

THE MERCHANDISE

Because of my line of work, my parents are totally pissed. I'm 22, and last week The Wall Street Journal spotlighted my dot com. Believe it or not, Mom and Dad are actually ashamed.

Knowing they'd want everything hush-hush, I got the Journal to use my professional name, which is Michael T. Dodge. The article was very complimentary. It said, "Mr. Dodge is taller, better looking and better built than any of his actor studs, and he's always fully Armani clothed. He looks exactly like what he is, a bright kid with a somewhat toothy, infectious grin."

Mom says the 2.3 mil I got for selling the dot com is "filthy money."

I've never told Mom and Dad that I've developed a disease which is scary but little-known. I'm writing this as a medical journal for the benefit of fellow victims. To protect my parents' privacy and mine, I'll be using the professional name, and I'll be speaking strictly in the third person.

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He (Michael T. Dodge) has a large number of ailments, such as unverified possible cancer (various organs), aggravated pulmonary insufficiency (refusal to exercise) and vulnerability to bacterial infections (from, e.g., paper cuts).

Those ailments are nothing. The big one is the little-known disease. (Actually it's more of a personal condition.) Since it's nowhere in his library of pathology texts, he's named it "CPE" (which stands for chronic prostate exhaustion). To be perfectly frank, it's caused by excessive, uncontrollable masturbation.

Besides pathology, he reads everything. For example, in "The Courage To Be" the theologian Paul Tillich announces his version of why hypochondriacs are hypochondriacs. He says they're convinced they deserve to die.

Not so.

First of all, theologians are not medically trained. Second, the persons who are actually medically trained—namely your MDs—remind you of the Modern Major General from Gilbert & Sullivan. They can list every disease there is "in order categorical." When it comes to diagnosing a specific case, such as his own, a case that's not your run of the mill, the very best they can come up with is hypochondria.

So much for deserving to die.

By the way, he's also convinced he has advanced undiagnosed syphilis, innocently contracted.

He awakens this morning and recalls a dream in which he's transiting from material existence to spiritual immortality. He's finally glimpsed his role in the universe. Probably it's important, but he can't remember what it is. He can't remember, because he's too busy preparing for his 10:00 o'clock appointment with his new lawyer.

Mr. Grogan is writing his will.

Even though lawyers are not medically trained, such as this Mr. Grogan for example, they have impressive medical knowledge. “I wouldn’t worry. You’re a young man.” Mr. Grogan said those exact words one week ago. “Prostate cancer is an older man’s disease.”

“Prostate cancer” was the right way to put it to Mr. Grogan. He’d been confiding his illness but saw no point in revealing it was actually CPE. The glandular wear and tear is enormous. Mr. Grogan, who reminds him of his father, would have no way of comprehending.

He is thinking here about Angie. In fact, he’s always thinking about Angie. For a dozen years now, night after night, he’s got one thing in his hand and one thing on his mind—the latter being the small, white, oblong, bottom crotch segment of Angie’s panties. Way back, when he was about 10, there was this hot evening early in June. She was maybe 14 and was wearing this incredible micromini. For a full hour, she sat with one chubby leg raised over the arm of the chair. When finally she lowered the leg, she flapped her skirt up and down. “It’s hot in here. Have I been sitting the wrong way?”

Hence—rationally or irrationally—he deems both Angie and the Funk & Wagnalls people directly accountable for the syphilis. At school the very next day, he’d boasted to a classmate, “Guess what. She showed me the Grand Canyon!”

“No shit? Now you’ve got syphilis.”

“What’s that? How did I get it?”

“Sexual intercourse, I think.”

In panic, he’d zipped home to consult his father’s Funk & Wagnalls Encyclopedia (no longer published) and thereby confirmed the diagnosis. There is in fact a disease called syphilis, and sexual intercourse causes it.

He's learned better over the years, of course, but back then it was obvious—whenever you think about Angie's crotch, you're doing what Funk & Wagnalls calls sexual intercourse.

Angie loved to aggravate his syphilis. Every single day—literally—she'd come to see him or call him on the phone. For over 5 years now, because of the demands of his internet work, it's had to be strictly by telephone. Just yesterday, however, he had this stroke of genius. He called his tax accountant, who said, "Yes, that would be deductible." He ran out and, as an upgrade, bought Angie an internet video camera.

His dot com website is <http://www.whatsnewinporno.com>. For the last 5 years he's been selling feature-length Angie video fantasies to his subscribers. His gross profits soared astronomically, but, on the down side, Angie's fantasies kept on aggravating his syphilis.

He got an offer and decided to grab it. One week ago today, early in the morning, he was the owner of the dot com. By noon, precisely as The Wall Street Journal reported, his bank had received and credited 2.3 mil by wire transfer.

Actually it wasn't just 2.3. He'd also inked a rather lush two-year consulting contract with the new owner. His job: to continue doing what he does best, to wit (as Mr. Grogan would say), to talent scout for brand new stars and starlets and to produce marketable feature-length screen tests.

Immediately after the big sale, he realizes, because of his employment, that life as a rich guy won't be all that different. Indeed, grabbing a bite at the lunch counter to prime himself before undertaking his duties, he sees that he's already on the job. Specifically, he's evaluating the pink blouse on the photogenic ponytail blonde right next to him. He likes the appreciative way she's munching her salad. (His most popular

female stars exude voracious appetites.) Also she has a good facial profile, a nose perhaps a trifle snub, and pouty, voluptuous lips.

In his line of work pulchritude cancels out, of course, once you get to the actual nitty gritty. He writes his own scripts, and his characters always invent ingenious ways to discard their pink blouses and their various garments. The camera lingers here and there and then zooms in due south for action closeups and for a good bit of what Angie calls “oral resuscitation.”

Since it got to the point where he can't tell one female star from another, except for tattoos and unbelievable body piercings, his dot com began using the motto: IN THE DARK THEY ARE ALL THE SAME. His competitors copy it, and overnight it becomes the industry standard.

That's how his parents discover his line of work. Two female U.S. senators get themselves onto Larry King Live to complain that the standard is factually incorrect. The good news is that the senators hold hearings, which hype the value of his dot com. It shoots all the way from 1.5 mil to the 2.3. Thank you, ladies.

Now, at the lunch counter, he taps the ponytail's elbow. “I certainly don't intend to interfere with your eating pleasure. However, I'm presently hiring. What exactly do you do?”

A good talent scout is never mistaken. She doesn't answer but leans forward over her salad, favoring him with a glimpse of her right nipple. “Do hold that pose,” he advises her somewhat hoarsely, directing his line of sight toward her wonderful public offering. “I want you to be aware that you've got all the important qualifications for stardom. We'll just set up a tiny little screen test, and I can personally assure you that your future will be in the right hands.”

She blushes, sits erect, reaches behind her and tightens and tucks in the pink blouse. She's great! She's doing ostensible modesty, doing it beautifully.

“You’re a gifted actress,” he says. “You’ll need a stage name. May I suggest ‘Constance Coy?’”

She giggles.

Upstairs a half hour later, in the law office to which she personally leads him, it's instructive to observe her standing behind Mr. Grogan, supposedly her father. Resting one hand on each of his shoulders, she leans forward, pillowing against his head the pink blouse and its various delights, which, as a talent scout, he's already appraised as wholly authentic.

Unexpectedly, a lightning flash of jealousy zigzags through him. He's actually been speculating about settling down with this Constance Coy. Legal secretary? Hah! More likely this balding and obese Mr. Grogan is a person who in the olden days would be spoken of as a “sugar daddy.”

Sugar Daddy has an excellent courtroom voice. “So, Mr. Dodge, what is it that brings you here today?”

As he gropes for a plausible reply, Constance Coy takes over. “He needs a will, Daddy, estate planning. He just sold his dot com company for 2.3 million.”

Good for her! Estate planning—that's something that has a perfectly useful ring to it. He says, “That's before taxes of course.”

“Well, heartiest congratulations, young man. If you wish, we'll also do some tax planning for you. What sort of company?”

Downstairs he'd told Constance Coy, “Can you believe it—my parents disowned me.” Upstairs she chimes in now, “Please understand, Michael, no one in Daddy's generation is computer literate. It's an internet thing, Daddy. It's an internet thing that does all these avant garde video productions.”

This term “Daddy” is certainly confirming his suspicions.

“About my will,” he says. “I guess everything has to go to my mother and father—if they want it. Of course I’m speaking in the event of my untimely demise. I’m not 100% well, you see.”

“Too bad. Just when you’ve made a killing. What’s the situation?”

The silence becomes uncomfortable. No way will he admit to aggravated syphilis and prostate exhaustion in Constance Coy’s presence. At last Mr. Grogan gets it. He extends his arm and points toward the door. “Goodbye, Suzanne. I do believe we’re at the private confidential stage.”

She flounces out. (He plans to locate his miniaturized OED from the Book of the Month Club and his rectangular magnifying glass, and he’ll double check “flounces.”) Right now, as she’s flouncing out, she goes to the trouble of unnecessarily swaying or jiggling her lovely, rather prominent bottom.

He winks at Mr. Grogan, expecting a man-to-man return wink. “Certainly a classy looking broad you’ve got there.”

“I remind you, Sir, she’s my daughter.”

“Hey, in my line of work we have terminology you won’t believe. I can assure you without qualification that ‘broad’ is comparatively respectful. I was simply determining whether she’s your blood daughter.”

Mr. Grogan estimates one week to write up a first draft of the will.

That one week becomes endless. Night after night Constance Coy shows up in his regular fantasies with Angie. Angie herself gets the idea they should have a three-way conference call, but he’s forgotten to jot down Constance’s telephone number. He calls her office several times, but she’s never in. He goes to the lunch counter, but she’s never there. By the time the week finally ends, he’s suffering from APE (acute prostate exhaustion).

What's worse, first time in his life, he's in love. Constance Coy may be his one and only.

At last today comes. He no longer has to wait to review the first draft. Likewise, if all goes well, he no longer has to wait to behold Miss Constance Coy in person. (Even though they've become quite intimate in the Angie fantasies, he needs to check out certain possible camera angles.) So he detours to purchase two dozen white roses and arrives three quarters of an hour early for the appointment. She's nowhere in sight.

His job as talent scout is, of course, 24/7, and he's always on the lookout for photogenic receptionists. This one certainly is, but is it possible she's just a wee bit thin? He says to her, "As you may notice, I need a vase and water please, and I would like you to notify Mr. Grogan's blood daughter that I am here."

"She only works two days a week, and she's off this week." She calls Mr. Grogan. "Mr. Dodge is here. He's brought you some flowers."

"Hold on, Miss," he says. "These flowers are actually for you. May I speak frankly?"

She nods.

"I couldn't help but observe you. I'm wondering whether you have ever considered a career."

Soon he's approached from behind. There's the mandatory power handshake with Mr. Grogan, and then he's dragged a half block or more to a corner office. Released at last, he voluntarily subsides onto a chair. "I'm told this Suzanne of yours works here only two days a week. Don't you agree that's rather unusual for a highly-paid legal secretary?"

Since Mr. Grogan ignores him, he retaliates by skimming through the will faster than Mr. Grogan reads it out loud. Glancing up from time to time, however, he's

fascinated. Mr. Grogan's a superb natural thespian. Look! Look how he raises and twirls his forefinger at each paragraph, particularly those dealing with federal taxes.

When Mr. Grogan pauses to pour himself some water from his silver carafe, he says to him, "I assure you I'm not being impertinent. I'm merely wondering whether you, by any chance, are dieting. We're always scouting for character actors. A trial lawyer should be solid but also on the lean side. I'm sure your generation has seen Perry Mason. My father never missed a single episode. As you know, your Suzanne and I are what you might call the much younger crowd."

Mr. Grogan resumes reading without bothering to reply. Therefore he ballpoints a note for himself on one corner of his first draft: "Find out whether anybody's ever used the title 'Sugar Daddy, Esquire, Attorney-at-Law.'"

At last Mr. Grogan finishes and reclines way back in what appears to be his thousand dollar ergonomic chair. He interlaces his fingers across his tummy—a skillful legal pose! Now he moves forward and places his elbows on his desk, ever so dramatically. "So what do you think?" He brandishes the will. "Have we accomplished here everything you want?"

This guy is good, real good. With a maximum 1000-calorie menu, with a really vigorous exercise program and, of course, with the proper shade of makeup, he could play Johnnie Cochran.

"Oh, the will's fine. I'm sure it's fine. I have only the one question, which you seem to have overlooked. Your daughter, who introduced me to you, why does she work here only two days a week? Does she perhaps have another calling?"

"PhD candidate, University of Chicago. I expect she'll be here Monday."

He gets a brilliant idea. "I consider this first draft somewhat inadequate. I want to leave those U of C guys a whole million. If there's anything left, my parents can have

it. That's in case of my demise, of course." (He doesn't explain to Mr. Grogan that some people consider his money "filthy.")

"So you're a U of C graduate?"

"No, I flunked out elsewhere."

"Then your reasoning here——what is it, specifically?"

"Let's simply say I have certain post-mortem objectives. I'll be back tomorrow, same time, assuming that's OK." It is.

He sails out, pausing solely to review the receptionist and to slip her his card. Thin, yes, but he's relieved to verify that her bosom is exceedingly ample and cannot be attributed to a Miracle Bra from Victoria's Secret. (He ought to know——he gets all of his garment props from Victoria's Secret.) "Do you have any idea how utterly photogenic you are?"

She pulls back her shoulders and strikes two or three poses that aren't half bad.

"I forecast a promising career, abundant foreign travel. I suggest you immediately start brushing up on your Hungarian. It's a difficult language, but right now Budapest is where it's at——hot, red hot."

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Now he's on the street. His task is no problem for a resourceful talent scout. She's on the U of C campus. He'll find her there.

It turns out it is a huge place, maybe twenty, thirty square blocks of impressive buildings, including quite a few older ones with lots of gargoyles. He rolls down the taxi cab window and yells at a passing student, "Hey, where's the office?"

Eventually, after finding a student with some intelligence, he presents himself at a place called the Administration Building. They direct him to this really zaftig, middle-aged woman. "I have a life or death message," he explains. "It's for a PhD student who goes by the name of Suzanne Grogan."

“Life or death—that could be taken as a threat, you know.”

This broad is feisty, probably a professor. He can see her in suburban hot tub scenes, holding her own with Old Man Grogan. “I should have said urgent theatrical business. I’m a major donor, you know, as well as a talent scout.”

“PhD—what department?”

“I don’t actually know. One of your regular departments, I suppose. How about giving her my business card.” He scribbles “7:30 tonight” and puts it into one of those little gift card envelopes he always carries for this very purpose. “Oh, and here’s one for you.”

“Intimate Scenes,” she reads and laughs. “I’m sure I’m well over the age limit.”

“No way. Right now I’m casting this full-length feature about a suburban couple—your age. They’re both on diets and meet at the local spa. They get together in this unisex sauna.”

“Sounds like fun.”

“You better believe it.”

To make sure she delivers the message, he thrusts a fifty into her hand, waves farewell and taxis back to his downtown condo to await developments.

He decides to take a nap and maybe pick up on his spiritual immortality. With his eyes closed, he visualizes millions of prostate exhaustion sufferers lined up outside the brand new Michael T. Dodge CPE Pavilion. Inside dozens of photogenic nurses in thongs and see-through microminis are administering booster shots. Above the main entrance there’s this catchy motto chiseled between two modernistic gargoyles: TLC FROM MTD CPE.

He’d like to daydream longer, but he leaps up. He’s expecting Constance Coy and needs to get the place ready. His \$25,000-a-month condo payments are not even close to what he’s earning on his talent scout contract. He’s dedicated half or more of

his unit to the video studio where he does the screen tests. He starts adjusting the lighting and the audio and video and riffling through his file of scenarios.

When his door chimes sound at exactly 7:30, yes, it's Constance Coy, looking great on the surveillance camera. "Send her up," he says to the doorman.

Frankly, he's afraid. He's got this prostate exhaustion, and also he's fallen in love with her. If she does the screen test, she'll be just one of the girls. That's not what he wants..

She enters his unit and immediately declares, "You nut. I got your card."

She and her ponytail are standing in his living room. She's in tight jeans and a T-shirt that has a picture of Audrey Hepburn on the front and an old guy on the back. The white beard there is listed as "(George) Bernard Shaw."

He circles the whole 360 degrees around her, twice. "Your ass is perfect. Your breasts—I can't praise them enough."

He doesn't say so, but recently in his fantasies she's close to acing out Angie.

Now they sit on his couch, one big cushion apart. That's good. The typical newcomer snuggles right up and begins to paw him. She doesn't want a drink—just something diet. That's good, too. Would she want some coke? She never touches it. That's excellent. (He's just probing, of course. He never actually offers anyone cocaine or anything that's heavier or lighter. The average screen life for a serious user is not even 6 months.)

On the coffee table he's got the clipboard with the contracts and the consents and the questionnaire for Title 18, Section 2257. Just to see what she'll do, he lays the clipboard on her lap. She shoves it to the cushion between them.

Taking a swig from her diet Pepsi, she says, "No. Let's tell each other where we're coming from. You first."

"OK. Is your Old Man your Old Man, or is he your blood father?"

“I assume you’re asking because of what?”

“My women stars must project a certain innocence, a naivete if you will. If he’s your Old Man, that tells me you’ve been around the block. I will have to find out what that will look like on the tube.”

“Anything else?”

He shrugs. This is already the weirdest interview he’s ever had—she’s interviewing him.

“Thank you for inviting me,” she says, rising and extending her hand. “You have a lovely apartment, but I’m not satisfied with your point of origin. I’m going back to school.”

“Sit down.” (As a video director he’s accustomed to barking such commands.) “Here’s where I come from. I originate from this little town in PA. Now your turn. Tell me everything about you. You’re an open book.”

She sits but teeters on the edge of the cushion, ready to leap up. “Very well, Mr. Dodge. Do you have AIDS? You’re always talking about your line of work. You’re what? Twenty-two years old and have easy access to every bimbo there is. In the course of your various doings, have you ever contracted genital herpes?”

OK, she’s hitting some kind of nerve. Years ago there were occasions when he used to inspect himself ten, twelve times a day for herpes. Once or twice at every dinner with his parents, he’d suddenly say, “Excuse me.” He’d rush to the bathroom, whip out the OED rectangular magnifying glass and examine every square millimeter. (It got so his mother began studying all those TV diarrhea commercials. Soon she commenced mixing liquid Imodium A-D into his chocolate pudding and mashed potatoes. Once he discovered some in his ranch style salad dressing.)

When AIDS came along, he made a basic career decision—nowadays you don’t take even the tiniest chance. He’s abstaining 100% and in fact is having himself

checked out for HIV every 3-6 months. (If you can get syphilis the way he got it, he's convinced you can get AIDS the same way.)

In any case, because of all of her talk about bimbos, he's afraid Constance will soon be hitting on him. "I don't know what they're teaching you at the U of C, Miss Coy, but I can tell you they're not doing an adequate job. What's your Old Man's number? I'm taking them out of my will. They're not the right people."

"I'm just saying I do not have AIDS, and I do not have genital or other herpes. Mr. Dodge, do you recall what Audrey Hepburn said in My Fair Lady? 'Talk, talk, talk. Is that all you blighters can do?' If you will honestly certify to me that you are free of those diseases, let's just go to it and do the screen test and we'll see what happens. What are my lines?"

"Not so fast, Miss Coy. What they're not teaching you out there, on that great big campus, what you in your PhD ivory tower don't seem to realize, is that a true professional is a true professional. Do you follow my meaning?"

She doesn't answer.

"I'm a true professional. No doubt you're aware that a true professional talent scout does not ever appear in any of his own productions."

Absolutely no need to reveal to her that today, as a direct result of last night with her and Angie, he is suffering from advanced TPE (total prostate exhaustion), which may very well be irreversible.

"You ask about me and the bimbos. I made a career decision. Let's say you're the boss. You want one of these bimbos? You can have her. Take your pick. But, if you do, you either get whatever they've got, or else the next day they show up with their pimp, who will try to muscle into your operation."

(He doesn't mention that his career decision requires his complete reliance on masturbation. Also he doesn't mention his industry award for his hands-off policy, which refers not to his private habits but to his relationship with his female stars.)

She stands up again, but this time she pulls her T-shirt over her head, flings it at him and reaches behind her and opens her bra. "I think you're certifying. Am I correct?"

This is certainly not the time to mention the syphilis. "Clean, Constance, clean as a whistle, but I'm trying to tell you that's not the point."

She unbuttons and slides off her jeans. "We'll just be seeing about your point, won't we?"

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He arrives at Old Man Grogan's office precisely on time and hands the receptionist a five-pound box of Godiva chocolates. "A slender person like you will find these very nutritious. I want you to eat at least half a dozen every day."

"Thank you. Didn't you get my voice mail?"

"I got it, all right, but sometimes, like last evening, I had this big appointment."

"So where can I get Hungarian lessons?"

"Zsa Zsa will call you today. I've got this group of girls who get together at my place every Monday night. I bring in a tutor. Sometimes it's one tutor, sometimes another. Sometimes it's two, three or four. It's a barrel of fun. Go ahead, take a piece of chocolate."

"So who is it today? Suzanne or Mr. Grogan?"

"Mr. Grogan."

Old Man Grogan appears, seizes him, drags him down the corridor to his office, pushes him into a chair. "I'm a baby boomer, you know. That means no bullshit. I'm calling you Michael. You're going to call me Jimbo."

Jimbo says, “I had Suzanne look you up. She’s a maestro of the internet. No offense. I do that with all my new clients. We know more about you than you do. Some people think your line of business is unsavory. Don’t you find that?”

“My own parents.”

“Make up your mind I’m not your father or your mother. I don’t think it’s unsavory. I think it’s healthful, a genuine public service.”

By God! healthful! a genuine public service! “Thank you, Jimbo, I appreciate your support. But have you by any chance talked with your daughter since last night? Has she said anything about me?”

“No bullshit, Michael. She’s not my daughter. I think you suspected that.”

“I’m a professional talent scout. I have to spot these things.”

“OK, we’ve got that cleared up. You might just bear in mind that she and I have a very open relationship. Next question. You intimated, if I go on a diet, there’s a role for me. Were you sincere?”

“Jimbo, you’re a natural. I already penned some scenarios. In one you’re this horny crusading District Attorney. You uncover this sex ring run by this horny professor who’s actually a madam. She’s your age. She recruits the female students. Picture yourself fearlessly getting the goods on all these women. Then, in this other one you’re this corrupt judge. Believe me, you’ve got a future.”

“I’m not so sure.”

“Take off 30 pounds.”

“I’m not sure I’m up to it. Up to it——do you get my drift?”

“Lose your 30 pounds, then we’ll see. I’m not medically trained, but as a true professional I know what I’m talking about. You’re up to it. I think you’re a hypochondriac.”

He's brought his briefcase and hands Jimbo the contract, the consent and the questionnaire. "I'm signing you up right now. I'm assuming you never appeared in a porno film, but you've got to fill that out anyway, every stage name you ever used, and I'll need three forms of ID."

Jimbo says, "Title 18, Section 2257 is the United States Criminal Code. I don't want her to sign that questionnaire. She's a serious PhD student. Her thesis is 'George Bernard Shaw and the Victorian Morality.' She's got an academic career ahead. I don't want her to list all of her porno stage names, to see if she was ever a minor. When I met her, guess how old she was."

"She was 16, Jimbo. She's already signed, already done the questionnaire. Back then she was Fifi Fox. I've got a three-year standard contract with her. If she keeps her nose clean, she'll be my hottest property ever. Not to be boastful, I spotted her right away."

Jimbo gets up and is pacing around. "So this Fifi Fox thing——will it ever be made public to jeopardize her career?"

"Jimbo, Jimbo, take it easy, man. I don't want to mislead you——I'm not legally trained——but in my legal opinion she's entirely safe. First, I personally guard these records with my life. Besides, did you ever read Subsection (d)(1)? 'No information obtained from records shall be used as evidence.'"

"So you're assuring me they can't prosecute her or involve her any way, shape or form?"

"No way, shape or form."

"That's a load off my mind. Now what about me? Do you really think 30 pounds will do the trick?"

“Do me a favor, Jimbo. In my opinion you’re mainlining Viagra. Stop using those pills. Let nature take its course. If you can’t do something with one part of the body, don’t forget there are other parts.”

“You’re a young man, Michael, and you’ve got wisdom beyond your years.”

Mr. Grogan now goes to his desk and starts rummaging. “You bet I’ll do you a favor. I’m looking for something here. When Suzanne came home last night, she complained that you have total prostate exhaustion. I’ve never heard of any such thing. I never saw her so bitter. I had to calm her down. She says you told her it’s irreversible.”

“Oh, that——that’s just a line I fed her. Knowing she’s your Old Lady, I let nothing whatsoever come between you and me. But I must say, that girl’s persistent! Some of these broads——no offense——you have to figure out how to stop them. Between you and me, as one true professional to another, I don’t ever fool with the merchandise.”

Jimbo returns from the desk. “No bullshit, Michael.” He’s carrying a small bottle. “Let’s just see if we can’t reverse your so-called prostate exhaustion. Here’s some of my Viagra. It’s a miracle drug. As a favor from me, I want you to try it. I can get you all you need.”

“Thanks. My old man never did anything like this for me.” He stuffs the bottle into his briefcase. “Genuine public service, huh? I wish you were my father.”

“Don’t give up on your folks. You never know.”

He stands, and he embraces Jimbo. “Let’s forget the will,” he says, punching Jimbo’s shoulder. “I’ve decided maybe I deserve to live. I’ll show myself out.”

At the reception desk, he reaches across, opens the Godiva box and selects a piece. He plunks it into her mouth.

“Zsa Zsa called,” she says. “I’m so thrilled. I’ll be at that Monday meeting.”

“Suzanne will be there, too. A barrel of fun.” He blows her a kiss and waves goodbye.

“Oh, boy!” she calls after him.

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I (formerly known as Michael T. Dodge) go home to the condo and speed dial one of the only two numbers in memory on my hot line telephone.

“Dad? Here’s a heads-up. From now on everything’s strictly my real name. I’m starting this new dot com. It’s <http://www.babyboomerpublicservice.com>. It’s a first. I’m targeting your generation. Do you hear me?” No answer, but both of them are always on the line.

“I want you and Mom to meet my lawyer, Mr. Grogan. Take it from me, don’t ever think you two are washed up. Mr. Grogan’s your age. Just wait till you get a glimpse of his highly-paid legal secretary. Talk about not washed up! She’s one of my stellar attractions.”

I listen, but they’re still playing dead.

“You guys got to start someplace. Tell you what I’ll do. I’ll send you these 12 top-rated, feature-length DVDs from my old dot com. Trust me, you’ll get a great big kick.”

Dad hangs up, but Mom is still on the extension. The last thing I hear is “filthy.”

I sign off and speed dial the other number. “Angie, how about coming over here right this minute.”

She gasps and then says, “You want me to do what?”

“Hop in a cab and get here as fast as you can.”

“I don’t believe this. What’s your address? Shall I be wearing the white panties?”

“Of course.”

“I probably look a lot different, Mike, a couple of pounds. It’s been more than five years, a little bit of premature gray. Could you just tell me why all of a sudden?”

“I’m settling down. If it’s OK with you, I’d like you to be my one and only.”

I can hardly wait to see her. She was always chubby——so no problem there. I look into my briefcase to make sure the Viagra’s available, just in case.

Ten minutes later the phone rings. Somebody’s whispering. It’s Dad. Dad says, “Son, your mother’s in the john, so I have to talk fast. Go on ahead and deliver those DVDs but send them to my office. Let’s approach this whole thing one step at a time. We’re so proud of you, more or less——our son, the tycoon. Oops——gotta go.”

I try to picture the two of them. They lock the dog out in the yard, and they turn on the DVD. They plop in a disc, the one that won last year’s Golden Hand award. They sit on the living room couch. He puts his arm around her.

I can’t picture the next step——it’s too big a stretch. What was it Jimbo says? “You never know.” Well, I guess we’ll soon find out.