# The Further Adventures of Stanwyck – Your Necessary Diversion from the Ascension of Il Douche



Hello legions. It’s been a while.

Today marks a transition. Obama to Trump. This is a damnably bitter pill to swallow.



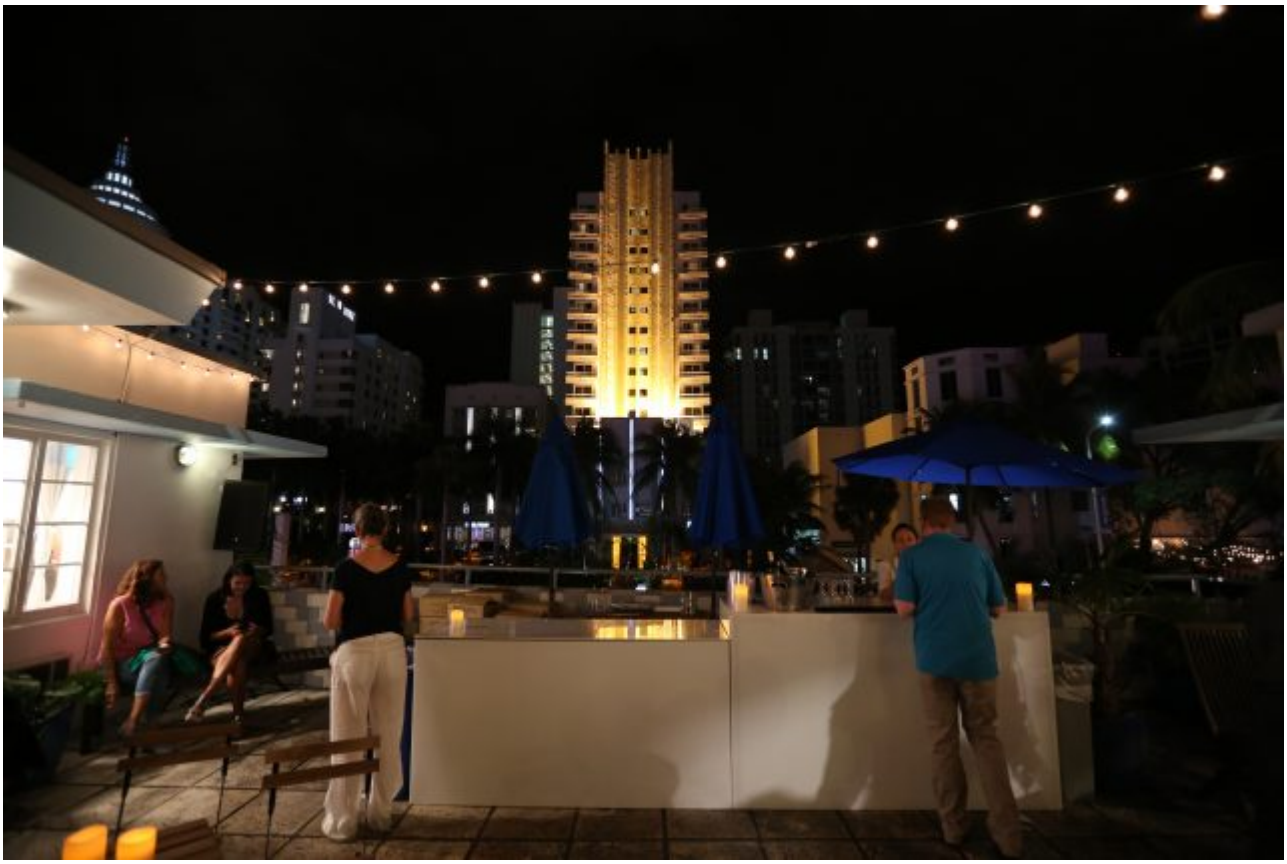

FFS

I barely slept last night. When I did sleep, I dreamt of a three-headed beast terrorizing me and my family. A little too on the nose, really.

Whaddyagonnado?

Here’s a mild palliative, a little something something that might amuse you. Bitter Southerner ran my piece about the Art Basel Miami Beach fair last Tuesday. It was nicely received, with a fair amount of enthusiasm about my trusty sidekick, Stanwyck. (If you haven’t read it yet, go ahead on: you have even more good fun to distract you from reality.)

Here’s an outtake, a part of the tale that did not make the final cut. Consider it lagniappe. Hope it makes today’s harsh medicine easier to take.



## The All American Event Attenders

At the lower end of Ocean Drive are hordes of easily recognizable rubes from away – like me! – prime targets for aggressive shillery. Smart people walk down the beach side of Ocean Drive relatively unmolested, but the landward sidewalk is a treacherous gauntlet of garish sidewalk cafes, each with

its own bass-heavy soundtrack, volume set to stun, and a stadium's worth of neon and LED lights programmed to trigger seizures, all the better to help the customer realize how much fun she is or should be having. Employees – buff and exhibitionist – entice innocent wanderers with touts for two-for-one specials and all day happy hours. Thus did I find myself in front of a half-gallon of something that tasted vaguely like after-shave. It was delicious.

At this other end of the barfly spectrum, we found our bliss in a bucket-sized liver-ripper called the CoronaRita. It is apparently a favorite of some creature named Snooki.



Definitely NOT Stanwyck

What's in it? So glad you asked. Dump a can of citrusy soda, a can of frozen lime concentrate, and 12 oz. of crap tequila in a plastic fishbowl. Garnish with two upended bottles of Corona and a couple of jumbo straws. This drink makes the Hurricanes on Bourbon Street seem quaint.

Judgement: 12 shots of tequila and two beers in one serving, the CoronaRita is the ugliest enticement to vomitous excess I have ever seen.

I ordered one immediately.

The Bourbon Street analogy is apt. There is equivalent desperation at play among both employees and their marks. The vendors occupy some of the most expensive real estate around, and even at $42 for a jumbo fruity liquor drink, survival hinges on serving vast amounts of event-attenders vast quantities of near-toxic comestibles. The marks are themselves determined to have fun, dammit. The exchange is relentlessly logical.

Stanwyck ordered a martini, naturally, slightly dirty. Eighteen bucks. A bargain. It came in a red plastic martini glass. She was Not. Fucking. Amused.

“Drink up,” I slurred cheerily, certain that her ether stash was close hand.

Stanwyck glared. If looks could kill.

“You drink it. I got my pride,” she says. And she does, you know. She does. She dumped her plastictini into my drink bucket. “When are we gonna see some art, anyway? Watching you drink that thing might be performance…but it pure sure ain’t art.”

Everybody’s a critic. I went to work on my fishbowl – with martini booster – straining to ignore the glare of sheer hatred Stanwyck was throwing my way. It was Kigali all over again.

The rest of the night was a blurred swirl of Bosch-like hallucinations. More. Bigger. Louder. Splashier.

There was the Corona Electric Beach Party, with special guest DJ Matoma (yeah, I don’t know either), just steps from our café. Security looked lax. I crawled atop The Clevelander Hotel’s poolside roof to join the shimmy-shimmy dancers in their matching yellow spandex outfits.



The moment YN was seized by the terpsichorean muse

The crowd roared approval, but the bouncers frowned on my lithely gyrations. Cazart! Miami Beach might have a reputation as a fun-loving place, but the choke holds from those ruffians tell another tale.

I awoke near dawn amongst the other rough sleepers in Lummus Park. I was no more than 75 feet from my hotel. My pockets were emptied and my shoes were gone. This was where Stanwyck had left me to my fantods. Damn her.

While Your Narrator slept, Stanwyck claims that Heidi Klum dared her to arm wrestle Venus Williams at the *Miami Beach Magazine* gala. She sipped bubbly out of Pitbull's slippers at the Dom Perignon bash. The Bombay Sapphire Gin shindig, the Perrier party, the Perrier-Jouët soirees. She says she got into them all.

I sez she's a liar. She smiles quietly to herself. Over a

breakfast of eggs, sausage, and, for me, another CoronaRita, she flashes her phone. Pics of Stanwyck and Paris. Stanwyck and Sarah Jessica. Stanwyck and Madonna! She knows a move or two, that Stanwyck.

One more. Stanwyck and Clooney.

Damn her.

---

# Bored of Education



Having conquered the long-standing challenge of developing our flowering youth into a robust and world-dominating work-force, the nation's Boards of Education have turned their attention to more pressing concerns.

> *SALISBURY, NC – High school students will be allowed to carry mace in the 2016-2017 school year after the Rowan-Salisbury Board of Education agreed to remove prohibitive language and amend its policy.*

Now before we go reflexively shouting "WHAT IN THE NAME OF POO FLINGING MONKEYS IS THAT ABOUT", let the good burghers of Salisbury explain.

> *Board member Chuck Hughes was in favor of the sprays on campuses, saying that in his mind, they were purely*

> *defensive. He also referenced HB2, saying that the sprays might be useful.*
>
> *"Depending on how the courts rule on the bathroom issues, it may be a pretty valuable tool to have on the female students if they go to the bathroom, not knowing who may come in," he said.*

What could possibly go wrong?

> *The board's lawyer, Ken Soo, said that there have been few cases of a student using Mace against a teacher.*

The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the tears of teachers and administrators. Freedom, bitches!

But stay your outrage. These sober guardians of our youth turned to yet another sharp concern of chin-stroking importance.

> *Wagner then directed the discussion to razors. The board previously agreed that straight-edge razors should be prohibited, but felt some discussion should be given to disposable razors…"To me it's absurd for even a student not to have a disposable razor . . . it certainly doesn't make sense for staff," Wagner said.*

The right to tidy your whiskers shall not be abridged.

Moving along to another hamlet that has apparently solved ALL THE PROBLEMS, let's look in on the no-doubt-conservative-fiscally denizens of McKinney, TX.

> *Voters in McKinney, Tex., have given the go ahead to build a nearly $63 million high school football stadium after months of contentious debate in the suburban city north of Dallas.*

Since ALL THE PROBLEMS have been solved, it makes sense to handle the other overweening, towering needs of this earnest village of 160,000 souls.

> *Supporters have acknowledged that the old stadium, the 7,000-seat Ron Poe Stadium built in 1962, has provided more than enough room to accommodate fans, even if the parking lot is too small.*

That parking lot sure was a problem, a goddamned embarrassment, really.

> *In debates and online comment threads, opponents argued that it represented a misplaced priority on sports over academics. Some mentioned concerns about football-related concussions.*

Namby pamby latte sipping pinheads, all. Fortunately, the good people of McKinney were not duped by these fifth columnist com-symp feminizers of our nation's young pigskin warriors.

> *In a vote on May 7, nearly two-thirds of McKinney residents endorsed a $220 million school bond measure that included plans for the stadium,*

And all is right in God's plan.

It is to despair. As soon as I stop laughing.

---

# Food Porn




One of the best movies I watched in the past year is *Jiro Dreams of Sushi*, a 2011 documentary about Jiro Ono, the 85-year-old proprietor/chef of Sukiyabashi Jiro. This 10-seat, sushi-only restaurant in Tokyo – in a subway station, no less

– is allegedly the greatest sushi restaurant in the known universe, and Jiro-san is sushi's greatest artist.



Take a look at these hands.

The movie delves into the single-minded pursuit of perfection that drives the Master, and by extension, his two sons, both of whom live under his shadow and dominance. One son has opened his own successful restaurant; the eldest remains chained to the old man as apprentice-for-life (or so it must seem to 50-year old Yoshikazu), or at least until the old man kicks and Yoshi can take over the subway sushi empire.

The movie is gorgeously shot, and slow, and lyrical. The depiction of the Lear-esque intergenerational dynamic is subtle and clear. The director (David Gelb) manages to let the story unfold at a leisurely pace that matches the pace of the diners who savor every bite of the $250 prix fixe menu.

More than anything, the movie is about dedication to craft over a lifetime, the single-minded pursuit of excellence in a single-task. The results emerge in the food. It really looks glorious, and the meticulous care the chefs take in selecting ingredients and preparing and presenting the end product is captivating. It is truly worth the couple of bucks you'll pay

to watch on iTunes or Amazon.

So we were pretty excited to see that Gelb was putting together a six-part series for Netflix called *Chef's Table*. Each hour-long episode profiles a chef from a different part of the world, with each one notable for his or her innovation and brilliance in the culinary arts. Most of them have developed creative interpretations of their own culture's food legacy. They are all faithfully honoring their heritage through innovation. They are all critical and financial successes after the obligatory years of struggle and failures, veritable icons of forward thinking foodery.



Crouton garnished with organic yard sprigs on a bed of hair with guitar pick.

And as we watch the full series, something about it just stinks.

It could be that top tier chefery remains such a boy's club, with LA-based Niki Nakayama the only woman in the series. It could be the generalized arrogance of the chefs themselves; Jiro may be imperious, but he's never arrogant. But mostly, it could be that the food lives in a world apart from 99% of us; this really is food for the one percent. And the food

experts delivering incisive analysis of why this chef or that is *so critically important* are the masticant version of fashion mavens who sniff at *pret a porter* and congratulate themselves for acknowledging the existence of so-called "regular-sized women". It's like *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*. You can never be too rich, or too thin, or have your foie gras or veal raised in such a humane manner, fed lovingly on grass that was pre-masticated and glazed with a balsamic-and-baby-tears reduction! Gaze upon our privilege, peons, and imagine yourselves so fortunate.



A more realistic dream…

Funny thing, though. None of the food in *Chef's Table* makes me wish I was there to eat it. And to be honest, none of the chefs makes me wish we could hang out. And as such, it fails as food porn at the fundamental level – it does not engorge my desire to be in the action.

Food porn, like regular porn, is a substitute for the real experience. Food porn makes you hungry. Regular porn makes you horny.<fn>YMMV.</fn> Food porn makes you think, "hey, I could enjoy that, too". Regular porn? Same sort of thing. In the end, one wonders what it might have been like to actually participate in the antics on-screen.



We like to watch.

But not all food porn is created equal. *Chef's Table* falls short because it is so fussy and privileged. It's a soft porn *Downton Abbey*. You are probably sort of sure there is something happening, but the attitude is so detached and stuffy that you can't be sure. Having contemplated *noblesse oblige* for the better part of an hour, Lady Mary's hand accidentally grazes the sleeve of Mr Bates' jacket leading to sexual tension, guilt, and, alas, no resolution. Some Maggie Smith commentary would help, but only just. That's the food experience at the *Chef's Table*.



The High Priestess

I really enjoy cooking shows, have loved them since I was a kid watching Julia Child and *The Galloping Gourmet* on public television.<fn>Your Narrator has always been something of a dweebnerd.</fn> Even their snobbishness – that hint of the genteel in accent and demeanor – somehow added to their charm,

and we had the idea that we were with someone who truly wished us all to become great cooks. And their food always looked kind of amazing and tantalizing.<fn>Plus sport! Watching the greats chop vegetables was like watching Baryshnikov or Federer. Jacques Pepin is bone fide Mack Heath with a blade. Watch Jiro-san slice sushi. Behold Julia poised before a duck, cleaver raised for the *coup de fowl*. Can we run that again on instant replay super slo-mo 360* telestrator?</fn>



The Galloping Punster

(My most enduring memory of Graham Kerr involved one of his intro stories. He was a shameless punster {“with fronds like these, who needs anemones?”}, and one day he told a nearly endless shaggy dog story that ended with him sticking a hypodermic into the top of a coconut, coinciding with the line “a furry with a syringe on top”. Well.)

Not for nothing, both of these icons were pretty liberal with the wine during filming.

The food shows of my youth were primarily instructional. We were intended to go forth and re-create what we had witnessed. In this sense, the oldie food shows were less porn-like and

more akin to a Human Sexuality instructional video. The mechanics were depicted, but one was expected to put one's learning into action.

Eventually, purveyors of foodie shows realized that most people can't be bothered to actually, you know, cook food. Like exercise videos, most viewers take the food shows as passive entertainment. Sure, some of the current crop of celeb chefs offer recipes and such, but most programming on the food networks are given over to spectacle, to travelogue and *Survivor*-style competitions where wannabe chow jockeys frantically yell at one another and sweat into the food they are handling in hopes of capturing the holy grail – a chance at their own food program.

But more than anything, modern food shows revolve around the Celebrity. Some actually cook, some just eat. Almost all of them paste their names on cookbooks and pots and pans and knife sharpeners and citrus zesters &c. Like Marylin Chambers and Jenna Jameson, our celebrity foodies have become franchises, interchangeable with brands like Trojan or Cuisinart, their photo on the cover a guarantee of a certain….something.

Latter day celebrity chefs run the gamut from sniff-sniff high society to here's how to make weenies in a blanket for a last-minute dinner party. Who do we love?



How does she not have

a headache from stretching her face like that?

Giada De Laurentiis is the chef with a 2000 watt smile. On camera, Giada has the miraculous ability to come off as your girl-next-door bestie, which is exactly who she is if you happened to grow up in the most exclusive neighborhood in Beverly Hills. Her food is every bit as utterly divine as Giada's smile and wardrobe. You can almost smell the garlic coming through the electric picture radio box. One could almost forget that she lives behind high walls and guarded gates. Almost.



Alcohol is a very important part of a balanced teevee diet.

My favorite high-tone food flinger is Hamptons-based Ina Garten – the Barefoot Contessa. She has the most soothing teevee voice since Bob Ross. Really, watch her some afternoon when it is raining and you need to relax. Have a glass of wine

or three – or maybe one of those pinkytinis pictured above – and let Ina's dulcet descriptions of produce and process float you away on clouds of imagined gustatory delight. Better than Xanax, guaranteed. You might even pick up a recipe or two that you have no intention of ever actually making.

Both of them make you feel like you'd be welcome to dine at their tables, though in fact you'd probably meet a couple of very serious security guys if you actually tried. Their food looks yummy, too. Let's consider them the purveyors of art house food porn. Very plummy, very luxe. Out of reach, but certainly delicious. An impossible fantasy. Let's watch another episode and pretend we're Jeffrey.

Others in our constellation of culinary heroes are more, um, proletariat. Rachel Ray brings the perky energy of an ex-cheerleader to her single-minded mission to dominate the food of the masses. She is just goddamned adorably cute, and did I mention that she is perky? Perky, perky, perky!!



Fresh fruit is an important part of a balanced diet.

Her food is basic, easy to replicate, and frankly, perfectly revolting. This combination is even less appealing than you might think. But nobody works harder than Rachel. Her routine of filming up to a dozen half-hour episodes per day

can lead to some pretty bizarre performances. It often seems as though she's suffered a blow to the head with a board. Her perkiness never lags, even when she is slurring her words from exhaustion, and it's always a suspense-filled mystery to find out if the unlikely ingredients she's mangling will turn into something magical.<fn>That's a lie. It never turns magical. But somehow, still, it's hard to turn away.</fn> This is more mass-appeal fare, something more like *Debbie Does Meatloaf* than *Story of O.*<fn>Credit where due. Rachel had the Galloping Gourmet as a guest on her talk show (yep) where she asked him to tell the furry with a syringe on top joke. Respect.</fn>

Then there are our travel guides, intrepid globetrotters in search of, well, something.

Andrew Zimmern (*Bizarre Eats*) seems a nice enough fella, but jesus hitler, that guy would eat sauteed dingleberries with poo garnish if someone served it out of a filthy kitchen with a camera watching, and then his face would contort into the foodie equivalent of oh-baby-you-have-such-big-thing that makes regular porn so, um, convincing. He even moans a little bit when the food is especially disgusting. Let's not even get into the episodes where he eats actual testicles; the parallel is getting uncomfortable even for me, and I'm behind this increasingly horrific metaphor-cum<fn>See what I did there?</fn>-critique.



That is, in fact, exactly what you think it is.

*Bizarre Eats* is sort of like watching the kid in middle-school who would eat a live cockroach on a dare. You're not gonna look away, and you're gonna get grossed out, but there's no chance you'd pass your bottle of Jack to that guy. Put this in with the X-rated *Frankenstein* that Warhol produced mid-70s, or maybe one of those *Faces of Death* shitshows. A very little bit goes a long, long way.

Guy Fieri? Probably the less said the better. This lands squarely in the amateur, homemade porn realm, kind of gross, a matter of some curiosity at best. Watching this peroxided hipster wannabe chow his way through a three-pound burger with some inexplicable sauce is to watch a pimply couple with mullets slapping flab in the grainy light of a double-wide trailer. To be fair, though, Fieri brings superior production values, so you can really see the disgusting thing you want no part of.



The food is even less attractive than Guy himself.

Fieri is an actual restaurateur, ~~just like~~ not at all like our favorites from *Chef's Table*. Where the *CT* foodies might offer

a thin slice of radish on a bed of peat with sea salt reduction for $60, our pal Guy is all about huge quantities of alleged food at allegedly low, low prices. One of his joints offers something called “Gringo Sushi”, which is apparently just like sushi without the fish, rice and seaweed, subbing in french fries, crispy fried onions, and iceberg lettuce for that nasty foreign stuff. Iceberg lettuce in your sushi. No. Shit.

He is, as you may well imagine, a huge financial success, with his own Times Square “bistro”<fn>If by bistro one means a sub-Applebees botulism experiment with $18 dollar frozen burgers.</fn> that was the subject of one of the greatest restaurant reviews in the history of forever. Much like snuff films and Olive Garden, the mere existence of Guy Fieri is enough to convince one of the existence of a dark and malevolent force in the Universe, a sure sign of the decline of Western civilization.

Anthony Bourdain’s another story. Man, I’d love to travel and hang with that guy, though I’d probably suffer irreversible liver damage within a week. His tastes run from high to low, from bizarre to pedestrian. He’s as much at home in front of the most high-faluting avant-gastro as he is eating his way through the menu at *Waffle House*. Even better: Bourdain keeps his eye on the fact that food is an essential ingredient of human interaction, a basic glue that binds cultural identity.



Drunk as a skunk at the Waffle House. As it should be.

Bourdain is food porn a la Henry Miller and JP Sartre and Terry Southern. It's raw, it's dirty, it has that certain *je ne sais quoi*. And then you have to think about it a bunch and spill a lot of words agonizing over what it all means in the larger scheme of things. And drinking. Lots of drinking! With normal people! My kinda food porn!

Bourdain was at one time an actual chef, but he has, like most of our heroes here, transcended actual kitchen work in lieu of a more profitable career in celebrity. More than anyone else mentioned here, Bourdain's heart and soul is about a good story, well told. Even though food (and drink) is still the common thread, Bourdain's interest is in the mechanics of food and drink as social and cultural signifiers. He'll take you 80 miles out into Gullah-land to find the best barbecue around, but he's going to be sure you understand why the people behind that Q do what they do, and how they do it, and how it fits into a larger narrative about economics and politics and social stratification. Unlike the knobs of the *Chef's Table*, Bourdain invites us to enjoy the food while we also take account of the classist balance sheet of the whole endeavor. On *CT*, they're too busy congratulating themselves on their

commitment to holistic-eco-fetishism to bother noticing their inherent privilege and material excess.

Bourdain's focus on character development would be enough to disqualify his show as porn if it weren't for the fact that the food and drink and landscapes he brings us are exactly where you want to be at that very moment. No matter if he is in Charleston or Cambodia or Coney Island, you want to be there in his place, eating and drinking and smelling exactly what he is smelling. And talking about what it means over that fifth or sixth glass of bourbon.

Porn. It's what's for dinner.

---

# Jobz Are Us: The Ethical Dilemmata of the Humble Scrivener




Toiling away here in the bloggy vineyard, Your Narrator finds himself in near-constant search of gainful, remunerative scribbling. Oh sure, regaling the tens of loyal ***i2b*** followers

with insight, pith<fn>Yeth. Pith.</fn>, and *tres bon mots* in return for your undying adulation is all the reward an inky wretch could hope for. But the family has this annoying tendency to, you know, eat, so I expose my tender talents to the cruel world in hopes that someone will toss a few shekls my way.<fn>That Donate button over to the right has not brought the expected riches, needless to say.</fn> <fn>The mere mention of which – the Donate button, that is – is of course, a classic example of shameless whoring, one which allows the reader a choice between casting judgement on Your Narrator or of empathizing with his plight.</fn> <fn>And, also too, this mentioning – re: the judgement v. empathy conflict – potentially instantiates a *frisson* of guilt in the freeloading reader, which pointing out represents a further, and perhaps more pathetic, instance of Narratory whoring.</fn>

So I troll, I dig. I hustle. And occasionally, I am rewarded beyond my wildest dreams when I find an inducement like this:

> *Do you love essential oils? Do you love to write about them and take pictures?*
> *[….] Essential Oil company is looking for someone who is passionate and knowledgeable about essential oils. We currently have a blog and we are looking to add guest editors/bloggers to our mix. Will will pay per post which will need to include general information about essential oils, DIY projects, recipes or other ideas. Posts must include images.*

The photo at the top accompanies this hustle, which appeared on Craigslist,<fn>Pro tip. Job ads on Craigslist are maximum sketchy.</fn> I love this: in itself, it appears to have been written by a 7-year old ESL student. “Will will pay…” But scoreboard! They realize they need a writer!<fn>A plight more common that most would think, and one that goes unrepaired despite the glut of folks like me who stand at the ready to make your communications shine!</fn> <fn>Too much hard sell?

Sorry, got a little over enthused.</fn>

Further, its appeal to the aspirant writer's *passion* for essential oils bears all the earmarks of a near-empty paycheck for the writer's work. Come for the oil! Stay for the love! Plus, photography!!!

Really, Your Narrator chortled heartily at this one, not even needing to get into the 4th grade trick of mis-attaching the modifier in a way that throws shade as to which is truly *essential* in their minds: the oil or the blogger.<fn>Fun fact: if you are picky and priggish about language and its (mis)use, you will never find yourself unamused in our culture. You may also never find yourself invited to parties and the like. Is that trade-off worth it?</fn>

But this is far from the funniest/oddest job description I've ever heard. Travel back through the misty clouds to last fall….

The result of a hot tip, I found myself a-phone with a marketing agency that specializes in providing ghost-bloggers/tweeters for various publishers and their author list. This allows the tormented author of *belle lettristic* masterpieces (as well as authors of, let us say, non-*bl* titles) to maintain a daily presence on the Internet tubes as a witty, friendly, 'hey-I'm-your-old-pal here sharing recipes and anecdotes and asides as I take frequent (up to ten a day) breaks from my *bl* and/or non-*bl* musings', when in fact, a writer working under deadline, regardless of the relative *bl* and/or non-*bl* merits of the work, definitely does not have surplus time/wit/inclination for such base-level whoring.<fn>That's for guys like me!</fn> Thus does it fall to schlockingly underpaid ghost writers to maintain the illusion of your favorite author as an active and engaged *pal* with her readers, when in fact, she is likely cranking out sub-mid-list potboilers at a rate that would have made Elmore Leonard quail.

And let’s go ahead and get out of the way any illusion re: the *bl* and/or non-*bl* divide. The authors/titles are decidedly down the prestige meter here; we’re not talking anyone/thing you’d likely read about in the NYRB or NYTBR. In fact, what we had in this case was a stable of ghost-writers churning out mass-pulp fiction under specific trade names, kind of like the *Nancy Drew* and *Hardy Boys* titles of my youth, but without quite as much class.

So, here I am, spinning myself as the perfect fit for the job of ghost-writing social media *content* for someone who does not exist but is rather being made manifest by a gaggle of scribblers who, like myself, are ghost-writing for some *nom de plume* who does not really exist.<fn>This delightfully meta recursion could go on forever, like one of those Nam June Paik installations with video cameras and monitors replicating into infinity. Could I get so many (imaginary) authors assigned to me that I would have to sub out the daily Intertubes witticisms to yet another level of people pretending to be someone pretending to be a person who does not exist anywhere other than a book catlague?</fn> <fn>Even more challenging: assuming the level of one’s persona-creating prowess – maybe even to the point where you’ve really devised some seriously recognizable and individuated character traits and proclivities for these authors who do not truly exist – would one also be able to deploy the epic juggling chops one would need to keep each of the various non-extant “people” sorted out in one’s daily creation of “witty, friendly, ‘hey-I’m-your-old-pal here” dispatches, or would eagle-eyed readers be able to detect your various fabricated personae bleeding one into another, thereby undermining the, not integrity, no, but the structural resilience of the whole facade. Say it with me, people, this thing is getting fraughter by the minute.</fn>

It turned out that this agency had two specific clients. One is a publisher of potboilerish steampunk thrillers, but, said the agency rep, they had plenty of people to keep that social

media illusion rolling. The other publisher, said the rep, presented a little more of a challenge, and this is where she hoped I "might be able to help, but, ah, it is, well, a little delicate."

Interest engaged! Do tell, what is this mystery challenge?

> *Please don't be offended…*

Offended? Damn, I'm dying to find out! Tell me, tell me, please!

> *…but how would you feel about ghost blogging for authors of gay male erotic fiction?*

Ya gotta admit: as job-related questions go, this beats out even a gold standard like "Do you love essential oils?" by a country mile.

You would have been proud of Your Narrator. He was silky, unruffled, and decidedly unoffended. This was some kind of challenge. Could I do it? Who knew? So I exuded that reliable and unearned confidence that served me in good stead all these years.

> *Yeah, I'm pretty sure I could handle that. I love new challenges. But you should know that I'm a 30-year married hetero with two kids.*

There was a relieved sigh at the other end of the line (apparently, the agency rep<fn>Who, as it happened, was breast-feeding her child during our call, a fact that she had shared early on in our telephonic relationship for reasons that were not completely clear. But I don't judge. I was likely in boxers at the time, myself, though there was no human creature attached to me.</fn> had borne the brunt of more than a few churchy/homophobic rants), and she said:

> *That’s ok. Most of the authors aren’t gay, anyway. In fact, most of them are straight women.*

I allowed that this was a fascinating tidbit. Please, do go on.

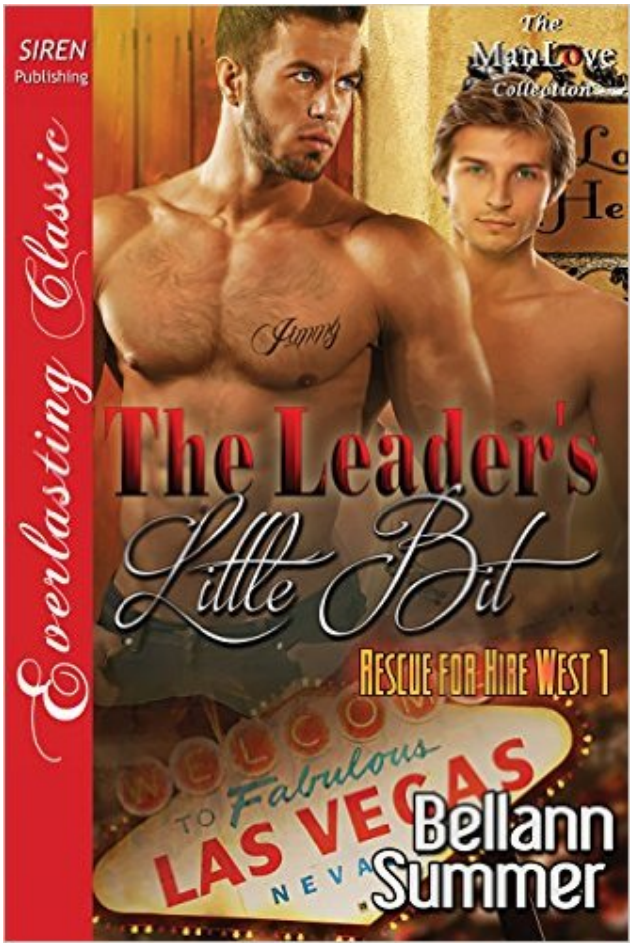
> *Yeah, in fact, we did some market research and discovered that 85% of all our sales were to married women between the ages of 40-55. Almost all of the authors fall in that group, too.*

You know what they say (and of course, *they* are always right): You can’t make this shit up.

So to re-cap: the job was to provide ghost writing services to authors who were in fact ghost writers themselves, writers pretending to be differently gendered *and* gay; straight women writing pornography (excuse, erotica) about man-on-man/men encounters for other straight women. And my role was to execute the friendly/witty/your-good-pal online personae to provide the so-called authors’ fans with a sense of connection one-to-the-other. I believe this is a situation for which the word *simulacrum* was specifically coined.

I did not get the gig. I guess things were already confused enough without dropping an aging, hetero, patriarchal penis person into the mix.

So next time you are spot a book like this, keep this little tale in mind. It may not be quite what you think. Or, if you are a married woman between the ages of 40-55, it might be exactly what you think.




This is not from the publisher in question, but it is pretty representative of the title list I saw.

Who needs a Jade Helm conspiracy when this kind of thing is going on?

My. Favorite. World.