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*For Piglet, because there just aren't nearly enough authors out there who are dedicating their novels to their pet cats, these days . . .*

## Prologue

To The Person on The Other End of This Book (That's YOU, in case you weren't sure . . .),

Hey there . . . hi! Bet you didn't expect *this* on the first page of the story . . . me . . . calling you out.

You probably just thought you could go through the entire book remaining completely and blissfully anonymous . . . while I poured my gory, globby, guts out all over your page, or Kindle or tablet . . . wherever you happen to be reading this. It's not really fair, when you think about it. But that's sort of the nature of the medium I've chosen to tell my story, so I'll accept it.

I'll accept that I'm probably never going to know much about you. I'll never know whether you're a cat person, or a dog person . . . or what condiment you prefer on your hot dogs. Maybe you hate hot dogs entirely, and no type or amount of condiment will change that.

I'll never know your favorite *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle*. Mine is Donatello. Not that he's really relevant to this story. I just thought you might like to know, seeing as we've ventured into the "one-sided sharing" portion of our relationship.

All that said, I could probably guess at least a few things about you. And I'm going to go ahead and do that, if you don't mind. Because it's going to make me feel a whole lot better about this (no offense) kind of one-sided friendship that we've got going on here.

I'm going to guess that, unless you are some celebrities' kid, and your famous parents named you Squash, or Chicken Finger, or Fart Nozzle, or something like that, your name is probably a pretty normal one. You were likely named after some dead relative, or literary hero, or your parents chose a name for you that they both really liked out of one of those Baby Name Books or, possibly, a Baby Name website on the Internet.

You may not be totally in love with your name. It may not be the one you would have chosen for yourself. But you don't hate it. It's yours, and as you've gotten older, you've likely even developed a feeling of ownership over it. That's YOU.

My name . . . is Snarky Esther Silverberg. (Esther, coincidentally, IS a dead great-grandmother of mine.) My first name comes from a mildly popular television sitcom from the late 80's. You might remember it, depending on your age . . . *The Realist*? It was that kind of meta show about a bunch of high school kids, all of whom just so happened to be named after their defining personality trait.

It ran on Fox for four seasons . . . just long enough to nab a syndication deal with TBS. You can still catch it sometimes around 4 o'clock in the morning, sandwiched between infomercials and "My Best Friend, Jesus" religious broadcasts.

I know what is probably going through your head, right about now. Your figuring that my parents must really hate me, to give me a name like Snarky Esther Silverberg. You may even be

wondering what I did to deserve such a name. Like maybe my mother's labor was back-breakingly difficult like Bella's in *Twilight*, but without kindly vampire Edward there to chew up the placenta, or whatever, to ease the pain. Or maybe I cried too loud when I was first born, and it made all the nurses in the hospital really mad, and embarrassed my parents. Or, perhaps, my first poops were just too stinky to be endured.

In actuality, it was none of those things. At least I don't think so. (Though, in all fairness, I wasn't really sufficiently cognizant in the moments immediately following my birth to tell you, for certain, how stinky, or not stinky, my first poops were.) My parents just really loved this Snarky character . . . possibly, they loved her more than they loved me. They definitely loved her more than they ended up loving one another. But I'll get to that in a bit. I don't want to get ahead of myself here.

Long story short, this fictional character, this Snarky, she sort of/kind of ended up ruining my life . . . and not just in the obvious way, with the whole name thing. So, the summer after my freshman year of college, when I was going through this whole introspective, find myself / fix myself phase, I decided to travel to LA and kill Snarky.

Hold up . . . before you go getting all upset with me. I wasn't out to actually murder this actress. It's not that kind of story.

I'm speaking more metaphorically. I wanted to murder the demon that was Snarky in my life . . . and maybe get a little vengeance on the actress that played her, in a totally not murderey, maybe-not-entirely-legal-but-not-so-illegal-that-I-risked-ending-up-in-jail-until-post-menopause, kind of way.

Anyway, that's what you are getting yourself into . . . reading this book. You're going to learn the story of my attempt at screwing over fake Snarky, so real Snarky (meaning me) could go on with her life, without a massive flat-screen TV-sized chip on her shoulder. So, if you are OK with that, by all means, keep reading.

But first, go thank your parents profusely for not naming YOU Snarky Esther Silverberg . . . unless you happen to be that celebrity kid named Fart Nozzle, in which case . . . I feel for you . . . really, I do.



## Chapter 1

### Ribbed for Her Pleasure

The morning I left Brooklyn to spend the summer in Los Angeles, my mother decided it would be a great time to have the sex talk with me. She started by plopping an economy-size box of “ribbed for her pleasure” Trojans onto the kitchen table, right between the pre-cut bagels and strawberry cream cheese, and saying, “Do you think these will fit in your suitcase?”

Never exactly one for subtlety, my mother . . .

“That depends, is your goal for me to get laid by the entire Screen Actors Guild this summer?” I asked mildly.

Technically, my mother introduced me to the concept of sex at age 6. She showed me an old 70’s porno, and asked me if I had any questions. She said she didn’t want to “hide anything from me.” I was terrified of any and all pizza delivery boys, home repairmen, and pool boys for about three years after watching that movie. But the fact that she waited until I was 19 years old, having already survived my freshman year at NYU, to contemplate the notion of my actually *having* sex, was a little insulting. The fact that I actually *was* a virgin at that time didn’t make it any less insulting.

“Don’t be vulgar, honey. This is serious,” my mother insisted.

“I’m not vulgar, Mom. I’m Snarky. Remember?” I asked brightly.

That joke . . . it’s the only good thing about my name, and it never gets old.

“I’m just saying that this is the first time you are going to be away from home for more than a couple of weeks, and . . .”

“I lived in the dorms this year, Mom.” I argued.

“Yeah, but you were home every weekend to do your laundry, and cuddle with Toonces,” my mother fired back.

As if in response to hearing his name, our family cat brushed deliberately against my leg. I smiled, and rewarded him with a quick neck scratch, one that unfortunately was going to have to last him all summer.

“How long exactly do you think it takes to have sex, Mom?”

“I know, but it’s different, Snarky. You insisted on living alone in the dorms. Now, you’re going to be roommates with a *boy*.”

“He’s not just some random boy, Mom! He’s Moody!”

OK, I know what you're thinking. But Moody isn't "Moody" in the way that I am "Snarky." Moody is Fred Moody, my best friend since the third grade, when he moved into the brownstone down the street from me. We've been classmates ever since, at least until last year, when he got admitted to Columbia and I went to NYU.

We still saw each other all the time during the school year, texted, had movie nights, met up for the occasional Sunday afternoon grocery run at the Food Emporium in midtown Manhattan that was the precise midpoint between both of our dorms. But it wasn't quite the same. Spending the summer together across the country, in a weird way, was going to be a return to normalcy for us.

Just for the record, Moody is actually one of the least moody people I know . . .

"I know, sweetie. But you and Moody . . ." my mother ventured carefully.

Fortunately, Moody, who I've always suspected had somewhat of a sixth sense about these things, took this precise moment to text me:

*Text Message from Moody at 9:02 a.m.*

*Outside your apartment with the car. Hollyweird, here we come!*

"Moody is here! Gotta run!" I exclaimed, rushing back to my bedroom to grab my suitcases.

By the time, I got back to the kitchen, Mom was already standing at the front door, waving Moody into the house. "Mom, come on, we don't have time for this!" I groaned. "We're going to miss our flight. You know how bad traffic heading to Laguardia is at this time of day."

The truth of the matter is, my mother would have no clue how bad traffic is on the way to the airport, because she's terrified of flying. Just seeing the little picture of the airplane on the highway sign near the airport is enough to send her into a flailing, scenery chewing, panic attack.

"Nonsense! I feel like I haven't seen Moody in ages. There's at least time to feed the boy some breakfast, seeing as you haven't touched yours," my mother noted nodding at my barely-bitten bagel.

Though I'm not quite as dramatic as my mother, I wasn't exactly keen on flying either. In fact, this trip to LA would be my second time on a plane ever. And I was only about three years old, my first time, barely old enough to remember. The thought of the flight ahead of me was making me more than a little bit queasy and definitely not interested in food, not that I would give my mother the satisfaction of knowing we had this in common.

"Moody, get in here, and let me take a look at you!" My mother exclaimed, enveloping poor Moody into a bear hug, before he can even get his foot into our entrance foyer. "Snarky, why didn't you tell me your friend got so hot while he was away at Columbia?"

"Because you are a lesbian, and he's literally old enough to be your son," I responded.

Yeah, the lesbian thing. I probably should have mentioned that. You've probably figured out by this point that my mom and dad aren't together anymore. Sometimes all it takes is the male love of your life cheating on you to realize that you'd much prefer the company of ladies.

My mom's new wife, Vera, isn't here because she's working this morning . . . at the Vegan Bakery she owns in Williamsburg, no less. We said our goodbyes at dinner last night. She's actually a lot cooler than you'd imagine a Vegan Bakery owner to be.

"Hey Moody. Mom, would like you to take some breakfast for the road. Today we are serving bagels, strawberry cream cheese, and Trojan condoms."

An introduction like this would send most guys dashing to the fire escape to make a quick exit. But Moody endured it with the same bemused calm with which he takes in everything else about our little wacky world. "I actually had condoms for dinner last night so . . ." Moody replied with a shrug. "I'll take a bagel though! Thanks, Ms. Silverberg."

"How many times do I have to tell you to call me, Genie, Moody!" My mother insisted. "You're practically family. You forget, I've known you since you were in diapers!"

"Mom, you met him when he was eight, I assume he'd been out of diapers for quite some time by then," I muse. "You were, right . . . out of diapers then?" I ask Moody, grinning. "I mean, I never saw you with your pants down then, but I feel like I would have known somehow, like you would have had that sort of diaper bulge in your underpants. Then again, I hear they are just working miracles with those pull-up training pants these days, so maybe I wouldn't have suspected at all."

Moody, to his credit, gamely played along. "Oh, I was absolutely wearing training pants back then. You wouldn't know it at all, but the first time I spoke to you, I was totally taking a big fat dump!" He offered.

"Were you?" I exclaimed, stifling a giggle. "I never would have guessed! Modern technology is amazing!"

Not only did my mother pointedly ignore Moody's and my poop exchange, she also chose this exact moment to unzip my extra-large hunter green suitcase, giving Moody an eyeful of my underwear and bras, as she stuffed the entire box of condoms on top of them. "Snarky, it fits!" She explained triumphantly, sitting on top of the suitcase so she could zip it up again.

"I'm thrilled," I responded, rolling my eyes at Moody, whose eyes strangely seemed to still be glued to the spot where my underwear used to be.

"Moody, will you promise to make sure she eats this summer." My mother insisted, as she pinched my waist with a frown. "Back when Snarky was ten, I sent her to one of those sleepaway camps upstate for two weeks. I swear she didn't eat a thing. She came back looking like one of those sad little children on those late night commercials that beg you for money."

"And because I didn't eat, I was the only one in my bunk who didn't get Salmonella poisoning and have to be sent home early," I argued.

"Salmonella . . . is that the disease from that old movie *Outbreak* that spread across the world, all because that monkey bit Patrick Dempsey?" Moody wondered out loud.

"No, that was Ebola," I corrected, grinning as I lug my suitcases toward the door.

"Ebola, that's right!" Moody exclaimed thoughtfully, his mouth full of bagel.

"You guys!" My mom groaned. "This is serious."

"She'll eat, Ms. Sil . . . *Genie*, I promise," Moody offered reassuringly. "I'll make it my personal mission to make sure that when she comes back to Brooklyn mid-August, she's so fat we'll need a forklift to get her through the door."

"I knew I could count on you," my mother responded, giving Moody an affectionate squeeze.

"We gotta go, Moody! You can finish your bagel in the car," I insisted, dancing nervously in front of the door.

"Yeah . . . sure, OK. Thanks for breakfast, Genie. Send my regards to Vera, when you see her," Moody responds politely, as he moves quickly toward the door.

"Oh no, I wasn't ready for this," my mother whined, her lower lip quivering as she tucked me into a smothering hug.

"Mom, please don't cry," I demanded, not without sympathy. "We'll be in touch all the time. And it's only a few months."

"Text me as soon as you land," my mother prodded. "Better yet, call me, so I can hear your voice."

"OK, mom," I promised, extracting myself from her stranglehold.

"And please reconsider what we talked about," she added pointedly.

"Mom, you are not telling Dad that I'm coming to LA. If I decide I want to see him, I'll tell him I'm there myself. Please respect my decision on this," I implored.

"OK, it's just that . . . fine, I won't say anything else on the subject," my mother demurred, raising her hands in a placating gesture, as I kissed her on the cheek.

"I love you, Mom. And don't worry. It's going to be a great summer."

Moody and I each waved at my mother with one hand, as we each dragged one of my overstuffed suitcases down the cement steps with the other. A single tear highlighted her cheek as the screen door closed in front of her.

Once we'd tossed my suitcases into Moody's trunk, and gotten on the road, I noticed two things. One, Moody was looking at me funny. And two, he hadn't put on his ultra-annoying classic rock road trip music mix yet. The latter of these two was particularly disturbing, because I'm pretty sure a Moody Without Music is one of the signs of the impending apocalypse. And if blockbuster movies have taught me anything at all, it's that nothing ruins a perfectly good coming of age tale like an apocalypse.

"What? Why are you looking at me like that? Keep your eyes on the road, buster. The last thing we need this summer is to be in another one of your accidents," I lectured.

"One, one car accident, in my entire history of driving. And it was only because your dumb ass prom date wouldn't stop climbing up from the back seat to fiddle with the sun roof," Moody insisted.

"Still, my neck hasn't been the same since," I said with a faux pout, making a point of laboriously massaging that back of my neck.

"Poor baby," Moody scoffed, but the way his eyes lingered on my neck for a few extra seconds before pointedly turning his attention back to the road, told me my comments met their mark.

"I take it from your mom's comments about your dad that you haven't told her the real reason you've suddenly decided to spend the summer in LA?" Moody ventured, as he kept his eyes deliberately on the highway.

"Of course, I didn't tell her. If I told her, she wouldn't let me go," I responded matter-of-factly, moving my hand toward Moody's iPhone, which was currently resting untouched on the dashboard, so I could put on some music.

After all, even heinous Classic Rock would beat the conversation Moody seemed to be starting with me.

On instinct, Moody grabbed my hand and pulled it from iPhone, causing me to look up in shock at the sudden contact. Moody and I had never exactly what you would call "touchy-feely" friends. His fingers were warm and surprisingly soft.

(Do guys actually use hand lotion? Or is that, like, only a girl thing? I'm significantly older now than I was when this story is taking place, and I still don't know the answer to this question. So, if you know the answer to this, shout it out loud, and maybe I'll somehow hear you through the book . . . or, maybe you will just make all the people who are sitting around you right now think you are a total nutter).

Anyway, Moody's hands lingered there for a few moments, before he pulled them away sharply, as if he'd been burned.

The back of my neck that I was rubbing so delicately just moments ago, started to feel oddly warm and tingly. So, I abruptly turned my head toward the window, hoping the strange feeling would go away, and yet, at the same time, wishing it would stick around for just a few more moments.

“And she didn’t suspect anything?” Moody inquired delicately.

“No, of course, not. She just assumes I want to spend the summer in LA. Everybody just loves LA, right? You love LA,” I muttered, trying to keep the bitterness out of my voice.

“I ‘love’ LA, because I want to be a filmmaker, and LA is the Land of Opportunity for movie geeks like me. This internship I got, it could really open doors for me in the industry,” Moody corrected. “Your dad loves LA because he’s a comedian and a comedy writer. You want to be a veterinarian. It’s all you’ve ever wanted, since we’ve been kids. And yet, instead of interning at a local vet’s office or animal shelter, or doing something for the ASPCA, you’ve decided to take this internship working at a television production company, all because of this weird Countess of Monte Cristo plan you’ve got running through your that little brunette head of yours. I just figured your mother might be a little suspicious is all.”

“Well, she wasn’t. Maybe she just doesn’t know me like you do,” I muttered with a shrug that I hoped came off as suitably nonchalant. “Which makes sense, when you think about it, because, to be perfectly honest, *nobody* knows me like you do.”

Moody seemed to blush a little bit at this, which didn’t surprise me all that much, because, in addition to not being “touchy, feely” friends, we also generally weren’t “effusive” friends. Moody and I always had this kind of mutual regard, and respect for one another, that didn’t require words. It was one of the things I always loved about us . . . how we always seemed to know what one another needed, without actually having to come out and say it. It’s the kind of relationship that I think can only build when two people grow up together like Moody and I did.

“Speaking of awkward and uncomfortable conversations,” I ventured, as I briefly glanced at my own reflection in the rearview mirror, “how did Bethany take the news that you’d be spending the summer in another time zone without her high-maintenance, excessively over Soulcycked ass?”

Bethany was this girl Moody knew from Columbia, who also happened to be his first real girlfriend. Moody never really dated much in high school, because he was kind of shy, and not really into the whole “popularity scene.” But then two days into college orientation, he meets Bethany and she’s like totally up his bum, until he agrees to go out with her. I met her once or twice. She was like one of those super Type-A girls who makes lists about everything. “Classes I will take,” “Clubs I will join,” “Calories I will eat today,” “Boys I will date,” and I guess Moody made the top of that last list.

They dated throughout most of their freshman year.

“Well . . . um, so, she kind of dumped me, a few weeks ago, so . . . yeah,” Moody explained, in a fashion that’s unusually inarticulate for him.

“Seriously, because of this? Because of LA?” I asked, trying to hide my shock.

“No, not because of LA . . . definitely not. We just, weren’t heading in the same direction, I guess. You know?” Moody mumbled uncomfortably.

OK . . . confession time. I HATED Bethany. She was just perky all the time, and yet weirdly uptight too, which made the perpetual perkiness seem super phony. It was like you were always waiting for something to go wrong in her perfect world that would make her head pop off her neck, Stepford Wife Robot style. I mean, I guess she was what some guys would call cute, hot even. But for a laidback, refreshingly low-key guy like Moody? She could never be what he needed in the long-term.

Of course, I could never tell Moody this. It just wasn't my place. Dissing on the girlfriend (well, now, ex girlfriend, I guess) is a guy friend's job. If I did it, it would just come off as bitchy. Plus, as much as I was relieved knowing that Bethany was out of the picture. I hated thinking about the fact that she might have truly hurt Moody . . . that he actually felt something for this awful wench, and now it was over between them.

"That sucks, I'm really sorry, Moody," I offered, genuinely, daring to reach over and give his floppy strawberry blonde (desperately in need of a cut) hair a ruffle with my fingertips.

At which point Moody started laughing hysterically, which totally threw me off guard.

"Hey! What's with the mockery? Can't you see I'm trying to be a supportive friend here?" I retorted, feeling mildly insulted.

"Please! You despised Bethany! You are absolutely thrilled that we've broken up. I can see it in your face," Moody insisted, causing me to notice that we've been stopped in traffic for the past five minutes, enabling him to look in my eyes, freely, without fear of massive collision.

"Shut up, loser! And, to answer your accusation, no, I'm not thrilled!" I exclaimed tossing a stray Nestle Crunch wrapped I found in the front seat cup holder at his head. "I mean, sure, Bethany wasn't exactly the kind of person I'd personally choose to spend my free time with. But that doesn't mean I'm happy that she dumped you! She was your girlfriend for almost a year! That's a huge deal! And for me to begrudge you your sad feelings about that, I'd have to be a total monster."

"Why? I was thrilled when you broke up with Josh," Moody mused thoughtfully.

Josh . . . the infamous prom date . . . the guy responsible for Moody's one and only car accident. We dated for about four months during my senior year of high school. Interestingly enough. We broke up a few days after prom . . . not because he got Moody into a car accident, but because I walked in on him having intercourse with Tessa Macnamara at the hotel in Wildwood, New Jersey that we stayed at after we got into the car accident. Now, I don't know about you, but guys having sex with other females in front of you is kind of a deal breaker for me, in terms of relationships . . . especially, when that female happens to be a girl who, at the age of 16, still was on a third grade reading level, like Tessa Macnamara.

"That's different," I argued. "Wait, is it? Did Bethany cheat on you?"

"No!" Moody insisted.

"Did YOU cheat on her?"



"Not exactly," Moody mumbled.

"What do you mean, not exactly? Either you did cheat on her or you didn't?" I pressed.

"Look, can we not talk about this now," Moody pleaded. "Why don't we just relax, put on some music, and try to enjoy the rest of our drive to the airport?"

"Yeah, sure, definitely. Sorry, I shouldn't have pried into your sex life like that. Not cool of me," I apologized, settling back into my seat, as the sounds of Dave Matthews Band's *Crash into Me* permeated the car.

"It's cool, no worries," Moody replied reassuringly, before belting out his own off-key cover of the song in time with the music. "CRASH! INTO MEEEEEEEEEE, BABYYYYYYY!"

"Ahhh! Please make it stop! My ears are bleeding," I yelped with a giggle, relieved that everything was back to normal between us.

Yet, I couldn't help but feel a bit of lingering sense of unease from our earlier conversation. I mean, I guess I'd always assumed that Moody and Bethany had sex while they were dating. And while, it bothered me a little bit that I was still a virgin and Moody wasn't, I kind of accepted it, because it was Bethany, and she just sucked so bad as a human being. But the idea that Moody had gotten it on with multiple girls, some of whom didn't have massive sticks up their asses? That thought bothered me more than I wanted to admit to myself.

"So Little Spielberg, what are our in-flight movie choices?" I inquired, as we pulled into the airport's long-term parking arena. (Moody's older brother Scott, who would be finishing up his tour with the Peace Corps in Indonesia in two weeks, and thus desperately in need of some wheels, was kind enough to offer to retrieve his little brother's ride from the car park upon his return to the states, saving us both some serious cash in the process.)

"I'm glad you asked," Moody responded. "I've prepared an eclectic buffet of films from which we can choose," he added, as he placed his iPad in my lap with a flourish.

"I would expect nothing less," I said with a grin, as I quickly typed in Moody's passcode (his dog's birthday, naturally), and was greeted by a list entitled 'Movies for Moody and Snarky's Journey to Lala Land.' "Hmmm . . . Godfather 1, 2, 3, Matrix 1, 2, 3, Indiana Jones 1, 2, 3, Star Wars 1, 2, 3, Scream 1, 2, 3, and Toy Story 1, 2, 3. Am I detecting a bit of a pattern here?"

Moody shrugged, as he tugged the key from the ignition and head toward the trunk of the car to extract our suitcases. "Six-hour flight, average length of a movie is two hours. No better time for a trilogy than this."

"True," I mused. "Except aren't a lot of these trilogy movies three hours long?"

"Yeah, that kind of threw a wrench in my plans," admitted Moody. "You think maybe they'd let us stay us stay on the plane a few hours longer?"



"Sure, why not," I responded with a smirk, as we wheeled our luggage toward the airport terminal. "Though it should probably go without saying, I'm really glad you are here with me doing this," I said looking up at Moody solemnly.

"I'm glad too," he replied, giving me a playful punch in the shoulder, before both of us fell into a contemplative silence, each undoubtedly pondering the complications of the summer to come.

"Weirdo," Moody muttered under his breath smiling goofily.

"Douchebag," I responded in kind, smiling widely.

And that's how it was between us, then . . . easy.

A lot of things were easy about my life at that time. Frustrating, unnerving, sure. But also refreshingly, simple, uncomplicated. In hindsight, I think that's the reason I remember that car ride to the airport so vividly, even though nothing particularly out of the ordinary happened during it. Because that car ride represented the start of the last few hours of my life, before everything started to change .

..

## Chapter 2

### Vanity Card Girl

I got recognized at the airport that day. It didn't happen all that often, but it happened enough to make me wish it didn't happen at all.

"Wait . . . hey! You're that little girl!" Some doofus exclaimed, as he stood behind me in line at the security checkpoint. "Tom, check it out. It's the Vanity Card Girl from That Show. Wow, you got like really old!"

Since we happened to be standing on the security check-in line, we were both barefoot at the time . . . "we" being me and Tom's Friend the Asshat Who Called Me Old For Being Nineteen, who, I'm sure it won't surprise you to learn, wore sandals with socks. And I recall very much wanting to grab my New Balance running sneaker from its spot in that grey box container, which was already en route through the X-ray machine, and bash him repeatedly over the head with it until he fell unconscious. Though I strongly suspect that doing so in a post 9/11 world would have made me into somewhat of a "security risk," thereby preventing me from getting to my flight on time.

It was because of those stupid vanity cards at the end of every episode my dad's latest sitcom. Never mind the fact that Chuck Lorre came up with the idea first. My dad just thought it would be so cool to end every episode of his show *Big Effing Deal* with "hilarious" pictures of me from my youth. Fans of the show apparently adored them, just gobbled them up like candy. "Who is that cute little girl?" They asked intently, flooding the internet with inquiries as to my identity.

When they found out that chubby-cheeked little munchkin was none other than Elijah Silverberg's own daughter, they were elated by the news. "What a great story," they exclaimed on Twitter, Instagram and Tumblr. Of course, they never thought to ask why the pictures of the girl stopped at age five . . . which, not so coincidentally, was the age I was when my father dramatically exited our lives, stage left, for good.

When I was 16, and *Big Effing Deal*, had just been picked up for a second season, I read something on the internet about "right of publicity." It was an article about how celebrities, like those old guys from *Cheers*, were able to sue people for using pictures of them to make money without their permission. I told my mom, I wanted to sue dad to stop him from using my pictures to make his show more popular, when he couldn't be bothered to be a part of the real me's life.

My mom wouldn't cosign on the lawsuit, which, since I wasn't 18 yet, pretty much left it dead in the water. She said that big part of the reason my dad wasn't a part of my life was that *I refused to see him*, which I guess was true. She also told me that using those pictures in a show that he loved was my dad's strange and misguided way of trying to connect with me.

I didn't really buy it, and planned to go ahead with the lawsuit as soon as I turned 15, assuming the show was still on the air then. It was, but, by then, I had more elaborate plans for my father, or, more specifically, for the woman he ended up marrying after my mother, as you'll see soon enough.

I guess this is as good a time as any to tell you about my dad, the inimitable Elijah Silverberg . . .

Elijah grew up in Brooklyn, New York, the youngest of three boys, son of a rabbi at a Reformed Temple in Queens, and a kindergarten school teacher. Like many socially awkward, gawky, kind of funny-looking Jewish kids, who were crap at sports, and even crappier with the ladies, Elijah had big dreams of being a stand-up comedian.

This also meant that Elijah watched A LOT of television. Television shows like *The Realist* accepted Elijah in a way that his sportier, better looking and more socially adept classmates didn't. It also provide him with tons of comedic material to blatantly plagiarize, recycle, and use as his own at open mic nights at the hipster coffee bar in Greenpoint he frequented throughout his junior and senior years.

When it came time to choose a college, Elijah decided on Penn State University, because why *wouldn't* a skinny funny looking kid with no interest in, or affinity toward, sports choose to attend a Big Ten school where sports was super important, and all his classmates were guaranteed to be large, blonde, brawny, corn-fed farmboy types?

Elijah chose to major in Communications, probably because "Being a Not Particularly Funny Comedian" wasn't yet available as a course of study at the University. And it was in a small freshman seminar for that major that Elijah met Genie, a Jersey girl with a big curly mop of brown hair, a face full of freckles, and a penchant for graphic design. Genie fancied herself an artist, and hoped one day to illustrate children's books, a passion she eventually cultivated into a surprisingly lucrative career.

The story probably would have ended there, with Elijah and Genie never giving one another a second look, were it not for their mutual EXTREME admiration for one very specific television sitcom. You guessed it. It was *The Realist*.

In the seminar, one of the assignments was for the students to create a homage to one of their favorite literary, film, or television characters in their chosen art form. And surprise! Both my future mom and dad chose Snarky! Dad's project was this weird, oddly prophetic, definitely pathetic, dialogue between him and the character, in which the character convinced him not to give up on his dreams to become a comedian. Nevermind the fact that Snarky from *The Realist* would never convince my dad to do anything but maybe kill himself, because the character just so happened to be a raging bitch.

Mom did a portrait of Snarky made entirely of mismatched socks whose partners had all been lost in the dryer at one time or another. I know it sounds terrible. But the portrait actually came out pretty cool, and hung in my bedroom from the time I was a baby until I was around eight, when I begged for it to be taken down, for obvious reasons.

I guess you could say it was love at first assignment. From then on, Elijah and Genie were pretty much inseparable. They dated on and off (but mostly on) for pretty much their entire four years at PSU. And I shudder to think about the sheer number of times they boned to the theme song of that damn

sitcom. Would you believe me if I told you a slowed-down version of that infernal theme song was the first song they danced to at their wedding? And you thought your parents were weird . . .

When my parents first got married, they actually had to spend their first year living in my dad's basement, because my mom's job working at a small graphic design firm in the Bronx paid her next to no money. And my dad's office temping, while he tried to break into "The Biz" as a comic, paid even less.

Becoming a successful comedian is hard for most people. But it was particularly hard for my dad, because . . . well . . . he just wasn't all that funny. I know that sounds like sour grapes, my saying that, especially considering that my dad eventually went on from his humble begins to become one of the most successful sitcom writers / showrunners of his generation. But bear with me for a second here, while I attempt to explain myself.

Sometimes, success comes, not necessarily from being the best at something, but from channeling your particular strengths in a way that works best for you. In this way, my dad was kind of genius. You see about 98% of my dad's stand-up comic routines were total and complete shit. But the other two percent, which usually amounted to about three or four jokes tops? Utter comedic gold.

My dad understood this, which is why he started publishing those 2% on social media, through Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. (This was before Vines existed. But my dad's videos were kind of the precursor to that, in that they were mostly Vine-length.)

Eventually my dad developed a pretty substantial social media following, filled with people who assumed that if these comedic 2%'s were so amazing, the other 98% was probably even better! And it was this following that ultimately ended up landing my dad his first legitimate writing job for an honest-to-goodness television sitcom . . . which he got fired from after only six months.

But it was at that job that good ole dad figured out how to collaborate with other writers, mainly by utilizing their 98% percent to make his two percent look even better. So at his next sitcom job, it took them two whole years to realize he was rubbish and fire him. And at the job after that? They didn't figure it out at all!

So, now we are at the point in the story where my dad is actually kind of successful. He's shuttling back and forth to LA to work, super sizing mom's and my birthday and Hanukah gifts when he's home in New York, the whole nine yards. Sounds pretty great, right? And it was great. Except, this is where things start to get a little weird.

Now, as we've established already, I don't know much about you, Reader, so I don't know your relationship status. You could be single, married, dating someone, involved in a deep and committed relationship with your horse named Stardust . . .

I mention this only because, if you do happen to be in a relationship, and you and your partner are a couple who is at all into television, movies, or music, then, I would imagine that, the two of you probably have an agreement relating to your "Five."

For those of you who just read that sentence and said out loud “Huh?” And / or you are embarrassed that you read that sentence and said “Huh,” and, therefore, have stopped reading to Google “The Five” on your cell phone, come back to the book, please, and I’ll enlighten you.

The Five is an informal, quasi contractual, agreement between you and your partner, whereby you each, respectively, get *carte blanche* to sleep with (but only just once!) five celebrities of your choosing, on the rare chance that you actually (1) get to meet that celebrity; and (2) learn that the celebrity in question actually has some interest in sleeping with you. The Five Provision tends to work well in most relationships, because there is literally about .00001 percent chance of it ever being evoked by either party. This extreme lack of likelihood of quasi contractual clause evocation allows both parties involved in the relationship to appear to their partner to be someone who is “cool,” not the jealous type, and even vaguely open to swinging . . . but only in such a way that one never has to actually worry about swinging. As an added bonus, it also allows each partner to figure out, in no uncertain terms, the type of significant other to which their partner might one day become attracted to, and cheat on them with, thus giving that partner the opportunity to force their loved one to avoid anyone who could potentially fit into that category at all costs.

So, anyway, back to my Dad. One night he’s at this Emmys after party for ABC or NBC, or whatever network he happened to be writing for at the time, when he actually MEETS Snarky . . . the very actress whose character singlehandedly spearheaded his marriage, not to mention his desire to become a comedy writer . . . the actress whose character he (very unfortunately for me) named his then-only child after.

Later that night, my mom gets a call from my dad. He’s totally wasted, and slurring his words. He tells my mother he met Snarky in person! And she’s amazing! And she actually wants to sleep with him! Then, my dad asks my mom if he can utilize the rights bestowed upon him by his Five. Though, I strongly suspect, given that my dad was about ten martinis into the evening at this point, that he wasn’t quite so eloquent as I just was. In fact, though I was most definitely sleeping at the time (it was a school night, after all . . . and I *was* just five years old), I am pretty sure it sounded more like this:

“Genie, oh, Genie-Genieeeeeee can I pleasssssse fuck her, pretty pleasssssse? Can I use my Five to fuck her just once, and I’ll never ask you for anything ever again? I’ll be the best husband ever, just pleassssseeee let me do this?”

(Imagine those words, but in a voice that’s like really slurry, and weirdly high pitched, as my dad, at least according to my mom, has this strange tendency to sound like a thirteen year old boy going through puberty, whenever he drinks too much. Super sexy, right? No wonder “Snarky” couldn’t wait to jump his bones.)

Wanna know the weird thing? My mom actually said yes.

This was the single moment that set off the chain of events that literally ruined my life, and my mother gave it her friggin stamp of approval, while I was innocently tucked into my bed just down the hallway.

My mother . . . Queen of the Liberal, Liberated, Forward Thinkers of America . . . the quintessential Cool Wife . . . the one who all the neighborhood men wished their wives would be more like . . . and naïve as the day was long.

By now, you've probably figured out what happens next. Dad and "Snarky" sleep together that once, with my mom's approval. Then, they sleep together a few more times without it. And before they know it, they are engaged in a full-fledged affair.

Six months later "Snarky" is pregnant. My dad is hopelessly in love, and he wants to leave my mother and me, and move to LA to be with the star of all his pubescent wet dreams, and her gross spawn. The divorce papers follow shortly thereafter. They come by Fedex though, because my dad left forever the night he told my mother.

He didn't say anything to me. I figured he was just leaving on another one of his business trips. The plan was for my mother to break the news to me, and then, when I was ready, I'd fly down to LA to meet my dad and my new stepmonster and half-sibling and we'd bond and have adorably hilarious shenanigans, like the plotline of one of my dad's ridiculous sitcoms. There were even two vouchers for plane tickets in the Fedex envelope containing the divorce papers.

But, as I mentioned earlier, my mom's always been deathly afraid of flying, and I wanted no part of going myself, so those plane ticket vouchers remained unused . . . until now.

About a year later, my mom (after spending a lot of time and money on therapy, naturally) discovered that she was more jealous of *my father* for stealing "Snarky's" affections than she was of the actress herself. So, she decided to become a lesbian. She met Vera on a gay online dating site, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Back at the airport, Tom's Friend shoved a napkin from the airport bar and a pen in my face while asking for my autograph. I scribbled on the napkin. "To Tom's Friend With Lots of Love – Good Old Snarky."

Then, I spit the large blue wad of gum I'd been chewing in the napkin and offered it back to him with a blue-toothed smile.

"You're a real bitch, you know that?" Tom's Friend exclaimed, as he disgustedly tossed the offending napkin to the floor, and promptly got pulled out of line by a stern TSA officer for doing so.

I waved at him genially, as Moody and I completed our security screening, and headed toward the terminal. "Shit, I hope that guy is not on our flight," muttered Moody under his breath with a smirk, as he wheeled his suitcase behind him. "You really are going to get us both killed one day."

"That's why you love me," I offered with a shrug. "my complete lack of social graces, my questionable sense of morality, and my continued tendency to make poor life choices."

"Who says I love you at all?" Moody responded, pointedly avoiding my eyes as he spoke.

It was an uncharacteristically cruel retort from Moody, whose sense of humor, even when teasing, usually tended toward the jocular and good-natured, where mine always veered into the territory of nasty, if not downright offensive. I mean, we were best friends. Obviously we loved one another, if not necessarily in a romantic way, at least in “our way.” It was just this kind of unspoken *thing* between us that I assumed we shared.

“I’m sorry if I embarrassed you back there,” I relented finally, not wanting any awkwardness during the interminable six-hour flight that lay ahead of us. “Hey, just think, you have an entire summer to get back at me for it.”

Moody smiled and deliberately veered to the right as he walked, almost knocking me over. And just like that, I knew that all was forgiven.