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The Definitive Guide to the Downfall of P&W

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The Definitive Guide to the Downfall of P&W

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Abstract: This honors thesis is a fictional work that tells of the downfall of P&W DNA. It utilizes multiple narrators, including a blonde bombshell, a deceptive recent P&W hire, and a rabbit, to show how a combination of flawed personalities led to the demise of a corrupt DNA testing company. The plot mostly follows Aaron Kelley, a P&W-agent-cum-detective, who is attempting to avenge his partner’s death by taking down gubernatorial candidate Lyle Saunders. Combining elements of classic noir with a modern comical tone and a mixture of voices, this work asks the question: does the truth really matter?
Much thanks to my advisor Peter Bognanni, Anna Joranger, my parents, who were always supportive of my writing, all the people who were kind enough to listen to me think out loud, and Tuptuś, my bunny. You kept me (relatively) sane.
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Aaron Kelley is one dumb son of a bitch, and if I wasn’t his partner and friend for eight years, I’d just as soon be alright with this all blowing up in his face.

-Sam Bernhardt, 1970-2007
Exhibit 1. Birth certificate of Trevor Lyle Tribulla
The Facts: As Andy Understood Them and in Actuality

The facts as Andy Lowly knew them were simple and few: P&W was never meant to become a big business. Andy would be the first to bring a client to the P&W office. Unannounced, nonetheless. He had a feeling he would be the last to bring a client to the P&W office. After all, this was not just any client, this was Lila Tribulla, with her snot-nosed son in tow.

These facts panned out in the following way on that October day in P&W’s Tribeca office: Lila gave her typical speech twice. First to Helen, an archaic secretary who had little importance at P&W, and then to Zachary Roth, founder and president of P&W DNA Testing. The speech went as follows (except for when Zach cut her off about three sentences in): “My name’s Lila, and this here is Trevor. His piece of shit daddy’s Lyle Saunders. And from what I hear, that man’s going to run for governor. Now I’ve been trying to get him to own up to being my boy’s daddy for the past three years, and he ain’t fessed up to it once. There’s only so much a single momma can do for her baby, and that man best start realizing it, cause he ain’t going to become governor of New York without me doing some exposing, and likely he ain’t going to get to be governor with me doing some exposing either.” This speech worried Andy, didn’t affect Helen in any way, and didn’t provide Zach with any information he had not already pieced together from earlier work on the Tribulla case and that morning’s paper. But between the two agents Zach currently had working on the case—Vanessa Carlyle, who sat awkwardly in the office as these exchanges occurred, and Aaron Kelley, who was nowhere to be found though he was due for a meeting with Zach at that exact time—Zach felt he had the situation under control. He was wrong. He escorted Lila and Vanessa away to the
conference room, returning to his own office, setting the wheels in motion for the facts the Andy Lowly perceived to start materializing.

_Abel Expected Reaction_

“What the _fuck_ were you thinking?” Zach asked.

“I know, Zach,” Andy answered, vaguely rolling his eyes and moving his head from side to side. “I shouldn’t have brought her here. But she didn’t think I was doing any work and she said she wanted to talk to a higher up, and who else would that be?”

“Andy, you don’t even _work_ here. I just do business with you. Jesus Christ,” Zach answered. He muttered under his breath: “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things that I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.” Zach took a deep nasal breath and continued.

“I do business with you because I expect you to handle your end of these cases, Andy, something which you clearly have no intention of doing.”

“I’m sorry, sir. I know you have better things to do. I just, I,” here Andy paused. “I didn’t know what to do and she had been wondering why the paternity testing was taking so long, and I can’t take her to any of the higher ups at the firm because they would just recommend a different DNA testing agency, and, well, you know, that would ruin the whole point of this. Sorry, sir.”

“Andy, quit the blubbering. You’re not getting it,” Zach responded, as he closed his eyes and repeated _serenity, serenity, fucking serenity, damn I could use a drink_ in his head. “You think I’m angry because you brought her here? I’m angry because you didn’t bring her here _sooner_. This is big bucks. Politics is big bucks. With the kind of dough
Lyle Saunders is rolling in, nailing him as the father is going to have me set for life. Do some research, asshole. Believe the client, tell me, and then do your fucking job.”
Exhibit 2. Daily News article announcing Lyle Saunders’ intent to run.
Lila Tribulla Is Peeved

Nothing ever gets done in this world unless you do it for yourself, that’s what I’ve learned. And I’ve never met a bigger halfwit than Vanessa Carlyle to prove just how little other people will do for you. We walked into that conference room and the girl couldn’t even figure out how to get the coffee pot going for herself, was actually going to get that Helen lady to do it.

So I told her with my sweetest, honey-lip-gloss-coated smile, “No, no, sweetie, let me take care of that. Wouldn’t want to change your employer’s little habit of making me do everything myself.”

Well, to that the little sheep just smiled and looked down at her feet. So I found some ground coffee in one of the cabinets—looked like it was about a decade old—and put it in the filter, of course once I managed to pull that rusty bugger out of the machine. Looked like the coffeemaker still had some water in it, so I figured I might as well use that and I turned the thing on, motioned to Miss Prissy Pants to see if she wanted me to set up a cup for her, but she was still staring at those clunky feet of hers and didn’t even realize I was trying to get her attention.

I got my clue and I sat down across the table from her, listened to her hum to herself, listened to that coffeemaker sputter and spurt and curse the thousand curses that I was biting my tongue not to say, and the whole time I was thinking Darn it, why don’t they let you smoke in business buildings any more? This went on for at least five minutes, that’s about five too many, not a word from Miss PP, not enough drips in the coffee pot to even fill half a mug.

And then thank the sweet Lord, it was my earthly savior, my one and only, my
Superman—oh wait, no it was just my inept, over-paid lawyer, with my still-bastard child in his pudgy arms—knocking at the door, coming in to pull me out of this dastardly situation.

“Hey, gals, having fun?” Andy asked us.

“Oh, yah, Andy, we’re having a fantastic time here. Just doing our little girly chitty chatting thing,” I said. That didn’t seem to get much of a response.

“Ok, then, let’s go,” I tried again.

“Did Vanessa tell you all about what work we’ve been doing on your case?” the moron asked.

“Oh, no, no, why would I be worried about that? Miss Poodle Puff here is really busy looking to make sure her shoes don’t run off and away from her feet, anyway. Wouldn’t want to disturb her. C’mon, let’s go,” I said, taking my Trevor out of that corporate-fattened man’s arms.

“Bye, Vanessa. Can’t wait to see you again,” I said, and swished out that door with Trevor in tow and the fat man coming up behind. Knew that girl wouldn’t have nothing to say anyway, so why even wait for a goodbye?

I power-strutted down through that office, head held high, straight for the elevator. Even if there weren’t very many people in there to see me, I knew that they had all been in on trying to screw me over, not doing shit for my case. They were going to see that I’m just not a woman that you screw over. I walked up to Helen’s desk, stood right by her chair, peered at her desk calendar, the one notebook and the Tupperware full of last night’s leftovers that she had sitting on it.

“Hi, Helen, honey,” I said. “How’s it going? Mind if I just take a look at that
calendar real quick?” I picked up her notebook and Tupperware, stacked it up nicely on the side of the desk, okay, maybe a bit forcefully, but I was getting a point across, alright? I grabbed the biggest pen I saw in her flimsy little pencil cup. It was one of those big Sharpie permanent markers, nice big tip, ripe to do some damn damage. I uncapped it, took a whiff of it like I used to with my girlfriends in middle school, and in huge, capital letters wrote: “WORK ON TRIBULLA CASE.” Then I flipped to the next month and wrote “WORK ON TRIBULLA CASE!” Flipped to the next one and wrote, “DAMN WELL BETTER BE DONE WITH TRIBULLA CASE!”

That’s when I realized the calendar was from five years ago. This whole shithole was useless. I capped the pen, sighed, walked to the elevator, held the door open button until Trevor scurried in. I even held it open for Andy, sighed as the useless tub-o came in and couldn’t even look me in the eye. He stood behind me, and I swear I could feel his doe-y eyes looking me in the back of the head as the elevator descended.

So help me sweet Jesus, I was going to throw up. Not since I was growing the little rascal in me had I felt this god-awful. I was going to vomit up my strength. I was going to vomit what was left of my dignity. I was going to vomit up my last hope that that asshole Lyle would admit to being Trevor’s daddy and start paying some child support. I was going to vomit up any possibility of Trevor growing up thinking his father gave a shit about him. I was going to vomit up everything I came to New York for and just call the whole thing quits to head back to a place that knows a little something about responsibility, and where the gentlemen show some respect for a hot young thing.

And that’s when I felt that pervert stick his thick finger in my hair. I turned around and faced him.
“You’re one sick man, and you better make this all work out for me and my Trevor somehow. Got it? This is making me sick. Very sick.”

I was holding my hand over my mouth, taking deep breathes, trying not to get ill right there and there, and finally the elevator doors opened and I could see out the filthy, pawed-at revolving door at the front of the lobby and I practically felt the mid-September chill on it. I jetted right for it. Another scruffy looking incompetent with a beard was just about to come in from outside and I sped up so I could get out that door before he got in my way. I lurched forward at the revolving door with all my might, just praying not to spew, not now, and hopefully not when I got out. I figured a breath of fresh air would do me all the good I needed, not that there was any such thing as real fresh air outside of the South. But the bearded bozo was being so slow, I pushed hard on that door, giving him a clue to get the hell out of there and fast: I meant business. The door was a damn inch away from being turned enough so that I could get to the outside. Just one more inch and I’d be okay.

But then I was hurling backwards, fast, all the push I had been putting on the door shooting back into me, sending me falling to the ground, crumpled at this moron’s feet. I looked up at him looking down at me. We had ended up in the same section of the door. The lines in the puff under his eyes stood out more than his eyes. And that’s when I spewed. Everywhere. Mostly on his shoes, somewhat down the front of my dress. It was quick—I’ve never thrown up that much that quick, even when Trevor was being a mighty rabble-rouser those first few months inside me. When I was done and looked up again he looked exactly the same, was staring at me just the same. Didn’t have a word to say.

All I could manage was, “Ugh,” as I noticed that his coat was stuck in the door
behind him. Mister Bearded Bozo was too stupid, too unobservant—like everyone else in the piece of shit building—to get out the damn door when he was supposed to. Was he just going to swirl back out the building with me? Seemed like that was the moron’s plan. And now we were both stuck. I was still sitting on the floor, he was still standing and looking at me. He wasn’t going to take care of this. He didn’t even look like he realized I had thrown up on his feet, or that he was stuck in a revolving door. I tugged at his coat with my vomit-soaked hands, not minding using it as a handkerchief—he didn’t seem to be complaining either. And I tugged on the pant leg until it ripped, a bit of it still stuck in the door, but hey, if he bought pants that cheap, what did he expect?

Well that’s when I started kicking at that door from the floor. Kicking so hard that I wondered how this fucker wasn’t worried about me shattering the glass, how he wasn’t trying to stop me. I cried. He still just stared at me, it wasn’t even surprised or shocked gaping, just a blank look.

“Fuck you.” I muttered. That’s when the crying really started. “Fuck you, fuck you, fuck you,” each time I said it I kicked the door harder. And finally it opened back up to the inside. Andy stood there, holding my Trevor’s hand. Neither looked too surprised.

“Yikes,” said Andy, though his facial expression didn’t match his words at all.

“Mama, are you ok?” was Trevor’s question.

“Yes, sweety, Momma will be fine,” I said as I picked myself up. I faced this bearded asshole, who was still standing in the same spot, motionless, “Despite the fact that no one around here seems to know how to treat a lady. Raised by a wolf, were you?” I asked the idiot.

But I didn’t get a response from him, instead Andy chimed in, “Holy shit, Aaron?
Aaron, is that you? I didn’t even recognize you with the beard. How long have you been growing that thing?”

“Wait, Aaron?” I asked. “The Aaron? Aaron, like the best agent at P&W, the one that’s going to save my case? The Aaron that is going to make it a-okay that all you other morons haven’t done jack squat for me all these months?”

Nobody said anything for a long time. And finally he spoke, “Yup, that’s me. And I guess I haven’t shaved in about three months, Andy. Well, nice to meet you, I’ve got a meeting with Zach to get to.” He drawled slowly like Eeyore, just one more donkey announcing himself in my life.

“Oh, buddy, that meeting started an hour ago,” Andy told him.

“Huh, unfortunate,” Aaron said. “Might as well pop upstairs, got some stuff to pick up.”

And I said the only thing I could say. “Fuck me.”

Bunny Tells It Like It Is

My name is Bunny and I am a fat bunny, a fat fat bunny. Feh-t. Not really fat, but if you put some food in front of me you can just watch as my tummy grows and grows super fast like a Sea Monkey except it never stops. I’ll eat anything. All sorts of lettuce. Strawberries, bananas, carrots. Crack pellets. Old, dried-up, and withered tea bags. Or they can still be soggy, I don’t mind, really. Gum. Shoes. Denim. Toe nails.

There was this one time my Mister came home with a box and he opened my cage so I ran around his feet to say, Hi! How was your day? I know you gave me breakfast and I’ve been munching on hay all morning and all, but I am hungry. What’s in the box?
Would you feed me, please? And I was sniffing at his shoes, and I took a lick at them as usual and it was icky. And I mean real icky. I took another lick just to make sure I wasn’t imagining it because nothing ever really tastes bad to me. It’s all good, my tummy can handle it. But it was icky again. I won’t lie, I checked one more time to make sure my bunny mind wasn’t tricking me but then he pushed me away with his foot.

“No, Bunny, that’s vomit,” my Mister said. He dropped his cardboard box on the floor by the couch, so I started chewing on a corner of that instead because it wasn’t icky like the vomit.

Now, I don’t know what vomit is, but it had officially become the first and only item on my yucky foods list. P-thoeey. I chewed as much cardboard as I could to get the taste of the vomit out of my mouth, and then I leaned my short and feh-t little bunny paws on my Mister’s shoes like I was saying, Please, sir, I want some more. But I didn’t want more vomit, no. Not cardboard either. Salad seemed pretty tasty, though. But, my Mister, he just plopped down on the couch. So I hopped myself up there, too, right next to his lap, and I cocked my head at him like, Wassup?

He put his palm on my head and I knew we were in it for the long haul—he wasn’t going to be sprinting about or getting up period any time soon—so I settled my big bunny butt and let my floppy ears lay on the couch and then I was all comfy, even if I was still hungry, too.

“We got a busy day ahead of us tomorrow,” he said. And I thought, Hey, why are you thinking about tomorrow, it’s not even noon yet? But I was comfy so I just laid there. Then he put his other hand in the cardboard box by his foot and I thought, YUMMERZ! It’s treat time! But he didn’t pull out any food, no, he pulled out a picture of some guy
and lady, and I thought *Hey, I know them, they used to come to the old house all the time.* They always gave me nice pets and the lady laughed when I would hop on her lap and try to lick her mouth because it always had this sticky, glossy stuff on it that tasted like cupcakes. And she would let me lick it off her mouth and laugh and laugh the whole time. But that hadn’t happened in a long time.

“Sam and Sadie,” my Mister said, and I remembered that yeah, that’s what the guy and lady were called. “You remember them, Bunny?” he asked, and I looked at him like, *Yeah, duh, I just told you about her cupcake gloss.* “She still won’t pick up his stuff at the office. So looks like it’s all ours, Bunny. Not like we don’t have enough junk trying to fit in this twenty-foot-by-twenty-foot prison cell of an apartment. Damn Red Hook, who would have thought?” But I didn’t mind this new place much; it was cozy enough here and Mister usually forgot to put me in my cage so I got to spend more time out than I did in the old house.

My Mister reached in the box one more time and pulled out what I think was another picture but it was all black and white and didn’t look like much of anything.

“Dead at thirty-seven. Dead at thirty-goddamn-seven. And they were so close. All he wanted was a kid. Sadie was so close this time. But that’s just how the world works, isn’t it, Bunny? One miscarriage isn’t enough, she’s got to have two. And at seven damn months. It’s just not right.” My Mister stroked that black and white cloudy photo.

“Couldn’t have been more than a month or two when this was taken; I can’t even figure out where the child is. Who can blame her for not wanting to pick up photos of her dead husband and miscarried child, right? It’s a damn shame. At least he wasn’t around for this miscarriage. Maybe he died a happy man. Right, Bunny, there’s a chance he was
happy?” And I thought, *Why are you asking me? Does this mean him and the lady won’t be coming around anymore? That’s sad.* And then I was sad for a few minutes, too, like my Mister had been for a long time now.

We watched Judge Judy, and Judge Hatchet, and Judge Joe Brown, and then my tummy was getting pretty rumble-y, but my Mister looked comfy, or at least very still, and I didn’t want to bother him because he looked tired. Though, he always looks tired, ever since we moved here and my Misses is never around. I liked her, she smelled like chamomile, but I guess it’s time to call her my old Misses because it’s been a long, long time since I saw her and she petted me. My Mister usually just uses me kind of like an armrest, but that’s alright, it’s still nice and he remembers to feed me sometimes.

But anyway it was late afternoon and my Mister was dozing so I slipped out from under his hand and started washing up to get all ready for my food hunt. I know they say bunnies are supposed to be prey but I don’t feel like that. Just because I don’t have to kill my food doesn’t mean I’m not a predator. You probably don’t kill your own food either. At least I go on epic journeys in search of food, you just always have these bags full of foods.

I looked at my Mister just in case like, *Hey. Hey! Mr. Aaron! Are you up? Okay, now I will get food for myself.* It’s much easier to get around on the floor here than it was in the old home where my Misses lived, too. The floors at both houses are all wood and slippery, but my Mister seems to like to put his stuff all over the floor here so it makes it nice and easy to hop around when there are a lot of papers, and clothes, and towels around.

I hopped over some old papers and some boxes and tried not to skid around on the
floor much because that can wake up my Mister, and I made it all the way to the kitchen. This kitchen is really itty-bitty compared to the old one. I can’t even stand by the big cold food box while my Mister opens it because there is just no room and I would get squished. But I was in luck just now because it smelled like there was something on the table so I hopped up onto the chair all stealth and then I heard my Mister startle. He went, “Ahem,” and then I could hear him turn the colored box on louder.

“It’s time for Eyewitness News at 5 with Joseph Tang and Erica Graboyes. Your most relevant local news source. Today’s top stories: The Atkins Diet: a healthy lifestyle or the fast track to death? Hear the opinion of local pulmonologist Doctor Sacia Foote; Death on the subway: how a Queens woman attempting to save a cat on the train-tracks ended up being the road-kill; and finally the latest installment of Gubernatorial Gossip: Lyle Saunders officially announces his intent to run for governor of New York State.”

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” I heard my Mister say so I stopped chewing at a sandwich I had found, all scared that he saw me on the kitchen table and was angry but phew, it seemed like he was just talking at the colored box. “That’s rich,” he said. And I don’t know what that means so I wasn’t too worried and continued with my munching; I was almost done and maybe if my Mister didn’t notice me eating this then he would give me an extra dinner of lettuces like I’m supposed to get. I heard him bzing the colored box off so then I sped up the eating real fast because I could hear him heading my way. I was going chomp chomp chomp swallow chomp chomp swallow chomp swallow and then I saw him in the doorway of the kitchen so I froze all still-like like a rabbit in the headlights. Ha! But he just bent over to his bag that he had dropped on the floor and pulled out some of those wrinkly gray papers that smudge a lot that he sometimes puts at
the bottom of my cage for my poops to go on. He stood there and his eyes were on this paper and not me so I tried out eating slowly and quietly. *Chomppp chomppp swallowww.*

“You damn well better be kidding me,” my Mister said. “Governor? Figures, I suppose. There’s got to be a political position for every crooked liar in this town.” Mister let the papers fall to the ground and then he spotted me. He looked at me and said, “Well, all that does is raise the stakes, right, Bunny?” but he sounded kind of sad and just stood there for awhile. I think I heard that the term for that look is depressed. I think my old Misses said that about my Mister. A lot.

After awhile he looked at my sandwich and said, “Good work, Bunny. Very resourceful.” Then he went to the big cold box but I just stood there and watched him because he seemed weird. He washed some lettuces and put them on the plate with the sandwich and said, “Here’s a treat. Good night.” Oh, well, that was exciting because it was a lot of lettuces, much more than usual, like three handfuls instead of one. So I munched and munched for like ten minutes straight but by the time I hopped over to my Mister in his room to see if maybe he would give me another handful if I was good, he was already asleep. And I think that in between snores I heard him say, “I have got to get a life.”

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*Aaron and Vanessa’s First Encounter*

They’d been sitting in the car for two hours. Aaron sat in the driver’s seat, and Vanessa next to him. A crushed soft-pack of L&M’s laid on her lap, flecks of loose tobacco spotting her black pencil skirt. They had just met today, but this was no business for taking time to get to know your associate. This was a business of ultimatums, not
formalities. They were meant to meet the prior day, when Aaron was to return from his hiatus. Having Zach around would have meant at least a semblance of a cordial introduction of the two partners. But then that woman threw up on Aaron’s shoes in the revolving door. He picked up his boxes at the office and went back home. He returned, straight to the stake out, with the intention of giving feigning a semblance of normalcy one more try. Just one more, he told himself.

Vanessa exhaled the smoke of her fourteenth cigarette of the day, hardly a lady-like plume, more so a cloud that engulfed and intertwined them, the cracked window of the Lincoln Town Car doing little for ventilation. Their eyes teared, but they still tried to keep a good watch on the Bay Ridge brownstone across the street. Every few minutes they eyed the photo lying between them, held down on one corner by a white paper cup with some tepid coffee soaking through its bottom. Three-year-old Trevor with green eyes and loosely coiled brown hair laughed back at them, unaware that this was the face he presented to the people that ensured his fate.

Vanessa looked up from the photo. “So have you met the kid’s mom, that Lila woman?” she asked.

“Think so,” Aaron responded. “Once. Briefly,” as though it hadn’t been just the other day.

“She’s totally off her rocker. Totally,” Vanessa said. They lapsed back into silence, Vanessa smoking her cigarette, Aaron dozing off as he stared at the house.

“Here he comes,” Aaron said opening his eyes fully for the first time all day. Lyle Saunders was locking up the front door of his three-story, two-garage, heated-pool-in-the-backyard, protected-by-a-security-system-and-two-midroar-overpriced-stone-lion-
statues, on-a-rolling-green-slope, gated house.

“Shit,” Vanessa answered. “Shit, shit. I thought we were waiting for him to come home. So he’s been inside this whole time?”

“Yup,” Aaron answered slowly, rubbing his short, scruffy beard.

“Ok, what do we do? I mean how does this work?” Vanessa was using the back of one hand to wick the tobacco off her skirt. The pack of L&M’s skidded onto the car’s floorboard. She already had one pump-heeled foot out the car door, and with her other hand was applying red lipstick to that perfect, plump sphincter of a mouth, snagging some on her tooth.

“What are you doing?” Aaron asked.

“Well, I mean, don’t we follow him?” Vanessa asked.

“Take the car back. I’ll take care of this one.” It was almost four in the afternoon and Aaron was ready to turn in for the day.

“Oh, well, I guess I could drive but I thought I was supposed to be learning how this stuff works and I’ve been sitting here for—”

“Yeah, don’t worry about it.”

“Uhm, ok, then, it’s just that—” Vanessa’s voice trailed off.

Aaron was already closing the car door on the sound of her escalating voice. The over-excited, under-informed trainee would have to wait. He was ten years her senior in age and eight years in his time working for P&W DNA, and he was going to get back in the work field without her.

Aaron followed Lyle Saunders down to a coffee shop on Fourth Avenue. While Saunders ordered and over-tipped the barista, Aaron watched him through the storefront.
No question about it to Aaron: Saunders was the kid’s father. They looked identical down to the wild glint in their green eyes, so wild he had thought the child would entrance him if he stared into the photo for too long. Aaron had known this since he first got the photo, over four months ago. But that was not the issue here. Truth was never the issue at P&W DNA. It was not Truth & Win DNA, after all.

Saunders walked out of the coffee shop, not yet noticing Aaron, who was in classic detective stance: face hidden behind a newspaper, right leg bent at the knee, his foot laying flat against the storefront. Saunders’ walk was a quick one, and Aaron snapped himself into action, following Saunders down into the 95th Street R station. As they swiped their cards, the chime of the closing doors announced a subway’s intention to leave the station. But they knew that realistically the doors would open and close a few more times before the train actually set off, and they both jetted for it, Saunders too preoccupied with catching the train to notice who his fellow commuter was. And he would’ve cared. Aaron Kelley was no stranger.
BERNARDT—Samuel L. On June 12th, 2007, age 37. He is survived by his wife, Sadie. His cause of death remains unknown and the case is under investigation. His body was discovered in the early A.M. on June 13th, 2007, in the Gravesend Sound, on the Brooklyn side of the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge. Please contact the NYPD if you were near the Verrazano Bridge Brooklyn-side underpass on the evening of June 12th, or if you have any information. Christian burial service, Wednesday, 11:30 A.M. at St. Simon and Jude's Church, followed by Catholic burial at Washington Cemetery.

DEVON—Jo Michael of Maspeth, NY. Father of Mini and Marge. Beloved son of late Thomas, Sr. and Jamie Devin. Loving brother of Maryanne, Kath Stillwell (Stephen), Claire and Jones. Brother of late Thomas, Jr. (Mary) and Margaret O'Connell (Brendan). Proud grandfather. In lieu of flowers please forward donation to Wounded Warrior Project, 7020 AC Skinner Pkwy, Suite 100, Jacksonville, FL 32256.


GARNER—Dennis. Passed away on June 11, 2007. Pension Member of the Metallic Lathers Union Local 46. Reposing at McMoul Funeral Home, 895 Route 82, Hoptown Junction, N.Y. 12533. Viewing from 2:00-4:00 P.M. and 7:00-9:00 P.M. June 16, 2007. Service at 11:00 A.M. on Thursday, March 4, 2010 at the Funeral Home.

HAMRE—Sister Cornelia. Formerly Sr. Michael Mercedes. Beloved member of the Sisters of Charity, Convent of Mary the Queen. Died June 9, 2010. She was the loving sister of Mrs. Mary Rosenberg and is survived by many nieces, nephews and loving cousins. Sister was preceded by her parents Cornelius and Jeanie and her brother Ted. Reposing at the Convent of Mary the Queen, 35 Yark Street, Yonkers, NY on Thursday from 2-8 P.M. with a prayer service at 6:30 P.M. Funeral Mass Friday 9:30 A.M. at the convent. Internment to follow at St. Joseph Cemetery, Yonkers, NY. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Sisters of Charity Development Fund, 6301 Riverdale Ave., Bronx, NY 10471. Arrangements being handled by F. RUGGIERO & SONS, Inc., 732 Yonkers Avenue, Yonkers, NY 10704. 914-375-1400.

Lila and Saunders (Almost) Meet Again

Miss me, y’all? Let me tell you, after that revolving door encounter, I was a little worried I was getting discouraged, but that all only lasted about five minutes before I told myself, “Lila, these idiots clearly haven’t got their acts together, so you better get this situation back in your hands. Can’t be letting Miss Prissy Pants and the Bearded Bozo handle your little Trevor’s future.”

We got out of that building, and I popped some orange Tic-Tacs, cleaned up my face, bronzed my nose, and I was back on track. Thank the Lord, I had thrown up mostly on that awful Unabomber-looking man and not my clothes. Trevor was pulling on my dress and so I looked down at him.

“Mommy, I want a Tic-Tac,” he said.

“That’s nice, sweetie,” I said. “Where the hell is the driver, Andy?” I crossed my arms, pursed my lips, and arched my eyebrows at him. “Well?”

“Probably circling the block,” Andy replied.

“Well is he going to be here soon?” I asked.

“I expect so.”

“Well, why the hell don’t you call him? I’ve got places to go.”

“Oh, yeah, good idea.” He called the company car driver, I put on some lipstick, checked my teeth, and was about to ask if he even actually called the right guy, but then I saw that swanky little car pulling up. We piled in the back and I was going to make little Trevor sit on my lap so he wouldn’t have to be near that idiot lawyer, but fortunately the one thing that the firm seemed to get right was a car with a nice and roomy back.

“Where you going, Andy?” I asked.
“Ah, just back to the office, though maybe I’ll take the afternoon off,” he answered. “Listen, sorry that I touched your hair or whatever, it was—”

“Which is closer to here: the office or home?” I asked.

“The office,” he answered.

“Then that’s where you’re going,” I told him. We were there within ten minutes, thank God—Trevor that rascal was getting fidgety and I had some business to attend to, as well. So Andy got out of the car and then he just stood there holding onto the door like he expected something from me. Vanya, the driver, turned around and looked at me and Andy like he was confused. How typical: late and a dullard.

“Can I help you two?” I asked.

“We’re here,” Andy said.

“I know. So, go ahead, let go of the door, get going,” I said.

“Well you have to come, too,” he eventually responded.

“Like hell I do. Says who? For all the money I’ve given you, I’ve earned it. I need a ride. And so help me God this car is going to take me.”

“I don’t know, I don’t think that’s how it works,” Andy said.

“From now on, that’s how it’s going to work,” I told him. He looked dazed and then finally cleared his throat.

“It’s a company car, Miss Tribulla,” he said. I almost guffawed when I heard the clown call me Miss Tribulla. Ha, they sure know when to pull out the works!

“And I’m a company client. Now come on, Vanya, pedal to the metal, we’re going to Brooklyn.” And then I pulled the car door closed and off we headed.

If my lawyer and P&W couldn’t figure out between themselves how to get that
asshole Saunders, I was going to do it myself. I had started out with some small-time ninny of a lawyer and after three years had finally ended up with what was supposed to be a legit law firm only to be put in the hands of some nincompoop like Andy. I ask for someone who’s actually in charge and he takes me to some practically condemned building downtown that looks like its about to fall over. This had gone on too long for Lila Tribulla, and it was time to get paid up, now. Be it under the table, over the table, whatever, I just needed that cash, not even an admission from that jerk, cause that I knew I was never going to get.

Well I don’t know what happened to Vanya’s speed, he had no problem getting to the office fast, but the drive to Brooklyn took forever. It must have been three or four in the afternoon by the time we got there. Vanya said it took so long because of traffic, but I know better than to believe that there was no alternative route to take. No, that man was just trying to make me pay for calling him out and making him actually do his job. If I were driving, we would’ve been in Mexico sipping on wine coolers by the time we were getting off the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway and just making it to Bay Ridge. Anyway, we got to that jerk Saunders’ house-on-the-hill mansion and I told Vanya, that’s alright, his services for the day were done, he could get out of there, I’d find my own way back home. I was being much nicer than I ever should have been to the hired help, my hired help, but as I was getting out of the back seat and dragging Trevor out, Vanya turned around to me like he thought I was going to tip him or something. Well I gave him a piece of my mind for that move.

“Oh no, no no, mister. No, I know this isn’t a livery or city cab you’re driving. You got a nice paycheck going on, and if you have a problem with it, why don’t you ask
the firm to do something about it, but don’t you look at me. I ain’t got a penny left for myself or my little baby boy after what I’ve had to shell out for that very firm you work for. With the amount I’m paying, I could probably be covering your pay for quite a few months, so don’t you worry yourself, I’ve pretty much already paid you. If it really bothers you, why don’t you get Andy to hook you up with P&W, too, and see how little they can do for you. Now skedaddle!”

I didn’t even close the car door behind myself, I just took little Trevor and sat us down on a bench right outside Shore Road Park, straight across the street from that Saunders’ house. And I didn’t exactly have this part of the plan worked out yet, but I knew there was no way that lazy good-for-nothing was still at City Hall, pretending to do his work. Now was his time to dick around at home before they wife got back from yoga class or cooking class or whatever other class his plump wallet was shelling out the fees for. But today when Saunders walked out that door, he would be in for it.

Aaron and Saunders’ Previous Encounter

They had last met four months ago. Four months was the maximum time of leave you could take from P&W DNA for suffering a traumatic event.

Aaron and Saunders’ previous encounter happened on one of those June nights that through its stickiness and buzzing proclaimed the coming of summer. Aaron and his partner Sam Bernhardt combated the onslaught of the season’s first mosquitoes with a six-pack of Killian’s. They watched the passing headlights of cars on the Verrazano Bridge as they stood on the stone pier that jutted out from the running path on the underpass. Saunders would be coming soon, but not quite yet; he liked to take his runs at
midnight, assured that then he would be out of the public eye. Aaron and Sam threw their empty bottles, some on the pier, some in the Atlantic.

“Hm, floats,” said Sam.

“Yup,” Aaron agreed. “How’s Sadie doing?”

“Great, well, I shouldn’t say that. We went to the doctor yesterday and he says the child seems perfectly healthy. Six months already, just three more and I may be a daddy,” Sam replied.

“You need to believe it Sam. Forget the past, everything’s going right this time, the doctor said so,” Aaron said, only sounding vaguely convincing, though he really wanted to be right this time, for Sam and Sadie’s sake. But Sam just smiled at the ground and they stood in silence for a few minutes.

“Think he’ll be here soon?” Sam asked.

“Probably, got about five minutes.” Aaron walked over to the edge of the pier and turned toward the water, facing away from the path. He unzipped his pants. He closed his eyes but was careful not to sway—there was no barrier separating him from the ocean. The pier was really just a block of concrete jutting into the Gravesend Bay, separated from the running path by a flimsy barrier that was eternally too easy to jump over. The only worrisome part was the descent from the barrier to the pier, which was five feet below the level of the running path. Still, so long as you paid attention to your footing, the cross over to the pier barely warranted a second thought, as evidenced by the plethora of graffiti covering every bit of its surface. Aaron eyed a startlingly punk-rock depiction of the garbage monster from Sesame Street (was Oscar his name?) and listened to the sound of his piss hitting the water fifteen or twenty feet below the edge of the pier.
“Hey, fellas,” Aaron heard someone say. He snapped out of his reverie, and slowly buttoned and zipped his pants, sighing as he turned to face what he figured would be a police officer, chastising him for public urination. But there stood Lyle Saunders, in his running shorts and an oversized Lakers t-shirt, the grey streaks in his wavy brown hair matching the reflective stripes on his shorts.

“What do you two morons think you’re doing?” Saunders asked. Aaron said nothing. Neither did Sam. This wasn’t part of the plan. They were supposed to watch Saunders pass by on his run, catch the water bottle that he without fail dropped as he passed the pier, and be on their way. This was supposed to be the last night of the Tribulla case. Collect the “DNA” and get the hell out of there. Saunders had received the letter that supposedly politely requested that he come into the P&W offices to give a DNA sample over a week ago, and had not responded. In truth, P&W didn’t even have a medical room for collecting samples. That front had been turned into a storage closet years ago, after Helen accidentally ordered twenty dozen rather than twenty boxes of Le Petit Écolier cookies and could not figure out where to put them. Either way, it had been over a week since the letter was sent, and now Sam and Aaron operated under the pretense that they would have to collect a sample without Saunders’ consent.

“So what, P&W hiring deaf-mutes now?” Saunders tried, again. Aaron’s mouth moved, but no sound came out. How did Saunders know who they were? They had only been tracking his movements for a few days, and it was always from a distance. Saunders was definitely not supposed to know about this aspect of P&W’s work, not at this point, they had only just informed him that they were representing Lila, and this was only in a letter. The threats and insinuations of P&W’s ability to ruin him weren’t going to come
“Fucking idiots,” Saunders said. He reached under his t-shirt hastily, and pulled out a gun, which he twirled around on one finger like a deranged gunslinger.

“Hey, hey, hey,” both Aaron and Sam now said, their disjointed voices echoing their fear. Sam inched closer to Aaron, who was thinking that jumping into the murky waters of the Atlantic might be the best conceivable plan. If Aaron was a real detective, he would be prepared for moments like these and say things like, “Hold it, sucker,” whip out his own pistol, and handle the situation from there. But he was just a P&W phony and he wasn’t about to pretend otherwise at the moment.

“You think I haven’t seen you following me around? You think I don’t know what’s up? Think I don’t have my own men?” Saunders said, as he walked a few inches towards them. He wouldn’t actually come up to them; he just wanted to sniff the fear on the men, to relish in it.

“You think I’m going to let two idiots ruin my life? Two idiots and some whore?” At this point, Saunders stopped twirling his gun, which had been in perpetual motion since he first withdrew it from his shorts, and let it rest so that it pointed at the two cowering men. It was small, but Aaron would have preferred it to not be pointing at him nonetheless.

“Yeah, thought so.” Saunders yelled. Though he had just pissed, Aaron felt a hot wetness stream down his leg. Too many beers, and he had broken the seal too early. He wondered if Sam could feel it, as they were now standing so close that their bodies touched. He wondered if this was also Sam’s first time having a gun pulled on him, and how it was that in their eight years of being partners the matter had never come up in
conversation. Aaron realized he had a death grip on the back of Sam’s shirt and tried to let go, but fear had seized him into a living rigor mortis, and his hand remained in a sweaty fist, clenching Sam’s shirt between its fingers.

Saunders raised his right hand, putting his finger on the trigger of the gun. He squinted one eye shut like a sniper, though he was no more than fifteen feet away from the men.

“Aw, screw it, why wait, right?” Saunders asked, and fired the gun. Aaron screamed even though he hadn’t been hit, an indiscernible vocalization somewhere between a squeak and a hacking cough, and felt his grip on Sam’s shirt tighten. Aaron felt the bones in his own fingers crushing themselves and screamed louder and fell backwards beyond the edge of the pier thoughtlessly. Aaron felt his own body suspended in the air, and awaited being completely immersed in the cold water of the Gravesend Bay. He saw Sam coming down with him, his hand still gripping Sam’s shirt. Aaron thought he had saved them both. They would bob and weave throughout the water, avoiding Saunders’ gunshots like all the tough guys in war movies do. But that didn’t happen, not that smoothly.

Aaron felt a jolt and heard a loud crack that made him think of gladiators. Sam screamed, “AH, fuck fuck fuck. Ahhhh.” While Aaron’s body had made it off the pier and began its descent to the water, Sam’s was trying desperately to maintain some hold on the pier. He succeeded, at least for awhile. Sam dangled from the pier, the flesh of his hands ripping off against the concrete. Aaron dangled over the water, both of his hands now holding Sam’s shirt, pulling him down towards the water, but only for what was barely a moment in time. Hot tears rolled down Aaron’s face and he whined like a horse,
not knowing what to do, and then he let go. When he fell in the bay, it came as a surprise. He felt as though steel pumps were pushing in and out all over his body. Pistons pumping, pistons pumping, repeated over and over in his head in an endless, mindless chorus—the water was freezing even though it was almost summer. Aaron held his mangled hand across his body, and with his other arm thwacked at the water. For the first time in his life, he desperately yearned to make it to Staten Island, that heap of the city’s trash that he saw about half a mile away from him, the only land mass in sight other than the one he had just escaped. He looked back at the pier as he began to head towards the opposite land mass, and found Sam to be nowhere in sight. *Fuck*, he thought, *fuck*. Last Aaron had looked, Sam was barely clinging onto the pier with both hands and attempting to hoist himself back up. Aaron scanned the water’s surface but didn’t spot him then either. He had to look for him. Sam had not been hit by a single bullet. If he was drowning, or—Aaron almost drowned himself thinking about it—dead, it was only because Aaron had clung to him for too long, and had taken him down into the water with him. Aaron was about to start scouring the nearby waters when he heard a very abrupt *Plup!* by his ear. *What the?* But soon he was hearing *Plup! Plup! Plup!* all around him. Looking in the direction the sounds were coming from, he realized Saunders was standing at the edge of the pier and shooting at him. Aaron didn’t think, suddenly vastly unconcerned with Sam’s fate, or anything other than making it the half mile or so to Staten Island. He thwacked his way all the way to the dismal landmass with just one working hand.

It took him an hour to make it, and when he pulled himself onto the shore, he fell asleep for hours on the littered sand, half his body still being wetted by the tide. When he
awoke, he looked across at the bay, squinting at the pier all the way back in Brooklyn, and didn’t see Sam or Saunders anywhere, though he swore he could see the glimmer of shell casings reflecting in the same way that the late morning sun was reflecting on the water. But he knew that he couldn’t possibly see that far. He walked all the way to Staten Island University Hospital, viciously angry that he couldn’t just cross the bridge to Brooklyn. But the only time that pedestrians were allowed on the Verrazano Bridge was for the New York City marathon. Aaron thought of how the runners would piss off the sides of the bridge immediately before the race began, relieving themselves one last time before they began their taxing journey. They produced a curtain of piss that gave the appearance of a waterfall cascading into Gravesend Bay. Aaron thought of his own urine hitting the Bay the night before, how that was the last moment he had shared with Sam. Stumbling like what on-lookers assumed was a drunkard, tortured by thoughts of being responsible for his partner’s death, Aaron gave up and headed inland. The thought of the water was revolting, and he couldn’t very well get a cab back to Brooklyn until he got himself taken care of. You’re a goddamn pansy and one lousy human being, Aaron, he told himself. If only that was as upset as he ever got about the whole situation. He passed out in front of what he thought was Staten Island University Hospital, but was actually a neighboring building: South Beach Psychiatric Center. It was just as well. They were used to a whole different sort there: alcoholics who claimed there was nothing wrong with them, they just had an especial appreciation for the artistic concoction known to most as a Long Island iced tea; “guidos” with a bit too much steroid rage; momma’s boys who were too anxious to drive over a bridge and ended up suffering a sort of agoraphobia that initially limited them to Staten Island but eventually limited them to just one padded
room in South Beach Psychiatric Center in Staten Island.

It was just as well. The psychiatric staff saw Aaron passed out on the shrubbery by the entrance, and called an ambulance to pick him up. Though the ambulance only had to travel down the block, and then back to the hospital (the whole trip lasted ten minutes), it managed to cost Aaron an extra twelve-hundred dollars, not that this was something that worried him for very long, given that he had other things to worry about.

Back to Aaron and Saunders’ Second Encounter

“Go figure.” Aaron opened his eyes but saw nobody in front of him. The lights flickered momentarily as the subway passed further through the tunnel. The voice came from his right, where Saunders’s lips were practically pressed to his ear. Aaron shook his head, orienting himself as Saunders’s lips grazed his ear. They were pulling into the Atlantic Avenue-Pacific Street station, and Saunders scooted even closer to him. They were the only passengers in the car.

Saunders laughed lightly into Aaron’s ear. Aaron cleared his throat but said nothing.

“Didn’t think you’d have it in you to go on without your buddy. Too bad I killed him. Oops, I mean, too bad you did.” Saunders hissed these last words, sending small streams of spit into Aaron’s ear. Saunders backed away and straightened himself out in the seat next to Aaron’s. Saunders crossed one leg over the other, and leaned his elbow on it. He folded his hand into a fist and rested his chin on it. He raised his eyebrows, or rather, eyebrow, for the two eyebrows seemed to connect at a downward peak over his nose bridge, giving the appearance of a flock of seagulls flying directly at whomever he
happened to be observing. Saunders peered at Aaron, smiling. The eyebrow-cum-flock-of-seagulls gave Aaron a chill, making him think of Hitchcock’s *The Birds*. Aaron tried his best to look away. Saunders saw Aaron’s eyes skit nervously throughout the car—but there was no one else in it.

“But then you come around with that young fox today. Man, I was surprised. How’d you get yourself a new associate like that?” Saunders asked.

Saunders stood up to get off at City Hall. Aaron smoothed out his collar and straightened his tie, readying himself to stand and follow Saunders.

“Don’t even think about it, fag,” Saunders said.

“Wouldn’t want to follow a cocksucker,” Aaron answered, barely believing what he was saying as he was saying it, and plopped himself back down on one of the hard citrus-colored seats. Saunders turned on his heel to exit the train quickly as the door-close chime chimed. Aaron watched Saunders disappear through the closing doors. The train pulled out of the station, and Aaron hunched over in his seat, heaving for breath. He rested his elbows on his knees and hid his face with his hands. Maybe he wasn’t ready for this.

He stood up from his seat, planting his palm on a grime-covered window to steady himself. He stumbled out at some station in Queens, and hailed a taxi back to Brooklyn. He walked into his one-bedroom apartment in Red Hook, and collapsed on his couch, asleep before dinnertime.

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*Lila Goes to “The Park”*

We sat there for a few hours. Trevor played on the strip of grass around the bench
with some Hot Wheels I found in my purse, and I filed my nails, plucked my eyebrows, touched up on my nail polish. If I was going to whip out my claws once my good-for-nothing baby daddy reared his ugly head, I had to make sure they looked good. We ate some hot dogs from the hot dog cart down the block, but even when we went to go get them I made sure to keep an eye on Lyle’s door and garage; there was no way he was going to slip by me. He managed to for three years, and today was going to mark the end of me taking that bologna from him. Lila Tribulla is not a weak woman, and it was time for her to stop being treated like one. If I wanted money for my baby, then Saunders was going to have to pay up. And if I wanted a little more to make life a touch more cushy, then why shouldn’t he have to pay for that, too? I had to sleep with the sorry man. And sure he paid me enough at the time, but it sure wasn’t enough to cover taking care of Trevor—*his child, his responsibility*, as far as anybody knew. The man ruined my goddamn career as well. Who wants a call-girl with a baby? I don’t see it as a big deal. I did my Kegel’s all through the pregnancy. But apparently having popped one out is a deal breaker for most of these fellows.

The way I see it, he owes me big time. He has a wife, and a baby on the way from what I hear, and he better set things right by me, and fast or I was going to make sure not just his campaign but his whole little comfy situation got blown up.

Anyway, it was around nine at night and he still was nowhere in sight, so I let Trevor get another hot dog, but I was still on the lookout, and I knew he would come out soon. He always went on these long late night runs, trust me, I would know. Back when we were doing our thing, he only ever wanted to meet up around ten or eleven at night, when his wife thought he was doing his training runs. And when he didn’t finish the
marathon in less than three and a half hours that year, he blamed me. But I said, Hey, you’re the one that’s been paying me to fool around with you. If you’re gonna whine, sugar, I got to listen because it’s my job, but you should know that was your decision.

And sure enough, right around a quarter past ten he came out his door, in just those neon orange shorts, not even a shirt. Whenever he showed up at the little apartment a few blocks away that he rented just for our trysts in those shorts, I knew it was going to be a long night. He called them his endurance trainers. Well the only thing he was going to endure tonight was me, and not in the way he used to.

I saw him running my way so I stood up and started smoothing out my dress. He was just about to pass by me so I started giving him a piece of my mind.

“You hold it right there, Mister. Now I don’t know how you’re expecting to get elected, but it ain’t going to be easy with me in your way because this has gone far—”

And this was right as he was passing by me so I reached out to grab him, but he just looked at me and said, “Do I know you? Keep running into whackos everywhere today. On the train, and now this,” and kept running away. Well let me tell you, that sent me riling. I started taking off my heels and was going to chase after him, but by the time I got my knock-off Jimmy Choo’s off, I knew I would never catch up with him, so I just chucked one of them in his direction instead. And I don’t know what I was thinking, because even though they were knock offs, they still cost me a good two hundred dollars. But when it hit his back, he didn’t even say anything, even though I’m pretty sure the stiletto hit him right in the spine. I hoped it hurt as much as the damn epidural. But all he did was turn around and look at me as he ran away, and I swear to you, he winked.
My Mister and Misses Can be Jerks

Hey, remember me? It’s Bunny, and I’m looking for some eats. I’ll tell you all about how my Misses came to visit me and my Mister at our new place if you just give me some lettuces. I’m all alone here now and nobody gave me my lettuces. It’s like, *Hello, just because you people have your issues doesn’t mean a bunny’s not hungry.* I’m angry.

Anyway, my Mister came home and laid down on the couch like always so I hopped over thinking we could look at the colored box for awhile but he just grunted and said, “Not today,” and turned to face away from me on the couch, and I thought, *Hey, you didn’t even leave enough space for me to hop on.* I got no response so I finally just leaped on top of him and tickled his face with my whiskers because then he couldn’t ignore me but actually he just pushed me off. It was very not nice of him, I think.

I went and laid down by the front door and was sleeping there because I figured if there’s any chance of my Mister getting up and going out to buy some food for himself later, this way he’ll definitely see me and feel bad and give me some pets and then go buy me some foods, too, and we’d be all okay again. And I was just laying there for a long time, at least an hour or two, and I was going to stick this out until my Mister noticed me and besides I was napping so it was nice. Besides, I had to conserve my energy since I clearly was *not* getting fed any time soon. Woe is a bunny. And then I actually fell asleep pretty hard and next thing I know *WHAM!* Somebody was coming in through the door and they swung it open real hard and it sent me skidding across the floor into the wall. When I was done shaking my head and trying to get myself back on my paws again, I realized it was my Misses who had opened the door. And I really wished that bunnies
made noises because I wanted to say, Misses! You hit me, but it’s okay, I forgive you. You still smell like chamomile. Can we eat? But she was heading straight for my Mister who was still sleeping on the couch and she didn’t seem like she even noticed I was there.

My Misses stood over my Mister and she had this big stack of papers in her hand that looked pretty good for chewing on so I hopped over to try to get some but then she held it over my Mister’s head and just dropped it. And I thought, Ouch, Mister, don’t worry, she hurt me, too. Why is she doing this?

To this my Mister kind of moaned and then he sat up and he just stared at her and she stared back and it looked like when two of us bunnies fight over territory so I looked up at them too and was about to start thumping my foot but then my Mister started talking.

“Hi, Agi, what’s up?” he asked.

*Thump.* Whatever, I was going to thump anyway.

“Don’t even, Aaron,” she said.

“What?” he asked. “We can’t be civil?”

“We can be civil, but let’s not act all buddy-buddy, alright?” she said.

*Thump.*

“Why don’t you sit down?” he said. He patted the space on the couch next to him, so I jumped up there.

“Thanks, it looks like Bunny’s got it, though. Well, looks like you’re somehow managing to keep him nice and fattened up,” she said. I was just hoping she would sit down on the other side of me and then both of them could pet me and it would smell like chamomile. But they didn’t, so….
Thump.

“I just came to try once again to get you to sign the divorce papers, Aaron,” she said. He didn’t have anything to say to that, and then she raised her eyebrow at him, making the same look she used to give me before I got good at using my litter box and I would leave poops everywhere. She meant business. Well so did I!

Thump!

“What divorce papers?” my Mister finally asked.

“Don’t even, Aaron. Seriously, please, don’t,” my Misses replied.

“What? I haven’t seen any papers yet,” he said.

“I’ve mailed you at least five copies,” she said.

Thump, thump.

“Don’t usually check the mail, Agi,” he responded and stood up and started walking to the kitchen.

Thump, thump, thump.

“Well maybe you should work on that,” she said, and she followed him into the kitchen and that’s a really small room so I watched them from the doorway and hoped they would pull out some food for me. But my Mister just rested his palms on the edge of the sink and leaned his head down. “Or at least check your messages,” my Misses added.

“Can’t seem to find my charger these days,” my Mister responded.

Thump. (Maybe I misunderstood what our bunny thumping is about. Maybe it’s to make other animals fight, not ourselves. Oh well, nature: it’s confusing.)

“There’s always an excuse, isn’t there?” my Misses said.

“I’m just going to stop talking now,” he said. “Everything I say just makes you
angrier.”

“I’m not angry,” she said. “I’m upset. This whole situation makes me upset. You think I’m happy?”

“No,” he said. And then she made him turn around and they just looked at each other for a long time but it didn’t seem like a good time for me to provoke the territory war more, so I stood in the doorway to the kitchen like a good bunny. Or at least I was pretending to be a good bunny so they would feed me.

Then my Mister tried to tuck my Misses’ hair behind her ear and I was all jealous that she was getting pets and I wasn’t. He said, “I’m back on the case, Agi. The Tribulla case.”

Thump!

“What?” was all my Misses could say. And she started backing away. “Are you serious? You have to be kidding, Aaron. Haven’t you gone through enough with this? At some point the grieving has to end. Did you even look at the list of counselors I sent you? The online support groups? Anything?” My Mister tried to respond but my Misses wouldn’t let him. I did though, I was being a good bunny again and I didn’t thump. Sorry for that last time I thumped, I wanted to say, but they weren’t listening.

“No, no, I’m not going through this again. I’m not a part of this any more,” she said. She was almost out the front door and then she turned around. “Now you know where the papers are so your excuses aren’t worth much. You should lock your front door. Bye.” This was very sad.

My Misses left without even petting me once, can you believe it? Then my Mister banged on the kitchen counter and said, “Damn it.” And before I could even say, Foods,
please? he was at the door, too. He sighed loudly and turned towards me and said, “Change, it’s tough, ain’t it? She’ll get over it. This just isn’t worth my time anymore.” And I thought, Yeah, like going from eating to not eating is a tough change. Do you have some eats for a lonely bunny?

Saunders Makes Andy an Offer

Andy thought it was going to be just another day at the office. He would show up at eight and read through his e-mails (which usually informed him of matters not more important than what was on sale at Sharper Image, and who was going to be modeling on *Sports Illustrated* this issue). Then he might stare at the wall or play Tetris or doze off until lunchtime. He’d look at his list of favorite lunch spots, then he’d close his eyes and turn once in his swivel chair, stopping the force of his turn by aiming his finger at a random, unseen spot on the computer screen. Wherever the greasy smudge of his fingerprint landed, there he would dine. And if he missed the screen completely, which he more often than not did, he would go to the communal kitchen and eat the meal his wife had packed him, which otherwise served as mere afternoon fodder. After eating, he would come back to the office for an hour or two, and find some excuse like a pain in his toe or a *Law & Order* marathon and head home. He knew he only got the job at the firm because his father-in-law Rudy Fields was a partner, and he knew that now that Rudy had seen him at work they only entrusted him with cases that they believed he could handle. That is to say, Andy’s clients were all jokes, but well-paying jokes.

It was already past four in the afternoon—atypically late for Andy to still be at the office, but he had fallen asleep for longer than usual that morning, and so had taken a late
lunch. (His lengthy morning nap left him bleary-eyed, which ensured that he missed the computer screen entirely when picking his lunch locale, and was forced to eat his wife’s provolone and pastrami on rye, which left him in a foul mood, since he had really wanted Kennedy Fried Chicken.)

Andy was about to bring his daily routine to an end and head home, when the phone rang. He expected it would be Lila Tribulla, who he had surprisingly received only two angry phone calls from that day, and so he let it go to the machine, but stayed to listen to the message out of curiosity to hear what slanderous phrases she would hurl in his direction this time. Earlier she had called him a Fruit Loop and informed him that he had a banana for brains. He expected no less than a fruity reference from this call, and yet he was met with something entirely different.

“Hello, I’m assuming this is the office of Andy Lowly, attorney at law. This is Lyle Saunders calling. I’m involved in the Lila Tribulla case and I was wondering if we could set up a time to meet. I think your firm has my office number on file, but why don’t you just give me a call on my cell phone. The number is 9-1-7-3-3—”

By now Andy had managed to pull himself together and reach for the receiver, though in his intense anxiety he managed to drop it on the floor and step on it before he got to put it up to his ear.

“This is Andy Lowly speaking. How can I help you?” he said when he managed to get the receiver right side up.

“You alright there, buddy?” Saunders asked. “Sounds like you’re in the middle of a battle zone. I guess in a way you are.”

“Yes, fine,” was all Andy could manage.
“Well, listen, partner, I was thinking, why don’t we meet up some time and talk about this whole Lila-Tribulla-I’m-supposedly-the-father thing. It’s just all so ridiculous, isn’t it? I was going to just let it all play out on it’s own, you know, me not being the father and all, cause don’t you dare think I’m calling to agree to some bogus DNA test or any of your other nonsense, but you know, now that this Lila woman is showing up at my house, I figure I need to do something. My wife doesn’t appreciate this. I don’t appreciate it. Got it? So why don’t we just figure this out.”

“Okay,” Andy said.

“Good then, bud. Next Thursday. Under the Verrazano Bridge. Let’s say ten in the evening?”

“Hey, that’s kind of an unusual time to meet,” Andy said.

“Yeah, well, this isn’t the most normal case, is it, Andy?” Saunders asked.

“I suppose not,” Andy responded.

“Nice. Ten P.M. And hey, Andy, do me a favor?”

“What’s that?”

“Don’t bring the bimbo.”
Exhibit 4. Sam Berndhart’s death certificate

[Image of a death certificate]
Aaron Explains to Sadie

Aaron walked out of the apartment with a determination he had not experienced in months, maybe even ever before in his life. Whereas for the past few months his primary motivations had been sleep and occasionally caring for Bunny, he now felt as though he had a pit of fuel within his core. And now that it had been ignited, he could barely contain the fire that burned within him. Prior to his encounter on the subway with Saunders his desire for revenge was of a much more benign form: it would be nice to get back at the man who sparked his partner’s death, but it was unlikely Aaron would ever actively pursue the mission. But like a mole that received no attention for years and suddenly turned out to be the source of a quite malignant and fatal melanoma, Aaron was now going to pursue his anti-Saunders campaign with a new zest. He walked past the subway entrance, preferring to walk the four stops to keep his heart rate up. The newsstand man by the subway waved and said hello to him, and to that Aaron grunted back, “Yeah, I’ll get him.”

The walk was not one Aaron would later be able to recall, as he did not feel he was really controlling himself, though he was heading where he wanted to be going. Suffice it to say, when he arrived at Sadie’s doorstep he knew it was where he had meant to go, but yet he was somehow briefly stupefied. He had not been there since the wake, and had predicted he would never go there again, as much as he sometimes might want to.

He ignored the doorbell and pounded on the door several times in a rhythmic way, so that anybody who heard would be perplexed as to why such a delicate melody would be delivered in such a harsh way. When he got no immediate response, he peered in
through the window and saw that none of the lights were on. At first he thought Sadie must not be home. Then when he pounded out the same chilling melody (dum-da-da-dum-dum—DUM-DUM) and again got no response, he presumed Sadie had ditched town, and without so much as leaving him her new address. Right as he was about to turn and leave, he caught a glimmer in the window. He peered in once more and saw the shell of what had formerly been Sadie descending down the steps, candle in hand. If he hadn’t known any better, he would have thought her a ghost, her and Sam haunting their old home together.

Sadie opened the door and looked Sam up and down, “You’re wet,” she said.

“I didn’t notice,” he said.

“It was raining just a few minutes ago,” she said and held one hand up to her brow, blocking the light of the outdoors, as she used her other hand to balance the candle dish. Aaron’s outline glowed. It had been one of those rare rains that come only once every several years, leaving everything in a sort of aurora borealis. Aaron’s silhouette radiated against the sepia tone that the sky colored the outdoors with. It was past seven in late fall—it should have been dark.

“Can I come in?” he finally asked.

“Yes,” she said, and turned around, leading the way in. As she turned, the candle flickered out and the house became permeated by the eerie brown glow, just enough so that shapes were visible—most of the shades were not drawn. Aaron flipped a light switch and the bulbs zinged on, clearly not having been utilized in a long time. Sadie whimpered. Aaron turned the lights back off and sat down on what he knew from past visits was a beige leather couch. He thought briefly of how his wet coat was probably
ruining it, but made no move to protect the expensive leather ottoman, which he believed Sadie and Sam had received as a wedding present from an aged relative. Aaron waited as Sadie went to the kitchen for a book of matches and relit her candle. She sat down cross-legged on the floor, on the opposite side of the coffee table Aaron was hunching over.

“How are you feeling, Sadie?” Aaron asked.

“Oh, you know,” she responded, and tried to smile at him, but she was holding her candle in her lap and as she looked up at Aaron, her face became ghoulish, the circles beneath her eyes turning to shadowy downturned triangles that practically reached her jaw line. But Aaron was unfazed. Until as recently as the previous day, his face bore a resemblance to hers.

“I need to tell you something, Sadie,” Aaron said. “I don’t think Sam ever told you this.”

At the mention of Sam’s name Sadie moaned. “Oh, I don’t know if we really need to go through all that,” she said as she placed a piece of what used to be her yolk-shiny blonde hair in her mouth. Sam watched her and noted that it seemed more like a nest of exposed electrical wire now. He watched as her eyes averted his and zoomed intently to a framed photograph of her and Samuel on a service trip to the Honduras that they had taken briefly after they graduated college together.

“No, Sadie, you need to know this, alright?” Aaron said. Sadie made an unpleasant noise in her throat and maintained it. It was like the rumble of a box-sized, old, European car, perhaps a Peugeot. “It’s about P&W. There’s a lot that’s not right with the company. Look.” And here Sam pulled a well-worn photocopy of a letter out of his breast pocket, which he passed over to Sadie, careful to avoid letting it catch on the
flame. “There’s only supposed to be one copy, and it’s supposed to stay at the office. But I’ve always kept a copy on me. Sam did, too, he had one just like mine. Just in case something ever happened to me or to him—the world needed to know.”

With this statement, Aaron stood up and rushed out the door, aware that he would ultimately be of little help to Sadie, but glad to have a weight off his chest. With Sadie’s support—even if it was only psychic rather than active support—he knew he needed no one else’s, and had enough purpose to make good on his mission. At least someone would know he tried, and why.
August 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 2001
(date)

P&W DNA TESTING
718 Chambers Street.
New York, NY 10282

To _____ AGENT _______ _____AARON KELLEY_________:
(position) (name)

You have recently been informed that you will be receiving a raise of ___$35,000 per annum_. You will also receive ___a one-time bonus of $50,000_______.
(amount) (amount)

Your job position will also change as you will be asked to prepare reports for legal dispute in addition to your regular duties.

The receipt of this letter is an honor and a privilege.

Through years of dedicated work, you have exhibited that you are prepared to be imparted with this information.

You are being presented with this information because the management at P&W believes it will help you better perform your job.

Once imparted with this information, you are expected to use it to help P&W with the recruitment of new clients.

This letter also indicates that the management at P&W believes you may one day be eligible for a managerial position at P&W.

You may not share or discuss the information presented in this letter with anyone, including other P&W employees, nor any P&W superiors, with the exception of situations in which superiors should choose to discuss it with you.

This letter is to inform you that P&W is a for-hire DNA testing company.

In your role as _____AGENT_______ it has been your job to serve P&W clients by acquiring samples for presentation in legal dispute involving DNA evidence. Your work has helped many clients receive the results they desire. While evidence you acquire is presented in court, it is strictly NOT used in genetic testing, as it typically would be in a DNA testing firm.
(description)

continued on next page
Your large salary, as well as P&W's financial success, are functions of its wealthy and benevolent clientele, as well as the wealth and benevolence of accused parties.

It is the mission of P&W to fill a niche in the market by providing the highest-paying party with the results they desire by creating DNA test reports and providing “evidence.”

As you will now be creating these DNA reports, you must understand that the demand of clients, as well as the client of choice (as the most willing to pay client is termed) is ever changing, and you will frequently be asked to revise your reports to meet the needs of the client of choice.

Please understand that this business model is a successful one for P&W DNA, and accounts for your comparatively large salary.

**Please note that acceptance of this raise and promotion is compulsory. You are a valued P&W employee.**

Best,

ZACHARY ROTH  
President, P&W DNA Testing

**Exhibit 5. Aaron’s P&W letter**
Aaron and Agi Meet Again

It was past eight in the evening when Aaron finally stepped out of Sam and Sadie’s house. As he fumbled in his pocket for his MetroCard, he heard a familiar voice.

“Aaron?” it asked.

“Agi? What are you doing here?” he responded.

“What am I doing here? I come to check up on Sadie every evening. What are you doing here?”

“I didn’t know you would be here,” Aaron cut her off.

“Why would you be here then?” Agi asked. Aaron gave no response other than a shrug of the shoulders and proceeded to walk towards the subway station, though he was only confident in putting on this performance because he knew that Agi would call after him.

“What were you doing here, Aaron? Tell me, or so help me God, I’m asking for alimony and the rabbit,” Agi yelled after him. Aaron turned back towards the house and approached Agi coolly. He spoke only when he was within a foot of her and looking her directly in the eyes.

“I told her about P&W,” he said, unable to keep his secret to himself. Agi was the only other person with whom he had shared this information. However, since Aaron for some reason never chose to actually reveal his letter to her, and brought it up for the first time en route to Sam’s funeral, Agi had a hard time believing him. Aaron often repeated his point about P&W being a scam, but Agi expressed little interest in Aaron’s “delirious attempts to rationalize Sam’s death.” On the rare occasions that Aaron pondered about it, he always insisted to himself that his insistence on discussing P&W’s criminal nature was
what drove Agi away in the end. That, and the squalor that Aaron insisted on maintaining everywhere in his life, whether it be physically in his and Agi’s home, or in his disorganized thoughts.

So when Aaron mentioned P&W, Agi at first looked confused, because Aaron’s moving out marked the removal of all thoughts P&W from Agi’s mind. When Agi finally realized what Aaron meant, her confused fury more than made up for her brief inactivity of response.

“What? Wait, what? You told her about it? You told her about something Sam never wanted her to know? You are sick. First you invent this whole totally mental theory about P&W is a sham. Then you come up with this caveat that Sam specifically did not want Sadie to know. And then you go on to tell Sadie. It’s sick, Aaron, that you can keep something like this up for so long. And with absolutely no care for how it might hurt the vulnerable people you set right in your path of destruction. Sick.”

This got no response from Aaron.

“Do you have any idea how marriages work?” Agi continued. “Do you understand what respecting a spousal request is? You’re a maniac. You’re a maniac on a psycho mission and you’re just trying to drag her in on a mess. Do you see how she is? She spends the whole day walking around in pajamas with all the lights turned off, refusing to eat unless she happens to pick at a hydrangea or a cactus or something. You think this is going to help?”

“It’s different. He’s dead now,” Aaron replied. And as he headed for the subway, in earnest this time, he added, “Maybe it’s best if we don’t talk for awhile. I’ll get to the divorce papers. Don’t worry. No need for you to be coming by my place again.”
Bunny Likes His Mister Now

Hey! Hey hey! Do you see how much more fluffy I am? How much more feh-hh-t? I mean, not to say that I wouldn’t like more lettuces, but this is pretty nice. Even my cottontail seems to be bigger than usual, and my tummy just kind of goes splat all around me when I lay down. These days when I lie down and look up at my Mister, I say, Mmm, thank you for the yummy foods, you should always be this productive. Is your winter coming up? We bunnies get real busy when winter is coming and we need to get nice and feh-t to prepare for the cold. Except I guess we have central air in the apartment, but you know what I mean, nature and stuff.

Anyway, after that day when he and my Misses were huge meanies, he left for a real long time. I got to eat all the food that was out on the table before he even got back. I just staid up and ate cereals and uncooked macaroni and that stuff that they say is cheese powder but I don’t know if I trust it, and leftover sandwiches, and it was GREAT! But then my Mister showed up so I went back to my cage and then pretty soon I was very very sickles, and I got a little worried because whenever I got sick, my Misses used to take care of me, and she wasn’t here now, so I thought it might be time for Bunny to meet his end and go on to a heaven of lettuces and organic strawberry clouds.

So I laid down on my side in my cage and I stretched out one paw towards my Mister who was looking through some papers in the hallway, and I said, Well, I suppose this is the end, my friend, my Mister. I had a great time with you and Misses, and hey you had some great food out on that there table. It’s just I—”

And then I farted.

“Bunny!” my Mister said, and ran over to me from the hall. “My God, that is foul!
What have you been eating?”

And then he saw my trail of poops from my cage to the kitchen table. “Holy shit, Bunny. Holy…shit.” What can I say? It got to be a little too much and I didn’t make it to the cage in time. Little did I know I would have to pay for it with my life. I told you there was something wrong with that “cheese” powder.

“Okay, we have got to get you back in shape, Bunny,” my Mister said, and as he did so a whole new trail of poops kind of just fell out of me. “Fantastic,” he said, and he picked up a towel off the floor and wrapped me up like a little swaddled baby, and I thought, what a very nice way to die. I wondered if I could get just one more macaroni elbow.

But as if that wasn’t nice enough of him, my Mister left me all curled up on the couch and went digging through the closet. And at first I blinked at him like, Hey, aren’t you going to stay with me while I expire from this cruel, cruel world of poisonous cheese powder? But then he came back with something in his hand and it was the big plastic tube of yuck that my Misses used to put in my mouth to make me feel all better when this used to happen at the old house. And I thought, Oh my! I’ve been granted another day. I wonder if I’ll get some more lettuces. And then my Mister put the tube in my mouth and squished the stuff in my mouth and I put up a bit of a fight, because I couldn’t let him think I was just going to let him put icky things in my mouth all the time, but after a few minutes he got it all in and I knew I just had to lay there and pretty soon the rest of my poops would be out and then I’d be all ready for some more foods. My Mister left me there all wrapped up on the couch and he walked over and started cleaning the poop trail that went all the way back to the kitchen.
And that wasn’t the end of it! He just kept cleaning and pretty soon the whole house was clean and so now it’s so tough for my feh-t bunny butt to hop around! And he started actually buying me lettuces and strawberries and raspberries and oh I am just so feh-t!

But I suppose you want to hear about my Mister because I know one thing that hasn’t changed, he gets all the attention around here. Don’t you be mistaken; he gets me super tasty foods and all and has some time for petting me but all the time that he spent sleeping before he spends on that silly screen that you people call the internets or out of the house and he just always looks so rushed so I tell him, *Hey, Mister, take a chill pill*, but he doesn’t seem to notice. Or at least I don’t think he does because the only thing he ever says back is, “Oh, Lyle, Lyle, Lyle, your day is coming, and faster than you know.” And I don’t think that has anything to do with a chill pill, but how would I know?

One day I was just peeing in my cage and my Mister walks over to me and this is what he says, “Okay, Bunny, here’s the plan, you ready to hear it?” And I was like, *No, duh, can’t you see, I’m sitting on my litter box?* but he kept talking anyway. “If we want to get him, we have got to get him good. I don’t know how exactly I’ll do it, but I don’t care, I’ll facilitate my own self destruction as long as that fucker goes down with me. But I can’t be letting those P&W idiots know that I have a plan of my own. No, that would *not* work at all. Who knows, they would probably wrap me up in one of their bribing-out-to-be-the-client-of-choice-mess-shenanigan- nonsense-bits. No, no, no. This is not about me and that Satan Lyle Saunders, it’s about all the cases, all the kids. It’s about all us people that have gotten fucked on some money-making scheme. And it’s about Sam. Mostly about Sam. Sadie would’ve had that kid, I know it, if it wasn’t for the goddamn
sick stunts they pulled on us. And now because that devil Saunders got in the way, and took away her husband, he also took away her child. It’s sick, and I’m going to fix it. Got it? I’m not going to be this jack-shit nobody being pushed around anymore. ‘You may not share or discuss the information presented in this letter with anyone’ my ass. Now, want a strawberry? Chop, chop.’

And that’s when I started thinking that even if he was highly-functioning, at least in comparison to the past few months since we got to the new place, my Mister was kind of scary. He picked a strawberry out of the carton in the big cold box and was starting to bring it to me when he cocked his head to the side and laughed a bit to himself. I was wondering what was so funny, but then I just looked at him all afraid as he smashed the strawberry in his hand and looked down at it, saying, “Oops.”

Sadie and Agi at Sadie’s

We spent most of the morning sitting on her couch, all the shades drawn, as usual. It had been a few days since I was last over, that night that I ran into Aaron. The candle wax still covered every surface, all the pictures of Sam were still turned down except for one over the mantle, which she had a hard time drawing her eyes away from. In fact, the only physical difference I could take note of, between her house and Sadie herself, was that her eyes, which used to always have these moist, sharp edges that signaled her continuous crying, now seemed to hold a dark tint within them, which almost mimicked the heart of the flame of her candles. She sat holding her cup of chamomile tea with both hands, and peered over its edge at me. She was silent, and I tried to smile at her, stroking her wild hair. I thought this would be a visit as usual, and then she spoke.
“I need a child,” she said. And I thought, here we go again, this conversation we’ve been having for years. And as much as the first few times I supported her, it eventually grew tiresome for everybody, and I imagine even more so for her, to watch her fail every time her and Sam attempted to conceive.

“Oh, honey,” I said, “Are you sure that’s what you need right now?”

“No, not right now,” she said, and she must have noticed that I sighed a sigh of relief, because she was quick to add, “But I need one eventually. Soon.”

“Honey, you have to realize, it’s not going to bring Sam back.”

“No, I know, it’s just, I need some purpose,” she said. “And yeah, it wouldn’t be bring Sam back per se, but wouldn’t it be kind of admitting defeat to give up just because he’s gone? Can’t something good come out of all of this? Aaron told me all about P&W. It’s ludicrous. I can’t believe they would do that to Sam. I can’t believe he never told me. It hurts, Agi, it really does.”

“That’s fair, but why don’t you just get a bunny or something?” I suggested.

“No offense, Agi, I know that may be enough for Aaron, or for you, but I need something in my life besides myself to think about, and besides Sam. We knew we were pretty close to having to reconsider the idea of having a child of our own anyway. Wouldn’t it be nice? Wouldn’t it be something nice for Sam, if now that he wasn’t leading this whole miserable double-life, I could get a kid? Raise him or her right? Help out some child that could just as well have been hurt by something like P&W. I know, don’t shake your head at me, please don’t. There are all these people out there getting hurt every day, and someone needs to be proactive about it.”

“That’s great, Sadie, it’s great that you want to help a kid out like that,” having a
hard time listening to myself anymore, wondering how I was expecting that P&W would for once not come up in all of this. “But you have to be realistic, hon, these things take awhile, and do you really think you’re in a place to be thinking about this right now?”

“Aaron’s going to help me,” she said. I had nothing to say to that. I looked her up and down and tried to keep my smile on, but it didn’t seem like it was fooling either of us.

Sadie quickly turned her entire face so that she was looking directly at my pupils, and I realized I would rather have her looking at Sam’s photo again.

“Are you guys speaking?” she asked, clearly trying to get at the core of something, though exactly what I was not sure of.

“No, not at the moment,” I said. I started gathering up my stuff, too discomforted by her look to stay any longer. I was physically ill and felt a knot in my stomach tightening.

“Oh, don’t go,” she said, clearly not earnest in her expressed sentiment.

“I have a few errands to run,” I lied, and got out of there fast. I thought I heard her chuckle as I closed the door.

A Whole Other Type of Encounter

The sound of the doorbell swished around in his head. It was broken and its sound was faint. Aaron sat up on the coach and grunted. He walked to the intercom. A week of busy activity had tired him, though he still felt the essence of the fuel at his core burning.

“Yes?”

“It’s Vanessa. I came with the car. You should come down here, we’re supposed
to go to the—” Aaron jammed his finger on the “door” button, crowding out the sound of her voice. He walked to the shower, and when he came out fifteen minutes later in his towel, Vanessa was sitting on his dirty couch, her signature red lipstick already on, her hands folded in her lap. The room smelled of cigarette smoke. She opened her pursed lips to say something, stuttering to find her words.

“We-we’re supposed to go to the D-Days Inn in New Jersey. Saunders is going to be there.”

“I told you to pick me up at eight. Eight in the morning,” said Aaron. It was already five in the evening. Though he had intended to wake bright and early, his days of preparing for today had worn him down and he managed to sleep through the day, right until Vanessa’s arrival.

“Oh, well, I would have, b-but, they don’t think Saunders is going to be at the motel until seven or eight, so I figured I’d leave you alone. And I had some…stuff to take care of,” Vanessa answered. Something scurried across her leg, and she squealed, assuming it was a mouse or some other vermin, even though the apartment appeared to be in surprisingly good upkeep, given what she expected after encountering Aaron the previous week. This was Brooklyn after all. But the furry specimen soon found itself on Vanessa’s lap and its heavy weight suggested it was something wholly other: perhaps a rat or dog. But a quick reactionary jerk of her thighs sent the beast flying into the air, where it revealed itself to be a rabbit. As Vanessa looked at Aaron’s rabbit in midair, she noticed that it was surprisingly obese and kempt for being left in Aaron’s commission. The rabbit looked as if it got washed and fed more often than Aaron did just a week ago when she first met him.
“Right,” said Aaron. He walked into his bedroom and got dressed. When he walked back out into the living room, he walked straight for the door. Vanessa ran behind him. Aaron walked out the front door and leaned against the passenger-side of the car. Vanessa came out of the apartment and unlocked the car.

“Hey, you left your door unlocked.” Noticing that he was on the passenger’s side of the car, she added, “And your rabbit out. Not going to drive?”

“Nope,” said Aaron, as he slid into the passenger’s seat.

“Ok, hm, I think I know where the Days Inn is. I guess we have a while to figure it out. Hey, so, any luck getting a sample the other day?”

“No.”

“That’s alright. That’s what I figured. Anyway, P&W says Saunders is going to be at this motel with some woman, so we just have to get into their room once they’re done and then we should be all done.”

Aaron nodded, turning his head to face Vanessa. A few strands of her long chestnut hair had gotten caught on her lipstick, moving with her mouth as she talked. He stared at her as she went on and on about different ways they could get into the motel room. The more he zoned out on her speech, the more he zoned in on those few pieces of hair. Right as she was checking if she had any bobby pins in her hair to jimmy the lock on the motel door with, Aaron reached out his hand towards her face and peeled the few hairs off her lips, tucking them behind her ear.

“Oh, hey. Hey there,” Vanessa said. For the first time since their two hours sitting in the car yesterday, Vanessa was silent for more than five minutes.

“You have a family, Aaron?” she finally asked.
“No. Had one,” he answered.

“Yeah, I don’t have one either. But then I guess I’m young. Not so young, but still,” Vanessa answered. “Hey, say, where’d you go to school?”

“I didn’t. Or, I never finished, anyway.” Aaron answered. He could feel Vanessa’s gaze upon his profile and he realized once again that she expected him to continue the conversation. It was the first time he cared, or at least acted on this observation: “You?”

“Oh, well, for awhile. I should be a senior now at City College, but I guess that’s not what was in the stars for me.”

“You look old for that. Too many wrinkles. Around the lips.” He was saying too much, getting too verbose. He would have to watch it, or she might catch on that he was up to something.

“Well, aren’t you the charmer? I’m a smoker, aging comes as part of the package, whatever, I’m on par. Anyway, I was in the cafeteria one day and this guy with a briefcase came up to me and he just starts going on about how I look like the right girl for his company, would I like to help people, blah blah. Anyway, I had never really thought about DNA testing before, but it sounded like the pay could get pretty good, and let me tell you, college was costing me a lot. So you know, I thought—”

“That’s all very nice,” Aaron said, not meaning to cut her off, though this was the effect he achieved for some brief time. It did not matter; her speech was back to being treated as background noise. The hum in Aaron’s ears was the same regardless of whether she was speaking or not. Aaron knew Vanessa was new, and she had no idea about P&W. What it actually was. Not yet. To her this was just any old DNA testing
firm, perhaps with some abnormal sample collection tactics. They pulled up to the Days Inn.

“Hey, they got us a room. Already got the key,” Vanessa said, as she saw Aaron heading for the front office, and grabbed his arm, sinking her nails into his skin, being a little rougher than she needed to be. He turned and followed her to room 129. They walked into their room, no bags in tow, looking as though they were here for the same reason as most of the other frequenters of the motel. There was one bed, covered in a synthetic flower-speckled blanket. Beneath it laid a beige fleece blanket and two sheets, which Aaron did not notice as he dropped himself backward onto the bed, shoes and suit still on, and closed his eyes—he had been so tired since Sam’s death, and actively pulling himself out of his comatose mode was taxing. He felt like a fire that had raged for a week through the California wilderness, constantly under attack by hose-carrying firefighters trying to put him out. Now he needed to kindle at a lower, secluded rate before he enveloped the entire state in his blaze. He folded his hands together on his stomach. “Hmph,” he let out.

It took him five minutes to open his eyes and realize that Vanessa was lying on the other side of the bed, in much the same way as he was, though she had taken off her heels. Vanessa opened one eye and looked in his direction. She caught his gaze and turned onto her side, facing him, propping her head on her hand.

“You know, you kind of have this surly older guy thing going on,” Vanessa said.

“I’m thirty-seven,” Aaron answered, as he turned his head and stared at her legs, streamlined and smoothed by her black stockings. He was still lying on his back, his hands still folded together.
“Well, I just meant, it’s kind of a good thing.” Vanessa inched forward, almost imperceptibly. She stopped when she saw Aaron’s eyes widening.

“Haha, well that got your attention,” she said. She hoisted herself up, and Aaron thought she was going to get off the bed, but then she arched her upper body over his, reaching over him to the nightstand on his side of the bed. She grabbed her purse off of it. As she leaned to get back to her side of the bed, she let her breasts brush over his chest. He unfolded his hands and ran one finger from below her breasts to her belly button. She kept moving and sat back up on her side of the bed, fishing in her purse for a cigarette. She took one out and lit it with shaking hands. After a few drags she cleared her throat.

“Want a drag?” she offered.

“Sure,” Aaron said, reaching for the cigarette, but before he could grab a hold of it, Vanessa had moved closer to him and was holding the cigarette to his lips. When he had it in his lips, he closed his thumb and index finger around it, grazing her fingers, and claiming it for himself. Vanessa stayed where she was, her face hovering in the space above his.

They heard someone tinker with the door of room 128. Saunders had arrived, presumably with prostitute in tow. “It’s 7:25,” she said.

“Yeah,” Aaron said. He had wrapped his right arm around her, his hand landing on the small of her back, and now he pulled her close to him. Their lips met. When she parted those plump lips, her mouth tasted, unsurprisingly, like cigarettes. She giggled nervously to herself and kissed him heavily, finally rolling onto her back, pulling him on top of her. He put a hand on her hip and worked it up to her small breasts.

“They called me Perks in high school,” Vanessa said. “Small breasts, it happens.”
Vanessa breathed louder and pushed him away slightly, smiling at his face, only an inch or two above hers. He looked back down, but not at her. She thought his eyes were empty, like those of an old man who had resigned himself to never again knowing what was going on around him. His lips were turned down slightly. She pulled him back down to her. Eventually, his hands made their way down, mechanically it seemed. They were cold when they made their way under her blouse, and even colder when he worked them under the top of her stockings, and tried to pull them down.

She pulled her head down into the pillow below her, breaking herself free of his mouth, and said, “Just so you know, nothing like that is going to happen.” He said nothing back. “I’m on my period, so, yeah,” she said. Aaron slid himself down Vanessa’s body. For awhile she feared he had misunderstood. This is not the time, she thought. But he stopped himself. He rested his head on her stomach, right below her small breasts. He placed his hands on her sides. If they were vertical, rather than horizontal, it would look as though he were lifting her, preparing to spin her. But he rubbed the side of his head into her chest, finding a nook, and sighing.

“Too bad,” Aaron said.

“What’s your deal?” Vanessa asked. “What do you want?”

“I guess,” Aaron said.

“What? No, for real, what’s your deal? What’s with all the brooding?” Vanessa asked.

“My partner died,” Aaron offered, knowing that his stock response would still serve its purpose now. Though in reality, his current brooding was a manifestation of his frustration with the Saunders case. Even more so it was a manifestation of his unfulfilled
sexual desire, as evidenced by an awful sensation in his pants that he knew had lost all hopes of turning to a positive feeling. He was beginning to realize that it really had been over three months since him and Agi had last had sex. Making one last effort, he pressed his face harder into Vanessa’s chest.

“Oh, I know that,” Vanessa said, and pulled away. Aaron looked up at her quickly. “Lyle, I mean, Zach told me. He said you might act a little funny cause the last time you worked was with Sam. What I mean is all you do is sleep. Hasn’t it kind of been awhile?” Aaron had nothing to say, though he was pleased that Vanessa had not caught on to the re-energizing he had experienced in the past week. Vanessa petted his hair, avoiding his unshaven jaw line, and breathed out, “So soft,” seemingly exhausted. They both laid there, open-eyed, he staring at the door and she at the ceiling.

“Oh, sorry. I just mean we’re partners now, right?” Vanessa asked.

“Right,” Aaron said. “And?”

“And well, we should get along, right? You tell me things, I tell you things?” Vanessa said.

“All you do is tell me things,” Aaron answered.

“Okay, so you tell me something now. Let’s even it out,” Vanessa suggested.

“What do you want to know?” he asked.

“Anything.”

“I haven’t had sex since my wife left me.”

“Oh,” for the first time Vanessa didn’t know what to say. Vanessa petted his hair while he stroked her arm. After an eternity they heard the door of room 128 click open and shut. She looked over at the digital clock. 9:10.
“I’ll take care of this,” Vanessa said. She reached into her purse and pulled out a credit card. She straightened her hair and buttoned her shirt. Without putting on her heels, she walked out the motel room door, purse in hand. Fifteen minutes later she came back. Aaron was lying in bed, his head propped up on a pillow moved to where Vanessa’s stomach had been. His eyes were open and he looked directly in her direction.

“Got it all here,” she said, patting her purse, not meeting his gaze. “I just grabbed some hairs. It’s like I’ve got a nest in here, a real nice assortment, some of his hair, some of hers probably, maybe two sets of pubes. I guess the labs will have to figure out which are his. They can do that right? Like, they can tell apart male and female? It’s not like they’ll use the prostitute’s and this whole thing will go to hell?” Aaron nodded, reassuring her. Like it mattered. She put on her heels and went out to wait in the car while Aaron picked himself up and slowly sauntered over. When he came over he demanded that she let him drive this time, and she complied.

“You’re great.” Aaron said. “A real piece of work.” They drove off.

_Aaron is a Double Agent_

None-the-wiser was a phrase that Vanessa embodied, and Aaron planned to take advantage of it. While she busied herself with collecting a “DNA sample” from Saunders’ now abandoned sex den, Aaron had embarked on a mission of his own. He had peered out from the window of the motel room and looked to where Saunders had parked his BMW. Saunders had been nowhere in sight, and though Aaron could not say for sure where Saunders had wandered (he presumed to his prostitute’s car, for one final bit of “happy ending” by the dumpsters), he also knew that he had nothing to lose at that point.
He had run out of the door, sprinting for Saunders’ car, in his socks, not even bothering to put his shoes on. Aaron arrived at Saunders’ car and crouched by the driver’s door, ensuring he was not being watched. Taking a steady breath to calm himself, he had prepared himself to put his plan into action. He jimmed the lock with a safety pin—one of many things he had learned on the internet in the past few days, though he had a folded-up set of instructions printed from an instructional website in his pocket, just in case he forgot or got nervous. But Aaron did not end up needing to use these instructions, as he had managed to open the door on his second try, and attributed his success at opening the door to his newly found cat burglar knowledge. In reality, Saunders had just neglected to lock the door, which he most definitely should have, considering that they were in New Jersey. The car was of a quality that suggested that a car alarm would sound even if a burglar successfully picked the lock. But haste made the worst of Saunders: he was just too eager to make it into his motel room and could not be bothered with pressing the one little button on his automatic open and close car key that would have saved him so much trouble.

When Aaron had gotten the door open, much faster than he had expected to, he only took a few seconds to reach in and grab Saunders’ briefcase and laptop. Aaron did not bother with formalities such as at least closing the car door or making sure he didn’t leave any evidence behind. Rather, he had grabbed the purloined items and scurried across the parking lot to where the P&W car was parked. He quickly dropped the items in the trunk, covered them up with a blanket, and rushed into the motel room, lying down on the bed. Vanessa returned several minutes later, but Aaron was already practically asleep, being the most content that he had been in months. When he sensed Vanessa stirring in
the room, he jumped into action. He thought of how he had new cat-like instincts, and how he could not be too over zealous or Vanessa would catch on that he was not letting her in on something. The fire was definitely burning now.

“I’ll drive,” Aaron said. And though Vanessa looked surprised, she didn’t argue, and could not have pieced together why Aaron had such a strange turn in character, or so Aaron thought. If anything, Vanessa attributed Aaron’s new behavior, as signaled by his desire to drive, to their brief encounter in the motel room, and was proud of herself. Or so Aaron thought.

**Vanessa**

I bet you think I’m pretty stupid, don’t you? Just another babbling idiot, though not quite like that Lila. I bet you think that girl has spunk, whereas I am just some strange discombobulated mess, out of my element, unaware of what’s going on around me, the whole world swirling just a little too fast for me to ever really get a grip on it. I bet you think I’m just a P&W hire, some young girl who has no idea what’s going on and is getting tugged along for the ride. I bet you think I try real hard. Well, things aren’t always quite what they seem, so you should consider looking a little closer, trying to catch that devil in the details.

I’ve been around the block a few times, and it has never been without an agenda. And I am not one of those girls that things just happen to.

You think because I sit around chain smoking and running P&W’s little errands that I don’t know what’s up. You think I ask questions because I actually don’t know the answers. Let me fill you in on something. There are people out there who only ask
questions they know the answers to. And they aren’t just lawyers.

My family is from Connecticut. Did you know that Connecticut has the largest income disparity in the nation? Do you even know what that means? Well, my family is on the fortunate end of that disparity, so you can be certain this P&W stint isn’t just my way of making ends meet; I’ve never had to worry about that. Even if Mommy and Daddy don’t know what’s going on here, what does that matter? It’s not like you know what’s going on here either.

I’ve had a mission from the minute I got here, and you can be certain I am going to fulfill it. And that mission isn’t to fulfill your expectations. It isn’t even to fulfill Lyle Saunders’ expectations, though I guess it’s more along those lines than anything you could expect.

Agi Helps Sadie

It was only a week or so before I went back to Sadie’s. I realized she was my friend and I had to look out for her. Besides, it would only be a matter of time before Aaron completely forgot about her and left her fending for herself, and I was sure she wasn’t in any place to be attempting that quite yet.

I came right after work, so it was almost seven when I got there, and especially now that it was getting darker out, I expected to see her house as a dark hole when I walked towards it from the subway: the curtains drawn as per usual, no lights turned on, perhaps a flickering glimmer of candlelight somewhere within that miserable abode, signaling her movement. And though I did notice candlelight as I approached, it was not what I associated with Sadie’s house as of late. It was neither faint nor singular. Nor was
it indoors.

Jack-o-lanterns. There must have been at least a dozen lining the stairs to her front door. They lined both banisters, one on each end of each step. Their hand-carved faces glared and scowled and laughed and jeered at me like something out of the theater of the absurd. I couldn’t help but notice that they were evenly divided, all the pumpkins on the left presenting tragic faces, while those on the right were frozen in overly-comic expressions. It reminded me of those drama masks that are so often used on playbills these days when a theater can’t afford to hire any sort of decent graphic designer. I walked up the stairs hesitantly, and knocked on the front door, but rather than the usual few minutes of waiting, I was met with a prompt response.

“Well, why don’t you use the doorbell?” Sadie asked as she pulled open the door. She was clad in a freshly ironed pair of khakis and an oversized sweater in a mess of earthy tones that she must have purchased in one of the organic clothing boutiques in Park Slope that she favored before Sam’s death. She probably could have eaten that sweater if she really wanted to.

“What?” I asked. It was all a bit much to take in.

“I got it fixed! See, it’s lit and well, why don’t you press it and try it for yourself?” Sadie offered.

“That’s alright, Sadie, I’m sure it works great,” I answered, and walked past her into the house. She had a huge smile plastered on her face, by which I was not convinced in the least, and she had her arm extended into the foyer like one of those smiling bimbos at a model home that feels the need to point you in the right direction even though there is only one direction to take when entering a home. The whole charade lasted a bit long and
by the time I sat down on the couch, she was still standing at the door as though she was expecting someone else.

“Sadie?” I asked.

“Oh, yes, coming. Want some coffee? I have some tea biscuits; I’ll bring them out. Here, take a listen to the doorbell while I do that.”

“Okay,” I answered, not even having time to be puzzled over her bizarre suggestions before she pressed the doorbell and a chorus of children sang “It’s a Small World After All.” It was truncated to about two minutes, thank God.

“So, just you today?” she asked from the kitchen. “Or should I get an extra cup going?”

“Yes, it’s just me,” I responded hesitantly. “What’s going on, Sadie?”

“Oh, nothing, nothing, I was just thinking maybe you had come with Aaron and he was parking the car or something.”

“Sadie, honey, it’s been a long time since I came here with Aaron,” I responded, and wished I could see her expression, but she was still in the kitchen, busying her hands as she had obviously been busying her mind for the past few days.

“Oh, well, I just thought maybe you guys haven’t been here in awhile because you’ve been figuring out your own thing, though I think he mentioned something about having to go to Jersey tonight. Serious business,” she said. She entered the living room with an overdone tray. It held a tea kettle, two cups of coffee, a creamer, a sugar bowl, a crystal cup of artificial sweetener packets, two plates—one containing an assortment of cookies, the other containing an assortment of fruit—and an assemblage of gourds, presumably for decoration. She set it on the coffee table and sat across from me on a
lounge chair, smoothed her pants, and crossed her hands in her lap. She then jumped up to run back to the kitchen for a saucer of agave nectar and had to rearrange the entire coffee table when she returned to keep the décor “balanced.”

“No, he’s definitely not coming. I get the sense that things are really over between us, finally. Though it would still be great if he took the time to sign the damn papers. He said he’d get to them, though,” I told her. “What’s been going on Sadie? This is quite the spread.”

“No reason not to strive for perfection,” she answered.

“Right,” I said. “This is quite a change from just last week though, Sadie. Is everything alright? Don’t get me wrong, it’s great how much you’ve gotten done, it just all seems a bit…sudden.”

“Oh, Agi, don’t you worry, it’s just time for me to start getting my life back on track,” she said.

“If you say so,” I said.

“You know, the adoption agencies don’t exactly smile upon women who spend their days living in shambles.”

“Sadie?” I asked.

“I was serious last week, Agi,” she said. “I’ll do what I have to do to make this house perfect for a child, even if I have to do it on my own.”

“What do you mean?” I asked, between sips of coffee. “Christ, how strong did you make this coffee?”

“Surely you can’t deny a woman a little extra caffeinated energy,” she said.

“Okay, Sadie, but what did you mean about doing it yourself?”
“Oh, it’s nothing, I’ve really got this handled myself,” she said.

“Sadie,” I encouraged her.

She took a bite of a section of an orange she had been peeling, and looked up at me. “Well, it’s just that Aaron said he was going to help me out with this but he’s been busy with his own thing lately. He calls every once in awhile, but when I saw you today, I thought maybe he was coming by with you and was going to help me out with this.”

“Go figure,” I said.

“There are a lot of steps to it, you know, adopting a kid,” she continued, “Lots of background checks and stuff. And I’m not that worried about it, but how am I going to explain wanting to be a single mom?”

“Sadie, calm down,” I told her.

“I know, I know,” she said, “I just wish there was a way to speed it all up. You know, there are so many organizations, and how do I know which one to start with? I’ve kind of just been starting applications for all of them. She leaned over to the end table and pulled out manila folders stuffed with papers. “This one’s for Adoption Plus, and this one is Adoption STAR, and here’s Child and Family Services of Eerie. I haven't even looked out of state yet. I thought about some of those international organizations. It seems like everybody has an Asian baby these days, but there are just so many children in need here, it doesn’t seem fair to look right past them. You would never adopt a cat from Myanmar.”

“Yes, Sadie, I understand,” I cut her off. She had a manic look about her. “There are a lot of options, you’re just going to have to go with what works for you.”

“Yes, I know,” she said. “I just really wish there was a way to figure this out fast.
There’s just so much stuff.”

“I hear being a foster parent is a lot easier to get started,” I suggested, not realizing I had said this aloud and the trajectory that this would send her on. I was just thinking about a woman at the office who had a sister-in-law who fostered children for a living. Get enough of them in the house and the marginal cost of another one starts getting smaller than the marginal revenue. It was like she was running a motel, and the state never even checked on her, at least not until she was on her eleventh child request. That’s when the whole operation got shut down.

“What do you mean?” she asked. This was when I realized I had said it aloud, and that there was little backing out at this point, especially with her coffee-bean-rimmed eyes jutting straight into my own eyes, giving the impression that she was already reading my mind and had telepathically perceived the entire story about my co-worker’s sister-in-law.

“There’s a lot less paperwork involved,” I said. “And it’s a lot less permanent,” I added, not quite understanding what I was implying until it was already said.

“What does that mean?” she asked, raising her eyebrows at me.

“Nothing, nothing at all,” I defended myself. “Just, this way you could see what it’s like to have a kid and if it’s something you enjoy then at least you’ll have some company while you look for a way to adopt. And if it turns out it’s not for you, there will be no damage done, you will still have helped out a kid. Win, win.” She said nothing for a while and I looked at her, feigning nonchalance when really I was hoping she had bitten the hook and would look at the coffee table, the window, anything but me. After awhile it seemed that she was no longer looking at me with thoughts of a child for herself, but was
piercing directly through to deeper thoughts of inadequacy and hopelessness that she must have thought I was having because of my dissolved marriage with Aaron. There was some sort of connection.

“Well, that seems like it could work,” she finally said to my relief. “Yeah, foster care. Hold on, I’ll grab my computer and we can start looking for agencies right away.” She left the room to grab her laptop and I ate three cookies in quick succession, thankful she had calmed, be it only mildly.

**The Wrath of Lila**

Now if y’all missed me last time, I know you are dying to hear from me by now. It may have been awhile, but Lila is back, and for good this time, though maybe not right where you expected. Just cause Saunders stood me up last time doesn’t mean I’m going to give up on making him take notice of my Trevor and me. Not in the least. A jackass acting like the jackass he is just pushes good old Lila right along. It’s *chuga-chuga-chuga* for this engine. I don’t go over or around mountains, I just plough right through them.

I took little Trevor to skulk out in front of that good-for-nothing’s house a few more times. And for a few days it seemed like I might be able to corner Saunders as he was leaving his garage, if only I could scale the fence he had in front of his driveway. But it turned out that that fence—which I tell you, how does a guy have money for a fence like that but not a little more to send in my direction—was just too high for Trevor to get over, and some darn woman had the nerve to yell at me when she saw me leave Trevor on one side while I tried to hop it. Now, any properly-raised tyke can handle himself alone for a little while, but this woman was just drawing too much attention to us, so I
decided I had to lay low for awhile, find some other angle to attack this from. Besides, my fishnet stockings were about to tear something terrible, and I wasn’t about to get back on the subway at the end of the day looking like a lower-class citizen.

It was time to call in the ladies. Normal jobs have unions, labor organizations, whatever you want to call them. But us gals, we had something a little different going on. When you’re used to being treated like trash by just about everybody, you get to seeking out other gals going through the same thing. The first few of us found each other at a Seven-Eleven in Birmingham many years ago. Over the years we found more gals like us at the strip club, the mall, Bible study: gals just trying to make an honest buck by giving a few select guys what they were looking for, but not willing to put up with any shenanigans or foolishness. Nope, we knew how to get taken real serious. Now the type of work ladies like us do is a very independent type of work. Spend too much time with other ladies in the business and you start feeling like they’re all competition. No, our little group was about looking out for each other when we had to. I knew together we could scheme something up to make up for all the time I had spent on this Saunders business. Something to hold me over while I let the fuckers I stupidly hired for the job figure out this Saunders angle, which just might not cash out in the end. But don’t you worry; he was going to get his just deserts in the end.

Oh no, don’t think I was giving up, it was just “time for a few revelations,’’ as Mama liked to say. It never took more than a few days for me to settle up my business, pack up my bags, and get out of town. But before I hightailed it out of the Big Rotten Apple, I needed to get one of my gal pals to hook me up with some low-class call-girl with the clap to sick on the fucker. I ain’t going to lie to you, now, the whole Saunders
thing just did not seem to be worth the darn time at the moment, or at least not worth my sole devotion. Nope, Lila Tribulla could get bigger bucks doing bigger things if she wanted to, that’s for sure. And you know it. The day I decided to start getting ready to leave town, I saw Saunders zooming out of the driveway in his fancy BMW. He called it his ass-wagon, and I could tell where he was headed with this one: Jersey, where he met most of his other ladies. I didn’t even cross his radar anymore.

Bunny Can’t Tell You About This One

Yo dudes! I sure do miss you and your foods. Hiccup. Mmmm foods. It’s been fun and all around here, but my Mister has been a bit too busy if you ask me, all hectic trying to get something done still, and the phone just goes ring ring ring all day and then my Mister says, “I’ll call you back in a minute, Sadie,”—hiccup—but I don’t think he ever does because then it just goes ring ring ring again. I would love to tell you all about my Mister and his adventures, kind of like the White—hiccup—Rabbit and that Alice girl’s adventures, but that’s not going to happen. Hiccup hiccups.

You see my Mister came home tonight all discombobulated and he poured himself this big drink that smelled—hiccup—really quite tasty so when he got up to go to his litter box room and he said, “This may take a while, Bunny,” I hopped up on the table and took a go at it. I had my head in the cup and was slurping it up and it tasted all nice and citrusy and I ate this green thing that was—hiccup—bobbing in it and then all of a sudden I didn’t feel so good, kind of spinny, so I—hiccup—said, Hey, Mister, this drink is making me feel all funny. But he was still in the litter box room so I thought, Hey, why not? And I kept—hiccup—lapping—hiccup—it—hiccup—up.
Then things—hiccup—got a little too spinny and I kind of knocked the cup over with my head still in it—hiccup—and it was getting me all wet and then I thought I was going to drown in it so I jumped up real fast and skidded off the table, and the cup went flying in the air and I yelled out, Hey Mister, this is cool, man! But of course he didn’t answer, though then the cup landed on the floor and he yelled out, “What’s going on out there?” And then again, “Christ, what has that God-forsaken fur beast done this time?”

And I was in the middle of saying, Hey! I resent that, fool! But he was already on his way out of the litter box room and yelled out “Jesus Christ, Bunny, my gin and tonic!” I can’t really tell you how I got from that point to here, laying in my cage, but it feels pretty good laying here on my side, mulching up some hays nice and slow.

Belchhhhhhh.

“Oh, my, God,” my Mister says.
Exhibit 6. From Lyle Saunders’ planner
Aaron Finds Something

Aaron had driven the broad home—much as he saw her in a new light after the night’s activities, she was still just a broad, at least while he had bigger things to focus on. He headed home to Red Hook by himself. He drove carefully, the beams of his headlights illuminating what he imagined to be his path to salvation. He saw himself arriving at home, mixing a large gin and tonic, heavy on the lime, and rifling through Saunders’ laptop until he figured out the best way to bring him down once and for all.

At least the former he fulfilled. He had parked the car in front of his apartment building, thinking he must be lucky to have the unprecedented fortune to find a parking spot on his block, and proceeded to the corner deli for a bottle of tonic water. When he walked into his apartment, he removed his shoes at the front door. He placed Saunders’ laptop on the kitchen table and turned it on. He mixed his drink while it loaded. First, he poured the Bombay Sapphire, filling a good third of the glass, which he had pulled from the freezer. Though he never remembered to fill his ice cube trays, storing cups in the freezer only seemed logical to him, so that he always had a chilled beverage if he so desired. Besides, it left more room in the glass for gin if he didn’t need to put ice in. He filled the rest of the cup practically to the brim with tonic water, and finally halved a lime, the entirety of both halves of which he juiced into the drink and then plopped in. He looked at the halves floating at the surface like two green alien breasts and smirked to himself, thinking, “Perks.”

He had set the glass down on the table, between himself and the laptop, and brought his head down to the glass to take a sip while he cracked his knuckles in front of the computer screen in preparation.
As he watched the start up menu load, Aaron had been thankful for Saunders’ idiocy, his lack of a password. He had slurped up some more G&T and spoke out loud: “Dumb fucker.” So pleased was Aaron at his good fortune this evening, that he stood up and went to the bathroom, wanting to relieve himself before he approached the task of rifling through Saunders’ personal documents. As he sat on the toilet, contemplating what he could possibly find on Saunders’ computer, and if he might perhaps be able to get into his e-mail account, he heard shuffling in the apartment, but gave it no second thought, accrediting it to Bunny’s antics, until he heard a crash, as though something had fallen. Letting his mind get ahead of him, worried that Saunders or one of his goonies had figured him out and was here to “take care of” him, and that he would surely meet his end on the can, he pulled his pepper spray and Swiss army knife out of the pocket of his pants, which were gathered around his ankles, and yelled out, “What’s going on out there?” While he was glad to have his pepper spray and knife, which he had bought shortly after Sam’s death, he wondered why he hadn’t bought something more practical, like a gun, instead.

But hearing nothing but scampering in response, Aaron relaxed once again. And then he yelled, “Christ, what has that God-forsaken fur beast done this time?” annoyed that he had been interrupted. Finishing his business hastily, Aaron washed his hands and walked out of the bathroom as he wiped them on his shirt only to see Bunny standing amidst the puddle that only minutes ago had been his gin and tonic. He watched Bunny lapping it up and exclaimed, “Jesus Christ, Bunny, my gin and tonic!” He picked the incapacitated rabbit up and shuttled him into his cage, checked to make sure its water bottle and hay tray were full, and proceeded back to the laptop.
As he approached he noticed a crescendo-ing hiss, almost as if something were trying to warn him away from what he was about to encounter, and when he arrived back at the table he saw that it was in fact the laptop that was hissing, as fumes released from between its keys, and it sat amidst what seemed to be an ocean of fizzing beverage. Aaron was reminded of a “Gin and Titonic” ice cube tray he had scene at a gift store recently. The ice cubes formed the shapes of an iceberg and two halves of a ship. What a disaster.

It took all of Aaron’s energy not to lift the computer and hurl it to the ground in frustration, but after clenching his teeth and glaring at the laptop in frustration for several minutes, as if trying to will it back to a time when it was functional, he finally got a towel and dropped it over the laptop, choosing to ignore the situation for the time being.

Attempting to regain his focus and make the best of his foiled plan, he reached into Saunders’ briefcase and pulled out a planner overstuffed with various documents and papers, which, little did he know, would contain information much more pertinent than anything he ever would have found on the computer. As he was about to start ripping pages to sop up the liquid mess, his eye caught on to a peculiar note on a sheet of Saunders’ planner. Really, such good fortune today, he thought, not realizing that outside, his car (better known as P&W’s car) was being towed. He had only been able to find a spot because he had forgotten that it was an alternate side parking day. The morning was spent at the tow lot, though Aaron hardly minded, as he was still drunk off of joy and the extra gin that his joy had caused him to partake in. The wheels were finally really turning.
I know that most of the time I just talk about Sadie, or I’m that crazy woman that shows up at Aaron’s door, but sometimes it’s good to just talk about yourself, so I’m going to give that a try.

I’m Aaron’s ex. Or soon to be ex, I doubt he’s signed the papers yet. He says he’s busy, I say he’s full of it, as usual. I finally see it as a good thing that we never had children. The rabbit was our little experiment to see if we could handle a kid, and we only had him for a few months or so before things got really bad between Aaron and me. To be honest, I think we both knew when we got the rabbit that the kid was never going to happen. Who actually gets a pet to see if they can take care of a child?

We always had our issues. Like how I always thought he wasn’t giving our marriage his all and he always thought I was overbearing. But it worked out well enough for a few years. Sure, we loved each other, but as you’ll know if you’ve ever been in a marriage or really a relationship of any sort, that’s not all it takes.

After Sam died, the going got really rough around home. Aaron began muttering about some politician, Lyle Saunders was his name, and about P&W being a front, and not really a DNA testing company at all. It was really bizarre and I tried to reason with him. I found a great psychiatrist and even made an appointment for him, but he refused to go. And I would’ve tried to help him more but then one day I was asking him what he wanted for dinner, I don’t know why, because he really wasn’t eating at that point, and he grabbed me by the arms and shook me, screaming, “Don’t you get it?”

I don’t know how to describe my feelings at that moment, other than that it felt like I had melted. Not in a good way. I was a bucket of jello at a summer picnic, chunky
and melting in the sun, maintaining little form. I stayed, made dinner for the both of us, ate my plateful—he was in the bedroom—and then I just walked out the front door and took the subway to Grand Central, got on MetroNorth, and headed to my parent’s house, without saying a single word to him. When I came home a few days later, talking to my mother on the cell phone as I entered the apartment, I opened the door to find that Aaron’s belongings and the rabbit were gone, and on the kitchen table there was a note:

“A—
I’m sorry. I’ve found an apartment in Red Hook.
—A”

I filed for divorce that very day, and it was a week before I even heard from him to get so much as a phone number or an address. Why he won’t sign the papers now is beyond me, though he says he’s very “busy.” Oh well.

Preparations

Aaron walked out of the Broadway-Fulton St. station, into a storm of people clamoring around the former site of the World Trade Center. It was 8 AM and everybody was rushing—to work, to the PATH station, to school—pummeling the concrete with their shoes. Aaron normally would have walked slowly, but the masses pushed him forward. That today was the day he would be vindicated only sped him on more. That Lyle Saunders would not be put away for the murder of Sam Bernhardt, would probably never be committed for that, no longer bothered Aaron. Aaron’s plan would destroy Saunders’ life, and that was the best Aaron could hope for. He arrived at the front of the Tribeca building that housed P&W in a frenzy.
More than two weeks had passed since the motel. More than two weeks had passed since Aaron discovered that Andy and Saunders were meeting. Aaron already had his article written, but whatever was happening tonight, on the evening of October 31st, at the pier, he had a feeling it was not kosher, and he planned on being there to find out how so.

Saunders’ success lied in the political sphere, which in reality was the social sphere. Whereas Aaron’s initial plan was to dig up some dirt on Saunders and make sure it was sound before attempting to debunk the politician’s life, he now realized that all he needed to win against Saunders was to soil his reputation. Of course, that might involve soiling his own, but that much, he figured, he had earned. How many lives had he ruined by helping to prepare false test reports? And not bad lives, like the one of Saunders, either. How many decent lives had he ruined? How did he let his partner die? No, no matter what came of this exposé, it would be just. Maybe he would get off with less time since technically he was the informant. Maybe he should bring his information to the police first, and use it as leverage, rather than exposing his information to the press and then hoping to bargain. These last few thoughts barely crossed Aaron’s mind. He liked to think that he was resigned to his fate. He just wondered what would happen to Bunny. But Agi or Sadie would probably be fine taking care of the fur beast. Though he guessed Sadie might be too annoyed with him, since he never helped her much with adopting a child as he promised he would. Hm, maybe she would think of Bunny as a consolation prize. It was absurd, to be thinking of a rabbit in a moment such as this, though Aaron spent less time pondering about this absurdity than he did pondering about other nonsensical things.
Aaron hummed to himself as he walked into the lobby of the depressing Tribeca building, zipped right through the revolving door. He smelled his cologne as it seemed to waft in the air whenever he turned his head sharply, and hoped Vanessa would notice it. He stood in front of the even-floors elevator and pressed 14. As he tapped his right shoe on the ground, his hands in his pockets, he wondered what the meals in prison were actually like. He wondered if he would have a cellmate. He laughed.

When he got upstairs he plopped down at his desk, which was covered in a thick layer of dust. Aaron had chosen to avoid the office as much as he could. This was only his second time back since the funeral. The first was to meet with Zach after his four months of leave and to pick up the contents of Sam’s desk. This second trip back to the office had a slightly different purpose.

Aaron sat down on the swivel chair that squeaked with every breath he took, pressed the button on his old desktop Macintosh, and watched it load for ten minutes. He opened his e-mail and pulled the article that he had been working on for the past two weeks. He looked away from his desk and for the first time noticed Vanessa sitting at Sam’s old seat, only about fifteen feet away. He sensed that up until just a few seconds ago she had been looking at him with her mouth agape, completely befuddled and put off by his presence at the office.

The office was empty except for the two of them and the woman at the front desk whose name was forgotten by now. Aaron took an extra peruse to ensure that the rest of the office really was empty before sauntering over to a wall of file cabinets and pulling the contents of an entire drawer. These he put in a storage box, which he brought over to his desk. After he plopped it on the floor by his defunct swivel chair, he walked over to
Vanessa.

“What are you doing tonight?” he asked.

“Really, Aaron, are we those types of people?” Vanessa asked. “To sit at Ruby Tuesday’s or T.G.I. Friday’s and look over our over-priced, over-sugared martinis and wonder when we’re going to be finished with the meal and what venue we will choose for our after-meal lay? Are we going to nibble at our steaks and burgers and wonder why we thought this would go beyond one night in a motel room? Or is it that you think we might ‘go all the way’ this time. Anyway, I’m busy tonight, and I don’t eat cheap meat.”

“I was thinking something a little juicier,” Aaron replied. “But never mind, Perks.”

Aaron sat down at his desk and opened his desk, where he haphazardly kept a copy of his P&W contract. He took it over to the copy machine and scanned it to his computer. Figure 1 in his article. He didn’t’ know what figure 2 would be yet but he figured tonight’s meeting would lead to something juicy. He put the final flourishes in his article, tried to sound amiable. But he wondered what the proper ending to the tale could be. It would only be a matter of hours before he got the final pieces of information he needed to put it all together. What conclusion would draw this all together? Well, as they say, a picture is worth a thousand words. And if that is so, imagine the value of a video.

Aaron skipped all the way to the subway station.
THE TRUTH ABOUT P&W DNA TESTING AND MYSELF

NEW YORK—I am neither a wise man nor an eloquent one, so I will attempt to be neither in this article.

What I want to give you is the truth. Though I have not always been a truthful man, I have found myself on a path to truth since the death of my work partner, Samuel Bernhardt, this past June.

Sam and I were partners for 2 years at P&W DNA Testing, a small-scale, exclusive DNA testing company whose headquarters are located at 718 Chambers St. in Tribeca. For 6 of those 8 years, we were knowingly deceitful.

When we were first hired, we believed we were helping the world, identifying criminals and letting families be clear about their relations. We thought we were answering unknowns and adding truth to what we saw as a sad, unforgiving world full of uncertainty.

At the end of our second year of work, we were both promoted from our former positions as field DNA collection agents. With our promotion we were given the letter that you will find on the adjacent page, which I suggest you read before continuing with this article.

While I would like to say that I struggled with the decision to accept the promotion after reading the letter, I will admit that the raise seemed appropriate to me, and more than offset any qualms I had about the knowledge I had been imparted with.

Sam struggled much more with his decision to continue working at P&W, to the point that his stressful existence may have prevented him from ever having a child. For this I will never forgive P&W or myself.

Over the next six years we learned that P&W is a careful balancing act, continually attempting to measure whether the client or the party whom the client is accusing is wealthier, then drawing the results of the DNA testing in favor of the client with the deepest pockets, who is willing to pay the most.

P&W: Pay and Win.

Last June, Sam and I came face-to-face with an enraged man, accused by a P&W client of fathering her child. He was, namely, gubernatorial candidate Lyle Saunders. Offended by P&W’s insistence that he was the father of a child born of a woman of questionable reputation, he sought out Sam and me in an attempt to hush P&W. The outcome of our interaction was the death of my friend and loyal P&W employee, Sam.

Despite his untimely death, P&W continues to work on the case involving Lyle Saunders, meeting with him on secretive terms. There is such a meeting planned for tonight, October 31st.

I know it can be difficult to accept the truth. But if, to quote an old maxim, seeing is believing, then I implore you to tune into Eyewitness News, late evening edition, to watch how one small, corrupt DNA testing company chooses to do business. I only hope P&W is the only one like it.

—Aaron Kelley

Exhibit 7. Daily News article by Aaron Kelley. (See Exhibit 5 for referenced letter.)
Though the night of the showdown was not the first night that Lyle Saunders approached the pier at the Verrazano Bridge, it was the first time he did so with a posse. Zach and Vanessa flanked him on either side. Not that Saunders had announced that this would be the case to Andy when he called, even though it was how he had planned it all along. Zach was there to further intimidate Andy (if Saunders had ever actually met Andy he would know this was unnecessary) and Vanessa was there to fluster Andy as well. If Saunders had pushed it any farther, Andy might have actually been rendered speechless, making the meeting even more for show than it already was.

Rather than his usual neon orange running shorts and bare chest, Saunders sported a suit. It did not go beyond Andy’s notice as he emerged from the subway station and approached the posse by the fence that blocked entry to the pier. It was a rather warm night for this late in the year. It was All Saints’ Day and yet no one felt the need to wear a coat. Before he got close enough to tell for sure, Andy thought Saunders’ suit might actually be a tuxedo, and felt vastly under-dressed in his after-work gear: cargo pants and an over-laundered polo whose color ran somewhere between cat vomit and dirty snow. His black zip-up sweatshirt did little to cover the unfortunate shading of the rest of his get-up. Still, Andy preferred to be under-dressed rather than be on par with these guys; he never felt like he deserved the Brooks Brothers suits he typically decked himself in at the office. Whatever faults he might have, Andy was not deluded, even if his father-in-law and many others clearly over-estimated his abilities.

At this moment, Andy slowed down his pace and mumbled out a high-frequency squeal as he noticed that not only Zach, but Vanessa as well, was accompanying
Saunders & Co. watched Andy come to a halt at a street corner, succumbing to the power of the first red flashing hand that warned against crossing the street. He could have made it in time. As soon as the white walking man appeared, Andy looked both ways and then scuttled across the street, putting a trashcan directly in his trajectory. He knocked it over and fumbled with it nervously, attempting to upright it, but quickly gave up. Saunders mumbled, “Christ, is that dunce Andy Lowly?” as it dawned on him that this clown he had been smirking at was likely the man he would be trying to make a deal with. While over the phone Saunders had been able to perceive that Andy was a relatively weak man who could be bought out rather easily, Saunders now worried that Andy’s lackluster crossing of the street might signal that dealing with Andy would be more than difficult in some ways, or at least very trying.

Before anyone was able to answer Saunders, Andy hobbled up and, jutting out a hand when he was still several feet away, proclaimed, “H-hi. Andy Lowly, n-nice to meet you!” Saunders did Andy the courtesy of shaking his hand but then quickly followed this act by pulling a handkerchief out of his breast pocket to wipe off the sweat that Andy had dampened his hand with.

“Yes, well, we’re all familiar with each other, yes?” was as close as Saunders got to a greeting.

“Yeah, about that. Hi, Zach. Hi, Vanessa, nice to see you again. I,” here Andy paused while he thought about what could be the most likely reason for Zach’s and Vanessa’s presence. “I must’ve missed a memo about you being here tonight.”

Nobody said anything in response.

“Well, the more the merrier,” Andy said, and uncomfortably placed his hands in
his pockets and rocked on his heels.

“You don’t have anybody coming along, do you, Andy?” Saunders asked. “Because I know for sure that you didn’t send me any memo about additional guests. Which means my guys, if you look around you can see one behind that tree, and, ah, yes, there’s Jimmy by the rocks, didn’t get any sort of memo. And if they didn’t know about another guest, well, that would just be unfortunate. Ha!”

“Oh, no, no, just me. For sure,” Andy answered, not attempting to hide the fact that his eyes were skirting around the area, trying to get a hold of how many of Saunders’ goons were surrounding the area.

“Good, I approve. No Lila?” Saunders asked, just to make certain. “Nope, nope, not tonight, not any night, nope,” Andy began to mutter and his voice was trailing off, but Saunders was quick to keep control of the conversation. “Great! So we’re clear, what I want to talk to you about will be in Lila’s best interest, and in her rug-rat’s, too, and yours of course. It’s just so much easier to get things done without women around, right?” Saunders said. Vanessa didn’t even flinch at his comment, and stood her ground stoically.

“Sure, sure,” Andy answered. “She’s a wild one!” he offered, in reference to Lila, when he saw that Saunders expected some further response.

“Oh, yes,” Saunders responded. And here he placed his hand on Zach’s shoulder, beckoning him to speak.

“Hello, Andy,” Zach said. “So, I think you can imagine why Mr. Saunders has invited you here today.”

“Yes,” Andy replied, and once again had to say a bit more before anybody else
would speak. “I imagine, that, uhm, Mr. Saunders would like to bargain for client of choice?”

“Ha, ha, ha, Andy, Andy, Andy,” Saunders laughed. “Since when have I not been the client of choice? Shit, I’ve been running this case ever since I shot that jerk right here, a few months back, and he had to up and croak on me.”

“Sam?” Andy stammered.

“Was that his name? I suppose. That much I couldn’t get them to change on the death certificate. Anyway, let’s not get caught up on these formalities, Andy. This is my plan: I send some cash in your direction and Lila’s direction, more than enough to keep Lila and the kid well cared for, and enough to keep you pretty comfortable. In exchange, you keep your mouths shut. You see, I tried to work with you guys, I really did, Andy. But the fact of the matter is, I can’t be having a legal case right now, you know, regardless of whether I win the election or not. I’m sure you know what bad publicity can do, Andy. It’s a very impressionable world we live in these days. A real shame, that is.”

“Okay, then,” Andy said. “That’s weird. I mean, interesting, generous.”

Here Saunders placed his hand on Zach’s shoulder again, and even Andy was finally able to read this gesture for what it really was: Zach, the most powerful man at P&W, was merely Saunders’ puppet at this point. Do business with a man who killed one of your employees and this is what you sing up for. Saunders would place his hand on Zach’s shoulder, and Zach would speak exactly as he had been told to. He was a pawn, and Andy knew what he would say before Zach even began miming the words that Saunders had told him to implement.

“I’m your associate, Andy. We may work for different companies, but we’re both
part of P&W and its workings. P&W has many associates. And one of them at the moment is Mr. Saunders.” Zach stopped to gasp for breath, and for the first time ever Andy saw him break a sweat that was not a direct product of the lack of air conditioning in the Tribeca office. “As he has been for the past few months, Andy. And I want you to understand that the only reason you were never previously informed of this was because P&W has to act in its best interests, Andy. You remember the letter, Andy. It’s just the rules.” Andy noted that, for the first time, Zach looked rather pale and overall weak, and listened attentively as Zach continued. “Just like P&W doesn’t reveal to outsiders or other associates the business that it does with you or your company, it cannot reveal to you what work it does with other clients, the exception being if those clients choose to reveal themselves to you. As Mr. Saunders here has.”

Though what Zach said was mostly what he expected, Andy was surprised to actually hear the words coming out of his mouth. Zach was supposed to be the top dog. Andy’s astonishment did not last very long, since he was used to finding out that there were many things going on over his head, particularly in his dealings with P&W.

“Well, that’s cool, I guess,” was how he finally decided to react to the news. “But that doesn’t explain why she’s here. Sorry, I mean, why Vanessa’s here. Is this some sort of breaking the news party? Where’s Aaron?”

Vanessa got no hand on the shoulder from Saunders, and put on a sideways smirk before she spoke, “Well, Andy,” Vanessa said, though it seemed as if in her mind she was speaking to someone else, “You might say I’m a bit of a closer associate to Lyle.” Vanessa let her eyes wander away from Andy’s face, and looked at the water of the Gravesend Bay, whose dirty surface looked like a glittering oil spill as the headlights
from the nearby highway reflected on the light ripples that the northern breeze produced.

“Lyle?” Andy asked.

“Mr. Saunders to you,” Lila reminded him.

“Oh, yeah,” Andy said, and overzealously nodded his head.

“And now that this is all pretty much over, I’d really appreciate it if you didn’t let your mouth hang like that when you’re speaking to a lady. Take that bit of advice. But, I’m getting off track.” Vanessa cleared her throat. “It’s been set up to go like this from day one. You see, you may think you’re the only one working with Zach and his little scam of a company, but Zach here actually likes to do business with a lot of people. Anything to turn a profit, that’s Zach’s model, and well, my boss here just knew how to take advantage of that, didn’t he? P&W might make some decent amount of money by getting a cut of a child support settlement, but don’t you think it would make a little more if it were off the books? Out of the public eye? We all appreciate discretion sometimes, you understand that, don’t you Andy? I may say I’m a P&W agent, and walk like one and talk like one, like all you mumbling idiots, having no idea what’s going on, but from day one I’ve just been here to keep an eye on you and Aaron and Zach. Make sure things are working out to my boss man’s specifications. How unfortunate would it have been for you, Andy, if Lila had gotten what she wanted, and all you got was a little bit of a cut? Things are much better this way. And to think you never thought to contact us earlier, Andy. No, a few months ago you were ready to let Sam and Aaron collect Lyle’s sample and let this be just another high-end whore case. Thankfully, we managed to catch wind of what P&W was doing right in time. More people than you would think know what P&W’s real spiel is, Andy. It only took a few phone calls before I figured out for Lyle
what the paternity test request was all about. Lyle was quick to nip that trouble in the bud, right? See, the thing is, though, we were a little hurt that P&W didn’t think to contact us in the first place. Lyle may not have been as much of a big shot a few months ago, just an assemblyman from a wealthy family. Still, he’s always had quite some clout, and even though this was only announced publicly a few weeks ago, he knew he would be running for governor. Important stuff. Big stuff.”

Vanessa paused for just a second before Saunders jumped in with his contribution, “It’s true Andy, all very true, sadly, maybe, for you. See, first that little Aaron and Sam duo were a liability. Well, I took care of that. Sure that wisecracker Aaron got away, but I got his buddy, and, well, I think we can all see how much leverage that got me around here. Ha, ha, ha. Oh, funny. And why didn’t anybody figure me out? Let me tell you something, I have friends everywhere, buddy, including the police station, so don’t even think of going there.” Saunders reached into the crotch of his suit, from which he pulled out a .38 Special engraved with “El Gubernator.”

“Christ!” Andy yelled, even though the pistol did not look much larger than those toted by dames in old noir movies. He whimpered a little but ultimately swallowed back and tried to look Saunders straight in the eyes. Andy recalled that some show on the Discovery Channel said this was a good scare tactic to use on potentially dangerous or deranged predators, like rabid squirrels. Andy had a hard time maintaining eye contact, though, since by this point his entire body was trembling in fear.

“Now, I may have needed this baby to send a message to Sam and Aaron, to get Zach here to take some notice of me,” Saunders said, stroking his gun. “But I don’t see any reason for it to come to that here. It’s really all worked out already. All we need you
to do is take this suitcase here. I think you’ll find it more than ample pay, and split it between you and Lila. I’ll leave that for you to work out, but make sure you give that crazed bimbo enough so that she never comes within a mile of me again.”

Andy wished he could respond simply, “Okay, fine, great!” but his trembling still prevented from saying more than, “P-p-puh.”

“What the fuck is that?” Vanessa pointed down at the pier just below the fence that the trio of herself, Saunders, and Zach had gradually cornered Andy back into as they were speaking.

“Fuck off, V. I haven’t seen a single person pass by since we got here,” Saunders reassured Vanessa. “Quit stalling, let’s get these pricks out of here and be done with this.”

“I swear there was something, Lyle.”

“V! Chill the fuck out, would you, woman? Keep it cool.” Saunders held his forehead in one hand and halfheartedly held onto the gun by letting it swing from a finger on his other hand.

A scream of, “Wrong, asshole!” withdrew Saunders from his reverie. Looking around to determine who uttered the exclamation, Saunders received only confused looks from Zach, Vanessa, and Andy.

“You piece of shit, somebody’s got to teach you a lesson,” the voice screamed again, wavering. There were no joggers or bikers on the path, no cars pulled over from the close-by highway. Saunders looked to the one place the yells could have come from as though he expected to see a ghost. He peered over the fence at the pier that was several feet lower and jutted into Gravesend Bay.
Though Saunders tried to portray a visage of nonchalance, Aaron saw Saunders’ eyes widen as he showed him the video camera he was holding. “Got this on loan from Fox News, Lyle,” Aaron continued. “And there’s plenty more tiny ones you wouldn’t even notice set up all over here. The way this baby works—”

Aaron didn’t get a chance to explain the live feed feature on the cameras, how all the footage he was getting and had been getting for the past half hour was being transmitted directly to the news station, how he had showed the newspaper his article about P&W and Saunders and they were more than quick to take him up on his offer to get them some hard evidence, and set him up with the news station. Saunders’ biggest weapon was now Aaron’s: he had the media.

Before Saunders could even fully come this realization, he had already pulled out his “baby.” His arm jeered forward at Aaron and he shot and shot until Aaron dropped the camcorder and was stumbling backwards, backwards, back-flopping into the Gravesend Bay like he and Sam had so many months earlier.
Exhibit 8. Aaron Kelley's death certificate
It was worth it, even if it did all blow up in my face. I was never the type to end up sitting on a resort on some Caribbean island drinking Mai-Tai’s and relishing in the success of my little detective mission. Save the sloppily made gin and tonics and dingy apartments for me, that sounds much more to my taste. Besides, large bodies of water and I never got along very well, so that does away with a lot of the appeal of lounging on a beach.

So how did it get to this point? Well, even if I ended up floating belly-up, the footage from the camcorders made it to the station and the whole tri-state area knew about Saunders and his trickery practically before the police even arrived at the scene. Saunders may have bought out a few cops, but there was no way he was going to be able to buy out the entire N.Y.P.D. and all the news stations.

The newspaper article was something I had been working on for awhile. Whenever I had been fed up with the work, whenever I had wished I had done something more decent with my life, something that didn’t hurt so many people, whenever I was discontent, I sat down and worked on it. But I never got serious about it before Sam’s death. If I saw a sad movie that made me contemplate things, or read about one of the victims of P&W’s work in the paper, saw the look on a kid’s face as he was told some rich asshole he had never met was his father, I would take a day or two off from work and work on the article. The article ousting P&W to the entire world. I really got into it for those three weeks. But right as I was getting ready to hand it in, six years of work realized, I figured out the one thing I lacked, the one thing that had always kept me from submitting it when it came down to it: evidence. What would an article written by me
matter if Saunders had all the police paid off? No, I needed everyone to see before it could get to that point.

The prison count: Saunders, Zach, Vanessa, Lila, that lady Helena that worked at the P&W offices and didn’t ring very memorable for anyone, a handful of other P&W employees who didn’t get off with deals by offering up more information on the workings of P&W.

Why Lila? Firstly, when the police arrived at the pier, they found her crowded behind a bush, Trevor playing in a patch of bushes by her, observing the entire situation. Now if that’s not reckless endangerment, I don’t know what is. But they let her go home for the moment, confusing her for some crazed though well-dressed hobo. But once a few of the dots were connected and the police showed up at her apartment to question her about her involvement in the Saunders case, they found that Trevor and she were living in what couldn’t be qualified as more than a walk-in closet. They put the child in an orphanage and it looked like they were going to return him to that wing-bat as soon as she found a more substantial place to live, but then she jetted for the South. She was found a week or two later, disguised as a man, at a prayer meeting with her Baptist mother. She was taken back to New York where it was discovered that she had participated in a handful of successful (and a larger number of unsuccessful) extortion incidents with a band of high-end call girls that called themselves the Lady Luck Bandits. It didn’t help her case that legitimate DNA tests revealed that Saunders was not Trevor’s father.

Andy offered Lila free legal counsel, which only ended up leaving Lila with a longer sentence than she would have gotten otherwise. He visits her at Ryker’s every
once in awhile, always with a care package in tow, though the prison security officers stopped allowing him to give her bottles of hairspray after she used one to blind her cellmate. His benefit from the whole incident: his confusion in the media spotlight, as well as his general entanglement with the case led his law firm to finally “let him go” on friendly terms, with enough compensation to provide for a comfortable life. Which was definitely helpful, since Saunders’ suitcase of money ended up in the hands of the courts.

Trevor was moved to a different orphanage, though not for very long, as he was quickly picked up by Sadie, who had been desperately scouring the orphanages for the first kid she could pick up and decided it would be poetic of her to care for Trevor, who it turned out was not the spawn of the man whom she now blamed for her husband’s death. In fact, at times Sadie would swear that Trevor looked somewhat like Sam did. In reality, Sam just looked somewhat like Trevor did, who looked somewhat like Saunders did, and they both looked like most white dark-haired men do. But let everybody think what they want to.

Agi got the rabbit and that was her consolation prize. Bunny got more lettuces, and Agi finally didn’t have to worry about getting the divorce papers signed. Both Sadie and Agi were able to maintain more genuinely friendly relations without me around to mess things up, and united as widows. They are often seen at Prospect Park, walking hand-in-hand with Trevor, trailing (a very reluctant) Bunny on a leash if the weather permits.

Vanessa benefited from the prison psychiatrist, resolving issues she had with the fundamental boredom she experienced as a child, and briefly attempted to join a covenant, to prove to herself that she could be happy in a situation that she in reality
thought exhibited fundamentally the most boring way to live a life. She disappeared in Latin America when she was sent there on a missionary trip.

And all the other people who were either falsely alleged or wrongfully dismissed based on P&W DNA “evidence?” The “fathers” framed by P&W who pay child support though they swear there is no way they can be the kid’s father, and all the real fathers who never got to know their children? All the criminals who got off on crimes they actually did commit, and all the other ones who were convicted based on P&W’s findings? I took the lists. I had the boxes. Names and names of clients. There must have been a few thousand cases total. But I decided, best leave it be. Those boxes were at the bottom of the Gravesend Bay hours before my dead body hit the water.

-Aaron Kelley, 1970-2007
State of New York

CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

Form OCFS-741 (Rev 2/09)

PLACEMENT AGREEMENT

FOSTER CARE PROGRAM

OCFS RESPONSIBILITIES:

1. OCFS is responsible for the overall planning for each youth.
2. The Counselor will contact the youth and foster home on a bi-weekly basis.
3. Boarding payments will be made on a bi-weekly basis.
4. OCFS is responsible for all medical and dental needs, in line with the NYS Medical fee schedule.
5. OCFS is responsible for clothing needs, to the maximum allowable in the clothing schedule.
6. With prior approval, OCFS will assume responsibility for certain special needs as they occur.
7. Legal responsibility for the youth remains with OCFS.
8. OCFS will provide foster parents with all pertinent information concerning youth placed in their home.
9. OCFS will provide training opportunities for foster parents.
10. OCFS will review and evaluate each foster home on an annual basis.
11. In those situations in which OCFS plans to remove a youth without the consent of the foster parents, OCFS will provide the foster parents at least ten (10) days written notice.
12. OCFS will remove a youth from the home, at the request of the foster parents or the youth, within 48 hours where possible but in no case more than ten (10) days.
13. OCFS will provide in writing to each foster home all relevant foster care rules, regulations, guidelines, procedures and any amendments or changes in such written material.

FOSTER PARENT RESPONSIBILITIES:

1. Maintain the foster home in conformance with the rules and regulations of OCFS.
2. Accept for foster care only youth placed by OCFS, unless written exception is granted by appropriate OCFS staff.
3. Provide the day to day care of youth placed in the foster home, including adequate diet, clothing and sleeping accommodations.
5. Support the youth's preferred religion.
6. Keep the youth's clothing clean and in proper repair.
7. Submit completed "Statement of Care Provided" (Form OCFS-207F), on a bi-weekly basis.
8. Provide receipts for all clothing purchases, and return to OCFS any part of the clothing advance check not used for that purpose.
9. Provide each youth with a minimum allowance of $7.00 per week from the boarding payments.
10. Maintain access to telephone service at all times.
11. Report immediately, to the OCFS Counselor assigned to your home, any unauthorized absence of a youth placed in your home by OCFS.
12. Attend training sessions as agreed upon by the foster parent organization and OCFS.
13. Notify OCFS of all changes in household, such as family composition, illness, employment, address and telephone number.
14. Attend necessary meetings with teachers and/or other school authorities.
15. Treat materials relating to youth, and shared with youth by OCFS as confidential.
16. Accept youth placed in your home as a member of the household.
17. Notify OCFS promptly and cooperate in the development of alternate plans for foster care youth you are unable to continue to provide for in your home. (It is expected that OCFS will be provided at least 48 hours to make alternative arrangements for care.)

Foster Parent(s): Sadie Bernhardt  Sadie Bernhardt  11/25/07
(Signature) (Signature) (Date)

OCFS Representative: Adam Marnot  OCFS Placement Agent  11/25/07
(Signature) (Title) (Date)

Exhibit 9. Foster care form for Trevor Tribulla