

\ SPONTANEOUS COMBUSTION

A Collection of Memorable Monologues

by
Dennis Bush



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SPONTANEOUS COMBUSTION

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AMY

(Amy is 18. SHE's sharing her secret for staying safe.)

Before I go to sleep, I take my stuffed polar bear out of the freezer. ***(quick pause)*** Oh, don't worry. It's not a punishment. It's not some kind of teddy bear torture. I'm not hurting him. Polar bears love chilly temperatures. ***(simply, logically)*** And he needs to go in the freezer for eleven minutes so he stays cold all night. Fifteen minutes is too long. Ten isn't long enough. Eleven is perfect. And he's in a Ziploc freezer bag, so the fur doesn't get soggy. He's fine with it. Really.

His name is Sheldon. I've had him since I was five so you could say we've been together for thirteen years. My friends don't know about him. They wouldn't understand. . . they wouldn't understand why he needs to go in the freezer for eleven minutes every night before I go to sleep. My parents don't understand either, but they've learned to tolerate it. After the first few times my mom opened the freezer door to get out the ice cream and saw Sheldon staring her in the face, she got used to it. She doesn't scream anymore.

When I turned eighteen, she said, "OK, Amy. You're an adult, now. You can vote. You don't need to sleep with a teddy bear any more. Especially one that you insist on sticking in the freezer every night before bedtime." I thought about it. I considered it. But that night, Sheldon went in the freezer as usual.

Fear is powerful. I had to take precautions. Before I spontaneously combust in the middle of the night, I had to do what I could to prevent it.

Freezing Sheldon and keeping him cuddled up close to me, while I sleep, has been the difference between life and death – between spontaneous combustion and no combustion at all.

END OF FREE PREVIEW

NO FOR AN ANSWER

DINAH

(DINAH is 21; SHE was raped by her best friend's boyfriend.)

I said, "No." No, I didn't want him to take me home. I was tired and I had a headache. That's all. I wasn't dizzy or anything. Just a headache. It wasn't even a migraine. It was just a headache.

But he insisted. He was insistent. He wouldn't take no for an answer. Jason was like that. He always got his way with Melanie. She's my best friend and Jason's her boyfriend. It's usually the girl who can get her way with a guy but Jason always got his way. He was insistent. He wouldn't take no for an answer.

So, finally, I said, "OK, you can take me home." He'd been to my apartment a hundred times with Melanie, so he knew the way. But instead of going the way I would have, he went a roundabout kind of way that made no sense. I didn't say anything. I didn't want to get into an argument about who knew the best way to get to my apartment. I had a headache. Nobody wants to get into an argument when they have a headache. And, besides, it's not a good idea to get into an argument with your best friend's boyfriend. So, I didn't say anything.

When he pulled into the parking lot at my apartment complex, he said, "I'll walk you up to your apartment." I told him he didn't have to. He said he wanted to be a gentleman. I said, "No. . . No, thank you. Really. You don't have to. I don't need an escort to my apartment. I'm a big girl."

But he insisted. He was insistent. He wouldn't take no for an answer.

So, he opened the car door for me and helped me out of the car like we were on some kind of date and he took my arm and walked me to my apartment. I got my keys out of my purse and he took them out of my hand and started to unlock the

door for me. “NO!” I said. “I can do it. I can unlock the door. I don’t need your help.” Before I was finished telling him I could do it myself, he’d unlocked the door and we were inside.

(begins to cry) And he was insistent. He wouldn’t take no for an answer.

END OF FREE PREVIEW

SURVIVING REALITY

ANGEL

(ANGEL is 19; SHE shares what her life has been like in the past few years.)

I’ve been on my own for a while. A few years. . . . Three years to be exact. . . . But that’s a few. . . . Three’s a few.

I left home when I was 16. I didn’t have a choice. . . . Not one that I could see, anyway. Things got too hard to deal with. . . . too hard to be around all that anger and never knowing what would set her off. My mom, I mean. She was crazy. . . . crazy for real, not an exaggeration or a joke like, “she’s so crazy.”

She’d go off on these rants about things that didn’t have anything to do with her but, somehow, she took ‘em personally and they set her off. Like Jay Leno’s chin. She’d yell at the TV about how big and ugly it was and how it disgusted her. She could’ve changed the channel or looked away or anything but, no, she screamed at the TV about Jay Leno’s chin. It sounds funny, I know. But in person – when she was doing it and I was there in the same room, it was scary. . . . scary as hell.

It was like she was disconnected from reality. She used to say our neighbor’s belly button talked to her. He was a really big guy and he wore t-shirts that were too short so his hairy belly showed. Him and my mom would be out getting the mail at the same time on Saturday mornings and she’d come back in and say that his bellybutton had told her all kinda stuff. Freaky stuff. Stuff like *(quick pause; recalling the stories)* our neighbor had a Chinese woman tied up in his garage. Or that he kept dead rats in Tupperware containers in the refrigerator. And she believed the bellybutton. *(incredulous)* She believed his bellybutton! She called the police. Of course they thought she was a nut case after she told ‘em she got her information from the guy’s bellybutton. But that’s the kind of craziness that went on in my house every day.

Now that I have some distance from it, I can laugh. . . . at least a little more than I could when it was happening. I didn’t have many friends. It’s not like I could bring anybody home. I never knew what kind of. . . . situation. . . . I’d be walking into.

She was in a constant state of. . . . agitation. *(quick pause)* It’s like she needed that kind of chaos to live. And she was always angry. . . . Angry about *something*. . . . angry at *someone* – usually me. I was fat or I was lazy or I was so much like my father that it made her want to kill me. Try going to sleep at night, after your mother tells you that.

My little brother figured out how to survive. He stayed in his room and pretended to be asleep most of the time when my mom would go in and launch one of her rants at him. She’d go off on some crazy tangent and he’d just lay there and not say a word. I could never do that. I got upset. I said things. I cried.

END OF FREE PREVIEW

THE MUFFIN MAN

COLLEEN

(COLLEEN is 19; sweet, quirky; her friend has asked her for advice about love and relationships.)

You have to compromise. You have to make allowances for. . . . personality quirks. *(clarifying)* When you’re in a relationship, you can’t let those. . . . quirks. . . . get under your skin. You can’t. You just can’t. *(quick pause)* You have to understand that opposites attract and, in those moments when your boyfriend is – like my boyfriend is – particularly opposite. . . . you have to take a deep breath and appreciate his individuality. All the things that make him unique can

sometimes make him. . . how should I say it? **(quick pause)** Odd.

My boyfriend is odd but wonderful. Really, he is. He's wonderful. And he thinks I'm wonderful, too. I have a quirk. **(quick pause)** Just one. It doesn't make me as odd as my boyfriend but I do have a quirk.

I collect the little plastic things they put in pizza boxes to keep the lid from crushing the pizza. They're like little tables. I have hundreds of them. Some are round and some are triangular. And they have three or four little legs – depending on whether they're round or triangular.

I collect 'em and put 'em together to make different shapes. . . Trapezoids, rhombuses – or would that be rhombi? Let's just say shapes. It's art. I'm making art. Artists make art out of all different kinds of materials. Why should little plastic tables be any less worth of being used to make art?

I could have lied and said I'm an event planner and that I use them to do miniature versions of table arrangements for banquets and wedding receptions. That would really be a good idea. I wonder if event planners actually use the little tables to do that? If I was an event planner, I would definitely use my little tables for that. My collection could be functional and serve as materials for my artwork, too.

END OF FREE PREVIEW

RUNAWAY

JULIE

(JULIE is 20. SHE's had an unexpected encounter with her boyfriend.)

He asked me to run away with him. **(quick pause)** I thought he was being silly. . . We could go away for a weekend anytime we wanted without our parents even knowing it. **(explaining)** We're in college. My mom and dad are two thousand miles away. Paul and I could have gone to Vegas without so much as an eyebrow being raised. So, when he asked me to run away with him, I said, "Sure." We were in a serious relationship but I wasn't serious about running away. Like I said, I thought he was just being silly.

He showed up at my dorm on Wednesday night. My roommate was at the library, so it was just me and Paul in my room. I gave him a hug, like normal, and I noticed that he smelled. . . **(quick pause)** kinda like ranch dressing. The only thing I remember Paul smelling like, before, was soap. I asked him about it and he was like, "I guess I stink, tonight, ok? It happens. I sweat. Guys sweat. And sometimes we don't have time to take a shower every day. Sometimes we have other things to do that are more important, ok?!"

I was like, "OK." Right then, I should have told him I didn't feel good and not gone with him. . . Then, his voice softened and he smiled and said, "Tie your shoe before you trip over your own shoelace. He said it sweetly – like he was being protective – like he was back to normal.

So, I tied my shoe, grabbed my backpack and a sweater, and started walking toward the door. And Paul grabbed my arm and dragged me out into the hall. He pulled me really close to him and put his lips against my ear. And softly – but really intensely – he said, "We don't have all night."

All the way down in the elevator and out through the lobby, he was quiet. Not scary quiet – just regular quiet. When we got into his truck, he leaned over and I thought he was going to kiss me. And he said, "Before I start the car, I need to do something." I was like, "OK, but you're freaking me out here." Then, he put his hands around my neck and choked me. I couldn't breathe. I thought I was gonna die. . . I blacked out.

I don't know how much time went by. When I woke up, I was in a motel room. A Motel 6. **(explaining how she knew)** I could see the sign through the window. I asked Paul why he was doing this to me. He told me that he found out that I had dinner with Jeremy – my old boyfriend. . . **(clarifying)** All we did was have dinner. Just dinner. Nothing else. But Paul didn't believe me. **(begins to cry)** No matter what I said, he wouldn't believe that I was telling the truth. **(more tears)**

END OF FREE PREVIEW

THE PROVERBIAL TRUTH

ELLEN

(ELLEN is 22 SHE's made a discovery about her boyfriend and it was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back.)

"Before I wipe your vomit off my shoe." That's how he started the conversation – by saying, "before I wipe your vomit off my shoe. . ." He actually used those words. Exactly those words. Verbatim. Then, he said, "I'm speaking metaphorically, of course," like I couldn't figure that out because I certainly would've known if I'd thrown up on his shoe. Then, he took a deep breath and sighed for what seemed like five minutes before he started whining, again. "You make me feel like the proverbial shoe upon which the proverbial vomit is vomited."

The proverbial shoe? The proverbial vomit? There *is* no proverbial shoe and, even if there was, the idea that there would be proverbial vomit to be vomited on it is ludicrous.

(chuckles a bit, ruefully) I feel like I've just been suckered in by one of those underwear jokes. You know, some jerk asks, "Are you under here?" and you say, "Under where?" and he laughs his butt off because he made you say "underwear." And, now, Craig has made me say "proverbial shoe and proverbial vomit."

What I find hardest to believe – besides the fact that I've just said proverbial shoe and proverbial vomit five times in the past thirty seconds – is that he actually made me feel like he was the victim and I was the victimizer.

He is the one who has vomited the proverbial vomit on *my* proverbial shoes. The shoes are definitely on the other feet!

He's the one who told me that he would always be there for me, even if our relationship didn't work out. I thought I could trust him. I thought I found one of the few good guys out there. What I really found was a guy who would Instant Message other women from my computer. Yesterday, he was IMing a woman whose screen name was WendyGoneWyld – wild spelled with a "y" – and he left the IM window open on my computer after he was done.

Did he think I wouldn't notice? Did he think I wouldn't care? If that's what he thought, he was mistaken. *(quick pause)* I noticed. . . I cared.

END OF FREE PREVIEW

ADDICTED

GINA

(GINA is 21. SHE's not the brightest bulb but SHE's pretty and flirtatious and has a secret addiction.)

Before I let you have a sip of my Dr. Pepper, I think you should know a little something about me. After all, sipping from someone else's soda is an intimate act. My lips have been where your lips are going to be. It's very different from sharing a bowl of popcorn or a pizza. We might as well be kissing. *(quick pause)* I'm not suggesting that. *(quick pause)* Not at all. I just want you to think about the line you crossed when you asked for a sip.

(Takes a sip and continues to sip from the soda, throughout the monologue.)

You may think you know me. . . I look nice enough. . . Pretty enough – on the days my hair does what I want it to. But you don't know me. . . You don't know me. . . Not really. I could tell you things about me that would give you chills. Bad chills. . . Really bad chills. *(shivers)* I give myself the chills. If I can give myself the chills, just by thinking of the things I've done, imagine how bad the chills I'd give you would be.

I won't prolong the anticipation. I won't make you wonder anymore about the things I do that could be so upsetting. . . so. . . *(searching for the word)* so. . . chill-giving. I won't make you wait another second. . . *(pause, looks as if SHE's going to speak, then, stops)*. . .

Or will I? *(pause)* Do you think I'm pretty? I mean, really pretty?

I'm teasing you, now. It's naughty making you wait. **(quick pause)** No, I won't be cruel anymore. . . I'll tell you. . . I'll confess. . . **(pause; milks the pause)**

END OF FREE PREVIEW

KILLER

LAURIE

(LAURIE is 21; SHE was driving when her car crashed, killing her three passengers)

We were driving along and everything was fine. I was driving. Carolyn and Marcy – they're my friends – were with me. Carolyn was in the front seat and Marcy was in the back seat behind me. Marcy's friend, Michelle, was sitting behind Carolyn. We were driving along and talking. We weren't doing anything crazy. I wasn't driving recklessly. It was raining, so I was being extra safe. I'm a good driver. I'm a very good driver.

So, we were driving along and Carolyn started to put on some lip gloss and Michelle started screaming. "I'm allergic to strawberries!" And Carolyn was like, "It's lip gloss. It's strawberry *lip gloss*. It's not like I'm smearing strawberries all over my face." But Michelle kept screaming, "I'm allergic to strawberries. I am ALLERGIC to STRAWBERRIES!"

The windshield wipers were going back and forth and Michelle was screaming and Carolyn was trying to calm her down and Marcy was growling. **(quick pause)** Growling like a dog. And I was like, "Shut up."

It started raining harder. Michelle was hyperventilating in the back seat. I looked in my rearview mirror to make sure she wasn't passing out or anything. And we started sliding off the road. **(explaining)** The car hydroplaned. . . Hydro. Plane. It sounds like it oughtta be a plane that lands on water. The ones that have pontoons. Pon – toons. Like pons set to music. Pon-TOONS.

What was I saying? Pontoons. . . **(tracing her through-line backwards)** Hydroplanes. . . The car hydroplaned. We hit a telephone pole and spun around.

That's what they said. **(clarifying)** The people in the car behind us. I don't remember what happened. I blacked out. When I woke up, I was laying in a puddle. I was all wet. I don't like being in wet clothes.

They didn't wake up. Carolyn, Marcy and Michelle. They didn't wake up. We were all wearing our seat belts but mine popped open and I flew out of the car. I was ejected. Ejected. I was ejected but they weren't. They got crushed. Plus Carolyn got kind of impaled by a mile marker.

END OF FREE PREVIEW

JUST LIKE A MUSIC VIDEO

TRACY

(TRACY is 21; a former pop music star)

I was on TV when I was seven years old. It was local TV but it was still TV. They had a reporter covering the Little Miss Princess Pageant and I was the winner. She interviewed me. I had poise. For my talent, I sang a Jim Morrison song. He was the lead singer of The Doors. I sang, "Come On Baby, Light My Fire" while twirling a baton. . . A *fire* baton. People cried. . . They cheered. . . Their lives were changed.

After that pageant, my parents got me an agent and I started singing anywhere they could get me booked. Malls, Rotary Club meetings, doing the National Anthem at Little League games. You name it and I did it. A producer heard me sing "America The Beautiful" at a demolition derby and he offered my parents a contract.

My first album – my *very first* album – went gold. I was on *Entertainment Tonight* five times in two months. I was everywhere. I couldn't walk down the street without people screaming my name or running after me to ask for my autograph. My second CD went platinum. I had my own line of clothes and make up. I was a corporation. I did a tour of Japan. I'm very big there. I was mobbed. They just wanted to touch me. "Tracy" they called to me, in their Japanese

accents. **(explaining)** They have Japanese accents because they're Japanese. Ten people were killed in a stampede at Tokyo Disneyland. All they wanted to do was touch me. I did a duet with Paul McCartney. He used to be somebody. I went to a sleepover at the White House as a guest of the President's daughter. I performed at Madison Square Garden. The concert was sold out. The whole *tour* was sold out. We sold out stadiums

END OF FREE PREVIEW

SANCTUARY

AUGUST

(AUGUST is 20; SHE was named for the month in which SHE was conceived; SHE's agoraphobic)

My roommate is dead. On Monday night, I heard a thud in her room. It was loud. **(quick pause)** A loud thud. I'm not sure what happened. Her door was shut. I didn't open it. I respect her privacy. I was sitting on the sofa when I heard the thud. I asked if anything was wrong. She didn't answer. Not a word. She's quiet, though. **(quick pause)** Very shy. So I didn't ask her, again. I didn't want to be a pest.

I waited to see if there was another thud. She could have been moving things around in her room and made a thud when a piece of furniture slipped out of her hands. It happens. People drop furniture. It makes a thud.

After about five minutes, I heard a voice say, "Help!" – kind of whispered or like it was a strain to say it. It could have been a voice on the TV. I couldn't be sure. **(insistent)** Her door was shut. **(more insistent)** And I wasn't going to open it. **(even more insistent)** And I wasn't going to call 9-1-1. I don't make outgoing calls. And I screen incoming calls. I order my groceries on the Internet. They deliver. I leave a note on the door so they know to knock three times, then, bring them inside and get the money. I leave it on the table. I run to the bathroom, when they knock. I can't be in the living room or kitchen if the front door is open.

So, I couldn't call 9-1-1. They'd bust down the door. It would be open. **(quick, horrified pause)** Wide open. The 9-1-1 people can't be trusted to wait until I get in the bathroom and shut the door before they bust the front door open. They can't be trusted. They like to ride around with their lights flashing and the siren going. People like that can't be trusted for a minute.

And, anyway, I didn't hear anyone say, "Help," again. So, I didn't have to worry about calling anybody.

Everything was fine. Everything was perfectly fine for three or four days. Maybe it was a week. I don't remember. It's not important. It was fine. Everything was fine. No more thuds.

And, then, they came. The 9-1-1 people. And they busted down the door. There must've been a hundred of them storming in like an army taking over an enemy village. It takes a village to raise a child. It takes the Village People to raise a child. And they came in. Before I could get in the bathroom.

And the door was wide open. It was open far enough for them to drive their ambulance right through the door. They didn't drive it through the door but they could have. The door was open that wide. And the neighbors were standing in the hall looking into my apartment. Looking at me. Looking at me like I'd done something wrong. I didn't do anything wrong.

You shouldn't call 9-1-1 every time you hear a thud. If people called 9-1-1 every time they heard a thud, all they'd do all day was call 9-1-1. The vast majority of thuds do not require outside intervention. The vast majority of thuds do not require that strangers bust down your door and come in yelling and screaming like wild Indians. Like Cowboys and Indians. Like the Cleveland Indians and the Dallas Cowboys. They were all in the apartment and the door was wide open.

END OF FREE PREVIEW

THE SCREAMS IN MY HEAD

ROCHELLE

(ROCHELLE is 16. SHE's a writer – a poet and SHE gives a window into her home life through one of her poems.)

I write poetry. Just stuff that comes into my head. It's not about me or anything. It's just about stuff. I know some of 'em by heart. I could say one for you. I could recite one I wrote last night. It's called "My Brother Is Home."

MY BROTHER'S HOME

I hear
Footsteps
In the hallway.
My heart races.
I can't remember
How to breathe.
His key
Turns in the
Front door lock.
I forget
How to move.

My brother
Is home.

I hide
In my room.
If I'm

Still enough,
If I'm
Quiet enough,
He won't hear me.
He won't see me.
He won't
Know I'm there.

END OF FREE PREVIEW

IMMACULATE

JANINE

(JANINE is 20; believes SHE is in the 11th month of a pregnancy caused by an immaculate conception.)

My boss doesn't wash his hands after he uses the restroom. **(quick pause; firmly)** That's not speculation. It's a fact. I've had my suspicions about him for a while. **(quick pause)** I've suspected. I've presumed. My office is directly across from the men's room. I can hear what goes on in there. I can tell when there's water running. I can hear when someone uses the hand dryer. And my boss never runs water and never uses the hand dryer. And I've never seen him use hand sanitizer. The other day, he came out of the restroom and reached right into the candy jar on my desk. He dug his hands way down into the M&Ms. His unwashed, undried, *unclean* hands and he looked at me and said, "Mmmmm."

And it wasn't the first time he's done it. He's violated my candy jar too many times to count. And, every time, I throw away the candy. I'm not going to have unclean candy sitting on my desk.

That's how it happened, you know. **(explaining)** The pregnancy. **(clarifying)** Not from the unclean candy. No. It was an immaculate conception. He didn't touch me.

END OF FREE PREVIEW

CHAOS AND CONTROL

TANNER

(TANNER is 17; privacy, order and control is very important to him.)

There's chaos outside the door, but it's not a monster. *(pause, deciding whether or not HE's going to share any more personal information; HE decides that she has earned his trust, so HE continues)* My parents are loud. They both come from big families and my mom's Italian and, apparently, those people yell a lot even, when they're not mad at each other. And they have no respect for my privacy. *(quick pause)* Especially my mother.

I can feel her standing outside my bedroom door. Like she's a specter – a ghoul. . . the phantom of no privacy. And she listens at the door. I don't know what she's listening for. It's not like I'm on the phone making drug deals. I don't do drugs. Well, except for my prescription acne medication. And she stands there, for what seems like hours, before she finally knocks. She can't just walk in. I have a lock on my door. I put it on myself. She was seriously pissed off about that – my dad was, too – so we had a big long discussion about it and I said I wouldn't keep it locked at night so if there was a fire, my mom and dad could get in to wake me and the firemen could save me without having to bust the door down.

So, she knocks. *(quick pause)* Like a machine gun. Knock, knock, knock, knock, knock. Always the same. Five knocks. Loud and fast. I let her in and she walks around the room like she's browsing at a store. So I ask her, "What are you looking for?" And she says, "Nothing. Just looking. I'm allowed in so infrequently, it always feels like I'm coming to a new place, so I want to have a look around. I never know when I'm going to be allowed in, again." – which is a total exaggeration, since she comes in almost every day. And every time she comes in and walks around and looks at my stuff and *touches things and moves things* and says "hmmm." It's like she's judging me.

END OF FREE PREVIEW

TOO HARD TO HAVE AROUND

GREG

(GREG is 16. HE lives with his mother in a run down apartment in the Hell's Kitchen section of New York City. HE's not shy but HE's also not outgoing or overly friendly. HE's like a wary and wounded animal. HE's been through things that a guy his age shouldn't know about or have had to deal with. HE's met a new group of people and has been asked the question, "What I wonder about most is _____.")

(Initially, not making eye contact with anyone) I wonder where my dad is. *(pause)* Last time I saw him – almost a year ago – he was living on the street. Down in the Village. I was having dinner with my uncle Wayne – my mom's brother – at an Italian restaurant on Bleecker and we saw my dad sitting on the sidewalk leaning against a trash can. He didn't recognize me but I knew it was him. I could tell right away, as soon as I saw him, even before my uncle took a quick breath and looked away like he'd seen a ghost.

My dad is kind of a junkie. Kind of an alcoholic, drug addict combination.

END OF FREE PREVIEW

LOOKIN' FOR A FIGHT

ERROL

(ERROL is 22. HE's nerdy and intense. HE's an aspiring writer, yet finds himself drawn to a gym where the regulars are hardcore weightlifters and boxers. HE's gotten into Ultimate Cage Fighting. The pain and numbness appeal to him. Fighting has become the measure of his masculinity, as well as his escape.)

You wouldn't know it by looking at me, but I'm a fighter. . . a professional fighter. . . an ultimate cage fighter. I'm wiry. I'm lethal. Doubt me at your own peril. *(quick pause)* Seriously. Because I could go off on you and then you'd know what I'm

capable of. **(corrects grammar)** That of which I am capable. **(quick pause to regain edge)** I would mess you up. Because I'm a professional. I've been paid to fight. Fifty dollars. Cash. Under the table.

The money's nice but the experience is what I value. It's what I crave Life is about experiencing things and learning from those experiences. Every scar represents a lesson. **(points to scar on his left cheek)** See this? I got it in a fight six months ago. He almost put my eye out. **(clarifying)** My opponent. He dug his fingernails into my face like he was trying to tear the skin off the bone.

And I laughed. Laughter in the face of pain. Laughter in the face of pain, on my face.

It was freeing – the laughter and the pain. That's the thing about fighting. It's freedom with fists. It's about doing, not thinking. When I'm fighting, I'm not worried about anything. I'm not *obsessing* about anything. . . like what my girlfriend meant when she said that we seem happy together. *Seem* happy? Is that like delusionally happy? Like *not really* happy but *appearing* to be happy?

END OF FREE PREVIEW

THE SECRET WORLD OF SPORTS

SEAN

(SEAN is 17, not athletic; disconnected from his father.)

Sometimes, I feel like if I pretended to be more of a jock, like my brother, my dad will like me better. So, I talk myself into believing that if I just watch ESPN or read *Sports Illustrated*, I'll be able to have a conversation with him. I stand in the bathroom, looking into the mirror and giving myself a pep talk. There's always a stack of *Sports Illustrated* magazines in the bathroom, so it seems like a good place for the pep talk. Plus, there's the mirror and, that way, I can make tough-guy faces and practice looking like I know what the heck the difference is between a small forward and a power forward and why they call the small forwards small, when all of 'em are so tall.

But even after the pep talk and all the tough-guy faces, as soon as I sit down in front of the TV to watch ESPN, it's like my head weighs a hundred pounds and it takes all my concentration just to keep it from falling off my shoulders. My dad watches *Sports Center* at four or five different times during the day and night. He says it's new scores and updates and different highlight footage, but it seems to me like it's the same stuff repeated over and over.

My dad and brother communicate in this bizarre language of abbreviations and codes. ERAs and RBIs and PPG and PAT and they talk about who has a better slugging percentage and who doesn't have their legs under 'em for a three-point shot. Where are their legs if they aren't under them?

END OF FREE PREVIEW

GETTING BACK HOME

TIM

(TIM is 17; a lost boy in more ways than one.)

"Who are you?" That's what I asked her. "Who are you?"

She was holding my hand and we were walking really fast. She was pretty much dragging me. Her legs were a lot longer. Four-year-olds don't have long legs.

"Call me Mommy." She said it like an order. Like "Call me Mommy, or else!"

"Are you my mother?" I know that's a Dr. Seuss book, but it's what I asked her. "Are you my mother?"

"I am, now," she told me. I remember being confused. I had a mother. She's who took me to the beach. I remember. I had sand in between my toes. **(confirming)** I remember. I had sand all over my arms and legs. **(more intensely)** I remember.

I had sand in my butt. **(quick pause)** And I smelled like the ocean. **(quick pause)** Ocean smells different than swimming pool.

And my mom – the mom who took me to the beach – said she had to go to the bathroom and I was supposed to stand outside the ladies' bathroom and not move. That's what I did. I didn't move. Somebody *moved* me. She grabbed my hand and pulled me along behind her. **(clarifying, almost desperately)** I didn't move. *She moved me.*

Her car was black on the outside and white on the inside. **(quick pause)** Like an Oreo. I'd never seen a car that was black on the outside and white on the inside before. I liked it. She said we were going for a long ride, so it was good that I liked the car. And she opened up her purse and pulled out a plastic bag full of Oreos. She had *Oreos* in her *Oreo car*! I ate them all. There were 17. I remember. I ate 17 Oreos in the Oreo car. I'm 17, now, but when I ate the 17 Oreos in the Oreo car, I was only 4.

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