

“It’s a rather pleasant experience to be alone in a bank at night.”

-Willie Sutton

*“I know the taste of a watermelon which has honestly come by,
and I know the taste of a watermelon which has been acquired by art.
Both taste good, but the experienced know which taste best.”*

-Mark Twain

“Everybody's got a plan until they get punched in the mouth.”

-Mike Tyson

The Three Weasels

By Ben Steber

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-SYLVIA-

All too often you'll pass a magazine stand, and staring back at you are piles and piles of beautiful girls. Perfect in every way. Sure, they're made up, then airbrushed, some-no-most have had plastic surgery to cut out and throw away as much of the ugly as possible. They get face-lifts that vacuum-clean the fat out from under their cheeks. There are liposuction routines and tummy-tucks that trim waistlines and dress-sizes overnight. Then comes the makeup. Base coat, lipstick, eye shadow, perms and hairspray, they have vaseline on their teeth that forces them to smile and superglue to paste back wide ears. There are wonder bras or electrical tape used to push breasts all the way forward. Spandex to suck in the, like, last millimeter of point-whatever percent body fat. All this happens before the camera even flashes. Then after the shoot, you have CG-editing, embossing. Stretching and formatting the airbrush tool, cut paste, embellishments, renderings.

Wow. I could go on. I know all this because I am a photographer. I'm a student, I'm a kennel club madame and I'm a photographer.

I was 11 when I got a present in the mail from my deadbeat dad. I open up this package and it's a wonderful Kodak piece of shit that I simply loved to death.

It should still be in my closet, somewhere.

My name's Sylvia I'm 17 now and I'm looking for something new to shoot, so long as it is not a woman.

The female form is overrated. I mean Jesus. It's over-done, surgically cut like a prom-dress 900 different ways, shot, then edited at 2 gigahertz, and plastered in every sexy way, shape and form on everything in sight in order to sell more magazines by the cover.

OK, I'm no model. Not that I'd want to be one. Not that I could. All kinds of operations can make you look bustier. All kinds of photo effects can trim your waist just right. Nothing makes you taller. I'll never be more than four foot eleven inches.

I am not even joking. I am an inch shy of five. I have stopped growing and I have stopped caring. A photographic eye teaches you that the ideal female height is somewhere between 5'4" and 5'9". You see; taller girls intimidate men and shorter girls appear too juvenile. So what you have is an army of women that go absolutely nuts to control their weight and shape, when really, as long as they are under six feet tall and over five three they've already got it made. Meanwhile, the tall girls and the short girls are the ones really short-changed and forced to date leftovers. Am I, maybe, bitter about this? A little bit. But I don't date much, not these days, not ever. Maybe if I lived in another era.

In Ancient Greece before magazines and Photoshop and saline implants things made more sense. The way women are today: on the cover of magazines everywhere, sex symbols, that's

the way men were thought of in Athens, ages past. The first sculptures of Greece, the last remaining evidence of their artistic civilization was nothing but perfectly proportioned nude men. The perfect male form, one foot in front of the other, naked and smiling faintly. Pectoral muscles that are perfectly flat and strong at first sight, but curved, carved and firm after you really take it all in. Greek sculpture was the first real move towards Ideal human form in art. It's definitely a huge element in my taste.

It's also the reason you'll see me at sporting events. I might as well be the Lakeland Cobras' mascot. Basketball, Wrestling, football, lacrosse: You'll see me at every game. Just don't confuse me with any of those boy-crazy sluts that tag on the team's ass for sex and popularity. Hell no. I hate boys. I love the male form and I'm a photographer. The school newspaper is weekly, and sporting events are part of the coverage, so I'm always ready to take shots at the gymnasium. Sure I get to see strong, perfect guys muscling each other around but no, that's not what I came to see.

Gymnasium is a Greek word. Its origins are ancient. In ancient Greece, sporting events were all men. Even more, athletes would do it all their contests buck-damn-naked. They were also idealized, and sculpted naked. Gymnasium means "the naked place" It was then, and it still is today, as long as you know where to look.

I love men because they have to really work to make themselves look good. A flexed bicep does not mean that a surgeon cut into his arm and implanted a bag of saline. Abdominal muscles are not washboards installed just under the skin. Beauty does not mean slim, pretty or delicate, it means functional. It means strength in action. If something looks beautiful it means it works beautifully. Their glistening, sweaty tones move uniform on the court, so fast I can't even blink, or I'll miss calf muscles pulling taught on a jump-shot, sparkling sequins of sweat, or the fluid motion of their arms on a behind the back dribble. It was only a matter of time before basketball wouldn't satiate me any more. I needed to find the real gymnasium. I was willing to break in.

An everyday lock is just a cylinder attached to a bolt. Turn the cylinder and the bolt slides out of the door frame. The door can open. The only thing that stops it from turning is a series of pins in a line along the cylinder and key slot. Each pin is cut in two with one bit on top and one on bottom. With no key, or with the wrong key, the cut pins don't line up right, and the cylinder won't budge. The right key will line up the breaks between the pins on the edge of the cylinder and that frees it up to turn.

At 6:00 PM on a Wednesday night I head down to the school's basement access door, and I don't have a key. I move my camera bag aside, reach in my pocket, and take out my torsion wrench and my probe. The torsion wrench is a flat piece of metal with a hook on the end, and the probe is a long wire. I stick the torsion wrench into the lower part of the slot, and jam the slot a little counter-clockwise. This tightens the edge of the cylinder. With my probe I go back into the rear of the slot, and tap up on the first pin. It clears at its break point, but won't sink back in because I've jammed the cylinder to the side. Moving on, I do the same thing to the next pin and the next one and the next one. When they all clear the door will be open.

With the basement unlocked I make my way to the heating duct. The access port to the vent is grimy with the oils from my palm, having opened it so much. I'll admit that being 4'11" has certain advantages. The heating duct is long and square-two-by-two, and for me, an easy fit. My first segment to go through is a 20-foot crawl length north. With my LED flashlight blazing bright-blue strapped to my head, I scootch along fist over fist with my elbows hugging the sides of the duct. I'm humming a song by the cure as I go along, to calm my nerves. I don't handle tight spaces too well. OK, not well for what I do, anyway. It's all for the sake of art after all. I pass the first T-junction. It goes right. It leads to nothing but classrooms, bathrooms and lounges.

The first time I tried this I used a piece of string to find my way back. It took almost 2 hours but I did find the spot I was looking for. Like I said, it all comes back to ancient Greece. I pass the second T-junction which heads out to the principles office, then on to band wing. In the gleaming blue light I see my goal. An upward slant that will take me to the air ducts for most of the first floor hallways. I start my way up the incline. I've already taken some shots of the basketball team for the standard weekly newspaper gig. This portion is strictly for my personal collection. Crawling over grates in the central hall duct soft light gets reflected back up from the linoleum floor.

Nudity is nothing to be ashamed of. Quite to the contrary: power and beauty have always been associated directly with some level of nudity. Powerful people, be it those sculpted in Athens ages past, or modern rock and movie stars will be remembered wearing next to nothing. They are set in stone in a bare tunic and they are on the cover of "Vogue" sporting a string bikini. Even the super conservative Victorians made sure the high-class had low-cut cleavage dresses and ornate codpieces.

I am the voyeur Napoleon. I'm a photographer. First and last and that's it. I'll go down in history with my little short, checkered skirt, with the camera in hand, and my little black t-shirt, of which I have a collection. My panties are the same size they've been since I was 12. I'll never be hot, but I'll always be cute. With blonde bangs and little hooked nose. No-one this short will make it onto a magazine or into marble. Look at Michelangelo's David. He carved it from a rock that was called Goliath. It's 17 feet high. Art likes tall, and I'm not.

Dirt-coated and panting from the crawl, I make my way to the grate in the corner of the locker-room. The little hole I cut in the grate earlier this year is still there and it's a perfect fit for my camera lens.

It took me a month of stud-piping to afford it, after the bills were paid, of course, but I now finally have this beautiful digital camera. Seven mega-pixel. Every image is huge and flawless.

And here they come-

Around the shower-room corner, their tightened, muscular bodies glistening and naked with beads of water sprayed across their hair and shoulders- come my olympians.

Scott, Eddie, Mitch, Tre, Vince, Josh.

Their faces look so ordinary in the halls Monday through Friday. This is taking into account their varying cuteness. Like the little stubble that grows a small, fluffy sheep's wool on them, trying to be a big man's beard or mustache or pork-chops. They don't ever notice me in school. They don't ever notice me in the locker.

Greg, Jess, Taylor, Cliff, Keith.

A big part of me wants to see them play basketball as is. It'd be Greek style with every one of their perfectly toned nearly-manly bodies acting in ideal harmony, in full view.

Oh, God yes.

Drew, Ike, Bill, Cuffer, and Blondie.

One by one they come in from the shower and I don't want to miss a moment. I've spent over 500 dollars and taught myself to pick locks for this, so every second counts.

Soon they'll be dressed and dried, and out the door. So, I center my sights and click, click, click the images off as fast as I can.

-DAVE-

Nine out of ten commandments can't be all bad if you ask me.

You can count them all down, all nine.

First is 'thou shalt have no Gods before me.'

So assume this one God, the ever-living omnipotent, benevolent being exists. Nations and worlds have risen and fallen before him, right? This means that behind every one of those nations and worlds have to really come back and answer to him at the end. All purpose and meaning of everything in existence would have to trace back to God at the end. Have nothing before God, and you will accept his plan for your life, no matter what may befall you.

In the park someone fell asleep. When he woke up, he found that his guitar was gone.

At the moment, and in the passion of that moment, yes I'm sure he was very angry indeed. Like I said though, all purposes and all things trace back to one Gods plan, and since God is ultimately just, all things are ultimately justified. The guitarists problem is just a small section of a plan that he has no understanding of, but must accept as just.

An Ibanez acoustic/electric can fetch \$150 at the pawnshop.

"God's in his heaven, all's right with the world."

-Browning.

Next is not to make any graven image. No Idols.

No Idols means nothing to distance you from God, nothing to block that relationship, and by that reasoning an Idol can be just about anything. Your flashy new car, your newest computer, your collection of antiques, these things can become your idols. Empty, hollow, man made, trappings. No matter what this thing is, it won't be secure. They can get lost, they get worn out and they are nothing to rely on. Idols exist in a world with no reliable security or preservation. This does not stop us from filling out lives with them.

Television is just the newest Tiki-God. Hours and hours of worship in every home in America, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Over 150 channels. If the guy at the electronics store does his incoming stock inventory, and discovers that a 32-inch high-def, digital ready, plasma-screen golden calf didn't make it to the shop, score one for God, right?

Even without serial numbers, new TVs can sell for over a grand.

“God damn it all!”

Next commandment is don't take the Lords name in vain.

In strict Judeo terms this refers specifically to the name 'Yahweh.' Translating from the Hebrew dialect, it basically means, “I am.” This is how God identifies himself to Moses, the ‘I am and there is no other.’ The Supreme Being, big cheese, man upstairs. This commandment was, according to the sisters, designed to maintain respect and awe from the Hebrew people that the name of God was not to be trifled with, because it was directly tied to his existence.

He is, he knows he is so he identifies his existence in a statement, rather than a name.

“I am.”

He is God: one, true, omnipotent, omniscient, sovereign, transcendent and good.

My God, your God, our God, the God.

I faithfully believe that he takes it very seriously. That outside his self-actualized ('I am') notion of being, that he deserves all and more of the respect and faith than we mankind can possibly imagine.

“Goddamn it all to hell. Where are my shoes?”

Here we are at the height of civilization, founded on the benevolence of the eternally living lord and “Oh my God” is uttered left and right with no due respect.

The woman in the dressing room who just blasphemed God will have to live with that over a pair of shoes. That's it, she's willing to blaspheme just over the fact that her alligator-skin shoes went missing from under her dressing room.

I'll say “Oh my God” occasionally, but whenever I do, I do so not in swearing, but in addressing. If God's always listening then I'll call down attention on something big in my life.

Shoes that you buy at the thrift store can sell online for several times what you may have paid. Selling alligator-skin, the authentic kind...Oh my God, that's big, isn't it?

The next commandment is to keep the Sabbath.

The Sabbath, to this day is very important. Unplug. Relax. If you do nothing but your job, then your job is working you over. Saturday, the Sabbath, at a coffee house means you don't bring your laptop computer to catch up on your accounts. There are better things to do in this life than work all the time. When Mr. White-collar, who planned to work the whole weekend away comes out the shitter, he has the whole day to himself to relax.

A laptop is a number of different components; so once the hard drive(s) is wiped it can be broken-down and sold bit by bit. Hard-drive, DVD, Motherboard, RAM, heat sink, fan, power converter, Video card, CPU all go their separate ways into new machines, and even the case with its fifteen inch LCD screen can be sold and filled with new guts.

Chill out, friend, you've earned a day off.

Honor your father and mother.

I don't know my father, never met my mother, but the sisters taught me this commandment and I won't live it down. So no, this commandment never applied to me, but I would advise others to follow it.

This little high-school brat couldn't care less about the bike he probably got from his parents. I would bet he even screamed at daddy because he wanted a Giant, not a Huffy, If he really honored his parents, he would have locked their present up at school.

Sell a bike to thrift store, and in good condition you can make, maybe 3/4ths cost on it. Not really a huge gain, I admit, but at least it makes commute to the shop a piece of cake.

Think about how you have to explain this to dad on your walk home, kid.

Do not murder.

People murder for one of five reasons: profit, revenge, love, pleasure or secrecy. None of these are worth a human life. Behind the yellow police-line tape is the heroin-house apartment shared by 'victim' and 'suspect.' 'victim' is stenciled in with masking tape on the floor and 'suspect' won't be coming home for his stuff. At 3:00 AM the slim lines of tape, door or floor, isn't enough to stop the air conditioner unit from slipping out the window.

When removing bloodstains from electronics try a mixture of bleach and rubbing alcohol on light gauze. Ventilate the room, unless you're into killing brain-cells.

Do not commit adultery.

Downtown she throws her engagement ring into the public trashcan outside the apartment complex. She does this with him looking down at her from the third floor window. He pleads, shouting at her the apologies he should have whispered. She walks away and tears off in the Saab.

Don't fuck around with commitment. Maybe Sister Anna could have seen it that way then, if she could see me now. Adultery is going to nail you every time. I solve this problem by never committing. Like the man said; those who can commit should...well, I can't, so I don't. If a girl feels that I can kill her loneliness for a night, I'm more than happy to oblige. But if you commit

adultery, it's like throwing a valuable ring into the trashcan. By the time you come back to recover what was lost, well it's gone.

Jewelry may be cliché, but it's always in circulation. Some take gold jewelry and break, or dismantle it for the jewels, then melt the metal down into nuggets. Others sell jewelry to pawnshops.

Still, it can't buy love.

Don't give false testimony.

If you're told a lie, then find out the truth, the truth destroys the lie. That's not morality, that's reality. One man lies to his neighbor says he swears that he doesn't have his stereo, a boom box.

"But I saw it in your car!" his friend declares.

"Look I said I didn't take it. Do you believe me or not?"

When the liar goes back out to his car that he left unlocked, the stereo is gone. The truth destroys the lie. Now he knows for certain that it is missing. Now, because he lied, and his lie was overheard neither of them have it.

Boom boxes practically leap out of your hand. It'll earn a quick fifty right off the street with no middleman.

The point I want to get across is that the good book is right.

Don't make anything more important to you than God.

Don't idolize things.

Don't cuss God out.

Don't work everyday.

Don't dishonor mom and dad.

Don't kill.

Don't commit adultery

Don't lie.

Don't covet. I don't covet any of this stuff. Of that I can assure you.

All this stuff is going up for re-sale. I can't and I won't keep it, ever. I don't want it; I want to sell it off. I need my pad. I need to eat. I'm just trying to get by.

In a fast food restaurant, when the little girl with the blonde hair, black T-shirt and checkered skirt ignores her camera for a second, then she turns to find it gone I wish she could know that it's not gone because it was coveted. It didn't have to be a digital camera; it just had to be

something the pawnshop is willing to buy off me. Something an internet auction would pay down on.

I'm just trying to survive here.

Everything I get my hands on is everything that keeps me alive. I can't live paycheck-to-paycheck.

Yesterday I woke up and I stole what I could, today I've stolen as much as I can and tomorrow I will be stealing some more. This is how I survive.

"Thou shalt not steal?"

Take it or leave it.

-ARTHUR-

It's beautiful, yet tragic that to excel, to overcome and dominate, all your work must be done from neither top, nor bottom, but amongst. Living, vying, risking gaining and losing scattered in the thick of it all. Existing between the lines. My definite goal is at the top, my origin is nowhere near the bottom. I thrive in the rigmarole. In this mass, in this dense pack my means are clear, my ends attainable. Getting away with it is ultimately my daily victory.

Best profits are attained not by breaking laws, just bending them. I never see it as anything more than that. I'm an entrepreneur, a man with a dream and a potential, and anything else aside are resources. Ill or fair, every one of them are my means to the ends.

Having money is not really a big concern of mine, but making money, that's where my endeavors lay. Coming from the well-to-do side of town, with private schooling, and few detractors to challenge, I consider myself well off.

In this world where most get what they can, when they can - I am privileged to what I want, when I want.

I love bitter-sweetness. I've never found a pure joy or pure sorrow in this world, so I have determined to rather find the purest bittersweet. I love the paradoxes, the antipodes, and the polarized.

I also see my quest for dual extremes as a battle against the lithium. Most of the while, I'm not thinking that a mood stabilizer is what I need. Maybe I'd rather experience the bitter depression, and raving mania that I've been given to live out. Still, that would hardly win me any points with my father.

Depression. Winston Churchill called it the black dog. Just something to hang about and drag your spirits away. My black dog is a trickster. One moment tugging my soul into the night, the next jumping through hoops.

Manic depression isn't insanity, it only makes introductions extremely awkward.

"Hi my name is Arthur DeLobb-" The conversation goes on from there until, inevitably, "Did I mention I'm bipolar?"

Constant treatment is not something I like to talk about, mostly. I have my antipsychotic drugs. I have blister packs of Prozac to swing the dog up and Zyprexa lithium to smooth it down. Whatever stage I happen to be needing it in it's cycle. It's not out of the ordinary it's only excessive In my case. It's the way of life for everyone. In all lives there are ups and downs, good times and bad times, rain and sunshine.

Bull and Bear.

The stock-market is something anyone with manic depression could understand and relate to. Up then down. Feeble, then dominating. Sullen and then ecstatic, and all this is set to the chorus of fortunes and savings and the livelihood of everyone involved along for the ride. I've been trading stock since I was 18 and I found the best-the only way to do it right is to put your whole self in it. Get involved.

I bought 30,000 shares of drug company stock that felt like it was topping off. I looked into the company a bit. They were about to abort their big project. It's a botched penicillin-based antibiotic that can't cure anybody, but is fantastic for making test subjects burst out into hives. That's vital information and I sold.

Sometimes the six o'clock news isn't on fast enough to give you this information.

There was an all-star out of UCLA, who was the rebound and 3-point leader in the league. He was a guaranteed first draft. I attained information about his upcoming clothing line, like who was going to produce it for cheap out of penny-a-day labor in Taiwan. The stock was low, and these were one-of-a-kind prospects. Again this was vital information.

So I Bought up.

It's not just about reaction, it's about anticipation. If you buy a stock after it's been talked about for two months, you're five months too late. Your investment only catches the tail end of the profit before it sinks. Then you belie to hope that it will rise once more, and give you a gain of some kind. This hope will be dashed after the stock has stunk and and sunk and you made no money, you lost at least some of it. This is what lazy investors do.

Think to yourself then, if only I knew when it would rise, and when it would fall then I could win every time. People know when it will go up and when it will come down. People on the inside have a tap to all the information you need. You can get this advice: Insider trading. Someone in the company keeps you up to date on when to buy and when to sell. It's extremely illegal, and it is insanely profitable.

Not all trades need this inside track; most of mine do not. Never the less, I invest in contacts. I always investigate to be vested in the best investing. It's not so hard, all one needs is to push their social skills out there. Insider contacts are just people after all. Some know I'm bending the law, others just think I'm ambitious or curious. Some people just want to talk about their job. Some are shady enough to take a small cut with an *omerta* clause. Others are so squeaky clean that they wouldn't have ever participated if they knew the entire score.

I'm on the phone, making and taking calls all day long. I'm getting contacts I'm snooping in places that, maybe, I shouldn't, but it's all between the lines. Nothing overt, and nothing

blatant. All my actions are lost in the grand scheme of the Wall-street pig-pile. The stock market is too busy, too fast for anyone to worry about one ambitious trader.

At least 3/4ths of the calls I field at my dad's insurance company are my contacts. Old friends, new acquaintances, I haven't even shared a drink with most of them. That never has stopped the flow of information, though. I'm always two steps ahead of every turn.

The money I make has a meaning. I can't spend it. It will have a time and a place.

Untill that time, I'll be ducking in and out of the office. I'll be on an off the phone. I'll be selling or buying. I'll be blissfully manic or Earth-shatteringly sullen, and popping little white and green pills, going up and down, in this crazy world of business.

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