred and fifty pounds in the last five years.

Gilly: Really? The wonders never cease.

Editor: She's been on the lecture circuit promoting her new book, *How to Lose Weight the Lopez Way*.

Gilly: I'm not surprised. Anything to get ahead.

Editor: She's also, supposedly, writing a book about the incident.

Gilly: Really?

Editor: Yeah, it's allegedly called *Me, Joseph, and Gilly*.

Gilly: Bitch didn't inform me.

Editor: Is there anything you can do to stop her?

Gilly: Not really. I could write a book if I wanted to. I'd rather not.

Editor: So Joseph tries to write a book and Marian is writing one, but you have no interest in a book?

Gilly: None at all. If we're lucky, maybe she'll disappear too. (*Smiles, puts out her cigarette*) I'm out of cigarettes. I think we might be done here.

Editor: Yeah, it seems like a logical place to end. Do you have anything else you'd like to discuss?

Gilly: Can I go into more detail on some more of my latest projects?

Editor: Sure.

Gilly: I mentioned the anti-nuclear reactor work I've been doing in South America. Lately, I've been involved in anti-collider protests. We've successfully closed down about three. Why do they even try? They always get shut down

Editor: I saw your interview on Larry King the other night.

Gilly: Larry is a weird guy. Glad he didn't try to make me wife number ten, or whatever.

Editor: You've become quite a celebrity, haven't you?

Gilly: I guess. That's not why I'm doing this.

Editor: Of course, of course. Altruism is a rare thing these days.

Gilly: Don't be a smart ass. I'm not Miss Altruistic. I'm only human.

Editor: I understand. Anything more you want to say about your life, up to this moment?

Gilly: I'm writing a book.

Editor: Oh really? I thought you weren't interested in writing a book.

Gilly: It's not about the Hadron Collider. I never said I wouldn't write a book. Just not a book about that. I just started, any ways, doing the research. Quantum Physics. Trying to show how it's impossible to recreate the Big Bang. I'm not scientist, but that's what the book is. It's a book for people who aren't scientists. Trying to help people understand it, from a layman position. It's important that a book like this gets written, so that the people can understand the dangers of atom colliding. It's not anti-quantum physics. Just anti-colliding.

Editor: Well, that sounds exciting. Thank you for your time.

Gilly: Thank you. Bye.

Editor: Bye.