

18. HOPE GIVES TOO MUCH

I am looking at a magazine. There is nothing unusual in what I am doing. I focus on the picture. I can't let go. What is there that glues my fate to the image of the person that I see. How long will I suffer through this?

I turn the page. I have lingered on the image too long.

I want to touch her. I want to protect her. I want to own her.

She is in another picture in the magazine. She is with a man. I don't look at this picture the same. I grit my teeth. I don't want her to be with that man. I want to hurt him.

I turn the page. I don't want to think about this anymore. I am thinking about daffodils. Nothing can harm me.

We can meet. We can have coffee. I can take your picture. This is the beginning of my life.

I see her in another picture with her friend. It pisses me off. There's nothing that I can do about it. Why do I really care?

She is going to make sure that I can't make contact with her. I want to tell her my story. I know that she wants to hear it.

What are you worried about? Why are you running from me? Hold up. And let me catch up to you. There's something that I want to tell you.

I am your magic man. I give you my soul. And for that brief instant. I know what you are about. I know you better than anyone else in the world. For you part, you just wish that I could be part of your world. I will give you everything. I will show you everything.

I want you to be my hope. Hope will you wait for me?

I hand her a DVD. "This is my favorite movie. I want you to watch it, and tell me what you think of it."

"I've probably seen it before."

"I'm sure that you haven't."

"It's not something perverse, is it?"

"It's strange. But it's not perverse. It's not me doing something weird on camera. It's just a movies that I really like."

I wonder how I have been able to get this close to her.

"My friend is motioning over there. I have to go."

I don't want her to go. I'll just have to wait for her to watch the DVD. She may not like it. One of the male characters has a crush on his friend who is also a guy.

I can hear her saying to herself, *He must think that there's something weird about me.*

"I'll try to watch it."

She just can't try. I need to make sure that looks at it. Not just part of it. The whole thing.

There is something so safe and so real about their life together. They think about garbage collection. They worry about whether or not their morning paper is delivered. Their only fear is the day that she mentions that she wants to have a child. He is not sure if he is ready. She is afraid how he is going to react.

They live in that limbo between true love and real love. And that is good enough for

them. She can hardly dwell on his shortcomings. He has enough of his own.

She hands him the DVD. Have you heard of that movie?

“I think so. I thought that we saw it,” he gives her a sour face.

She wants to watch it on her own. She is not sure that she will find the time for it. When she gets home, she tosses it on a pile of stuff.

I see her out a couple of nights later, Hope wants to be noticed tonight. She is wearing a short skirt and super-spike high heels. I could really take my tongue to those legs. She would just purr.

She laughs.

“Do that again, and this time, don’t stop.”

I expect her to tell me something stupendous. When she coos, I want her to unlock the mystery of the universe.

I throw the magazine that I am looking at on the coffee table. I sit back on my couch.

If Hope was here, we would be making out right here, right now. I would rest my hand on her hips. She turns to look up at me. She is so immersed in her passion that there is little that she can say to me. She might as well be someone else. I might as well be someone else. She is glad that she wore what she wore tonight. Her legs, her lips, her low cut sweater. I lost myself again and again in these kisses. I hardly think about what come next. It is all so natural.

Afterwards, I am afraid that I am melting. I don’t want her to find out. I’ve got to leave.

“Where are you going?” she asks.

I don’t hear a thing.

I can’t do a thing. I close the door behind me.

I go back to my apartment. I open up the magazine and look at pictures of Hope.

It’s not just her beauty. I understand her quirkiness. The turned up nose. The twist of her mouth. I know what those things mean. I know what she means.

The more that I think about her, the closer I am to actually knowing her. This may seem preposterous. But this is a science. It is using the geometry of the situation to present all the intersections. I can follow these lines of force back to the subject. I can know her better than she can know herself.

I run my fingers along the page of the magazine. I am measuring the distances. I am discovering the points of radiation. All this is part of her mystique. I want to strip these layers and get closer to the heart of the matter. Part of this is a belief. If I can see these pulsating centers of energy, then I can track their influence on her personality.

I know what a smile means. I know what her pose says. If I see her shoes or her new dress, I can figure out the care that went into choosing these items. It provides me with a better opportunity to know who she really is.

That guy who they photograph her with, he can’t know as well as I do. She doesn’t realize that when she is wind-surfing with him. Or when they catch them roller-blading together. Or when she is in a tight bathing suit on the beach. One kiss and I could bring her to life.

In all the pictures, there is a feeling of discontent. I feel that I can help her.

I find another magazine. I see pictures of her alone. I need to ask her about the change.

“Why aren’t you with someone?”

“Because I am carrying a torch for you.”

“You know that we could never really get along.”

“Why is that?” I ask her.

“Look at me. I’ve become accustomed to a certain lifestyle. It’s something that you could never give me.”

I sit up in my chair and try to look more sophisticated. “I could give you anything that you need. I’m a man of means.”

“Is this something new on your part?”

I want to tell her of my recent successes. I don’t think that she will believe me. Or perhaps it won’t be enough.

“Maybe I could meet you in the park for fun. Have you ever thought about that?”

She can hardly think about things like that. These are all things that she only occasionally dwell on. She really doesn’t have much time for it to be any different.

I pretend that there may be more to our connection. We edge closer to each other. I stare more intently at her picture.

“Nothing is really going to happen between us if you don’t tell me how you feel about me.”

“I thought that you were with that guy.”

“I really am. He has a way of giving me things that I want.”

I wonder what she is talking about. “Like what? Flowers?”

“If the mood strikes him. It’s not as if he’s on a schedule. I like him because he’s spontaneous.”

I perk up, “I could be spontaneous for you.”

“That’s not what I’m talking about. You just can’t be spontaneous. You either are spontaneous or you’re not.”

I keep thinking that my lifestyle may not be dramatic enough for her. If I only had a chance to get closer to her, I could convince her how much I can offer her.

“You need to accept the fact that we never could know each other. By the time that you are finally ready to be where I am now, I will have moved far away. I will have changed. You can never catch up.”

I suggest to Hope, “You could slow down. You could let me catch up.”

“You’re asking me to die. I don’t want to become like that.”

I turn the page on the magazine. It is another picture of her. She seems to be looking at something intently outside the view of the camera. I again use finger to trace the outlines of her face. If I was an artist, I could draw these contours. But I can do something even better. Just looking at her, I know what can really make her smile. The raindrops of a spring rain dripping on the tree in front of her window. The water glistens in the crisp sun. I cannot create that reality for her. But I understand how that brings her to life. That is how I am able to communicate with her so well.

This is a science. It is important to understand that. Comparing her gestures, I see patters. For the moment, what holds together these patterns are things in her world. Her house, her yard, her clothes. But the same pattern could exist in my words. That is how I prepare myself. I study these photos so that I will be ready when the real encounters occur. I will not be afraid. I will be prepared. I am the student. I am learning my lessons well.

If I have reduced my efforts to a science, I need to discover what are the basic principles of her actions. What is the gravity that propels her in motion? That is my skill. I am able to generalize based on my application to each individual instance. Look at her running on a beach. She is almost like a thoroughbred in the middle of a race. There is an arch to her back that helps direct all the power of her stride. She puts all her body into the race.

I can feel the sweat drip even though I am only looking at a photograph. I can sense the extra effort that she expends. She is almost there. She can taste it. A saltiness in the mouth. A bitterness on the tongue. And the more that she pushes herself, the sweetness seems to win out.

I can taste that sweetness on her lips. I concentrate on the image so that I can feel that closeness to her.

She pushes me away, "I didn't want you to do that. I can't be acting like that."

"Like what?"

"Like a cheap whore."

"I've got money. I could help you out."

"I've got my own money. And I don't need your help."

I indeed want to help her. I do what I can to get to know her. I feel my strategy continues to face the same problem over and over again. I plot out my approach. And she is interested at first. Interested, no more than that. Then she offers me a polite smile. She is very inviting.

I take it to mean more than it does. I feel this need to tell her everything about myself. I need to spill my guts out to her. I get desperate. She gets frightened.

I know that she recently went on a vacation. It has been a very exotic location. I have seen pictures in some magazines. Hope is staring at the sky. It is so bright. I am overwhelmed by the intense heat that is depicted in these shots. She warms up to the situation.

In these pictures, I feel as if I am the sun. Nothing attracts her attention with as much ferocity. This is the only place that I could cast myself. There is one shot of her with her eyes closed sitting on the beach. She is not thinking about him. She is not thinking about anything. She is letting the warm rays of the sun penetrate her body. It invigorates her. She is in need of nothing else.

We form out unity in the heat. I can sense that same radiance. I need to close my eyes just to absorb all that vibrancy. It is blinding. The sun reflects off of the sand. There is something almost desolate about the scene.

She hops up and runs into the surf. She is giggling. She is like a child. Her movements are aimless. She is not going to attempt a swim. She is just splashing in the waves. The sea carries her along. It tosses her back and forth. She like surrendering to this feeling of freedom.

This is why she went on vacation. She has been torn by these abstractions. They have made her feel tense. In the ocean, she can lull around and let her body be taken over the deep waters.

I feel her venturing out into the depths, out into open water. This is where we coincide. She has already glimpsed the power of the healing waters. I want her to know the secrets hidden way beyond the shore. She has to venture beyond her protectors. This will show the limits of her vulnerability.

"Do you like this?" I ask her.

"My vacation. I loved my vacation."

“You know what I’m talking about. For once in your life, you felt free. You were unconstrained by all the thoughts that bother you day to day. Where has that taken you?”

She maintains, “It was what it was. I just feel relaxed by the experience.”

I have my opportunity to explain things to her. I am not getting through to her. I believe that the power exists within her. This power is way beyond anything that she has known before. She had a glimpse of this when she was out on in the sea.

But she would have to really turn her world around to know what I’m talking about.

“You are telling me that I can become the ocean. That makes no sense to me. I felt this powerful thing. It’s out there. And I have fond memories of my experience. That’s all that I can really say about it. But when you try to tell me that the ocean is inside of me, I’m not sure what to make of it.”

That night she is with him again. She gives herself to a force more powerful than anything inside of her. It is greater than anything that he can muster up.

He notices how fierce the love-making has been.

“What’s got into you?”

“I think it was my vacation.”

He tells her, “You should go on vacation more often.”

He leaves it at that. He does not want to make that journey into a lifestyle. He does not seek something more permanent.

I close my magazines, and stretch out on the couch. I am trying to reason through my recent experience. I have not only been able to penetrate Hope’s soul. I also have insight into her everyday experience. I know what her and Roger are doing. I know that he is not the one for her.

I am not crazy. I know that I just can’t tell her what I feel. She is still devoted to Roger. If only I could convince her what might be in her best interest.

Roger is her ocean. She lets herself swim in those deep waters. He is everything for her. I can’t compete until she sees me for the storm that I am. I am the only one who can wreak havoc on that harmony that reigns between them.

I don’t want to give in to such negative thoughts. I am not about that. That is not my way. I am supposed to be her protector.

I sit up and look at the magazine. Each time that I flip through the pages, I begin to bring her to life again. I read about her father’s illness. Roger did what he could to understand. But how could he really be sympathetic. He had his career to worry about. She didn’t want to miss any shoots. But she did have to cancel the trip to the Phillippines.

“I wanted to be by those restful waters. But there was a storm brewing inside me.”

Perhaps, Roger is lacking inside. He doesn’t have a sufficiently developed character to appreciate her spiritual side.

“Hope, have you thought about seeing a therapist. You just seem depressed all the time. Maybe you need to take something. You know what I mean. You just need to even out those highs and lows.”

She listens to him. His diatribe sounds so cliché. “Roger, you really don’t have a spiritual side.”

He wants to tell her about the program that he has enrolled in. It is really changing his

viewpoint about life. She feels that it is brain-washing. There is nothing at all profound in the teachings of his director.

“Honey, it’s very spiritual.”

She feels that he can only think about psychology like the stock market. She can hear him saying, “You just need some dampers to prevent extreme shock. There is no significant cause for depressions or inflations. Just the inability to regulate capital.”

He continues, “Honey, I’ve explained that to you before.”

Indeed he has.

She wants to remain with her sadness. It is what holds her together. She feels that she is finally accommodating herself to a deep truth about life.

Why is Roger so deaf to her pain? They make love that night. She ceases to wonder about their difference. She accepts the distance as what makes her who she is.

“You can never really know who I am. No one can.” She needs to accept that balance for the time being.

Why am I trying to upset things? People can only take so much truth. If Hope doesn’t want to digest the bitter pill, then why am I forcing her to swallow it.

She tells me, “You need to leave me alone. I like things how they are.”

“But Roger isn’t giving you what I need.”

“But as long as I’m with him, I can fret the small things. I can get cranky when he ignores me. And I can feel delight when we have a good time. You’re asking me to change all that. If I thought the way that you did, I’d never show up for a photo shoot.”

“You could come to my place, and I could take your picture.”

She laughs at me. “Is that all I need to do?”

We start to talk about the intent of the photograph. This seems like an extremely fruitful discussion. We don’t get lost in any of that silliness about revealing the soul.

“I show the camera what it wants to see. If it wants me to be happy, I am happy. If it wants me to be sad, I’ll be sad. There’s no big deal to this. I just keep myself focused. At the end of the day, it’s all that I can do to keep sane.”

If I take a picture of her lips, it is because I want to be kissed.

“They really have to make up my lips to look good and juicy. A little fruity colors. Some hot pink. Gloss. I have to keep licking them.”

She wants to tell me more, “I am not trying to convey something inside. I am trying to connect a bunch of exteriors. Like scenes in a movie. There is this consistency that is communicated in all these photographs.”

“This is not pornography. I am not looking to get the viewer pumped. I am opening things up. This is not just about sex. It is so much more.” I listen to her words. I am getting excited hearing her tell me about her work.

“It is almost like getting transported into another world. That is how the story works. The heart begins to race. The body gets turned on. It is like a race. You want to get to the next point more quickly. You just get involved. You go on a journey.”

In an actual shoot, there are so many more photographs taken than she can actually interpret. As a viewer, I give a special poignancy to each shot. It freaks me out a little.

Maybe I’ve got it all wrong. I am taking it too seriously. No wonder Roger interacts so

well with her. They both live in the same world. She likes to dabble in the mysteries of life. But fundamentally, she lives for one reality. She survives on the surface. The depths are there to put everything back in place.

I again open the magazine. It all makes sense to me. She is smiling.

“What are you smiling at?”

“I’m smiling at you,” she tells me.

I have never been happier in my life. Since we have come on this vacation together, things have never been as exciting in my life. I love being with her. This is truly how life is meant to be.

She puts a shirt over her swim-suit. She has been at the beach all day. It is a little chilly on the deck.

“I’ve missed you. What have you been doing?”

“I had some work to do. I was at the library doing some research. I got some ideas for a new book.”

I have waited all my life for this perfection. There is nothing that is more delightful.

She has made some dinner. Some cold salmon and potatoes. It looks great. After dinner we sit together on the couch. I lie back. She is in my arms.

She suggests, “Let’s go for a walk by the ocean.” I feel a little tired, but I take her suggestion.

“Roger, I’m glad that you decided to come with me on this vacation.”

I tell her, “This just gives us a chance to know each other better.”

She seems so relaxed. Nothing seems to phase her. I want that sense of comfort about my life.

When we get back home, things seem to change. She seems more distant. She goes back to her job at the cosmetics counter of a department store.

She is looking at a cup of coffee after a hard day at work. She lights a cigarette.

“I thought that you had quit.”

“Are you on me about everything today?”

I thought that this would be perfect. After the vacation, we would come back all renewed.

“Roger, this isn’t working.”

“What are you talking about?”

“You know what I’m talking about.” She takes a sip from her coffee. “We took this vacation in the hopes that we could work things out. Things really got no better between us. I’m hating my life.”

“I saw that picture of you. Who’s the guy in the background.”

“Just someone at the shoot.”

“Have you met someone? Is that it?”

Hope has her head down.

“It’s not about that” She stands up. “I really don’t want to talk about it.”

“I need to ask you what is going on?”

I can’t figure out what is really happening with her.

“I’ve been communicating with this guy on the internet. There is really nothing to it.”

I am admiring her necklace. Small costume jewels surrounded with silver. I feel as if I have nothing more to say to her.

I am looking through one of her magazines on the coffee table.

“Do you know this model,” I ask. I am holding up her picture.

“Do you like how she looks?”

“I really do.”

She looks really vicious, “Would you like to fuck her?”

“I don’t know. I was just looking at her picture.”

Her eyes are very blue. It seems as if she is wearing contact lenses. Her lipstick is a matte rose.

I am doing my best to ignore Hope. I am staring at the girl in the photograph. She is coming alive for me. I seem to have caught her in mid-sentence. It is as if she is in the middle of her life. I am trying to stop her. I want her to notice me. I want her interested in what I have to say.

My tongue brushes her lower lip.

“Not now, she tells me. I’ve got something important to tell you.”

She has come to life completely for me. I am no longer even with Hope.

“What do you want to tell me?”

There is a brush of fear in her face. Otherwise, it seems to beckon me.

“I just want to go over there and shake you over and over again.”

I see that she is trying not to smile. I want to be serious. This is where I started everything. I started all my reflection with this one photo. I need to find the girl in the photo.

“Stop trying to kiss me when I want to talk to you.”

There are almost faint rings around her eyes. A touch of fatigue. She wants to see. She is ready to embrace the world.

I love the picture. What it says and what it does not say.

“Why are you bothering me with all your troubles?” she asks me.

“You were the one who told me that you had something important to tell me when I tried to kiss you.”

Her face is finely powdered. I can still see the colors of her skin. I can see the tiny veins in her face. It all gives her character.

“This is serious,” she says.

“Are you sick? Is it some that you know? Are they sick?”

“This is not about someone being sick.”

“I wonder, “Is it about us?”

“There is no us.”

In her kisses, she wants to forget. I lick the back of her neck. She is getting more excited. This is not like making love to Hope. My new girl wants to forget. She refuses to tell me her name.

“Roger, I don’t want you messing with my life. Keep it simple. That is why I let you visit me here.”

She has pictures of this guy everywhere around her apartment.

“Who is that guy?” I ask.

“Just someone that I fuck. You have Hope. Don’t get jealous on me now.”

I am trying not to be jealous. I just want what he wants.

“Are we going to have sex tonight?” I ask her.

“No wonder Hope has problems with you. You’re so rude.”

“I just want to be with you.”

She looks at me, “We are together. I’m not going to offer you anything more.”

“We’re not going to sleep together,” I wonder.

This has all gotten way out of hand. I have not been able to work things out with Hope. Now I am hanging out at this anonymous models house.

“Did anyone ever tell you that you look a lot like Hope?”

“Our hair cuts are a little alike. That is all.”

She lies on top of me on the couch. She pouts up those wonder lips. She gives me little pecks of kisses. Then her tongue starts to go to work. We can’t hold back. She doesn’t want me to stay the night. I go back to Hope’s. It is close to 1.

“Roger, where have you been?”

“I just went out.”

“You’ve had sex, haven’t you?”

“No I haven’t.”

She is angry, “Don’t lie to me. I can smell her perfume. It’s not that girl at the cosmetics counter. You’re not cheating on me with some girl at a department store. Some cheap whore who you just bought with your credit card.”

“I did give her money. But it wasn’t about that. I don’t even know her name.”

I sit up on the couch. I’ve had a weird nap. Something about Roger and Hope. I need to find Hope. Things are getting out of hand.

“I don’t want to take a shower. I just want to go to bed like this. I’m not going to take any more showers.”

“Hope, you are acting strange.”

“Roger, you still haven’t told me what you were up to last night. Why didn’t you get home before 1.”

Roger admits that things may seem unusual, “I had to go back to the office.”

She reminds him, “I thought that you were working at home.”

Hope tries to smell his clothes to see if he has been with someone else. She can’t tel. Just thinking about him being with another woman is enough to make her want to sleep with him, Her kisses are long and deep. They are hypnotic.

Their contact at first seems so physical. But then she can feel herself soaring. Her body seems to project in all directions. She feels herself spread out everywhere. It is as if she is taking flight. There is something glorious in their connection.

Hope falls asleep in his arms. She can still feeling herself out of herself. She floats on in this high.

In the morning, she remembers their embrace. But there is something in her feeling that has little to do with Roger. He has simply been a catalyst. When he gets up, he hardly remembers a thing about the night before. She is moving his things off the coffee table when a slip of paper falls. It is a telephone number. Penny or Paige. She can’t make out the writing.

Hope dials the number from her cell phone. She wants to know what this is about. A woman answers. "Who is this?"

Hope doesn't recognize the voice. She tries to listen for some clue. Can she imagine the woman's face?

I notice Penelope's picture in the magazine photo spread. She is being photographed in Greece. She has dark hair. It is short. And deep blue eyes. I feel blessed just to gaze upon those eyes.

Penelope is looking far off into space as if she is waiting for someone. I imagine myself frolicking with her in the waves.

In the first few scenes, she looks afraid of the water. The surprise is refreshing. Later on, she seems to live in the water.

I want to follow her back to the hotel room. I want her to invite me up for drinks. There is something in the way that she shakes her body that just drives me crazy. I am trying to take in that movement. I want to make sense of it.

Things haven't gone well with Hope. She decides to go back to Roger. I am now attracted to Penny.

Penny finds a local boy to take up to her hotel room. I see her in the lobby.

"What's going on Penny?"

"Nothing."

"I thought that we could hang out."

"You just make things too complicated. You want sex to be this thing that it isn't. The world isn't going to change because we sleep together. Lenny is uncomplicated. That is why I like him."

He touches her shoulder. She kisses him on the cheek. She does a little jump. I want to follow her up to the room. She can do better. I can do better.

I just stand there.

I want to do something to Lenny. This is not right. I have thought about Penny. She is the perfect lover for me, not him. This is perverse. This is completely wrong.

"Penny, I know who you really are. We are meant to be together."

"I hardly know you. Don't say things like that to me."

"You pick up a boy on the beach, and you won't even give me the time of day. What good is he going to do for you?"

"He's going to fill me up with the most exciting feeling. You're going to try to turn sex into an intellectual puzzle."

I don't want to let go of my feeling for Penny. I know that we are perfect for each other. I feel this attraction more than I felt the attraction for Hope. I feel that I am being tossed in an empty sea with no hope of rescue. I need one of my girls to kiss me.

I see Hope in the supermarket the next week.

"You're shopping by yourself," I wonder.

"I've always shopped by myself."

"I thought that you were with that guy."

Hope informs me, "Roger and I broke up."

I see this as my in. "Maybe we can get together and hang out."

“I don’t think that would be a good idea. It’s going to take me a while to get over Roger.”

The week after, there is a splash of pictures on all the gossip magazines. Hope has found a new guy. I buy one of the magazines and take it home.

Her new guy has made his money in computers. Some kind of software. He gives this goofy look for the camera. She was not meant to hang around with a guy like this. I look for some pictures of her by herself. There are none. She is afraid of her solitude.

Since her father died, there has been a part of her that she is afraid to share with anyone else. She has drifted aimlessly from one man to another. Now she is with this new guy. Will she even get her life on track.

I find a picture of her on the computer. It is another beach scene. It seems as if she lives in the water. I put it up on full screen.

Her eyes tell the story. She is restless. She can never be happy. This is her condition. One kiss, and I could take her out of her malaise. We were meant to be together. I am the eyes of her soul.

Hope has rejected me because she is rejecting herself. I can find no one who is sympathetic to my tender heart. I feel too much. I want to invite these girls into my world. To help them end the sadness that fills their day to day. In their eyes, I see only melancholy. In their souls, there is only misery. I can end this heartache.

“Roger, you were never good for me.”

“You’ve just run off and found some new guy. I bet that you picked him up on the beach.”

“What about that night? Where were you? That was the final straw.”