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Issue #1

22 June 07

The Pampered Poodle

by Josh Amidon

"Excuse me but I have to tell you, it's your dog that made my baby girl sick all of last week." The look Cheryl radiated was entirely incredulous, her arms folded at the front of her chest, the frizz of her curls twittering angrily in the cold morning breeze.

The owner of a black poodle, Cheryl wore a purple vest. Her vest matched the vest her poodle was wearing exactly. She and the poodle wore the same purple barrettes in their hair, and their hair – tight, black, frizzy curls – looked as though it had been styled at the very same salon.

The issue had been greatly on Cheryl's mind for the whole of the weekend past. When she saw the man Larry, the owner of a pit-bull-boxer mix and a man she had never spoken to before, she felt she must immediately inform him.

Larry turned to look at her no more than a second, and then he turned away. "It's probably because she's always licking his butthole." This comment, though entirely true, brought the morning at the dog park to a close.

Issue #2

7 July 08

Over a Sushi Nine

by Spencer Dew

What it came down to in the end was we couldn't even agree on how to order sushi.

"What were you thinking of ordering?" she said.

"This, uh, sushi 9," I said.

"Oh," she said.

"Is that alright?" I said.

"Sure," she said, "Except nine's not divisible by two."

"Well, wait," I said, "How is it done? I thought, I mean –"

"What?"

"I figured I'd get something and you'd get something. Is that not how it's done?"

"I guess we could do that. But nine's a lot. No, forget it. It's not a lot."

It didn't even end there, over the gray fingers of raw fish, though I heard all about how incompatible we were, how we spoke different languages, how it always made her nervous, being with me in public, not that we didn't have so much in common, and a real intimacy, sure, but she could be so much happier without me, and she had friends, which was something that couldn't be said of me, she said.

What was left of us – of us as us – limped on down the street, to that unfortunate hipster café, the coffee shop/restaurant with the video rental store in back, and it's there that I tell her she's a stranger to me anyway, a robot, I say, numbed by psychiatry. I tell her that I find it incomprehensible that she kept her whole medical record a secret from me, which isn't exactly the truest way of saying the thing. I bring up the fact that I hate her roommates, too, though then she says that everything I've said has been exactly as her therapist had predicted, and she starts crying, sobbing, red-faced and sloppy, out of control, and this, of course, is when the waitress comes over, all cleavage and cherry red bangs, and this waitress kneels down and tells us she's really sorry but the café has to enforce the one hour rule. People are waiting, she tells us. We have to give our table up. We have to move on.

Magic 8 Ball

by Amy Stern

My Magic 8 Ball told me *It Was Definitely So*, so I put on my best sweater and left the house. But when I went out there and waited and waited, I realized, maybe it wasn't so. It was probably just a glitch so I

shook it and asked something else. *The Future Is Uncertain*, it said. Which I'm pretty sure I'm aware of since if I knew what the future held, I wouldn't be asking a ball would I? I'd be out there holding the future in my hot little hands.

I set it down and went in the kitchen to make a smoothie. Sometimes they just need a break. To rest and regain their answering ability to the fullest extent.

My smoothie turned out to be kind of lumpy because I was pretty distracted about what my future held. That's a huge load to have on your mind, especially when you're trying to blend something. When I went back to the Magic 8 Ball I could almost feel that my answer was in there, so I set my drink down and picked up the ball with both hands. I closed my eyes, thought firmly about what I wanted answered and shook. *Concentrate and Ask Again*. Ok, that's fine, I was having a little brain freeze before, so I closed my eyes tighter. I opened and saw, *Cannot Predict Now*. Come on, I was totally concentrating that time! I held the ball behind my head because geographically it must have been in the wrong spot before. Sometimes I can't write when I'm not in the right seat so why shouldn't it be the same for this, except that, oh yeah – it's a Magic 8 Ball! But still, behind my head I shook it, and then realized I would have to somehow yoga-ly maneuver myself into a position where I could see it without moving my arms. Luckily, I have freakishly long arms. *Who Knows?* It said.

"You should!" I growled at my ball. "That's your job."

Forget About It. It said.

"Forget about what? Forget about getting any answers from you or 'forget about it' is your answer to what I asked?"

Yes, It Seems So.

"Which part?" This was not going as smoothly as planned.

Does It Matter?

"Maybe not to you, but to me it matters a whole hell of a lot or I wouldn't be shaking the bejesus out of you."

It's Doubtful.

"Not really," I said shaking it harder.

It's Doubtful.

"Doubt this mother f-er."

Are You Kidding?

I gripped the ball as tightly as I could, "DOES IT LOOK LIKE I'M KIDDING?" I said holding it up to my eye.

Better Not Tell You Now.

"Fine!" I said and flung the ball across the room, where it unfortunately did not crash into a million pieces like I had hoped, but instead landed in a pile of laundry. I took a deep breath and walked over to it.

That Was Uncalled For.

"You son of a bitch," I said picking it up and walking it over to my blender. "This is what's uncalled for." I shoved for a while, but I couldn't fit the ball in the blender, no matter which way I turned and twisted, it being a ball and all. I'm sort of glad because it probably would have killed the blade and made the whole thing go up in smoke. And I really love smoothies so... that would have sucked.

Issue #3

14 July 08

Platter

by Rory Jobst

People say I look like Oliver Platt.

They won't necessarily know who that is. They usually don't remember any characters he's played. They usually don't remember the titles of any of his movies. Still, I've been compared to him enough that I know whom they mean.



Photo by Rory Jobst

"You look like that actor. He was on that show. It was on last year."

"Oliver Platt?"

"That's it!"

"You look like that guy. You know, he was in that thing about the alligator. And the thing about the midget."

"Oliver Platt?"

"Exactly."

I'm an actor, and because I'm bigger and romantically awkward, I tend to get cast in more character roles. The villainous crony, the subservient buffoon, the dopey comic relief, even as bumbling old men in their sixties. In other words, the standard Oliver Platt roles. I like being Oliver Platt. He's a good actor, and he has the ability to make nearly any crapola he appears in watchable. The otherwise dispensable *Cassanova* was redeemed by the mere fact that a hot older lady like Lena Olin was totally into him. It gave me hope. Maybe Rubenesque men do exist after all.

A couple of years ago, I put on enough weight that I couldn't shop at regular clothes stores any more. Goddamn fucking bean sprout, snap pea eating Urban Outfitter motherfuckers! I was really embarrassed by that. I always knew I would be a big guy forever, but just an extra large guy. But, every time I wore just an extra large shirt at the gym, my belly stuck out, pushing the bottom of my shirt up to my ribcage. The gym employees kept directing me to the Middle Eastern Dance classes, even though I was obviously a dude. I look like Oliver Platt, remember?

So, I had to start shopping at Casual Big and Tall, the fat guy store. A store that was even afraid to use actual fat guys in their catalogues. They were so sick of dealing with fat guys all day that they relentlessly campaigned to tap into the tall guy market. Needless to say, I wasn't exactly head over heels to shop at special needs store that, oddly enough, didn't really want *my* business. Then my mother told me something. My aunt Jenny is a costumer for movies, and was working with the aforementioned Oliver Platt. She told me that Jenny had to make a special trip to Rochester's Big & Tall in order to provide the

appropriate wardrobe for Mr. Oliver Platt. Wow! He was always a big guy, but rarely defined as one. It wasn't like he danced topless opposite Patrick Swayze as the butt of a cruel joke. I sighed and smiled.

If my aunt ever works with him again, I'll tell her to get doubles of what ever she buys for him. Maybe I can get a job as his stand in. I'm certainly qualified, or so people tell me.

Issue #4

21 July 08

How to Become an Armchair Detective

by Caroline Picard

Fifty fifty-somethings came to the Discovery Center to see. It was a Saturday afternoon. Private Eye Jude McBride led the class.

A locksmith, a mystery writer, a woman interested in background checks, two in-betweens, a retired postal worker, four landlords at least, a criminal defense investigator, an IRA operations specialist, one building contractor, an adoptions specialist, a 'skip tracer' wanting to improve his trade, a police officer on the verge of a new career, a buyer and seller on e-bay, and a handful of others. "A lot of people want to make this line of work a living but it's really hard to make a buck—you know, because you're the last guy on the food chain," McBride said. He used to be a tunnel rat in Vietnam, but that is a secret he keeps. "If you can imagine me a few pounds earlier and a few Jacks too."

He'll get three cases out of the class. And the handouts cost \$30. "First I ask two things, is the money good and who's asking." Expensive handouts mean these people can pay.

He is light. His hair is white, his eyes blue and were it not for their sharp attention he might look like an average man. Though he's friendly he's still sizing up the class, interpreting interest. "You gotta understand, I'm a P.I., so I categorize people." His eyes are the color of Algren.

A woman in the back row raised a hand. The roots of age were showing through her dyed black hair. She was concerned about con-man fiancés. She wanted a background check.

"What if he's bankrupt with two wives already?" she asks hypothetically.

"We all got problems, alright, ma'am, hear me out. If the guy's been in jail, maybe he's smacked someone in a bar, is that a reason not to date him? I mean I don't know what your moral threshold is—I can't answer that one, but if I am in a relationship and I feel like there's something wrong, I'm outta there." The woman persisted, provoked by Lifetime television and remote panic. Would someone find out if you did a background check on him?

McBride interrupted, "Here's why you want to hire a P.I.: you want to keep some blankets between you and your subject. I have a few safeguards. The only way he's going to be able to find out is if you make a mistake."

Between practical recommendations, ("You're only as good as the information you are going to get,") how-to's and whos'-who in the 'armchair detective' world, McBride doesn't just walk the fence between what an officer of the law can and can't do, he pulls off wise-guy clichés and literary references which expose a world-view. His e-mail address is falconpi. "I do a lot of husbands, wives, you know, girlfriends, in betweens. I find that more exciting—going to O'Hare and following someone all night, that's exciting. I'll do the criminal stuff. I'm more interested on knocking on doors. I'd rather knock on doors. I like being out by myself working the streets. There's nothing like getting leather on cement and knocking on somebody's door to sell them ice cubes—I could sell ice cubes to an Eskimo, what did Ernest Hemingway say, 'There is

no greater hunt than the man himself?"

The mystery writer is looking over my shoulder. He is reading my notes. He looks like a mystery writer, and I'll bet he teaches high school science classes, too. He looks like he prefers the metric system. He's wearing square glasses and a flesh colored sweater. His moustache is the shape of well-groomed comb. Like his sweater, it is sandy. I wrote it down: the mystery writer is reading my notes. Before I added punctuation, the writer sat back.

At the break housewives, younger than the rest, leaned in to conspire, "It's too bad they don't serve wine at these things." Giggles respond.

The mystery writer unwrapped a bologna sandwich in wax paper. After the break McBride began again: "What's the worst case scenario for a private eye?" He paused, "He gets caught." McBride paused again, "Why do most people get caught?"

Issue #5

28 July 08

Thomas & Jack

by C. Robin Madigan

Thomas and Jack walk to work together, briefcases in hand; umbrellas on call.

A homeless man searches dumpsters and flop-lid leans his head. "Back in the shit," says Jack.

A woman's hair, her collar cocked, Jack thinks of his wife.

"Weather in Poland was terrible last week. It was that wet rain-snow shit," says Thomas.

"Man, it was gorgeous here, the whole of last week."

"Lucky."

"How's Iza and the pup?"

"She's back from boarding school for spring break. She can't do anything without that dog. She hates Lafayette."

The vacation-house sat at sea. Fire billowed from it one afternoon. Jack, his sister, and parents watched from the hill. Small explosions and pops filled the gully before them where firefighters stood and watched, spraying. Jack's father said, "A smudge of good living on a beautiful summer sky." Jack's mother knelt, pushed elbows into stomach, clenched jaw, ripped green blades of grass and rubbed them into balls, burst into more tears to pulled Shiela's toddler girl arm. "We've got everything of value out, right?" He listed: "Mother's box of butterflies." This inspired a burst from his wife, as though she just realized the house on fire. "Shiela's stuffed animals from the boardwalk, dad's ancient Playboy, which hid, in the dry paged, crinkling knowledge of everyone, behind a cabinet." This calmed her down, and got a laugh. "Just you don't worry darling, everything will be fine."

"Daddy?"

A lady in a broad-rimmed hat drops her dog to lead it on-leash.

Thomas received only an hour before a plane from Indiana. One of his students cornered him in his office. She locked the door, made some comment about fatherly affection, and kissed him. He'd only heard tales of things like that.

"Kim rearranged the office," Jack says.

"New everything, huh. Do you have a view?"

"Only the best: over the new park and across the lake."

"Across the lake."

"Yeah. Makes you wonder who'd looked out the windows before they were the school. She drops things. I don't think I could let her go. Too cute."

The two round a corner to their building. Jack's thoughts hang around a smudge of smoke, vacillating towers of darkness on sea sky.

"Should have lunch tomorrow."

"Of course."

Jack gets Kim her skim latté. He loved that Playboy. The magazine shared life with Jack and his father. "Most important of all," Jack wished his father said. His mother enjoyed the gully, loved to run the hill with Sheila and Jack, and make hotdogs on the grill and hold them up for the gulls.