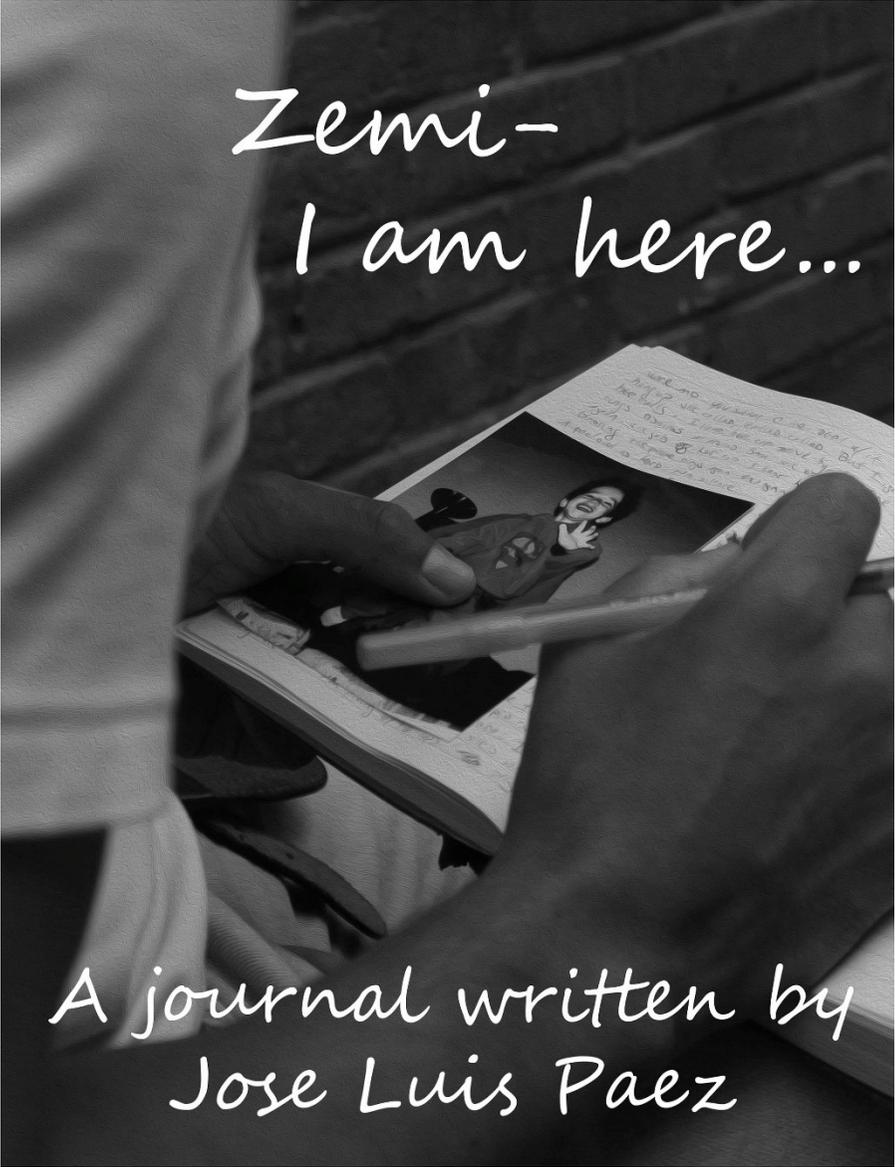


Zemi-
I am here...



A journal written by
Jose Luis Paez

Zemi—

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Author's Note

Most names and identifying characteristics of persons included in this book have been changed.

For Zemi Adore

So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

--Shakespeare

Zemi—

I am here ...

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Chapter 1



August 17, 2008

Zemi—

Happy fourteenth month!

I just got home from watching *Bonnie and Clyde* on the big screen at the Plaza Theater. Faye Dunaway did not disappoint.

It's now twenty-seven days since I've last seen you or heard your voice. I miss you so much! A part of me believes that you will not remember who I am. I feel sick just thinking about it.

I've been writing you since June 2007, but alas, your first journal was purloined by Bonnie! I kept a detailed account of your first year on Earth in that journal. I wrote about everything under the moon. My fatherly advice to you, an account of our time together, my tortured thoughts, aching pains—My heartstrings! So many precious memories! Gone! She took my memories of you, Zemi.

'Wretched woman, why the hell would she do that!?'

Tears of anger are streaming down my cheeks as I put pen to paper. A true writer respects the work of a fellow contemporary and does not secretly

read their unfinished work. Had she only been guilty of that, I might have looked past it, but her fear of you finding out the truth drove her to destroy it. She was difficult to live with and the hell she put me through make me sound crazy when I recall those times.

I have read some of her work. It would have been far more interesting had she allowed her true nature to be the influence that commanded her inspiration. Instead, it lacked substance and thus will remain what it always has and always will be: serviceable.

‘She calls herself a writer?’

Pfft! She is bereft of any integrity, vision, and originality to merit such designation.

In this journal, I will write you about everything that happens to me. Since you are the only one that I confide in, there will be no need for me to lie. I’ll keep these journals in a laptop to further complicate any future thieving attempts from Bonnie. The memories she stole shall have to be recounted to the best of my memory in this new journal. Those entries were mostly written as they occurred. Like a fresh wound, I was painfully open. Raw. I captured in great detail the tumultuous times I experienced on pen and paper. But alas, they are gone! Forever! She is dead to me now.

You will hear fraudulent accounts about my actions as you grow older. You will. For that reason I find it extremely imperative for me to keep an account of my side of things. I don’t want you to take my side or think any less of Bonnie. I only want you to know the truth because that is all that matters.

I was placed on this Earth for a reason. I don’t believe that I am here to simply observe life. I believe I am here for a bigger reason and these entries will play a critical part in that. Know that you are my drive and motivation to write and grow. Know that I want you to experience my life through these words because one day I will be somebody and it’ll be because of you.

Bonnie may have robbed me of your development, but in the future we will stand next to each other as father and son. The longing and suffering will soon cease to exist. For right now, I have the incredible honor to write you. Only to you.

Love,
Dad ...

P.S. Wish you were here.

August 20, 2008

Zemi—

Bonnie's mom, Ingrid, called at around 8p, blaming me for her not being able to locate her grandson. It appears that Bonnie won't reveal your exact location to her in Albuquerque.

“You don't care about that child!”

‘Excuse me!? You have no idea what went on!’

“Who are you to tell me this?”

‘Who are you to tell me I don't care about my son?’

I hung up.

I spoke to my mom to gain a different perspective and I must agree with what she said. Ingrid is hurt. She loves you and is worried about your well-being. Bonnie's refusal to reveal your whereabouts only serves to add to that frustration. God, I have but myself to blame for all this. I let it get this far.

I am apprehensive to write down my genuine thoughts on paper again. Yet, a part of me believes that Bonnie will manage to somehow get ahold of them. I need that laptop.

Good nite, Zemi. Raise hell!

Love-
Dad ...

August 24, 2008

Zemi—

I can't sleep! It's 1:40a and I have to be up in four and half hours. My mind currently races with thoughts of hate, anger, longing, regret, revenge--ugggh! (Let me roll a cigarette...) All right.

I can't stop thinking about my journal. **My** memories are gone. All my precious encounters with life, drugs, fights, lonely nites—all gone! She probably burnt it already. Selfish human! The thought of—alright. Stop.

This is a new beginning. A new chapter in my life. Ah, but those words were written as my life unraveled itself. That is why it pains me so! Oh, I just remembered. I wrote my mom and dad frequently from Albuquerque. I wrote them concurrently with the first journal. I will collect those letters from them soon and use them as references to recount that period.

New beginnings. I like the sound of that. Why don't we make that the theme of this journal? I plan to improve both my mental and physical well-being once I have my own place. I still struggle with my demons, Zemi. At times, the pain becomes too unbearable. So much so that I took five oxycodone last nite and washed them down with two forties to silence my thoughts and numb my pain. I have to stop. I just don't know of any other way to get a peaceful nite's sleep. Once the anesthetics wear off in the morning though, the beast reawakens. It never rests. The fucker haunts me.

That's it for now. It's now half past two this morning. I will smoke one more cig before I hit the hay. Goodnite, Zemi. Remember, I always will be thinking about you.

Love—
Dad...

xx-xx-2008

Zemi—

I don't know what the date is today. What I do know is this: it's 1:18a Sunday morning. I write you from my mom's kitchen table as thoughts of rejuvenation flow through my mind. I have decided to completely quit using drugs because without them I will live a happy and fulfilling life. I have hurt both myself and my family with my drug use. I have realized that people who use drugs on a regular basis tend to be a bit on the negative, bitter, and depressed side. I think I may be depressed because I constantly put myself down. Sometimes I don't notice it until it's too late; like when the drugs, pills, and/or

alcohol have already altered my perception. I can't live like that anymore. I have you to think about. I don't want you to ever see me in that state. I want to inspire you. I don't want to disappoint you.

For the majority of our relationship, Bonnie and I were either stoned, drunk, or both and altercations invariably ensued.

'Were we so insecure under our own skin to notice how the bickering and
cruel

mind games fostered an unhealthy environment?'

Urgh! It is nauseating to even think about our time together. Soon I will purchase a laptop and write the entire detestable tale for you. I will point out the specific events where our relationship took a turn for the worst. Having to compose those entries to you on paper again worries and puts me on edge.

'Bonnie will steal them,' I tell myself.

Picturing her peruse your journal at her leisure fills me with disgust.

Zemi, I suspect you are in town for Labor Day weekend. Yesterday late afternoon, a car eerily similar to Bonnie's cruised by as I smoked a cigarette out in front of mom's apartment. The driver sped off when we made eye contact. It was her, Zemi. I am certain it was. Urgh! I felt terribly uneasy afterwards.

'What misery awaits me next?'

My mom seems chirpier now that I'm back. I am sure it's my presence that cheers her up. If she knew what I do once the shadows emerge in her apartment then her motherly fondness toward me would surely be negatively affected. I am not the angel I believe she sees me as. I raided her medicine cabinet and thus far, I've taken a total of fifteen (maybe thirty) codeine pills, fifty Tylenols and chased them down with beer. I only took them to take the edge off. I know it's a mental thing. I just need to keep myself busy with activities and surround myself with people that make me happy.

'And what are they?'

Well for starters, I'd like to learn everything! I also want to act with artists who inspire me. I want to reach my full potential as a man and date beautiful, intelligent, funny, and sane women. You know, thinking about my life like that makes me not want to use drugs anymore. I become complete and regain my ambitious hunger. I need to take action, but I don't.

'I wonder why?'

I want to act because it comes natural to me. I want to travel the world and bear witness to all its riches and share those magnificent moments with my loved ones. I know I will. I am in a stage of my life where all I read harmonizes with my essence.

‘Why won’t I listen?’

Like an inner compass that, despite the malevolent efforts from others to steer me astray, remains true to its course without the need to chastise me when I betray it. If only I would listen. Sure, drug fueled insubordination makes for a much more interesting water cooler conversation. It’s fun and dangerous to think you are on the run. It’s a rush which keeps you on your toes but trust me when I tell you this—you only do it because you aren’t happy with yourself. Something gnaws at your soul. Remember this, Zemi: no one will love you unless you love yourself first. Good nite my son.

Love—
Dad ...

September 15, 2008

Zemi—

What a crazy week I’ve had!

(Hold on. I need a cigarette.) Okay.

I have a place to call my own! 2020 Hastings Ave. I moved in last Sunday. It’s a great apartment. It’s on the back of a house with its own private patio. It’s got a sunken living room which gives a cozy intimate quality to the place. Off to the left, sitting across from each other, are the kitchen and bathroom and nestled directly behind the living room is my sleeping quarter. It boasts a bed that rests on a platform three feet off the ground. I have arranged my books on a shelf that is fixed on the wall. I truly like this place!

It’s become incredibly difficult for me to write my thoughts down on paper. It’s like an attempt to document a dream immediately after slumber. The dream slowly falls into an abyss. I hurry over to the edge and manage to clutch its forearm, but it slides off my grasp. As it falls in farther and farther down, its memory in my mind gradually fades to darkness. Nothing.

I am worried. I haven't heard a single thing about your whereabouts or well-being. I don't know what to do. I miss you so much, Zemi. I assume you walk now and look great doing it. Shame things turned out this way. I know you won't hate me because you possess two admirable traits: common sense and a sense of humor. I have seen it.

The first time Bonnie and I bathed you at my mom's was memorable for all the wrong reasons. As Bonnie drew your bath, you and I patiently sat on the ledge of the bathtub. On an impulse, I whisked you down the stairs in your birthday suit and paraded you before my family. I thought it would make everybody laugh. Boy was I wrong. Judging by the menacing glare you shot me, my insensitive antic only succeeded to vex you. On our way back up to the bathroom, you fixed your piercing eyes upon me as if to say,

“I'll return the favor when you're in a wheel chair at a nursery home.”
Zemi, I cringe with shame at the thought of having done that. I'm sorry.

That story was in your Journal.

‘Oh, did you know that she left a ripped page from it under my car seat?’
Wow. How thoughtful. I've got to get over this anger. I think it may take a long time.

She took full advantage of me only because I let her. I do blame myself, but mostly her for being so heartless at times. I look back at all she did and how she went about it and pity her. Poor soul. She's troubled.

That's it for now my man. I work manana at 8a, so I'm going to finish my Mickeys and fall asleep. Take care of yourself. Wherever you are. I love you!

Love—
Dad...

September 17, 2008

Zemi—

You turned one year and three months today!
‘Technically, you've been alive for two years, but who is counting?’

I understand that I proclaimed abstinence from drugs and alcohol a few days ago. I know, yet a Colt 45 rests snugly in the palm of my hand. A line from *Network* just came to mind.

“Don’t do it, buddy! You’re a young man!
You got your whole life ahead of you!”

I’m fucking miserable. I can’t cry anymore, Zemi. I don’t want to. It hurts when I do. I keep to myself because I don’t want anybody to take advantage of me again. That’s what people do when they get hurt, I guess. At work, nobody knows a thing about my personal life. I prefer it that way, but I desperately want to share those details with people. I want to share all my thoughts, passions, heartaches, and my yearning to see you, my son!

I have decided to stay single until I find the right person. The women I flirt with from work don’t give me the feeling I seek. Flirting only serves to make the monotony tolerable. I still want to meet *her*, and I’ll know it’s her once she crosses my path.

Reality hit me hard today. Earlier this afternoon, I gave a buddy from work a ride home. He asked me,

“So what do you want to do with your life?”

I gave him a bullshit response because I hardly know him and the answer. I thought I knew, then doubted myself. That frightened me. I don’t see myself being happy doing anything other than acting, so I need to make my dreams happen now. Here are my goals: 1) To land the part of Brick in Williams’s *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* in a couple of weeks. 2) To grow as an artist and learn that domain’s history. 3) To get accepted at the Scaena Drama School in NYC on a scholarship.

That’s it for now Zemi. I will write soon.

September 19, 2008

Zemi—

I want to go out and have fun, but then I have second thoughts and hide behind closed doors. I get in this funky mood. I turn into a paranoid closed-minded taciturn character. I sabotage myself.

‘How come?’

I'm way over your mom. It's you. I'm not happy. Everything in my life is great, but to not have you in it pulls me back into a depressive state.

(Hey, that rhymed.)

Oh, I cleaned out my suitcase and found letters, receipts, and all sorts of cool memories from Albuquerque. I even found a receipt from the cafeteria at Presbyterian Hospital. You must had been only a few hours old when it was printed! I can't wait to piece them all together to write about our time then. I fucking miss you! We will get to know each other soon. Got to go.

Love—

Dad...

September 23, 2008

Zemi—

I am sad, beaten, confused, hurt, angry, desperate, and utterly hopeless.

‘What am I doing? What am I going to do?’

Flashes of yesterday pop up. Awful times still haunt my mind. I am doubting my dream. Maybe I should quit. Maybe I should conform and be simple. I don't know anymore. Maybe I've been lying to myself all these years.

It's lonely, Zemi, when you are trying to find yourself. You question your whole existence. It can drive a man insane. I mean, all I have to do is apply what I have learned and grow as a person. Everything bad that happens to someone is spawned from oneself. We only have two options. It just happens to be that we always choose the wrong one, when the right one is right there in front of us. You live you learn, I suppose. If you are given a reprieve, I think it's best to remember that it is only momentary.

I wrote this to your mother today. Not sure if I'll send it to her.

I don't want to hate you anymore. I have wasted many a nite doing so. Your inability to accept me for who I am precipitated the countless fights we had. I wonder what is it you resent of me? You never could *just be* or let things develop on their own accord. I ask of you one small favor: accept yourself. For all your follies and insecurities, love yourself! For how can one do if they don't

love themselves? I think of all the great times we created together. Those memories make me feel complete, but your lack of acceptance drive me to a stupor. I can never love you as my woman. You had my child, Zemi, our child of passion, but that is it. I don't believe we will ever have a civil relationship and that bothers me none. Your childish acts of *wanting control* sicken me. What you did to me, I shall never, **EVER** forget! You have left your malignant mark on me. How will I ever forget?'

October 1, 2008

Zemi—

Nite just made its way out. How beautiful she is in all her grandeur. The mystique she possesses, the tales she sows, and the psychos she welcomes. I feel at home. I am bothered by something, though. There's something I want to understand, but its essence eludes me. Bonnie's been on my mind lately. I smile when the mental images of all the beautiful times we created together replay in my mind's eye. Then, the reel changes abruptly and before I can look away, it's already too late. It's got me. I sound like a broken record when I recount all our horrible times. It's a purge, I guess.

'How much longer will this liquid disease that
squats in my soul inhabit my thoughts?'

My mind just went blank.

Good nite Zemi.

October 5, 2008

Zemi—

It rained today. I love the smell of rain, particularly as the clouds that carry it loom on the horizon and scud across the sky. Ah, the anticipation. I opened my front door to welcome such delightful scent into my apartment. Sometimes if I close my eyes the scent intensifies. It did.

Oh, last Friday nite, I saw a good cover band perform at the Shadow Lounge. For the first two sets, my attention was drawn to the back scene. In

between sets, I noticed multiple girls who fought for the drummer's attention, the lead singer and his girl bickered by the bar, and the bassist chatted up a pretty girl outside over a smoke. Girls, girls, girls! It was fascinating to watch. All drama set to the side, they rocked my world. I witnessed how effortlessly they connected with the audience. I want to do the same thing when I act. In a nutshell, you have to not care about what other people think of your work and just do it. Like Lynda says,

“This is my gift to you. If you don't like it, fuck off!”

The band's performance got me motivated to win the role of Brick on Tuesday. I've worked hard on my craft these past couple weeks. I've read *A Challenge for the Actor* by Uta Hagen during that span and everything Lynda taught me is in that book. The first seventy-five pages are about accepting who you are. Don't lie to yourself, Zemi. The quicker you accept yourself the sooner you'll be able to change this world.

There is so much I have to fill you in on, but in the meantime stay strong and give your mom hell!

Love—
Dad...

October 8, 2008

Zemi—

I didn't get the part. An avalanche of thoughts crushed my mind as I read the director's e-mail. It was the best audition I've ever done. In all the rest, I'd stumble through words, gave a horrible read, or had no confidence nor composure whatsoever. Yesterday, I came prepared and that helped A LOT. All I did was *listen and respond*. Every read I gave was different than the last. I had so much fun. I was sure I nailed it. Ah, I could have done more. I'm at a that stage where I need to give more of myself. It's a learning process which gives me further insight about myself. Lessons matter, Zemi. I was bummed out though. That's the end of it. Closed chapter.

Text message from Buddy

FWD

Hey, if you see or hear from Jose, have him call me when he's able to. Thanks, Bonnie

I was taking a shit when I received that text from Buddy.

'Kind of sums it all up, huh?'

Her message was laced with ominous undertones. Chills went down my spine then nestled themselves at the pit of my stomach. It was unsettling. My mind's eye transported me to memories I'd prefer to avoid. It took me about two hours to shake them off.

I love him. I don't know what it was that I did wrong

was what Bonnie wrote Buddy. She wants me to see you before she moves to either Seattle or NYC. I don't buy it, Zemi. I don't want her to know my number or where I live. It'll start the cycle again and I don't want that. All I want from her is a civil relationship for your sake.

This is bull!

'What? She's seen the light all of a sudden without acknowledging her transgressions and insensitive callous treatment of me!?'

I don't believe she'll move to either of those cities. Oh, and apparently, she lives in a crummy apartment in ABQ with a roommate. And Zemi, you were but a mere transient footnote in her tragic soliloquy.

He's fine.

'Why Seattle? Something about a save the kids foundation gig or maybe Jimi Hendrix. NYC?'

Well, that's where I'll be in a couple of months. None of what she said adds up. I won't bite on this suspect armistice she proposes. I've made up my mind. I'll never get back with her. I will set up rules between us and if she doesn't like them well, she knows what she can do. I need a day to sort out my thoughts. I know what I want. I know what I feel. I know what I don't feel. I only worry about her next move. What she says isn't always what she means. That killed me before. Okay. Enough.

I messaged Bonnie earlier. Below is a full transcript of our conversation:

Hey! How are you...?

Jose?

When are you guys moving away from ABQ? ...

Who the fuck is this?

I see you haven't lost your charm. This is Jose. ...

She then let me have it.

Let's break it down to brass tacks here: I will not answer your preliminary question because it sounds too polite and insincere. Zemi is well. Second answer: if I decide to, I will have my own office in NYC come January. How is your miserable existence?

I decided to have a little fun with her.

It's the way you say it is. I miss you. I think about you every day. I think I made a mistake.
...

What do you mean?

Get over yourself. I'm great! You tell Buddy all these things that, by judging from your last text, aren't true. I would very much like to see Zemi, but I doubt you will allow it. Now, I don't have time to bullshit. What do you want? ...

Whoa. I'm sorry to bother you. Zemi had pneumonia pretty bad. He's better now. I called Buddy to see if you were okay. You didn't have to be a jerk.

Can you send me a picture of him? ...

How about please? And I tried. They're not going through.

Did he lose any weight? Did he go to the hospital? Did his foot angle back in? How long has he been walking for? ...

He needs to gain 3lbs. We had an ER visit, 2 rounds of antibiotics and a nebulizer. Leg is fine. Been walking for a month.

That text made me cry. I got lost in my thoughts there for a second. God, that meant you're between 20-25 lbs.!

How did he get pneumonia? And why is he always getting sick? ...

He isn't always getting sick. The weather here has been fluctuating between hot and cold. Plus, we moved to a new place and he went into daycare. Babies get sick! So, chill. Fuck.

Get off your high horse, will you? Nobody's blaming you for anything. It's about Zemi, not you. So, don't get offended. ...

I'm not offended. Just chill with the questions. I said he's better. That's that. I'm not going to explain everything so stop being a dick. You can see him before we move, so get back to your jobless self-indulgent life and quit hating on me.

Yes mam. ...

Laugh it up boy, just laugh it up. Not like it matters to you but, I do think about you a lot and still love you very much. Sucks to be me.

At least I know you are okay. I need to feel this one out more to find out exactly where you and I stand, so I can set up a relationship and deal with only you, but through her. Through thick and thin. It begins!

October 11, 2008

Zemi—

The director just offered me the part! Yeah! She called about ten minutes ago and said that the other actor couldn't commit, and that I was the next best thing. She's fucking right I am! This news rejuvenated me so much my second wind kicked in. I have to prep well for this guy. I'll have to work on my voice, re-read the play, and live as Brick. At the moment, I'm at the downtown plaza writing all this down as I experience it. I need to call my mom to let her know the good news.

I'll write more later.

Love—
Dad...

October 13, 2008

Zemi—

I spoke to Bonnie today. The pneumonia is gone but the ear infection is back. You had a flu shot as well. I bet you cried. I remember how much they hurt you. You'd bellow out a long painful cry as soon as the needle punctured your skin. So innocent and pure your cry is. It pained me to watch you in that state, my son. You'll be okay. You always pull through.

Not finding a job really worries me. I don't want to work at a call center, but if it comes down to that, I will have to swallow my pride and suck it up for the mean time. I feel emasculated for not being a provider. I mean, I work on my character most of the day, but I need to make money. Okay, my plan is to be at the gym early tomorrow morning then spend the rest of the day in search of a job. I'll try restaurants. Anything really, as long as I can work days and every other weekend. How embarrassing it would be if I was to work at a job that requires manual labor. I just now admitted that to myself.

'Fuck it, right? So what if I'm 25 years old and work at, oh say, a downtown eatery?'

I am an aspiring actor, and a prestigious job isn't in the cards at the moment, so to hell with my insecurities and this paranoid egotistical false sense of entitlement. I will be employed tomorrow. Anywhere.

Bonnie thinks that we're rekindling our relationship. She's dead wrong!
This was what she messaged me:

I'm writing a play. About us. For the Ox Theater.

Two hours later:

Fine. Fuck it. You have better things to do.

First of all, I was at rehearsal.

'Second, what was she thinking?'

I almost messaged her with a detailed description of my whereabouts, but then thought better of it. I don't want her to know anything about my life. Besides, she's not my woman anymore, so I have no obligation to report to her. I didn't messaged her back, and won't for a couple of days. I know you're okay and that's all that matters to me.

That's it for now. It's 11:27p. I'm going to eat some noodles, smoke a cig and call it a nite. Good nite Zemi. Be bad!

Love—
Dad...

October 16, 2008

Zemi—

'Where is she? My friend, lover, and soul mate? Does she even exist?'

I want to go venture out into the nite-scene to find her or meet a bunch of people to develop some type of social life, but when it comes down to actually doing it, the interest vanishes. Everything linked with meeting people, the baggage, trust issues, time, all that just turns me off. I don't want to have to deal with shit like that again. After what I endured with Bonnie, I hesitate to get involved or get close with anybody. A part of me is still hurt.

'Apprehension, you know?'

Got to keep a vigil eye on the front. Another part of me wants somebody to talk to, hang out with, make love to, but I still lack the confidence to go out and meet her. My mom told me not to look because I'll never find her. That's sounds true.

I get very lonely. All I really want is somebody who'll accept me for me, not want to change me, or bring any drama into my life. That last part I consider a long-shot.

'Am I addicted to drama?'

No, she stalks me.

'I can deal with a little bullshit if it's brought in good faith, you know?'

I enjoy and cherish my time alone, but I don't plan to be alone forever. I'm afraid that I won't be able to accommodate a person into my life after all the time I've spent as a loner. She'll have to be somebody very special for me to want to include in my loneliness.

October 27, 2008

Zemi—

I woke up today feeling bad. Ominous vibrations tuned into my wave lengths. Something was very wrong. I couldn't shake it off. All I thought of was you and your well-being. I wanted to text Bonnie, but then thought otherwise. Something bad had happened and I feared it had something to do with you. My stomach felt empty, my thoughts cloudy, and I projected back to those god-awful times I experienced with Bonnie. The past creeps up on me incessantly, like a broken Ferris wheel that rotates counterclockwise and entices me to get on once more. I don't want to get on, Zemi! Thank God it vanished once I got to rehearsal.

I've thought a lot about my dad lately. I haven't spoken to him in weeks, and feel guilty about it. How lonely he must be. It's a little past 10p. I'll call him to let him know I am okay. Hold on.

Okay. That made me feel better! We both have Friday off. He told me to bring the vacuum to clean his carpet. My dad's a good man. I hold nothing against him.

'How could I?'

He's my dad. He was there physically, but absent emotionally. Lots of people would resent their fathers for that, but not me. I want to help him start up his own restaurant. I consider him and our family motivation to become a respected actor. I will help my family financially and give them a good life, so they won't need anything. I'll do it one day. I'm just a fucking dreamer. Hey, it beats being a human being that passes on every opportunity that's presented to them. Conformity. What an ugly word. Luckily, ambition gets me past that foul word. I'm going to make it one day, Zemi.

Good nite.

Remember to laugh!

October 30, 2008

Zemi—

Night Falls. The ashtray collects the powdery residue that once were dying embers - guilt no more. Only pleasure. I don't enjoy it, but it calms me down. The few seconds after that first drag are placid. I am at peace with reality. The smoke fills up my lungs then slowly glides off my throat as I exhale. It's become a daily ritual. I look forward to that first aching drag.

'It ain't so bad after four cigs, you know?'

It's a way to relieve the stresses I have to endure from the day.

You were in my dream last nite. All I remember was you and I were in my old room in that two-story, two-bedroom apartment I grew up in on Campbell Street. You had the same forehead, same nose, eyes and smile but your chin was different. It was wider than the rest of your face. God I hope you're well.

Bonnie messaged me last nite. Here's our exchange:

Um, the douche thing wasn't for you. We're not coming this weekend.

Okay. Let me know what's a good time for me to go up there to visit. ...

No chance. Not up here.

Whatever. You need to grow up and start thinking about his well-being. I don't give a fuck about you or what you do with your life. If you're going to make it hard for me to see Zemi, that's okay. I'll get my chance. ...

And that's how I left it, but she carried on.

It's not that, Jose. Not at all. Don't be a dick.

Okay. You're acting irrational. Just calm down. I know you don't give a fuck. I laughed when you asked how I am. So just cut the bullshit and stop being mean.

I said you could see him. I made the offers. Just not up here.

Then around 7:30 the next morning, I got these:

Oh and you won't ever find us. You will get jail time for what you did to me on my birthday... In front of Zemi so don't talk to me about state of mind. What you did was wrong.

Wow!

‘How can she keep a straight face while telling those lies?’

Nothing happened on her birthday. Ah, fuck her. I've got a police report that shows her as the aggressor.

‘She wants to go that route?’

Fine! Let's dance.

It's about to get nasty. I'm ready for it though. (My heart was beating pretty weird right now. Every other beat felt as if it was going to pop out!)

I'm going to smoke a cigarette. I'll be right back.

October 31, 2008

Zemi—

So how was your first Halloween? Wait a minute, second Halloween!

‘I wonder what Bonnie dressed you up as?’

She messaged me this morning. Check out what she said:

Can't believe we almost named Zemi 'Santino'.

Two things: 1) What the fuck? Two days ago she threatened me with jail time, and now she acts like nothing happened. I'm telling you Zemi, she's off! and, 2) Allow me tell you how you were almost named Santino. (I need a cigarette for this one. Be right back.)

We considered that name only because I romanticized it. While you shacked up in Bonnie's belly, we watched *The Godfather* daily. Every time you gave her love pains, we'd play it and it immediately appeased you. A strong bond between you two quickly developed. I thought Santino would be a strong name for you. For the first four months we lived in Albuquerque, Bonnie and I worked as roaming photographers for Closeups by Francesca. The job required us to drive out to every school across the state of New Mexico to take class pictures and portraits of the students. One nite in Ruidoso, we ate at a restaurant called Santino's. I took that as an auspicious moment and thus became convinced that I would call my son Santino. Eventually, we became discouraged by the idea and distanced ourselves from that name.

Bonnie created your name in May of that year. To this day, I have no clue how she created the list she showed me. You'd have to ask her about it. After an uneventful day at work, I walked into our apartment in Corrales and found her on the recliner with a pen and piece of paper in hand. She appeared amused and my arrival seemed to have alleviated her anticipation. I sensed she wanted me to take a look at what she had written. On it was a list of about eight names. I couldn't recall the others if you put a gun to my head. No other moniker stood out but Zemi Adore. My eyes naturally gravitated toward it and without hesitation, I proclaimed,

“That's it. That's his name!”

We love your name. It's unique and it makes everyone smile when they hear it for the first time. Zemi Adore. You carry it well too!

Tomorrow I work until 1:30p. My goal is to walk out with six sales. That's it for now, Zemi. I am going to smoke one more cig before I go to bed. I'll talk to you soon.

Love

Dad...

November 7, 2008

Zemi—

What a waste of a nite! The fucking joint was empty, and to top it off I spent too much god damn money. I have to stop! Starting today, no more pointless spending. I am going to hustle at work. I am going to earn enough money in the first two weeks of the month to make my rent and the rest will go toward NYC. This is getting out of control. I have to stay focused. I want to get to NYC with money in my pocket but all I do is squander it. I am so fucking bad. Fuck this! I am losing Zemi. I buy a shit load of cigs, a forty every nite, and go out on the weekends.

‘Do I want to settle down?’

I say one thing but do the total opposite. It's got to stop. This is enough. No more. I'll read, write, and watch my movies. There should be no reason to go out. Simple as that. I am so disgusted with myself!

‘Am I trying to be somebody else? Why the fuck do I go out?’

It's pointless. I've always hated it. I hate myself right now! I am so disgusted with myself! I am veering off track. I am not doing the things I told myself I was going to do: read, learn, bulk up my knowledge. I am not doing any that. I am wasting my time.

I will take more walks at nite to connect and harmonize with myself. I need to write more interesting thoughts. I need to work on my voice, so I'll sound eloquent because I always reach for words. No more alcohol. No more mindless spending. It's an addiction I have but I won't cop out and blame it for my behavior. All I have to do is stop.

I feel better. Okay. I've been committed to my sobriety for thirty seconds and look fantastic!

‘Oh, why do I still feel like shit!?’

I just got off the phone with Bonnie. She put you on the line and I heard your laugh. It breaks me that I am not there with you. I miss you so much. I am very emotional right now. I am crying. My tears are falling on this journal; my own tears.

'What the fuck is wrong with me!? I just want somebody to talk to, you now? Is that too much to ask?'

Being myself has always bothered me. I'm not comfortable in my own skin sometimes, but on stage, I feel free. I need to eat. I haven't eaten all day.

I needed that break down. Released a lot of stress. I need my movies, my books. Those are my drugs and inspiration.

Okay. Calm down, get up, and fix yourself some noodles. Then, make your way to the gym and spend time with mom afterwards.

November 9, 2008

Zemi—

Yay! Bonnie sent me two pics of you this morning. In one, you drank for your bottle and wore dark pants and a blue sweater with a light brown vest over it. And your hair looked wild! Just like mine! You looked awesome! The other was of you at the aquarium. You stood in front of the shark display, but your attention was focused on something on the floor just off to your right. Again, you looked extremely chic. It's the first time I've seen you stand on your own two feet. A sense of relief washed over me because I gained some certitude that you were all right. Your health, however, isn't too well. You still have that darn ear infection. Many antibiotics have been prescribed to you, but have worked to no avail. Your doctor now wants to administer what's called a tympanostomy. It's a surgical procedure where they cut open your eardrum, drain the liquid that has taken shelter in there, evict it, and replace it with a small device to let air flow through. This will prevent future squatters from shacking up in your eardrum.

I wish I could be there with you, but the more I think about what kind of person Bonnie really is, I second guess myself. Certain scenarios from our past come to mind that deter me entirely from reconciling with Bonnie. Scenarios that were driven by lies and deceitfulness. In many religions, couples with children are supposed to stick it out for the kid's sake even when the shit hits the fan and splatters on your face. They say no kid should come from a broken home. I believe that's just as bad as a child having to live in a tense environment. Times have changed, Zemi. We live in a time where couples have

options. I made a choice and I will pay dearly for it unless Bonnie comes to her senses.

As I watched football earlier, I daydreamed that you were a high school football star. I think you'd be more inclined to play baseball though. You were rapt with attention last June when we watched the MLB All-Star Game. We had watched football, basketball, and soccer games together, but the interest wasn't there. Baseball's the only game you gave your attention to. All the others seemed to bore you.

I can't wait until you get older so we can get to know each other as human beings. I'll never feed your mind poison. You are your own person with an autonomous mind. If you don't like me, that's okay. I only ask for an opportunity. You can't deny me that. I am your dad, Zemi. We are blood. Nothing can ever deny us the bond we have.

I wish you were here with me at this very moment as I listen to Hendrix's *Little Wing*. My favorite song is *Castles Made of Sand*. We'd listen to it in the car. I think you liked it too. It's 10:30 at nite. Seems like a cold nite out. I want to go for a walk to check up on the nite drifters.

'Maybe I will learn something, huh?'

I suggested to Bonnie via text for her to get a PO Box, so I can send you guys money.

'You know what she retorted with?'

We don't need your money!

I still asked her to think about it.

That's it for now Zemi. I will smoke one more cigarette, read and then call it a nite. Hope you had fun today! You rock!

Love
Dad...

PS-- I sent Bonnie a text thanking her for the pics.

They were beautiful!

'You know what her reply was?'

Yeah, yeah whatever.

November 12, 2008

Zemi—

Received some good news from the front lines. I get to take you to your doctor's appointment on January sixth! Plus, we'll spend the whole week together while Bonnie is off in New York. The news made me whole yet a bit nervous because I have to see Bonnie. But, like everything else, I won't worry about until the time comes. For now, I will bask in the pleasurable anticipation that we will spend quality time together.

'What will we do?'

Oh, I can't wait! Good nite Zemi. Smile!

November 21, 2008

Zemi—

How empty my soul feels. I walk with transparent pallid eyes. No one notices my soul withering away. The guile of that façade distracted the distracted from my vulnerable truth. God how I miss you.

'Am I really a father? Can I really call myself that?'

Father. Such weight in that designation. Much responsibilities which I have yet to honor. We know each other only in our dreams. Scattered images of what might be. Deja vu. A blood connection that's been detached by hatred and terrible timing.

'How can we begin to understand one another if we
won't allow ourselves to be understood?'

Why god chose this path for me, I may never know. All I can do is adapt because if I don't, I'll go crazy with melancholy. I inch ever so closer to complete strangeness of what you and I had and could share.

But I will not go quietly into the nite! I will not disown what is rightfully mine! Fingers filled with poison and resentment are pointed my way. That filth will not pollute my bloodstream for I am too strong to fail, especially against my accusers. Those poor misunderstood souls; god's bastard children. I am not one of them and as god as my witness, I never will be! You are my boy, Zemi! MY BOY! Nobody can take that away from me, no matter how great the distances are that keep us apart. She uses you to hurt me, mentions you so I'll miss you, and sends pictures so I'll yearn for you. A piece of my soul was killed by what happened. I changed because of it.

‘I have grown immune to their attacks, but at what price?’
It costs me now, but I'll be repaid in dividends.

Goodnite, Zemi.

I can't wait to see you in my dream. I've made some pretty neat plans for us.

Stay strong!!

Love—
Dad ...

November 30, 2008

Zemi—

You never showed for Thanksgiving. Bonnie never apologized. She picked at my scars with sharp acrimonious messages instead. When she was done, she offered me a part in a play she wrote. It apparently got picked up by a local company. Funny how just a few days ago, the same script got picked up in NYC for stage. Pompous lies!

Don't worry, Zemi. I'll be okay.

I'm heading over to mom's to do a load of laundry. Maybe get a bite to eat too. I will write later.

Love—
Dad ...

December 20, 2008

Zemi—

It dawned on me today how similar personalities we have. You become very quiet when you're put in a room with strangers. You don't smile, mumble or laugh. You observe. Same with me. It isn't until we feel that it's a safe place (well, safe enough) that we show our true colors. I am happy that you have my personality. Nobody will ever take that away.

I hope Bonnie treats you well. You're going to have it rough, Zemi. It won't be easy putting up with everything that's about to happen. Don't change, Zemi! Never pick up a negative attitude toward all of this. None of what transpired was your fault. Yeah, we played roles in what occurred but there's no need for you to point the finger at somebody and hate them. Be happy that you're alive, free and a man! We only live once. We have this journey to ourselves just one time. Then it's gone. Spend it laughing and loving your family! I've met a lot of people who blame their parents for the way they are. My dad was hardly there for me. Fuck all that. Forgive but don't forget and keep your head up.

Well my boy, I am debating on either watching a movie or a curling up in bed with warm book.

Goodnite Zemi. I love you.

Love—

Dad ...

December 24, 2008

Zemi—

I am very lonely. My heart aches! If only I could hold you, kiss you; tell you I love you. I hung out at my mom's today. I had a descent time. I called my niece as Santa and told her that I received her letter. She was so happy! She can't wait to tell her friends at school that Santa Claus called her.

How all these problems weigh on my mind! I try not to let them get to me. I don't show it, but when I see my niece and nephew, I want you. What long torturous road awaits me. I have to walk down that road and do things my way. The only way I see fit. I hear of people who kill themselves because they can't bear facing their demons. They take the coward's way out. Not me! I'd rather suffer and hope for the best. Knowing me, it will happen. It always does. I don't know if I should call Bonnie. I want to see you, but I can't bear the sight of her. She hurt me so much I much rather avoid her. But, she is my in to you. I'll call her tomorrow.

'What else, what else?'

I've been drinking again. This past week I drank every day. Internally, I am depressed. Fuck it!

'Lots of people are worse off than I am so why am I complaining!?'
Be glad for what you have. Quit crying over what you don't. I haven't gotten my dose of HST in a while. Seems like a good nite for it. The good doctor always gets me going. It's good to be alive if only I had you by my side. Then, I'd be complete.

FUCK ALL THIS BULLSHIT! I MISS MY JOURNAL! MY MOST CREATIVE STATE! GONE! FOREVER!
FUCK IT! ...

December 25, 2008

Zemi—

After not hearing from Bonnie all day, I messaged her hoping she would reply in the negative.

You in Albuquerque? ...

I've got to finish packing. I'll be in town next week.

I'm sorry, Zemi. We're not going to spend Christmas together.

Christmas isn't Christmas anymore.

You tell yourself it's only Thursday to ease the pain.
You become a hermit.
Play CD's to avoid the holiday jingles on the FM dial.
Watch movies. Anything to keep your mind from
Realizing that these are the holidays.
These are the times spent with family for good or ill.
To make amends. To kiss your loved one. To share a cup of joe with mom.
To wish your boy a Merry fucking Christmas when he opens his gift.
To tell your niece that Santa is an angel, then go upstairs and call her, changing
Your voice, telling her 'Ho, Ho, Ho, Ho! This is Santa Claus!'
You walk downstairs to find a blushed, perplexed, happy as
Hell five-year-old, jumping up and down, yelling,
"Santa called me! Santa called me!"
No, you don't do those things when you're in Albuquerque and have got
To finish packing because you'll be in town next week.
Oh no.
Not this year and definitely not next year.
You go to Valero on Montana, pick up a Mickey's
(maybe two if you're feeling very jolly)
Crack it open,
Numb those voices to be able to sleep with a fucking smile
On your face as you puff your cigarettes away.
Christmas isn't Christmas anymore.

December 25, 2008

Zemi—

It's sixteen-minutes til 9p. I'm at my mom's and kind of drunk. I miss you Zemi. Not seeing you took its toll. But fuck it! I can't portray a picture of a weak man in front of my family. So, I'm drunk to numb the pain. Things have been good for me with the exception of not having you here. As long as I know you're okay for now.

December 30, 2008

Zemi—

Lonely nites. Wasted with a forty ounce. Only way I could forget about reality.

Love—

Dad ...

Flashback



September 18, 2004

Zemi—

My date cancelled at the last minute. We were to go on a double to the Lies Telling Truths's (the community theatre) latest production with a friend of mine. Undeterred by that minor setback, I went solo with the fullest intention to have fun. At the ticket counter, a mischievous smile spread across my face when I noticed an inflatable green alien arranged next to the coffee maker on the counter.

‘Yes!’ I said triumphantly. ‘There’s my backup date.’

Every hand I shook or conversation I had on the way to my seat, I introduced the green alien as my date.

‘This is Marcia! She’s in Earth for the weekend.’

I found the entire ordeal extremely amusing.

During the second act, an actress wearing a football helmet was shoved onto the empty stage. Alarmed to be under the spotlight, she appeared disoriented and in her panic broke the fourth wall.

‘Is this part of the show?’ I wondered while chortling.

After regaining some of her composure, she placed both her hands on the helmet's shell and tried yanking it off. But it wouldn't budge! The helmet was stuck to her head! Bending forward and cementing her feet to the stage, she took a deep breath, and with one great strenuous tug—POP!

A sudden silence then fell heavily over the entire audience. Moments later, scattered murmurs could be heard coming from different sections of the audience. The actress's light brown hair was disheveled with parts of it covering one of her gorgeous brown eyes, accentuating the devilish smile she flaunted at us. She was beautiful.

'Who is that?' I asked my friend with my eyes fixed on the actress.

"That's Bonnie."

I pestered everybody at LTT with questions about her shortly after that show. Nobody said anything bad about her. She was, however, in a relationship that was going on nine years.

'That's a shame,' I thought feeling discouraged.

Six months later, we crossed paths during an LTT audition. Waiting for our turns to deliver a monologue, we established an implicit rapport through furtive glances and flirtatious smiles. Her eyes. I became mesmerized by her gorgeous brown eyes that kept whispering sweet nothings into my soul. I was smitten.

About thirty minutes after the audition was over, her boyfriend came to pick her up and I got to meet him. His name is Herbert. He seemed like a nice guy. They mingled for a couple of minutes and then drove off.

Then, in late September 2005 after a rehearsal, a fellow actress handed a black envelope to me.

'What is this?' I asked her.

"Don't know," she said grinning cheerfully, walking away.

It was a Halloween card and written underneath a silhouetted black bristly cat was:

You are invited to Bonnie's ~~sex~~ Halloween party!

I didn't know what to make of Bonnie's indecent invitation. My mind became flooded with all sorts of questions and possible explanations that would merit this type of invite. It also came to mind that I may be overanalyzing what was written. Intrigued by Bonnie's boldness and invigorated by the chances that she may now be single, I made up my mind to attend her party.

During the days leading up to the party, I couldn't stop thinking about her. A part of her essence had somehow gotten hold of mine and she kept constantly reappearing in my nite and day dreams. I couldn't help but feel that she was a part of my life already and that we would be forever linked in some way or another. On the nite of the party, I arrived at around midnite. The ambience was lively and spirited! Screamin' Jay Hawkins's *I Put a Spell on You* played prominently in the air waves, heaps of chips on platters and bowls of salsa were on the counter beside an array of liquor bottles, beer cans seemed to flow endlessly out of coolers, and porno played silently on both her TVs.

Bonnie smiled from across the living room and made her way toward me. She wore a lime green sundress that accentuated her features quite nicely and her slip on cork sandals added a few inches to her menacing five foot stature.

"There's a bong in the bathroom if you want to take a hit," she whispered in my ear.

Her soft voice laced with coquettish undertones made my heart bound with joy as I began imagining the two of us together, kissing passionately under the soft glow of the moonlite. But then, as Bonnie made me watch her walk away, I caught a glimpse of Herbert out of the corner of my eye and my passionate fantasies disintegrated in thin air.

'Guess she's not single after all,' I said disheartened.

About an hour later, I decided to call it a nite. Although the people I met seemed nice, I found it hard to relate to any of them. I also began to feel out of place which activates my anxiety, letting me know that it's time to go home. Not wanting to be ungrateful for her hospitality, however, I searched for Bonnie to bid her goodnite. I found her by the counter, opening a bottle of Southern Comfort.

'Bonnie! Thanks for the invite but I've got to go.'

"Don't go yet," she said with a soft voice, leisurely making herself a drink. She kept glancing up at me, shooting flirtatious darts from beneath her eyelashes. Once her drink was prepared to her liking, she wrapped her arms around my neck, pulling me close.

"You can share my bed with me," she whispered with coquettish undertones. Taken aback by her bold remark, I spotted Herbert by the door looking at us as she pressed her breast against my body, running her hand gently over my chest.

Confused and not wanting any trouble, I gently pulled myself away from Bonnie and smiled fondly at her.

‘Thanks for the invite, Bonnie. I’ll see you around.’

Before I got on the highway, I pulled over to a side road and began to process what just happened. Nobody had ever come on to me in that manner, much less in front of their boyfriend. Even though we hardly knew each other, I felt a special connection with her; one I couldn’t explain.

‘Fuck it!’ I said.

I turned my car around and headed back to Bonnie’s.

Chapter 2



January 1, 2009

Zemi—

I saw you today!! Bonnie brought you over to the Children’s Theatre at around 6p where I was helping finish built their set. As I hammered a nail into the leg of a small wooden piano, Bonnie could be heard talking to you in the lobby.

“Go to him,” she told you.

And then without much further ado, I caught the off-beat tempo that your cork soles jiggled along to, clicking against the linoleum floor as you hastily tottered down the corridor. As your steps drew nearer and nearer, I became more nervous and anxious because it had been six months since I did the unthinkable. I wasn’t sure how you would react when you saw me. But before I knew it, we were standing five feet away from each other in complete silence. My god, how much you’ve changed! Your face, hair, body—and you were standing on your own two feet! My eyes were thankful to you for allowing them to witness such beauty and magnificence. I was rendered speechless.

Once the initial tension wore off, I lifted you in my arms, but you kicked your legs out signaling for me to let you down.

‘Zemi!’ I said confounded by your reaction.

You had never done that to me, so I was surprised and hurt by your rejection. When I tried lifting you again, you quickly turned and gave your back to me, shielding your head with your arm.

‘Zemi, it’s me,’ I said in a soothing voice, pacing slowly toward you. I knelt down and placed my hand on your head, caressing it and beamed lovingly at you. This calmed you down, and then you *looked* at me—recognizing me.

‘Hi Zemi!’

An all too familiar smile then broke on your face, signaling for me to bring you closer. I did.

‘I knew you wouldn’t forget,’ I said, whispering joyfully in your ear. We spent about thirty minutes together before Bonnie had to take you back to your grandma’s so you could get ready for bed.

January 3, 2009

Zemi—

Regardless of how grateful I was to have held you for the first time in almost six months, the last three nites spent with Bonnie were but carbon copies of times best left unvisited. (I just couldn’t turn her away. She’s my Bonnie; the mother of my only son.) She spent the final nite of last year and the first two of this year over at my place. Those first two nites were okay. Last nite— not so much.

She showed up at my door with her script and a bottle of red wine; her eyes swimming in the red sea. Bonnie made herself at home; like she had been for the last two nites. She kicked her lime green shoes off and took two drinking glasses from the cupboard, grinning as she filled them to the brim with Lambrusco. Once the drinking glasses had had their fill, she picked them off the counter, handing me one as she waltzed on by me and plopped herself down on the couch, giggling for almost having spilt some on herself. I was delighted to see her exuding a carefree attitude. Her smile reminded me of why I fell for her. It instilled that fleeting hope in me once more that we are indeed capable

of moving past our demons and thrive as a family. But my mind harbored not thoughts of rekindling, but of your unusual wary demeanor.

‘Zemi acted weird around me the other day. Like he was scared of me. What’s that about?’ I asked Bonnie.

Flipping through the pages of her script, she suddenly froze. Her eyes, no longer glinting with joy, now glared at me.

‘He’s very protective of me from men,’ she said, sounding annoyed.

‘Why?’ I said anxiously.

She tried changing the subject over to her script, but I refused to have her side-step my questions about your well-being. A few moments later, she shot up to her feet, clearly agitated and headed toward the door.

‘Did anything happen to him?’ I asked
concerned, blocking off the door with my body.

She cast her eyes on the floor, looking inward as if to summon up the moral fortitude to be able to reveal the reasons behind your concerning behavior.

‘I was staying at the Cordoba apartments with two guys.

Nothing happened to Zemi,’ her gaze still downward.

‘Nothing happened to Zemi,’ I repeated, trying to make sense of it all.

‘Then what did?’

‘They ran a blade through my thigh because I wouldn’t fuck them!’ she said, her eyes bulging out, staring intently at mine. ‘I wouldn’t fuck them because I still love you! I can’t love anyone else because I love you!’

I was stunned by what she had just revealed to me. Many uncomfortable images started playing in my mind on an endless loop and most of them had you bearing witness to Bonnie’s unfortunate assault. I was livid for not having been there to protect you and for Bonnie putting you in such a toxic environment.

‘What the fuck is the matter with you!’ I yelled. ‘That bullshit you put him through is not on my conscience. It’s on yours!’

‘But he’s too young to remember any of it!’ she said, crying.

‘Won’t remember any of it?’ I said, trembling with anger. ‘Oh, he’ll remember. The pen is mightier than the sword, Bonnie,’ I said, holding up a pen to her.

Her soaked red eyes filled up with rage and fear and her fists closed into a tight ball, quivering by her thighs.

‘All Zemi has to do is read it,’ I reminded her. ‘He’ll judge for himself.’

With a yell, I stumbled backwards after she punched my head, hitting my ear. Dazed from the blow, I slumped on the couch and bended forward, grimacing from the painful ringing in my left ear.

As I sat there hurting, Bonnie poured her glass of wine over my head, sneering as she did it. She then sat down next to me and pulled out her phone.

“Hey Buddy! It’s Bonnie. What’s the exit I take to get to your place again?” she voiced coquettishly.

After her call with Buddy had finished, she got up from the couch and stood menacingly over me.

“I’m going to go over to your friend’s house and fuck him!” she said, sinisterly.

Reeling from everything I had just experienced and stunned by the swiftness in which the sequences had taken place, I managed to somehow gain some clarity and realize that the gravity of this situation shouldn’t be taken lightly.

‘Hello, 911. I need to report a domestic violence incident,’ I said into the mouthpiece.

Realizing that the gravity of this situation was not being taken lightly, Bonnie’s complexion turned a pale grey. She panicked and quickly fled the scene.

When I finished talking to the 911 operator, I called Buddy to demand an explanation.

“She’s been coming over to my place these last few days to smoke out, man,” he said.

‘How come you didn’t tell me?’ I demanded to know.

He either couldn’t or wouldn’t provide me with the answer that I sought, so I took his silence as an admission of guilt. He disappointed me.

‘Don’t you ever call me again!’ I said and hung up.

And just like that, our friendship was terminated.

Seconds later, my phone rang. It was Bonnie, sounding worried.

“Are the cops coming?” she asked.

‘Yeah! Are you going to fuck Buddy!?’ I yelled into the mouthpiece.

“No, I am not. You called my bluff.”

‘Well, you said you were, and you punched me. Deal with it!’ I said and hung up.

All twenty of her subsequent calls were ignored and sent to voicemail.

It was now 3a and the cops still hadn't shown up. I was on my eighth cigarette, contemplating about what had just happened when a car screeched to a halt in the alleyway. Gorillaz's *Dare* blared from the speakers as the engine idled roughly, placing the dead of nite on alert. The car door popped open, amplifying *Dare* which sent chills down my spine. Cautious steps then crept closer, crunching on the gravel until coming to a stop at the front door.

I felt her standing outside before she called. I wanted to let her in so she could apologize and promise never to treat me bad ever again. But I knew she wouldn't and sent her call to voicemail. The car door then slammed shut, the car put in gear, and then peeled off. She was finally gone.

At around 420a a cop, wearing a black cap with the word *Police* embroidered in white on its panel, showed up to take the police report.

'Thank you officer,' I said as I escorted him out the door once the police report had been filled.

And then, pale with exhaustion, I collapsed on the couch and quickly slipped into unconsciousness.

At 10a, I was abruptly awoken by an ominous suspicion that Bonnie had done damage to my car. Still wearing my shoes and clothes from last nite, I stepped outside into the alleyway, hoping that my suspicion was wrong. But alas! It was not. There was a dent on the front door and some paint had been scraped off; a black streak running across it.

'Goddamn it, Bonnie!' I muttered to myself while dialing 911.

Ten minutes later, a pair of young clean cut cops drove up and parked behind my car.

'Why weren't they on duty last nite?' I wondered to myself.

While one of the young officers was taking photos of the damage, I got a text message from Bonnie.

I'll give you \$100 for the shirt and car. My bad.

Rattled by this new information, I hurriedly ran inside the apartment. On the floor by the couch was my white dress shirt crumpled in a heap.

'She fucking didn't' I said to myself in disbelief.

When I picked it up, shards of brittle plastic fell to the ground. It was my CD: *Axis Bold as Love*. I picked up all the pieces and placed them on the couch so

that I can glue them back together later. The white dress shirt was in no better condition either. One of its sleeves was ripped in half, rendering it unusable.

I took the ripped shirt to show the cops. I also showed them the message Bonnie sent me. All they could do was take pictures and document. Well, as I spoke and they documented, my phone rang.

‘It’s her,’ I announced.

The young cops looked at each other in surprise. I let it ring for a while before I answered. I almost didn’t, because I wasn’t sure if I could handle anymore of her abuse.

‘I’m sorry for what I did. I’ll give you mone—’

‘I thought you had no money,’ I interjected.

‘I can get something.’

I then got an unsettling feeling that she was watching us from a distance.

‘Where are you?’ I said, looking around.

‘I’m in El Paso.’

‘Where is Zemi?’

‘Zemi’s fine. I got to go.’

One of the young cops told me that I should have set up a meeting.

‘She knows better than that,’ I said to him.

Besides, I wanted to them leave because I was mentally drained and couldn’t think straight anymore.

Well Zemi, there is a warrant out right now for Bonnie’s arrest. What a fucking nite! I’m hungry. I haven’t eaten in twenty hours. Be strong, Zemi! There’s always light after the dark.

Love—

Dad ...

January 5, 2009

Zemi—

Apparently you are in New York City right now. I don’t buy it. Maybe she is, but not you. Her stories didn’t match. First she said that she will audition

for the upcoming term which starts in a few days. Then, she said that she will travel to New York for an interview for the Fall term.

Wait. They aren't holding interviews or auditions for that term now. They do that around June. ...

No, they are going to record it and review it when the auditions come up. Maybe I'll just sign up for the summer intensive program.

The only intensive program they have runs with the full-time. The summer program is for high school kids. I am telling you Zemi, her pants are on fire. Our conversation then focused on our relationship.

'You are a beautiful human being and I do love you, but you have demons that you need to conquer. I can't be with your demons... '--- What did you mean by this Jose?

(I sent her that message yesterday)

Every word came from the heart, Bonnie. If you don't understand what it means, after all you have done, then move on, love another. ...

I could never love another... Ever. Not ever. But forever. The only demon I have left is of what you've made me feel. If you have been fucking others then why would I want you? Hub? What does that speak of your love? I have had time to think in these airports and Sam Shepard says it all in one of his poems. Fact-- I have been with no one but you in almost three years. Your demon thinks otherwise. Fact-- I fucking love you, but your demon doesn't want it. Fact-- I don't trust anyone, and I hate it. But anyway, here is the poem.

An excerpt from Watching the Sleeping Lover—

"I am confused by the yearning. I want to have your dreams inside me. I want to strangle your dreams inside me. As the light comes through and the night is turning in today I want to know that I will die before you. I want to know that I will die before we aren't lovers anymore."-- Sam Shepard...

Call me a psycho. I don't give a fuck. I am a crazy lover, and this is what I feel. So take all of me or none. Like I said before, we all have demons, especially the greats. And I nailed that audition. I owned them. And because I am twisted and broken and fucking ready to

kill the stage. To murder it with words and actions and a smirk. With my own words? Even better! I am writing another play. One that will make people sick.

I didn't buy any of it. I replied with a quote from Abe Lincoln.

"In order to be a great liar, one must have an impeccable memory."

How true that is. Well Zemi, I am going to smoke a cigarette and call it a nite. My head hurts.

Love—
Dad ...

January 29, 2009

Zemi—

I've been thinking a lot, in retrospect, about key moments in my life that trigger, or that have conditioned me to be the way I am today. It ain't pretty.

I got a hold of an amazing self-help program. The first couple of DVDs talk about fixing yourself from the inside. Most of those ideas I've come to realize on my own, but there is something about hearing it from somebody who's been there or with more experience than me talk about them that help me to accept those ideas.

I used to be able to just write what I felt. I'd let my emotions flow on paper, and that soothed me. Whenever I sit down to write you or an urge compels me to write, I hesitate because I then remember how my privacy was violated. Bonnie snuck behind my back, read my journal and eventually stole it. That's my trigger. I hold so much anger toward her. I blame her for my lack of productivity. But the problem isn't her. It's me.

Even though she is no longer here with me, I still believe and convince myself that she'll somehow manage to get her hands on this journal and destroy it. I think twice about writing certain thoughts down on paper. I am insecure, sense fear, and feel disgusted from having my privacy violated. It's all in my mind, Zemi. I allowed it to hinder my growth. I've let it control my natural

ability to communicate to you on a sincere level. The foundation I built was based on trust and it was undermined. I don't trust this journal. I want to, but I don't. My goal is to find that trust again.

'You know something?'

I let it happen. I let it get this far and I blame myself.

'But if I could let it get this far out of control, I can flip it around, right?'

I don't see why not.

I am really motivated to change. Motivated to get what I want and what I deserve. I miss those thoughts that would shoot across my mind like a comet whose hot tail I'd yank down to have crystallize on your Journal before they cooled off. I'd go on long walks, think about the surroundings, not even worry about all the bullshit I had to deal with, and came up with some really great profound stuff about that moment.

See, right now, I thought about all those times in Albuquerque I wrote at bus stops, bus stations, Corrales, and while I was stoned staring into the gorgeous nite that ignited a fire in me. I lived the moment and you were the only one who knew about it. See, an emotion charged me while I wrote those last few sentences. I fear I don't have those thoughts to share with you anymore. So callous of her to take your journal from me.

'Why?'

Wow, I haven't written this freely in a while! Feels great! I'm making progress. I've got all the tools, all I have to do is use them.

This feels good. I know my life is in for a drastic change. I'll talk to you later!

February 1, 2009

Zemi—

I had a lot of revelations about myself these past few days. A lot of issues that I never realized I had fucked up my frame of mind which in turn became the model for my functioning with society. I will trace back the origin of what aided my current frame of mind to develop starting with my birth. Gotta talk to my mom about this later today. I will inquire about my first seconds in this world.

‘What were they like? Was I immediately taken away
from her? What exactly happened that day?’

See, I need to understand the emotion that could have ran through my veins during those first few moments out of the womb. Once I do, I can then learn from them and accept them. Something in me will then let go of that negative attachment linked to those moments which probably still affects my current way of thinking. I will write all these realizations to you in hope that they serve as your model to gain a better perspective of your own life. If Bonnie and I would get along, I'd be able to document your life in this journal. Every emotion you experience, and all the significant moments of your life would have been written down on paper. How helpful for you that would have been.

On a different note, I didn't buy booze last nite. I did drive to the corner store, but the manner in which I got myself to go was incredible. Keep in mind, a convincing urge emerges every day around the same hour at nite. It occurs without fail as soon as the sun goes down when the cool nite breeze brushes up against the trees making them sing. I sit to watch a movie or read a book, then something in me clicks. A voice in my head tells me to buy a forty.

“It'll make you feel good,” it says.

It starts from the pit of my stomach then rushes up to my head. That's when its attempts to persuade my mind start. It won't take no for an answer. It becomes a need. I struggle with it for a while. I roll up a cigarette, debate with this entity, say fuck it, get my debit card and then drive off to the corner store. Once I get about half the forty in me, my body shuts off the negativity and I feel great if only for a fleeting moment. Numbness prevails then I fall asleep. The next morning, I drag myself out of bed with that all too familiar burden of guilt and pull that dead weight with me throughout the day. I get over it when the sun hits my face as I drive down the road, or when I reach my destination. I fill the canvas of my mind with optimistic notions, positive feelings, desires, daydreams, and empty promises I make with myself. The cycle then repeats itself at nite when that voice clicks inside my head again.

‘You see what I put myself through!?’

Last nite, that voice maneuvered me to the corner store. On the ride over, my conscience tried to talk me out of it, but that fucking voice took over the controls for my limbs and got us to 711, like a fucking parasite. I got off the car, went in, and told myself,

‘Okay, if they don't have a Colt 45 I am not buying any booze.’

It was a compromise my conscience made with that wretched voice that constantly tells me my conscience is weak. I walked to the booze section and scanned the inventory. No Colt 45.

‘Well, why not get a Mickey? You are already here,’ it said.

No! I darted off, but that voice managed to get me to buy something. I bought a pack of smokes. All in all, I still felt guilty about buying the smokes but proud for not giving into the booze.

That is one of the many issues I have to work on. Feels good writing it down. Gives me a lot of perspective into what I experience during those moments. I feel good with this newfound awareness. I got to become more aware of the pressing issue and then learn from it, thank it, then move on.

February 2, 2009

Zemi—

‘What are traumatic experiences?’

I've had a few in my lifetime. I am angry with myself for allowing them to happen. Let me tell you about the earliest one I remember.

It was my first day of kindergarten. I was five years old. I remember the blacktop swarming with young kids and their parents, looking both excited and anxious. The bell rang and the children lined up in a single file then followed their teacher into the building. When it dawned on me that my mom wouldn't tag along, I suffered an intense nervous breakdown. I clung to my mother and held on to her blouse with all my might. So dependent on her I was, that I felt scared, exposed, helpless, and useless. The teacher finally managed to yank me off her, ripping the buttons of her shirt. I wailed and kicked because they were taking my mom, my protector, away from me. I can't recall if my teacher carried me to the classroom.

Now I sat by myself on the floor beside a desk. I was still crying and trembling. I couldn't stop. The year *1988* was written on the chalkboard. Suddenly, the principal towered above me. He crouched down and placed his huge hand around my neck, choked me, looked me straight in my eyes and

demanded that I stop crying or else he'd hurt me. Those fear inflicting eyes of his made the crying stop. I don't remember the rest of that day.

The subsequent mornings were hell for me. I dreaded that bell. I was terrified of it. I wouldn't eat breakfast in the morning because I was too anxious to hold the food down. My mom would make scrambled eggs with maize tortillas. I'd take a few bites then chuck the rest under the couch.

That day changed the course of my life forever.

'Why was (am?) I so dependent on my mom? Was it that she nurtured me too much that prevented me from being able to defend myself or be independent?'

I have to ask my mom about the period of my life from birth to age five. Something had to have happened for me to be so dependent of her. A roller coaster of emotions rushed through me that day. I went from dependent, abandoned, and helpless to an emotional collapse, to fear of getting hurt to submissive.

'You know what?'

My mom did nothing to help me that day.

'Why?'

'You know what else?'

I don't remember anything that happened during the entire year of kindergarten. I don't even remember the name of my teacher to this day. Hell, I don't recall much between kindergarten and sixth grade.

It was all downhill from that day on. I cried a lot between kindergarten and sixth grade. I was confused and full of fear. I dreaded leaving my mom and dreaded even more going to school. The moment up to that first bell, oh god! I would be on the brink of another nervous breakdown. So I was afraid to leave my mom because I never learned how to handle a situation on my own without her being there. I think that is it Zemi! That's why I cried in school when kids yelled or threatened me. I wanted my mom to save the day. I wanted her to make them go away. That was overlapped by the fear and threat of possible physical pain from the principal. I cried for help which led to more crying because I was alone and about to get hurt. Damn, that fucked me up!

This explains a lot. Many experiences from that day on now make sense. I'll start with this one experience, deal with it, accept it, learn from it and

finally let it go. I will replace it with a different imprint to guide me to a deeper understanding of myself.

Thanks for listening to me Zemi! It means a lot to me. I'll see you later!

February 7, 2009

Zemi—

I care too much about what people might think of me. Earlier, I observed how one of my friends interacted with his brothers. It felt like I was out in the wild observing a coalition of lions. Alphas. I became totally self-conscious, drained of all my power, and I believed that they were judging me. I never adapted to that type of environment, so I shied away from it. They'd ask me to do something, or interact with them and I'd get so into my head, feeling judged, that I did whatever I was asked to completely wrong. I would disappoint. I knew everybody expected more for me, but I felt threatened by that vibe. That testosterone filled frequency.

I don't know how to claim my territory. I am going to have to learn whether I want to or not. My life since kindergarten has been a domino effect. There's been countless occasions where I've felt judged in social interactions. None to the extent where I walked away traumatized like on my first day of school. No. It has to be something else then.

My acne scars.

See, even writing those words down projected me back to high school. That's it! What held me back from embracing the alpha male environment was the kindergarten experience. Then, just as I began to come into my own freshman year, boom. Breakout all over my face. Jesus Christ! I've been dead for twenty years. The social interactions take me back to the hallway in Building A. The bell rung. I nervously got up, putting my cap on with the bill just over my eyes so my forehead would be out of sight. I clutched my backpack and walked out the door with my head down sneaking past everyone. When people would stop me to chat, I never looked them straight in the eye. When I did, I noticed that their eyes played connect-the-dots with my face.

I am very insecure. There's only one way to overcome this and that's by looking people straight in the eye and make their day. I thought I only had to work on my emotional scars created by traumatic events. Now, I come to realize that there's a distorted reality I created for myself these past eleven years.

I am making a lot of progress, Zemi. I am accepting my problems, extracting lessons from them, and then letting them go. I will dissect this last issue further. I'm not sure how much damage it's caused, but I am aware of it.

'Imagine what I went through at the age of fourteen?'

An emotionally traumatized boy who had a nervous breakdown at the age of five along with fear instilled for being vulnerable by the alpha male, (Is that why I fear them?) who can't look anybody square in the eye, and lost everyone's respect and thus settled for failure. I think I belong to a different group of alpha males.

'Are there other types?'

I mention this because I am not a pack traveler. I travel solo or with one other person. I've tried to fit into that pack environment, but I know it's not for me.

'So then what am I?'

I need to know and as soon as I do, a lot more will make sense. I feel good about all this.

Thanks for listening Zemi! It helps tremendously writing it down! I've got to get some rest. Goodnite!

February 10, 2009

Zemi—

My heart feels hollow. I miss you! I'm missing out on being your father. My boy. I won't see you grow up.

'Is this is some kind of test from a superior being or higher power?'

Is this part of my journey? Is this a test of persistence I need to pass?'

When you see me, a man who is in complete control of himself will emerge before you. You'll be proud of your old man. A real man is in touch with his emotions. A real man isn't afraid to show them. A real man can control them. Not showing any emotion is self-destruction. This, what I feel, what I go through is common. It has to happen. I must let it run its course. A

relationship with my emotions will help me look the issue straight on to deal with it. I am disgusted for cowering down into a corner. I am sick of blaming everyone for my misery.

Enough.

Good nite, Zemi. Smile.

Love—

Dad ...

February 13, 2009

Zemi—

I am lonely; desperation agitates my spine. I'm so anxious and needy right now! I want that quick fix!

'Why haven't I met somebody?'

Feeling this way lets me know that I am not ready. All I want is a woman to hang out with. To have a great time and connect.

'Am I telling myself I'm not ready because I am scared?'

It's Friday nite and I am alone. I need to join a class so that I can meet people with similar interests. I look in all the wrong places. I want to jump in my car and go someplace.

'Where to?'

I'm being too hard on myself right now.

Okay. I took a breather. I acted like a wuss there for a moment. I have to remind myself to be disciplined and focus on the bigger picture: New York City. Okay. I am going to—wait! I am needy again! I have a strong urge to go out to meet somebody! Got to stop thinking that way. I have to want to go out to enjoy myself and live life.

'Right?'

Right.

I hope everything is alright on your end. Good nite.

Love—

Dad ...

February 14, 2009

Zemi—

My mom knows that I watching those self-help DVDs. I told myself that I didn't care, but deep down inside it did bother me. It's like I was caught with my hand in the cookie jar. I think she judges me for it, and I feel insecure. I want to explain myself to her, so she won't cast me out for seeking help. That nauseating feeling in the pit of my stomach that translates to,

“Aha! So this is what you're doing!”

I now walk around ashamed. Urgh!

This may be tied to a time when I did get caught. Back in, I want to say sixth grade, I was part of the school's Postal Service.

‘Pretty geeky, huh?’

Each room had a number and each hallway had its own name. *55 Lion's Den*. Ground Zero was my homeroom. One day, I sorted out all the mail and saw that there were letters addressed to me.

So I snagged them and went about my way.

‘Why wait, right?’

The following week, I was about to leave Ground Zero with my mail again when I felt a negative vibration coming from my left. A teacher stood by the door and barked,

“You're not allowed to get your mail in advance!”

She barked those words at me like I was an over-privileged prick. Such envy, frustration, and anger in her tone. That frazzled me a bit. Someone snitched on me! Don't be a fucking rat, Zemi!

All I can think of is you guys. You and Bonnie. I think it's truly over between her and me. It's the same feeling I got when my first girlfriend moved on from me. I think Bonnie's moved on with somebody else.

‘Why do I let it get to me?’

Good night, Zemi. Oh, I drove by Ingrid's. Bonnie's car wasn't there. I hope you are okay.

Love—

Dad ...

February 17, 2009

Zemi—

Happy 20th month!

February 18, 2009

Zemi—

Whoa! I had another breakthrough! This time in regard to my problem solving skills. I hit a wall yesterday with my vocal exercises which opened up a can of worms. Here's the thing. I became frustrated, insecure about my own ability to act, and actually considered quitting on my dream. I also insulted and degraded myself which was like adding salt to the wound.

‘How fucked up was that, huh?’

I encounter a problem and automatically think the worse, and want to quit. I beat myself up which exacerbates the worthless belief I have of myself, ruining the whole day.

Today, I woke up at 5:30a and told myself that my body needed rest. So, I laid in bed until 8:30a, not asleep, but chastising myself because my entire schedule was now ruined, and I made myself feel like shit about it. That was pathetic. I made all that shit up, Zemi. I let my inability to attack a problem head-on affect my psyche.

At this very moment, the sun feels brighter! Tears streamed down my cheeks when this issue came to the forefront. The stark realization that it's been my choice all along for how I've felt my whole life made me extremely vulnerable.

Deep, deep stuff.

‘How do I know it's me?’

Is it me or my mind that makes up the breakthrough?

How do I know?’

It just feels right. That's it. It feels 100% all right. Gut instinct. Trust it!

Got to go-- it's 12:18p and I have a lot of cool things to do. I'll write later.

Written sometime between February 2009 and March 2009
Zemi,

Here's the letter I wrote to Scaena Drama School. It explains why I want to act.

Why I am Here

I decided to call myself an actor at the age of twenty-four. Lynda, my mentor, once told me, "You have a unique way of expressing your emotions with your body language. Remember that! Use it!" I have.

I took my mom's camcorder once and had a little fun with it. I decided to give a tour of our apartment and film it. While I was filming, I created a character that was so much fun for me. I went through a transformation. I became present in those moments, aware of my surroundings, giving live to everything I touched, saw and spoke to. It was as if some unknown innate part of my being took over! All of the possible distractions that my eyesight caught faded out to an opaque black, centering me. My senses were heightened, and I had an episode that can be described only as exhilarating and freeing, similar to those I encountered in my acting class. I was experiencing the moment!

The mistake I made was not following my intuition and nourishing the energy that spawned that day. Social pressures, such as family and friends, subconsciously pushed me away from it. I bounced back and forth between unfulfilling jobs and majored in Math in college, while that beautiful energy screamed for attention.

There's an old Yiddish proverb that says, "We can't run from what we are. Our destiny chooses us." My purpose, my mission, my passion in life is to act. There isn't anything else that gives me the awareness, the excitement, the thrill or the satisfying sensation acting does. I want to attend your institution to gain the discipline, become a student of the craft and to surround myself with mentors and like-minded individuals who are on the same path as me. I want to develop my passion, get in touch with it, integrate it into my life, follow it and

master my craft! I won't torture myself anymore by running away from what gives me true bliss in life. I want to run no more.

Jose Luis Paez

February 22, 2009

Zemi—

It's about 10:30p. I miss you! I hate myself for not being there with you. I don't regret my decision though. Things would have been much worse for you if I had stayed. When you're old enough, we'll straighten things out like mature men. Come to me with an open mind. That's all I ask from you. Goodnite Zemi.

February 25, 2009

Zemi—

What a week. I am out of control! I'm not being cool with myself. I'm not sure what it is. A terrible feeling festers in my gut. I fear something bad. I hope everything is well on your end. I haven't heard from Bonnie in almost three weeks! God only knows what she's up to.

Honestly, I could give a fuck! But worry still lingers in my mind about your state and your health. I mean, a

“Hello! Everything is okay with us!”
wouldn't hurt, right? Oh well. That's it for now.

Good nite my son. I've dreamt of you often.

March 5, 2009

Zemi—

Bonnie messaged me a week ago at around this hour. The message read:

Hey...

I haven't replied. I will conquer all my faults, my issues, but I will never forgive myself for not being around you. I want to show it though, but I can't. I walk around like nothing bothers me; like I am carefree. But even when I don't think about that, it still affects my mood.

I have to make it in New York City. It's the only way I will be able to see you (\$\$\$) and demonstrate to you that I am stable. When I think I've completely let you down I know it's not true because tears fill up my eyes. We will eventually connect. It's only a matter of when.

March 7, 2009

Zemi—

I dreamt about you last nite. It took place at Ingrid's house during the evening twilight. It was a beautiful sunset. The study room was your stage and you showed off how well you could walk. The show was for me only. You were as tall as the last time I saw you in Albuquerque. No tension was felt in the air. Ingrid peeked in and watched briefly with maternal love as I chased you around the room. Bonnie was nowhere to be found. A serene tranquil vibe encapsulated us. The storm had finally died out. I was set free. Our vendetta was put to rest.

--Jose

March 19, 2009

Zemi—

Two days ago, I received a phone call from Halie over at the Scaena Drama School. They wanted to know if I'd be making the excursion to NYC for the audition, or if I'll mail an audition tape.

“Let me know ASAP.

We'd like to receive the tape no later than mid-April."

I thought about it and weighed my options. Well, I don't have any money to travel, so—

About three hours later, I called to let them know my plan.

'Hi! This is Jose Luis Paez . May I speak with Halie?'

A man's voice on the other end said,

"Give me one moment."

He placed me on hold for about fifteen seconds then said,

"Halie is out right now. I have your file here. I am her assistant.

Is there anything I can help you with?"

I asked him to explain to me what the hell a taped audition was. He did. Now, here comes the great part. Before we parted he told me,

"Just call us before mailing it so that we can be expecting it."

'Okay!'

I don't know Zemi. Either they say that to all applicants, or they must really be interested. I'll take it as the latter! My day just blew up! I'm on my way! I went straight to the library and checked out a book of Greek tragedies. I'm reading *Agamemnon* at the moment, so I know I'll do one of those as my classical piece. As far as contemporary, Sam Shepard. Hands down. He is the fucking man! I'll give myself until the end of this month to choose two pieces, work on them for five days, practice for a couple, and mail them no later than by April 15th. Ah, tax day! I will call them early April and let them know to be expecting my tape.

This is so fucking cool! All I need now is money. I got a job as a telemarketer. Fuck it! I loathe it, but I've got to look at the big picture. So, right now I love it because it's a great source of income. I'll look for a nite job or weekend job later. I am on my way Zemi!

I knew it was your 21st month on the 17th. I didn't forget. I hope you are well. Oh, I spoke to Bonnie last week. She hasn't changed. Still blames me for everything. All I wanted to know was if you were okay and you are. Okay for now. Got to read. Good nite Zemi—

SMILE!

Love—

Dad ...

March 24, 2009

Zemi—

My verbal discourse is severely stilted and disconnected from my being; have been for many years. Translation: my speech pattern sucks. When I read out loud, the entire ordeal ends with shortness of breath and a complete disregard for what I speak because my attention is instead on the proper pronunciation of each word and not the meaning of what I speak. That leads to a bunch of moonshine and the recognition of how heavy an accent I have.

When I read silently, a mind and body connection is formed. I paint a vivid portrait in my mind. Each word acts like a brushstroke. By the end, I clearly see what was spoken. Unfortunately, that is not the case when I open my mouth. Here's the plan. Every morning will commence with ten to fifteen minutes of reading out loud with the goal being to speak each word with meaning. I will also practice this at work and out in the real world. I have the looks. I have the personality.

‘Why not to be a triple threat and combine both
those sexy traits with eloquent speech?’

I made up a game that will not only entertain me, but also force me to breath into my diaphragm and down to my belly. Here's its origin. There's a lamp above my bed with a hemp cord light switch hanging from it. On the end of the cord is a plastic ball. So, I place my mouth a few centimeters away from the plastic ball, then push it up with an exhale. That gives me about 1.5 seconds to take a deep breath and exhale again before the ball smacks me on the mouth. Hey, you got to learn to have fun by yourself!

Okay Zemi. I am going to smoke a cig then call it a nite. The more I bury my love for you deeper in my heart, away from harm's way, the more secure I feel with myself.

Good nite Zemi.

Love—
Dad ...

March 29, 2009

Zemi—

I just got home from a dinner party. I went because I wanted to learn how to socialize again. I focused on not being needy of anything or anybody. I listened attentively to what was said and interacted with people.

Kathy was at the party. She came striding toward me with her beaming smile and greater than life personality. She's Bonnie's best friend and confidant and from what I hear, has developed a maternal relationship with you. I could tell from talking with her that she genuinely loves you.

I guess she wanted to apologize for something, or some beef we had over you. Honestly, I never held a grudge against her. I like her. Kathy said you are really smart. You pick up a book and start babbling through it. God I wish I could be there with you. I wish Bonnie would work on her inner demons and realize that she shouldn't give me a hard time about seeing you. It hurts like nothing you can imagine Zemi. To know that my son is out there without his father around.

There's been moments when I wanted to call Bonnie and try to work something out for your sake, but I know she won't allow it. In her eyes, I am her soulmate, but because of what occurred last July, she'll never forgive me and hence keep you away from me.

Okay Zemi, I am off to bed. I start work tomorrow at 8a. I will try to be at the gym by 5a. I will. I already told myself I would.

Goodnite Zemi. Remember, you're my boy. That's all that matters.

Love—
Dad ...

April 6, 2009

Zemi—

It's 2:35a. I've been awake since 12:25a. I woke up thinking it was 4a and told myself

"Time to get ready for work!"

But it was only 12:25a. Now I can't sleep.

I had a great weekend. Yesterday, Sunday, I memorized one of my monologues, *Fool for Love*, as I walked around Central. It came easily because the story is about a trek on foot. I got it down in about an hour. Moliere's monologue was aided by a forty ounce because the guy loves alcohol. That one sank in in about an hour as well. That's my style. I have to live it in order for me to get a feel for what the character experiences.

I am sitting on the edge of my bed smoking an early cig thinking about you. I had lunch with family at Hong Kong Buffet earlier. My niece is like my little girl and I teach her loads of stuff. She's real smart and says she wants to be a teacher when she grows up.

I miss you. I hide my love for you deep down in my heart.

I love you Zemi! Hope all is well.

Love—

Dad ...

April 12, 2009

Zemi—

In a few hours, I'll stop by Ingrid's to drop off a cool set of clothing my mom bought for you. I messaged Bonnie yesterday asking how her film was progressing and if you guys were in town.

Film's going great. Will finish shooting in July. And we're driving back to Albuquerque.

Okay. Let your mom know that I'm swinging by to drop off some Easter goodies for my boy.

...

Don't do that! Just mail them. That's intrusive.

I'm going to anyway, so fuck her.

'When is she going to stop lying?'

Good nite Zemi. I feel great! I love you!

Love—

Dad ...

April 13, 2009

Zemi—

It's off to New York City! My audition piece, that is. I worked on it for about seven hours yesterday. But it's done. I don't know how to feel about it though. I thought it was okay. It caught my attention yet, it's so different from the audition paradigm. I want to convince myself that it's bad and nobody will like it. They'll think it's the weirdest thing they've ever seen. But on a gut level, I like it! We'll see if they call.

April 15, 2009

Zemi—

When I took that acting class up in Albuquerque, I was much more aware of everything. I paid so much attention to detail. The color and texture of an object. I felt people's emotions. I was present. That's what Stanislavski tries to communicate to his readers. To be completely aware of all your surroundings. I will adopt his philosophy again so as to regain that sensitivity.

I am currently reading *The Power of Now* by Eckhart Tolle. What an amazing read. He explains in vivid detail the concept of *Now*, of being present. I know that the human mind can be your enemy and thinking about past and future thoughts can be harmful. We can get stuck in our heads and the worry makes us weak and uninterested. All wasted energy that is. He says,

“Thought cannot live without the consciousness,
but consciousness can live without thought!”

Powerful stuff.

I feel great! I still go into my head but now I can catch myself and correct it. Life is a miracle. The best thing, the sexiest thing you can ever do is listen. Trust me. No more bullshit. I'm going to NYC in five months and nothing is getting in my way!

Love—
Dad ...

April 16, 2009

Zemi—

The personal growth exercises seem to be paying off. I say hi to everyone and smile at girls with more confidence. I'm upbeat although sometimes I still get stuck in my head. What I'll do then is go to the bathroom stall and breath for ten times until I get centered. It works.

Funny thing happened Sunday. Nobody but Ingrid was home. I dropped off the outfit my mom bought you and made small talk with her.

'When was the last time you saw Zemi?'

"Last week," she said.

'Well, according to Bonnie, she was driving back to Albuquerque last Thursday.'

Someone is lying. I know you're here. I think it's selfish of them to not tell me. I'll call Bonnie to remind her that you have two grandmothers, not just one. I know why she keeps me at a distance, but there's no reason to have my mom suffer. I could see in my mom's eyes that this is hurting her. God, she hasn't seen you in close to a year! How fucked up is that! I'll call her tonite.

'Who knows, maybe she has changed?'

Love—
Dad ...

April 17, 2009

Zemi—

Happy 22nd Month!
It's almost midnite, Zemi. I just made it.

Love—
Dad ...

April 18, 2009

Zemi—

I had a dream that I picked up my guitar again. I can't remember the last time I did. That guitar is as old as you. I played *Simple Man* while you slept in your crib. You looked serene and had a grin on your face like you had just heard a funny joke.

'What were your dreams about?'

Probably about clouds or Bonnie's smile. When I opened my eyes, you weren't there anymore. I'm shook up right now.

You know, I only cry for you. I used to be an open tear duct. I'm now selective with my tears. They are reserved for meaningful occasions. It's much easier that way. I saw a boy about your age on TV earlier. God, he was big! He was alert, bright, alive—I felt left out. I want to hug you, show you off to everybody, grow old with you, and learn with you.

Okay. I'm going to a show tonite at LTT. Some theatre troupe from Mexico is in town and I want to meet them. Maybe I can get them to hang out at my place after the show. Take it easy Zemi.

Love—
Dad ...

April 19, 2009

Zemi—

I used to pick up the El Paso 'Times' *Home Finder* and flip through its pages, dreaming of owning one of their advertised homes. I was in my early teens. My mom had started her own jumping balloon business. Licha put up the money for, ah, I can't remember the theme of it.

'Power Rangers?'

My mom had a red pickup truck. Mid-80s Chevy single cab. Trucks are great. They feel intimate. Something about them that helps bring the people in it closer. With the help of her custom biz cards, her business began to flourish. We went everywhere, Zemi. My mom took whatever work came her way.

'Far east side?'

No problem.

'Lower Valley?'

Sure.

'Canutillo? Why not?'

My mom showed me how to unload, set up, and load up the jumping balloon. That fucker was heavy! I really enjoyed the work, but I was a snotty troubled kid. Shit bothered me. Internal issues, you know. My mom put up with me, though.

We had a gig once over by the Country Club. You feel it when you're there. Crossing the train tracks on Mesa, heading west—you know it! And there are more trees, healthier ones at least, nicer cars, higher incomes. The Country Club. We drove up to a gated community. Those houses were it for me when I first laid my eyes on them. We drove down a long winding dirt road. I thought we were out in the country. Grassy field, crops, the whole nine yards. Then I noticed this house up the street that caught my eye. It was a house I'd seen advertised on the *Home Finder*. The driveway was paved with red dirt.

(Ah, this fucking washing machine sounds like a locomotive!)

I liked that house. Something about it drew me in. It meant success to me. It made me content.

'See that house over there Mom!'

"Si."

We passed by it and I told her,

'I'm going to own that house one day!'

She looked at me with a smile that I'll never forget. A smile that said,

"You're a dreamer. I know you will."

April 20, 2009

Zemi—

I swung by Ingrid's around 11:30a to drop off the Easter basket my dad got for you. Ingrid gave me a smile. I didn't know what to make of it. I could never read that woman. She keeps me wondering. But it also felt welcoming. At least the last two times I was there did.

I saw a great learning tool on TV today, err, yesterday, called *Your Baby Can Read*. It's amazing. An eight-month-old knew how to read the word *shake* off a flashcard. I'm going to get that for you as soon as I get paid on Friday. You're a bright kid as it is already, Zemi.

'Imagine, by the time you're five you will know how to read?'

Okay for now. It's 3:05a. I'm going to watch the last scene of Pulp Fiction, eat something then head to work.

Love—

Dad ...

April 22, 2009

Zemi—

I got in Zemi! I got accepted into the Scaena Drama School! This feels great!! I got a call earlier today. This is how it went:

"Is this Jose?"

'Yes.'

"This is Geoffrey"

I think. May have been a different name.

"from Scaena Drama School. How are you?"

I dropped my phone! After I picked it up, I said,

'Good. What's up?'

"We reviewed your audition tape, and I like to tell you that you did get accepted into our program."

'I did get accepted?'

"Yes."

Slight pause.

'So now all you need is the tuition money, right?'

He laughed at that comment. Yeah! Isn't this great!? Me, from all the possible candidates worldwide who apply to that school, me, they want me! Everything is now lined up. I've been given the opportunity to follow my dream, my meaning, my mission in life! Yea! It's so real. I am blessed. My life makes sense now. It starts today. My journey, Zemi. My path!

Love—

Dad ...

April 26, 2009

Zemi—

I've got to stop drinking myself to sleep. I go the entire week without a drink but when the weekend rolls around, I find myself at the corner store buying a Colt 45 and cigarettes. I feel empty, guilty, and needy the morning after. The mornings are so beautiful. The cool crisp breeze that presses up against my body. The sun shines down on me from the heavens and I fuck up that wonderful experience with my drinking.

I have been given an opportunity to do something special with my life. I actually have a chance to do the one thing I am passionate about and not just work because I have to like the rest. All the people that I admire had issues. Maybe that's why I keep doing it.

'I have that experience in me already, so why do I keep doubting myself?' I am afraid if I stop living my current lifestyle it'll hurt my potential. If I change, the characters I create will be boring and uninteresting. But I know better. I am lying to myself. I know that I could always bring that person back to life at my beckoning.

A happy life is the concept I toy with at the moment. I love the feeling I get being in the *Nom!* I love it. Yet, I struggle to keep myself there. More work on myself. More work. Go back to the basics then it'll be all right.

Love—
Dad ...

May 1, 2009

Zemi—

FUCK!

I've been miserable this whole week! My writing sucks! My life is mundane. I hate it! I wake-up at 3:45a, work, hit the gym at 3:45p, get home at 6p, shower, prep my lunch for the next day, and am in bed by 9p. This has been my routine every day for the last month or so. It's driving me insane, Zemi! But I got to do what I got to do to save \$\$\$.

Bonnie won't return my calls. I'm sick of working out, of looking good. I want to drink, smoke, stay up late and get lost in my own world. But, I can't. I don't want to fuck-up my life in New York City before it even starts

Well, I'll keep my word, Zemi. I won't drink a forty today, Friday, nor one on Saturday. I'll just a drink three tonite to get them out of the way. I bought a Cash Bingo lotto ticket. I'll save it for later or for when I am raving drunk.

I miss you so much, so, so, so much! I haven't gotten you that reading kit yet. I'll get it soon. I've got to stop making promises because I don't keep them. Promises are cheap contracts. Everybody breaks them.

Fuck working out. Fuck conformity. Fuck it! Fuck money! I want to tell stories. Dress up. Explore. Follow my curiosity.

'Where will it take me?'

Okay for now. I am going to shower, then drink, smoke and eat chips while I enjoy a nite with Daniel Day-Lewis.

Love—
Dad ...

May 4, 2009

Zemi—

I just wandered back from a fulfilling peaceful walk. How much I haven't been paying attention to. The silence is noisy. Birds woke me up to the melody of a car alarm (and they go on all day long). A slight breeze brushing up against me like a game of tag,

“You're it!”

and then it flows away. Leaves, green with skeletal like features, each form the same pattern only magnified. Flowers, so soft. A smile forms on my face. The smell, oh god, the smell! Like spring perfume. A wounded hound lay on the shade outside a fenced house guarded by a cat. Two generations of women enjoyed the kisses of the sun. The sun! A comfortable uncommon warmth radiated in this town, similar to Albuquerque. I miss Albuquerque. Peaceful moments in my mind. I was overwhelmed!

‘How much have I been missing?’

Listen, see, touch, smell and taste. I don't know how to articulate all this, but I had to let you know about it. I haven't felt this aware in close to a year.

May 21, 2009

Zemi—

Sorry I haven't written.

‘How are you?’

Bonnie sent my mom some cool photos of you. Photos from when you were a couple of weeks old to now. You looked happy!

Your birthday is coming up in a few weeks. Two years on this bloody planet. I will find you a Jack-in-the box. Don't know from where but I'll find it.

Let me catch you up. My schedule at work drains me. I'm there from noon till 10:45p. I don't like that schedule because I work when I am at my creative peak. By the time I get home, I can't think clearly. I've tried to find somebody to switch shifts with me. I just can't do telemarketing at nite. You have to get that shit done in the morning. Plus, there is more money to be made then. It's an Inbound Center. People call us, so a lot has to do with luck. I had

four sales yesterday, but lost three. I lost them because my computer crapped out. Plus two of those sales I needed to collect money upfront. My real problem is my current schedule. I don't care who's my coach as long as I get a morning shift. But then I say to myself,

'Jose, you're going to NYC. Stay focused.

You're getting hours, so quit your bitchin.'

I'm thinking of moving back in with my mom in July to save up every cent I earn. It's 10:10a. I've got to leave in an hour. No time to do anything with this crummy shift.

I just spaced out for a minute.

Life is great though. Try to enjoy every second of it Zemi!

May 25, 2009

Zemi—

Zen Masters have a word Satori. It's a flash of insight. A brief moment of no mind and total presence.

Bonnie messaged me yesterday with a strange proposition. She wants to copulate.

'Huh?'

Go figure. I gave her the green light this morning. I honestly don't want to do it, but I'll get to see you. Plus, I have to get rid of this ridiculous idea that having sex is morally wrong. I am a man. A man is a sexual being just like a woman is. It's okay to have sex. It's a treat!

It's Memorial Day today. It's beautiful outside. I'll have lunch at my mom's before heading off to work.

Love—

Dad ...

May 29, 2009

Zemi—

I am scared. I'm scared of fucking up. It's all led up to this. My one opportunity to do what I love. Now that it's in front of me I doubt myself.

'What if they don't like me? What if I go up there and hate the business? What else am I going to do for a living?'

I'm going to shower then head off to Scenic Drive to clear my head.

That was rough. I guess I got a bit lonely there for a second. I parked a ways down and sat on the short stone wall and looked out at El Paso. There's so many trees out there.

'I wonder if the whole city was once full of them before we came in and built roads, homes, and factories?'

And the noise this city makes. Different type of melodies from birds, dogs barking, airplanes landing, the wind whistling. This city is alive. Everything is alive Zemi! I'm just asleep.

Three more months and I'll be on my way. I've made it! Going to Scaena will guarantee me a job as an actor; stage or film. This is finally it. All the hard work, suffering, mental anguish will finally cease to exist. I am an actor. I bought my ticket. Now I've got to take the ride. Yeah!

Your birthday is coming up soon. Mine too. I'll be twenty-six on the eighth. Twenty-four years I got on you, my boy. You looked great in that photo my mom has of you up on her wall. You're on the tricycle she bought you, looking straight ahead at the camera. You're beautiful.

"Every day he looks more and more like you," Bonnie wrote.

My boy! Remember, I haven't forgotten you. I never will. I work on myself every day to straighten out my life because I am not healthy. By the sound of it, Bonnie hasn't improved either. I want to help her. She's got to conquer her own demons on her own terms first before we can transcend.

"To what? Happiness?'

The more I try to focus on the *Nom*, the more my mind fights to keep me locked up in my past or in an anxiety filled uncertain future. It's fighting. It's gotten the best of me these last few days. I fight through it though. I put myself in situations where I am forced to grow so I can be me without fear, regret, or shame. Just me. This is who I am. It's not so bad right now. My mind only tells me that. I'm happy for being alive; for being here. That's all that matters.

Talk to you later.

Love—
Dad ...

June 8, 2009

Zemi—

'Happy birthday to me! Happy birthday to me! Happy birthday dear me! Happy birthday to me!'

I'm twenty-six years old today!

I cancelled my phone service. I felt liberated after I did it. I was becoming too dependent on the thing. Always anticipating to see if someone would call.

It's around 11:30 at nite. I am on the roof top of my place staring at the sky while I drink a forty ounce. I know, I know, but it's a real beautiful nite!

Okay for now. I'm going to lay down, take in the midnite breeze, and think of you. I miss you. I know Bonnie is thinking of me as well. I will become one with the nite. Goodnite!

June 15, 2009

Zemi—

'What's up?'

The one thing I haven't done is tell myself that it's over between Bonnie and me. Many regretful exchanges of words, memories that are best left in the recesses of the subconscious, and certain people trigger anger which then leaves me in a state of resentment toward Bonnie. That's because I haven't let go of her.

'I've got to cling on to Bonnie emotionally or

I won't see you,' I insist to myself.

That's all bullshit my friend. I *will* see you.

My dad, brother and I shot pool at *Clicks* Saturday. It was the first time in my life that I've gone out with my dad and partook in an activity like shoot

pool. He's a good teacher. I tried showing my brother how to hold a fucking cue to no avail. Then, my dad showed him, and he made a bank shot! I told myself,

'If only he was like that with me in my youth!'

Better now than never I suppose.

Whoa! A huge emotional rush took over me right now. I let go of all that anger and confusion with tears. I needed to go out with him in that type of environment. Plus I noticed how alone he is. He's stuck in his head too. My whole goddamn family is!

I hadn't realized how serious these problems were. God, I feel so much better. I know we bonded. Finally! That's all I needed. There's a couple of questions I've got to ask him though.

'Why did you ignore me? Why did you put me down?'

After a basketball game in seventh grade, his words cut me deep. He asked me if I had played and I told him no.

"It's because you aren't any good," was his reason.

I don't know, my dad has a weird way of expressing himself. He gets offended easily and takes things personally. He's insecure. Putting others down and acting like a victim probably makes him feel better. That's the way I am.

'Did I pick that up from him?'

June 16, 2009

Zemi—

One more day and you'll be two!! How cool is that?!

June 17, 2009

Zemi—

2ND

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

[I'll write about today on Saturday]

Love—
Dad ...

June 21, 2009

Zemi—

The more I work on my internal issues the less I want to write. That person that you've read about up to now is dying! I was [am?] that boy that never grew up. Who always bitched and complained because life treated him like shit. There's a bunch of upsides to all this: the sun is more luminous, and the breeze feels cooler. I heard the actual brushing sound this morning while I brushed my teeth. Everything seems more alive.

I have a lot of anger inside me. Anger that goes back a long time. Stupid things, you know. I am also tormented with anxiety. I've come to the conclusion that I wasn't raised right. My mother was supposed to nurture me to clear up my anger. The best remedy for anger: laughter.

When one of those thoughts I battle with crosses my mind, I write it down the way it's being spoken in my mind and then I say,

'You have very low self-esteem. I feel bad. I wish I could help you.

Maybe tomorrow you'll have a better day.'

to the person I am angry at. I nurture myself this way. It's okay to get angry because it'll turn into depression if you repress it. Then you might act in a destructive way. Anxiety is what a father figure should teach their child how to manage. To not make a decision amounts to a loss of hope, a *what if* mentality, and resentment with yourself for not taking any action.

'How do you get rid of anxiety?'

You do something about it! You take action to build courage and more confidence. Courage and self-esteem equals happiness.

Got to go. It's Father's Day today. I will stop at my mom's to say hi. Oh wait! On Wednesday, I stopped by Ingrid's house. You weren't there. Supposedly Bonnie is in school working on her bachelor's in Albuquerque. I heard otherwise. I heard she will film her movie in El Paso this July. Ah, the endless contradictions.

Take care Zemi.

Love—
Dad ...

July 1, 2009

Zemi—

I had a weird dream last nite. There was a huge pool filled with pitch black water. You and Bonnie were pool side and my mom and Ingrid were in the kitchen. The house we were in belonged to my uncle. He wasn't there. I'm scared of pools. Maybe I need to get over my fear of finally leaving her. The pool represents my fear of jumping in. I'm going to jump in and get over it. Move on.

Love—
Dad ...

July 4, 2009

Zemi—

Happy fuckin' 4th, Zemi! Hope you popped some firecrackers!

Wu-tang's on the radio. Was. They crushed it!

I haven't slept well lately. I've got cigarettes in front of me that I don't want to smoke. I've got one Miller High Life next them. Ah, man! Yesterday was brutal. My fucked up thoughts got to me in the morning and at nite. I can't control the urge to buy cigs and booze at nite. My mind justifies it. I act possessed with a belief that everything will turn out fine afterwards. It's very powerful, Zemi. The addict in me. I hope it skips you.

Next time I get that feeling, I am going to suck it up and go through the withdrawals. It's the only way, Zemi. It happens mostly at nite. I get an insatiable urge to smoke. Once Thursday rolls around, I convince myself that I have to drink. Let's not forget about the chips. I can't control myself around

chips. I'm not sure if it's a means to make myself feel better. I remember being six or seven, I'd go to the kitchen, pour half the bag in a bowl (sour cream and onions! Yeah!) and drench them with lime. I'd do that as often as I could remember.

'Was it an escape then?'

After I have my fill on chips, I do feel a little guilty. I will try to put myself through withdrawals. I'll start tomorrow. Funny, it was easier to quit weed. In eighteen days, it'll be a year since I quit it.

'Why are cigarettes and beer harder to give up?'

Maybe it's a lot of things to quit at once.

'One by one, right?'

Okay for now Zemi. Take it easy Zemi. I love you!

Love—
Dad ...

July 13, 2009

Zemi—

I had a weird dream about you last nite. Bonnie and I were watching a movie. Midway through it we realized that you had disappeared.

'You want to know where you were?'

Inside the air vents!

'How did end up in there!?''

When I grabbed you, you had the same look on your face as the nite you crawled out of your room. You literally crawled-sprinted out of your room to punch a ball. Then you dashed back inside. You did that at around 2a. You were sleep crawling.

I miss you. Your absence hurts me. It's okay. I've accepted it. My frustration may slip out every once in a while and manifest itself in tears, but only because it hurts to carry that pain inside. Got to let it go.

I just spaced out and pictured myself crying in the restroom. Weird. I feel anxious because I haven't done anything to get you back in my life. Later on this week, I'll call Bonnie from a pay phone to check up on you two.

Flashback



October 29, 2005

Zemi—

As I drove back to Bonnie's, my mind painted various elaborate portrayals of her suggestive remark on the white canvas that is its eye. While all renditions thrilled and excited me, one key element altered my amatory expectations to a state of uncertainty: Herbert.

'Did she plan to relinquish her loyalty to him in favor of a liaison with me?' I was torn because I had never broken up a relationship. I don't do that type of thing. It's a dishonorable way to end a relationship and a shameful and mortifying way to begin one. It's a messy spectacle to say the least. Yet, the ambiguity of it all piqued my curiosity.

The melodic and rhythmic notes emitting from the radio faintly wafted over the chatters of the crowd. Everyone was having a good time and the end to all of this was nowhere in sight. I made my way past an assortment of faces—drunk, stoned, sad, bored, jovial—and sitting on the futon, amongst all of them, was Bonnie. I placed myself in her line of sight to turn her attention away from the conversation she was having. Once we locked eyes, I mouthed,

‘I need to talk to you.’

She quickly sprang up to her feet, took my hand, and pulled me into the kitchen where Herbert was.

“You came back!” he said excitedly.

He then turned the music off and asked everyone to leave. While he was doing that, Bonnie pulled me into her en-suite bathroom where the bong she offered me a hit from earlier sat on the counter. After taking a long hearty hit from it herself, she gently pressed the lighter and bong on my chest, but I declined. I would have bounced off the walls had I taken a hit because an acute anxious state was slowly wrapping itself around my nervous system, which was further aggravated by the uncertainty of the circumstances in which I now found myself in.

Bonnie kissed me just as Herbert walked into the bathroom. I immediately pulled away, but she just as quickly pulled me back in.

‘Why isn’t he beating me to a pulp right now?’ I wondered.

‘His girlfriend is making out with me right in front of him!’

No, Bonnie’s kiss was of no consequence. Instead, a slight smile had formed on his face. He possesses a powerful presence, Herbert does—which does all the talking for him—and at that moment his non-threatening aura was attempting to mitigate my anxiety. Once he succeeded in setting me at ease, he slowly made his way back into the bedroom. Following suit, Bonnie undressed me and pulled me in there too.

I felt uncomfortable with that particular arrangement.

‘It didn’t feel right to me, you know?’

I walked out midway confused, self-conscious, and a bit embarrassed even, without saying goodbye. The drive home was cold.

As I lay on my bed, my mind replayed what had happened on an endless loop. I honestly wasn’t sure if what occurred was real.

‘Did it happen or was it a figment of my imagination?’

As with any strange encounter—*strange* functioning entirely as a subjective perspective—I couldn’t help but to reassess the principles that have guided my life thus far. After sucking violently on eight cigarettes while my options churned over in my mind, I concluded that I was not of the disposition to share a woman with another man. Bonnie, however, made me reconsider

otherwise. But settling for that type of lifestyle would mean betraying my own values.

‘No! I want her all to myself. But she is in a relationship. I’m not going to wreck it. Wait, *is* she in a relationship?’

Hold on—do I even want to settle down?’

I was terribly conflicted about what I wanted and how to go about it. This treacherous ambiguity deprived me of any conventional sleep. It wasn’t until the sun hung low in the sky that my mind finally shut off, thus allowing for some much desired rest and peace.

A few weeks later, I had just gotten home after a long day at school when my sister handed me the phone as I walked inside.

‘Hello?’ I said into the mouthpiece.

‘Hey, it’s Bonnie. I enjoyed our time together. Maybe we could do it again?’

‘Um, okay. Hey, let me take your number down. I just got home, and I have to take care of something. I’ll text you later?’

‘How did she get my number?’ I wondered.

And what perfect timing she had too.

We set up another date for Thanksgiving Eve at her place. When I got there, Herbert had just pulled up to the driveway, so we walked in together. In the kitchen, we all chatted awkwardly about the weather and played twenty questions. Frustrated by all this, Bonnie finally said,

‘Let’s watch *Fight Club* in the bedroom.’

It turned uncomfortable yet again. Both waited on me to get the ball rolling, but I turned their cues down. When the movie finished, I decided to speak my mind. I looked at Herbert and told him that I couldn’t give his chick the ol’ one-two with him there.

‘I am not his chick,’ Bonnie retorted.

‘Can I at least watch?’ he asked.

‘Uh, no!’ I said.

Without making much fuss about my conditions, Herbert casually stepped outside.

A few seconds after Bonnie and I exhaled, Herbert walked back into the bedroom.

‘What was it with those two and perfect timing?’ I wondered.

After we all shared a joint, I excused myself because I had an early morning.

I became more attracted to her as the days fell off the calendar. I felt a strong pull tugging me towards her. She constantly made appearances in my slumber and daydreams. It was as if her energy, her being, had mixed with my subconscious. I was under her spell.

Our first date was at Scenic Drive a few weeks later. She wore a mini denim skirt with a Jim Morrison T-shirt. We discussed movies, acting as a craft, and the play I was in at the time. That was the first time we had a real conversation. She wasn't the confident woman I had met at her party. She seemed nervous, averting her eyes whenever I looked into them. Her vulnerability humanized her and set me at ease.

Our date at Scenic Drive ended on a high note and we began seeing each other on a regular basis thereafter. Those were the incipient stages of our relationship but two nites during that period stand out from the rest.

It was an overcast brisk day. The Winter Solstice would be making its presence known in a couple of days. Fall and Winter—more so Fall—are my favorite seasons because I get to put on layers of clothing, particularly my beanie and scarfs. And cigarettes are more enjoyable in cooler weather I think. It's disgusting to light up with the sun glaring down on you. Yuck!

She was running five minutes late. That didn't bother me because my focus was elsewhere. I kept rolling *pregnant* cigs, so I was determined—borderline obsessed—to roll the perfect one that nite. Bonnie was a pro when it came to rolling cigarettes. In fact, she introduced me to that concept.

A month before, my grandmother tried showing me how.

“No tiene ciencia,” she told me, snatching the papers from my hand. She took two rolling papers, sprinkled tobacco on them, and rolled a perfect cigarette without spilling any of the makings on the table. I found the process mesmerizing.

As I waited for her to arrive, I sat on the short stone wall on the fringe of Leech Grove at UTEP. Now, I couldn't tell you how long she had been waiting for or if she had just arrived because when I finally glanced up, she was already there, gesturing at me from her charcoal grey Dodge Neon.

“Need a ride?” she said as I neared her car.

I loved when she spoke to me with confidence.

When I offered one of my cigarettes to her, she looked at it and then at me.

“Been practicing, huh?”

I loved when she spoke to me with sarcasm.

She had a half empty bottle of Southern Comfort and a glass pipe nestled between her thighs. Before we took off, she packed the bowl, took a hearty hit, then passed it to me. I did the same. We were now ready to go.

‘Where to?’

It didn’t matter. We would often just do that. Drive around town stoned, drunk with the windows opened while we listened to the Stones or Doors on the radio.

She appeared nervous and on edge that nite. Like her mind was elsewhere, you know. Every so often, she caught me glancing at her and every single time she gave me a smile masked with fear.

‘What is it?’ I finally asked her.

She began to tremble.

‘What is it?’

Suddenly, she swerved into an empty parking lot, coming to a screeching halt underneath a light post. Bonnie’s breathing got shallower as she clutched the steering wheel with both hands.

‘What is it, Bonnie!?’

She took a long swig from the bottle, looking out the window. About a minute later, she turned to me; her eyes were filled with dread. She appeared to be on the brink of a nervous breakdown.

“Do you want to go steady with me?” she finally muttered.

‘Say again?’

“Do you want to go steady with me?”

I had fallen for her by then, but there were a few uncertainties looming that prevented me from fully committing: Herbert was still living with her and that awkward arrangement didn’t convince me that they were no longer an item. I found his loofa in her shower a couple days before for christ’s sake!

‘What is a man supposed to deduce from that?’

Also, the manner in which our relationship began bothered me. What would we tell people when they asked us,

“How did you two meet?”

No. None of that sat well with me. And, I was seeing three other girls beside Bonnie at that time.

‘No. I’m seeing other people and I’d like to

keep it that way,' was my response to her.

She acted like it was no big deal, but for a split second, her eyes raged with fiery anger that burned from the depths of her heart. I sensed something changed for her underneath that pool of light. An internal shift of sorts.

A few days before the New Year, Bonnie was cast as Adriana in The Troupe's (another community theatre company) production of *The Comedy of Errors*. The show was to be presented at the end of January and run thru February 2006. We saw quite a bit of each other before the play opened, but it wasn't the same anymore. She treated me differently.

The other girls I was seeing were out of my life, so all my energies were now focused on Bonnie. Clinging to her, my neediness and fear of being alone and that no one wanted me turned me into her boyfriend. I never asked her to be my girlfriend nor did we talk about exclusivity again. I just assumed we were a couple. For the most part we acted like one, but the strong fondness she had for me was replaced with a stronger dose of skepticism with hints of spite.

Her show opened to a full energetic house and closed to rounds of applause. After the show, I made my way past the hordes of patrons to congratulate Bonnie.

'Hey!' I told her as my hug lifted her off the ground.

When I set her back down, I felt an overwhelming negative vibe coming from my left. I swiveled my head in that direction and discovered the source of my discomfort. It came from one of the actors from the show. He gawked at me with intense disgust. His face quivered with the scorn he felt at the sight of my affection toward Bonnie. I mean, the vibes were so powerful, Zemi. My core felt his contempt and it stuck on me.

I walked toward him to get a closer look so I could assess the situation. When I got about ten feet away from the guy, a foul, putrid scent halted me in my tracks. A grimace of disgust materialized on my face. I had never smelled anything like it in my life. The stench was coming from him: a strong terrible BO laced with whiskey. I decided to forgo the assessment for if I got any closer, I would had vomited. Even in cultures where a person's natural musk is embraced, this type of negligence would not have been tolerated. So from a safe distance, I got a good look at him. His hair and clothes looked like they hadn't been washed in weeks and his top incisors and canines were rotted. I suppose he just took poor care of himself.

I accompanied Bonnie and her cast for drinks after the show. From a safe distance once again, I tried to make small talk with the guy, but he wouldn't have any of it. He made no attempt to hide the fact that he didn't like me. He forced politeness on me and was passive aggressive, making it difficult for me to like him too.

Stepping away from him, I asked one of the actors who that guy was.

“Oh, that's Sobacos,” they said.

‘You're kidding me right?’ I said in a disbelieving tone.

“No. That's what everyone calls him,” they said, suppressing a laugh.

This actor also revealed to me that Bonnie had made out with Sobacos after a rehearsal. The thought of *any* woman *willingly* kissing that guy made me question my very existence. There's just no way! No woman in her right mind, and even those who suffer from a mental illness for that matter, would ever dare to touch him with a ten foot pole. And hearing that Bonnie *willingly* kissed *him* was disheartening. I found that insulting—not only to me, but to all males on this planet—and completely out of the realm of probability. No way Bonnie would stoop that low!

I took this matter up with Bonnie, but she wouldn't deny nor confirm that she had kissed him.

“He saw you hug me and asked if it was serious.

I told him I wasn't sure,” was all she said.

Doubt. She left me in doubt. That is the worst thing anyone can do to me.

A few weeks later, we made plans to hang out at nite. But when I arrived at her place, she was dressed to go out clubbing.

‘I thought we were staying in tonite,” I said.

“No. I got plans.”

‘With who?’

“Friends from the Troupe,” she said, walking out the door.

She did that twice more. On one of those occasions, she promised she would be back by midnite.

“Will you wait for me?” she asked.

Zemi, she didn't come back until 7a.

Her unfounded inconsiderate behavior and insensitive treatment drove me insane and yet despite all this, I couldn't bring myself to just simply walk

away from her. For me, a world without Bonnie—hell, a reality without an innamorata—would have propelled me into an inconsolable dolor.

A trip to Las Vegas was booked for Spring Break week in March 2006. I looked forward to it because I thought maybe spending some alone time outside of El Paso would bring us closer and strengthen our bond. I was psyched to say the least! Two weeks before our highly anticipated trip, however, Bonnie's heartless behavior toward me reached an all-time low.

We lay in each other's arms on her futon watching the movie *Rounders* in her living room. In roughly one hour, that particular Saturday would be consigned to oblivion in most people's consciousness if nothing remarkable had occurred. Unfortunately, that wouldn't be the case for me.

Without notice, the door knob rattled. I was startled because Bonnie hadn't mentioned anything about guests coming over. The door creaked as it was being pushed open, but before I could turn around to see who it was, it hit me: *BO laced with whiskey*. Sobacos, with an air of unprecedented arrogance and bearing a smug countenance, sauntered in through the doorway.

'What the fuck is *he* doing here?' I wondered indignantly.

Peeved at him unexpectedly dropping in on us, I turned to Bonnie for an explanation, but she paid no attention to me. She gestured for him to take a seat next to me. Puffing up even more, he kicked off his plastic sandals, set them beside the door, and gloatingly plopped himself next to me just as Bonnie instructed him to. After a few tense moments, Bonnie turned to me and said,

"I need to talk to you."

Chapter 3



July 23, 2009

Zemi—

Bonnie got married.

I don't know how to feel about that. I'm confused. It's a shocker! I'd be happy, but I also heard you broke your leg.

'What is up with that!?'

I need to get ahold of Bonnie to find out if it was an accident. I feel sick to my stomach!

'Why do I feel sick?'

Some other man has replaced me. I should be grateful that somebody else has love for you too.

I need to cry. I knew this was bound to happen. I hope that she married out of love and not spite. She's also going to school. I suppose she wants to make this work. I want to feel happy for her, but I need to know for sure if she married out of love.

I can't dwell on it now. I will call her this weekend. I need to hear it in her voice.

Bye.

Love—
Dad ...

July 23, 2009

Zemi—

I'm smoking a rare mid-day cig. My stomach is still churning from hearing about Bonnie's marriage. I'm nauseous. I asked my mom,

'Why didn't she tell me?'

"She didn't need to. You aren't in the picture, so why should she?"

A little too direct, but I accepted that. I am being a bit selfish. I will not be a blundering lost soul who isn't fulfilled in life just because the mother of my son replaced me. I know what I need to do. This is part of life. We all come to a crossroad where tough choices need to be made. This is a difficult one but one that needs to be done.

I hope you're well. I hope both of you are happy and smiling!

Talk to you later.

Love—
Dad ...

July 23, 2009

Zemi—

I will love only where love is real. All the rest are not worthy of my attention. I will strive to be happy. Happiness that is genuine and real. I will live in the moment but never love for the moment. I'm not stupid anymore. Since Bonnie married, I've been able to let go of all the shit we both went through. That chapter is closed. That part of me is dead. The burning candle that was once our passion is no more.

I am a bit angry. Don't know why, but it's good anger. I've mourned over what has occurred and I will move on. I am liberated; free. For some odd reason, this couldn't have come at a better time. Motivation has entered my veins again. I will not fail! I will give it all I got. If people don't like it, fuck them! It's my gift to the world.

Still, she's demonstrated something magical to me. She lives in the moment. She does it for the wrong reasons, though. She fills the voids in her soul with quick fixes. I will not go down that treacherous path no more. It's self-destructive and no good ever comes out of it.

I feel great! I feel alive! Let's be happy!

Love—
Dad ...

July 26, 2009

Zemi—

Beautiful nite out! There is hardly any breeze. The smell of pine trees fill my lungs. It is a peaceful nite; one of memories of yesteryear.

I thought of you. For the first time in a long, long time, I thought of you being near me. A calm placid happiness enveloped me. I love you!

This great journey awaits us both, Zemi. We will meet again but on peaceful terms. This is not the right time for us. We will have a great relationship together. New memories will engulf the void that was created. Laughter will arise and contentedness will be the theme. We shall be Father and Son. Don't forget. You are always in my thoughts. Always. You are my drive. My motivation to become the person I was destined to be. Be happy Zemi, my blood, my boy. I love you! I'll see you in my dreams!

Love—
Dad ...

July 27, 2009

Zemi—

Loneliness

‘Have you ever felt lonely around people?
Have you ever felt that everyone lives their life to
The fullest while you hold yourself back on the sidelines?
A mere spectator of life?
A hole you dug for yourself?
Promising to dig no more only to deepen it further with excuses?’
Pull me out! Please! Yank me out! Wake me up!
I don't want to feel this pain anymore! I know you are out there!
You! You! You who will show me the light and open my eyes.

August 4, 2009

Zemi—

I bought my plane ticket! September 12th at 8:45a. There's a four-hour delay in Chicago before I arrive at LaGuardia at 9:25p. I don't have a place to stay, but fuck it! I'm going! The thought of me in New York City makes me anxious which leads to fear but then I tell myself,

‘You're going up there to act!’

If I give it my all, I will turn heads and make friends. I know I will!

August 11, 2009

Zemi—

‘What is it that bothers me!? Why am I not happy for Bonnie?’
I know she's always been full of shit. I know she'll never come clean. That thought annoys and disgusts me!

‘Was I ever that way?’

Sure, but not to that extent.

I've been trying really hard to be naturally happy. It's tough, Zemi! It's tough! It's so much easier to drift off than to deal with the realities of my life.

‘So then why do I give a fuck? It's her problem, right?’

It surely isn't mine. I want to talk to her. I have a false hope that she'll get over it, only she won't. I can't let this shit beat me down. She's not my problem anymore.

I hate being lied to! That's all she's ever been with me: a liar. I make up excuses on why I can't deal with her when it is plain as day that she's got problems that need to be addressed. I am concerned about her. I want to help her get through this shit. I care about her. Poor soul! I want to hug and kiss her. I am in love with her vulnerability; her shattered soul. I feel sorry for her, but she won't let me help her, Zemi. She won't. It hurts me having to not give a fuck. She had you, my boy! That's how much she loves me. She wants nothing but the best of me—for her! That's where she has power over me. She knows I care for her. She knows it.

My mom just walked in.

Love—
Dad ...

August 16, 2009

Zemi—

When you were about two months old, Bonnie and I got into a heated argument that ended with the two of you spending three days and two nites at Leonora's. We all worked together as roaming photographers at Closeups by Francesca. That's where Bonnie and I met her. Anyway, I am embarrassed and ridden with guilt for having let you out of my sight.

I'd stop by during my lunch hour to check in on you. It usually went like this:

I'd come in and Bonnie and Leonora would step out. For about ten or fifteen minutes, it was just the two of us. I'd tell you that everything would be okay, hold, hug, and kiss you goodbye then leave. At nite, I'd message Leonora to tell you *I love you* and to *wish you a good nite*. On the third day, I walked in while you all watched *Lemony Snicket* on the TV and you, my friend, were propped up on the couch by three pillows. It was the greatest thing I ever saw. After work that

evening, I couldn't take the distance and disconnect much longer, so I arrived unannounced at Leonora's, looked at Bonnie and told her,

'Get your stuff. We're going home.'

Bonnie drew you a warm bath as soon as we got home. After we gave you a bath, I swung by Walmart and bought pizza. It felt so good having you back home! That nite, I held you close to my breast with your head on my heart and didn't let go until an hour after you had fallen asleep. My little boy.

A great deal of sadness washes over me as I recall that time. My niece and I have forged a solid bond. I am her father figure. Meanwhile, you're somewhere else with a father figure that isn't me. I try to look at the upside to all this. It's difficult, especially when most of our memories together happened in a negative atmosphere. But within it, there was hope and fleeting happiness.

You're different, Zemi. Special. Ah! Another great memory just came to mind. You were no more than three months old at the time. It was a brisk Albuquerquean summer nite. The three of us were taking a bath to keep warm. We played with rubber duckies and buckets. On a whim, Bonnie released you and you floated with your head under water! Wow! An instinctive reaction on your part. It was like you channeled back to your time in the womb. Your entire state changed. You knew to hold your breath and float. I miss those type of memories.

My biggest fear is you won't be told that I'm your dad or you will, but a negative picture will be painted for you and you'll grow up resenting me.

'How do you feel about all you've read so far, Zemi?'

I hope you can look past all the bullshit Bonnie and I created and realize that I am your dad and I really do love you! If you don't want to believe how sincere I am, burn this fucking book up right now! If you do, then call me, message me, email me, whatever right now and say hello.

Wow! As I write you, an emotional wave takes me for a ride I do not want to go on. So, I sit with it as it cycles through my body. Sometimes it takes me back to happier times. More often than not, it ushers me back to the House of Horror. I am not sure what triggered all this. I mean, I'm fine up until Sunday evening. Although, when I'm here at my mom's it happens a lot. Weird.

Okay, I feel better. It happened already. Time to let it go and time to accept things the way they are.

Goodnite.

August 30, 2008

Zemi—

What's going on little guy? As usual, the depression was on time Sunday evening, crippling me to a stupor. But I fought it, Zemi. I fucking fought it! Everything is okay.

I'm going to take Bonnie's mom out for coffee during the week. I need to apologize for disrespecting her and thank her for raising you. It's something I got to do and will do with sincerity. It's a long shot, but I have faith that it will work. Okay, I'm gonna read then get some zzzz.

Love—

Dad ...

September 9, 2009

Zemi—

“You're not really a dad, Jose. You don't do anything for Zemi.”

That is what Ingrid told me when I dropped off your gifts at her place. She is right, you know. I haven't been a dad.

‘What is a father?’

So she found herself a nice guy to marry. From what I hear, you have a great step dad. I respect the man because I wouldn't be able to get with a woman who already has kids. Too weird for me.

‘I write you, but so what?’

Doesn't mean anything.

For starters, I will send money every month to you. That'll show that you actually matter to me. Enough with this lifestyle. It's too unstable. I am too selfish. I have let you down. I appreciated Ingrid's honesty, but I know what I experienced. Bonnie and I weren't right for each other from the beginning. But it is what it is. Change can always occur if I'm willing to change. So, enough with being selfish. No more splurging money on useless shit. I will

return the digital camera I bought and give the money to you instead. I could send at least one-hundred and fifty per month. That'll cover your food, diapers and any other extra things. I am sorry Zemi for not having done anything for you. Nothing. Haven't shown any interest whatsoever.

I felt like a failure, but nobody will ever convince me that I am to blame for all of this. Ingrid threw stuff at me that stung. Some were true. I don't deny them. I accepted them. I did not strike back with,

‘But Bonnie did this...’

No! It's about what I will do about the choices I've made.

Bonnie has moved on. That's good. According to her mom, she's ignored my calls because she doesn't want me to fuck this up for her. Well, I won't. I don't want to get back with her. It's pointless. That just tells me that Bonnie still cares about me.

She may be going back to school to establish a foundation for herself, but I don't buy that she is happy. In May, she texted me to set up a nite for us to spend together. She didn't follow through, but the timing of it seems suspicious now.

‘When did she meet this husband of hers? In June then married him in July?’ Hardly anything ever seems to add up with that woman.

Look, Bonnie called me yesterday and left a message saying that she was in school when I called and that she had just heard her messages. Meanwhile, Ingrid told me this morning that Bonnie called her yesterday complaining about my calling her. Bonnie is playing both sides.

I will do my part and be a dad who supports my child, bonds with him and develops a relationship.

“You can't just come into his life and tell him you're his dad
when you haven't raised him,” said Ingrid.

I think that's bullshit. You're my boy and I'm your dad. That's all that there is to it. Apparently by paying money, you can buy your dad license and take it from there. The whole acting thing, it's going to happen. I know it is. It's time to bring you in my life.

I appreciated everything Ingrid told me. Ninety-eight percent I accepted, the other two-percent, nah. I had to stand my ground because she doesn't know me, and she wasn't at the battlefield.

All right little man. Talk to you later. Two more days and I am out of here!

September 12, 2009

Zemi—

I am on the plane. My mom packed me enough burritos to last a month. As I parted ways with my family, I hugged my mom and gave her a kiss. She cried before I left. For the first time, I held back my tears. I can't be weak right now. I did the same with niece, brother, and sister. I walked away without waving goodbye. It's only goodbye, not fare well. I couldn't look back. The last image I wanted to remember of them was from up close, not far away.

I got the best seat in the house. Way, way in the back. Window seat to the left. These clouds are amazing. They look like the ice sheets in Antarctica. Some of the smaller clouds resemble a school of fish. My niece would love it up here.

Most of what Ingrid told me Wednesday still echoes in my mind. I haven't been a father. I want to be your father. So, I returned the camera I bought and purchased a money order of one-hundred and fifty-dollars made out to you. It's not much, but it's a start for child support. This is the first of many to come your way. Ingrid was pleased because I'm not just talking any more. I am taking action.

The lady next to me is in torture. There's a man hitting on her and all she could do is nod her head. Sucks to be her.

I didn't call Bonnie last nite because I was afraid.

'Why?'

Well, because it's awkward. Right before I dialed her number, my stomach tied up into a knot. I'll call her from Chicago.

The cool part about sitting in the rear is you get to see all the people who are about to defecate or pee. They make funny faces on their walk down to the restroom.

Okay, we're stopping in Houston for a brief delay, then off to Chicago. The voice in the sky said we're about two-hundred and fifty-six miles from there. We covered a lot of ground in one hour. Okay. See you!

[on route to Chicago]

I got home last nite around 9p. My mom sat outside waiting for my dad to drop my niece and brother off. I lit up a cigarette and joined her. He pulled up about ten minutes later, but he remained distant. Literally. About a minute later, he made an about face and got in his car. I put the cigarette down then ran after him.

‘Hey, ya me voy mañana’
“Pense que era hasta el lunes.”
‘Las clases empiezan el lunes.’

“Porque están tus ojos brillosos? Andabas tomando?”

He hurt me with those words.

‘Is he joking? That's what he asks me before I leave!?’

The disappointed look on his face with a hint of *you should be ashamed of yourself* crushed me.

‘Ayi nos vemos,’ I told him.

I walked away from him. No hug. No hand shake. Nothing. Fuck it! I got angry because he puts me down at a time when all that was needed were words of encouragement. Tell me it's going to be all right because that's what I needed to hear at that moment. It frustrates me that he doesn't use common sense. He isn't aware of the gravity of the situation. He is selfish and I am on my way to being just like him. But I won't allow that to happen. My dad has only been a paycheck for me. Never taught me how to be a man. I will not be a paycheck to you. I will be a father! I will. Whatever ails him is his problem. Not mine.

‘Then why did I get pissed off?’

Well, I expected something else.

‘Way to be memorable, dad.’

Okay, the voice in the sky told us that Chicago is fifteen minutes out. See you then!

I called Bonnie from Chicago.

“Hello?” answered a groggy voice.

‘Bonnie?’

Click.

Okay, just touched down at LaGuardia. Will write once off plane.

Ugghh! That airport smelled like a urinal. The first thing I did was call my mom from a pay phone. I fed the thing two quarters, but we got a bad connection which ended a minute later. So, I fed it four more quarters and once again got a faulty reception just as long as the previous one. I only had enough change left for one more terrible connection. Gotta make this one count.

‘Mom, can you hear me?’ I yelled into the filthy mouthpiece.

“Hij...est...bie...? No entie...lo qu...dic...”

‘Yes, I am fine. Listen, I don’t have much time left so I may as well say this to you now. I lied about having a place to stay. I don’t. I will find one, okay?’

‘I’ll call you later. Bye.’

I felt better for coming clean. Look, if I told her that I didn’t have a place to stay before I got here, she probably would have worried herself to death and guilted me into not coming to New York City. I had to do it. You understand.

I was tempted to look for one of those hostels people speak of. I didn’t even know where to begin. So, I did the next logical thing anyone would do: I asked around. The last thing I wanted to do was spend the nite at the airport.

Well, I spent the nite at the airport. I made a bed out of three bar stools in the food court. They are most comfortable when laying sideways, by the way. Around 7a, I asked a nice lady if she’ll let me use her phone. Her name was Angela from Columbia. Really nice and down to earth! I called a bunch of hostiles but unfortunately, all were booked due to the major tennis tournament in town. My situation now looked bleak. The worst thing you could do in a case like this (no place to stay and no idea where you are) is to freak out. I almost did. My mouth went completely dry when those thoughts inhabited me, but then I remembered,

‘You haven’t even walked out those doors yet! Relax. It’s day one.’

Angela had also pointed out to me that Scaena is located in Manhattan. So, I figured someone there would guide me in the right direction. A nice gentleman advised me to take the bus—not a cab—into Manhattan. The fare was only twelve dollars, Zemi. I sat toward the back and quickly got in a conversation with the guy sitting across from me. I guess the manner I was hauling my luggage around gave him the impression that it was my first day in New York City. His name was Mike from Boston. He told me that we were headed to a place called The Port Authority. His kindness and support for me and my endeavors made me feel optimistic once again.

When we got off the bus at the Port Authority, Mike gave me one final piece of advice.

“North on 8th Avenue will take you to Central Park. South will take you to Madison Square Garden. That’s all you need to know right now.”

My instincts told me to walk south. A few blocks later, a shady looking character stopped me with his eyes.

“You need a place to stay?” he asked.

Damn, man! Was it that obvious that it was my first day here?

‘You know of any cheap places?’

“You want to party?”

‘Nah, man. I’m here for school.’

“So you don’t want to fuck it up.”

‘What did you mean by party?’

“You know, smoke, puff-puff pass.”

‘I don’t do that shit.’

“I can still get you a place to stay over at my buddies.”

‘I don’t party, so I guess not.’

“That’s all right. We can still chill.”

‘Nah.’

“Okay. So you want a cheap place to stay. How much you want to spend?”

‘Tell me the name of the place.’

“Over on 6th and 27th. \$60, \$70 bucks. I forgot the name.”

‘All right. Thanks.’

He sure had a smooth manner of speaking. I almost checked that place out because the price seemed low, but my instincts interjected once more and told me not to go. Better safe than sorry.

I was so proud of myself for having passed my first test! Had I let desperation taken over, I would have partied, and god only knows what kind of shit I would have gotten myself into. I think he was part of a prostitution ring. Never be afraid to say no! Trust your gut. Walk tall with confidence, with purpose, and be aware of your surroundings. If you’re lost in your head, the hustlers will spot you and will eat you alive.

I needed to get off the streets fast. I was extremely tired and hungry and definitely not in the mood to have a conversation with other opportunistic hustlers roaming around. So I bit the bullet and checked into a Holiday Inn. I

only intend to stay here for one nite. Maybe tomorrow I'll have better luck with the hostiles. The check in girl, Jackie, had an easy-going personality. She told me not to worry about my bags. Someone will take them up to my room and that brunch would be served soon.

'You know what else she did for me?'

She looked up where Scaena was on her computer and it's about two or three blocks from the hotel! Things were looking good now.

Now, the attitude in New York City:

Do not come in here waving your middle finger at NYC. No. NYC has been around longer than you and me so respect it. You adapt to the city. The city will not adapt to you. Adapt to it in a confident way. Reach a compromise with the city. Be aware. Walk with the people. Cover the fact that you are new here. Observe and mimic the locals. They are easy to spot. Jaywalk without hesitation, talk with conviction, and be loud and clear. Look people in the eye when talking to them. Walk tall, straight, look up, not down. It's a good town, but it's easy to get suckered in by temptation. Adapt, adapt, adapt! You have to pick up the pace! You have to, otherwise the city will eat you alive!

Alright for now. I'm going to have brunch then head over to Scaena.

'So how does it feel? To be on your own?'

Like a Rolling Stone!

September 13, 2009

Zemi—

The studio is maybe ten minutes away from the hotel. There's was sign on the elevator that read: *Welcome Scaena Students! Please take the stairs!* Once on the sixth floor, I saw it for the first time. I was overwhelmed and taken aback by the vibrations I got from the place. I felt the vibes of great artists who have left their mark here at one point. You have to be there to know what I'm talking about. I walked around and came upon a huge photo of Lazarus Osiris hanging on the wall. It's the photo on the front cover of his autobiography! Tears filled my eyes. I finally made it. I'm here with him. He's the reason why I wanted this to be my studio. I'm following his footsteps because to me, he embodies

everything a great actor has. Plus, I see a lot of myself in him. I relate a lot with him both mentally and emotionally. I finally felt at home.

September 14, 2009

Zemi—

I got a bottom bunk in a room with ten others at the luxurious *Chelsea Star Motel* on 8th Avenue and 30th. Good deal too. Thirty dollars a night! Cheap! Cheap! Sweet! It's almost 5p. Class starts at 6:30p.

All I've done is walk. Earlier, I walked to Central Park and stayed there for two hours. It's beautiful and so vast and plenty of things to see and do to keep you busy. There were lots of people just walking the streets of New York City.

‘Do they work? Are all these folk tourists?’

I saw a cute boy, around your age, at the park chasing pigeons like he was some kind of zombie.

“Aarghh!” he screamed at them.

Really funny.

My mom told me Bonnie called her two nites ago. Bonnie's about to get her Bachelor's in theatre arts soon. Oh, you had a brief conversation with my mom too!

“Say hi Zemi.”

“Hi!”

“What are you doing?”

“Playing.”

“With what?”

“Car.”

These first two days have been a real eye-opener for me. It's going to be difficult. My body aches. I'm not sure where I'll be staying in two nites, if anywhere, and I'm sick of walking. I could just pack it up and go home. My head hurts, I'm tired, but I won't let this situation get to me. I can't. Everything will be okay. I'm up here for a reason. Thing is, I'm going to have to earn it. It won't be handed down to me. It's only been two days man, and things don't look promising.

'Who said that they were?'

Keep thinking positive! That's the only way to survive. My job is to show these people why they chose me to study under their care. The rest will handle itself. I only have to try.

I'm sitting outside the Holiday Inn. I'll sneak inside in a bit to get some water and coffee. I may have to sneak in tomorrow morning too to get breakfast.

This is great!

'I have survived two days here, right? What's another year?'

Alright man, time to hustle. See you after class.

Love—
Jose ...

September 16, 2009

Zemi—

Yesterday was hectic. I found a place in Brooklyn. Wasn't hard to find. All I had to do was go through an agency. You pay them two-hundred dollars and they find you a place to stay. Five-hundred dollars a month for a room in a three-bedroom house. All set.

I had movement and technique class yesterday. I was so busy throughout the day that I forgot to buy my sweats. My technique instructor didn't mind, but Madeline, she let me have it. I made no excuses. For the first time in my life, I knew what it was to feel selfish. These instructors are so passionate about what they do. They really care. I felt ashamed for letting my selfishness get the best of me. I know I'm selfish. I've been called that word many times, but no one has ever made me own up to it like Madeline did. I felt vulnerable, exposed, and ashamed for not coming to class prepared.

Okay. No more excuses. I got a cell phone. Tomorrow and Friday I will look for a job.

Time for class.

September 19, 2009

Zemi—

What a great week I've had! The first day of class we were told to feel proud. There were twenty-five to thirty people who didn't get accepted for every one of us that did. We got chosen not because we're good, (because we're not—that's what they told us) but because they believe we are trainable and can be taught what they want to teach. So walk with pride. Don't act like middle class pedestrians. We represent a tradition, so embrace it and don't tarnish the name.

We have to understand the human condition in order to grow and develop depth within ourselves. If we judge we'll feel and thus that's all we'll know. Let go. Understand the situation, accept it and let it go.

The core of this program is self-acceptance. Our instructors want us to be comfortable with ourselves. I have to remind myself to focus on my inner growth and not anyone else's. I'm still a bit insecure. I still care about what others think about me. I got to let that part of me go. The school is a sacred place. They tell us it's okay to fail and if we do, to fail brilliantly. I love this program!

My first train ride into Brooklyn was memorable. All of us in the A train were packed like sardines. It was late in the afternoon. Rush hour. Ten minutes later, the fatigued silence was broken by the following interaction:

“That ain't the floor you're stepping on. That's my foot,” said a woman.

“What?” replied a man.

“That ain't the floor you're stepping on. That's my foot!”

“Well, you got a hard-ass foot.”

The whole joint went to bananas, Zemi! The tension that everyone had built up from the day had ballooned to a critical point and that man's humor dispelled it. I still can't stop laughing.

Today, somebody let a nasty silent one rip in the train. It fucking stunk! It hit me first like a ton of bricks then slowly wafted across the car, causing people to gage and cover their noses.

“God damn!” someone exclaimed.

‘You know who I think it was?’

Some suit from Manhattan who got off on 14th Street. He sat next to me but never flinched. Sick motherfucker!

Last nite on my way home from class, I entered the train station through the wrong platform. When I realized my mistake, I rushed over to the correct one, but the turnstile wouldn't take my MetroCard.

"Just used," it read.

Or something of that nature.

'How long do I wait before I can re-swipe? A minute? Ten minutes? A day?' I didn't know. I almost hopped over the turnstile, but I sensed cops nearby.

All right Zemi. Okay for now. I'm going to read and enjoy this last weekend of not working. See you later!

Love—

Jose ...

September 22, 2009

Zemi—

Being myself is a lot more interesting than being somebody else. Today in Elia's Technique class, I found out how much pain and hurt I have inside me. These professors make the circumstances neutral, so it's difficult to not be myself. I am wounded. I haven't let go of the past. The past is still in me. An open flesh wound that never healed. I haven't let it heal.

Vulnerable.

Let go, Jose.

Let go.

At a Bar:

'Empty. I miss you. I missed you grow up. It's a part of me, an open wound that will forever remain unhealed. One day.'

On the subway. A monologue I heard.

"Ladies and gentlemen. I am sorry for interrupting your commute. I will only take a minute. I am ashamed. Would any of you be willing to provide me with fifty-cents? One dollar? I am not an addict, a thief, a drug dealer. On July 6th, my house burned down, and I suffered second-degree burns on my hand and

left leg. I just had surgery on my left leg. I am an electrician by trade, and everything accumulated to this point went up in flames. Times are hard for my wife and two boys. I have two boys. Thank you for your time. If you cannot contribute, I'd ask you to say a prayer for me and my family tonite. Thank you. God bless!"

On the A train

There's a man who walks the aisles begging for spare change by jingling coins in his hand. He wears a white Nautica t-shirt that has seen better days and jeans that are three sizes too big. They probably fit him snug at one point, but now, he creases the front to hold them up with no belt. He exposes a long scar on his belly when his t-shirt rises up. Weird man. I think he recognized me today.

"Spare change. Spare change?" he said.

I drift back and forth between depressions. Depressions about issues that I cannot give solutions to at the moment. One thing at a time. Obviously, what bothers me most, what weighs on my mind heavily is you Zemi. Keep a positive attitude! It's gotten me this far. I cannot let my mind defeat me. It won't! I've been stuck in the past for two years! Two fucking years, Zemi! That's not healthy. Keep a positive outlook.

I am in New York City playing out my life dream. Why am I depressed?

I choose not to anymore. You know, it requires more energy to live in the past than it does to focus on the present. Mustn't be lazy. The right choice is always the hardest one to do.

I want Pringles, chips, or tostadas. Goodnite!

Love—
Jose ...

September 22, 2009

Zemi—

"To refine, to clarify, to intensify that eternal moment in which we alone live there is but a single force—the imagination."—William Carlo Williams

This quote was given to us by Madeline in her movement class. Or should I say *movement technique* class. I expose myself in there. I'm not secure enough in myself to let go. I constantly look around for everyone's approval. I am not a leader. I just have to let go of whatever it is that holds me back. I wanted to follow my instincts at certain times, but my inner self told me not to.

I restrict myself and hurt my peers by not letting go. Scaena is a sacred place. Nobody judges anybody. But in Madeline's class, I feel very insecure. She's this tiny, short, skinny lady with glasses with an imposing aura. She frightens me. She reminds me of my second-grade teacher Mrs. R. I'd be afraid to fuck up in her class because she yelled at me the first time I did. That's how I felt when I forgot my sweats. I got to get over this. This is not the time to be living in the past. It's time to take risks. Time to stir up the pot. Time to knock this town on its ass. I didn't come up here to be intimidated by anyone. Come on! I got to show them what I got.

All right Zemi. I hope all is well with you. I'll talk to you later.

Love—
Jose ...

September 24, 2009

Zemi—

“Have you ever been in love?”

I'd never been asked that question before, so it took me a while to provide an answer for Elia.

‘I'm not sure. I think I have, but I didn't know what to do with it,’ I finally said,

stumbling over my words.

Elia stared at me with his deep brown eyes as he pondered which direction to take me on next. I felt naked standing in front of the entire class underneath a bright hot pool of light. I was about to make a dash back to my seat, but before I could he asked,

“Do you love yourself?”

‘No,’ I said without missing a beat.

His eyes now gazed at me. He was quick to notice the internal shift I experienced after answering his last question. I felt totally exposed, and when he saw that he said,

“Now speak your speech again!”

In tears, my words now carried weight. I mixed the words of my speech with my true feelings about love. I linked my heart with my mind. My words were being spoken outward. I was truthful!

I didn’t feel judged by Elia’s questions or reactions. He was sifting through the empty rhetoric I had recited about love. He wanted to uncover my truth. I felt different afterwards. I felt accepted; freer. The nerves I felt at first came from fear of judgement. They go back from the times I was teased. But, I’m letting go. I’m becoming Me with no regrets and no apologies. Nobody judges anybody. That’s a rule!

“I saw all the six people who went up had a lot of demons inside.

They went up there and just let it all go,” said a classmate.

How true she was.

I grew so much tonite! I feel more at peace with myself; more secure. I am more alive. More aware. All that inner bullshit will go out the window.

“Leave the drama for your characters.

Live your life without drama!” said Elia.

Understand, let go and don’t critique! Okay for now. Sweet dreams my baby boy.

Love—

Jose ...

September 26, 2009

Zemi—

I messaged Bonnie earlier to apologize and to seek an apology from her.

Whenever you are ready to speak without judgment, with forgiveness, and sincerity call me. ...

I'll need something to forgive first, otherwise I will call the day after you die as that may come before an apology.

I'm sorry, Bonnie. I really am. ...

Look, I think I may still love you and it's very confusing for me. I'd rather you left us alone. Zemi is very happy. He has someone to play, paint, read, dance and play guitar with.

I want nothing from you. I don't love you and I don't want to mess up your life. I want to be a part of Zemi's life and that consists of me talking to you. I will respect your request and leave it up to you. Good luck! Tell Zemi his pops loves him. ...

Yeab, yeab. I know. Give my husband permission to adopt Zemi and for us to change his last name and you might be a part of his life. If not, I'll change my number and you won't ever get to see him. If you love him, you will allow this. It's better for him. So, fuck off if you won't.

I will never do that. I'm sorry you feel that way. Change your number then. Work on getting over whatever it is you're harboring inside. It isn't healthy. I really want to help you Bonnie! I want to understand you, so I can put all this bullshit behind. It's up to you. Got to go catch the A train. See you. ...

Tough shit. That was your chance. You would have made us real happy. He loves Zemi. Zemi calls him daddy. If I couldn't get a real apology from you, I expected that you would at least do that for us. Tell your mom I'm sorry but, you blew it. Let's hope you fall in front of a subway instead, you back. The end.

Words of love from Bonnie. Notice how destructive she became after I let her know that I didn't love her. Which is true, Zemi. I don't, and I know she still loves me. I called this on the first journal. I said she would get married just to piss me off. And she did. If Bonnie were the lottery and all I had to do was predict her behavior, you and I would be in Tahiti right now.

I feel sorry for her. *Me da lastima* like they say in Spanish. I feel bad for her husband, too. If I was truly a jerk, I could fuck up her relationship, break them off then tell her to fuck off. But I won't. This guy does like you and nice

guys are needed right now. Poor guy. He's probably really polite, overly nice, agreeable to everything, over affectionate, insecure and easy for Bonnie's to control.

I've got my own problems to worry about. Like finding a job. Nothing has panned out. Got to keep looking. With no TV, I am forced to read, write and analyze things.

Okay for now. Talk to you later.

Love—
Jose ...

September 29, 2009

Zemi—

It's 1a. I just got home from Jersey. Cameron invited me to his place after class. He's a cool kid. I've noticed how hard it is for me to open up and talk to people. Cameron does it with such ease. He's right where I'd like to be. He mentioned something that stood out for me. He said,

“I try to talk to at least three people a day. I don't want anything from them, only a decent conversation.”

I will adopt that philosophy.

God, I am starving! I am eating a PB&J sandwich to alleviate my stomach pains. I am in for the long run Zemi. If I have to starve for a while, so be it.

Goodnite my baby boy! Daddy loves you!

Love—
Jose ...

P.S. I've stopped signing your letters as *dad* because I haven't done anything to deserve that designation. Once I've earned it, I'll do it again. It's a motivational thing

September 30, 2009

Zemi—

‘Remember that last conversation I had with my dad?

Right before I left El Paso?’

I don't want that to be the last thing we ever say to each other. I love him. I want to understand him. I want him to love me. I want him to tell me that everything is going to be okay. I want my dad to be a father to me. I know that's the way he is. He has always been that way. Aloof, inconsiderate, and says things in a hurtful manner without realizing that they are indeed hurtful. I don't know much about his relationship with his own father, but it must have not been a great one. I want to help him. He has a hard time understanding people. He thinks everyone is out to get him. It's a defense mechanism formed from a lifetime filled with hurt, isolation, and abandonment. He has to let go. As do I. I see a lot of myself in my father. I don't like that part of me, but it's me. I can change, though. That's why I don't hate him. He is my dad. I will call him and tell him how I hurt for his love and for his understanding of me! He has to know that I do love him, and I always will.

Okay for now Zemi. I love you with all my heart. I haven't forgotten about you. I never have.

Love—

Jose...

October 3, 2009

Zemi—

I miss my family, Zemi. I miss El Paso. I've cried a lot in New York City. I'm so fucked up inside. This is too much for me. This is too much!

My stomach aches.

It's all in my mind. I can't allow for this loneliness to get the best of me. And I shouldn't smoke weed. I felt extremely guilty afterwards. I am too weak-minded, irresponsible, indolent, and unemployed. I've got to hustle, man. I've got to be me! I'm nervous, scared, unsure—

I got to eat 'cause my stomach aches.

October 8, 2009

Zemi—

My boy! I've thought about you consistently as of late. I miss you so very much. For the longest time I've tried to make people like me by being somebody else. What a fake I've been. I don't like myself. I try too hard to fit in sometimes. I lead with this persona I have created. Then I discovered that the real me ain't that bad. I dropped that fake persona and have noticed a more positive response from my peers. I am grounded, filled with less stress, and much more in tune with myself and the world. It feels great! When we see each other again, I will appreciate our time more than ever. I love you. I always will. I haven't been myself for too long. It's time to be real. YOU ARE MY BOY!

Love—
Jose ...

October 9, 2009

Zemi—

I feel lonelier than ever. I can't seem to relate to anybody. All the girls I've met either bore me or are into the whole social scene which is filled with drama. I don't want that. My soul is so empty. My love is waiting for takers, but I just don't feel that connection. Not yet.

Lovers past:

Most have been lust.

Friends past:

Not much in common.

I don't want to open up to anyone. I'm stuck in limbo all by myself. How lonely this is! I can't be the life of the party. I don't want the attention anymore. I don't. I want my art to speak volumes and touch people's souls. I want to talk to everyone individually, so they'll remember our conversation. That's my essence. I am memorable.

My mom is the fucking greatest!

‘You want to know what she did?’

She mailed food to me! Two boxes of cereal, tripitas, meat, three packs of bologna, three packs of cheese and flautas.

Good nite, Zemi. I love you!

Oh, I got a job selling jewelry at this store on 5th Avenue. Now I can send you money and pay my way through school! I love it. I need to get myself grounded first before I socialize. I have nothing to offer people.

Okay. I love you. I miss you. I will see you soon.

Love—

Jose ...

October 10, 2009

Zemi—

Fighting back urges from yesteryear. My body is out of control. My mind is possessed. It’s taken by the persona I created. Rabid dogs fighting for territory. Not wanting to be nice took me off in a different direction. Away from what/who I really am.

‘Am I ashamed of myself?’

Seems like it. Thought about the last time I led with my essence. Five and a half years ago. Hasn't been that long. I don't know what I'm trying to say, other than **I** feel the same way in NYC as I felt back home. The second I leave Scaena, I feel worthless. Like I'm walking aimlessly into the depths of depression. Those I attract are too dangerous. Too emotional.

It's almost Halloween. I want to be a sunflower.

‘What were you?’ ‘What was I on my third Halloween?’

Every time I see a child or a father holding his boy, the wound depends. I question my being here.

‘Should I be here?’

I am missing out on my baby boy.

‘Am I doing the right thing?’

I constantly remind myself that I will see you. We will be together. Not now, but later.

Later. I hate that word.

Unable to control these tears that stream down my cheeks. I have bottled so much this past year, but now, here, I need to cry. Let it go. I thought I did. I didn't. I still think of Bonnie. How I love her. She is a great companion, but then I think of her dark side. That makes me loathe her. I miss her companionship. I guess that's all she ever had to offer.

'Why am I crying!? Why!?'

I am staring at your photo. You weren't three days old. This breaks my soul.

I have forgotten what it's like to feel. It's painful but it's real.

(Hey, I rhymed!) I'm confused, which means I don't know what to do.

I don't know why I abandoned myself.

October 21, 2009

Zemi—

Last Thursday was when I first noticed it. A small ball of mass protruded from my groin. It hurt to the touch. Friday during voice class, I was convinced that it was a groin pull because it hurt as I stretched. Saturday afternoon, the ball of mass had grown not only in size, but it was firmer, more sensitive to touch and had a trailing, pervasive pinkish hue to it. This infectious imposter prevented my leg from completing its natural stride. I was in pain. I had to get this checked out.

I sat in the clinic's waiting room for almost two hours before I got called into the back. The doctor told me if the infection didn't go away, to seek medical help at the Emergency Room. What a waste of my time. Four days later, the ball of mass had doubled in size. My leg's range of motion ceased to exist. Zola saw the pain I was in, gave me \$40 for cab fare and strict instructions to get to the hospital. I wanted to cry after every step I took because the pain was too unbearable. But I didn't. I can't. Plus, I'm starving, desolate, despondent, and sick. I've lost ten pounds. I mean I'm a real work of art right now Zemi.

'How have I managed to get through life so far?'

It's a scary realization to see your groin and then have the first word to enter your mind be *amputated*. Very disturbing. So I'm here. I've been here for about one hour. It's felt like three. I'm so tired.

October 22, 2009

Zemi—

The bump got smaller, but the redness and pain remained. I loathe feeling this way. I demand more pain-assassins be given to me. God, they all must think I'm an addict. My mom claims my current state is due to the lifestyle I've chosen to abide by these past couple of years. I don't know, maybe she's right. At age nineteen or twenty I also got hospitalized.

'What was it for? Stomach ache?'

I spend two or three days in the hospital. Then, at age twenty-one, a rash spread all over my body. Red ringworm shapes appeared on my thighs and back. Spent two days at the hospital for that. Then at age twenty-two, I was bitten by a spider on the forearm. It swelled into a golf size sensitive pinkish ball of infection. Similar to the one I have now.

Hey, I began to smoke pot, take pills, stay out late, drink like a maniac, you know, living a pretty intense life after all those trips to the hospital. Now that I have stopped, I am sick. Maybe I have to start up again to avoid the ER.

It sucks feeling this way, Zemi. My Polish nurse, Norota, told me that I will stay here for an additional nite. According to her, no one leaves after one day of an antibiotic treatment.

My mind still focuses on the negative. Fuck it! I can't control it, so might as well enjoy it.

Oh, let me tell you about Heather. When I was admitted to the ER, she handed me what I thought was a sizable cup for a urine sample and a bag to put my clothes in.

'You want me to fill this all up with pee?' I asked her.

That questioned cracked her up. After I handed her my pint of pee, she leaned in and whispered,

"Let me inject you with morphine. You'll feel better."

I looked at her face to see if I could detect any malicious intentions behind her offer. I didn't detect any. Her tone was a cross between that of a fellow addict who was eager to share their goodies and a pusher handing out a freebie to cultivate new customers.

'Free morphine?'

I gave her a nod.

It felt like my internal body jumped into a pool. My breathing slowed down, weird sensations surrounded the area around my knees, and my chest briefly tightened up before it released its tension. It was awesome! I read that heroin addicts described their first time as complete euphoria.

'Pains, aches, problems?'

Nothing matters in that world. I literally forced myself to think about my problems while in this euphoric state and felt absolutely nothing but bliss. That feeling lasted only for a few minutes, but they were magnificent.

Heather observed me with glee as I drowned deeper and deeper into the pool.

"Do you want another hit?"

I don't know why I turned her down. Someone was probably looking out for me. I am going to lay down and read Brando until they bring my pills and breakfast.

October 26, 2009

Zemi—

That sadist butcher of a doctor broke me. He cut me with hardly any anesthetic, then drilled a long cotton swab into the infected cavity. He broke me. The pain broke through my threshold. I cried. I wanted it no more. I want to leave. I'm never coming back here again! Nobody will tell me exactly what the fuck it is that I have. We are doing this again tomorrow and the day after until it completely drains out. I don't want to get kicked out of school, Zemi. If I do, I have to go back home.

October 29, 2009

Zemi—

This wound represents my psyche
The way I truly feel inside
Filled with venom. Spreading.
An opened flesh wound into my spirit—
My mind is sick, I need medication—
I take alcohol, drugs, and drags of cigarettes
To take the edge off
But these medications throw me deeper in the deep end.
My soul is crying out for help! I wanted to be
Cured! I've tried, fooling my mind into
Thinking I'm doing the right thing. I
Suffer for it the next day, when I hit rock
Bottom, alone, confused, crying, wanting love:
Receiving none
It's an ugly wound, painful when touched,
Depressing to look at
I'm here! In NYC at the Scaena Drama School,
I still feel the same—so the problem is me.

November 3, 2009

A Train

Zemi—

'What am I doing up here? What do I want for myself right now?
I feel depressed—low on cash, haven't exercised in months, haven't been eating
well and I'm emotionally drained. I was about to have a nervous breakdown the
other day because I was lonely, tired, missing El Paso, and miserable at my job.
I felt emasculated for letting my boss know about you. I told them how I felt.
Urgh! They know.

'But we are allowed *to feel, right?*'

I fear they will think less of me if I tell them my problem and ask for
help.

'When did I get the idea that opening up was unbecoming?'

I was too open before. Now, I am too closed. That side of me portrays a weakling and I abhor him! I meant to push it to the side, only now it is repressed deeper inside. I didn't mean for it to go that far.

A guy is flirting with the woman beside me. The balls!

Feels good to write all this down. It feels good to vent.

I can't be known as the depressed kid.

Romeo has a bored look on his face. All the woman talks about are cats.

I feel so alone that I am convinced my feelings are unique. I know they are not, but I believe that they are. My emotions control my logic. I fucked up my whole plan for tonite. Now I am stoned, tired and will only get about four and a half hours of sleep. Finish. I gotta finish. I got to know how to read body language. I bet there is an underground cult that deals with body language. That's all they do. Study humans and decipher language not many know even exist. For the longest time I wanted to understand body language. I blank out. Space out. I miss hints. I get lost in my mind.

But I have written about all this bullshit before.

I just want a friend.

November 14, 2009

Zemi—

I gave my landlord notice of my move this morning. He wasn't too pleased because I'm a good tenant who always pays on time. He's been cheated many times in the past. Still, the move isn't set on stone. What prompted this change was my health. I wore myself out with a busy schedule that entailed waking up at 6:30a after falling asleep at 2a or 3a the nite before and not eating much. My diet consists of nothing more than a protein shake for breakfast, nuts and crackers as a snack, a bologna and cheese sandwich for lunch, a peanut butter and strawberry/grape jam sandwich and if I still have the energy, a small portion of spaghetti with tuna.

Uncertainty makes me nervous. Cameron hasn't called to let me know if the move is a go and I already told my landlord I'm moving out. Plus, we need to work on our scene that goes up Wednesday.

I'm calling Bonnie right now. She didn't answer. She sent me a text last week.

*Going to change my number. I can't do this, I feel better
when ur not around 2 play bead games.*

'Head games?'

My intentions are not to get back with her. I think she believes that I want us to reunite.

It's a go! I'm moving in with Cameron in Jersey next week! YEAHHH! Okay for now Zemi. I'm going to go over my lines for an hour. See ya.

Love
Dad...

November 22, 2009
New Jersey

'Why the flip-flopping Jose? Why the sudden impulse for change? You went from having your safe place to invading someone else's. Why did I move?

Why did you run when shit hit the fan?'

I've always been this way. I don't know how to handle problems. I was never told it's okay to fuck up as a kid.

I feel unwelcomed, like I'm overstepping their boundaries. I spent money last nite that I don't have. I don't know how to take care of myself. Impatient. I want the pill to solve all of my problems, so I won't have to do anything.

November 29, 2009

'How long will this inexorable oppression press on for?'

My soul yearns for my sins to be expiated once and for all! Enough! You don't have to be circumspect in your dealings with me anymore. The basis of that

past quarrel has expired. You have strewn your retribution all over my being, my life, but more importantly—my family.

‘What have they done other than accept you for what you are? What?’
Either you refuse or don’t know the meaning of selflessness. Please, stop.

December 5, 2009

Zemi—

I went out last nite. I drank an awful lot too. I shouldn’t have done that. That sort of behavior can lead people to one of two conclusions: 1) you’re an alcoholic or 2) you’re depressed, lost the battle, and are on your way to becoming an alcoholic.

‘Are all alcoholics depressed? Do they all have something pressing on their soul? Does anyone drink just for the sake of drinking?’

December 17, 2009

Zemi—

I’m flying back to El Paso today. My instructors could see it in my eyes that I am a very troubled boy. I spoke with Zola Balzac, our Executive Manager, about my options of finishing the program. She advised me to take a year off, get right (mentally and financially), and I could come back next Fall but would have to start the program from the beginning. I agreed. I’m embarrassed to show my face in El Paso. Everyone’s going to laugh at me and make me feel bad for being a failure. I’m sorry I failed you, Zemi. I’m going to get well. I promise you! I’m going to save up enough money, kick these addictions to the curb, and come back to New York City stronger than before. Fuck! I’m such a fuck-up! I’m going to cry.

March 23, 2010

Zemi—

I took a much needed respite from writing. Pretty much from everything. These last few months have been weird. I am back in El Paso

working as a telemarketer again. This time in Spanish. Fewer sales, bigger payout—or opportunity of—and better people to hang around with. Well, I shouldn't say better.

‘What's the word?’

Easier to relate with. Much more empathy in Spanish. I love it!

I want to educate myself with new ideas and words, but I lack motivation. I can't get myself to do any of those things. I'd much rather smoke, drink and/or watch movies. That won't get me anywhere. I have been so fortunate with these opportunities and if I don't take advantage of them, I will die of self-inflicted cancer.

Oh, I have been receiving pics of you. You look so different than from the last time I saw you. You have my curly hair and Bonnie's grin. You look good. I will swing by Ingrid's on Easter to drop off some goodies for you. I hand-picked them myself. You'll like them.

All right Zemi. I'll see you!

March 28, 2010

Zemi—

I attended a bachelor party Friday nite that my coworkers invited me to. I've never been to one before, so I asked around what I should take, and the consensus was,

“Some beer and ten dollars for the girl.”

‘Okay.’

I got there around 10p. My anxiety was riding high by then, so I concentrated and forced myself to stay poised. Lots of people who are diagnosed with anxiety go on meds. Fuck Xanax! I will beat this shit without drugging myself.

The girl finally came out and brimmed with sexuality. I liked her. After she gave a little dance, I calmed down. I was so worried about what others would think of me that I almost ruined the nite for myself. I was not alone in thinking this way. I'm slowly adopting the idea that everyone is too worried with their own baggage to care about what I think of them.

After the exotic dancer left, it was just us guys talking. I actually conversed with people. I felt good about myself. I talked to this cool guy who claimed to overthink things too much.

‘I know how you feel,’ I told him.

He's a musician. In fact, most of those guys were some sort of artist. I learned that unless you do something really dumb or offensive, nobody judges you. Cool!

But then, at around 1a, in came the smokers and were quick to spot me.

“Smell this!” the guy with the pipe said to me.

Man, that herb smelled minty with a kick to it. Once packed, he placed the pipe on my mouth. So I took a hit. Nothing happened, but shortly after taking in the second hit, something did happen. My lucidity was still intact. In fact, all of my senses were heightened. I felt my pupils dilate; narrow beams of moonlight streamed through them. The cool nite breeze whistled in my ears, gently pressed up against my skin, and it completely dried the saliva in my mouth. Then, I smelled adrenaline.

“You have one minute, Jose,” warned a soothing voice in my head.

I understood what was to come next. I bid adieu to all in attendance in haste, but as I did, something felt terribly wrong within me. I needed to get away from everybody, fast! I frantically scrambled to the front door, jostling my way to it. I flung that fucker open, darted through the doorway, and came to a halt on the front lawn.

“Times up.”

Boom.

The beat of my heart resonated loudly throughout my body. I thought it would explode. My body temperature dropped, but my blood felt like a boiling waterfall cascading down my limbs.

‘I got to get home!’

I drove for about ten seconds before pulling over to the curb. I was in no condition to operate this vehicle. I thought I was going to die. I kept telling myself,

‘It's okay. It's not real.’

I rocked back and forth and felt completely defenseless and scared for my life. My mind was out of control. *Or in control.* I pushed the driver seat back to get in a fetal position.

'I'll be fine,' I reassured myself. 'Just got to sleep it off.'
I couldn't fall asleep, though. My mind raced with thoughts of insecurities, fears, and phobias. Inside my mind, I felt like a prisoner climbing up the walls. I bet if you saw me in that state, you would have noticed drool hanging from my mouth.

3a. My phone rang.

'What the fuck! It's the cops. I'm done for! I'm surrounded. I'm going to jail!'

My mind, oh my mind! I saw myself from the passenger seat trembling in fear. I was gone. I finally came to at 5:34a. An almost five-hour long trip. I drove home in a guilt and shame ridden daze.

(My brother is with me as I write this. He is drawing.)

I got to stop doing that. I've had too many bad trips. I don't understand why I still do drugs and alcohol. I read about panic and anxiety attacks and people who have them go on a downward spiral of depression, drugs, alcohol, stress, and paranoia. That's me. I don't want to take meds, so I have to control myself. Life is too short to be paranoid. Life is too grand to be depressed. Life is too healthy to be doing drugs. Life is too vast to be a prisoner of my own mind. It's not for me. I give you my word right now. I am done with marijuana. Done. I will do this for you. I promise to learn about myself and use it towards my advantage. I miss you!

April 5, 2010

Zemi—

I saw you tonite! I dropped off your gifts and Bonnie and Ingrid were there with you. I saw you! You were framed at the threshold standing tall waiting for them. That put a smile on your face.

'Hi! I am a friend of your mom,' I told you.

I first gave you the Valentine's bouquet, but your attention went to the Pepperidge Farm Goldfish instead.

"Oh, fishes!" you exclaimed with glee.

You like them still. I then handed you your Easter basket. You took it from me then ran inside like a bandit. When you came back to the door, you proclaimed,

“Oh! Monkey!!”

I was speechless. Oh, you even said my name!!

“Jose.”

Oh my God! My name has never sounded so beautiful. Thank you. My name has never been uttered so eloquently and beautifully before and thereafter.

‘Here’s a little note for you. When you’re older, you can read it.’

We stared into each other’s eyes for a moment before a small gorgeous smile formed on your face. I explained to you that the eggs weren’t edible. You then ran off inside with them too. But before you did, I touched your hair. It’s so soft and curly. I used to have hair like yours. Mine is falling off.

Afterwards, I had the usual cigarette talk with Ingrid. She told me that Bonnie’s husband was uncomfortable with me showing up. He’s threatened.

‘Huh!?’

I explained to Ingrid that he has nothing to be threatened about. Bonnie is his wife. My intentions are not to take her away from him. Insecurity is a bad trait to have.

“My husband thinks you should have no say at all,” said Ingrid.

‘Well, everyone’s entitled to an opinion,’ I said.

Fuck that! I don’t care what others think. I will keep doing what I can when I can. I have to acquire a thicker skin.

I was surprised that Bonnie was the one who opened the door. I didn’t pay much attention to her. She was only a blur.

Thing is, she told me that she might get a divorce soon, but I haven’t even seen this phantom husband. If I was him, I’d come out and introduce myself. I don’t know what his problem is.

‘Threatened?’

I smell foul play.

Anyway, I felt relieved having seen you.

Okay for now. Going to watch *Last Tango in Paris*. I need Brando right now.

Love—

Dad ...

May 1, 2010

Zemi—

I haven't heard from Bonnie in almost a month. I do think less and less about her as the days go by. My days are now meaningful Zemi. The guys from work amp up my confidence level exponentially.

I found my favorite painter: Basquiat. I love that man. He is intimate with his work. *Widow Basquiat* is a book I will buy to learn more about him.

For your birthday, I will paint you a Basquiat-esque painting. I can't wait.

I promise to write you more. I feel alive. Yeal

Love—

Dad ...

May 2, 2010

Zemi—

I feel incomplete. I cause pain to my peers.

Lonely. Lonely. Lonely. Empty. Empty. Empty. I miss you. I feel you miss *me* too. We are far apart, distant, and prisoners of the gray between us.

Fuck gray.

Living life day by day has its downside. I tend to forget about you. When time catches up, your soul fills my mind with wonderment. Life is but a game. A game I refused to play because I was too scared to stake my claim. Now that it's been injected into me, I get the joneses when rendered stagnant. I am riddled with guilt when I waste an opportunity that life handed me. Then, I think realistically. You aren't part of my life, and I am not a part of yours because I chose that hand. I took the coward's way out. I am too fucking selfish to give up this dream.

On the flip side though, I am a better person. The insecurity slowly purges out of me and it's replacement, confidence, imbues my spirit. I wake up and feel this energy that leaves traces of hope; then the light becomes visible again. A beacon of hope.

Sacrifice or selfishness.

They both go hand and hand I guess.

I love you Zemi, but I haven't made the best of the few chances when our lives crossed paths. I wasn't aware enough to make our time memorable. I promise you that won't be the case in the future. I use this time to discover who I am, what I am about, my needs, my fears, my joy, my ambitions, challenges, challenges, challenges. I will rock this world! They will remember Jose.

I looked in the mirror and saw a man who my mind didn't recognize. I got startled. My mind obscured what/who I am. I don't give myself the credit I deserve. I am special. I am wanted. I am needed. Coveted.

I am Jose...

May 6, 2010

I'll never be your friend! I will never stop loving you! Never. Ever.—Bonnie

I have been warned ...

May 18, 2010

Zemi—

Last nite, I took all the photos out of you, me and yes, of Bonnie. I have two identical phones. The original was loaned (not by choice) to you to be used as a teething toy. Well, I believe you will not be surprised to know that it stopped working a short time after you claimed it. I did, however, get an exact replacement from a lady at LTT who offered it up. Cool!

Last week, the replacement quit on me. I couldn't get it to charge anymore. Your teething toy, err, my original phone has almost a hundred photos of our time together. I sent eighty of those pictures to Bonnie. I want

her to add them to your already vast photo album. I was there for the pregnancy and for the first one and a half years of your life. I deserve to be there! It brought back powerful feelings of happiness mixed with anger. I can tell you where things were shaky just by pointing out a certain photo. Me looking like shit sort of gives it away, but they serve their purpose as a timeline that unfortunately was cut short by neurotic tendencies. Hopefully we will soon be connected again.

Last nite, I felt ashamed. Here I am reinventing myself, having a hell of a time and you are not with me. Or I'm not there with you. I have no right to live life the way I have this past month and a half. I stared at the photos lugubriously, then began to cry and this morning, I felt drained. Bonnie suggested I try and connect more. I have been! She hasn't been connecting back. She is still angry, and I will not let that ruin my day, much less my life. God, I am going to cry again.

Love—
Dad ...

May 23, 2010

Zemi—

‘Oh, these mental doldrums I have.’

My alarm went off at 7a. As usual, I ignored it and went back to sleep. The curtains hanging from the backside of my eyelids drew open, and before my subconscious was the setting of a dream that was about to play itself out. It started without any previews. My mother and I crossed the same street three consecutive times without uttering a single word to each other. I looked straight ahead, but felt her stare. When I finally turned to her, she began to utter something to me, but before I could make out what she said, I woke up. Now she stood over me and asked,

“No vas a ir al trabajo?”

Strange.

I admire this magnificent firmament during my breaks and wish I was somewhere else. I think home, yet I have no home.

My fingers appear thinner and my hands seem smaller. I am in a sully mood. I get that way sometimes. I am anxious at work and want to quit. That's the devil speaking in my ear. I've squandered too much money. I like sordid honky-tonk venues.

'Why?'

Just a phase, I hope. These last three weeks have been languid ones.

Urges to drink and get high. Urges I cannot succumb to.

I can't stand a girl who won't drink beer.

I want to read but don't. Going to bed. Got to wake up early to go to the gym.

Love—
Dad ...

June 1, 2010

Zemi—

I got drunk on wine last nite at a co-worker's apartment.

'What did I learn?'

I am selfish and irresponsible. My niece's award show was at 9a this morning and I missed it because I was still drunk in the morning. She received the trophy for up-and-comer. The lesson: two-drink maximum for me at social events. Getting drunk will be a solo event.

My head hurts. The worst part was I missed her award show. Shows what kind of father I am. I don't deserve to be called that designation. Not the way I am. I can correct it. I have to fuck up only once to become aware not to do it again. You know, it's a blessing to be conscious of when I mess up in life.

June 6, 2010

Zemi—

I feel lost today. I've been lost for about three days. I think it's due to the probability that I'll miss another one of your birthdays. I'm such a fuck up!

Maybe I am snapping at everyone because I gave up drinking. I need that nectar to enjoy myself. I got to learn to enjoy myself without it. I can conquer anything. The root of my problems is you or the lack of you. A true story based on lies. I haven't gone to the gym as often as I'd like. The snooze button is worn out. Going to read *On The Road*. I finished reading *Widow Basquiat*.

June 12, 2010

Zemi—

Twelve days sober. I snap at and push people away. My mind boycotts my vocal cords. I don't know what's up with me. Maybe it's my diet. Maybe it's the reality that sinks in about dealing with problems head-on without a cup of dirty water in me. I never learnt to deal with my problems. That's why I drink and get high. To not deal with them. It's sad my parents failed me in that area.

I need to get back on my diet. I need to have fun. I need to go to the Outback and have fun. [Ha!] Gotta stay focused. Patient. Patient. My tummy hurts. I need to finish your shirt. Distractions, distractions. I need to learn how to write complete sentences. Just six more months. I can do it. I will do it.

I want to cry.

June 25, 2010

Zemi—

I want to be alone, yet I want someone near me.

I want to go out, but I'd rather stay indoors.

I want one person to be near me while I am home.

I don't have a home—

a place to call my own.

Twenty-five days sober. I don't miss it.

I want to hop on the bus with no destination in mind.

When I get to where it takes me, I'll want to come back.
I want to tell her that I miss her but then she'll know that I miss her.
I want to act and make a name for myself.
I don't think I can do it. Acting is foolish.
I cannot pull it off.
A walking contradiction I have become.

Flashback



March 4, 2006

Zemi—

“I need to talk you,” Bonnie said.

‘About what?’

“Follow me to my bedroom.”

‘No! Whatever you have to say, say it to me here.’

“Follow me to my bedroom!” she insisted angrily.

A sickening feeling knotted itself in the pit of my stomach. With my heart racing, a giant lump formed in my throat and what little control I had slowly slipped away.

‘What the fuck does she need to talk to me about? Just fucking say it, right?’

“I need you to leave,” she finally said once we were in her bedroom.

‘Why?’ I asked confused.

“I need you to leave!” she yelled. “Now!”

‘Bonnie had fallen for that!’ I thought dismayed.

I couldn’t see Bonnie with him. I didn’t want to! Believing if Bonnie did cuckolded me, I figured it would have been with anyone but that unhygienic biohazard sitting on the futon. But it didn’t appear that way. Realizing what

the reality was, I went into a state of utter shock, followed by fear and anger which quickly dissipated, leaving my nerves cold: I felt nothing. Nothing.

I walked across the living room stunned, somnambulating out the door. Before I got in my car, I asked her,

‘Are you going to fuck him?’

Her mouth transformed into a sneer and the skin on her face got taut. Turning to me, she shrugged her shoulders and said,

“Maybe.”

Then, without tearing her eyes away from me, she lifted her arm up and with an extended forefinger pointed to the horizon, bellowing,

“Now get out!”

The way she said *maybe* cut me. The way she said *now get out* broke me.

I drove home in some kind of a fog; a blur. I couldn’t understand what had happened. I just knew what I felt: humiliated, stupid and betrayed. That moment made such an indelible impression on my psyche and I did nothing to stop it. I did nothing to defend myself. To defend what I believed was mine. I stayed up all night, smoking an entire pack of cigarettes while I stared blankly into the middle distance.

I showed up to her place two days later, looking for answers.

‘You slept with him!?’ I asked incredulously.

“I didn’t fuck him,” she said while her eyes averted mine.

‘Why did you kick me out then!?’

“Fuck you!”

‘Did you plan it!?’

Silence.

‘Answer the questions, Bonnie,’ I demanded.

She didn’t.

She avoided answering my questions by throwing fits and launching insults at me instead. I became obsessed with wanting to know the truth. I pressed and pressed for it, but she wouldn’t budge. All I got were the same responses as before:

“Fuck you!”

followed by her storming off. Our relationship was now fraught with tension and acrimony because this elephant in the room, which was in plain sight, was purposefully and consciously being ignored by her.

Two weeks later, she let me know of Sobaco’s intentions whilst we had breakfast at her place. It began with her handing me a stack of about ten sheets of paper.

‘What is this?’ I asked.

“He wrote a short play with me in mind,” she said in a nonchalant manner.

I was livid.

‘What’s it about?’ I asked through my teeth.

“It’s about a couple who is madly in love with each other,” she began.

“The entire thing takes place in bed.”

I became infuriated.

‘Are you going to do it!?’

“I haven’t decided yet. I think he just wants to get me in bed with him” she said, grinning.

“Oh, he says he knows you, by the way,” she then added casually.

‘What!?’

“He told me that he had been personally acquainted with you years ago.” Zemi, the first time I saw that guy was after Bonnie’s show. And how pathetic was his attempt to woo Bonnie through the guise of deception. Any man who has to resort to that kind of trickery in order to gain the favor of a woman is weak and ought not be allowed to breed.

‘Bonnie, he’s lying!’ I retorted.

“He hasn’t spoken well about your character,” she continued.

“He told me that you’re a womanizer who uses and hurts women.

Says you’ll do that to me, too.

He says the difference between him and you is that you’re selfish and he is selfless.”

‘What a crock of shit,’ I said in disgust, rolling my eyes back.

What a pissant! I lost complete respect for that guy. He established a relationship that never was and then smeared me all in an attempt to break us up!

‘That was how he went about it?’

I couldn’t comprehend why someone would blatantly lie with total disregard for other people’s feelings.

‘And I was the selfish one?’

What confused and enraged me most, however, was Bonnie’s allegiance to his cause.

‘Why didn’t she ask me if what he claimed was true?’

Why didn’t she tell him to *fuck off*?

Why didn’t she take my side?’

Why did she kick me out that nite?’

Was that nite planned? Was she punishing me for what he claimed I did?

What did I do exactly?’

All those questions were posed to Bonnie and they were all met with the same response:

“Fuck you!”

followed by her storming off.

Honestly Zemi, despite her unrelenting refusal to give me an honest explanation, I tried to forgive her so that we could move on from this, but suspicious circumstances befell me which would cast an even larger shadow of doubt on her already brittle integrity.

Not more than a month after that unfortunate nite, I made an unannounced visit to Bonnie's at around 9:30a. It was eerily quiet, and something felt off.

'Bonnie? Are you home?' I said in a low voice.

I slowly made my way into her bedroom. Once inside I noticed a picture frame sticking out from underneath her dresser. I immediately recognized it when I pulled it out. It was the poem I had given her for Valentine's Day.

'Huh. She told me she'd thrown it awa—'

Before I could finish my thought, an all too familiar foul stench filled my nostrils. I swiveled my head around, and my soul was immediately crestfallen by what my eyes registered—Sobacos. There he lay on Bonnie's bed with nothing on but a pair of grungy looking boxers, staring at me with a pompous self-satisfying grin on his face.

He very gingerly got himself out of bed, then haughtily sauntered over to the dresser—shoving me aside with his malodor—and randomly took an article of clothing of Bonnie's out from each drawer, inspected it, then placed it back inside. He repeatedly glanced over at me while he did this, like he wanted to make sure I was watching.

'What the hell is he doing?' I wondered, perplexed.

I found his behavior odd because his grubby clothes laid in a pile on the floor by the foot of the bed. Then, it dawned on me. He wanted me to believe that he's moved in with Bonnie. I took umbrage at his duplicitous one-dimensional performance and smoldered with anger at his attempt to get under my skin.

'Where's Bonnie?' I asked him.

'She's at work. Didn't you know?'

The nerve this guy had to imply that I wasn't involved in her life anymore. Boy, he rubbed me the wrong way! But at that moment, heavy complex emotions inundated my heart. I felt anger for being deceived and thought of as a fool and hurt and confused that Bonnie was allowing this to happen. But even more so, I was frightened, now more than ever, that the probability of her leaving me was surely inevitable. That shift in state ushered those irrational thoughts back to the seat of my consciousness and I became severely insecure once again.

'How long have you and Bonnie been seeing each other?' I asked in defeat.

'Who? Me and B? Going on three months,' he replied as if with a jab.

I was paralyzed with shock.

‘Three months!?’

No. That wouldn’t do. I needed confirmation from her. I got in my car and zoomed over to Bonnie’s work.

‘Hey! Sobacos is at your place right now.’ I told her.

“So?”

‘I found him in your bed!?’

‘He said he needed a place to crash. I put him up on the futon and told him he could sleep in my bed in the morning after I left for work. Geez!’

I pulled in close to her, looked directly into her eyes and said,

‘He said you two have been seeing each other for almost three months now.

Is that true?’

She smacked her lips, rolled her eyes back in annoyance and looked away.

‘Did you fuck him?’

She got angry and turned away.

‘Why did you kick me out that nite? Huh? Answer me!’ I inquired in distress.

“Fuck you!” she said, storming away.

Our relationship had turned hostile, to say the least, and it seemed unlikely that we would ever get it back on amicable terms. At that time, as incredulous as this may sound, I truly believed that our relationship would be saved if I somehow got Bonnie to tell me the truth or if I gathered enough evidence against her to where she couldn’t avoid the truth any longer, forcing her to come clean.

So, a couple weeks later I got Sobaco’s phone number from a friend in the theatre community and called him. I asked him if he had slept with Bonnie and without hesitation answered in the positive. I then confronted Bonnie with this information, but she was quick to deny it.

‘Why would he lie about having slept with you?’ I asked in a frustrated tone.

“I don’t know,” she said shrugging her shoulders.

I became annoyed because I sensed that some vital piece of information was intentionally being held from me.

‘So why did you kick me out that nite when he showed up!?’

By now you should know how she responded to that question.

I had become obsessed with finding out the truth. So much so, that I incessantly pestered her about the nite she kicked me out on a daily basis. All of this would make sense, I believed, if I understood her motives from that nite. But the more I probed into the inner workings of her mind, which were progressively being met with a stronger, more aggressive opposition, I couldn’t

help but feel like my strings were being pulled. And for the first time, a terrifying realization came to me that maybe I was also being punished.

A month later, I was having lunch with a friend at a restaurant not too far from Bonnie's.

'Guess who was a waiter there?'

I excused myself from my friend and hurtled over to Bonnie's. My plan was for us three to have our own little pow-wow. I figured if I asked the questions I needed answers to with all of us present, I would be able to tell who wasn't telling the truth.

Bonnie lay on her bed reading a book when I arrived.

'Hey, I need you to come with me. Now!' I said revved up. She appeared somewhat out of countenance at my sudden invitation.

"Where?"

'Just come with me. We're meeting up with someone,' I said.

"Who?"

'Someone we both need to talk to.'

Her eyes turned inward, and her visage molded itself into worry.

'It's Sobacos!' I told her. 'I know where he works. He's there now.'

Let's go there so we can clear this mess up.'

A barrage of piercing, bloodcurdling shrieks then erupted from Bonnie's core. She tossed her book and threw herself to the ground, wailing and trembling uncontrollably. My first instinct was to console her, but when I got within a foot, she let out another earsplitting shriek, shoving me away with it. Shocked and dumbfounded by this phenomenon, I stood there rooted to the spot. Ten minutes elapsed before she had finally calmed down. Needless to say, we never made it to the restaurant.

Three days later, I got a message from Bonnie saying to come over to her place at 3p. When I pulled up to her home, she was already outside, displaying a slight grin on her face. Before I could step out of my car, she had already gotten in it.

"Okay. Let's go," she said calmly.

'Go where?'

"To confront Sobacos."

'I thought you didn't want to,' I said.

"I do now. So drive."

So I drove.

I spotted him the moment we stepped into the restaurant. I marched toward him, broke through his shroud of fetidness, and got within an inch of his face.

‘Did you have sex with Bonnie?’ I asked, glaring into his eyes.

‘Yes. Yes, I did,’ he muttered.

‘Just stop it already!’ Bonnie barked at him, standing three feet away with her body facing the adjacent wall.

‘But what about our—’ Sobacos’s spluttered.

‘Stop it!’ she demanded sternly.

And just like that, he retracted his claim of ever having slept with Bonnie.

It then came to my attention that he was trembling with fear. This confrontation seemed to have triggered bad memories which placed him in the grip of paralysis. The terror in his eyes said that he’d now confess to everything, provided I would allow for him to leave this scene unscathed.

‘Why did you lie to me then?’ I pressed on.

‘Because I admired you,’ he said in a quavering voice, cowering.

‘Fuck you! Why did you lie to me?’ I insisted.

‘I was envious, and I wanted to impress you.’

Pitiful, to say the least. Just utterly pitiful.

I then turned to Bonnie and said,

‘This is the kind of scum you allow into our circle? Our lives?’

Right on cue, she retorted with,

‘Shut the fuck up!’

and stormed out of the restaurant.

Without breaking eye contact, I slowly backed away from him and ran after Bonnie. I still had more questions to ask, but she refused to go back inside. The more I pleaded with her to come back inside, the angrier she became. After five minutes, it became evident that she was done. It was a silent, tense ride home.

I wanted to believe him, I truly did Zemi, but something still didn’t add up. I walked out of there with more questions than before. What did he mean by,

‘But what about our—’

Our, what!?

I also wondered about the previous three days.

‘She wasn’t okay about confronting him three days ago, but today she was?
Why?’

What happened between then and now?’

How did Bonnie know that he would be working today at that hour?’

Did she get ahold of him so that they could get their stories straight?’

Nothing was resolved. In fact, more fuel was added to pyre. What a damn shame.

‘You haven’t torn your eyes away from our story yet, have you Zemi?’

Good, because our narrative wouldn’t be complete without recounting the clandestine actions of one fellow called Billy Bob. So, gather ‘round the fire, my curly haired son, and I shall tell you about this arrogant recreant character who lurked safely from a distance at the same time Sobacos was being dealt with.

On Valentine’s Day 2006, I wanted to surprise Bonnie. I had come across a poem that I thought encapsulated the feelings I had for her. It was P.B. Shelley’s *Love’s Philosophy*. I wanted Bonnie to officially be my girl, only I didn’t know how to articulate it. I printed it out at school on a green glossy cardstock and enclosed it in an ornate frame. This poem, I believed, would reveal my true intentions to her.

On the big day, I snuck into her place while she was at work and meticulously set it on her bedroom dresser. I then waited patiently for her phone call. The one where she would praise me for such a thoughtful gift. The one where she would tell me that she was rushing over to wherever I was to shower me with hugs and kisses. The one where she would say,

“Yes, I am *your* girl.”

I received no such call. In fact, I receive no call at all. So, I drove to her place later that evening to find out what had happened.

Her living room was completely dark with the exception of the swarm of electrons dancing on the tv screen, casting bouncing silhouettes off the walls. Bonnie, in her green tartan pajamas, sat cross legged on the futon smoking a hand rolled cigarette.

‘Happy Valentine’s Day,’ I said.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” she snapped, pointing at the framed poem that now laid face down on the coffee table.

‘I dedicated that poem to you, because—’

“Only to *me*?” she asked, her voice crackling with suspicion. I was confused by her strange query.

‘Of course only to you.’ I answered.

“What about Abigail? You sent that exact poem to her on an email yesterday,” she said definitively.

Which was true. I had, but the accuracy of her accusation took me aback, rendering me speechless before I could reply.

‘I e-mailed it because I thought it would help her.’ I finally said.

Abigail was also having trouble articulating her desire to go steady with a guy she was dating. Bonnie didn’t buy it, though.

“Asshole!” she said to me in a hurt tone, storming off into her bedroom.

Later, when I lay next to her in bed, she quickly turned over and gave her back to me. I gently grabbed her arm to indicate that I wanted her to look at me, but she jerked it free. I couldn’t understand why she was treating that way. I had done nothing wrong. All I did was show her, in my own way, that I wanted her to be my girl. I then started to believe that I was the one who had fucked up. Confusion clouded my consciousness as I cried myself to sleep.

A couple weeks before the confrontation with Sobacos at the restaurant, I had lunch with Abigail. Abigail was my friend of six years at the time. Actually, she was more than that. She was my closest friend and confidant and our relationship was strictly platonic. She knew about all my relationship struggles and successes as did I about hers. At this juncture of our relationship, all I would ever talk about centered around my struggles with Bonnie. She listened, gave advice, made me laugh, and even though she wasn’t too happy with what was transpiring with Bonnie, she supported me.

During this particular lunch, I talked about how I was strongly considering taking a break from school. My heart just wasn’t in it anymore. After a lengthy discussion that consisted of us weighing the pros and cons against each other, I decided to drop out of school. My heart—my true calling—was in acting. Why waste my time in school when I could be honing my acting skills. The word through the acting community grapevine was that Albuquerque was establishing itself as one of the premier acting towns in the Southwest. I wanted in on that action! My eyes were now set on Albuquerque.

As I drove on the 10 after my lunch with Abigail, I received a text message from Bonnie.

Had a nice lunch?

I am a firm believer in synchronicity, but the timing of her text was disconcerting, especially since my mind was swimming in thoughts about Albuquerque: I wasn't thinking about her then. That sent chills down my spine. Nevertheless, I set it aside and continued my drive to the Library at the university. I wanted to gather as much information about Albuquerque as possible. After about three hours down the rabbit hole, I came back up for some air to check my email before I left. Sitting at the top of my inbox was one from Abigail. In it were numerous links that led to websites and articles about the film and stage scenes in Albuquerque.

'Way ahead of you,' I thought to myself with a smile.

I scrolled down to read the ending to her email. She wrote:

"P.S. You need to take a break from Bonnie."

I knew she had nothing but the best of intentions for me, but I paid no heed to her suggestion. I still had hope.

Bonnie and I had made prior arrangements to spend that evening lounging at her place in our typical fashion: smoke a bowl, watch a movie, and EAT! Every once in a while, I'd swing by Subway and would pick up her favorite sandwich: veggie patty with cheddar cheese, cucumbers, lettuce, spinach, tomatoes, guacamole, salt—no pepper—and red wine vinegar on 9-grain wheat. Tonite was one of those nites.

As I drove, I wondered what movie we would watch. Anything with Brando, Day-Lewis, De Niro, Pacino, Depp, Rourke, Nicholson, Walken, Norton, (oh, she has a secret affinity for Ben Stiller that she'll never admit to—you didn't hear this from me, okay?) or Bill fuckin' Murray were fair game. Anything directed by Tarantino, Scorsese, De Palma, Allen, Jarmusch, Kubrick, Lynch or Coppola were welcomed as well.

'I want to watch Pulp Fiction!' I proclaimed just as I stepped over the threshold of her home.

Bonnie didn't appear to be in a good mood. She looked flustered, irritated and wound up; like a tea kettle on the verge of whistling.

"Did you have a nice lunch?" she said, glaring at me from a distance. That question projected me to earlier in the day and I felt uncomfortable once again. Then I wondered how she could have known about my lunch with Abigail. The one I didn't tell her about! Disturbing possible explanations surged

up to the forefront of my mind which were immediately discounted because of their fantastical nature.

‘But how else could she have known?’ I reconsidered.

The unease inhabiting me transmuted into annoyance.

‘Were you following me, Bonnie?’

My question evoked a snicker from her.

‘Were you!?’

Without answering, she marched in my direction. When she got within a foot from me, a piece of paper was shoved into my chest.

“You need to take a break from Bonnie,” she said sardonically.

The sheet of paper was a copy of the email Abigail had sent me earlier. The annoyance was transmuted back to unease and then into anger.

‘How the fuck did you get into my email account?’

She didn’t answer. She just stood there, sneering at me, with her arms crossing her chest.

‘You know what?’ I said while walking toward the door, ‘Fuck you!’

“He doesn’t like you,” she cried out when I was stepping through the doorway.

‘Who?’ I said, stepping back inside.

“Billy Bob,” she said with a menacing tone of voice.

“He doesn’t like you at all.”

‘You know this guy?’ I asked.

‘Oh, yeah. He’s a friend of Sobaco’s and he’s got the dirt on you!’

That bit of information knocked my teeth out and sent me reeling. Billy Bob was the one who let her know about the poem I sent Abigail and god knows what else. I had nothing to hide, but I felt angry, disgusted, and dirty because my privacy was being invaded and she wasn’t putting a stop to it.

I began receiving emails from him shortly thereafter. Some were laced with disparaging remarks about my character. In quite a few, he boasted about how he was a much better man than me. Others he chastised me for taking Bonnie for granted. A few he described how he’d please her sexually and of sexual exploits he’d had with other women. He then began emailing me detailed accounts of my day. The exact hour I left from work. A description of the person I spoke to during my lunch hour. The time I got home. What I wore! Ugh! If I had spoken to a girl, he emailed Bonnie about it and she would then use the information to accuse me of infidelity. It got so bad that everywhere I went, I had the nasty feeling that I was being watched.

He had gotten access to my phone records too. Any new phone number that appeared on my call log, he’d email over to Bonnie. On one of

those occasions, thinking he had caught me red handed, he forwarded the email he had sent Bonnie over to me. Just to gloat. It read:

Be gentle. He hasn't fucked her yet.

It didn't matter how many times I changed my password. He got ahold of it that same day. When I emailed him demanding that he stop stalking and harassing me, he replied with a *No* and used the opportunity to chastise me some more.

What hurt and confused me most was Bonnie's refusal to tell me where I could locate him.

"He'll hurt me if I reveal his identity to you," was her reason.

This harassment and stalking carried on from April 2006 to December 2006 and then again from August 2007 until I finally put a stop to it in early December 2007. I had grown tired of this cat and mouse game. Since Bonnie refused to disclose his identity, I sent Billy Bob an email with instructions to meet me at a park at midnite so we could settle this like men.

Why, so you can turn me in to the cops? Nah.

That's when I realized that he was a coward. Nothing but a mere cyber bully who hides behind a screen. The following email would be the last time we corresponded. It was meant to put him in his place. I said:

Let me remind you of the difference between you and me. You walk into a club with one hundred dollars in your pocket and *maybe* walk out with a girl's phone number. I walk in there, with nothing but a smile on my face, and walk out with twenty bucks and your girl by my side.

That was it. No more emails from him.

Two weeks later, however, he got in one last jab. I was at Ingrid's visiting you and your mother. (A bit of context: you and your mom had moved back to El Paso September 2007 and I followed suit early November.) I got on the computer to check my email, but couldn't log in because the password I typed was incorrect. Bonnie, who stood behind me while I did this, reached

over my shoulder and casually typed the letters *FU2* in the password box and Voila! Access was granted.

‘How did you know that was the password?’ I asked incredulously.

“Billy Bob gave it to me.” she said casually.

My entire body was washed over again by that nasty feeling that I was being watched. I gave Bonnie an incredulous and disappointed look as she went into the other room to feed you.

If any definite certitude arose from all these encounters, it was that the foundation for our heated arguments had been established. Our identity as a couple had, without a doubt, been crystallized.

Chapter 4



August 24, 2010

Zemi—

Bonnie was taken into jail last week. Remember when she punched me on my ear, poured wine over my head, tore up my shirt, and dented and scratch my car? Well, the warrant caught up with her. Justice! I am glad. I am happy because she deserves to go to jail. She called yesterday extremely pissed, demanding to know how I could have done such a thing.

“I’ve never put you in jail. This was all your fault!” she said.

First of all, I’ve never hit her. Second, she hit me. Hey, life is fair after all. This will go on her record as a misdemeanor which means that she can't apply for teaching positions. Karma baby!

On a different note, I think Bonnie wants me out of your life. If I apply for child support, she has to let me see you and I sense that she doesn't want that. I am motivated more than ever to become an accomplished actor and use my earnings to get custody of you. Nobody's going to like it, but I want to be part of your life. I feel sorry for her. She still hasn't changed. Her soul is polluted with anger.

Love—
Dad ...

September 8, 2010

Zemi—

I had another dream about you. You were competing in an art tournament. After you were crowned the victor, I jostled my way through the crowd with a huge grin slapped across my prideful mug. At first, I hesitated to hug you because Bonnie told me you had *stranger anxiety/fear*. Well, you didn't hesitate to hug me. You remembered!

'See, I told you he remembers,' I reassured everyone.

I lifted you up and gave you a prodigious hug!

'Let's get out of here,' I said.

My sister was kind enough to give us a ride home. I wasn't supposed to take you anywhere. We were to wait for Bonnie, but she was nowhere to be found. I guess she had forgotten. We had a grand old time in the backseat. I tickled you because I love hearing your laugh. I knew it was you because of that laugh. There have been times when I've been shopping at Walmart and heard your laugh. I'd scan every single aisle looking for you, but your laugh would vanish. I know it's you now because I can not only hear you but I see you as well! You pushed my hands to the side, sat on top of me and offered me a portion of your cookie. That made us both laugh.

Then I woke up.

You do remember Zemi!

Love—
Dad ...

November 15, 2010

Zemi—

In a fit of agitation, I messaged Bonnie the following:

*To forget can be an endearing trait of somebody, but to ignore?
Well, that's downright selfish and heartless.*

Bonnie's ignoring me. She stood me up Halloween. She hinted (never actually said yes) that we'd be able to hang out a week before the holiday. Every time I called, I was transferred to her voicemail. On Monday, she claimed her phone was off because she forgot her charger. I asked for pics of you in your Superman costume.

My phone doesn't have photo capability. E-mail?

I immediately gave it to her. No questions asked. It's been two weeks and still no pics, and now she ignores me. She is a fucking tyrant and an abuser of emotions.

I've got to control my emotions. I've got to not take things personally.
'How can I not when she keeps on making it personal?'

Love—
Dad ...

November 29, 2010

Zemi—

I've made up my mind. From now on, I will write you about possibilities, dreams, and eventful days. I haven't taken your journal with me. It's been shelved up next to my pants. A part of me still fears it being read by unwelcomed eyes. The time has come to trust people again. I don't blame myself for thinking that way. After all I went through, I just didn't trust it with me. I trusted no one.

'So how have you been? What's new in your life?'
Give me a call right now to tell me about your latest adventure.
Good nite Zemi! I love you!

Love—
Dad ...

December 11, 2010

Zemi—

I have to constantly convince myself that you are okay. I have to convince myself that you are not a part of my life and won't be for a very long time. I have to accept that notion every single day so that I can get by. I may not be there with you physically, but rest assured Zemi, I am there in spirit! I haven't given up on you. I have not lost all hope in us reuniting again. Don't think otherwise. Many will try to convince you that I gave up on you. It's not like that at all. It never was.

I will promise something to you right now. I will come back for you. When I do, we will never be separated again. It'll be different. I need to take away all the power she has so that I will have a chance to be in your life. Aside from a miracle happening, Bonnie will always keep us apart. That's how it is and that's how it will be. That's the hand that was dealt so that's the hand I must play.

Okay for now Zemi. I've got an early morning. Good nite. I love you.

December 17, 2010

Zemi—

Below is the Christmas letter I wrote you. Hope you received it.

It's 10:02p. The clock on the wall goes tick-tock-tick-tock. I wonder what it's trying to tell me. On the kitchen table I see a dictionary, a thesaurus, a cell phone, a red pocket note pad, two Pall Mall cigarettes, a coffee cup acting as an ashtray, a journal, a set of keys, a dirty napkin, a yellow Bic lighter and

pastries. My niece and nephew are asleep, my brother is upstairs watching TV and my mom is talking on the phone. Zemi, you have my undivided attention.

How do I begin? I stood in line at Toys R Us earlier when I noticed (what I thought) was the most peculiar thing. In the midst of comparing your gifts to those of others, my eyes came across a *Hello Kitty Karaoke System*. I feel sorry for the little girl whose fate a week from today is to unwrap that karaoke system. The adults will have had one too many drinks, snatch the mike from her, and sing *Pero Sigo Siendo el Rey* all nite long. She will resent the entire ordeal and sell the system to her friend. I don't understand why parents would buy a gift like that for their kids. Live and let live, I guess. I had already declared myself the victor of better gifts when a cart carried in it something that made me envious. It was a canvas and a stool. How could I have missed it! I thought about running back to get it, but two things crossed my mind: I had already been in line for over an hour and the little girl it was for was so cute. She was so full of life. Fuck it. I let her win. This time.

So how have you been, Zemi? How's life treating you? I hope you're living it up. I bet you're laughing and smiling all the time, huh? Life is treating me pretty good. I have less, but am much happier.

I got you these gifts because I don't want you to struggle like I did. My problem is I don't know the basics of English. I am twenty-seven years old and I have to re-learn the fundamentals. That not only takes time off my day, but it's also very embarrassing. I'm working on it though. I may not be there in person to teach you, but I am there in spirit. I think you are going to like the gifts. Stand tall Zemi! I miss you dearly! Not one day goes by that I don't think about you. I love you. Merry X-mas.

Love
Dad ...

December 28, 2010

Zemi—

Hey man! I drove over to Ingrid's Christmas morning. I arrived between 9:30a and 9:45a. On her driveway was Bonnie's ride.

‘Sweet! You're here!’ I thought excitedly.

I got your gifts out of my car, walked to the front door then knocked twice. Your grandpa opened it slightly ajar and peered through.

‘Merry Christmas!’ I said. ‘Can I talk to Bonnie?’

He slammed the door in my face.

“Bonnie! *Someone's* outside looking for you!” he hollered from inside.

Three minutes later she stepped out wearing a sweater and PJs. She yawned and rubbed her eyes and then—Whoa. I just went somewhere else in my mind. Okay, I'm back. Anyway, she rubbed her eyes and then with her left hand scratched her forehead placing a strong emphasis on her wedding ring. I caught on the second time she repeated that gesture.

‘Okay she wants me to acknowledge the ring,’ I thought.

I tapped the wedding band and said,

‘You have one more than I do.’

She gave me a dirty look.

“Are you getting married?” she asked.

‘Fuck no!’

“I know! You would never.”

She's still angry but worse, she still loves me. That's not good.

I changed the topic over to her husband.

‘Ask him to come out. I'd like to meet him.’

“He doesn't want to.”

‘Why not?’

“He thinks it's awkward.”

‘It's only awkward if you make it.’

That shut her up like a clam. She then did something I found very peculiar. She turned back a little and looked over her shoulder as if to acknowledge someone behind her.

“Are you still behind the door?” she asked some entity.

Zemi, I didn't think there was anybody behind that door. Heck, I don't think there is a husband at all.

‘Why wouldn't he come out to at least let his presence be known?’

That was classic Bonnie. She casts doubt in just about everything in her life.

Zemi, you will hear some pretty fucked-up things about me that aren't true. They want me to give up, but I won't. I gave her my email and asked again

if she would sent me pics of you. I'm not expecting any, but it was worth the try. What she doesn't know is that I have copies of all the letters, notes and descriptions of gifts I have given you. If she says that I never gave you anything, I have proof that I did. I'll let you make up your mind about the whole ordeal.

Good nite. I will visit Ingrid again Friday to drop off a bottle of champagne because, well I want to. Got to show that I care.

Peace!

January 6, 2011
Email from Bonnie

don't go to new york again. i have a role for you in my feature length. also, you were in my dreams last night. we've gotten quite close in my subconscious.... i don't know why, but, you very often appear. if you insist on going, take extra care. there's a warning in my heart.

b

January 8, 2011

Zemi—

I think our purpose in life is to pass down wisdom of a healthy life to our children.

'But we have to know what that wisdom is first, right?'

Right. Goodnite Zemi. I love you.

Love—
Dad ...

January 10, 2011
Email from Bonnie

have you gotten any of my messages?

January 14, 2011

Email to Bonnie

I'm so sorry. I am terrible with email. I find it a nuisance now, but they insist it's the only way they'll contact me. They being Scaena Drama School. I'm still in El Paso. I've booked my flight for Tuesday the eighteenth. I'll be crashing at Jory's place near Columbia University until I find my own. This is really it. Go or bust. So, I'm a reoccurring character in your dreams? I'm flattered, touched really, that that is happening. How is Zemi? I hope he liked his gifts. Thank you for writing me. I don't want to write too much too soon, you know? Let's see where this takes us first. If you feel that writing me will cause problems with your husband, please let me know and I will cease corresponding. Okay for now. Hope to hear from you soon.

...

January 18, 2011

Zemi—

Stranded in Midway. There's a motherfucker of a storm out there.

It was difficult to say goodbye. It felt definite this time around; set on stone sort of deal. My mom cried. We embraced warmly and I kissed her goodbye. Same with my niece and nephews. I held back my tears because I had to. I mustn't show any weakness.

January 20, 2011

Zemi—

Well, I am back. I just heard a real cool story about the building I'm staying at. But first—I arrived yesterday morning at around 3:30a to Jory's studio. This is not a studio. It's a cubby hole. I sleep on a yoga mat next to the oven and kitchen sink. Good news is, tomorrow I will talk with Chantal (a

friend of Jory) about subletting her apartment for six weeks at a six-hundred-dollar cost. Looks like a done deal but I still have to meet her, so she'll know who she's dealing with. I didn't sleep well because Jory left the window open throughout the nite. There's two feet of snow outside! I asked him if he could close it while I'm here, but no dice.

Earlier, I walked up Broadway. Not *down* like everybody else. Once on 116th street, I marveled at the architecture that stood before me. It was that of Columbia University. Hunter Thompson took a couple of courses there in the early sixties and knowing that I was walking on the same ground as he gave me a feeling of accomplishment. I felt proud of myself and was truly honored. Yeah! On 125th, also known as Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd, I crossed paths with the Apollo Theater. The first thing that floated into my mind was that Jimmy Hendrix played there in the mid-sixties. I wish I could have been there! New York City is filled with great history. Know your surroundings, Zemi and know them well. Know where you are at all times.

Now, the cool story about this building. Jory's room is numbered 345 yet he's on the 4th floor. I was intrigued by that because the first number is normally indicative of the floor you're on. Last nite, as I stood outside the building memorizing my lines, a guy bummed a cigarette from me. In getting to know each other, I found out that he resides in this building, so I proceeded to ask him about the strange numbering system. Fifteen years ago this building inhabited drug dealers. They made a deal with the gatekeeper so that only tenants knew that the middle number was indicative of the floor they were on. This came in handy when cops showed up to raid the joint. They'd rush up to the third floor looking for 345, but would burst into some old ladies apartment, while the drug dealers—who were on the fourth floor—surreptitiously made their way down to the lobby and out the front door. That's awesome.

Well, it's 11:58p. I need to shower because I stink. Jory is a weird dude. But that's Jory. Good nite Zemi.

January 21, 2011

Zemi—

Jesus! It's got to be fifteen degrees out!

I arrived at Chantal's earlier than we had arranged. I wasn't going to wait around, so I gave myself a little tour of the area. It seemed pretty chill. There's a school right around the corner that made me think of you. I think you would like it up here.

So, it was now time to meet Chantal. I made my way to the front of the building and before me was the ringer. I've never rang anyone up before, so my first impulse was to call her on her cell to let her know that I'm downstairs, but that seemed touristy. I'd already made too many mistakes my first nite here.

After touching down at LaGuardia, I hopped on the Q33 and tried to insert change into the slot that only takes bills. When the bus reached my stop at 82nd and Roosevelt in Jackson Heights, I stood waiting for the rear doors to open, but nothing happened. So, I walked out the front and when I stepped down on the sidewalk, the bus driver told me,

"Just so you know, press the yellow strip and the door will open."

With a line forming behind me at the kiosk, I fumbled and dropped the change on the floor when purchasing a MetroCard at the subway station. Then, after I swiped my card at the turnstile station, I couldn't carry all four of the heavy suitcases I had on me through it. Fortunately, two kind teenagers told me that it'd be easier if I walked through the gated swing door by the wall. All I needed to do was set my luggage down by it and release its lock by swiping the MetroCard at the turnstile station. Only draw-back was that I had to purchase another fare.

Jory had instructed me to take the 7 over to 42nd Times Square, transfer to the 1, and get off on 96th street. About fifteen minutes into the train ride, the train crept to a stop at a platform where mosaic signs reading 42nd hung prominently on walls and I-beams.

"This is my stop," I thought.

Had I not had my headphones on, I would have heard the voice in the sky announce that this was 42nd *Grand Central Station*. By the time I had realized my mistake the doors had already closed, and the train slowly sped off into the mouth of the dark tunnel. It was well past midnite at that point which meant the trains didn't run as often. The next one didn't pulled up until two hours later. Finally, this long ordeal ended at around 3:30a when I arrived at Jory's.

'Fuck it! I'm ringing her up,' I told myself.

"Yes?" answered a melodic voice.

‘Hi, it’s Jose.’

“Hey! Come on up!”

She had long straight brown hair and the posture of somebody who had taken ballet. She hadn’t packed all her stuff yet. The entire place was strewn with different colored loose fitting dresses, skirts, cropped tank tops, scarves, pointed-toe flats, and it smelled like sandalwood. She was really down to earth! We must have talked for about one hour. I showed her pictures of you and her first impression was,

“Oh my god! Look at those eyes!”

I think she got comfortable around me super-fast because she changed into a skirt right in front of me and then sat down with her legs uncrossed. I made sure that my eyes were kept in line with hers.

We agreed on six-hundred and fifty dollars for five weeks. Utilities and internet included. I’m moving in tomorrow at 3p. She generously offered me her couch after I mentioned the size of Jory’s apartment.

Tonite is the last nite I will sleep on this floor. Jory’s hardly ever in his studio. He’s either out on a job, at the gym, or at a bodega purchasing a few ounces of vodka. The times he is here, all he does is smoke pot and talk about himself. He’s a nut! He falls asleep at around 5 or 6 in the morning and doesn’t wake up until past noon.

Two nites ago, he was rummaging through piles of clothes, books, dishware, pens, and sheets of paper on his coffee table looking for his cuff links. When he found one, it slipped out of his hand and cracked on the floor. He then went on a frenzied search for a glue gun.

“God fucking damn it! God fucking, fucking, fucking damn it! Where the fuck is it!? Ughh! This clutter fuck! Where is it?! I put it here! Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, FUCK!!”

This went on for twenty minutes, Zemi. I sat bolt upright on the yoga mat, and without tearing my eyes away from him, I groped the sink for a knife in case he snapped. But that’s him. He didn’t have to put me up. I wouldn’t have. There isn’t any room here. Weird, weird, weird guy. He just walked in holding his toilet seat pressed up against his chest (we share a restroom with three other tenants).

Okay for now. My shoes are soaking wet because of all the slush. I haven’t eaten anything since morning and I’m starving.

It 11:25p. Good nite Zemi. I love you.

Love
Dad...

January 23, 2011

Zemi—

I arrived at Chantal's yesterday with my luggage in tow at around 5:15p. She was on the phone with her mother.

“Let me call you later mom. The boy who's
subletting my apartment just got here.”

“The *boy!*?”

She went to work shortly thereafter and I on a stroll. I walked into a 24 hour grocery store nearby. I bought a bag of Lays potato chips, a liter of root beer and hot sauce. I craved Kentucky Fried Chicken, but none were in sight. I noticed a Popeyes across the street. That'll do I guess.

When I got back to Chantal's, the first thing I did was cut my toe nails and finger nails because they were filthy and then took a much needed long hot shower. Chantal got back like at around 3a. I greeted her and fell right back to sleep. We woke up at around 8:15a and I helped take her luggage down to a cab that was waiting outside. We hugged farewell. After that, I lay down for the longest time, missing home and you and well—everybody.

I got myself out of that funk by saying positive things to myself. I then studied my monologue for a while and ate some rice. That's where I'm at right now. Alright. I'm going to work on my monologue again.

January 24, 2011

Zemi—

First day of class.

“You know what the coolest thing is about my class?”

There are only twenty-two of us and fourteen are girls! I don't know if I'm more excited of being back or because there are two girls for, err, to every guy. I didn't mess up the lines of my monologue. Usually I stumble because the nerves get to me. That's a plus. I love being back.

Okay for now. I emailed Bonnie pics of Jory's and Chantal's places along with a journal entry I wrote you. I want her to know how I'm doing. I want her to be a part of this. Hopefully by me opening up, she will too. Goodnite. I love you.

January 25, 2011

Zemi—

Just got back from class. I want to write down the thoughts that are swimming in my mind right now, but I don't know where to begin. Okay—contrasting this year to last. Maybe it's just me, but I feel safer, more confident, and comfortable around everybody at Scaena. I think it was me. Madeline talked a lot about our will to do this acting thing, especially now that more and more people want to be actors. Reality TV and similar outlets are killing off what we consider true acting. Broadway is filled with musicals and only a handful of stage plays go up because people want to be entertained and will happily cough up the two-hundred dollars to watch Spiderman or Pee Wee Herman. That's what they want and that's where all the money is at. It's tough for those of us who want to put up true stage plays. But, to get to be in those very few, very rare productions we must have discipline. Every day, we have to work on our technique, voice, body movement, read a poem out loud, listen to songs, see paintings, live life, and do things that we normally wouldn't do. Find yourself in the real world and be okay with that. Accept yourself for who you are and not care what others think.

Oh, I had a great out of the blue conversation on the train with a complete stranger. She was cool. We talked about music, her Jewish heritage, what I do—you know, what normal people talk about. Before I got off on my stop, I asked her to give me the name of a Jewish music band. She said SOUL FARM.

'You see what I mean?'

I had an experience that had I been too afraid to embrace never would have happened. I lived. I risked myself with this complete stranger in front of

everybody. All I did was be present and in the moment, trusted my instinct, responded, and reacted to the things she said. I was ALIVE.

‘What was her name?’

Hold on. Raizel—it means rose. Beautiful name. So good to be back.

Okay for now. I’m going to have a smoke then eat this nasty shit quinoa (pronounced keen-wa) It’s gross. Oh and I also made mac without cheese!
Good nite Zemi. I love you.

Love—
Dad...

January 27, 2011

Zemi—

Just got back in from class. It’s 11:45p. I got that weird, awkward, self-conscious, insecure feeling I first noticed last year in improv again. I still blank out during Mitch’s improv class, although I’m not as scared as I was last year. Mitch wants us to be comfortable with the empty space.

After class tonite, I mingled outside and caught up with a few classmates from last year, particularly with Geovanni. He is a good actor from Ecuador. Last year, he was really outgoing and always had a smile on his face. Not so much this year. He’d always be around people, had a girlfriend and now he seems to be a loner. He told me that he’s really focusing on acting and having a girlfriend gets too complicated. I agree but I still want a girlfriend. I want someone to share my deepest thoughts with. But, my main goal here is to be the best of my class and get a scholarship for the second year.

Okay. I’m starving, and I need a cig.
Good nite Zemi. I miss you.

February 3, 2011

Zemi—

I was on the 1 train listening to Louis Armstrong's *What a wonderful World* when I had one of the most morbid images pass through my mind.

‘What if another train hit us head on while that song played in the background?’

Everything would be moving in slow motion with people flying across the car and shattered glass would pierce flesh and body parts would break off. I saw myself standing still while all of this was happening. It would be a great ending for a movie or a scene in a movie.

Nothing spectacular has happened. Classes are going exceptionally well. I'm doing a much better job at letting go and not thinking about what happened with Bonnie all the time. Overall, it's good.

Good nite Zemi.

February 4, 2011

Zemi—

Bonnie sent me photos of you earlier. You dressed up as Superman is now my wall paper. You look great! You look happy. I sent her my first draft of an exercise we're doing in Elia's class that deals with an Idea. Here's the first draft I wrote a couple nites ago at around 3:30a while listening to John Frusciante's album *Curtains*.

Children

Gibran said,

“Your children are not your children.”

An indestructible bond is shared between parents and their children and yet no ownership exists between either. One first realizes this when their child sleeps over at a friend's house or calls to say they are okay while on a field trip. It's a paradox. You refuse to let go. They demand that you let go. Children are the most curious people you will ever encounter. They want you to teach them everything. So love them for who and what they are. Relate to them and love them unconditionally. Allow your children to be comfortable with who they want to be. Don't chide them when you've caught them using a mop as a giant

pen as they write their name on the floor you just waxed. Embrace it! Encourage independence. Never deny what they innately feel in their soul. If your little girl wants to pick up a baseball bat instead of a purse, be the one who throws the first pitch. Play games with them, but never have your child play games with you. Have a staring contest when you're in line at the grocery store. Say words they find hilarious like *poo* or *pee*. Let them tickle you and laugh hysterically! Be grounded, well-adjusted, and sensible because they will model after you. How far they go in life depends entirely on you, so set the example. Weigh them down with strong virtues and beliefs so that you can catapult them far into the depths of life. Watch them as they fade into the distance with the assurance that you did all you could do to prepare them for life. Your children are not your children.

It's not finalized yet, but it's where I want it to be. It's difficult to speak my truth because I become emotional. I'm proud of it though.

‘What did you think?’

February 7, 2011

Zemi—

“You have to pay the price,”

was the note I received from Elia. I went up first and recited my Idea, but I wasn't connected. A new meaning, however, came to me after class. Gibran says you have to let go of your children *after* you've raised them to the best of your abilities. I wish I could be there to raise you! But there is still hope. Stacey, a classmate, told me that she's never met her father and has been trying to reach him. My mom was right, eventually the child gets curious about who their parent is and wants to connect with them. There is hope Zemi. I know what I did was wrong. I only hope you understand. *You have to pay the price*. As an actor, one needs to delve into the darkness of their soul and find understanding through those experiences. I've been warned: this is going to get ugly. Good nite Zemi. I love you!

Love-
Dad...

February 9, 2011

Zemi—

My stomach aches. I may have eaten bad pizza on Sunday.

‘Was it Sunday?’

Could have been on Saturday.

Okay, on a brighter note, I bought you a piggy bank from Babies R Us on 7th ave and 25th street. I doodled on it with a black sharpie. You’ll see. I’ll take a picture of it too. Oh, and I also got you a piece of chocolate which I took a piece off for myself. It’s pistachio. I love pistachio.

Alright for now.

Goodnite Zemi. My mom said you looked gorgeous in those pictures. You’re amazing!

Good nite.

February 13, 2011

Zemi—

On Friday, I got word that a bunch of people from school were going to hang out at a bar on 23rd street called The Limerick—better known by its epithet: *the joint with the green door*—after class. I was in a very upbeat mood because my improv skit was well received by both Mitch and my classmates. It was the best work I’ve done so far in his class and he acknowledged it as so.

With the effects of the nite’s accomplishment still radiating from me, I walked into the bar with a bit of swagger. When I reached the table my classmates were at, I kissed the girls I knew on the cheek, hugged all the fellows and made my presence felt. I took a seat next to a girl eating a hamburger. I’d seen her before in school. We’re part of the same class, but were placed in different groups.

‘What kind of burger is that?’ I asked as she took a bite of it.

She placed one hand over her mouth as she attempted to reply and chew at the same time. But before she could, I interjected with,

‘It’s not polite to talk with your mouth full.’

She grinned in disbelief, slapping my arm.

‘Breathe out into my nose and I’ll tell you what’s in that burger,’ I told her. At this she giggled while shaking her head.

‘Come on! All I need is one whiff.’

Smiling, she leaned toward me and gently fanned my face with a long-drawn-out exhale. When her breath no longer brushed against my skin, I opened my eyes and was greeted by a set of deep blue eyes that glinted passionately.

“We’re leaving now. Follow us,” said one of our classmates.

I must have been swimming in her eyes for god knows how long, because everybody had already paid their tab by the time I had come to. Buzzing with excitement and anticipation for what was to come, it seemed that an implicit pact had been agreed upon between myself and my blue-eyed friend. We left the bar together, with her holding my arm with both hands.

We all ended up at the Beauty Bar on 14th street by Union Square. Sounds of 80’s dance mixes welcomed us inside. Boy, was this joint buzzing with excitement! Without hesitation, I led blue eyes into the dance floor to dance the nite away. Hell, I danced with ALL the girls. The nite was going great until one of the girls, who’d had too much to drink, fell into the coat rack. Blue eyes along with a couple other girls swarmed to her rescue. Her nite was done and so was everybody else’s for that matter.

‘What a buzz-kill,’ I thought.

“We’re going to make sure she gets home safe,” blue eyes told me.

‘Let me walk you all to the subway station,’ I offered.

“We’re going to take a cab, but thank you. I’ll see you in school Monday?”

‘Take my number down,’ I said, taking my phone out, ‘so I can tell you what was in that burger.’

She giggled and slapped my arm again. She saved my number under the name *Burger* in her cell.

‘How fitting,’ I told her with a smile.

We hugged goodbye and went our separate ways.

One minute later, my cell rang.

“Are you still nearby?”

It was blue eyes!

‘Yes. I’m right around the corner.’

“I’m walking that way now.”

‘What happened with your friend?’ I asked.

“The other girls will take her home. Oh, I see you!”

With her hands holding on to my arm, we walked over to the Union Square subway station. She takes the L train to get home, and it was just pulling up when we reached the platform.

“I had a good time tonite,” she said.

‘Yes! So did I.’

And we kissed. It was a tender kiss that sent me floating up into the stratosphere.

“I’m Brigitte,” she said as she drew herself back.

‘Jose Luis.’

As I watched the train pull away from the platform, I juxtaposed last year with this one. A year ago, I battled my inner demons and pushed everyone away from me. Friday, I walked down 14th street with a Brigitte on my arm. Zemi, I’m never going back to the way I was. NEVER!

Okay for now. It is now 3:07a in beautiful New York City. I’m going to sleep a couple of hours then attack my next assignment for Technique class. Elia wants me to give a present to *my new born baby girl whom I love deeply*.

Love—

Dad...

February 15, 2011

Zemi—

I’m so irritated with the way my performance turned out in class. I may have under rehearsed this time and failed to connect with my imagination. I saw the present in my mind’s eye, yet the adjectives didn’t register quickly enough. Every day I will describe an object until I get familiar with shapes, colors, textures and sizes—only then will I be able to hurtle over this hump. Practice doesn’t make perfect Zemi. PERFECT practice makes perfect.

I’m back to feeling self-conscious again. I can handle the beginning stages of attracting a woman, but it’s in the subsequent ones where I struggle

the most. I get stuck in my head thinking negative thoughts like *she doesn't like me*, or *she won't text back*. I kill myself with these thoughts, you know. I walked around Scaena and became aware that most girls noticed and smiled at me, so it's all in my head.

‘Why do I think I am undesirable?’

I texted the following message to Brigitte about an hour ago.

If I were a school bus, would you ride in the front or the back?

It felt like an eternity waiting for her reply. My mind flooded with insecurities in the interim.

‘What if she thought I was a creep for asking such a question and totally dismissed it?’

Is she going to ignore me the rest of the year?’

You get the picture. If women reject me, I get down about it. Three torturous hours later, I got my reply.

Hey. I guess I'd be all over the place if you were a school bus: in the front and the back and the middle.

It's all in my head Zemi.

Alright my boy. Your Valentine's Day present did in fact arrive at Ingrid's Saturday morning at around 10:30a El Paso time, which eerily enough was around the time I had woken up that day.

Good Nite Zemi.

Love
Dad...

February 17, 2011
Email from Bonnie

What's your mom's address? Have pics to send.

February 21, 2011
Email to Bonnie

2007 Cedar Elm Street #17
El Paso, TX 79906

I mailed Zemi a Valentines package to your parent's house. Did you receive it?

...

March 5, 2011

Zemi—

I seriously considered quitting acting after a failed performance in Voice Class. I didn't prepare as well as I should have. Because of one's lack of preparation, you doubt yourself, second guess your intentions, then flat out fail. My breaths were shallow, anxiety took over me, and I forgot the lines to the poem. Teva had me stand still while I recited the poem because my fidgeting distracted her which rendered my performance ineffective. I couldn't stand still. At the end, she gave me a great note—process. I'm not where my mind tells me I am.

'Does that make any sense?'

I have delusions of being great when really I'm not. I do too much, so I come off fake and unoriginal. The idea doesn't stick with me. I've succeeded before in Elia's class so it's not like I can't do it. I have a weird speech pattern. It's choppy because the words don't come to me as fast as I think them. I am going to test something out. I will engage with people when speaking with them. I will focus on the topic and then maybe, just maybe the thoughts will pour out effortlessly.

Things did brighten up after class, however. Geovanni invited the entire school to celebrate his birthday at Good Company earlier in the week. So, after a rough outing at school, I was really looking forward to a nite of partying. When Brigitte and I arrived at around 11:30p, the party was already in

full swing. Draft beer and shots flowed and poured out in dangerously copious amounts from the bar and Brigitte and I made sure the status quo was maintained. While we danced, I got lost in her deep blue eyes again. They drew my soul into the depths of her heart where love was eternal and true. They sung stories of everlasting bliss to me. I had found heaven in her eyes.

“You’re going to meet my dog tonite,” she whispered in my ear.

She cupped my face in her soft hands, pulled me closer and kissed me with fervor. We finished our beers then hailed a cab. That was the first time I had ridden in a New York City Cab. The city is so beautiful at nite. I opened the window to take it all in. The crisp nite air hit my face ever so gently. I was reminded of my purpose. Opportunity and redemption reinvigorated me.

She lives on the 8th floor of her building. An elevator took us directly to her apartment. When it opened, the most adorable Bassett hound latched itself to Brigitte. His name is Benji. I guess he approved of me because he licked my hand and allowed me pet it. Her walls have many paintings on them. There was one of a fish which she painted back in college. She has a keyboard, Zemi! And books too. Lots of them.

While Brigitte was in the bathroom, I stood in front of her full length mirror. The thing was at least six feet tall and four feet wide. I didn’t know mirrors such as that one existed. I then noticed the door that led out to the balcony was ajar. I channeled my inner Juliet and made a grand entrance.

I couldn’t have asked for a better setting than the one we had that nite. A bright full moon hung above us which contrasted beautifully with the pitch black nite sky. As soon as she joined me in the balcony, I wanted to know more about her. She’s been a New Yorker for about ten years, has a degree in English and enjoys taking pictures. While she elaborated about her home back in Copenhagen, I kissed her. She didn’t object.

Brigitte wasn’t in bed when I woke up the following morning. On her nite stand was a book that caught my attention. It was *Letters to a Young Poet*. I sat up and began to read it. I liked it immediately because I too share my thoughts and experiences in writing. Not to a young man about to enter the military, but to you Zemi. My son. Just then, I was brought to my feet by the delicious smell of freshly brewed coffee wafting in the air. I walked to the kitchen and found Brigitte making breakfast. She made us eggs with mushrooms and coffee which we ate out on the balcony. What a great way to

start the day! After breakfast, I thanked her for the meal and for a wonderful nite, and then excused myself. Brigitte. I like her!

Okay for now.

March 18, 2011

Zemi,

Below is the short essay I wrote Scaena for the scholarship/assistantship position.

Zola—

We're working on our third exercise in Elia's class. It's the second go around and now there's dialogue involved. All sorts of ideas had been popping into my head but none of them felt grounded. Last Tuesday, I decided to hit the streets of downtown Manhattan in search of inspiration. I hopped on the 1 and got off at 34th street. I reached the upstairs landing and shut off my iPod, so I could be on the look-out for any interesting comments made by passer-byers. After two hours of trudging up and down the streets with no luck, I crossed over to the east side of 5th Avenue. I noticed an almost too familiar sign hanging over the entrance of a grocery store/restaurant. *TEX-MEX FOOD* in red, white and green coloring. I gazed at the burritos, tacos, enchiladas, rice and beans through the glass window. I thought of my family back home and how much I missed them. The name of the place was *Smiler's* on 54th Street and Madison Ave. After that nostalgic episode, I decided to call it a nite.

I was waiting for the light to turn green when I felt a very powerful presence getting near me. I looked right and standing three feet away from me was Arnold Schwarzenegger. *Twins, Junior, Last Action Hero, The Terminator* trilogy—all those movies I saw with my mother when I was a young lad. She thought they were great movies. Who was I to go against my mother's word? She fed me. I stood there speechless and motionless not knowing what to say or do. Let me tell you—he looked AMAZING for his age! He says he's 6'2". Well he's not. He's 5'10"—tops. He smiled warmly at me. Then just as he effortlessly appeared into my sight he just as gracefully disappeared into the shadows of Madison Avenue. He seemed genuinely happy and exuded a powerful positive energy that got me in a great mood. The fog in my mind cleared up. Suddenly, great images for the exercise started to emerge. It wasn't

an idea that I needed. It was the archetype of well-being. It just so happened to be embodied by Mr. Schwarzenegger.

Okay, onto the essence of this letter. My plan was to find a full-time job to cover my expenses which is still an option but one I would like to avoid if I can. I wake up every morning and do movement exercises that Madeline suggested us to partake in, followed by stretches and voice tasks i.e. belting out *Ha's* and *Mm's*, working on poems and monologues and ending with *Speak with Distinction* assignments to improve my enunciation for Julia's class. Then I tackle Elia's homework assignment followed by thoroughly researching the script for Scene Study. Having this type of *freedom* to focus completely on my studies is helping lay a solid foundation in both my craft and discipline. What I'm getting out of the program as of now is the confidence to trust my natural instincts and, as trite as this may sound, being my best self. Granting me an assistantship at Scaena will strengthen my craft and discipline by keeping me on that path and surrounding me with like-minded individuals who can help me mature as an actor. I want nothing else but to be able to dedicate my entire time to acting; focusing on both its tangibles and intangibles. I want to be a skillful, capable trained actor. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Jose Luis Paez ...

March 23, 2011

Zemi—

I don't write much to you anymore. If I drop you now, then we'll no longer have a connection. That is not even an option.

'Is it me or does time go by slower when you are actually living life?'

I had another breakthrough. I'm afraid to enter an intimate relationship with Brigitte. We've progressed, almost too fast, with parallels that resemble those of my past relationships. See, I have a hard time being myself with her. I get apologetic, needy, doubtful, and hesitant because of fear she might turn hostile.

'Sound familiar?'

I want to please her, but that fucking annoys me. I hate myself because I believe I come off as someone I'm not. Insecurity still gets the best of me. There are times while we have sex, that I get the impression that she doesn't enjoy it which causes me to go soft. There's also times when I have to force conversations

with her. If there is silence, I believe something is wrong and if I don't fix the problem then that must mean she is mad at me.

I act differently when I believe that someone doesn't like me. I don't give voice to my true sentiments because I don't want that person to put me down. It's not paranoia because I know when someone doesn't enjoy my company. I've been around too many people who I know don't like me and they've all projected the same negative backstabbing vibe. It's a double-edged sword. I suspect everyone has a secret motive to get on my bad side. Or, I connect with a person who is having a bad day, then our negative vibes become entangled, and we rub each other the wrong way psychologically. It pisses me off to the point where I stress about it for the rest of the day. So I run home to hide inside my shell. I hesitate. My instincts are not my first choice. I become insecure and would much rather not deal with all the drama.

Elia gave our class an insightful comment. All the people who try to pull you down are unhappy. They don't want to see anybody happy and when they do, they undermine you and make your life miserable. I was a victim of that with Bonnie. The whole Billy Bob ordeal. The invasion of privacy, the put downs, and emotional abuse got me so depressed and full of rage only because I allowed it. She's not happy. When I was happy, she couldn't stand it. She became suspicious then interrogated me until I snapped and then both of us were in a foul mood. I let it happen. I don't know how to laugh it off without sounding hurt or irritated. I want to throw a punch and hurt them. But I'm scared to. So I hold it in, and it festers inside me. I don't know how to handle situations without becoming emotional. I bottle it all in and do nothing.

Okay for now. It's 1:56a. As you can see, I have a ton of work to do.

Goodnite Zemi. I love you.

Love—
Dad...

March 25, 2011
Email to Bonnie

Bonnie-

I sat outside a Dunkin Donuts in Brooklyn the other day waiting for my scene partner to arrive. We needed to block our scene for class. Anyway, before she arrived, a man walked up to me and asked,

"What size shoe you wear?"

'11's.'

"Merry Christmas!"

He handed me a plastic bag with these three pairs of Cons! I love the greens. The black ones are stylish, and the gray ones are Karma. I had a pair exactly like those five years ago that were stolen. Now I got them back. Oh, I took a great picture of The Empire State Building from Studio 3 which is where I take Movement class. Something about the nite in New York City and taking that particular movement class with Madeline and the Empire State Building. I don't know. You have to see it in person.

Oh and in other news, I will publish my journal written to Zemi as a book. Not anytime soon. I picked the quote that will be used on the dedication page. It's from Shakespeare's Sonnet that begins with, *Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?*

“So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see;
So long lives this, and this give life to thee.”

It's perfect! ...

March 30, 2011
Email from Bonnie

please don't write anymore.
b

March 31, 2011
Email to Bonnie

Okay. Good luck with everything you do!

...

March 31, 2011
Email from Bonnie

Thank you for understanding.

April 10, 2011

Zemi—

I got the scholarship!

Email from Zola Balzac
Executive Manager at Scaena Drama School

Hi Jose,

You have been granted an assistantship that covers your entire tuition for the second year, as long as you continue to perform well in the classroom and complete the tasks that will be given to you as an assistantship student. Thanks

Jose,
Zola

April 29, 2011

Zemi—

I didn't send you anything for Easter. It wasn't that I didn't have time. I simply didn't make the time for you.

I'm so confused with my life right now. I want a relationship, but Brigitte doesn't. Maybe she's right. Maybe she truly doesn't see herself in a relationship with me. Maybe we don't belong together. Something is off.

'So what do I do now? We don't make a good match?'

My confusion lies here: I want a relationship but at the same time I don't. I don't know what I want and it's driving me insane.

I'm considering dating multiple women at the same time, but I'm too scared to. When I do consider it, I picture Brigitte will get mad and leave me. I don't want to lose her because I need her companionship. I need someone around to hear me complain and to make me feel better about myself. I want her to reassure me that all is alright.

It's difficult for me to trust women. The awful experience I had with Bonnie may have subconsciously altered the way I act around them. I simply don't trust them. I shut myself up and avoid them almost at all costs. I wasn't that way before, you know. I remember being very open minded, a loud mouth, intrigued and a guy's guy. Boy were those times fun!

I got stoned last nite and wasn't very productive. Belittling thoughts shot back at me. Committing to a relationship is a huge step. That means being faithful and one-hundred percent dedicated. I'm not ready for that.

'I think it's because I'm not stable, but so what?

I saw a bum with a girlfriend the other day.

'If he can have a soul mate why can't I?'

I gotta let things happen on their own free will. I worry too much about the future and that makes me extremely anxious. After class tonite, I have the option to hang out with Brigitte, yet I want to write and spend time with myself.

'But if I don't have to be alone, why should I?'

'Is it the neediness for companionship or for sex that causes this behavior?'

The sheer thought of her with somebody else terrifies me. At this very moment, I want to know if Brigitte does like me. I want to be REASSURED that I'm liked. I'm okay when I get what I want, but the moment things become unstable and uncertain, I believe she's trying to push me away. Then, I become extremely insecure and needy and pester her with a thousand why's. I have this incredible need right now to go over to her place and fool around. That's really all I want right now, but I'm ashamed to admit it. I should just give her what she needs too. I don't want people to think that I'm only after sex. But it is what it is. Maybe I should mess around a bit.

Okay, I'm going to mail off a letter to you.

Talk to you later Zemi!

Love-
Dad...

May 6, 2011
Email to Bonnie

I'm going to get Zemi some summer gear—what's his shoe size?

...

May 6, 2011
Email from Bonnie

Ten. he likes capes and some 'batman' boots would be cool. also, are you in El Paso?

May 6, 2011
Email to Bonnie

I'm not in El Paso. I won't be back until Thanksgiving and for a couple of weeks during Christmas and New Year's. Tomorrow I'll be shopping at the Children's Place in Herald Square. I was thinking of getting him shoes, shorts, a pair of jeans, shirts, couple of tank tops, socks, temporary tattoos, a toy and some chocolate. Batman boots. Never heard of them, but I'll look around. I'm sure I can find them somewhere. Thanks.

...

May 6, 2011
Email to Bonnie

Do you mean boots with Batman, the cartoon on them, or boots similar to the ones Batman wears?

...

May 24, 2011
Email to Bonnie

Bonnie--

Did Zemi like his new clothes? Did they fit him?

...

May 26, 2011
Email to Bonnie

Bonnie-

I was a fool to even suggest printing my journal for Zemi for anyone to read. I was wrong! I'm asking you, to please find it in your heart, to set everything aside and know that I truly, deeply **miss** him. Don't close off the only channel I have with Zemi.

...

May 27, 2011
Email from Bonnie

I won't. And I'm confused. Why not print it?

May 28, 2011
Email to Bonnie

Bonnie-

Simply put: it's our business. No one else's. It wouldn't be right. The

earlier entries are soaked in hatred. I read them over and saw nothing but an insecure, angry, regretful, vindictive boy whose ego's been bruised.

June 15, 2011

Zemi—

I wrote you a sonnet for your birthday. I hope you like it!

How often when you, Zemi, my dear boy
Come running to me in a dream-like lea;
Twirling, jumping calling my name Jo(e)y--
That my heart flutters-my limbs flail with glee!

As I see you off in the distance, 'Wow!
How big you have gotten! And your smile--My!
I stagger backwards in amazement, 'How?
This cannot be true! It must be a lie!'

As you near closer, closer to my breast,
I can't help to feel anything but grace.
'Finally, the past shall be put to rest.'
But you fade away before we embrace.

If our love is true and true it is--
In time, Zemi Adore, we'll live in bliss. ...

June 16, 2011
Email to Bonnie

Bonnie-

My mom swung by Ingrid's, but no one was home. She left Zemi's birthday gifts next to the door. Wish a Happy Father's Day to your husband! He deserves it.

...

July 13, 2011
Email to Bonnie

Where are you? Are you well? What's going on? Why are you ignoring me?

...

August 14, 2011
Email to Bonnie

Wow! I'm looking at your picture and I really don't know what to say. Complete transformation! You've taken up residency in my thoughts for the longest time. You even snuck into one of my dreams many moons ago... I've thought about what happened and what could have been had we handled the circumstances differently. Ah, youth!... (hold on, i need a cig) okay... What I'm trying to say is I want to see you. Is that bad? The city has taken its toll on me. I'm lonely. I miss you and Zemi, my family... Hope you're well...

Jose...

August 18, 2011

Zemi—

‘How much are we supposed to feel?’

They say men aren't supposed to get mad, jealous, doubtful, insecure because those are signs of weakness. As I get older, I realize that sex isn't as important in a relationship as much as an emotional connection is. You and your girlfriend may have tons of sex, but if she goes with another man because she feels something for him, well, that's a stab in the heart. I'd much rather

have chemistry with my girlfriend. Fun talks, debates, laughs, moments where all we do is enjoy each other's warmth than a mere physical attraction. Couples who cheat on each other for whatever reason, be it carnal lust, a drunken nite out with the girls then things got too wild, have different levels of hurt to their sins. What I'm trying to say is I'd much rather have my girlfriend cheat on me because she just wanted to sleep with the guy than her bedding him because they had a connection. Although both of those scenarios are just as hurtful, to me the former would bring less pain in the future. In some weird way I'd understand if she was just in it for the flesh.

I have yet to master the need to not need anyone in my life. It seems rather pointless that I want a girl in my life, only to not want to let go when things go sour. I'm miserable and my mind takes over and I can't think straight. I need to break up with Brigitte. I don't think she's the girl for me after all. Besides, I suspect that I may be second best in her eyes. It's only when the woman does something to lose my trust that I become sketchy around them. It's all fun and games before then but fuck. I need to let go of her.

August 22, 2011
Email from Bonnie

i know how you feel.

August 25, 2011

Zemi—

I had my first performance in New York City last nite and it went pretty well. The show overall I thought was good and like always, I began to hit my head against a wall afterwards. I thought I failed which sabotaged my positive outlook. Those thoughts were outweighed by you. Something triggered the perpetual pain that lingers inside my soul for you. I met up with Brigitte after her rehearsal drunk, lost, raw, and vulnerable. After a while, I let it all out. I cried because of how much I miss you. This hole can't be filled up with anything but your love. Your love isn't here with me.

There's a powerful monologue at the end of *Alone at the Beach* delivered by the character Alex. Throughout the play, he's indifferent to everyone's feelings and thus he's cast aside. Nobody wants to hang around with him and they avoid him at all costs. He gets turned down when asking for rides but remains unaffected. He just doesn't feel. He doesn't want to feel. In his speech, he remembered how his twin brother's death killed him too. After that, he lost faith in life and thought that the only thing left to do was to give up. He shut himself up, refused to feel anything and hasn't allowed others into his world. That's exactly how I feel!

Three years ago, I died and was never the same. I've been torturing myself since. I can't go on living in this zombie state. I may as well be dead. I take up valuable space that someone who truly loves themselves and life could enjoy.

Love,
Dad...

Flashback



August 27, 2007

Zemi—

‘I can’t do this anymore, Bonnie. Not if you won’t tell me the truth.’

Billy Bob was back in our lives so the persistent nagging at each other started up again. She nagged at me about my alleged infidelities and I about why she had kicked me out that one nite and her resistance to give up Billy Bob.

The apartment was densely tense from the morning’s latest dispute. It ended in a stalemate that left us both swelling with anger and with an acrimonious taste in our mouths. I was at my wit’s end! I just couldn’t take it anymore. Not if she wouldn’t tell me the truth.

Bonnie was fixing to go to the apartment complex’s office to use the internet and I to Barnes and Noble, but I couldn’t leave. My cell phone was missing. I stormed out of the apartment to confront Bonnie.

‘Give me back my cell phone!’ I barked down the stairwell, as she climbed your stroller down the final flight of stairs. My imperative call fell on deaf ears.

‘The pen is mightier than the sword,’ I reminded her.

She whipped her head up, shooting a nasty look at me.

‘All he has to do is read it. He’ll judge for himself.’

I stormed back inside and marched into the restroom.

I stood before the mirror breathing heavily, still shaking with anger. I stared deeply into my eyes, but I didn’t recognize what stared bitterly and angrily back at me. I didn’t recognize what I was becoming; what I had become.

‘I can’t do this anymore, Zemi. I ca—’

A sudden hefty shove on my back knocked me forward, whipping my head back. Bonnie’s clenched fists reflected in the mirror. I spun around and spat on her face. Fuses were no more. She lunged at me, and a scuffle ensued thereafter. By the end of it, we were on the floor. She writhed and kicked her legs out violently from under as I straddled her. My right arm was pressed firmly across her chest, holding both arms to prevent her from scratching me more, while my left hand covered her mouth to prevent her from biting me again.

‘Are you going to quit fighting now!’

She writhed and kept kicking.

‘Are you going to quit fighting now!’

She stopped kicking but kept writhing.

‘Are you going to quit fighting now!’

She finally stopped and I left to cool down.

I came back about two hours later. Leonora was there and said the cops were on their way.

‘Good!’ I told her. ‘I have nothing to hide.’

Two cops arrived at around 3p and assessed the situation. I told them my side of the story and she did hers. I showed them the scratches I had on my chest, abdomen, face, and arms, my swollen nose, and the two bite marks on my left forearm and groin. They were concerned with the state she left me in. They couldn’t believe how deep she had bitten my groin.

After consulting amongst themselves, one of the officers pulled me aside.

‘Look, we’re going to charge her with Battery Against a Household Member.

However, we cannot arrest her because there is an infant in the apartment.

So go spend the nite in a hotel.’

I spent that nite at the Motel 6 off I-25 and Alameda and took pictures of the markings on my body. They weren’t pretty.

Nine days later, I got a copy of the police report and gasped after reading her statement. She said I knocked the wind out of her when I pushed her into the bedframe, her ankle is swollen, and her cheeks are bruised from when I pinned her face to the ground. And I covered her mouth *and* nose so as to suffocate her. All lies.

At the end of the police report, the officer summed it up quite accurately:

“*Note* The only visible injury found on Bonnie was a rugburn on her left shoulder that was sustained during the altercation.”

Chapter 5



August 27, 2011
Email to Bonnie

If you haven't already, listen to *The Fall* by Gorillaz.

...

August 28, 2011
Email from Bonnie

Why? Is it going to give me some glaring insight into the realities of your mind?

September 1, 2011
Email to Bonnie

Yes! It will confirm the rumors that I'm delusional.

...

September 1, 2011
Email from Bonnie

ain't that the truth. your delusions ruined our relationship. so it goes...

September 1, 2011
Email to Bonnie

Our relationship's foundation WAS delusion.

...

September 6, 2011

Zemi—

I broke up with Brigitte six days ago. There was another guy in the picture. He's from Denmark and she housed him for a week. She claims that nothing happened, but I don't believe her. The way I broke up with her was not the noblest of ways. I waited until she left for yoga class to write her a letter saying it was over. Hours later, she left an angry voice message saying that I didn't have the trousers to do this in person and she never wants to see me again because she hates me. I felt relieved but empty.

Alright, I'm going to memorize my monologues. It's a dreary rainy day in New York City. These last few days I've felt so lonely. I miss Brigitte's company, but I don't miss the uncomfortable cloud of doubt that hovered above us.

See you around Zemi.

Love

Dad...

September 21, 2011

Zemi—

I don't know who I am. Or I may be ashamed of who I am. I got my evaluation last nite after class. Overall, I didn't make much progress and am not where I'm supposed to be from a developmental point of view. Something's holding me back. Something that keeps me from revealing my true being and sentiments to the audience. My performances come off as artificial. Fake. I need to strip completely down to my essence.

This is my process: I read the script, understand the circumstances, then play them out. But I skip a fundamental step. I won't allow for my character's soul to dance with mine. I've gone from sounding general, to doing an impersonation like I did with my monologue. I assume either way would be an okay approach if only I were connected to the words.

By nature, I am sensitive, quiet, shy, reserved, clumsy (a dork)—a human being. I tried to be the opposite of that. It shows up in my work. Before I perform a monologue or play out a scene, I revert to this fake persona I've nurtured for years.

Enough. That's it for now.

Jose...

September 23, 2011

Email from Bonnie

i miss you often.
sorry for the distance.
feeling a little blue.

September 23, 2011

Email to Bonnie

What's going on with you, Bonnie? Why so blue?

...

September 26, 2011
Email from Bonnie

A lot of what we had was very real, raw emotion - limited only by our bodies.

It seems a shame that it is all wasted, simply because we were beautiful
strangers attempting to grow and
understand each other at the wrong time.

Badly timed.

For, how do I explain my enduring affection and
lingering thoughts aimed at you?
Why do I still even care?

I still remember the conversation on Scenic Drive.

I still remember you soaping me up in the shower.

I still remember falling to pieces.

And falling in love...

And falling in the slippery parking lot.

Forgeries on my brain.

To Wit, said the man on the corner.

For in love, all depends solely on shadows.

September 26, 2011
Email to Bonnie

Bonnie—

You took the thoughts right out of my mind. There hasn't been a nite in which I haven't thought of you and our very real raw emotions we embarked on when we went along for the ride. The ride. It ain't over. It never will. I do still remember our conversation on scenic drive (you wore a jean skirt). I do still remember soaping you up in the shower. I do still remember you falling to pieces and my inability to put you back together. I do still remember you falling

in love. I fell in love too. Yet I don't remember you falling in the slippery parking lot. These aren't forgeries in my mind because I know they happened and therefore are real.

Long before Zemi was born, I knew that we were going to be linked for the rest of our lives and Zemi, our Zemi, has made that possible. And as for love depending solely on shadows, I don't agree. Shadows are sneaky buggers that fuck with your psyche. Love in shadows is not love, it's hate. Our growth was stunted by that imposter. We simply didn't know any better. "Badly timed" once said a wise woman ...

September 27, 2011
Email from Bonnie

Oh jojo...

I'm sorry I didn't do the right thing when I should have. And I'm sorry that you were so awful about it.

(I slipped on the ice in the parking lot at the Camino Real and you laughed at me)

I miss you.

Bonnie

September 27, 2011
Email to Bonnie

Bonnie—

"Jamey Rademeyer was a victim of bullying."

I read that headline today and couldn't stop crying. They called him "stupid, gay, fat and ugly. He must die." How could they be so mean to him? He was so beautiful. I bet you ANYTHING that those bullies have a negative, warped, hollow, lonely, self-loathing core. This took me back to my time with you. I too was a victim of cyber-bullying and I'm still not completely healed. It left me scarred. I didn't know what was going on and I know you knew who was behind it all. I never once did buy that cock and bull story you laid out to me. I don't believe you're truly sorry for you didn't do the right thing

when you should have. You owe me an explanation. This has to stop! It's not right.

...

September 30, 2011

Email from Bonnie

I'm not going down crazy lane with you. Get over it. Jeez.

October 1, 2011

Email to Bonnie

“Delay is the deadliest form of denial.”—CNP

“This is the Nineties, Bubba, and there is no such thing as Paranoia. It's all true.”

—HST

Okay. I will.

...

October 15, 2011

Zemi—

Brigitte and I are cool again. I know it's not a healthy relationship, but I do miss her companionship. I'm confused again.

Last week, I had a breakthrough in Shakespeare class. Our assignment was to create a theatrical piece using Sonnet #27 as our dialogue. Most of my classmates portrayed the scene with themes like longing and misery. I had a different take on it.

I imagined a father, weary with sleep, struggling to rock his restless newborn boy to sleep. It was 4a and he must be at the office no later than 7a. He needs at least one hour of sleep, otherwise he will go mad. In a moment of delirium, he toys with the idea of giving his son a tiny dose of Ambien. Not a lot, you know. Just a little taste, but is then overcome with remorse for having

even though of such a sinister idea. So, he lit up a cigarette and continued to rock his boy to sleep.

I had the entire class on the edge of their seat! They laughed in some parts, too! My confidence is back!

It's 11:47p. Okay for now. I'm going to start reading *All's Well That Ends Well*.

Nite!

October 19, 2011

Zemi—

In school, we are being taught the ropes about how to manage ourselves in the business. We've been lectured on how to approach agents, what mentality we should adopt, and how to be upbeat. Most important of all, we must make sure to leave a memorable impression and all that nonsense. Live where you want to work they say.

'I want to live out in the middle of nowhere in my big ranch with my kids, my truck, and my fifth of whiskey. No work there so that's why I'm here.'

There are too many easily acquired temptations here in New York City. I don't think my bad habits will ever go away, so I need to be cautious of where I live and the way I choose to live. I mean stick me in a bar at noon while I'm depressed with five-hundred dollars in my pocket and sit me next to the pusher and we'll see if I won't dance. I will. Like a fucking top!

I questioned my being here again an hour ago. I sat by the window with my knees pressed up against my chest and sobbed uncontrollably for fifteen minutes. I can't shake this guilt. When it takes hold, I believe that I should be punished and that I don't deserve anything I've worked for. But a pristine element in my core fights those condemning thoughts off, reminding me of my worth. This is the internal battle I fight with on a daily basis, Zemi. A battle where there is more darkness than light. It drains me, placing me on a self-destructive path. I hope you won't have to struggle with anything of this nature yourself. God, I hope you're okay.

Good nite Zemi.

Love-
Dad...

October 20, 2011
Email to Bonnie

Bonnie--

I'll be home Saturday December 17 thru Sunday January 22!

...

October 21, 2011
Email from Bonnie

and?

October 21, 2011
Email to Bonnie

Are we still playing games? So I said something you didn't like. Get over it. So we can maybe catch up. Why else?

...

October 22, 2011
Email from Bonnie

are you wanting a short, intimate love affair?

October 22, 2011
Email to Bonnie

I only want to see you.

...

October 22, 2011
Email from Bonnie

just see?

October 22, 2011
Email to Bonnie

I haven't seen you in over two years Bonnie. Will a short intimate love affair really help?

...

November 16, 2011
Email to Bonnie

Bonnie-

I've been trying to open up but whenever I do you shoot back with disparaging remarks and a proposal to have a secret tryst with me. It makes no sense to shoot me down then want to be intimate. I'm going to kick you when you bring me down not caress your cheek.

...

November 16, 2011
Email from Bonnie

Obviously, I don't know what I want. Caressing and kicking are all the same to me. I don't even know why I still write to you. I thought I asked you to stop

some time back. But, it seems you won't. My BonnieAckermann blog is linked to my husband's Azuma Project. We expect to be at NYU or York University in Toronto by Summer. All this and prior will remain confidential. I speak to you as I speak to my own heart.
Bonnie

November 16, 2011
Email to Bonnie

I only want to see you. If it leads to kicking or caressing so be it. I just to be in your presence even if it's only for five seconds.

...

November 17, 2011
Email from Bonnie

why Jose? Go find another svelte gorgeous broad to bother. I mean, do you still love me?

November 18, 2011
Email to Bonnie

Yes, I still love you.

November 18, 2011
Email from Bonnie

Wow, really? I thought you were over me years ago. I just don't understand.
You

never did anything to start over with me. are you being serious or just toying with me?

November 18, 2011
Email to Bonnie

All I know is that I still do.

...

November 19, 2011
Email to Bonnie

As far as my relationship with Zemi is concerned, I hardly ever get a response from anybody when I ask about him. I HAVE ASKED! I find it pointless to keep asking if my requests fall on deaf ears! Me and you. You and me. I can't clarify with e-mails, Bonnie. The only way to find out is to be in each other's presence. And please: stop with the I'm not there you love me/I'm here you loathe me. Save the drama for the stage.

...

November 19, 2011
Email from Bonnie

do not write to me anymore.

You were being very rude and arrogant in your last email. I do not trust you to even give you five seconds. How do i know it isn't some ruse to lure me in and call the cops on me? Some awful scheme to hurt me because I know you love to hurt me?

All of this supposed 'love' talk could just be your games again. I really hope Zemi never knows how self- destructive you are. You are very melodramatic, and I cannot tell if you just say things when you're 'high' or lonely.

For, sometimes you go months without a word, and I assume it's because you have a warm body near, and I don't exist.

I think about you all the time. Without some articulate clarification on your end, I will adamantly refuse to let my guard down. You always end up playing me because it gives you a feeling of control and when you respond to me with your temper as you just did, I cannot believe that you've really changed. You've only ever done what you wanted. I hope it's been worth it. Either step up and tell me what you want or leave me the fuck alone.
please.

November 20, 2011
Email to Bonnie

Okay--I choose to step up. I want us to be like we were on our first couple of dates. Going from moment to moment, laughing, and nervous because we weren't sure what would happen (yet excited!). That's what I want. With you and Zemi. To set everything aside and live and have fun. Will you do that with me? One day is all I ask for Bonnie.

...

November 20, 2011
Email from Bonnie

One day and that's it? Then, pffff! Off into the sunset you go?
One day to get me into the 'pen'?
One day to stab me in the chest?
One day to pull the trigger?

No, Jose. Those few sentences are not enough. Keep it coming.

November 23, 2011

Email to Bonnie

Have a Happy Thanksgiving Bonnie. And Zemi too! Give Zemi a hug and kiss for me please.

...

November 28, 2011

Email to Bonnie

Bonnie—

Thanks for the card and pictures of Zemi. He looks *too cool for school* in the one with his orange rimmed dark shades and coy in his batman costume. We all loved them!

...

December 4, 2011

Email to Bonnie

Bonnie-

Once again, thanks for the pics and the wonderful card you sent my mom. You put a smile on her face. She would like to know if you will be making the trip down to El Paso and if we can set a date for the kiddies to mingle. You can call her and work out all the details. Once again, thank you!

...

December 11, 2011

Email to Bonnie

Bonnie-

I'll be presenting the first scene from *Fool for Love* tomorrow in my scene class. It rings true to what we have. The pic I have on my Facebook page (I know you've seen it) was taken hours after we met in that alley way on Hastings. You kissed me for the last time then put your cigarette out over your heart. I remember.

...

December 12, 2011

Email from Bonnie

still have that scar.

December 15, 2011

Email to Bonnie

Hey—

I miss you. I'm sick of not having you around. Can we be happy together? Can we leave the past in the past and grow together and have pictures taken of us to capture it all in a still? Are we ready for each other? Will we get along? Can it just be the two of us?

...

December 16, 2011

Email from Bonnie

What? what about my marriage?

December 16, 2011

Email to Bonnie

If you're happily married, I'm screwed. I don't want you to break it off if it's going well. Just know that I'll be waiting for you.

...

December 16, 2011

Email to Bonnie

Bonnie-

It would be very selfish on my part to alter your life at the moment. Look, I don't have a place for us to move into. I'm unemployed and live in a tiny room. It wouldn't be ideal. I don't want for Zemi to grow up and see me every once in a while either. I want a family. You guys are my family. I need to know that you'll come back to me if I provide a home for us to live in, food, a steady income but most importantly, a faithful loving mother. If you say yes Bonnie and mean it, I WILL do it. You know I will. I need to be 100% sure about your end. I'm in. Are you?

December 19, 2011

Email from Bonnie

It's about being an attentive, devoted and loving husband and father. Not only when it is convenient for you. My husband and Zemi read, draw, ride bikes, go for walks, go to the library, paint, play together better than any father does with his son. Right now, he's run out to the store to get me medicine cause I'm sick.

I am a magna cum laude college graduate. I have my own production company and have been published several times. I don't need anyone. So, why would I want you? Tell me that.

What happens when you feel insecure and bogged down by mundane daily life and decide to leave me and Zemi alone to go out to a club? What happens when that darkness comes over your face and you give me the silent treatment? What happens when you cannot resist another woman and I am betrayed?

Your repetitive nature is just cause for hesitation.

How deep does your love go? Or were you just lonely and regretful the moment you wrote that last email?

Bonnie

December 21, 2011

Email to Bonnie

What's this about me having to submit reasons as to why you should take *me* back? My Alma mater will be Scaena Drama School in New York City.

Have you forgotten all the ill-will you created? I've forgiven you for all that nonsense. That wasn't some 'one sided fuck up'. Remember that.

You're a fighter Bonnie, not a lover. You fight with passion on one hand and cunningness on the other. Your nature is just as predictable as mine. And you're scared.

I put you in your place and you call me an asshole but that's what we do! It's not going to be easy but with a lot of work, dedication, passion, love, understanding, mutual respect—we will work.

...

December 23, 2011

Zemi—

I thought of writing you a poem for Christmas. It seemed like a good idea. I've decided against it though. I'm looking at your picture. How big, beautiful, and cool you've gotten. I did, however, write you a Christmas card.

'Are you playing a video game? Are those 3-D glasses you're wearing?
See-thru glasses?

You look good Zemi! I hope you have a great Christmas!

Have you been a good boy? Have you written Santa
a letter with a list of the toys you want?

Be sure to leave him a glass of milk with cookies. He'll appreciate the gesture.

I miss you Zemi. I do. My family and I would like to wish you a Merry
Christmas! Be good now, but not too good.'

'What did you think?'

Dad...

I want to blame others for how miserable my life is. It's my parent's fault for not instilling the proper tools of life in me. How and when to fight back, the assurance that everything will be okay, and the encouragement to not back down and stick up for myself. The times Bonnie had her way with me, my parents weren't there to help me manage my emotions or give me a plan of action. The rest, as you know, is history.

They did the best they could with what they had, I suppose. They had their own demons that were apparently more important than their children. There was always tension in the house between my mom and pops. According to psychology, that tension made me into the anxious wreck that stands before you today. Zemi, I fear that one day you will ask me where I was when you needed guidance.

'What am I going to say? It was my parents fault because they didn't give me the proper tools to develop and maintain a healthy relationship with you!'

I know that's not the right answer, but my emotions tell me otherwise. I just don't want you to hate me for the choices I've made.

Enough.

December 29, 2011

Zemi—

I saw you Christmas Day! My niece, brother, and I swung by Ingrid's to deliver presents. On a whim, I asked Ingrid if you were inside.

'Can my niece see him?'

"Yes!" she said.

A minute later, out came Bonnie with you. You were terribly shy. You stayed with us for only a minute, but it was the minute of the year for me. You looked like a string bean man.

Ah, and Bonnie. Even though our interaction lasted only seconds, she still managed to leave her mark. She snubbed me in front of everyone.

'Why?'

That wasn't a classy move.

But she wasn't done. When I got back to my mom's, I told her to call Bonnie to say hi. Over the phone, she told my mom that she would swing by Tuesday with you so you could meet your cousins. The time agreed on by all was 5p. At around 7p, I called Ingrid. She said Bonnie wasn't home. My niece and I stayed up waiting for you until 9p. She finally said,

"I don't think they're going to show up."

She stood us up. I sent Bonnie an email saying that what she did wasn't right, and our ties were now severed. I want nothing to do with her. I made it very clear that I was only cutting my ties with her and not you. She's texted and called me a few times since then.

'She calls me a coward and wonders why can't we talk like adults?'

You know what she messaged me?'

Only a sociopath acts the way you do.

Good stuff Zemi! I think she only wants control. I don't know. I haven't replied to any of her attempts. Fuck her.

December 29, 2011

Email to Bonnie

This is officially my last attempt to contact you. Why must you snub me? Why? What pleasure did you get out of that? In front of your own mother? My niece and brother? In front of Zemi!? The last straw was what you did to my mother. How dare you mislead her into thinking you would show up last Tuesday? My niece was very excited and stayed up until 9p waiting for your arrival with Zemi. You stood us up. You stood my mother and niece up. I don't love you anymore. I don't hate you. I don't understand you and I'm exhausted trying to. Just know that I seriously considered getting back together with you. To be clear, I will only cut my ties with you. I will continue to do everything possible to keep reaching out to Zemi. I wish nothing but love and happiness in your life. I hope you find peace.

Jose...

PS- Do not reply to this e-mail. I won't be reading them.

December 30, 2011

Email from Bonnie

I asked your mother to call me when your sister got home from work. I waited forever. At seven, I decided that it wasn't going to happen. Obviously, there was some miscommunication. She said she'd be in Juarez on Monday and that she'd call me when your sister got home. I had planned for us all to go to chuck e cheese. How dare you attack me. She could have called me at any time that day, there was no definite plan.

Coward

January 21, 2012

Zemi—

It's my final nite in El Paso. It was a great vacation. I needed it. My landlord called me yesterday to say that I will have to move out when I get back to NYC. I don't have a place to stay. At first I panicked, then realized that this type of situation should be normal for me and just maybe something big is about to happen. It's a sign. I know through experience that it will turn out okay. Okay for now. See you in New York City.

February 27, 2012
Email from Bonnie

Zemi has been real sick all weekend. I will email it to you AGAIN after I get his blood test this afternoon. Stop acting like a douche bag. Thanks

Bonnie

p.s. maybe you should double check your spam mail for the pdf. called Monologue.

February 27, 2012
Email to Bonnie

A simple "Hey, Zemi's sick so I won't be sending the monologue" would have sufficed. I would have understood. I never got the monologue. Your email doesn't go to my spam. Thanks.

...

P.S. Stop using Zemi as an excuse on why you didn't do what you told me you would do. There's no need for that. You left me out of the loop. I don't want to half ass everything with you anymore. I'm willing to commit myself to you but you aren't doing the same. I suggest you do if not then there's no point to what we strive at. We'll only resort back to the bitterness that we know all too well.

March 5, 2012
Email to Bonnie

Bonnie-

I'm so sorry but I won't be able to call you tomorrow. I've got rehearsal from 11a- 1p (9a-11a your time). I'm performing a scene from Adam Rapp's *Red Light Winter*. We go up tomorrow nite. It's a fun scene. I hope Zemi is feeling better. Please say hi to him for me.

...

March 9, 2012

Zemi—

I didn't get into the showcase. I used the monologue Bonnie wrote for me. It was a challenging piece. I took a risk.

I saw the list of those who did get in. Every actor who made that list deserved to be there, yet I got extremely envious. My competitive nature was awoken. I've never felt the need to compete. Not this intense at least. I suppose that's what is required in this business. In life! I gotta fight for my spot! I got to destroy everyone who is in the room and show the fat cats that I am their man.

But it's okay. We still have two weeks of classes left, the end of year plays and our six meetings with casting directors. It's still good. I've got something to prove now. Talk to you later Zemi.

Love
Dad...

March 25, 2012

Zemi—

I got a job as a waiter!
Before I forget, remember this:

Never follow a stranger you met late in the nite. They will befriend and convince you to follow them into the dark recesses of New York City's underbelly. Don't. Horrible evil things will await you.

April 15, 2012

Zemi—

I worked my last shift yesterday. The same problem plagues me. I can't seem to shake it off. I don't know if I'm a nincompoop or if I need to get on meds, but I'm fed up with this. It's got to stop.

I don't know or understand many things. I've blamed everyone I could think of for my inability to comprehend simple common place knowledge. My learning ability is shit! My focus is skewed. Me and it aren't on the same page. Hell, we're not even reading the same book.

Let's first dissect my lack of focus.

I needed butter to fry the omelet in the morning. While I retrieved it from the refrigerator, a red spot on the counter caught my attention. Seeing the counter in an uncleaned condition irked me. I immediately scrubbed it clean with a napkin. My attention then went back to butter mode, but I couldn't find it! I searched the refrigerator about five times and surveyed Brigitte's entire kitchen until I found it by the faucet.

I don't remember placing it there.

Now, let us link what I just elaborated on to my short lived career as a waiter. Full disclosure—I never learned how to properly cut limes like a bartender. I've been shown, but I never retained the steps. So, one of the first duties as a waiter was to cut limes before every shift. The waitresses assumed that I knew how, so they merely mentioned it to me. I then panicked. One of the bus boys saw the sweat dripping down my face and showed me how. I was relieved and felt safe afterwards.

That's how I was trained. I was told but not shown.

“You'll find the stuff for your sides in the coffee room,” was all they said to me.

Apparently, the coffee room stores jelly, mayo, ketchup, mustard, etc., the essential sides.

‘Where was this coffee room?’

I didn’t know, but I knew that’s where the stuff for my sides were.

My job was purposefully made tough by those malcontent waitresses. The vibes were evil and the environment uncomfortable. Yesterday morning, I arrived an hour before my shift started to prep my sides. Half an hour passed before I located the coffee room. My anxiety intensified two-fold because before me were four different types of mayo and mustard and one of the disgruntled waitresses prepping her sides. So I made a choice. I later found out it was the wrong one. I mistakenly used the mustard the chef uses to make a chicken salad with. It could have been prevented, though. That belly-aching waitress waited until I finished prepping two layers worth of sides to tell me that I used the wrong one. Then, she ran upstairs to let everyone know what I had done. A few minutes later, one of the runners came downstairs and showed me where everything was, which mustards we use and not, where to stow everything and it stuck.

The system where I’m supposed to put in the order is complex. I mistakenly pressed the digital button for a Café au lait instead of Latte. It didn’t happen all the time. Only during times when the restaurant was extremely busy and I under pressure. I was fine taking orders from people who just kept with the menu. It was with those who wanted to mix and match whose orders I fucked up. I didn’t know how to put that order in the way they wanted me to which lead to numerous mistakes in the kitchen. I felt a great deal of fear and shame when the runner would bring the food out only to immediately take it back because it wasn’t the way they had ordered it. Then I would have to explain myself to the kitchen staff which wasn’t always fun.

It was my responsibility to bring the coffee and iced tea out to the customers. All other drinks came out from the bar. The bartender would set them on the counter and all we had to do was take it to the appropriate table. I forgot a few times to get the drinks, so they arrived fairly late to the paying clientele.

I spoke to the manager at 10a and told her I was out. I didn’t walk out. I finished my shift which she appreciated.

‘What is wrong with me? How have I gotten this far and why are people letting me get away with it?’

Brigitte knows all the foods on the menu but only because as she puts it,

“I was a spoiled brat.”

My folks never took us out to eat. I don't know these things.

‘Why am I having a hard time paying attention and retaining information?’
That's all I got for now. I need to fix this NOW.

Forgetfully unemployed,
Dad...

April 16, 2012

Zemi—

Man, I feel weak. Brigitte tells me that I'm being too hard on myself, but the fact is that I feel like a loser.

‘What kind of example is this for you? Why can't I retain information?’
I'm so confused with myself. I just don't know what to do.

Luckily, I have no urges to hit the bottle, smoke weed, take pills or lock myself in a room and become a hermit. I want to fix this; push through it, but the right way so that it will not happen again. I don't know. I'm very disappointed with myself. All I want to do is cry.

...

May 21, 2012
Email to Bonnie

Bonnie-

I've been trying you call you. How is everything?

...

May 21, 2012

Email from Bonnie

awful.

May 21, 2012
Email to Bonnie

call me

...

May 22, 2012
Email from Bonnie

we don't have a phone.

May 22, 2012
Email to Bonnie

Whatever it is you're going through, I hope it gets resolved.

...

May 23, 2012
Email from Bonnie

It's horrible. I am grieving and miss you more than anything in the world right now.

May 23, 2012
Email to Bonnie

Stay strong, Bonnie.

...

May 24, 2012
Email from Bonnie

you know, if i wanted some bullshit one-liners like "stay strong" i would go to a generic motivational website and get my fill. if you've got nothing else to say then just shut up. i've had a fucked up month.

plus, Zemi has a birthday coming up.

June 12, 2012

Zemi—

It's raining dogs and cats outside. It's unlike June weather but I guess times change. My life is set to go. This was what I came here for. I sacrificed you and a life back in El Paso to finish school to become an actor. After so many life altering experiences and so many lessons learned, it's finally come to an end.

I just finished my last show about an hour ago. I didn't hang back because I had an incredible urge to write down these random thoughts whirling in my mind. Oh, graduation is set for Thursday 630p.

'What will I wear?'

That's the least of my worries.

I will buy a journal tomorrow and write you by hand again. I'm tired of typing on a laptop. So much has happened during my time up here in New York City. I want to sit down and reflect on those moments so that you can read them and hopefully learn something, or laugh, cry, get angry or what not. My words are the only thing that keeps me connected with you. You'll be five on Sunday (Father's Day) and I will send you a letter because I didn't get you anything. I didn't know what, so I thought I'd at least give you my love through words.

I had to develop a thick skin during our show's run. I've learned to just do my job to the best of my ability and not care what others think. But there were some people whose judgment I felt. It's difficult to get past it, but not

impossible. My mom has been very supportive all the way and I'm grateful for it. If she could have made the trip she would have.

I want to watch a movie. I am eating cereal without milk.

June 16, 2012

Washington Square Park

Zemi—

It's been so long since I've written by hand. My handwriting is sloppy, weak and shameful. I'm sitting in front of a fountain. It's so refreshing. It's one of the benefits about New York City. You can be yourself and no one really cares. It's actually embraced. Encouraged even.

School is out.

'Now what?'

Seems to be the popular question.

'Now what?'

I left Scaena with a bruised ego. My evaluation was terrible. I received nothing but bad marks.

"You weren't centered. You were in your head.

Your relationship to Howard wasn't believable."

I asked a few people how there's went, and they all said they received positive notes. I seemed to be the only one who got bad ones.

'Am I really that bad?'

I'm so confused.

'Why no positive notes? Not a single one?'

I think my approach is all wrong. I feel like I have a wall up that I haven't been able to break down. Fuck it! Just climb over it. Nah. I think it may be too high to jump it, so it must come down. I feel like I don't have a clear identity of who I am as a person. I am too scared to close as they say in the sales world. Too scared to try stuff out. I get that fear of,

'What will they think of me?'

It creeps up my spine. I am also inconsistent. Both in life and on stage. Too afraid to be myself. Too afraid to make somebody's day. To offend, to stand my ground, to express my opinion. Really I don't get it. I've tried to justify it to myself, but it makes no sense.

A few hours ago, I knew exactly what to say to you. It was so beautiful, honest and I raw. Now as I'm write, I don't feel it. At all. The intensity

vanished. This guy was just about to attempt a belly flop in the fountain. It's too shallow to do that!

It's now nite time. I am on 95th and Broadway sitting down on one of the benches watching life pass me by. I want respect from people because I feel disrespected at times. I believe that people want to take advantage of me, so my actions may come off like I'm being rude. The way I see it, if I put them in their place from the very beginning, they won't do anything to disrespect me, or at least they'll think twice about it.

Loneliness overwhelms me right now. So many beautiful girls walk by. I want to date them all, but feel guilty for thinking this. There is so much to do and so much to learn. I'm going to smoke one last cigarette then hop on the subway.

June 17, 2012

On the L. Headed to Brigitte's

Zemi—

Happy birthday!

It's such a beautiful day in New York City. It's sunny which means the girls are showing off their great legs. They are driving me insane! According to Bonnie, you are in El Paso having a party. I sure hope so. I called her earlier, but she didn't pick up. I hope you're laughing and having a ball. I can't write while ridding the train.

11:36p

I am at Brigitte's. We had steak with grilled onions and tomatoes, and we split a bottle of Veuve Clicquot Champagne. Very nice meal. I sent Bonnie a text message.

Happy birthday Zemi!

She hasn't replied.

I just want to be held.

Sex and Empty Promises

I want to be mothered.

My mom called to wish me a Happy Father's Day along with my niece, nephew, and brother. I haven't call my dad. Strangely enough, I don't feel bad.

June 18, 2012

Zemi—

I can't seem to finish writing a story.

As I write, I am in bed with Brigitte. I am kind of mad at her. She's only telling me half-truths and I suspect that she may have indeed cheated on me. God, I feel disrespected. I read a quote by Bob Marley that is serving as guidance for my current situation.

“You are not her first, her last or her only. She's not perfect. Don't change her. Smile when she makes you laugh, tell her when she gets you mad and if she loves you now, what else matters?”

That's difficult for me to believe or even accept because I don't love her enough to see past all the bullshit. If I did, I wouldn't really care. Or I would leave knowing it's her loss but still wish her the best. I'm so mad right now! I feel betrayed and lied to.

‘So how can I trust her if I'm not her only one?’

Jose ...

June 19, 2012

Zemi—

I just got home. I was at Barnes & Noble in Union Square and came across Keith Richards's autobiography called *Life*. It was on sale for \$6.98!

‘Can you believe that?’

I couldn't. I wanted to buy it a few weeks ago, but the price was too steep then. Not anymore. I am the proud owner of this intriguing man's autobiography. I can't wait to start reading it. I'm going to tonite.

Brigitte invited me to celebrate her friend's birthday in Hell's Kitchen. Boy was that an uncomfortable evening. I got the impression that everyone at that table was privy to our relationship troubles. That annoyed me!

I ignored her throughout the entire evening. She ordered me a margarita. I didn't touch it. She invited me to an art gallery opening. I told her I had other plans. Finally, when the tension became too much to bear, I walked out of there.

‘You know what though?’

We're both the same. In this sense—in times of strife, I want to be comforted by a new girl. That's what Brigitte did. She sought comfort with that guy from Denmark.

“He visited me when you were acting like a jerk,” she told me.

I justify it in that exact way. Yes I sought comfort from other girls when shit hit the fan and I even thought about sleeping with them, but I never went through with it. I was overcome with shame and hurt because of it. Shame because my integrity was compromised for having thought about it, and hurt because our loyalty now appeared suspect to each other. I am saddened by this realization. What a fucking shame. We're both the same.

I need to make up my mind about whether or not to work through our issues or just put an end to the relationship. I also need to get my career going. I can do it. I have a lot to offer. I just need to believe more in myself.

Okay for now.

It is time to read *Life*.

Love—

Dad ...

June 21, 2012

Zemi—

Well, I just found out Brigitte did indeed cheat on me. I got the news not ten minutes ago. She locked herself in her room after she confessed. I knew it! She kept insisting it happened while we weren't together; when I was acting like a jerk. I scoffed at that excuse.

“I'm not attracted to you anymore!” I yelled at her.

I'm so pissed off at her! She attempted to hug me, but I stepped away from her.

“I want you to get out of my apartment,” she said and placed a twenty on the kitchen table.

Cab fare, I suppose.

“I am too drunk,” I slurred, “and I will drink all your beer and liquor.

I'm going to spend the night on your couch.”

“I didn't cheat on you. We were fighting during that period.”

“Whatever you got to tell yourself to justify your actions,” I said.

Hey, at least she told me the truth.

Still, I deserve better. We both do.

Flashback



February 29, 2008

Zemi—

She pulled up in a Black 1996 Ford Mustang GT Convertible listening to The Doors. I'm not a fan of that particular model. I like the boxed car Mustang. The 5.0. 1989. Stick. Modified. The adrenaline. The rawness. The pull. The rumbling at idle--knowing that in less than 4 seconds I'll be going 60 and over 100 in 9. The rush I got gunning it in broad daylight and watching Camaros, Trans Ams and Euros trying to catch up in my rear view. The respect. The allure. The sexiness. Knowing that this ride could be my last-- Oh baby, you had to be there! Still, it's the thought that counts. She's my Bonnie.

'Where did you get this?'

"I borrowed it from the dealership."

Keith Richards popped into my head. We're gonna have to be rock stars tonite: we've got a hot car, Morrison's voice emitting from the juke box—all we need now is a psychological adjustment. 'I've got my stash in the Lower Valley. Let's go get it.'

She gunned it. We sped through Paisano. All the lites were green. I lit up two Buglers and handed one to her. No dialogue. None needed. We've got the top down, the cool nite breeze hitting our faces, Polaris smiling down on us from the heavens--the unexpected expecting us.

We reached Spoony's house. Well, not really his house. He's renting it. But, you get the gist: his house. Two cars were on the driveway. He's been having an affair with a married woman and lately, he's told me, her husband has been on to them. Bonnie parked several houses away. I've got to fuck with him! I knocked on the front door and ran to the side. I waited. I knocked on his bedroom window. He peeped through. I laughed, but not out loud. I can't. It'll spoil my fun. I knocked on the rear door. He's rattled now. I knocked on the front door again and yelled,

'I know she's in there you son of a bitch! Come out and fight!'

A few minutes passed and he finally opened the door, but no one walked through it. I was disgusted. I walked through the door and saw him sitting on his couch in the dark.

'If you're fucking another man's wife at least own up to it--pussy!'

He gave me a jackal's laugh. I'm done with him. He's for the birds. I grabbed my snuffbox from the seldom used bookshelf and left.

On the highway heading south to the Old Plantation. We each parachuted two Mollies and washed them down with Jack. We burned one and weaved our way in and out through cars obeying the speed limit. There was an empty parking spot waiting for us at the front of the club. Bonnie put the top up and I chucked what little was left of Jack on the back seat and put on my green aviator shades.

'How much to watch over the car?' I asked the parking attendant.

“\$5.”

'Here's \$20 and take a drag of this.'

He did. Rock Stars, right?

We walked past the queue. I shook Mark's hand and he let us in. It's packed! I grabbed Bonnie and led her onto the dance floor with me. She challenged me. A circle formed around us. I accepted her challenge and responded in kind. The tone was set. We danced and danced and danced the nite away. That dance floor was ours and no one was going to take it. After a lengthy reign, we relinquished the dance floor and bequeathed it back to the people.

“Take me home,” Bonnie said.

She hit it on the nose. Something didn't feel right.

I drove this time.

“Call me as soon as you get home,” she said.

'Always.'

We kissed good nite.

I got in the car and zoomed onto the highway. I couldn't stop thinking about the way she said *take me home*. I knew what she meant. Fuck. It got me

upset. I dropped down to 2nd gear. The Mustang roared. 50mph. 60. 65. 70. Shifted to 3rd. 80. 90. 100. Shifted to 4th. 110. 120. I couldn't take it anymore. I closed my eyes, let go of the wheel and counted to five. One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Nothing. I almost missed my exit.

Almost home. Only a right turn at the light, drive over the bridge and I'm there. I took the turn at 20mph but gunned it before I completed it. The rear of the car turned into a pendulum and I couldn't stop it from oscillating. I turned the wheel left, then right, left again, right one more time—no control. I'm in this state for about 30 feet and inched my way toward the guard rail. Now it was the only thing I saw: the guard rail. I was going straight toward it. My sense of sound turned off—I felt incredibly at peace. Time stood still. The trees were still, the river running underneath the bridge was still—my final tableau. Well, this is it.

All of a sudden, a great force yanked the Mustang off course. I took advantage of this and turned the wheel to the right and only nicked the guard rail. I looked around. Not one soul in sight. Only me. I looked up at the nite sky and saw a star twinkling down at me. I thought of my grandma.

'What the fuck am I doing with myself? Who am I trying to mimic?

This is how much I respect myself'

I don't like what I've become. Shame, embarrassment, dishonoring my family name, self-treachery, discomfort, anguish, self-disgust, self-loathing, revulsion—all crept up my spine. I opened the snuff box and placed its contents on my hand. You conniving bastards. I let you blind me and hold my will hostage. I shoved them back in the snuff box, drowned THEM in Jack, lit a match and watched them burn.

They died.

I heaved both them and Jack over the bridge.

Enough.

I dropped down to my knees at my front door. I couldn't stop crying. I called Bonnie and she was crying too.

'I'm home.' I said inconsolably.

"Let's stop," she said.

'Let's stop,' I agreed.

You know what?

We didn't.

Chapter 6



June 22,2012

Zemi—

¡Persona non grata! A person who is not welcomed.

I am still hurt from the split. I'm pissed off at her, but this time it's official. It isn't the fact that she slept with someone that bothered me. What bothered me was her reasoning. I still feel disrespected and less than. Fuck it. It's over between us.

'You know what, Zemi?'

I've talked so much about wanting to date multiple women at once, that I'm going to do it now. Fuck it!

Gloria, a beautiful girl of Cuban and Armenian descent, messaged me late this afternoon to invite me to a stage reading. We know each other from school. I was falling asleep throughout the entire thing.

'Still in shock about Brigitte's confession, hung over, famished, and on an hour and a half of sleep, could you blame me for nodding off?'

'Let's get out of here,' I said as soon as the thing was over.

"Wanna get a beer?" she asked.

I then remembered that I did in fact take Brigitte's twenty out of spite.

'First round's on me!' I said proudly.

We got to know each other very well over drinks. She's very intelligent, eccentric, and sassy. She would tell me to *fuck off* every now and then. After three rounds of Guinness and whiskey, the streets of New York City summoned us.

We ambled along Midtown laughing, smoking cigarettes and discussing our time at school. Out of the blue, she recited Shakespeare's Sonnet 18 to me and then asked,

"If you could have any object right now, what would it be?" Zemi, I didn't have a chair in my room. So, for the next ten minutes, I explained to her how much better my life would be if I had one.

"What kind of chair do you want?" she asked.

I surveyed the area and my eyes settled on a couple of bus boys at a corner restaurant who were stacking wicker chairs from the sidewalk seating.

'Like one of those,' I said, pointing at the heap of chairs.

Without missing a beat, she walked over there, picked one out, and brought it to me.

"Here's your chair," she said coolly.

Then like two shots had been fired off from a double barrel shot gun, we scuttled across the street, zigzagging between oncoming traffic. Five blocks up, we turned into a corner and pressed our backs up against the brick wall. Panting heavily, we looked at each other and then collapsed in laughter. This girl has balls.

I sat down on my new chair, getting a feel for it.

"Smile," she said as she took pictures with her cell.

'You're going to blackmail me with those, aren't you?'

"Maybe," she said with a devilish grin.

We took pictures together with her sitting on my lap using different types of filters, some with flash others without, and posing with silly faces. We had so much fun together, Zemi.

At the end of our nite, she walked me over to the subway station. Instead of releasing her after our hug, I kissed her.

"Do you always do this? Kiss someone right away?" she asked.

'I try not to.'

Which is true. When you feel the energy is there, go for it.

The train ride back home was great. I sat on my chair for the entire ride.

June 24, 2012

Zemi—

This particular pub that Gloria and I were in played top 40 tunes. That type of music annoyed her.

“Let’s sneak into Washington Square Park to have sex,” she whispered seductively in my ear.

‘No way! That’s against the law,’ I reminded her.

Twenty minutes later, she looked like she’d had enough.

“Ugh! This fucking music! Let’s go to my place,” she said.

‘Okay, but no funny stuff!’ I told her.

The walls in her apartment were colored with a coat of ivory paint. They were completely bare. The place was scantily furnished with a queen sized neatly made mattress covered in ebony colored bedspreads and duvets which sat on a low bed frame, a white ceiling fan that quietly hummed directly above it, a robust collection of books that were kept in two egg white colored four-shelf bookcases, and a refrigerator that contained nothing but an empty gallon of milk. Her only pillow lay beside it. The entire floor was jet black with a slight sheen.

“Go rinse off in the shower,” she suggested.

I needed that rinse. Not because I stunk, but because I had a good idea what would happen next. Warm water relaxes my muscles and puts me at ease.

As I patted myself dry in front of the mirror, I mentally prepared myself. Once ready, I let out a slow lengthy exhale and made my way to the door, but my allergies were suddenly triggered, clogging up my nasal passages. I blew my nose and when I looked down at the tissue, it had a red spot on it.

‘What the fuck!’ I wondered.

I leaned in, placing my face about an inch from the mirror to inspect my nose.

“Goddamn it! Perfect timing!”

I must have rubbed down too hard after blowing my nose because blood was now spouting out from an open cavity where a blackhead used to reside.

“Is everything alright in there?” Gloria asked, knocking on the door.

‘Yeah, I’ll be out in a minute.’

I pressed tissue paper on it, but blood kept surging out. Ten minutes later, more knocking on the door. This time they were louder.

“What are you doing in there?”

‘Hang on,’ I told her, desperately trying to stop the bleeding.

“Let me in!”

The small receptacle under the sink was half full with spotted tissue paper by now.

‘Hang on a second! I’m almost done,’ I said, trying to buy more time. The door handle rattled.

“Let me in!”

With tissue paper still pressing down on my nose, I unlocked the door. She burst inside, looking suspiciously at me and the surroundings, but found nothing except for mortification. She grabbed my hand and pulled it away from my nose, revealing my embarrassment.

“This is why you’ve been in here?” she asked incredulously. I nodded sheepishly.

“That’s cute,” she said chuckling. “Let’s go to bed.”

I woke up at 11a with Gloria in my arms. I left almost immediately because I had a catering job at 2p. Before I left, I told her that I wanted things to be casual between us. If I had to place a designation on her reaction, it would be disenchanted. But hey, this is what I want. I thanked her for a lovely night and gave her a kiss goodbye.

I must have gotten a total of ten hours of sleep these last five days. It was worth it, though. I had so much fun. I felt so alive. I allowed for the moment to take me where it would, and it didn’t disappoint.

I sit on the fire escape as I write you. Guilt gnaws at me, however. I should spend my time auditioning, but I don’t want to do that at the moment. I want to explore my limits and discover who I really am. I am scared. Maybe I’m not good. Maybe I should do something else. I feel lonely right now. I’m tempted to show up at Brigitte’s so we could be miserable together.

“Why do I feel this way?”

Being told that I am no good harmed my psyche, Zemi. I know I am good, though. I made it this far. I am interesting. This fucking guilt trip is the product of many years of telling myself that I was no good. It’s a putrid self-sabotaging state of mind. I proved to myself these last couple of days that I am interesting. I had fun and people accepted me for who I am. I am the one who is preventing my success in life. I say this knowingly, but it’s difficult for me to believe it.

Love—
Dad ...

June28, 2012

Zemi—

[To Brigitte]

I can't seem to shake you off my mind.
We are both cut from the same cloth
I see a lot of me in you
why must we lie?
No honesty, half-truths, *that led to what?*
Misunderstandings. We were both playing the
same games with each other.
You're still in my thoughts. For some
strange reason I still need you in my life
but I can't place my finger on the *why?*
Why? The question every man asks when he's
been done in. *Why, why, why?* When in the
end, I only have to look at myself to get answers. I am you. You are me.
Two of us cut from the same cloth.

Cash is running low.

‘What am I going to do with my life?’

I am twenty-nine and I haven't done anything substantial in my life. My place
in society is still as an outsider.

‘Yeah, I've lived a bit, but so what?’

I need to push through these challenging times. Many people believe in me.

‘So why don't I?’

9:57p

Emotionally unavailable. That's me.

‘Since when? What's the source?’

Aisling.

A confident, fun, sexy Scottish girl I met at Scaena. We are supposed to hang
out tonite.

‘Why do I get the feeling that she's going to bail?’

If she does, that'll be it. No use pursuing her if she's flaky. I know, I have said
that many times before, but I think I actually mean it this time.

Oh, she just messaged me.

Hold up—Yes! We are indeed going to hang out tonite!

Zemi, even though she messaged me that we are on for tonite, I am not completely convinced that she will come over to my place. I believe she'll want to meet at a bar.

I'm going to give it another—Wait.

There it is.

Hold on.

It's on! She's on her way.

June 29, 2012

Zemi—

Aisling strode into my room wearing slim fitted jeans and a black lace long sleeve crop top, leaving a tantalizing fragrant trail of jasmine and fresh citrus in her wake. The nite was uncharacteristically cool for this time of year, so we seized this wonderful gift from mother nature and sat on the horizontal platform of the fire escape which we accessed by climbing out the window. For the better part of our first hour, we swapped stories about our respective hometowns and expounded our personal philosophies on life all while chain smoking Camels and downing Coronas. In the midst of our lively chat, a great idea came to mind.

'Follow me,' I told her.

"Where to?"

'The rooftop!' I said enthusiastically.

I'd been wanting to do so myself, but I hadn't had a justifiable reason. Last nite, however, everything seemed to have lined itself up to clue me in that a justifiable reason was already present and all I had to do was take it.

Once on it, we sat on the ledge and took it all in. I closed my eyes to enhance my other senses and to calm my nerves. I was nervous and in disbelief still that Aisling would want to spend time with me. But then I thought,

'She could be anywhere in the world right now, but she chose to be with me.' Which was true, you know. From all the options she probably had last nite, she decided to spend it in my company. I reveled in that thought for a few seconds, allowing it to transmute my anxiety to excitement. A few seconds later, now grinning from ear to ear, I opened my eyes and found Aisling staring up at the sky with wonder.

"Look at the moon!" she said as she pointed at it.

The moon, Zemi, with its buttermilk glow, smiled down at us from up above. Sensing our excitement about its company, the mystical orb released a mischievous idea that slowly fluttered down from the heavens, landing softly in the seat of our youth. We couldn't help but to giggle at our friend's idea, but understood that we had no choice but to comply. Without more hesitation, we set free a succession of hearty howls out into the nite sky. Then Zemi, I swear on your life that this happened: three stars magically appeared next to our new friend.

'Look at those three stars right beside it,' I said in utter disbelief.

"Wow!" she gasped as she marveled at them.

I looked at her with pure joy, admiring her for having such a carefree high-spirited approach to life. I let her be and just basked in her energy. Moments later, she turned her attention to me.

"What are you looking at?" she asked, beaming with pleasure.

'Nothing,' I lied.

I then drew her in and stole a long tender kiss. She didn't object.

When we climbed back into my room, the ceiling fan was rotating at full throttle, producing a faint humming sound that blended harmoniously with the lively spirited jazz notes that were being carried smoothly through the air. At once, we kissed more; with ardor this time. As we tore our clothes off of each other, anxiety took hold of me once again.

'She's going to be critical of my body,' I told myself.

A premature twinge of guilt followed closely thereafter.

'It's too soon to have sex, don't you think?'

When the last article of clothing hit the floor, the hunger that possessed me was gone.

Soft, I was.

Aisling was quick to notice that something was up. She lay down in bed with me and kissed my chest, cheeks, and lips. Then, while caressing my body she reassuringly whispered in my ear,

"It'll be alright."

After a few minutes, I was again comfortable in my own skin and was able to fulfill my obligations for the nite.

When I awoke the following morning, Aisling sat on my wicker chair fully dressed, shaking her head and flashing a slight grin my way.

“I told myself that I wasn’t going to sleep with you last nite,” she said in her
gorgeous liquid brogue.

I sat up and lit a half smoked cigarette from the nite before.

‘Well, I sort of gave you an out,’ I joked, ‘but you didn’t take it.’

What a great nite. She was so sweet and understanding. Just like with Gloria, I told Aisling that I wanted things to be casual between us. And just like with Gloria, her reaction would also be aptly described as disenchanting. But it is what it is.

‘She’s going back to Scotland in August. Why not keep it casual?’

I’m exhausted right now. I should stay in tonite and rest, but there’s so much to do. I don’t want to waste a single opportunity to learn something new about myself. I am realizing how much I sabotage my own mind with these negative thoughts. All these years I have deprived myself of a good time because I wanted a relationship from the get-go. I’ve got loads to learn. I will reframe my mind about having sex without strings attached. I will also work on becoming comfortable the first time I have sex with a woman.

‘How many guys would want to be in the position I am in right now!?’

So I will live it up!

Okay for now. I’m going to lay down for a bit.

Nite Zemi!

Love—
Dad ...

July 4, 2012

Zemi—

Earlier, I stood at a crosswalk waiting for the light to turn green. Across from me was a man who was having a heated argument with himself.

“Your dad, he a crackhead,” he told himself.

Once the light turned green, his attention was on me. He went from angry to happy in an instant. So, he rushed over to me and said,

“I am proud of being gay!”

And gave me a high five.

“When are we going to get rich for being gay? he asked me.

“Tomorrow,” I told him.

“Man, I was thinking of getting rich today!”

‘No man, it’s a holiday today.’

July 5, 2012

Zemi—

I don't believe that I am interesting at all. I don't. Bonnie used to tell me that I wasn't.

"All you ever talk about is yourself," she'd tell me with a venomous glance. I confided this to Brigitte one nite. She scoffed at Bonnie's heartless assessment and discounted it as mere rubbish.

"You've shown me unorthodox ways to interpret a scene.

You are indeed interesting. You are unique; special."

I almost believed her.

July 9, 2012

Zemi—

An hour ago, I received a text message from Bonnie.

I refuse to talk to you until you return Zemi's money. We are living on the East Coast now.

'First of all, what the fuck? What money? Second, the East Coast!?

Did she join the Navy and is now stationed at Virginia Beach?'

I called her, but was sent to voice mail. I don't believe her.

'Wait, what about her husband? Doesn't he know that I live in New York City?'

Is he aware that she contacts me?'

I doubt it.

July 12, 2012

Zemi—

I rode the train earlier, and a woman, donning a zebra patterned dress, got on at the Union Square Station. We instantly made eye contact. I got the impression that she would be willing to talk to me, but alas! she got off on the following stop. I berated myself because all I had to say was something as innocuous as,

'You look like a zebra,'

to start a conversation with her. Then, my reality hurtled itself back to the forefront. That woman exuded an aura of perpetual love and commitment. The relationships I am currently in are carnal because I am scared of commitment and think,

‘What the fuck will she want with me? I’ve got nothing of substance to offer.’ I’ve no career, future, and I’m unstable. I am the guy they had a fling with before they settled down to start a family.

I feel terrible. I’m going to buy a forty.

July 14, 2012

Zemi—

I am lonely. My stomach aches. It doesn't feel like it's over. I want to get ahold of her, but I know it's not good for me. I want to call her. I want her to hold me. I don't want to wake up alone. I hate that we are so much alike.

I need to talk to someone about this. I need help understanding what I'm feeling.

‘Why won't you leave my mind right now?’

I caved. That was a text message for Brigitte. I doubt she'll reply. I hope she won't.

I need food in me.

July 16, 2012

Zemi—

The nite didn't go as planned. All I wanted to do was drink, smoke, laugh and have a good time. Gloria, however, had other intentions.

“Are you seeing somebody else?”

For most of the evening, she incessantly pestered me with that question. I thought I had made myself clear. Our relationship is casual, meaning she's free to see other guys if she so desires. I sensed that she wasn't going to stop asking until she got a verbal confirmation. So, I told her about Aisling.

‘You're a fucking uncouth asshole!’ she hurled at me.

That's a new one! I rather liked it. *Uncouth asshole*. It rolls off the tongue.

I didn't waver on my stance after she christened me with that term of endearment of hers. No way. That is how I want to live my life. Eventually, her anger subsided, and we were able to enjoy each other's company. I learned that if you stick by your convictions, women will love and respect you. Well, I should say *most* women.

In the dead of nite, Gloria's nude body was partially masked by a thin bed sheet. The gentle luminance of the moon cast a soft glow over the uncovered parts of her warm golden brown skin as she slumbered. There lay, an exquisite being—mind and body—before me. A woman who likes me and yet, I didn't believe that I was worthy to be in her presence.

As I lay there, mulling over the various possibilities of why I thought myself to be inferior, the all too familiar feelings of guilt and anxiety took hold of me once again. For thirty minutes, my mind oscillated between those two states before finally reaching a conclusion.

"There's something wrong with me," I thought disheartened. I smoked five cigarettes then fell into a fitful sleep.

Flashback



July 4, 2008

Zemi—

I smoldered with indignation as we drove down I-25. We were invited to a party on the edge of town by one of Bonnie’s coworkers. Her fledgling employment as a Grassroots Coordinator was no more than three months old. Given the ample time to do so, one would think that their better-half would have made an attempt to arrange for a proper introduction of her coworkers over drinks, or at the very least a fleeting reference of their existence at home by way of an anecdote. Nope. Bonnie had done neither. I felt excluded.

Alternating with the agonizing feeling of being left out, worry and unease ebbed and flowed over the socializing that was to take place. I dread any situation where mingling is required because I can’t help but think that not one single person has anything nice to say about me. When in that type of environment, a bulwark is erected to defend and protect me from the salvo of criticism being shot at me. And when I can’t withstand the barrage of disapproval much longer, I flee.

“It’s the third house on the left,” Bonnie said.

Zemi, I couldn’t remember the drive we had just taken to get there.

Walking across the front lawn with you hoisted up on my shoulder, my mind projected me to a worst-case scenario in which I was paraded through a house full of critical faces.

‘What will they think of me?’ I fretted.

Bonnie led us inside. We were greeted by whom I assumed was the hostess. She was dressed in a colorful poncho that flowed down to her knees. An oversized straw floppy sun hat with pastel stripes sat askew over her frizzy blond hair. Her disarming smile and friendly demeanor set me at ease.

‘Hi Zemi!’ she said enthusiastically. ‘May I?’

‘Yes, of course,’ I said, handing you over to her.

‘You two make yourselves at home. There’s food and alcohol on the kitchen counter,’ she said as she whisked you away.

‘Hey, hold on a second!’ I called out.

‘She’s going to show him off,’ Bonnie calmly reassured me.

Not so long afterwards, Bonnie excused herself to go see a man about a horse. It irked me to have yet been properly introduced to anyone. I began to suspect that Bonnie used me as a means of transportation to this party. I’ve endured many slights from her. To claim insusceptibility to her callous disregard for my feelings would be a lie. They deject me. They anchor me further down into the abyss.

‘What did I do wrong now?’ I muttered.

I slumped into a couch, lowering my gaze to conceal the tears flooding silently down my face.

A few beats later, a jaunty looking fellow wearing a spiked leather bracelet on his left wrist, took a firm grip of the coffee table and dragged it beside the arm chair he plopped down in. He took a metallic stash jar out from his jacket pocket and poured its contents onto the table. My nostrils immediately registered the herbal aroma wafting across the air, alerting my mind to give full attention to the ritual that was about to ensue. The precision with which he applied his technique made me smile in reminiscence of my grandma. It also worried me.

‘Was she out of harm’s way? Was she eating?’

Or, was she in an altered state of mind?’

The artisan’s face, now split into a wide smile, pulled me back into the present moment. He extended his arm in my direction, offering me a hit. I truly admired his work. So, out of respect for his craftsmanship, I obliged. I took a long hearty drag, closed the windows to my soul, and gently reclined back on the couch. I exhaled all that ailed me back out into the open. Relief. She finally found me. I handed the cigarillo back to the young artisan along with a nod of approval. Feeling confident, I decided to locate Bonnie. Before I did, however, I threw back two sizeable shots of Jack. You know, for courage.

I found her under a tree in the backyard, acting very friendly with a guy. I got within five feet from her and positioned myself directly in her line of sight to beckon her over. She glanced over, brushed me off, and carried on with her animated conversation.

‘Bonnie,’ I said, waving at her.

Now both of them glanced over, gave a cursory look, and continued on with their lively exchange of thoughts; like if I was being a nuisance.

‘Bonnie!’ I said in a stern tone.

She rolled her eyes back, as if to put a fine point on the aggravation I selfishly inconvenienced her with. Sensing an imminent threat, the guy spun his head over to me then back at her, and quickly registered the cross-fire he was about to get caught up in. He made an about face and dashed across the back yard and in through the rear door of the house without having said goodbye to Bonnie.

‘Who was that?’

“Nobody,” she said, avoiding my eyes.

‘Didn’t seem that way to me,’ I retorted.

“That wasn’t any different than how you and your *girlfriends* mingle in your acting class,” she snapped.

Just then, the hostess walked by cradling two whiskey bottles in her arm. My heart skipped a beat because she wasn’t holding you in the other.

‘Where’s Zemi?’

“He’s asleep in one of the bedrooms,” Bonnie said matter of fact. The troubling thought of you being alone in a house full of strangers emptied my stomach out from underneath.

‘By himself!? What the fuck is wrong with you? Anybody can—’

“Fuck you!” she said sharply.

In a panic, I rushed inside to look for you. I didn’t trust anyone at this party to leave you unsupervised. In a stranger’s house, nonetheless!

‘What if someone—’

I stopped myself from finishing that thought.

Fortunately, it didn’t take long for me to find you.

‘There you are!’ I said with a sigh of relief.

A powerful surge of the purest form of euphoria swept across the depths of my soul, delivering me from misery. You command unconditional love from me, Zemi, and at that moment, as my entire being was inundated in rapture, I obliged.

‘For how can I do anything but to love you when that is all I am capable of in your presence?’

No! You wouldn’t allow for nor accept anything less from me.

You lay face down on an olive green plush duvet cover, sound asleep. I gently picked you up and slid underneath, resting your head on my chest.

‘It’s me Zemi,’ I said, kissing the top of your head.

I ran my fingers through your soft tousled hair while you listened to my heart beat. You let out a faint gurgle of approval once its rhythm was recognized. You didn’t forget. Feeling completely at peace and one with you, I closed my eyes and slowly blew air through your hair while caressing your back.

A warm touch was then bestowed on me, running tenderly down the ridge of my nose and around my lips. It was Bonnie’s. She snuggled up against my shoulder and wrapped her arm around us with the fondness that only a Mother’s love can provide.

‘Let’s go home,’ she said with her motherly voice.

We did. At home with you snuggled in between the two of us, a blissfully peaceful nite’s rest ensued.

Thick leaden clouds lined Albuquerque’s sky nine days later. The acrimonious ambience of our home that afternoon turned the adoring moment we shared on the 4th into an anomaly. For since then, Bonnie and I had done an excellent job in one-upping each other’s rudeness and coldness toward one another. On top of that, I, blinded by my self-righteous crusade against dishonesty, ignored all signs and clues that this destructive behavior was slowly straining my tolerance to its limit, and limits cannot be ignored.

I was craving potato chips. Since I was a kid, they have provided me comfort when tensions become too much to bear. A quick trip to the Walmart a few blocks away would have solved this problem, only my car keys were nowhere to be found. I searched all the places where it should be, which weren’t many, and then it dawned on me that my driver’s license and social security card were missing too. I flew into a rage.

‘Why does she do this to me!?’ I thought, storming into the living room. Bonnie was there, putting you in the car seat.

‘Give them back!’ I demanded.

‘Give what back?’

‘My Driver’s license, SS card, and car key!’

‘I don’t know what you’re talking about,’ she scoffed.

‘Besides, you’re always losing things.’

‘Was I?’ I thought, now doubting my own memory.

Nonplussed by her statement, I began to reconsider my stance.

‘But there’s no way I could have lost them!’ I tried reassuring myself.

Then, with one final scornful look my way, she carried you across the lawn, secured you in the backseat of her car, and sped off. Still doubting my memory, I stood immobilized as her car drove out of sight. I then felt anger toward myself for having lost them. Then, that anger was directed at Bonnie. She appropriated my journal last month and gave a similar answer when I confronted her about it. Feeling incredibly alone, extremely angry, and sensing dishonesty once again, I now sought comfort in the forty that was in the refrigerator. It helped, but not much. So, I walked to the liquor store and bought a fifth of Jack.

Bonnie brought you back home a few hours later. I didn't bother asking about your whereabouts. At dinner, we sat in miserable silence as our meal and youth grew stale and cold.

'I'm going to tuck him in,' I told Bonnie.

Thank god it was time for bed. I couldn't stand the tension any longer. After I kissed you goodnite, I dreadfully made my way to the master bedroom where Bonnie was already in bed. Right when I lay down on the mattress, she jumped out of bed and stormed out of the bedroom without acknowledging me. Her cold shoulder released me from its grip as soon as she shut the door of your bedroom behind her. As I lay alone in bed, trying to make sense of what had just happened, a sudden wave of guilt punched my stomach.

'What did I do wrong now?' I pondered.

My face then crumpled, and I sobbed uncontrollably. At last, after exhausting my tears, I fell asleep.

Breakfast the following morning was fraught with hostility. Instead of stinging each other with hurtful words, a heavy silence charged with friction wore us down. If Bonnie hadn't taken off for work immediately after breakfast, then tempers would have flared up and harsh words for sure would have been exchanged. It took just five minutes after her exit for the ambience to recover from that morning's friction and to acquire a harmonious spirit. And knowing full well that this precious mood was transient and impermanent, you and I, Zemi, made every second count.

The apartment was minimally furnished with a dining table and two chairs, two twin sized mattresses we slept on, a TV and DVD player, and your high chair. The rest of the space was occupied by your toys. A play gym sat in the place of the coffee table. An assortment of rattles, teething balls, bouncy balls,

and bath toys replaced the arm chair. Your baby walker, red Push Around Buggy ride, musical toys, Lincoln logs, multicolored blocks, stacking cups and rings, your Nemo Jumbo plush doll, and your Amy Coe green peanut plush elephant settled by the window where the couch would have been. You could say that the living room was the playground where your imagination was given free rein to develop and express itself.

We rolled the bouncy ball back and forth to each other and every now and then, instead of rolling it, you'd punch it back to me. Or, we'd launch ourselves at it when it stopped dead center in between us. Invariably, you got there first! We then stacked cups and rings. You'd take my hands and place rings and cups over each digit and every so often, over my nose. After briefly pausing to have lunch and to take a quick nap, we lay down on the floor to feed your plush elephant. Then, we'd have it gallop all over the rough terrain to help keep it fit. During one of those runs, a beam of sunlight broke in through the broken slat of the blinds and kissed my cheek. I got an idea.

‘She thought cutting off my driving privileges would
keep us from exploring our fair city?’

Nay! We had things to do and places to be. Albuquerque was our oyster!
‘We’re taking your wheels today, Zemi.’

You needed a hand walking over to your car which I was more than glad to provide. I held you up by your arms as you swayed and tottered over to your red Buggy. You did great! Your legs were getting stronger every day. With the red Buggy now before us, you placed one foot on the raised step and pushed yourself up and into the cabin, sitting comfortably in front of the steering wheel. A joyful smile formed across your face as you gripped it with both hands. It was impossible to steal the Buggy because it could only be started a certain way and nobody but us knew how. I positioned myself behind it and gave it a light push, sending it forward on a slow roll until it gathered enough speed.

‘Pop the clutch, Zemi!’

The engine sputtered for a few feet and then, VROOM!, it turned over. As the engine purred in idle, you threw your hands up in the air, emitting a squeal fortified with excitement and anticipation. We were ready to go. But first, we needed to pack a snack, for we would surely get hungry during our twenty minute trek to Barnes and Noble. Very quickly, two sandwich bags were filled with Pepperidge Farm Goldfish and your Sippy Cup had OJ poured to its brim. I was hydrated and would drink water upon arriving at our destination.

‘Let’s go!’ I said.

The Albuquerquean blue sky hovered adoringly above us as we sauntered over to Barnes and Noble. I loved to spend time there. I'd frequent it often to forget about the despondency that had taken up residency in my heart. Before you and Bonnie moved back to Albuquerque in May, I lived alone in the apartment we now share for the entire month of April. It was a trying month, to say the least because I'd spend most of the time mulling over the events that occurred during that dark period with Bonnie. Being a practical man, however, I devised a routine to help take the edge off.

On my days off from work, I'd wake up just after noon and dash over to the corner store to purchase a 12 pack of Modelo Especial, a couple of forties, and bags of potato chips. I'd sprawl across our then bare living room floor and either memorize lines or re-read Jimi Hendrix's *Room Full of Mirrors* (a fine book Bonnie gifted me) while munching out on flavored chips and imbibing the beer in great quantities. By 3p, the 12 pack was now nine bottles light, but those thoughts still haunted me. So, I'd fire a few up in the bathroom. They gave me relief, making those torturous thoughts somewhat tolerable.

I'd then spend the rest of the afternoon and evening at Barnes and Noble reading Nikki Sixx's *The Heroin Diaries* and Anthony Kiedis's *Scar Tissue*. Reading about a person whose state of mind was relatively worse than mine fascinated me. What I was experiencing seemed petty and foolish when compared to the nadir of their tribulations. Yet, I admired them for living out their demons. It was a twisted romanticized relationship I had formed with their stories. By closing time my stomach was growling, reminding me that I had to eat something. So, a jaunt to the Whataburger across the street was next in line.

'Let me have a #5 to go, please.'

Although my stomach had been nourished, I had to deal with those dismal thoughts again because the numbness had worn off. Frantic with worry, I paid another visit to the bathroom where I'd fire up a few more, but they didn't help much. I then rushed over to the refrigerator, pulled out a forty, and chugged it all. Life became just a smidge more tolerable after that, but I could still hear them. They were much louder at nite. So, I'd load up my portable cd/cassette player with either Freaky Styley or Axis Bold as Love, set the volume at eleven, stand in front of the bathroom mirror and lip sync to Kiedis's lyrics or give a standing-ovation-worthy air guitar rendition to one of Hendrix's solos, all while standing bare chested with a deluge of tears rushing forth from my eyes. After my concert, I'd collapse on my air mattress bawling, shaking, moaning, and writhing in that godforsaken pain that wouldn't loosen its grip on

me. An hour later, still shaken from that episode, I'd stare off blankly into the darkening distance, chain-smoking myself to sleep.

'Hi! Welcome to Barnes and Noble,' said the clerk
behind the Information Desk.

'Look!' I said, jokingly as we passed by.

'He's already drinking and driving.'

Her mouth fell open in disbelief. Her wide-eyes stared at us incredulously.

'Relax. It's just orange juice,' I said, sensing that an
overreaction was brewing.

Zemi, if nobody laughs at your jokes, then you are telling them to the wrong crowd. To hell with her! She's for the birds.

As we strolled along the many rows of bookshelves, a glint of ardent curiosity appeared in your eyes as you gazed at the different book covers beckoning for your attention. A few moments later, you tossed your sippy cup to the floor and leaned out of your Buggy, straining to grab a particular book with both hands. I knelt down and ran my index finger along the lower shelf until it matched up with the object of your desire. It was Sam Shepard's *Seven Plays*.

'You remembered!' I said, kissing your cheek.

I very happily took it from the shelf and handed it to you.

Sam Shepard is the man. A rugged hard-drinking intuitive playwright who wears his heart on his sleeve and will never back off from a fight. I was not even aware of his existence until a few months ago when Lynda Allen, my acting instructor, handed me five sheets of paper with his words printed on them for me to consider as the scene to present in June. It was from *True West* and the character she wanted me to play was Lee. Later that nite, while nursing a tall glass of Carlo Rossi, any doubt about whether or not I would present that scene was quickly laid to rest. I was moved to tears because I sensed a subtle poignancy underneath all the bravado and charm that Lee flaunted to the world. I understood Lee's visceral lifestyle and it was because of that that I believed Sam Shepard understood me. When someone gets me, Zemi, they have me for life. He became someone I not only respected, but vehemently defended when others would talk critically of his work. Yup, Sam Shepard is the man.

Three days before your first birthday, the six duet scenes that my classmates and I had worked on were presented before a live audience of about fifteen people. It truly was a special nite for me, Zemi. Not only because you were in attendance, but because you made your presence felt while I performed my scene. You pointed and uttered undecipherable remarks at me (so you were the heckler in the audience that nite!) and attempted to wriggle your way out of

Bonnie's grasp to jump into the scene with me. That magical evening will forever remain in my heart.

After getting our fill of paperbacks and hardbacks, we had about an hour still before Bonnie got back home from work. Suddenly, I remembered! Ethan Hunt had asked us, as a personal favor to him, to complete a special mission as undercover agents. Our mission, which we accepted, had us posing as two fashionistas on the lookout for the next big trend. The fashion industry's livelihood depended on our refined taste and keen eye for marketable fabrics, so failure was not an option. We cannot let Ethan or the fashion industry down, Zemi! We must hurry, as time is of the essence! Our next stop: Cottonwood Mall.

We swaggered and strutted up and down the mall's corridors like Tony Manero on 86th Street, trying on an assortment of clothes until the right balance and proportion was achieved. You picked out a feather boa that looked dashing wrapped around your neck. The midnite ink silk scarf with the fringe edging hugged my body ever so perfect! Ah, that pair of turquoise aviator shades paired up well with your rainbow-colored tie dye t-shirt. We were dressed looking chic and a la mode, but something was still missing.

'Hats? Hats!'

Yes! Great choice, Zemi. The grey striped fedora. Classic look! And with that final touch, our mission was complete. We did it! The only thing left for us to do was to make our outfit official and there was only one way to do that. Channeling our inner Madonna, we vogued. We giggled incessantly as we struck a series of catwalk worthy poses, nodding and blue-steeling at everyone who looked at us. Yes, we looked ridiculous, but were enviably stylish. Just then, my phone rang.

"Where are you?" asked Bonnie, sounding upset.

I checked the time. It was 3:30p. She had just gotten home.

'We're at the mall. Give us 25?'

With you in my arms, we hurried back home anxious to tell her all about our impromptu runway show that saved the fashion industry from total collapse. As we dashed across the parking lot of the apartment complex, Bonnie's figure came into view. She was outside, pacing back and forth before the front door, sucking violently on a cigarette. Once we were a few feet away from her, I noticed the agitated look on her face.

"Where were you?" she demanded to know.

‘We were at the mall,’ I said panting. ‘Oh man, you missed it! We tried on—’

‘You took him to go see your lover, didn’t you?’ she interjected.

Zemi, that accusation caught me completely off guard. My train of thought took the blow on the blindside and staggered sideways. I was stunned.

‘No,’ I said, regaining my balance. ‘We were at the ma—’

“Fuck you!” she barked.

She snatched you from my arms and stormed inside. I followed hastily on her heels as the sudden surge of anger that was triggered by her baseless accusation glazed my eyes in dark maroon.

‘What about you, huh?’ I yelled at her. ‘Why did you kick me out that nite!?’

“Again with that?” she said sardonically,

slamming the master bedroom door in my face.

The anger swelled up violently against the inner lining of my soul, straining my tolerance to its limit, creating a crack on the surface.

‘Fuck you,’ I muttered, pressing my middle finger against the door.

I snatched the cigarettes and lighter from the dining-table and marched out of the apartment to take a walk around the property. I needed to cool down.

I peeked my head in through the front door a few hours later and scanned the room for any smiles. Bonnie was drying dishes. She acknowledged me subtly with a sharp tinge of disappointment before refocusing on the dishware. Nope. No smiles there. I scanned the room further and spotted you sitting in your high chair. There you were, amidst these turbulent young star-crossed lovers who are parted by conflict and spite and you, Zemi Adore, were the antithesis; a beacon of peace and unconditional love. I walked across the living room, wading through the tension, to stand beside you. I caressed your forehead and gently ran my finger along the contour of your lips. I was then overwhelmed by the lethargy of a heavy broken heart.

Suddenly, Bonnie callously barged in and in one fell swoop removed you from your high chair, carrying you off into your bedroom then slamming the door shut. I stood there paralyzed with fear, thinking I had fucked up again. Seconds later, I was seething at Bonnie’s unkindness and but a few seconds thereafter, I was hot with shame. Shame for displaying cowardice in the face of her affronts.

Feeling lonelier than ever, terribly confused, and indignant at the manner I was being treated, I pulled mightily at my hair as those dreadful thoughts resurfaced yet again, burning intensely. Not knowing what to do with myself, I intuitively went for the bottle of Jack that was perched on the

refrigerator and took it with me into the master bedroom. Stillness, calmness, and slumber found me an hour later, but it came at a dreadful price.

Chapter 7



July 23, 2012

Zemi—

Hold on. I'm going to get a glass of milk. Okay, I'm a back. You, my son, are currently living in New York City!

Bonnie and I met by the steps of the Metropolitan Museum of Art at 3p today. I, being a stickler for punctuality, got there at five minutes til three. Within those five minutes, the gravity of our engagement began weighing heavily on me. The last time we spent time together by ourselves didn't end well. So, I was nervous because I didn't know what to expect from this planned rendezvous.

'How do we greet each other?

How could I make this less tense and awkward?' I wondered.

I've made it a habit to pick up an AM New York newspaper before hopping on the train. I rapidly flipped through the pages of today's edition, searching for a story that I could use as a conversation starter. Fate smiled down upon me from the heavens because on the penultimate page was the perfect ice breaker. The headline itself guaranteed at least a solid ten minute dialogue.

'Okay, Bonnie. I'm ready for you,' I reassured myself.

And then, the second I glanced up, there she was. I couldn't believe my eyes! It really was her. She strolled up 5th Avenue looking every bit like a tourist. My mind then played a montage of our best and worst moments on the

screen of my consciousness, sending shock waves across my nervous system; my emotions now in a state of disarray. At that very moment, I loved and hated her simultaneously and alternatively. I wanted to kiss her passionately and vehemently curse her out. But it had been over two years since our last row. I hear that time heals all wounds.

‘People change,’ I told myself as I exhaled, regaining my composure.

Feeling confident, I strode along the sidewalk so that we would bump into each other by the steps.

“‘Streetcar Named Desire’ closed yesterday,’ I said once we were within an earshot from each other. ‘We just missed it!’

“So?” she said dismissively.

Well, I suppose some need more time than others.

You know, reconnecting with Bonnie wasn’t as bad as I thought. There was no need for one of those long embraces people give each other in this type of situation. It felt like a smooth transition—a continuation, if you may—from where we last left off. I forgot the MET was closed Mondays, but that didn’t mean that our afternoon was ruined. No. This is New York City, baby! The next best thing to do was to walk around. You’re always one block away from somewhere exciting and from walking away with a great memorable story.

We sauntered along the fringes of Central Park, with me doing most of the talking. I began to wonder where she told her husband she’d be right now. I started to inquire, but then thought better of it because it might upset her. And an upset Bonnie will not allow Jose to see Zemi.

We were stopped at a light, waiting for it turn green. I explained to her that it was far more efficient to jaywalk than to wait for the goddam light to turn green in Manhattan.

‘And besides,’ I said in my closing argument, ‘police haven’t issued a jaywalking

citation here since the early ‘70s.’

But she wouldn’t have any of it.

‘I’m trying to set a good example for Zemi,’ was her reasoning.

‘So reserve jaywalking for when he’s not with you,’ I suggested as a compromise.

Nope. None of it.

‘Fine,’ I thought. ‘We’ll be the only two schmucks obeying this law even though the general consensus is to ignore it.’

As I stood there, channeling my inner schmuck, I glanced over at Bonnie and noticed a stray thread proudly sticking out from the neckline of her shirt. That type of thing drives me insane, Zemi. I had to pluck it off. My first few attempts failed for my fingers didn’t get a good enough grip on it. The light

then turned green. Still undeterred and determined to pluck out that pesky thread, I leaned in to give it a go with my teeth while we walked.

“Don’t do that!” she said irritated, throwing her head back.

“I’m going to punch you!”

But I wouldn’t have any of it, Zemi. Nope. None of it.

A few seconds later, I, like a bear with a fish in its mouth, came back up triumphantly; the thread in the clutches of my teeth. And at that very moment, a shutter sounded off over my shoulder. A street photographer had taken a picture of what had just happened and then fell back, blending into the horde that is Manhattan. I should have asked her for a copy.

We spent the rest of the afternoon dropping off Bonnie’s resume at restaurants and her telling me about you. You’ve become quite an interesting little boy. You’re very tall and lean. You like pistachios (so do I! In ice cream), hats, and know how to play Yahtzee. You’re also finishing up a Pre-K activity book (I got you that) and have a vast imagination. You want to live in the water like in Atlantis. I can’t wait to see you!

Before we knew it, we were in St. Marks Place in the East Village.

‘You been to McCabes?’ I asked.

“No.”

‘Come on. Let me buy you a shot of whiskey.’

Once we settled inside the bar, the time came for me to ask her something of much importance to me.

‘Do you believe in me? Can I count on you to be there and support me when I need a little boost?’ I asked.

I genuinely wanted to know if she had my back. Zemi, there’s nothing worse than not knowing if the woman who loves you, who gave birth to your only child, does not believe in you and your dream.

“Yes! Yes, I do!” she replied.

Zemi, I found the comfort, encouragement, and the approval that I desperately needed to hear in her response.

‘Bring us another round!’ I told the bartender.

Just like that, I was motivated again! I make my dream more difficult than it should be because doubt creeps in and sabotages me. And when things don’t go my way, I become anxious, bitter, bitchy, and whiny. That is then followed by procrastination. But with Bonnie’s blessing, the sky is the limit once again!

A couple shots of whiskey and a few laughs later, it was time to go because her husband would begin to wonder where she was. On the entire walk

to Union Square, I pestered her with pleas to disclose where you two were living. She wouldn't say where, but did tell me that the 7 took her there. Sensing that I might have been pushing for too much too early on, I backed off. I was forced to be contented with the fact that you resided somewhere along the 7 line. Given our history, that bit of information is considered substantial progress.

I accompanied Bonnie on the 6 over to Grand Central Station where she would transfer to the 7.

'Will you say hello to him for me?' I asked as she boarded the train. She nodded in agreeance, with a smile on her face.

I was impressed by her laid back demeanor. We promised that we'd keep in touch.

Love—
Dad ...

August 4, 2012

Zemi—

Harper came over to my place last nite. I met her at Scaena yesterday where she wore a beautiful sundress. Later that evening, she showed up donning Daisy Dukes.

Yeah. Those.

She leaves for Chicago on Saturday for a week, then back to Philadelphia to finish up her undergrad in two years. In the morning, she told me,

"There was a temporary lapse in my mind that caused me to think about the possibility of kissing you in school just for no reason other than I found you very attractive."

She was funny, sweet, intelligent, and youthful. She's a catch! Time for bed.

Nite!

August 6, 2012

Zemi—

Just got out of my audition with an agent. It went great! I'm on Cloud-Fuckin' 9 right now! He said,

“You’ve got this naturalness about you that can’t be taught.”

Fuckin’ ay! And, he took the time to actually interview me! I hope he calls me back. My mantra before I auditioned was this:

‘I have this of extreme importance to say so listen to me.’

I needed this so bad. After so many put downs, an agent from New York City thinks I am good. My self-esteem is through the roof! And, I didn't beat myself up afterwards. Although, it could have been better. Regardless, this shot of confidence was desperately needed.

August 15, 2012

Zemi—

I got a part in a short film! I was given the part of a prominent Spaniard who hunts elephants for game. I've got a week to come up with a character.

‘So it appears that I can do this, huh?’

Haha! It's pouring outside. I'm going to celebrate in the rain. Bye Zemi.

August 23, 2012

Zemi—

I have been up now for twenty-two and a half hours. Just got back home from my first ever film shoot as the lead. I went balls out, but I've got a lot to learn still. For starters, the accent could have been better. My cast, on the other hand, was so easy to work with, but it took forever to film. We waited around more than we did act.

Last nite was weird, Zemi. In one of the scenes of the film, my character is raving drunk as he's telling a story to his wife and friends about his latest elephant hunting trip. In my quest of bringing a sincere portrayal of my character to the set and to identify with him emotionally, I chugged a bottle and a half of red wine in order to rehearse that scene in a similar state as the elephant hunter. Well, I only managed to stay conscious for two hours before passing out in a drunken stupor. When I came to this morning the window in my room was open. I went to close it and saw that my underwear, jeans, and white t-shirt lay in a crumpled heap on the fire escape steps. And that's when I realized that I was completely naked.

‘Did I go up on the roof last nite?’

I couldn't remember.

“You took too much man. You took too much.

Too much,” said Zeta.

Regardless, I came up with some great ideas for the scene which were well received on set.

Well, got work at Scaena in three hours, then head over to an audition at 7p. No rest for the wicked.

August 25, 2012

Zemi—

‘What if what I think I lack to act is already in me?

Is that why it comes off as fake?’

August 31, 2012

Zemi—

Bonnie hasn't fucking changed at all! I knew it was too good to be true. We just had a heated argument over text messages about regaining trust for each other. She kept insisting that the only way for us to build trust was by disclosing any infidelities we've been hiding from each other. So I did.

Zemi, I cheated on your mother between March and April 2008 in Albuquerque. This happened before you guys moved back up there from El Paso. It was a short love affair with a classmate from Lynda Allen's acting class. I did it out of spite and for revenge. Out of spite for her allegiance to Billy Bob. Revenge for not only kicking me out of her place that one nite, but for her refusal to tell me why. That was the one and only time that I cheated.

When Bonnie asked me for my lover's name, I gave her a fake one. I thought that maybe Bonnie would want to track her down. That wouldn't be fair to the other woman because she wasn't the one who initiated our fling. That was me. I was the one with a motive. So, if anyone should pay the price, it ought to be me.

Then, it was my turn.

Did you sleep with Sobacos? ...

No.

Why did you side with Billy Bob? ...

I don't know what you're talking about.

Oh, no? Swear on Zemi's life. ...

I'm not doing that.

Swear on Zemi's life that you never slept with Sobacos. Swear on Zemi's life that you didn't side with Billy Bob. Swear on his life! ...

I'm not swearing on his life. You never played with him. You screamed at him, you gave him pink eye and he always had a dirty diaper when I got home.

Zemi, none of that is true. Pink eye? That one came out of left field.

Swear on Zemi's life. ...

Fuck you!

That was the last I heard from her tonite. She wouldn't swear on your life, Zemi. She wouldn't do it. I want to trust her, Zemi, I really do, but— (sigh)

Trust is a two way street.

Fuck her. She hasn't fucking changed at all.

P.S. There's a blue moon out tonite!

September 11, 2012

Zemi—

Just got home from my new gig as a busser. Forty-one dollars for yesterday's work and forty-five dollars for today. Cash only.

“What about credit card tips?” you asked.

Well, I won't see that money until my boss hands me my paycheck every other week.

‘You reading between the lines, Zemi?’

This pay sucks! If this hasn't motivated me enough to buck up, I don't know what will.

P.S. Below is a text message I sent Bonnie earlier.

You never had my back! You weren't my girl. You don't love me. Instead of telling all those haters to fuck off, you defended them instead of me. You aided them and didn't believe in me. You let me down. You fed me to the wolves. Where's your loyalty?

October 17, 2012

Zemi—

I owned the pool table for the first hour. I mean, I was having the kind of streak that you only see in movies, you understand. Whatever shot I called went in! Now, I don't consider myself to be a good pool player, but I was shooting like an ace. I was untouchable! Until, I wasn't.

Brigitte—no, not that Brigitte—the sexy lady who drank red wine and wore red bottom shoes claimed not to know how to play. I didn't believe her, but gave her the benefit of the doubt. I showed her how to rack the balls, etc. No ball went in after I broke. Then, she very casually made an impossible shot.

‘You're a shark!’ I told her.

“I know how to play a little,” she said, grinning.

Sassy. I liked her!

Throughout the game, I struggled focusing on my shots because of her overt-flirting. I knew what she was doing! I was well aware of her appealing to my breeding juices in order to gain an edge. Our game went back and forth with both of us missing a couple of shots each. In the end, only the eight ball remained to be made. It was my turn to shoot.

‘Eight ball, corner pocket,’ I said.

I scratched. Game over.

I took a seat next to Brigitte's friends who were about ten strong.

“That was one hell of a run you had there. My name is Paul.”

Paul was cool. He told me they were doctors having a fun nite out in the town.

“Hey, is that a woman's scarf?” he asked, pointing at the one hanging off my neck.

‘Yes it is,’ I said proudly. ‘It makes me feel sexy.’

“I like it, and the girls did too,” he said. “Why do you wear them?”

‘Paul, if I sleep with a girl, I at least have the right to wear her clothes,’ I said. Paul liked my response so much that he bought me a beer.

A few minutes later, a luscious smile sat next to him.

“Oh, this is Matilda,” Paul said.

“Hi,” she said.

‘Hi.’

Noticing that we hadn’t broken eye contact since she sat down, Paul excused himself to go to the bar.

‘We’re all going to get a drink somewhere else. Wanna come?’ she asked.

‘Sure, why not?’

“Let’s have a cig first” she said, excitedly. “Don’t tell on me.”

‘Your secret is safe with me,’ I assured her.

Matilda smokes Camel Turkish Jade cigarettes. Soft pack.

‘Hey, I’ll trade you one of my Buglers for one of those,’ I proposed to her.

“You roll your own?” she asked, looking intrigued.

‘Yeah. Wanna trade?’

“Okay!”

We smoked our cigarettes around the corner while we waited for her friends to pay their tabs. She kept glancing over her shoulder, making sure that none of her colleagues caught her with a cig in hand.

‘Put it out!’ I said alarmingly. ‘Paul’s walking this way!’

She panicked and quickly flicked the rolled cig into the street. Looking guilty and thinking she was caught, she slowly turned around to explain herself for what I imagined would have been the umpteenth time. You should have seen the look on her face, Zemi, when she realized that I had tricked her.

“You owe me a cigarette,’ she said, smirking.

‘No. I don’t.’ I said.

“You made me waste one.’

‘I said *put it out* not *flick it*. Next time, just drop it on the ground and place your foot over it.’

Reluctantly lighting up a fresh Turkish Jade, her eyes glinted with a trace of smoldering anger as half of her smirk transformed into a grin.

“Matilda!”

It was Paul. Once again in a panic, she flicked her cigarette into the street.

“We’re all going home. Are you smoking?”

At a loss for words, she glanced up at the stars, hoping that some pretext would fall from the heavens.

‘She wasn’t smoking, Paul,’ I interjected after a tense few seconds. ‘There was

a large group of people smoking beside us earlier.’
Matilda shrugged her shoulders, nodding in agreeance with my half-baked excuse. Paul knew we were lying to him. In that moment, however, sensing that Matilda needed him to be a friend, he turned a blind eye to her minor setback. He eyed us both suspiciously then wished us a good nite.

“Thanks for not telling on me,” she said as her friends
climbed into two taxi cabs.
‘No worries,’ I said. ‘Here.’

I handed her a freshly rolled cigarette.

With her friends now gone, she was able to relax and enjoy her cigarette without constantly having to be looking over shoulder.

‘I like it better when you’re not worrying,’ I told her.

Smiling, she took a long lung-filling drag; one that would make her relax even more and smile with instant gratification upon release. As she exhaled, a venturesome idea lit up her face.

‘Have you walked across the Brooklyn Bridge?’

The nite air was crisp, fraught with promises of fleeting opportunities. A black velvet blanket, sparsely mottled with cryptic messages from far away galaxies, lined the cloudless firmament as we ambled along the bridge’s promenade, walking side by side in comfortable silence. We had no particular destination in mind for when we reached Manhattan. That didn’t worry me. I was just happy to be in her presence, Zemi. She was a stranger to me because we’ve only known each other for a couple hours, and yet, I knew her.

All of a sudden, we were engulfed in total silence. No cars were heard driving along the roads underneath and no pedestrians were in sight. The tranquility that had found us was so intoxicating, that it then became clear: the Brooklyn Bridge would be solely ours, but only for an ephemeral moment. I placed my hand on her lower back and drew her in closer to me. She put her arms around my neck and drew me in closer to her. I felt her warmth as our bodies pressed up against each other. Matilda’s back arched after my lips lightly brushed her delicate neck. Her hands then fell down my back as my lips, now burning, searched for hers. I wanted to consume her, but she was a stranger to me still. A stranger whom I met not too long ago. Her lips, her luscious crimson lips, now waiting with ardent anticipation, brushed tenderly on mine. But she was a stranger to me still. A stranger whom I met not too long ago. I cupped her face in my hands and then we were strangers no more.

The next morning, I was awoken by a pillow crashing down on my face.

“What’s your name!” Matilda shouted, sitting astride on me.

‘What the fuck are you doi—’

Wham!

“What’s your name!”

Matilda was breathing heavily and had a mortified look on her face. She cocked the pillow above her head again, but I seized her arm and snatched it away from her grip.

“I don’t do this on the first nite,” she said, now looking ashamed.

I believed her. She was different, Zemi, because somehow I knew her before we met. I held her close in my arms and told her my name.

‘I don’t think any less of you,’ I reassured her.

We spent the rest of the morning eating breakfast in bed and trying to figure out how in the world I managed to go an entire nite without introducing myself. The best answer I could give her was that I didn’t think I had to. I like her, Zemi. I like her a lot.

October 28, 2012
Email to Bonnie

Turn your phone on...

November 3, 2012

Zemi—

‘When did I lose my sense of truth and belief?’

November 12, 2012

Zemi—

Matilda and I are going steady! She told me that she made up her mind. I’m her man. She only wants me, and I only want her.
Life is good.

Love—
Dad ...

November 13, 2012

Zemi—

My only enemy is ME. Everybody likes ME so why wouldn't I want to be ME? Bonnie made ME feel bad about ME. All that shit stuck because I was too scared to be ME. Everyone is rooting for ME and those who aren't must be ignored by ME. Some people would love to be ME, but they won't tell ME because they much rather see ME miserable and keep ME away from ME. HATERS! [Oh shit! I'm rappin?! 😊]

Fucking bullshit, Zemi! Check this text thread I just had with your stepdad. Bonnie called, but she only let it ring twice.

Did you just call? ...

What do you want?

If you're going to have an attitude, then never mind. Be with your husband. You chose him to raise our child. You claimed to be happy with him. So be with him. Love him cause I'm sure he loves you. Just keep me in the loop about Zemi. ...

This is him. Do not call. You aren't in the loop.

Fuck off! Tell it to my face like a real man. I'm off tomorrow. Where do you want to meet. ...

A man raises his own child and treats his woman fair. You are a dog.

Call me. ...

I waste no minutes on you. Do not call. Do not text.

Then call in fifteen when Bonnie has free minutes. I'll be waiting. ...

Sixteen minutes later:

Look, I've got no gripes against you. I respect you but don't believe for a second that I'm going to forget about my boy. You're one minute late.

Ten minutes later:

That's what I thought. Don't text me this bullshit again.

'Wasn't that BS!?'

Zemi, don't settle something like this over text. You at least call, man. Let me hear it in your voice. Don't text me! Fucking bullshit.

I am trying Zemi. I really am. I am trying to be a better person. A better person for you. Period. I can't control what she tells him, and I can only assume she has used slanderous and libelous words to stain my image. But I am trying Zemi.

'Haven't you been reading!?'

I will never, ever renounce you. You have my word. I know I haven't been there for you but please know that I haven't forgotten about you. I never will. And that's exactly what this asshole suggested that I do. He is wrong. Dead wrong. I will never give up on you.

Love—
Dad ...

November 14, 2012

Zemi—

My stomach hurts.

Why? Is something bad about to happen?

Has it happened already? Is it happening now??

Enlightenment is what I currently seek.

I'm at Matilda's. An hour ago, we had dinner at a Tai restaurant. Knowing very little about foreign foods, the majority of the meal was spent with me asking her a lot of questions about the cuisine which she gladly answered. At one point, I complimented her for teaching me.

'I'm going to be sophisticated when you're done with me,' I said.

"What did you mean 'when I'm done with you?'" she said suspiciously.

She took it to mean that I was implying our relationship had a time limit. This is what I was afraid of, Zemi. Something always changes when I go steady with someone. I'm realizing that once we find someone who we want to share our time with, the façade that we put up at the start sheds off, and then our true essence emerges. I believe our relationship has reached this critical juncture. I can either bail at the first sign of trouble (as I am accustomed to do), or work through this. I chose the latter because I really do like her. She's delicate, intelligent, resilient—a beautiful human being who I won't give up on so easily.

You know, I can be insensitive at times with some of my crass and immature comments. I hate Machismo. I reject it, but it runs through my veins, Zemi. I'll be more careful with what I say and do around her. This doesn't mean that I will completely change who I am as a person. I will just tone it down a bit.

'Is that compromising?'

I don't know, but I'm willing to take the risk to find out!

November 15, 2012

Zemi—

I may go back to EP next week. Monday through Saturday. I need to recharge my soul.
Okay for now. Off to work.

Love—
Dad ...

November 22, 2012

Zemi—

Fourth day in El Paso.

I can't shake off this bad feeling I've had since getting here. All week, Matilda's been ignoring my calls and messages. This is unlike her! She'd message me every single day without fail. Now, this ominous feeling in the pit of my stomach haunts me. It's similar to the one I got before my relationship with Bonnie went sideways. I don't feel connected with her at all!

'Am I overreacting?'

Something's not right. Ugh! I hate situations that I'm helpless and powerless to change. She assured me that she's very faithful; almost to a fault. But I can't help to think that she's deceiving me in some way; like she's going to play me for a fool. This fucking sucks! I should be happy right now. I need to know why she's avoiding me, otherwise I'll go insane!

November 23, 2012

Zemi—

I fly back to New York City tomorrow at 5:50a. Yesterday I took a drive over to Ingrid's house. Don't know why. I just did.

It's back to my life in NYC. I needed this week. Reflected quite a bit, but not as much as times before. I have nothing to do here. I felt lost.

See you back in NYC!

Love—

Dad ...

December 1, 2012

Zemi—

After twelve days of silence, Matilda dumped me today without a reasonable explanation.

I don't want to see you anymore.

A text message. Seven words long. That's it.

'When I told my mom, you know what she asked?'

"What did you do?"

Wrong question, mom. Thanks for making me feel like shit, assuming that everything is my fault. Here's the text message I sent Matilda, demanding an explanation.

Respect yourself

You proclaimed not to play games. I opened up my heart and treated you like a queen. As we made love, you gazed into my eyes, telling me you were so happy that we were exclusive and that you wanted to see the world with me. You promised we'd make love on your rooftop come spring. We had intimate conversations about our pasts. I told you about my boy! Not many get to see that side of me. I made you laugh—I was real with you. We had the perfect first kiss. A memorable first nite. Does all this warrant you breaking up with me? Through a text message!? The amount of time spent together is irrelevant. Be it two days, two weeks, four months, eight years—you owe it to me to tell me face to face.

Four hours later, I got a message from her:

I'm a realist. You're an idealist.

December 15, 2012

Email from Bonnie

It doesn't bother me anymore, what you do with women- I've been hurt past my breaking point. Just when I thought you couldn't have done any worse, you did. You cheated on me with Mia or whatever. Angela at the bar or whatever and who knows who else. These are people you're not even close with now but i think your satisfaction also lay in the idea of 'sticking it to me'. You probably cheated on me when I was home with baby Zemi. Tired and completely alone. I always wondered why you showered so much.

I have a trusting heart and I don't enjoy being trampled on.

All my memories of us are becoming vapor. You really shouldn't have thrown me away the way you did. Zemi, too.

I have tried repeatedly to do the right thing with this situation, and you continue to let me down. If you could just, for once, commit to something (child support, friendship, etc.) and be consistent, I could trust you.

Right now, I cannot. You toss me aside when you are busy fucking someone else and then, when you find yourself alone again, you turn your lighthouse back on and let me in.

It's bullshit. It's made my heart grow hard and my husband is not getting all of me because of it.

So, please, don't keep fucking up.

It'll be a cold day for you when I finally turn my light off.

I don't know what you want. I can say now, though, that I don't see any dramatic changes in your life's choices. You are still doing the same shit when I met you. You can do right by Zemi if you do right by yourself. You shouldn't be living with three other people. You should get your own space. Work extra hours. If you don't want to help us out, I can't make you. But, that also gives you no right to see Zemi. Take a hundred bucks every month and invest in savings bonds

for him. That, you can give to us and know it will be his when he turns 18. He'll want to go to art school someday.

-Bonnie

December 16, 2012

Email to Bonnie

If you're over all of this, why do you keep writing about it? I do keep running back to seek your comfort. It's wrong and immature. That will cease. The only reason I told you about Mia was so that hopefully you would admit to your wrong doings too. You haven't delivered. But that's okay. You made my day yesterday.

Jose...

December 18, 2018

Email to Bonnie

Honestly this is tragic. I want to help and be a part of his life, but you are making it harder than it should be. How can I be assured what I do send his way is being given to him? It's best we never meet up again. What's the point? Wish Zemi a splendid Xmas for me. Even though I know you won't.

Jose...

December 18, 2012

Email to Bonnie

I only talk to you because Zemi is in your care. If he wasn't around, I wouldn't. The upshot of this will be you getting upset and pelt insensitive remarks my way like you always do and say how hurtful my words were and banish me from your world. Or you will act like it didn't bother you and tell me

that you're okay and happy without me or laugh in a condescending tone. Fine. You'll put icing on it by saying something like 'leave "US" alone.' I get sad when you say that, not because you've excluded me from your life, but because I've pissed off the gatekeeper who is my only access to Zemi. I am and have been trying Bonnie. Quit making this about you. Enough of this.

I bought him Peter Pan, The Wonderful Wizard of Oz and Brothers Grim for you to read as bedtime stories! I'm sure he'll love them as they will surely enrich his imagination. Take him to the Highline. There's a couple of spots where he could sit down and sketch landscapes or architecture. Take him to the MET. \$1. 'Nough said. I can only hope the book of mazes amazes him. He has a set of pencils for drawing and sketching and one for shading and contouring which should be used in tandem with the Barber book. The animal book could be thrown into the mix as well. DC Covergirls--women are alluring, dishy, foxy, mysterious and a handful; they are art. I hope he gets to appreciate their beauty by drawing them. You're his hero so he may create a character based on you. The dot book. That'll be my little secret.

...

December 26, 2012

Email to Bonnie

I didn't mail Zemi's gifts. Can I hand them to you instead? This Saturday? ...

January 19, 2013

Zemi—

A very pretty girl with a black bow on her hair walked up to the bar and ordered a vodka tonic. Stirred not shaken. I tugged on the bow. She turned to me and asked,

“Have you been lucky enough to have smelled in a dream?
To have actually smelled in the subconscious?”

‘Once,’ I told her.

“Tell me about it.”

‘Well, it’s pretty fucked up, so you’ll have to promise not to judge me.’

“I promise.”

‘I was watching TV with my mother. Both of us lay naked in bed. My dad, who was also naked, crawled out from underneath the bed, and made his way onto my mom, like a monkey in heat. I think he may have been clenching a bough with his teeth. As I scuttled off the bed, I crossed paths with his feet. I don’t have the words to describe that smell, but it was FOUL. The scent was so putrid it woke me up.’

She pulled me in toward her and gave me a kiss.

“Thanks” she said, then walked away.

She smelled of Tainted Love.

February 14, 2013
Email from Bonnie

I cannot meet you. My husband is at work and he has the phone. Repeat, HE has the phone so please contact me HERE today.

February 14, 2013
Email to Bonnie

No worries.
Let me drop off Zemi’s gifts today.
...

February 14, 2013
Email from Bonnie

I don't know about you coming to us. It is valentine's day after all. I may be inclined to wear red on my cheeks.

February 14, 2013
Email to Bonnie

So wear your rosy lips and cheeks within his bending sickles compass come. It'll be a drop off sort of thing. Be at your door and I'll give you Zemi's bag of treasure. ...

February 14, 2013
Email from Bonnie

You don't know where we live.

February 20, 2013
Email from Bonnie

Zemi is sick!

February 21, 2013
Email from Bonnie

He's got a fever. I put onions in his socks to draw it out.
Plenty of water and rest...

February 21, 2013
Email to Bonnie

Is there anything I can do to help him?

...

February 23, 2013

Zemi—

I used to think that if my girlfriend left me, it was a sign of weakness or to be perceived as weakness by the world. I've been on both ends of the spectrum and I've come to realize that no matter which side you're on, it looks bad either way. No amount of rationalizing or explaining or even analyzing will get you seen the same. People have opinions and those opinions fluctuate no matter what you do. It's a catch 22.

February 24, 2013

Zemi—

Fourth day sober.

February 25, 2013

Email to Bonnie

How is Zemi doing? I hope he's feeling better. How are you?
I have time off Tuesday and Wednesday. We can meet up for coffee and deserts.
Let me know how you are doing. Bye-Bye.

...

February 28, 2013

Email from Bonnie

Thank you. He is doing fine.

February 28, 2013

Email to Bonnie

Cool! That's all I ever hope for. You? How you holding up?

...

February 28, 2013
Email to Bonnie

Bonnie-

Would you please send me a recent foto of Zemi? Attached is the only one I have of him. I want to look at his eyes.

...

March 1, 2013

Zemi—

‘I want to be loved. I need attention. I want to be held, caressed, told everything will be alright, and made to feel like I am all that matters to you . The façade came down for both of us. Comfort levels kicked into high gear and that scared you. Or did you not like what you became?’

I couldn’t get Matilda out of my mind today. I wrote down what I wanted to tell her. I feel better now.

March 2, 2013

Zemi—

‘Why is it that I feel more confident and have a better outlook on
life when I drink on a regular basis?’

I’m now on my sixth day on the wagon and I feel like shit!

No excuses literally means NO EXCUSES. Just go along for the ride—those voices that tell me *I suck*, or *they won’t think I’m good enough* are background noise. The sparks of inspiration are fleeting moments.

‘How can I make them constant? Welcomed?’

Where’s the sense of my being proud of what I do?

Why can’t I embrace the way I’ve been built to think, speak, and behave?

When did I lose it? Did I ever have it?’

March 2, 2013
Email to Bonnie

You know, the more I do for Zemi I still get the cold shoulder from you. A picture Bonnie! A simple picture and that you deny. You're making this about you. I've come clean about everything and you haven't but the only reason I even put up with it is because you're my son's mother. Are you going to step up or keep holding grudges?

...

March 6, 2013
Email to Bonnie

Bonnie-

You haven't the slightest idea the sort of mental anguish you, the thought of you, your entity, the idea of you, Stanley oh Stanley--it's driving me crazy! But then I imagine I wouldn't be where I am or be the person I am because of you. If only you would come clean Bonnie all will be forgiven-between us-no judge no jury—only US! Own up! That's all I want! I was misled by you. You took me for a ride, and I didn't like that but worse, you stole my words. Ughh! How can you call yourself a writer and not respect the words of others? I thought I was your writer? That's what you said. And you took my words from me. How could you? You heartless bastard! I fucking hate you for that! Just come clean. Release me please! Let go of me.

March 7, 2013
Email from Bonnie

What are you talking about???

March 7, 2013
Email to Bonnie

My deepest apologies. Repressed anger was brimming last nite. Had to let it flow out.

...

March 7, 2013
Email from Bonnie

But, what does it mean?

March 7, 2013
Email to Bonnie

My journal. The one you confiscated.

...

March 7, 2013
Email from Bonnie

The journal? You've got to be kidding me....

Bonnie-

“You haven’t the slightest idea the sort of mental anguish you, the thought of you, your entity, the idea of you, Stanley oh Stanley—it’s driving me crazy!”

Is that you or the booze talking?

What mental anguish? How you felt then, feel now, or will feel is entirely up to you. I am not the source of your oscillating emotional death drive. Get a grip. You talk about mental anguish. I was living in a trailer with no heat, no electricity, driving a fucked up car with no windows, in winter, working two jobs and getting no time with my son!!!!

YOU CAN FUCK OFF you bastard. You have no idea, NO FUCKING CLUE, how much it hurt to put him in daycare so that I could have a job with which to shelter and feed him. The doctor visits I went to ALONE. The ear aches, the allergies. While, you were out taking acting classes and fucking anyone who smiled your way, all because you are insecure. All because you have a

grudge.

Insecure and Lonely.

Are you trying to create a vacuum between us because truth be told, I feel almost nothing for you at this point.

B

March 7, 2013
Email to Bonnie

You're right. I can't be complaining about my problems. They pale in comparison with what you had and are going through, but you still acted like a bastard toward me. And with time, maybe through Zemi, when he gets older, all the bad things you did not just to me but to every person you sand bagged will come back to bite you in your ass. And I hope I will be there to see the look on your face. Hey, maybe you can read an excerpt from my journal. It's content is way more interesting than anything you have ever written. ...

March 7, 2013
Email from Bonnie

I will not be seeing you anywhere.

March 16, 2013

Zemi—

I met your stepdad today.

Bonnie invited me to her show in Midtown. Overall, I thought it was okay. The young man she cast as the lead made the entire show worthwhile. If it hadn't been for him, it would have been a challenge to sit through the entire thing.

After curtain call, your stepdad thanked the patrons by the door as they exited the theatre. I waited for everyone to leave because I had a couple questions to ask that would require his undivided attention. For instance, I was interested to know his reasons for likening me to a dog.

When the theater emptied, I made my move.

'Hi, I'm Jose Luis. Zemi's father,' I said, shaking his hand. His hand went limp. The amiable semblance he greeted me with quickly faded and was replaced with one of disgust. He released my hand and walked away without saying a single word to me.

Love—
Dad ...

April 13, 2013

Zemi—

Bonnie invited me to a show in Brooklyn today. She told me that your artwork was being used as part of the production. You drew a unique crayon rendition of our country! It looked like something out of *Mikey's Follie* or *Steamboat Willie*. It vibrated. I'm so proud of you! Unfortunately, you were not in attendance. I'll catch you next time.

Love—
Dad ...

May 28, 2013
Email from Bonnie

hey...

May 29, 2013
Email to Bonnie

I need your apology for everything you did. I think about you and Zemi every day and every day I wish us three to be together, but it won't work until I get closure. The day you make peace with yourself will be the day we can move on and rebuild what is ours. Til then, my answer is no.

...

May 29, 2013
Email from Bonnie

I'm sorry to hear that you are the same paranoid, stubborn person you have always been.

May 29, 2013
Email to Bonnie

Deny it til you die, right?
Don't apologize.
I'm not paranoid.
I'm still going to support you in whatever you do. Come on! Let's start over with a clean sleight, man!

...

May 30, 2013
Email from Bonnie

I'm a fool to think I could be happy with someone who will always hang something over my head. I thought, well, I thought there was something else holding it together.

May 30, 2013
Email to Bonnie

I'm not holding anything over your head. That stuff actually happened.

...

June 5, 2013
Email to Bonnie

Bonnie-

I want to make us work. I can't take the uncertainty of all this anymore. Where do we begin?

...

June 14, 2013

Zemi—

Below is the message I wrote on your Birthday Card.

I received a text message from Bonnie this morning at 10:10.

Bay Ridge Avenue Station at noon. Off the R line.

Hot dog! I began to fizzle inside like a newly uncorked pop. I brushed my teeth, jumped in the shower to rinse off last nite's scent, put on my black boots and am making my way down now on the 1 (103rd stop at the moment).

You're finally getting your X-mas gifts. All them art supplies. Bad thing is they're been passed off as B-day gifts. This is exactly why the economy is in the state it's in, Zemi.

You'll be six years old on Monday. At 8:44p. (Okay. On the N) Well, I hope you've been having fun and more importantly smiling. Not a day's gone by that I didn't think of you. I want to hear your voice. I wouldn't know what to say to you. Call me anytime 347-xxx-xxxx. Happy sixth Zemi!

Love
Dad ...

June 14, 2013

Zemi—

Hey! Bonnie and I spent about an hour at Mocha Mocha Coffee in Bay Ridge after I handed her your gifts. Her show goes up next month and she couldn't stop beaming about it! She's taken great pride in it because she's not only the writer of the play, but the director as well. An invitation was extended my way. Oh, she drew a rough sketch of me with her ink thumb print stamped next to it on the back of the receipt. I will show it to you!

It was a great day! I'll be waiting by the phone to hear your thoughts about the gifts. See you later Zemi!

Love—
Dad ...

June 22, 2013

Zemi—

Bonnie put up her play for a competition in Washington Heights. I couldn't tell you what it was about if you put a gun to my head. No one did. One of the judges told her,

“We didn't know what to do with your play.”

There's a compliment in there somewhere.

Flashback



July 15, 2008

Zemi—

The following morning, my spirit dragged its body up from the mattress. My tolerance was wearing thin, Zemi, and Albuquerque wasn't fun for me anymore. I should be happy. I've got everything one needs to be content: you, a girl, a roof over my head, and food.

'Then how come I'm not?' I muttered to myself.

Feeling groggy, I tottered into the kitchen.

"He's been fed," Bonnie said, shoving water bottles and loose sheets of paper into her green backpack.

I screwed up my eyes, attempting to peer through the broken blind slat, but the mental haze that lingered behind my eyes prevented me from doing so.

'What time is it?' I asked in a low raspy voice.

"8:44!" she said, hurrying to the door. "I am late!"

'Well, why didn't you wake me up this morning?' I said. 'I could have helped.'

"Like you fucking care," she said dismissively.

Usually, such a comment from Bonnie is all that is needed to irk me for the rest of the day. In that moment, however, I recognized that victory—for this battle, at least—was staring me in the face, and I couldn't help but snigger.

“What’s so funny?” she asked.

‘Aren’t you past due for a *fuck you* and the slamming of a door by now?’ I remarked sarcastically.

She was, and she did. Happiness: it evanesced the mental haze behind my eyes and shone through.

I won’t lie to you, Zemi. What I said to Bonnie felt pretty fucking good. That insolent remark put me in such a great mood, that I wanted nothing else but to share that feeling with you.

‘You’re going to enjoy this movie,’ I said as I loaded up the DVD player. ‘Brando is really good in this one!’

I whipped myself up a bowl of Frosted Mini Wheats with two slices of white bread on the side and poured me a tall handsome glass of apple juice to wash it all down with. For the next couple of hours, we sat in the presence of greatness, enjoying the erotic drama that is *Last Tango in Paris*. Don’t you worry, Zemi. I made sure that your first viewing of this movie was carried out with the utmost discretion. Rest assure that if any perverted fascination with butter forges itself onto your personality, this movie is not to fault because I did cover your eyes.

Feeling revitalized, I raised the blinds and drew the patio door open so that nature’s light and breath would mingle with us. The living room, flooding with a warm glow emitting from Helios’s radiant crown, was suddenly rushed with a cool summer draught. Yes, nature accepted our invitation to mingle under one condition: that it played host to us.

‘I know where we can go, Zemi,’ I said as I carried you in my arms. ‘The Corrales Library!’

But first, it was time for your lunch.

With you in my arms, we waltzed across the kitchen floor, gathering all the necessary provisions needed for your meal along the way. By the end of our number, we had taken one can of beef ravioli from the pantry, and carrot puree, mashed beans, and a half a cup of whole milk from the fridge. Lately Zemi, you have been very fussy about what you eat and exceedingly vocal with your

sentiments. So, before you were fed, a discussion to remind you about proper table etiquette was had.

‘Okay Zemi,’ I said, holding a spoonful of ravioli about a foot from your mouth. ‘One piece of food at a time and chew with your mouth closed.’ You opened your mouth with anticipation as the spoon inched closer. But then, you abruptly swatted it with your left fist, spattering the floor with ravioli.

‘He’s my son, and I love him,’ I repeatedly told myself as I reloaded the spoon, this time with mashed beans.

I inched the spoon toward your mouth again, keeping an apprehensive eye on your mitts. To my relief, you accepted it. That relief, however, was short lived because when I tried to pull the spoon out, you clamped your chompers down, refusing to let go.

‘Zemi,’ I said sternly. ‘Let go of the spoon.’

You then took hold of the spoon, banged it several times on the tray like a drum stick, and flung it behind your back. This act of rebellion from you began flustering me, but that feeling was immediately overtaken by one of paternal pride. I beamed with pleasure, knowing in my heart that you wouldn’t be taking any shit from anyone when you’re older.

‘You’re a cheeky bugger,’ I said, proudly. ‘You know that?’

It took two plates of food to have you fed properly, because one of those servings wound up smeared or stuck on various places of your body. You had ravioli on your back!

‘How do you get ravioli on your back, Zemi!’

After a much needed warm bath, I applied baby lotion all over your body, slapped on a fresh diaper, and wrapped your *I am not a nugget* onesie on you. We napped, perfectly tranquil thereafter.

The quickest route to the library is through the Corrales Road Scenic Byway. We left your Buggy behind because the tires don’t get any friction on the soft dirt trail, which is the safest footpath to take. So, we opted for the baby carrier instead. I love taking you places on it because my heart beat resonates against your ear and I can repeatedly steal a kiss from you with impunity. As customary on our treks, two sandwich bags were filled with Pepperidge Farm Goldfish and your Sippy Cup had OJ poured to its brim. I took two water bottles myself, for this walk was much longer than the ones to Barnes and Noble. All these provisions were stowed in my backpack. The perimeters of

the footpath are lined with thick rows of cottonwoods, providing plenty of shade for us from the Albuquerquean sun, hovering directly above. The acequia, half full with water, winds alongside the cottonwoods like a dormant snake; its scales glistening in the sunlight.

Forty-five minutes later, we reached our destination. I checked the time. It was 1:45p.

‘We only have an hour, Zemi.’ I said, lifting you out of the carrier. ‘Let’s find a book to take home.’

The main hall boasts a small koi pond by the entrance, sitting below a sky light. The ceiling uses birch tree trunks for support beams and the red brick floor resembles a completed puzzle of tetrominoes that should have collapsed ages ago—rustic. We had no use for the baby carrier inside the library, so it was neatly stowed away in my backpack. With you in my arms, we ventured off into the Non-Fiction sector of the library.

As we strolled leisurely along the rows of shelved books, we came across a wooden bookcase that had a gilded sculpture of an owl perched atop. Your attention became fixed on a novel, leaning against the spiral grained back panel. You tossed your sippy cup to the floor and strained eagerly to grab it with both hands. On the cover was an elephant’s grey trunk; pale and wrinkled, resembling cracked sand and one maroon beady eye, mournfully staring at us. It was Lyall Watson’s *Elephantoms*.

‘Huh? You seem to be drawn to elephants,’ I thought, handing the book over to you.

I then crouched down to pick up your sippy cup when a book on the bottom shelf caught *my* eye. It sat on top of the row of books, like it didn’t belong with the others. I plucked it out and held it up before me. On its dandelion colored jacket was a penciled sketch of a man with white hair; his eyes looking inward.

“*The Prophet*,” read the cover. “By Kahlil Gibran.”

We sat down at a nearby bench with our chosen books. As you marveled at the elephant in the room, my soul was deeply touched by the beautifully written prose poetry of Gibran. With such ease and eloquence, he expounded on an array of topics apropos the essentials of our existence, evoking from my core the intrinsic beliefs about the human condition that I’ve been suppressing for I have been terribly apprehensive to embrace them. But, for

those few minutes that I was absorbed in his poetic prose, his words lit up my heart and I felt safe to be me again.

‘We can go home now, Zemi,’ I said pleasingly. ‘Our books have found us.’

Fresh conditioned air had never felt better than when it greeted us at home. Exhausted from our long trek, we laid down to rest on your bed with our prized books in hand. Moments later, I heard a faint distant sound of water running from the bathroom. I must have been too engrossed in Gibran’s words not to have noticed Bonnie enter the apartment. I checked the time. It was 3:38p.

‘Who else could it be?’ I wondered.

I turned to confer with you, but you were sound asleep. Gibran and I then got up from the mattress and proceeded cautiously toward the bathroom.

‘Bonnie?’ I said softly, rapping the door. ‘Is that you?’

There was no response.

‘Bonnie?’ I said louder.

Again, no response. I turned the door handle and let myself inside. Bonnie was bent over the sink, rinsing her mouth. By her side, on the edge of the counter, were her toothbrush and glass pipe, white ash smoldering still.

‘Hey! How was your day?’ I asked her.

‘Fine,’ she said, spitting out the water.

‘Check out the book I got from the library!’ I said, proudly holding it up. ‘Have you read it?’

‘How did you find out about that book?’ she asked, turning the faucet off, addressing my reflection on the mirror.

‘I—it was—a chance—,’ I sputtered, fumbling for the right words.

‘*Who* told you about that book?’ she sternly interjected.

It then dawned on me that I had naively walked into an interrogation.

‘Jesus fucking Christ,’ I said incredulously. ‘I’m not doing this with you right now.’

I marched out of the bathroom; her hot on my heels.

‘Which one of your *girls* told you about that book!?’ her voice now louder; leaden with accusatory tones.

My tolerance was once again being strained to its limit. The anger, that all-too-familiar feeling, swelled violently against the inner lining of my soul, widening the crack on its surface. I snapped.

‘It was the new one I met at the bus stop earlier!’ I shouted sarcastically. Then, just before Bonnie and I would get into another shouting match, you began screaming and wailing from inside your room.

“See what you’ve done?” she said contemptuously, rushing to your rescue.

The walls then closed in on me as those wretched god-forsaken thoughts reemerged. Not wanting to deal with them, I locked myself in the master bedroom with only Jack to keep me company. We didn’t see each other for the rest of that evening, Zemi.

The toxic environment that Bonnie and I created continued wreaking havoc the following morning. Had Bonnie not been scheduled to work, we would have persisted tormenting each other by way of strife and great amounts of hostility—consequences be damned. O! How I dreaded 3:30p.

You and I were building cabins with Lincoln logs when Bonnie’s car was heard pulling up front.

‘Fuck!’ I muttered to myself. ‘Here we go again.’

She was on her cell phone when she entered the apartment, talking loudly to the person on the other end. She also appeared to be in a cheerful mood. For a split second, the convivial guise she presented herself with rendered me utterly defenseless. For that longing of the armistice that I’ve craved—the one that would pave the way for us to flourish as a family—would cease being a Barmecidal reverie of mine and could be had. Ah! I am a dreamer. But I am not the only one.

“We’re still going to the movies tonite?” she voiced with that coquettish tone of hers into the mouthpiece.

The exact tone reserved for my ears only.

‘For my ears only,’ I echoed. ‘For my ears *only*.’

Those words knocked the wind out of my life, descending me farther down the realm of the shadow that was once I, leaving me dumbstruck with her brazen act of betrayal and plunged me into abject anguish.

But before I could retaliate such a shameless affront, I noticed how stressed you had become. Thus far, Bonnie and I had collectively failed to create a home conducive to a nurturing environment for your well-being. The spitefulness and antagonism that had become the staple of our family was having a negative effect on you and it pained me to see you in such a detrimental state. So, instead of confronting Bonnie, I decided to spend the rest of the day at

Barnes and Noble, thinking that would save you from witnessing yet another one of our foreseeable hostile interactions.

‘I’m going to revisit Nikki Sixx,’ I said, lifting
you up from the ground and caressing your back.

With Bonnie still talking on the phone, I handed you to her, got dressed, grabbed my lighter and cigs, and left for the bookstore.

I came back home by nitefall. The apartment was dark and felt oddly tranquil.

‘Are you guys home?’ I wondered to myself.

I walked across the living room, side stepping your toys strewn all over the floor, and slowly opened the door to your bedroom. I found you in a peaceful deep slumber with your plush elephant tucked in your arm; pressed up against your breast.

‘I’m home, Zemi,’ I said softly, kissing you goodnite.

A smile formed on your face, lighting up the room with its radiant glow and a faint chuckle was then innocently issued forth.

‘You must be dreaming with elephants,’ I said, chuckling to myself.

I considered sleeping by your side, but something, I don’t know what, told me to be with Bonnie. So, I left you to your dream and headed over to the master bedroom.

Bonnie was also in a deep slumber, but taking up only half of the mattress. Taken aback by her allusive gesture of peace, I struggled making sense of its meaning and deliberated over the probable consequences of my interpretation. It didn’t take long for me to decide to forgo the verbal ambush that undoubtedly awaited me after I brushed against the mattress. But, ah! I am a dreamer, Zemi.

I removed all clothes except for my underwear and quietly lay down on the empty half of the mattress, settling beside her. But before I closed my eyes to drift off into the subconscious, Bonnie turned over and faced me. Her eyes, those gorgeous brown eyes of hers, got a powerful hold on me. A mesmerizing stare it was that drew me in through the black abyss surrounded by the tempestuous russet sea that are her gorgeous brown eyes. Her gorgeous brown eyes adored me with nothing less than unconditional love; much like when we first met. And it was then that I remembered. It was then that I remembered the unbridled passion that keeps pulling us back into each other’s arms. It was then that I remembered the coquettish pose she struck with a mariachi hat for me during last year’s Valentine’s dinner. It was then that I remembered her

showering me with kisses for no reason other than she missed me. It was then that I remembered.

The soft glow of the moon spilled in through a broken slat, teasing our vulnerability as soft moans filled the air with carnal yearnings. But her scent. It betrayed her, and I no longer felt safe. And it was then that I remembered. It was then that I remembered her treacherous deeds. It was then that I remembered the depth that her words,

“Now get out!”

cut me. It was then that I remembered *him!* It was then that I remembered. Smoldering with indignation, we glared at each other in absolute stillness, reverting to the normalcy that is withering our family away. But we’re not the only ones.

All of a sudden, Bonnie hastily gathered her clothes that lay crumpled on the floor and ran into the bathroom, sniffing along the way, slamming the door shut behind her.

“Boom!” went the bathroom door.

The booming sound carried over across the living room, in through your bedroom, and was thrust into your ears, startling you. In a dart of urgency, I dashed into your bedroom to soothe your nerves, but no matter how much I reassured you that everything would be okay, the intensity of your wails amplified. The apartment was tranquil no more. Then in one fell swoop, Bonnie callously barged in on us, seized you from my arms and took you into the master bedroom, slamming the door shut behind her.

‘Boom!’ went the master bedroom door.

Feeling like an utter fuck-up and like my sanity was slipping away from me, I sobbed uncontrollably, trying to make sense of what had just happened. No matter how hard I tried to make sense of it all, however, the gaps left over by her lies, manipulations and deceptions sent my mind reeling further out of control. Burdened by the lethargy of a heavy broken heart, I collapse onto the floor, feeling worthless and beaten. Then, that all-too-familiar surge of anger swelled up violently against the inner lining of my soul, ultimately shattering me: my tolerance had finally been strained past its limit! As I picked up the pieces to my broken soul, your well-being—which was needlessly being wasted away—impressed itself on my consciousness along with a solution to salvage it from further harm.

‘No!’ I shouted, pleading to the gods. ‘There must be another way!’
But alas! My pleas fell on deaf ears. I drank myself into a stupor.

Chapter 8



July 31, 2013

Zemi—

Below is a thread of text messages between Bonnie and myself (mine end with ...). Her initial message took me by surprise.

‘Was she now divorced? Separated?’

To me, that was irrelevant. What I saw was an opportunity to see you. So, I decided to act in accordance with her wishes.

July 20, 2013

I am going to start seeing other people and I would like you to be the first.

Okay ...

Nothing serious. Let's just have a night out.

I like that idea. What did you have in mind? ...

Anywhere next Thursday or Friday. 25th or 26th.

Friday. ...

She then got ahold of me on Friday the 26th to ask if we could meet on Saturday.

July 26, 2013

What's the plan?

It's your nite. Call it ...

Can we meet after 7?

Yes. Have you decided where we'll be meeting? ...

Can we meet at the Brooklyn Bridge Park Saturday night?

I'm working Saturday. ...

All day?

After 7 I am. ...

I can meet after 4 on Tuesday.

Perfect! ...

She messaged me the following Sunday to let me know that Tuesday was a no go.

I ended up working a shift at the sports bar Sunday so I couldn't meet her, but was

willing to on Monday.

July 28, 2013

My husband works Tuesday. Let's meet tonight or tomorrow.

I cannot meet Tuesday because I will have Zemi, but I will be in Manhattan tomorrow night.

Okay ...

July 29, 2013

Text message to Bonnie

What time will you be in the city? ...

I didn't hear from her on Monday or Tuesday.

'I wonder what happened?'

August 10, 2013

Zemi—

We tried again the following week. Everything was going well until—well, read for yourself.

August 7, 2013

Meet me at the MET at 2p ...

My husband lost our MetroCard. It will have to be later.

I lost mine once. On the bus of all places. Call 511 to get a reimbursement for the days you didn't use it. ...

I will have a MetroCard tomorrow. I can come by your work for a drink?

You could do that only I won't be working tomorrow. I work Friday and Saturday. ...

Oh well see you tomorrow then!

Yeab! ...

August 8, 2013

Let's meet up at around 8? ...

Zemi got sick today. I will see what i can do.

No. Stay with him. Stick your hand out the window--raincheck ...

I really want to see you. What are you doing tomorrow before work?

I'll be reading. I can only meet for a couple of hours. Anytime between noon and 3p. ...

No problem. I just need one hour.

Hey! Let's go to the Highline tomorrow. Let's meet on 9th Ave and West 23rd at 1. ...

August 9, 2013

Will you be there at 1p? ...

A little after. What train do I take?

Take the N\R train up to Barclays Center. Transfer to the A. Take the A train to 14th Street. Have ten dollars with you ...

I don't have money. Really we are broke.

Don't worry about it then. I'll meet you at that stop ...

On 23 street.

23rd and what? ...

8 avenue. Is that wrong?

No. I'll be there in 10 minutes. ...

I can go back to w 4.

Stay there. I'll come to you ...

August 9, 2013

Zemi—

Wow.

Bonnie and I were having a great time together at the Highline up until we sat down. Once seated, a rustling was heard from the bushes. It made Bonnie edgy. She braced herself like DEA agents were about to jump out of the bushes and place her in hand cuffs. It took her a few minutes to calm down.

Later on, she asked me if the negative tension between her and your stepdad affected you even though you were in a different room.

Yes, it does. He'll absorb it,' I told her.

Then she vented about her money problems and inability to get food stamps. She seemed frustrated, so to put her at ease I told her how to qualify for food stamps. She then snapped at me.

“Don't you fucking tell me how to handle my financial affairs!”

My sympathetic nervous system shut my mind off and told it,

‘I got this babe,’

then rose me up to my feet and immediately got me away from her. It didn't give me the opportunity to say goodbye. I literally ran away from her. I ran down 23rd Street without looking back. My sights were set on the subway station on 23rd and 7th Ave. I cannot explain why I ran away. I am glad I did. I guess my body knew what would happen if I stayed so it saved me from the inevitable verbal abuse—or worse—that was to come.

She hasn't changed. I'm done with her. I don't want to see her again. I am worried about your well-being Zemi. Stay strong, my son. Remember to laugh!

Love—
Dad ...

August 19, 2013
Text message from Bonnie

I want to see you Wednesday. I won't talk of food stamps and money.

August 27, 2013
Text messages from Bonnie

You want to blow me off. That's fine. But you sent a text saying you emailed me, and I did not receive it. If there is something I need to know then spill it.

Jose... What can I do to make it better? I am sorry.

November 21, 2013
Zemi—

Below is another thread between Bonnie and myself. Know that the only reason I got ahold of her was because I wanted to give you a gift card.

'Why is she making it difficult for me to see you?'

November 19, 2013

*Are you still receiving mail at your NYC address through your PO Box in Albuquerque?
I want to give Zemi a gift card. ...*

No. We closed that down.

Where can I send it to? ...

What is it?

A gift card for him to use at JCPenney. ...

Why JC Penney? You can send it to my mom's. That's where we will be.

So he can get winter clothes. ...

November 20, 2013

Email to Bonnie

Zemi's gift card is in the mail. It's got \$100 in it. ...

December 23, 2013

Zemi—

Below is another thread of text messages between Bonnie and myself. We actually had a good time together at FAO Schwartz! I bought you a bag of Gummy Dizzy Bears, Zemi. Hope you liked them!

December 22, 2013

Did Zemi ever get his gift card? ...

Yes. But I hesitate to go to jc Penney in times square. He wants an elephant for Christmas, and I don't know where to get that.

There's a JC Penney in Herald Square. 6th Ave between 32nd and 33rd. I can get the elephant for him if it's okay with you. ...

Where? FAO Schwartz? I will be in Manhattan tomorrow. we can keep in contact. I want to find elephant food for his elephant, maybe Dylan's candy store?

Yes. That would be the best place to find a toy elephant. I've never heard of Dylan's candy store. ...

Only place I know with every candy known to mankind. I think I can get a whole bag of green candy for his pet elephant.

That's very good to know. He likes elephants! ...

Let's meet at FAO in the afternoon. The candy bar is close by.

Okay. Can we meet up around noon? ...

I cant. It's okay. I will go to jc Penney and look for an elephant there. Take care.

I want to go. What time can you make it? ...

After one. I don't want you to rush it. Two would be best and we can just go to Penney since you already got a gift card. Why spend more money?

Because it's Zemi! ...

September 11, 2014

Zemi—

I haven't been able to get ahold of Bonnie in almost two months. Below is the last thread of text messages we had. She hasn't responded to any of my texts or emails since. I'm getting a bad feeling again.

'Why would she go cold on me all of a sudden!?'

July 6, 2014

I'm free on Wednesday. Can you make time for me to give you Zemi's birthday presents? ...

July 7, 2014

Tomorrow is the only day I have free. Would you please mail it to my mom's? It's better for me.

Tomorrow I've got to be in at work at 3:30p. Meet me at the Bay Ridge Ave station before then so I can give them to you. Just hello- goodbye. ...

It would have to be after the German game.

Come on Bonnie, work with me here. I'm only asking you to give me two minutes of your time. Anytime between 5a and 2p will work for me. ...

Let me find out when the game starts. It may be 4. In which case I can meet you at 1.

The game starts at four. ...

So, are we meeting tomorrow at 1p? ...

Ok.

Great! 1p. Bay Ridge Ave Station. See you then. ...

July 8, 2014

Get off on 86 street instead. Two stops after bay ridge avenue.

I will. ...

I'm here. ...

Below is the final thread of text messages between Bonnie and myself. They occurred a few hours after I gave her your birthday presents. It was a friendly exchange and we shared a few laughs. I just didn't appreciate her remark about my signature.

The 'dad' signature is not right. Why are you trying to confuse the boy. Just sign Jose from now on. I cannot show him the book. I am sorry. Thank you for the other gifts. He likes them a lot. :) and thank you for coming out of the way to deliver them. Cheers.

I do love your choice of gifts. Thank you.

I am glad he liked them! I knew he would. I'd like for him to be familiar with the poem. There's a website on line that carries it. Would you read it to him please? And thank you for accepting his gifts. It meant a lot to me. ...

You are welcome. I do save the cards and letters for when he is ready to know. For now, I am enjoying his innocence and curiosity. Scored very high on his end of year exam. Home school was a great success.

That's great news. What soccer team is he rooting for? Germany?

Absolutely. They may just win with Silva and Neymar out.

They just might. I'm also pulling for Germany. Argentina versus Germany as a final would be awesome. ...

Definitely! Although I really liked Columbia. Just no Holland.

Definitely no Holland. ...

Totally domination! 5! Hurrah Deutschland!

Flashback



Friday—July 18, 2008
3:17p

Zemi—

‘Where did she hide my car key!?’ I said in desperation, turning
the house upside down.

I rummaged through Bonnie’s clothes, burrowed through your playpen, and
rooted around every crevice in our apartment.

‘Did she throw it away!? Is it on her person!?’

Then, as I groped the innards of the narrow wall cabinet above the range hood,
I found a few loose bills tucked away in the dark shadows. It was Bonnie’s stash
of money. Forty seven dollars they totaled.

The door knob to the front door then rattled.

‘Shit! She’s home early!’ I said as a wave of panic swept over me.

Without thinking, I shoved the forty seven dollars into my pocket, closed the
cabinet door and like an ostrich, stuck my head inside the top freezer, concealing
the guilty look on my face.

“Where’s Zemi,” she asked as she dropped her green
backpack on the counter, sifting through a bundle of envelopes in her hands.

‘In his room, sleeping,’ I said, reappearing with the ice cube tray in my hand.
I took Jack, who was perched on the refrigerator, then dropped a couple of ice
cubes into a clean water glass.

‘Want one?’ I asked, pouring myself a drink.

“No,” she said, her eyes fixed upon an envelope. “This is for you.”

Without having had acknowledged me for that entire time, Bonnie dropped a white baronial mini envelope on the counter then proceeded making her way to your bedroom. I leaned over the counter, craning my neck to make sure Bonnie had her back to me and once she did—she bent down to lift you off the mattress—I hastily returned the forty seven dollars to where I had found them, absolving myself from guilt. As I sipped my drink, thinking of other places where Bonnie may have hidden my car key, a novel idea materialized in my mind, overshadowing the rest.

‘The phonebook!’ I proclaimed to myself.

Carrying the mini envelope and drink in my hand, I hurried to the master bedroom and locked myself inside. On the closet floor, with two shoe boxes resting on top, was the Albuquerque phone book. Fearing that Bonnie may press her ear against the door, I played *Axis Bold as Love* on the CD player to muffle the conversations I was about to have.

For the next fifteen minutes, I called all the locksmiths located near our apartment and got estimates. The cost to have a replacement car key made ranged from fifty to eighty dollars.

‘Shit,’ I thought, now worried. ‘I’m short.’

I began thinking of ways in which I could quickly cover the difference: hawking my guitar, donating plasma—but doing that would have required giving Bonnie an explanation. No, I needed to be furtive about how I was to acquire the difference.

Reaching for my drink, my eyes came across the white baronial mini envelope. I’d been preoccupied with the car key that I had forgotten about it. I thought it strange that someone had written me because it had been a year since I’d last corresponded with anyone.

‘Who wrote me?’ I wondered, inspecting the name linked with the return address.

It was from Licha, my mom’s spouse. I put my drink down and tore the envelope open along its shortest side, shaking the contents out. A single wire-bound memo notebook sheet fluttered to the floor. Written on it, with pencil, was one sentence:

“En caso de que lo necesites.”

Confused about the meaning behind her message, I shook the envelope again, but this time three green notes slid out, landing by my feet. I gazed at them in astonishment, believing that my eyes were playing a trick on me.

‘No way!’ I thought, picking them up from the floor, holding them before my eyes.

Mouth agape with incredulity, I became flabbergasted by Licha's fortuitous timing as I added up the different denominations: thirty-five dollars. With both Bonnie's and Licha's money, I now had enough to get a spare key made.

When luck or fate—or whatever you wish to call it—blesses us, we tend to be grateful. It's a wonderful feeling to have when that *stroke* manifests a desirable advantageous outcome. But at that moment, I felt nothing even remotely close to that. I felt sickened by myself and it broke my heart knowing that our days together were now numbered.

Sunday evening—as the waning gibbous moon, glowing mightily above us—subsumed within a starry speckled sky—I raided Bonnie's stash of money. I made out with a lighter haul of only twenty dollars.

'Fuck it! This will have to do,' I said definitively.

You and Bonnie were asleep in the master bedroom, so I had enough reason to believe that she wouldn't suspect any stealthy activity from my end. How foolish and naive of me to have believed such a thing could ever be true.

The green backpack that Bonnie took to work was actually mine. I had loaned it to her two months ago. It was my sole companion on the countless times I drifted through the streets of Albuquerque and El Paso and while I commuted the two hundred and sixty six miles between the two cites on a bus. The only items in it were a pen/pencil, cigarettes, and your first journal. There was a lot of history between us and last nite I took them back.

Zemi, when reclaiming your backpack, the foreign items it carries must be discarded if your intention is to have a fresh start. And mine was. When I emptied out the contents within on the kitchen table, the last ounce of respect I held for Bonnie began to vanish.

Condoms.

She was carrying condoms in *my* backpack! For one terrible moment, my imagination hurtled me into the center of a seedy vestibule, where a wraparound row of floor to ceiling window panes prominently showcased every possible scenario in which a condom could be used for. I looked away in sheer disgust, but not fast enough to have salvaged that final ounce.

Just then, I heard the bedroom door open.

"What are you doing?" asked Bonnie in her usual interrogatory tone, standing behind me.

Terror stricken, I found myself rooted to the spot for I was caught red handed.

'I want this back,' I said, holding up my backpack.

Like a tiger stalking her prey, she examined me with a mistrustful eye; one that suspected an ulterior motive. As she inched closer to me, I lowered my gaze toward the floor and braced myself like an infant about to receive much more than just a terrible scolding. Stopping within an inch from my body, her brown

eyes glared at me with glints of intimidation. I glanced over at the kitchen table, hoping that the condoms were out of sight. But they weren't. And she spotted them.

"Why do you have to be such a fucking jerk, huh?" she hissed, glaring back at me.

'I'm sorry,' I said, riddled with fright.

She glowered at me menacingly for what seemed like ages before she finally tore her eyes away and stormed back into the master bedroom. Heart-broken and panic-stricken, I was quick to take refuge in your bedroom where I once again found relief in uisce beatha.

On Monday, I woke up at 6:17a, alone in your bedroom. I slowly sat up on the mattress bleary-eyed, feeling groggy and aching all over. I grabbed hold of Jack to kill what little was left. It wasn't a lot.

'About yay much, you know?'

Even though I killed Jack, it wasn't enough to numb the pain of what was to come next. In fact, I didn't believe any amount would have been enough to numb an already dead soul, but I emptied the bottle regardless.

As I made my way across the living room, the faint sound of running water could be heard coming from the shower. Bypassing the bathroom, I entered the master bedroom and lay down on the floor beside the mattress, caressing your arm until you started to stir.

'Good morning, Zemi,' I said softly, trying not to startle you.

Fighting back tears, I beamed at you with unconditional love and took in all of your essence. You then smiled at me, Zemi, and we giggled together like we did after having saved the fashion industry that one day.

'That was fun, wasn't it?' I said nostalgically, kissing your forehead.

I gently took you in my arms and into the kitchen where we made breakfast for us all.

Dressed and ready for work, Bonnie joined us about thirty minutes later. She made no attempts to look at me, nor I at her, because the animosity from last nite lingered heavily still. But I cared not for any of that, for my undivided attention was solely given to you. I sat there, engrossed in memorizing your features that my breakfast was left untouched and I missed Bonnie leaving for work.

For the remainder of the morning we kept to our routine except I held you for longer, bombarded you with kisses, and we laughed—oh! how we laughed! So much we laughed that when it was time for your nap, you were already asleep in my arms as I gently placed you on the mattress. You were smiling. You were happy.

I took the phonebook out and dialed the locksmith. He showed up at the door an hour later, and within fifteen minutes he handed me a replacement key for my car. I checked the time. 2:15p. I then went about rounding up my belongings. After having done that, I waited for Bonnie to get home.

She pulled up in her crimson pearl 1996 Infinity i30 as Gnarl Barkley's *Gone Daddy Gone* blasted from the sound speakers. *Gone Daddy Gone*.

'What a strange tune to be playing right now,' I thought.

Ominous clouds, pregnant with forsaken promises and commitments, overcast the Albuquerquean sky. Deadened with a heavy heart, I put my cigarette out in the ashtray and went into the bedroom to wake you. Securing you in my arms, I felt the warmth of your body and gently pressed your head against my breast so you could recognize the rhythm of my heart. You did.

On our way to the front door, we passed Bonnie as she was placing her keys on the kitchen counter.

'Where are you taking him?' she asked suspiciously.

'Oh, um—we didn't get a chance to step out of the apartment today,' I said, holding back tears. 'We won't be long.'

As we walked across the parking lot, I could no longer hold back my tears. I only managed to get us to the wooden water crossing before becoming completely undone, for the painful reality of the moral transgression I was about to commit began filling me with profound feelings of utter shame and self-condemnation. Pressing you closer up against my breast, not wanting to let go of you, raindrops began to fall from the heavens, steadily drowning us in forsaken promises and commitments.

'I'm sorry, Zemi,' I whispered into your ear, shuddering with remorse. 'I'm sorry.'

When we got back to the apartment, Bonnie was seated at the kitchen table. I avoided making eye contact as I placed you in the walker beside her.

"Where did you take him?" she snapped.

With one final tender gaze at you—adoring you, Zemi Adore—I drew my eyes close to yours, cupping your face with my hands and kissed the windows to your soul, your nose, cheeks, forehead, and lips: goodbye. Then as if in a trance, I rose up to my feet, grabbed my cell phone from the kitchen table, and walked out the front door.

A broken man walked out the front door, having been stunned by his own actions and climbed into his car. I walked out moments later, lagging behind. The broken man put the car in reverse and drove a few feet when the windshield cracked. We turned our attention to the front and found Bonnie, absolutely livid, seizing rocks from the rock bed and flinging them at us. The

broken man, unable to feel anymore hurt and pain inflicted on him by her assaults, absorbed her rancorous blows and sped off toward I-25.

On the highway, an oppressive emptiness took residence inside my heart as I stared blankly down the road. Everything I cast my eyes upon was lacking in essence; meaning; purpose—life. Unbeknownst to me, my hands were trembling, and my mouth was parched. I pulled over to the shoulder, got out of the car and collapsed to my knees.

‘I abandoned my son!’ I wailed up at the grey skies. ‘I abandoned my son!’

Chapter 9



September 12, 2014
Text message to Bonnie

Are you and Zemi alright? ...

September 13, 2014
Text message to Bonnie

Have you read my emails?

Are you having trouble withdrawing Zemi's money? ...

October 2, 2014
Text message to Bonnie

I noticed on my bank records that you withdrew Zemi's child support money from an ATM in El Paso. Are you now residing there? ...

October 12, 2014

Zemi—

I had an epiphany the other nite about my purpose on this earth. Inspired, I wrote the following:

I was pacing back and forth on the roof-top of my apartment complex while I anxiously puffed on my cigarette. Densely saturated grey clouds scudded across New York City's dusking sky. Souging frigid winds gusted through the branches of the trees along the sidewalks. They zipped up the downpipes attached to the façade of the edifice and penetrate into my bones. I trembled as I reluctantly stared at the tip of the sword. The very one I'd steered clear from for many years and now, it had me. Cornered and up against a wall I could no longer run. I flicked the cigarette butt off to the side and began assessing the situation I was in.

It had been a year since I last pursued an acting job and making it as an actor was the reason I had moved to New York City. I was unemployed and had been collecting unemployment checks for the past three months. Insomnia kept me up at night while depression put me down during the day. I was angry at the world which consequently made others keep their distance from me and too unwilling to take greater risks because I was full of fear. My family was 2,200 miles away at a time when I needed them most and I coped with the stresses of life by indiscriminately drinking alcohol and smoking marijuana on a daily basis. I had a problem.

The scales fell from my eyes and I regained my eyesight. Shortly thereafter, the rain began to pour down as I cried.

October 31, 2014

Zemi—

I am back in El Paso for good!

December 13, 2014

Zemi—

It's always been a great pleasure of mine to create art from scratch with you in mind. It's special. One of a kind, like its muse. Telesich. You've inspired yet another one. Hope you like it.

Residing in Fool's Paradise these past six years—Music on my mind—sounds like manouche jazz
Amy Cole offbeat Green Plush Elephant—on stilts/soaring above/twinkle in its eye
Cellulose Camel matchstick in its mouth saturated with patterns of concentric circle striations/cranium
Pulled back by cunning Judith served on a silver platter/please do express yourself Amerighi

Llama, llama red pajama
Winogrand's Street Theatre shot with Kodak Brownie posthumously by Vivian Maier—Shutter Sound
Aristotle riveted by Socrates' silhouette butterfly as water trickles down through an underground grotto
A girl buried her head into Balthus's vest front at a window drops her lotus flower on the sooty floor
Helios descends over a dense canopy casting a chiaroscuro on the ashes of the phoenix/Rise

Dad ...

P.S. be happy!

December 24, 2014
Text message to Bonnie

Bonnie, this is my new number. 915-xxx-xxxx

Jose ...

January 27, 2015
Email/Text message to Bonnie

Bonnie,

On Wednesday, I will meeting with a lawyer to begin the process of exercising my rights to spend time with Zemi. I will not be attempting to take him away from you. I only seek visitation with him. Call/text me if you would like to meet with me to discuss the matter in person.

915-xxx-xxxx

Jose ...

February 1, 2015
Email/Text message to Bonnie

Bonnie,

I hired a lawyer this morning.

Jose...

February 9, 2015
Email/Text message to Bonnie

Bonnie,

You'll be receiving a document from my lawyer this week. The only address I have is your mom's. I don't want to ask anyone where your current address is. Not behind your back. Is there an address they can send the documents to? Call 915-xxx-xxxx. Ask for Shannon and let her know your address.

February 15, 2015
Text message to Bonnie

Will you not be withdrawing Zemi's child support money from his account anymore?

...

June 17, 2015
[birthday card for Zemi]

1. I hope you received plenty of hugs.
2. I hope you smiled.
3. I hope you induced a few smiles.
4. I hope you laughed so hard that your belly ached.

5. I hope your mind spoke its mind.
6. I hope a cloud took the shape of your favorite dessert.
7. I hope you found a dollar in your pant pocket.
8. I hope your wish comes true!

Happy eighth Zemi!

October 14, 2015

Zemi—

I'm scared. I can't remember the last time I wrote you. It's been at least one year I think. I arrived last Halloween malnourished, emotionally unstable, and thinking of myself as an utter failure. I remember the plane touching down on the tarmac was precisely the moment I felt such deep hatred toward this town for what I had endured the last time I was here. I was tempted to demand that the pilot turn the plane back around to New York City. I wanted nothing to do with this town. I still have a difficult time shaking off certain images and thoughts from my time here with Bonnie.

‘Remember the epiphany I had on that rooftop?’

A few months later, I found my true calling in life. I'm going to be a Mental Health Counselor. Since UTEP offers a Master's Degree in that field, I am finishing up my Bachelor's so that I can apply for the program. So far, I have completed four of the six courses. I will graduate in December! I will then attend EPCC and earn an Associate's Degree in Psychology and Philosophy. My goal is to have at least a basic understanding of Psychology before I enter the Master's Program and Philosophy, I believe, will help expand my mind. I expect to be back at UTEP by Fall 2017.

Last June, my hubris unwittingly led me to rehab. Allow me to explain. The thought of becoming a Mental Health Counselor uncluttered my mind and it became crystal clear what needed to be done. At the time, I hadn't drunk in about six months. In my mind, that was all the qualifications I needed to help addicts overcome their struggle with illegal substances. I, who didn't have a problem by the way, would usher my unfortunate contemporaries out of their darkness and into a happy fulfilling life. But first, I needed to find a mentor to

model and to help me hone my skills. I confidently walked into a rehab center and asked to speak to the person in charge. After I explained my mission to him, he allowed me to sit-in group sessions twice a week. After about the third week, it dawned on me.

‘What these folks talk about sounds a whole lot like what I went through.

I think I have a problem.’

Technically, I wasn’t in rehab because I wasn’t admitted to the place. I was more like an outpatient who attended group sessions twice a week for about three months. Shortly after my realization, I was invited to an AA meeting. At first, I felt uncomfortable and wanted to leave. After my initial resistance subsided, I simply listened to all the wonderful stories of redemption and rebirth. I wanted that. So, I got a sponsor and started to work the 12-Steps.

Now, let me backtrack to the beginning of the year. On January 28, 2015 I hired a lawyer to represent me. I am seeking visitation rights to see you. A court date has been set for next month. By the looks of it, we will meet soon Zemi! It feels so great and refreshing to write you again! All I do I study and work. I needed this and will continue to do this as much as I can. This is the start of a new chapter. I must have waited this long to write for a reason.

‘We’ll soon be finding out what that is won’t we?’

Good nite Zemi!

November 23, 2015

Zemi—

Bonnie never showed up to court. Instead, she faxed in ten reasons why my case should be dismissed. I couldn’t believe she actually submitted these lies to court! Read them.

Motion for Dismissal

Respondent, Bonnie Ackermann, hereby moves the court to dismiss this case for lack of personal jurisdiction over the Respondent. I also believe it would be detrimental to the mental, emotional and most likely physical welfare of the child to allow visitation by the Petitioner in whatever state. The bases for this motion are set for in the accompanying memorandum.

Respectfully,
Bonnie Ackermann Respondent (Pro Se)

Memorandum in Support of Motion to Dismiss

I am over eighteen years of age, of sound mind, and am otherwise qualified to testify to the facts and opinions set forth below. All of the opinions rendered herein are based on my personal knowledge and information.

1. I do not submit to the jurisdiction of the state of Texas by consent.
2. I have not been personally served with a citation in the state of Texas.
3. Mr. Jose Luis Paez (“Petitioner”) and I have never been married nor engaged to be married. The child was not conceived nor born in the state of Texas.
4. Texas was not the child’s home state when the proceeding commenced, nor was it his home state for six months prior. His home state was and currently is New York, where he resides and is registered with the state board of education.
5. My financial circumstances will not allow me to travel to and from El Paso for these proceedings, nor to afford attorney’s fees. My husband, son and myself cannot afford to relocate to El Paso County for the convenience of the Petitioner.
6. I live and work in New York and was a resident in the fall of 2014 when Mr. Paez and I last communicated. Mr. Paez should have been fully aware of this when he filed with the El Paso Courts, since at that time he was also a resident of NYC.
7. The Petitioner had me alter the child’s name and sign the child’s certificate and acknowledgment of paternity under duress. I have already submitted a sworn statement regarding this to the New Mexico Vital Records and Health Statistics office.
8. Mr. Paez is bringing suit seven years after abandoning myself and my child without resources in Albuquerque, NM in 2008. Mr. Paez had been unemployed for several months after his employer discovered that he had purchased alcohol for minors.
9. I do not feel it would be safe to submit my home address to public record, as Mr. Paez has verbally and physically abused me in the past.

This includes stomping on my bare feet, spitting on me, pushing, and choking me while holding the infant as a shield. He neglected and endangered my son by yelling at him and leaving him alone for hours at a time.

10. Mr. Paez abandoned myself and my son in 2008 and had us locked out of our apartment. I spoke to the New Mexico Legal Aid Office about filing for abandonment (NM Stat 30-6-1), battery against a household member (NM Stat 30-3-15), and pursuing termination of parental rights (NM Stat 32A-4-28). The petitioner could not be located however and did not return to the state after this. He provided no forwarding address or phone number.

Conclusion

El Paso County is not the appropriate venue for this case, if there is one. I believe it would be in the best interest of the child and the Court to dismiss the case. There is absolutely no parent-child relationship with the Petitioner. There is, however, a strong parent-child relationship with my husband of six years who has always treated my son like his own and provided for him in every way for seven of my son's eight years.

Respondent respectfully requests that this court enter an order dismissing the petitioner's case.

Thank you for your time.

Respectfully submitted,

Bonnie Ackermann

Respondent (Pro Se)

‘What is she doing!?’

You don't live in New York City anymore, Zemi. You're in El Paso.

‘Also, didn't she say that *home school was a great success for you?*

I had her alter your last name and acknowledgment of paternity under *duress?* The day you were born, both of us spoke to a nurse who asked us how we wanted your name to appear on your birth certificate. I gave her the final say of adding her last name after mine. She decided that only mine would appear

on your birth certificate. When you were about five or six months old, I took you to a clinic to have a paternity test administered. Bonnie was not there.

‘Purchased alcohol for minors?’

That’s also a lie. #9 is flagrantly untrue and the bit about me using you as a shield is preposterous. The only ounce of truth in this libelous piece of literature of hers lies in the first sentence of #8 and in the bit about me having spat at her.

You know, for someone who claims to be a writer this memorandum sure was a let-down.

‘This was the best her imagination could come up with?’

Getting you back in my life won’t be as easy as I thought it would, Zemi. During the World Cup, she was mostly affable with me. Then, for no apparent reason she completely cut off ties with me and now committed perjury. It’s infuriating that someone can lie with impunity. She can’t do that, Zemi. She won’t get away with it.

February 14, 2016

Zemi—

I wasn’t allowed to see your mom’s show earlier today at a venue that caters to artists in Durangito Neighborhood. Right before the show begun, the owner told me that she didn’t want me in there. I can’t do this clandestine bullshit behind people’s backs. I’m not a stalker. I have too much pride and ego to hide. I *wanted* her to see me. I wanted *everybody* to see me. Still, it hurt a lot. She really doesn’t want me around you. My sponsor tells me I still have feelings for her. Maybe. I do. He says that’s why it still hurts me when she pulls those types of stuns. I imagine she still has feelings for me as well. If she didn’t, she’d let me see you and not give me a hard time about it.

What she may have told the owner troubles me. I wanted to know.

‘What were you told?’

He didn’t say.

Zemi, it ain’t true what she says about me. I won’t let it slow me down. I am not who I was. I am who I am trying to become.

‘So what’s next?’

I want peace with Bonnie. I want to be part of your life. I want to be a father to you. I don't want to die not having known you.

July 21, 2019

Zemi—

This will be the final journal entry I will write you.

Allow me to bring you up to date. After Bonnie had me thrown out of her show in Durangito Neighborhood, I attempted to have my visitation rights enforced.

'Did you know that no police officer in El Paso can enforce those rights?' It's not that they don't want to. The police officer I spoke to told me that the police force is dying to be given the green light to do so, but the District Attorney won't allow them to enforce those rights. So, if I were to go knock on Bonnie's door with court order in hand and officer by my side, she can slam the door in my face and refuse to let me see you. I must then present my case before a Family Court judge. I thought the \$2500 I initially paid ensured that my visitation rights as a father would be guaranteed the very moment that the judge ruled in my favor rendering the visitation agreement a legal binding document. Nope. The system used in U.S. family courts rake in billions of dollars per year.

'What does that figure tell you, Zemi?

Who is the family court system designed to incentivize?'

It's a shame that fathers can only get as much justice as we can afford. Still undeterred, I appeared pro se to have my rights as a father enforced, but it was thrown out because of a technicality. I lost complete faith in our legal system that day.

I did manage to track down a couple of your last residences in El Paso. For a few months, you lived in a house in Sunset Heights overlooking UTEP. As soon as I got the hot tip, I drove to that house but alas, you weren't living there anymore. The landlord told me that you are a bright and handsome kid. I was then given a tip of you possibly living out in Santa Teresa. I didn't have an exact address, but drove around that area three, four times a week in hope to maybe spot either you or your mother. I stopped after a few months. My next move was to check the school districts. Two nice ladies checked the databases

for your enrollment in either Texas or New Mexico, but no match was found. The trail went cold after that.

Then, in the Fall of 2016, I received a fortuitous FB message from a friend. They had information that might help me locate you. When they told me that you were living in Ireland, I was shocked and rendered speechless.

‘Ireland!?’

Once the shock wore off, I was livid. I paid a visit to the FBI to ask if they could extradite you back to El Paso and charge Bonnie with kidnapping. Unless I had full custody of you, technically, nothing could be done to bring you back to El Paso. Apparently the word *technically* and *technicality* are buzz words in the legal domain.

On August 8, 2018, I caught another lucky break! I ran into an old friend from the theater community at a coffee shop. Defamatory and vilifying allegations about the manner I allegedly treated you and Bonnie were being spread amongst certain social circles by Bonnie and it was brought to my attention that this old friend of mine was facilitating them as well.

‘Let’s run down that list of hers, shall we?’

Bonnie is telling people that all I ever fed her while she was pregnant were PB&J sandwiches. Zemi, I can assure you that she was well fed. The day you were born you weighed a healthy 7lbs. 11 ounces.

She is also telling people that I used to constantly abuse her physically, yell at her, and that I left you outside in the cold when you were a baby. I will admit, I was an asshole at times, but I never hit either of you nor did I ever yell at you and I definitively never left you outside in the cold. These are all lies. In fact, I have police reports that describe her as the aggressor.

Bonnie is also telling people that I haven’t paid a cent of child support. That is rubbish. I have bank statements to refute that false allegation.

The one that takes the cake is my supposed plan to get rid of you because I never wanted to be your dad. This is my plan according to Bonnie: to duct-tape your arms, legs, and mouth, throw you into the trunk of my car, drive across the border into Juarez and sell you for \$25,000. This one is an incredulous fantastical lie! Zemi, I swear on your life that none of these allegations are true.

So, I was quick to confront this person about these allegations, but they were quicker to apologize. The thing is, this person never considered those

allegations to be rumors. They regarded them as truths because they wanted to believe Bonnie. They wanted to believe her because this person deeply cares about your well-being. In talking with them, I could tell that they truly do love you and I sincerely believe that they acted with the best of intentions which came from a place of welfare, protection, and well-being toward you.

So, why did this old friend become unsympathetic toward Bonnie's campaign against me? Right before Bonnie relocated you to New York City in July 2012, she wanted to take legal action against me so that I would no longer be able to see you. A lawyer told her that there was nothing she could do because my name is on your birth certificate, meaning I have paternal rights. Not pleased with the lawyer's verdict, Bonnie then went on to disclose those lies in the aforementioned paragraph in an attempt to convince the lawyer that I was a terrible father and a danger to you and her. But the lawyer pressed her on the validity of those claims until Bonnie finally admitted, in her own way, that they were indeed unfounded. The lawyer refused to represent her after all. Upon hearing this, Bonnie threw a fit, slammed furniture around and told my old friend that they would never see you again because they would let me know of your whereabouts. That was the last time my old friend and Bonnie had any contact.

Zemi, I believed that I didn't deserve to be in your life; that you'd be better off without me. I hardly told anyone of what I did for fear of being viewed as a loser and a failure. For eleven years, I've carried the guilt of having failed you as a father. And the shame of betraying my morals—I lost respect for myself and carried a painful feeling of humiliation—prevented me from opening up to a human being about my leaving you. I had mixed feelings about my role as your father which confused me, and anger for having my time with you denied weighed heavily on my soul. I'd dream about our reunion only to have that image fill me with fear.

‘What if you turned me down?’

What if nobody had mentioned to you of all my attempts to reconnect
or given you the presents I made and bought for you?

Or worse, what if nobody had even mentioned of my existence to you?’

The regret of abandoning you was so unbearable that I withdrew myself from society, like a self-imposed exile. I repeatedly told myself that I didn't deserve to be happy and denied myself the simplest of life's pleasures. To avoid

further pain, I sought comfort in external pleasures like drugs, alcohol, and women thinking they would help me forget about the part of my soul I had lost.

Nothing made me forget.

The scepter of abandoning you followed me everywhere I went.

However, I've made peace with my past and thus my essence has been unearthed. Zemi, I care about people. I am compassionate, empathic, and genuinely want what is best for anyone. With my essence shining bright once more, I've gotten the courage to own up to what I did. Courage to forgive myself and to believe that I definitely deserve to have you in my life. Most importantly, I've gotten the courage to reclaim my identity as your father.

What happened between your mother and I was unfortunate. I owe her an apology for leaving her to raise you on her own. My selfishness and lack for accountability insisted that she be the one to change her ways when it was me that needed to change mine. Of course it's my fault. You are my son too. If I had the maturity then to see past my selfishness and arrogance, all of our fates could have been more favorable than they are now.

Zemi, as you hold this book in your hands, I hope you recognize that my message to you—my son—is clear: I want us to be in each other's lives. Now that you have received my message, contact me. Remember, there are people very close and dear to you who know how and where to find me.

Keep the following in your heart:

I was there, Zemi. I always was and always will be.

Love,
Dad ...

