

Eternal Sunshine #9

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Quote Of The Month – “Drink up, young man. It'll make the whole seduction part less repugnant.”
(Clementine in “Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind”)

Here I am, just when you thought your life couldn't get any worse! Sort of like when you get a flat tire, and then realize the spare is flat too. That's me, your flat spare tire. The one that you don't realize is flat until you go to the trouble of putting it on the car and lowering the jack afterward. You watch as the car goes lower, and lower, and lower, until its sitting on the rim again. Next time that happens to you, remember who to blame!

I'm going to try and keep things short this time, since the issue is already too long. A few quick updates before I move on to the next section. I dropped the Colonia VII opening for the time being, but I am happy to report we only need two more players for the Diplomacy game to fill. Sign up now before it is too late! Towards the end of the subzine you'll find a gamestart announcement for By Popular Opinion, which is a sort of By Popular Demand variant. Any number can play, so give it a shot. I do plan on running another By Popular Demand once the current one ends. And as always, the winner will receive a prize.

In personal news, Tigger's latest blood tests came back okay. In fact, we had to decrease her medication again. The best news is that in the last five weeks she actually gained 11 ounces! That's the first really positive sign we've seen since the medication began to help. Maybe she'll decide to hang around into her twentieth year?

We've been busy arranging the final pieces of the wedding puzzle. Invitations went out around the middle of September. But don't feel slighted – even if we didn't invite you, you can still shower us with expensive presents! We're registered at www.myregistry.com – just search for Douglas Kent and Heather Taylor. Seriously, I don't expect gifts from anybody, but thank you for all the well-wishes we've received. Heather is so much more wonderful than I could ever deserve. Aside from her bad taste in men, that is.

In this issue you'll find the last of my current batch of prison stories, plus some other stuff. As always, comments are welcome. See you in October, just before the Halloween wedding!

I really don't believe that Heather and I are difficult to please. We like to relax, to sit around the apartment and read or watch movies or episodes of TV shows on DVD or VHS. We're working our way through some X-Files seasons now, and after that will probably concentrate on her complete set of Twin Peaks mixed in with some Columbo episodes. We buy some of our clothes at thrift stores, because we don't see any reason not to. I enjoy preparing some more complicated dishes in the kitchen, but Heather is perfectly happy with simple food like pot roast from the slow-cooker, or maybe the seven-flavor ginger chicken I whip up on occasion. We've got two old cars, which get us where we want to go (although I did have to get my air conditioning fixed a few weeks ago, which decided to die on the hottest day of the year). When we go out to eat, all we really want is for the waiter to check in on us now and then, refill our beverages, and bring extra napkins for Heather since she is a notoriously messy eater! The only other requirement we have is that the process of bringing the check should not be a 30-minute affair.

Granted, when it comes to movies or plays we have rather eclectic tastes. On the screen we enjoy some of the classics, some oddball comedies, independent films, documentaries, dramas and love stories. Most of the generic action films or Adam Sandler-type comedies do nothing for us, so we simply avoid them. On stage we have found we can enjoy almost anything, from small-stage dinner theater farces to musicals to drag queens to dramatic tear-jerkers to anything in between. We're selective in our choices, but once we make the decision to see a movie or a play we rarely are completely disappointed.

When Heather worked for the City of Garland (which she did until recently) she could sign up to receive two free passes to a play or musical at the Garland Civic Theatre. They perform in a very impressive theatre, the Granville Arts Center, which has both a large stage and a small one. The first time we went, while I was still on home confinement, we saw a terrific production of *Kiss Me Kate* in the large auditorium. The music and acting, the stage, the dance – it was all way above my expectations. The only thing I didn't enjoy was that I had to be back home by a certain time, as I was forced to live my life at that point by a pre-arranged schedule filed weekly with the halfway house. So for the final twenty minutes I nervously had to keep one eye on my watch, and figure out the fastest escape-route to the parking lot. We wound up getting home JUST in time. Yet even that madcap race didn't destroy the evening.

The second production we saw, again with the passes she received from work, was a small-stage adaptation of the George S. Kaufman Pulitzer-winning farce *You Can't Take it With You*. I'd seen the film years and years ago, but never seen it on stage. Heather hadn't seen it in any form, so she had no idea what we were in for. Comedy can be such a tricky business, but when done well (such as the screwball comedy "Caught in the Net" we saw a while back at the Pocket Sandwich Theater) it is an incredible experience. When it doesn't work, it is like a traffic jam on the freeway: slow, tedious, and you wonder how long it will be before you can escape its clutches. When we watched the first act of *You Can't Take it With You*, I was convinced that the actors on stage were fully aware how terrible things were going. I guess the lack of laughter at the appropriate moments (although there were some chuckles here and there from distant corners) could be a telling sign. I have never performed in a play – as much as I'd like to someday – so I don't know much about the instantaneous feedback from the audience. In fact, I've only spoken in front of a crowd twice, both times in prison, but those are stories for another day. All I know is, as we left for good and walked to the car during the first intermission, I could see cast members taking a smoking break behind the building, and it appeared to me that they were consoling each other.

Anyway, when Heather looked through the program for this season's productions at the Garland Civic Theatre, one play struck her fancy: an adaptation of the Agatha Christie classic "Witness for the Prosecution." This version would be set in New Orleans, which is one of Heather's favorite places (to read about anyway; I think she agrees that any visit there in the near future would shatter her idealized picture of the city). I figured, what the hell, how bad can they screw up Agatha Christie? So I called the box office and bought a few seats, and on Saturday night off we went. As I said, we are not that hard to please, and I hoped this was going to be a pleasant evening out on the town: a play, a simple dinner, and a relaxing addition to our long Labor Day weekend.

Despite some minor mishaps that we seem to get into more often than other people, my mood was rather upbeat. Some residents at the apartment complex had blocked our car in with a truck as they were loading furniture, but I explained we had to leave and gave them about ten minutes to get to a convenient point to move the truck. No problem. Then when we arrived at the box office about twenty minutes before curtain, the people in front of me in line were taking this opportunity to exchange tickets to a multitude of future shows, trying to adjust the performance date for one, the seating for another...a very complicated and time-consuming affair. Still, no worries, I waited patiently, got our tickets, and we walked in with a few minutes to spare.

This is where we both sensed real trouble. We sat down and began to leaf through the playbill, and, lo and behold, who should be directing this play? Why, none other than the same "professional award-winning actor and director" who directed *You Can't Take it With You*. Ugh, bad sign. Still, how bad could it be, right? Wrong. Right from the start the production was terrible. Overacting, over-dramatic murder sequence, dry ice (this guy is in love with dry ice)...stumbling accents, mumbled lines, awful blocking where we see way too much of the back of the actor's heads. By the end of the first act things were beginning to get better, as the actors found a groove and a rhythm of sorts. After initially wanting to get up and run out of the theatre shrieking, I thought we'd be able to fight through the play and enjoy certain aspects of the production. Alas, it was not to be. The woman playing Romaine (a role made famous on screen by Marlene Dietrich) entered, and all the wind was sucked out of the room. I don't mean to imply she was a bad actress; as far as I could tell, she has some talent. But the direction, the interaction of the actors, the accent – it was too much to take. And Heather couldn't get over the outfit they had her wearing: black hat, navy (and red) dress, and beige shoes and handbag. I don't know a lot about the rules of women's fashion, but Heather assures me this is not an acceptable ensemble.

At the first intermission we talked for a few minutes and decided to bail out. Truthfully this was not *nearly* as bad as You Can't Take it With You had been, but as we hadn't eaten dinner yet and we weren't enjoying ourselves or the production, what was the point in staying? It wasn't likely to get much better, and I didn't want to sit there and watch it get any worse...I might lose my appetite!

As it was earlier in the evening than originally planned, we decided to take advantage of a gift card our friend had given Heather for her birthday, and dine at the local Steak & Ale. I'm not a huge fan of Steak & Ale but have nothing against it – when it comes to dinner out I usually just let Heather decide anyway, as I can find something appetizing on almost any menu. Heather, on the other hand, loves Steak & Ale, which is why she was given the gift card in the first place. Driving up, we were happy to see that it was open until 11pm on Saturdays. Since it was only 9:25pm now, and the parking lot wasn't very busy, it appeared we would be able to salvage some of this evening after all! A steak, baked potato, some dessert, burgundy mushrooms, salad...we'd leave full, tired, and satisfied.

It didn't *quite* work out that way! When we entered the restaurant, we were told it was going to be a few minutes before we were seated, as they needed to clean a booth for us. No problem! I took the opportunity to sign up at their electronic kiosk, so they could email me announcements. It couldn't have been more than three minutes later when a party of four walked in. They also asked for a booth, and were told it would be a few minutes as well, since the booth which was available had been given to us. Off we went, seated with menus, ready to enjoy a pleasant dining experience. I even chose to ignore the wet bench seat I had to slide over, and the sticky residue on my side of the table. Instead, Heather and I held hands and talked as we normally do, and I took the opportunity to look into her beautiful blue eyes. She is so lovely, much too good looking for somebody like me, but I guess I can learn to live with it. Quite a sacrifice!

So we sat, and talked, and laughed, and joked...and started to glance around. The room was medium-sized, but all of the tables were empty. Instead there were three booths on the opposite wall, all occupied, and our wall had three booths as well. They were empty, save for us and the party of four who were seated at the booth next to ours a few minutes after we were. We could also see a waiter, talking to the table immediately opposite ours. And talking. And talking. Finally, after we'd been sitting there for nearly ten minutes, he managed to break away and take our beverage order...since I don't drink and Heather rarely does, it was two Sprites (or in this case, Sierra Mist since that's what they serve there). He excused himself, and returned promptly with the drinks. Taking our dinner order, he promised to be back in a moment with a loaf of Steak & Ale's signature honey bread.

Fast forward twenty five minutes. Our waiter had yet to return to our table. Now we're past 10pm, and Heather is starting to get very irritated and frustrated. This is one of her favorite places, so for the dining experience to be ruined for her means something must be terribly wrong. From my vantage point, I could see the booth behind us, and was careful to note that they now had their drinks, bread, appetizers, and salad (remember, they had a different waiter than us). We, on the other hand, had two sodas. I don't mean to imply we hadn't *seen* our waiter. We saw the back of his head quite clearly, as he stood across the room talking to that same table. And talking...and talking...and talking! And while we hadn't been served our bread, we saw that as well: it was on the tray the waiter was holding. Heather was staring in their direction, speaking in a somewhat elevated tone, saying things like "Hello? Can you bring that bread over here? I can see you!" No reaction. She wasn't going to shout however...if it took that much effort to get service, why were we eating there? Look, like I said before, we aren't hard to please. We don't like the waiter to hover and we don't require a lot of needless faux-friendly chitchat. Just dump the bread on our table and you can go back to your engrossing conversation with the other table! So we watched our waiter, and our bread, and started thinking about walking out. But Heather didn't want to be hasty, and she felt it would be selfish on her part to have us leave if I didn't want to. Personally, I didn't much care – but the one thing I wanted to avoid was one of those apologetic manager conversations where they promise to make things right. You can't make them right, not on this visit...I'd rather forget the whole thing and try again another time. So I told Heather "count to one hundred. If nothing happens, let's just go." So she counted, out loud. At about twenty the waiter finally moved – to the table next to the one he had been standing at. Thirty. He collected some dirty plates from them and put them on the tray. Fifty. He, and our formerly warm bread, walked out of the room. Never to return. Seventy. Eighty, Ninety. Ding, time is up! We gathered our things and left. I was considering putting a five dollar bill down for the two sodas, but since we'd had maybe two sips each, I simply didn't care. Out the door we went – nobody asking what we were doing. We stopped on the way home and grabbed a pizza.

I can't say the evening was a disaster. We've had worse ones. I got to spend a Saturday night with Heather, see her all dressed up and sparkling, make her laugh now and then. We were safe, happy, ate a good pizza, and still have a Steak & Ale gift card for future use...at a different location, I think. Plus we have the gift certificate the District Manager sent us to entice us to return and give that original location another chance. But why does it have to be so difficult? I keep saying we are not that hard to please. Or are we? You tell me, do we sound unreasonable? I really want to know...is it just us?

The Sunglasses

(Note - names in this piece have been changed but the events are, as always, as I remember them)

When I was transferred to a different facility in 2004, I didn't have a lot of interest in continuing to work as a plumber. I had no clue whether the working conditions at this prison would be similar to those I had encountered before, but my enthusiasm for that job had pretty much run its course. It was clear to me that not only would I be paid a lot less than in the past if I wanted to work on the plumbing detail again, but there was little hope that I'd get along as well with my new boss (whoever that might be) as I had with my old one. "Mr. A" was truly a decent guy, taught me a lot about plumbing, and never treated me as less than a human being the whole time I had worked with him. I'm sure part of that was because I worked hard and did what I was supposed to do, but he was a decent person to everyone, and even treated the troublemakers with kid gloves and an overdeveloped sense of fairness. Actually, most of the CO's at that facility had been rather easygoing. All the way wanted was to know you'd do your job, not create problems, be where you were supposed to be, and if you couldn't handle a task let them know before it turned into a mess.

During the orientation process at the new facility, I realized I simply wanted something easier, something which required little skill and even less thinking, but which would still take up part of my day and keep me on a fixed routine. The obvious choice was to work as an orderly in the housing unit. A few of the inmates I was already familiar with from my prior prison introduced me to the head orderly, the former Mayor of a New Jersey town who had been convicted of various fraud and embezzlement offenses. After talking to me and the people I knew, "Ruiz" decided I was just the kind of person he could use to run "the cage" during the week.

Unlike the other prison, this one made cleaning materials available to the orderlies. However, because of regulations, they were not left out for general use. Instead, an orderly kept them locked in a large metal cage, passing them out each morning to inmates and orderlies to clean floors, bathrooms, and anywhere else they'd been assigned. My job was to keep the chemical containers full, both the spray bottles and the larger jugs. I had to go to the stockroom every few days to replenish the supplies of scouring powder, gloves, and other necessities. I also had to help one of the assistant head orderlies wheel all the empty jugs down at least once a day to refill them with disinfectant and glass or floor cleaner, and assist with passing out the weekly ration of toilet paper whenever that came up. I also kept the cage area clean, wiped down the ice machine, tried to maintain clean mop heads and buckets, and helped out whenever necessary with other simple tasks. I worked from the morning until around 3pm Monday through Friday, with another inmate doing nights and weekends. Together we also shared responsibility of maintaining a supply of cleaning rags (which often were cut-up towels or old washcloths) and washing a bag of them whenever we got low. That was one of the more difficult tasks, because not only did you need to locate an open washing machine, but you also had to fight for a turn in one of the dryers (when they worked). Since you couldn't stand guard over the rags all day, you had to hope that nobody pulled your rags out before they were dry so they could stuff their clothes in instead. This was a constant problem when it came to your regular clothes, so with the rags it could be a nightmare. The best solution I usually found was to get into a dryer, and then do somebody you could trust "a favor" by telling him he could dry his clothes before the rage if he promised to make sure the rags went in next. Often there would be two or three bags of wet clothes sitting on top of each dryer, waiting in line, and unless you had somebody watching for you the popular trick was to switch the order of the bags around, or to simply jump in front of everybody and claim you were there in the first place. Anyway, the rags were a pain in the ass, but overall the job was pretty simple. You just had to be willing to be constantly interrupted all day long by people who needed a spray bottle or a scouring pad or something else.

Another part of the job, which I was introduced to soon after being hired, was to help Ruiz with one of this little sideline business hustles. All of the cubicle floors (As well as the hallways and corridors) had wax on them, but access to the wax was magically restricted. If the wax on your floor became too scuffed or dirty, you could be written up by staff until you stripped it down and applied new wax. However, since Ruiz was the only one you could get the wax or stripper from, you had to either bribe him in some way to get access, or else do the simple thing and pay him to do the stripping and waxing for you. During weekly inspections it was a normal sight to see Ruiz following the CO around, pointing out various cubes which needed to be waxed. Sure enough, those inmates would get warnings to have it done before the next inspection, and Ruiz would have himself some easy money. Then he could offer the inmates a regular cleaning service, wiping down and mopping the cube a few times a week, including a buff job on the wax and new wax once every two months...all for a price, of course. If you could afford it, I suppose it was a mutually beneficial solution. All the orderlies had to help Ruiz in small ways, but if you were one of the ones who did the actual cleaning or buffing you'd be paid a small fee out of what he charged the other inmates, and you'd also be assured of a decent monthly paycheck (which would run somewhere between \$15 and \$40). Because I ran the cage, I also was responsible for preparing Ruiz's wax setup kit, including wax, an applicator, stripper, and the necessary buffing and stripping machines and pads.

When he gave me instructions to do so, I was also supposed to pass out "wax" to other inmates for their own use. But he kept the "free" wax in a special container, and it was usually at least 50% diluted with water. So no matter how hard you tried, you could never get your wax job to look as good as the one Ruiz and his crew could do for you.

I wasn't that happy being part of all of these hustles, but there didn't seem to be much of an alternative. Besides I was making a lot less money as an orderly as I had as the head plumber, so I needed whatever income I could find. Since I knew that really nobody HAD to pay Ruiz for anything, especially to clean their cubicles as I made sure ample supplies were available for free if somebody wanted to do their own (and plenty of people did), I was able to go about my business without too much difficulty. As I had as a plumber, I was diligent in my work, tried hard, took pride in making sure things were running smoothly, and figured this would be an easy way to occupy my time without getting into any kind of trouble.

As it turned out, trouble decided to search me out. And it all started when the CO told me to sweep and mop his little office in the housing unit building.

One day after I'd been at the prison for a few weeks, while I was busy organizing things in the Cage area, an inmate who I'll call Mr. T came by to get some rags for the bathroom. We generally tried to keep a few clean rags in the sink area of each bathroom, so inmates could wipe up whatever water they splashed all over the place. Inevitably, however, these rags would get soaking wet, covered with people's shaved hair or soap or shaving cream, and left in a wet pile until the orderly would replace them the following day. Another good idea gone bad.

Anyway, I knew Mr. T from my prior prison. I hadn't had a lot of dealings with him directly, but he was buddies with my good pal Mr. G as they had both worked in the kitchen. As Mr. T and I talked for a moment, the CO came out of his little one-room office nearby and told us to sweep and mop the room out while he waited. He wasn't interested in anything too thorough - just a quick floor job by one of us (me) while the other wiped down the desk and cleaned the window.

The room itself was tiny, perhaps 6 feet by 6 feet. On the desk was the CO's computer and a phone, plus piles of papers. To the right was a rack of shelves with various junk on each level. In the back corner, on the floor, was a pile of crap which had been confiscated from inmates and was destined never to be returned; extra blankets, stolen food, a thermos jug with no ID etched on it, a few wooden boards often used as illegal shelves with our lockers, and other miscellaneous junk.

I quickly swept the floor, emptied the trash can, and did a simple wet-mop job while Mr. T wiped down the desk and used a dust broom over the shelves. The whole process couldn't have taken more than three minutes, after while the CO "Turk" went back in his office. As Mr. T and I walked away, he grinned a sly grin and said "I got me something, check them out." I looked down, and in his hand he was holding a pair of sunglasses. I figured he swiped them from the pile of junk on the floor, shrugged, and went about my business. I didn't think about it again until breakfast the next day.

As I sat down with my cold cereal the following morning, the head orderly Ruiz came up to me and said that the nighttime CO "Johnson" wanted to talk to me. I didn't know who Johnson was, but Ruiz pointed him out to me, standing at the head of the food line. I had no idea what he wanted, but I walked over to him and said, respectfully, "Mr. Johnson, you wanted to speak with me?"

He eyed me in an odd way, and asked "Are you one of the orderlies who cleaned the CO office yesterday?"

After I'd replied in the affirmative, he was quiet for a moment, and then shocked me by what he said next. "One of the CO's has had an expensive pair of sunglasses go missing from there. You didn't happen to steal them, did you?"

I couldn't believe it - this idiot Mr. T had stolen a pair of sunglasses that belonged to a CO! And for what? It isn't like he could actually wear them...as they weren't prison-issue, if any staff member saw him wearing them, they'd confiscate them as contraband anyway. This was my first experience with the pointless and moronic though process I would learn to recognize as "crack head logic".

I wasn't really comfortable lying about it, but since Johnson hadn't specifically asked me if I knew who took them, I was able to get away with saying "No sir, the only thing I took out of the office was the dirt on the floor." I sat down to finish my breakfast, and afterward I went and found Mr. T. He was a pretty big, muscular fellow, so I didn't really want to antagonize him. Instead, I simply let him know the CO was looking for those sunglasses. "Don't worry man, I'll take care of it." I figured he would either throw them away, or else leave

them somewhere to be found by a staff member. Once again, I naively thought that would be the end of the story.

Lunch was always a madhouse at that facility. They only served for 60 minutes or less, depending on which Kitchen CO was on duty, and you had to stand on a long line the entire time until it was your turn. You couldn't just skip the line and show up near the end of the meal, because if the CO saw the line was dwindling he would push everybody left into the chow hall, build them into a serpentine line again, and lock the door behind him so nobody else could enter. What fun! I learned to bring a paperback with me when possible, so I'd have something to do besides watch inconsiderate jackasses try to find ways to cut in line.

So that day I was waiting for the meal when Turk came up to me and asked if I had been one of the inmates he had asked to clean the CO office the day before. Oh great, here we go again. I told him yes, and he asked me to come with him. We walked up the hall to the Front Office, and when he opened the door to show me in, Mr. T walked out and past me, without looking up at me. I took that to be a bad sign, and for once I was right. Turk led me into the Head Counselor's office, who was sitting at his desk. "Mace" was rather heavy and gruff looking, but he somehow reminded me of my father the whole time I was there. Anyway, he looked up at me and shook his head as he put his hands out in front of him, wrists touching, as if he was wearing handcuffs.

"Before you say anything," he said, "I may as well tell you that you're getting locked up. You're going to The Hole."

I was completely blindsided when "Mace" told me I was going to be locked up. In my prior facility you pretty much had to punch somebody in the face (or try to start a riot) to get thrown in the hole. I would learn over the coming months that this particular facility was a lot more willing to lock inmates up, although part of that depended on how many inmates from the medium security facility were in there already (we shared SHU - "Special Housing Unit" which is the official term for the hole - space with their facility).

I looked at Mace with disbelief. "What the hell am I being locked up for?"

"That inmate who just left here told us you stole this pair of sunglasses," he said, holding a pair up from his desk. "And that then you gave them to him."

Now I couldn't believe both what I was hearing and what I was seeing. Not only had that idiot Mr. T. tried to blame me for the sunglasses, but he even gave them back. All he had to do was leave them somewhere, or throw them away, and he could deny ever having them. Instead he walked into the Front Office evidence in hand, and (according to what I was being told anyway) tried to lay the blame at my feet.

I just shook my head. "No offense," I told him, "but if I was going to steal something around here, it would be a pillow, because I've been here three weeks and don't have one yet. What the hell am I going to do with a pair of sunglasses? Not only do I wear prescription glasses which I can't see a thing without, but I've had malignant melanoma so I am not supposed to get much sun!"

"Look," Mace told me, "I believe you. But he is saying you took them. You haven't told me that he took them, but it doesn't really matter if you do. Unless he changes *his* story, there is nothing I can do. We have to lock you both up for investigation."

"Okay," I shrugged. "Can I go talk to him first? Try to talk some sense into him? Because this is bullshit."

Mace looked at me and paused. "Okay you can go talk to him, but don't threaten him or anything."

Now I had really heard everything! "Don't threaten him? That guy is three times my size!"

"I know, but I've had some little guys do some real damage. I'll let you go talk to him, but don't threaten him. If I hear you threatened him or hit him, you'll be going away for good instead of for investigation."

I left the office and headed back to the housing unit. On the way a couple of guys I knew from my first prison saw me walking quickly. "Hey Doug," they shouted, "where are you running to?"

"The hole," I yelled back. Ignoring their further incredulous yelling, I went inside and found Mr. T sitting on his bunk.

"Look man, this is bullshit, they're going to lock us both up!" I told him.

"I know man, it isn't right." He was staring at the floor. He actually looked frightened.

"Well why should we both go? Tell them you took them, or you found them. Or just tell them I *didn't*."

Mr. T shook his head. "Uh uh, I'm not telling them anything. I'm going to keep my mouth shut."

Obviously this guy was full of crap, but what could I do? He was lying to my face. How could he claim that he wasn't telling them anything, when the moron turned the sunglasses in?!? A minute later they paged me to the Front Office again, where Mace was waiting.

"Did he change his story?" he asked.

"No," I said. "I know you're just doing your job. Where do I go?"

"Look," he said. "I believe your story. But if he won't tell us the truth, we have no choice."

I was directed to stand outside and wait for the Camp Driver to pull up. I have to admit I was surprised that they let a guy who was supposed to be such a problem that he needed to be put in the SHU walk around freely. As it turned out that was standard procedure, unless the inmate had just been involved in something violent. Otherwise they trusted him. Besides, you weren't officially locked up until the Lieutenant at the medium-security facility gave the word. Only he (or she) had the authority. It was rare for them not to lock up someone when the officers at our facility requested it, but it did happen once in a while.

A minute later an inmate driving a beat-up white Crown Victoria arrived and I got in the back seat.

"Where am I supposed to take you?" he asked.

"I'm getting locked up, take me to wherever you go to get thrown in the hole."

The ride was pretty quiet, and only lasted about a minute. We pulled up to the front of the Medium-security facility and stopped.

"Just go through those doors and tell the Lieutenant who you are and why you are there. They'll tell you what to do. And hey man, don't look so miserable. It'll be okay."

"Thanks," I told the driver. "I just hate getting blamed for something I didn't do." Resigned to my fate, I climbed out and walked up to the front desk. The officer on duty looked up at me as I stuck out my hand. "Here is my ID card. I'm supposed to get locked up in the SHU."

The officer took my ID and looked at it. "Which sunglasses guy are you?" he asked, but I didn't really understand the question. "Oh, okay, *Kent*. Go wait in that room over there until the Lieutenant is ready to talk to you." He pointed towards a door made out of darkened glass. I went inside and sat on a hard wooden bench. I could see back into the main room, but it was hard to hear anything through the door. Moments later Mr. T came in, and they had him wait at the desk until a short, angry-looking woman came out of an office. As Mr. T was facing away from me, the only part of the conversation I could hear was hers, but it was clear enough what was going on.

"Now why don't you explain to me why you're here and what happened...uh huh...uh huh. What you're telling me doesn't make any sense...if he stole them, why is it that you are the one who was them?...uh huh...riigghhht...did you ever hear of something called the truth?...okay, fine, if you stick to that story you're both going to get locked up...if you just tell me he didn't have anything to do with it I can let the other guy go...okay fine have it your way."

It didn't sound too good for me. They led Mr. T away, and about five minutes later a guard came by and motioned for me to follow him. It appeared the Lieutenant had decided not to bother talking to me at all. I wasn't sure if they'd wanted me to hear the conversation with Mr. T or not, but clearly from the audible portion I had now confirmed that the only reason I was being locked up was his attempt at blaming me for his own crime.

The guard brought me through a metal detector and into a large control room, then directed me to a small room the size of a closet, with no door. He handed me a large clear trash bag, filled with some clothes. "Take off all of your clothes, put on what's where, and put your old clothes back inside the bag." That seemed easy enough. There was a pair of old ratty bluish boxer shorts, think bluish socks, a light blue t-shirt, and a big bright-orange jumpsuit. Some blue canvas sneakers completed the outfit. I felt like I was ready for a prison fashion show.

The only thing missing was the shackles, and those were added moments later: your standard handcuffs (behind my back).

Another guard took my arm and I walked slowly down a flight of stairs. We stopped at a huge metal door, which a very tall CO opened for us. It revealed a long concrete hallway with metal doors on each side all the way down. Immediately on the right were two small rooms with no doors, which were the showers. After that each closed metal door had a small window at eye level (covered in thick plastic) and a large slot two-thirds of the way down which opened to the outside with a keyed lock. To the side of each door was a space for the ID card of each inmate held within. Most of the rooms held one or two inmates, but the one I was led to had two cards already; three, once the guard slipped mine in an empty space. The CO banged rudely on the door.

"One coming in, approach the door!" he shouted. He opened the slot, and moments later a pair of hands came sticking out. The CO put cuffs on them, and waited until a second pair of hands appeared. Cuffing those as well, he slammed the slot closed and peeped through the window. "Stand back!" he bellowed, and then opened the door to reveal my new home – at least for the time being.

I didn't get much of a chance to look around when I walked in, as the two other inmates and I each had to bend down one at a time, stick our arms backwards through the slot in the door, and have the cuffs removed. Once that was finished, the slot slammed closed again. I rubbed my wrists and examined the cell.

The floor was a cold concrete. Immediately on the right was a stainless steel toilet and sink combination. The sink was just a tiny basin on top of the tank area of the toilet, with a button to push for hot and a button for cold water. There was a tiny spout between them where the water supposedly came out. The toilet itself had no seat, just a bowl which contained no water, and a flap mechanism at the bottom instead of the usual open drain.

The room itself was about ten feet by eight feet. In the opposite corner to the toilet was a steel bunk bed, bolted to the floor. Both bunks had a green plastic mattress on them which looked to be about an inch thick, and a couple of thin sheets. One had a pillow. On the floor over to the other side of the room a similar mattress lay by itself. Clearly, being the newcomer, that was going to be my bed for the duration. Next to that mattress was a tiny one-piece desk/stool, also bolted to the floor. There was a decent-sized window on the far wall, but it was thick frosted glass and blocked by a steel cage wall, so it didn't even let in any light from the outside. Our light was provided by two fluorescent lights in the ceiling. Aside from a stack of five or six paperbacks against one wall, and four rolls of toilet paper, that was basically the grand tour...your standard prison cell, into which three guys had been crammed; looked like it would be about as much fun as a trip to a leper colony.

After I surveyed the room, my two new roommates introduced themselves to me, and filled me in on the way things worked. I had never met these guys before. The younger kid was Andrew, and the thin older fellow told me his name was Mac. Andrew had been locked up because he got caught skipping work to get a haircut, and Mac was being investigated for some kind of unmentioned problem with another inmate. He didn't look too comfortable talking about it.

The first things they showed me was what we did to get privacy when we needed to take a crap. Basically, you tied one corner of a bed sheet to the bedpost, and stuck the opposite corner into a small hole in the wall, securing it by jamming a pencil stub in the hole afterwards. That gave you at least a semblance of privacy. It was also understood that you would push the "flush" button instantly upon making any even partial deposit in the bowl, to try and minimize the odor. The air in the cell was stale and old, so I could easily imagine the potential for foul smells to hang around heavily like incense.

Meals were delivered three times a day through the slot, in closed plastic boxes. If you wanted coffee in the morning you needed to be crouched by the door waiting, because if you didn't put your plastic cup up on the slot shelf the instant it was opened, the CO would say "nope, too late" and knock it back inside empty. Otherwise you were given tiny packets of drink mix, or milk cartons, or both. Andrew advised me to always save my milk cartons "for nighttime" – I had no idea what he meant. Showers were twice a week, at which time you'd be given new clothes. To get to the shower they had to handcuff everybody in the room, and then lead you to the showers that way one at a time. Exercise was an hour per day, but I was advised to turn it down. Since we were the only three non-violent inmates, we'd have to be kept separate from the others, and it just pissed the CO's off to be bothered by it. Instead, as long as we turned exercise time down, they'd be more likely to toss a few more paperbacks through the slot the next time they emptied one of the other cells. I could write letters a stick them in the side of the door, but had to leave them unsealed. I would not be allowed a phone call until I'd been there a week. All my stamps were in my property, which I would have no access to, and commissary was closed for inventory, but Mac said I could borrow a couple of his if I wanted.

There isn't that much to tell about life in the Hole. You sat there, bored, or napped, or tried to read. I was feeling rather claustrophobic, and my stomach burned constantly. I was depressed and didn't want to eat, but tried to force myself to. After I'd been there about a day, they dropped a paper into our room addressed to me. This was my "notification" which informed me I had been locked up for "investigation". That was the worst way to be held, because they could keep you for up to 180 days without any specific charge. If they locked you up for a "shot" (a charge) they had to adjudicate the shot within seven days. But investigation could drag on basically forever. In fact, I'd heard about men who were left in the hole for 180 days, brought back out, and then locked up for further investigation hours later. I didn't want to consider that possibility. The thing was, there wasn't anything I could do about it. They weren't even trying to squeeze me for information, since they already knew what had happened. All I could do was wait.

I wrote a letter to Heather, and tried my best to explain what was going on. I didn't need to be careful about what I wrote, because I had no fear of the staff reading my letter, since I hadn't done anything wrong in the first place. I also asked her to call my father and stepmother to let them know I was safe. I knew that when I didn't call Heather for a week she would start to freak out. We had a specific schedule we followed on phone calls, and even if she wasn't home she'd hear part of the automated voice announcing my call on her answering machine. Instead, this time she'd get nothing but silence.

I tried to sleep during the day when I could, because it was hard to sleep at night. Any time a guard opened or closed a door it was very loud, echoing down the hall. Besides that, and the yelling from adjacent cells, there was the milk carton game Andrew referred to. This nightly "fun" was inmates stomping on their empty milk cartons whenever it finally got quiet, making a loud popping BANG noise like popping a paper bag filled with air. So every time you started to drift off, you'd be jolted awake by another "gunshot" out in the hallway. Nice. The food was cold by the time you got it, except breakfast which was usually lukewarm. However, that was actually an improvement from usual, because the SHU was the only place you received hot breakfast anymore; they had switched to cold cereal seven days a week elsewhere because of budget cuts.

We talked now and then, trading stories. I didn't have very many good ones to tell, but Andrew told all sorts of wild ones about his days on the street, none of which I believed. And Mac talked in detail about how he had been horribly burned, and almost died, doing HVAC work in the prison. He had scars all over his torso, and was involved in a multi-million dollar lawsuit against the Bureau of Prisons. The way he told it (and others confirmed it later), he was pretty much guaranteed to win because his supervising CO on the HVAC detail had decided to tell the truth, admitting he had told Mac a valve was turned off and locked when in reality it was still mistakenly turned on. They also both talked about many of the other inmates I had met, or would meet later, discussing who had ratted on people in various cases. The conversations were illuminating, and more fun than staring at the walls...but I wanted to get the hell out of there all the same!

After I'd been there about four days, Andrew was let out. That night, Mac was sitting quietly, looking upset. I asked him if anything was wrong, and he looked at the floor. "Look Doug, you seem like a nice guy, so I want to tell you something. When you get out of here and tell people you were locked up with me, you're going to hear all kinds of stories. Believe what you want, but I'm telling you, the homo stuff isn't true!"

Mac then related to me a long, confusing story about how he ended up in the hole. It had to do with this one odd inmate who he'd befriended, and who was always getting picked on. The details didn't make a lot of sense, but basically (in Mac's version anyway) Mac had stuck his neck out for this kid, and somehow the kid had stabbed him in the back and then, when Mac confronted him about it, gone to the staff and claimed Mac had tried to sexually assault him or something. He was almost crying when he told the story; it was like a father talking about the son who had betrayed him. I kept telling Mac that I believed him, but really I was just hoping he'd go to sleep and stop talking about it altogether.

Finally, after seven long days, I heard them call out my name. "Kent, get your stuff together, you're coming out." I shook Mac's hand goodbye and waited for them to come get me. Lo and behold, it was Mace who had come to collect me and bring me back. First there was a bit of excitement, as he forgot to have me change out of my jumpsuit. We were about to round a corner and head outside when he suddenly pushed me back in a panic. "Holy crap, if the guy in the tower sees you walking around in that jumpsuit, they'll think you escaped, or are taking me hostage." He wasn't joking around, he was genuinely scared. Apparently the jumpsuits are only used in the hole, in order to make it obvious if somebody somehow breaks out of there. Once I changed back into my normal prison clothes, he transported me back to the front office. On the way, Mace told me that while I had been locked up, my stepmother had called frantically trying to find out why I hadn't called to check on my ailing father, who in the interim had been hospitalized once again. They'd let her know that I was safe and in good health and in the Special Housing Unit, but they were not permitted to provide any other information.

Mace told me that when word reached him about her phone call, he personally had gone down to the SHU to talk to Mr. T. "I've dealt with plenty of cold sons of bitches in my time, but this guy is one of the coldest. He will be back eventually, but I want you to know what kind of a man he is, so you don't try to involve yourself with him, and also so you don't try to get back at him. Just stay clear. I stood there and let him know that your father was in the hospital, and may be dying, and that he didn't need to admit anything. All he had to do was tell us that you hadn't given him those sunglasses, and we'd be able to release you back to population and you could call and check on your father."

Mace pulled the Jeep up to the front parking lot. "I told him that, and do you know what he said to me? He looked me right in the eyes and told me 'He doesn't give a shit about his old man, because if he did, he never would have stolen those sunglasses.' He didn't even blink. That is one cold son of a bitch."

The Dining Dead -

The Eternal Sunshine Movie Reviews

Sorry folks, no review of new movies this issue. We haven't seen a single one, mostly because there hasn't been one we WANTED to see, but also because so much of our weekend time has been taken up with other tasks. Better luck next issue...which is pretty much a guarantee as there are one or two coming out in the next week which we **do** plan on seeing.

Seen on DVD – **Screen Door Jesus** (Incomplete; we only made it through 20 minutes of this before we shut it off due to massive boredom); **The Illusionist** (B, even having seen it before it was still good, but the effects and atmosphere translate better to the big screen); **Stranger Than Fiction** (A-, just as enjoyable the second time around, regardless of the fact that I knew the whole plot. I also found a greater appreciation for the dialogue written for Dustin Hoffman's character. Plus, I now recognize that two of Ferrell's coworkers are the two Sonic guys – I **knew** they looked familiar!).

Meet Me In Montauk

The Eternal Sunshine Letter Column

Andy York: Sorry I didn't write much on the previous ES, just too danged busy. But, it's starting to look a bit slower on the horizon - I might just get to work a normal week, including getting out of the office for lunch! I took a long weekend this weekend (4-days), so I have a bit more time on my hands to read and such. Also, there is a Mensa Regional Gathering in town that I'm going to spend some time at.

Speaking of which, does Mensa still have a Diplomacy sig?

Regarding the weather, Austin's been about like Dallas. Instead of 20+ days of 100+ temperatures, we've only had a few - the first in August. Added to that, we've already had over an average year's worth of rain. As we'd been in drought conditions for a few years, having all of the lakes full is a good change of pace.

Aside from all the mosquitoes, I don't mind the rain at all...for a change anyway. If it keeps going all year I will certainly get bored of it!

Yes, definitely, keep on writing. The more you write, the better you are going to get.

So what you are saying is I need lots of improvement?

I agree with your assessment of "Stardust" (grade B+). All in all, quite enjoyable with Pfeiffer and DeNiro being the best of the characters. When she tries to repair the small cosmetic blemish with magic, the results had me rolling in the aisles. The one downside was some of the CGI was a bit amateurish and broke the movie's spell.

I didn't notice anything poor about the CGI. Then again, to me the CGI in movies like Spider Man is terrible, so I am in the minority there.

I just saw "Once" (reviewed in ES #7, my grade B) and also agree with your thoughts there. The music is why someone should see the movie, it tells the whole story. The dialogue is almost unnecessary. That's fortunate as sometimes the actors' accents made it difficult to understand them (especially early in the picture).

Yes, that early scene with the guy who grabs the money? I had no idea what anyone was saying. I saw recently that on Amazon the soundtrack is one of their best-sellers.

"Rocket Science" just came out here (yes, in one of the art houses). I'll have to put it up higher in the queue.

Not an earth-shattering movie, but fun.

In the DVD reviews, I have to disagree with you about "Running with Scissors" (grade B). I actually liked it - maybe because I haven't read the book to compare it to. I did buy it on DVD and I do plan on reading the book at some point. The "Science of Sleep" (grade D) was, to me, purely wasted time.

Perhaps it is just the old "they ruined the book" syndrome. I've heard people say similar things about Nanny Diaries, but for me the biggest example was Starship Troopers.

Game Openings

Diplomacy (Black Press): Graham Wilson, Brad Wilson, Chris Babcock, Melinda Holley, Alexander Levinson, needs just two more. Getting close, who wants to join in the fun?

Balkan Wars VI (Black Press): Signed up: Jack McHugh, Graham Wilson, Brad Wilson, needs four more. Rules and map on request, or you can find them online within Paul Bolduc's **Boris the Spider** site at: <http://members.aol.com/prbolduc/boris/hrules/BW6.html>

Eternal Sunshine Game Section

By Popular Demand

Credit goes to Ryk Downes, I believe, for inventing this game (although his original version had the GM supply the starting letter as well). The goal is to pick something that fits the category and will be the "most popular" answer. You score points based on the number of entries that match yours. For example, if the category is "Cats" and the responses were 7 for Persian, 3 for Calico and 1 for Siamese, everyone who said Persian would get 7 points, Calico 3 and the lone Siamese would score 1 point. The cumulative total over 10 rounds will determine the overall winner. Anyone may enter at any point, starting with an equivalent point total of the lowest cumulative score from the previous round. If a person misses a round, they'll receive the minimum score from the round added to their cumulative total. And, if you want to submit some commentary with your answers, feel free to. The game will consist of 10 rounds. A prize will be awarded to the winner.

Round 6 Categories

1. A brand of vodka.
2. A Dustin Hoffman movie.
3. A prime number greater than 3.
4. An island.
5. A flavor of popsicle.

<u>Player</u>	<u>Vodka</u>	<u>Hoffman</u>	<u>Prime</u>	<u>Island</u>	<u>Popsicle</u>	<u>Turn Score</u>	<u>Total</u>
Cal White	Smirnoff	Tootsie	5	Hawaii	Grape	<u>35</u>	196
David Burgess	Smirnoff	The Graduate	5	Hawaii	Orange	28	182
Jamie McQuinn	Absolut	Tootsie	5	Hawaii	Grape	30	179
Dane Maslen	Smirnoff	Tootsie	5	Hawaii	Cherry	32	179
Chris Babcock	NMR	NMR	NMR	NMR	NMR	17	173
Allison Kent	Kettle One	Rain Man	5	Australia	Cherry	20	171
W. Andrew York	Grey Goose	Rain Man	5	Greenland	Grape	22	164
Melinda Holley	Smirnoff	Tootsie	7	Hawaii	Grape	31	156
David Partridge	Absolut	Rain Man	7	Hawaii	Grape	26	155
Brad Martin	Smirnoff	Rain Man	7	Manhattan	Raspberry	20	147
Joakim Spangberg	Absolut	Rain Man	5	Iceland	Cherry	21	140
Kevin Wilson	NMR	NMR	NMR	NMR	NMR	17	135
Brad Wilson	Solichnaya	The Graduate	7	Cuba	Grape	17	128
Martin Burgdorf	Smirnoff	The Graduate	5	Cuba	Bubble Gum	23	126
Brendan Whyte	Smirnoff	Tootsie	5	Hawaii	Lemonade	31	112
Jeremie Lefrancois	Smirnoff	Kramer vs Kramer	7	Australia	Lemonade	18	111

Cal White had the highest possible score with 35 – Congrats Cal! Only 4 more rounds to catch him!

Selected Comments By Category: **Vodka** – Andy York “I’d like to say Tito’s (handmade in Austin and very tasty).” **Hoffman Movie** – Cal White “I want to say Little Big Man, but that’s pretty old, so I’ll go with Tootsie.” **Island** – Cal White “Hope the Aussies and the Newfies forgive me, but I’ll say Hawaii.”; Andy York – “Australia? No, well Greenland, Cuba, Malta and Jamaica all come quickly to mind. Well, so does Galveston and South Padre, but I don’t think anyone else will come up with those. I’ll stay with Greenland.” **Popsicle** – Andy York “I can’t think of the last time I had one so I’ve no idea what flavors are out there.”; Dane Maslen “Against my better judgement (I would have preferred ‘orange’ as an answer) I’ve opted for ‘cherry’ because a couple of websites tell me that it is the most popular flavour of popsicle. Yuk! (I’m not a fan of cherries).”

Round 7 Categories – Deadline is October 24th, 2007

1. A brand name of bottled water.
2. A Rolling Stones song.
3. A branch of science.
4. A carbonated beverage (brand name).
5. A professional basketball team.

Gamestart - By Popular *Opinion*

In this By Popular Demand variant invented by Allan Stagg, the questions are subjective, e.g. “Who is or was the best rock guitarist of all time?” The goal is to pick something that fits the category and will be the “most popular” answer. You score points based on the number of entries that match yours. For example, if the category is “What breed of cats are the friendliest?” and the responses were 7 for Persian, 3 for Calico and 1 for Siamese, everyone who said Persian would get 7 points, Calico 3 and the lone Siamese would score 1 point. The cumulative total over 10 rounds will determine the overall winner. Anyone may enter at any point, starting with an equivalent point total of the lowest cumulative score from the previous round. If a person misses a round, they’ll receive the minimum score from the round added to their cumulative total. And, if you want to submit some commentary with your answers, feel free to; players are encouraged to submit press justifying their choices. The game will consist of 10 rounds. A prize will be awarded to the winner.

Round 1 Categories – Deadline is October 24th, 2007

1. Who is the best female actor in movies today?
2. What is the ugliest automobile model in history?
3. Who is the funniest stand-up comedian ever?
4. What is the best-smelling perfume?
5. What is your favorite current television show?

**Deadline For The Next Issue of Eternal Sunshine:
October 24th, 2007 – See You Then!**