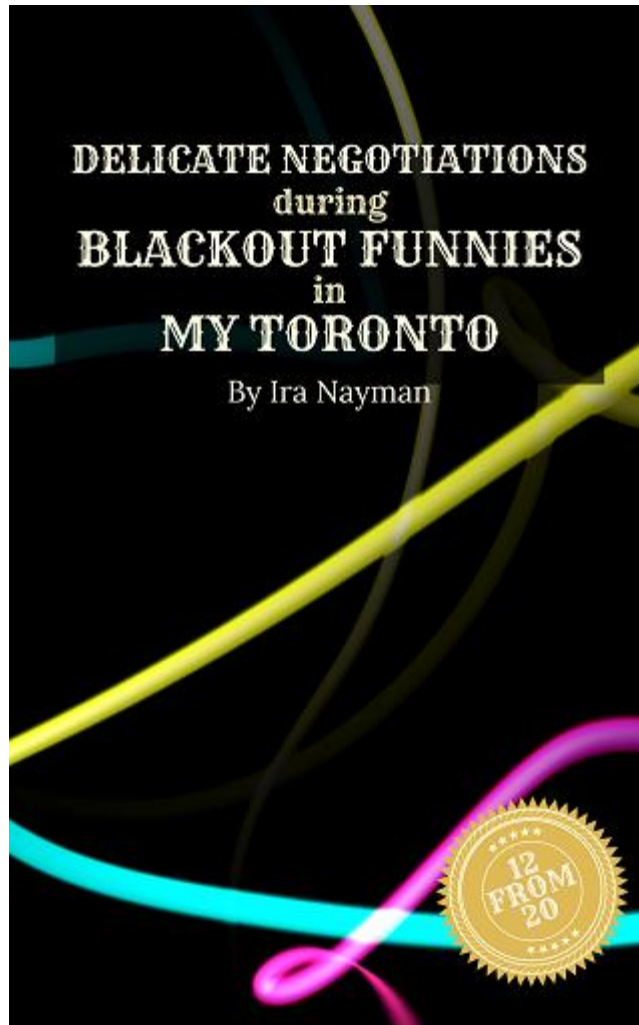




Delicate Negotiations During Blackout Funnies in My Toronto
by Ira Nayman
cover design by Gisela McKay

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Introduction

In the first week of September 2022, Les Pages aux Folles will turn 20. To celebrate this achievement, I will be publishing 102ebook collections of articles from the two decades

of the web site over the course of the year; this project is known as “12 from 20.” (For a brief overview of Les Pages aux Folles, see “The Back Story” at the end of this volume.) Each book will focus on a different feature of the web site. This month: cartoons. You read that right. Cartoons.

A truism I just made up is that real artists don't hesitate to create just because they have no natural aptitude for a medium. This is certainly applicable to the cartoons I created for *Les Pages aux Folles*.

I couldn't draw a straight line with a ruler. Photoshop? Pfft! The Paint programme that came with my computer was good enough for my grandparents' generation, so it's good enough for me! I'm happy when my lens cap is off and my photos are in focus (more or less).

Given this, why create cartoons for the web site? My web goddess Gisela informed me that text was not enough to attract readers; if I wanted more traffic to come to *Les Pages aux Folles*, it had to have graphic elements. Given my natural ineptitude when it came to the visual arts, I resisted her ministrations for as long as I could. However, you don't become a goddess without learning a thing or two about persuasion, and you don't succeed by ignoring your goddess' advice, so I eventually gave in. Cartoons it was.

I should probably point out that this wasn't my first foray into cartooning. In my early teens, I would cut out images from newspapers and magazines and paste them together, adding a caption to the resulting composite image. (This was waaaaaaaay before desktop computers made the cutting and pasting process so much easier.) Many years later, I would learn that there is a name for photographic image-based cartoons: *fumetti*.

Another cartoon I worked on in my youth involved creating images using Spirograph, which was all the rage when I was a kid. Spirograph is made up of thin plastic discs with serrated edges in a variety of shapes and sizes with small holes in them. You put a pen in the hole, then ran one disc around the inside or outside of another. You could repeat this with as many colours and shapes as you wanted until you were satisfied with the image you had created. With a few simple tools, even somebody as unvisually artistic as I could create complex, beautiful patterns. After which, I would give the images humorous captions, because me.

Sadly, my first forays into cartooning have been lost to time. They may not have been very good, but the experience of doing them did give me the belief that with the application of enough creativity, I could overcome my questionable visual image-creating talent and make something fun for *Les Pages aux Folles*, so, if nothing else, they would have been a record of an interesting early contribution to my artistic journey.

One of the first entries into my second foray into cartooning was Blackout Funnies (started in 2005). A mostly four panel cartoon, each one featured four black panels with speech bubbles. It may have been inspired by a blackout in Toronto, but that would only have been in part; it was almost certainly more inspired by the fact that it was doable with

my limited ability and the tools I had available to me. I created 100 Blackout Funnies before running up against the truth that the concept was highly limited; not wanting to repeat myself (any more than I may inadvertently already had), I shifted my focus to My Toronto (which I had started working on in 2004).

My Toronto was a *fumetti* through and through. It was based on photographs I had taken in and around the city (although I was sometimes inspired by photos I had taken outside the city, I didn't turn them into cartoons because that would have diluted the concept). Occasionally, I would combine elements from different photos, or incorporate clipart into the image, but mostly they were single image cartoons. Mostly, the punchline would be a cutline at the bottom of the image, although sometimes it involved dialogue balloons. My Toronto featured a lot of visual arts intertextual references (not only the obvious ones to painters like Rene Magritte, but a semi-regular feature of the cartoon was "Eat your heart out..." which referenced filmmakers with a well known visual style or motif). The most obvious reason for the creation of My Toronto was the purchase of my first digital camera (sometimes, creativity can be spurred by the most banal circumstances.)

Unlike most cartoons, My Toronto did not have a set size and shape. The more I played with images, the more obvious it became that some of them would not be well served by trying to fit them into a standard rectangle. This would have been impossible if I had a cartooning gig at a newspaper or magazine, since their production cycles require a certain standardization; however, self-publishing on the internet knows no such boundaries.

In retrospect, I'm surprised I didn't create more My Toronto cartoons. I had thousands of photographs to work with (when you have a camera, everything looks like a photo op). By the time I had produced enough to fill two books containing 124 cartoons each, my imagination had moved on to Delicate Negotiations.

While the first two cartoons were determined by their conceptual structure, Delicate Negotiations was driven by its semantic structure: it was conceived as a way of exploring human relationships, primarily romantic/sexual. Owing to this, it began as a four-panel comic with two characters talking to each other. How did I create the characters? I took a photograph of the Love of My Life and outlined her profile. Then, I added lines to indicate hair (straight and short to indicate male characters; longer and curved to indicate female characters). It was a simple design, almost abstract, but it did convey what I needed it to convey.

Over the years, the design of Delicate Negotiations become more complex. Not happy with the sameness of the characters, I started colouring their hair to differentiate between them; later, I would shrink the size of the image to indicate youth and add little bags under a character's (non-existent) eyes to indicate age. I added colour to the faces of some characters (light grey to indicate Asian descent, dark grey to indicate Blackness; this was early enough in the run that I was still thinking in monochrome, otherwise I would have given them proper colours) to further differentiate them. Finally, I added the heads of dogs, cats, sharks and a dinosaur, again by tracing around a picture of them and adding highlights as needed.

Delicate Negotiations was meant to be a series of one-offs. While there never were any recurring characters, it developed recurring situations. The first was True Tales of the City, which recreated conversations I overheard around Toronto (mostly on public transit). The second was The Cat Communications Network, which, be honest, we all kind of suspected was a thing. Towards the end of the run of the comic, I developed a small number of Great Moments in Romantic Comedies Revisited, which is exactly what it sounds like. I like to think that if I had continued producing Delicate Negotiations cartoons, more would have emerged. Alas, by the time I had finished enough for five books of 148 cartoons (and most of a sixth), I felt that I had started to repeat myself, so I stopped producing the feature.

I ended up combining the Delicate Negotiations cartoons that didn't quite make up a full book of their own with My Toronto and Blackout Funnies cartoons that I had created because I tried to revive those features. In addition, there was a fourth cartoon: Kiss My ASCII. This was made up of typographical characters combined with a comic caption. I only produced 15 of them before the well ran dry, but they are a good representation of what could be done with the concept.

The cartoons appeared on the home page of *Les Pages aux Folles*; two per weekly update, although this was reduced to one per week as I ran out of them. They did not appreciably drive traffic to the sight, but, oh well. They were another medium through which I could express my creativity. I hope you enjoy reading them as much as I enjoyed creating them.

Enjoy.

Ira Nayman
Toronto
January 28, 2022

Cartoons

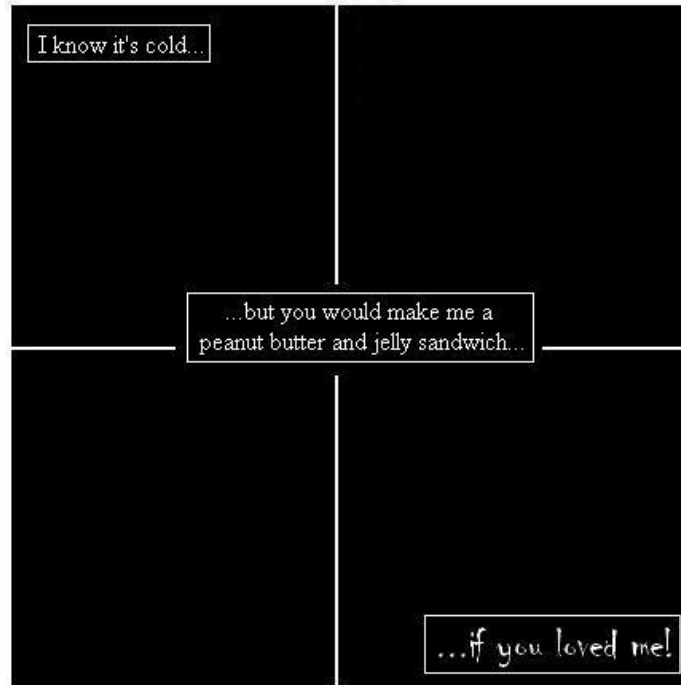
Blackout Funnies

Blackout Funnies

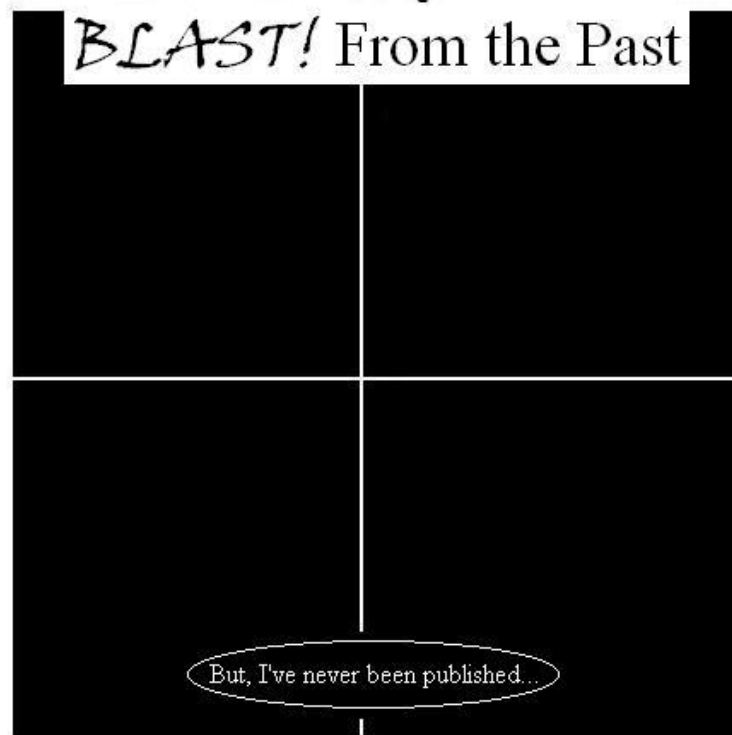
This never would have
happened if you had stopped
watching Desperate
Housewives when I told you
to...

[illegible]

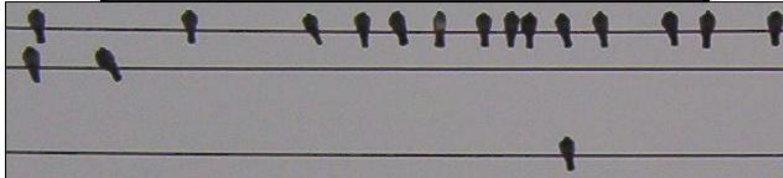
Blackout Funnies



Blackout Funnies



My Toronto



Gerry began to wonder if an open casting call for a remake of *The Birds* was wise, but it was already too late...

My Toronto



Frosty knew he was out of his depth, but nobody else seemed willing to jump in when the traffic lights went out.

My Toronto

You
have a
dirty
mind...



...and
you are
going to
hell!

My Toronto



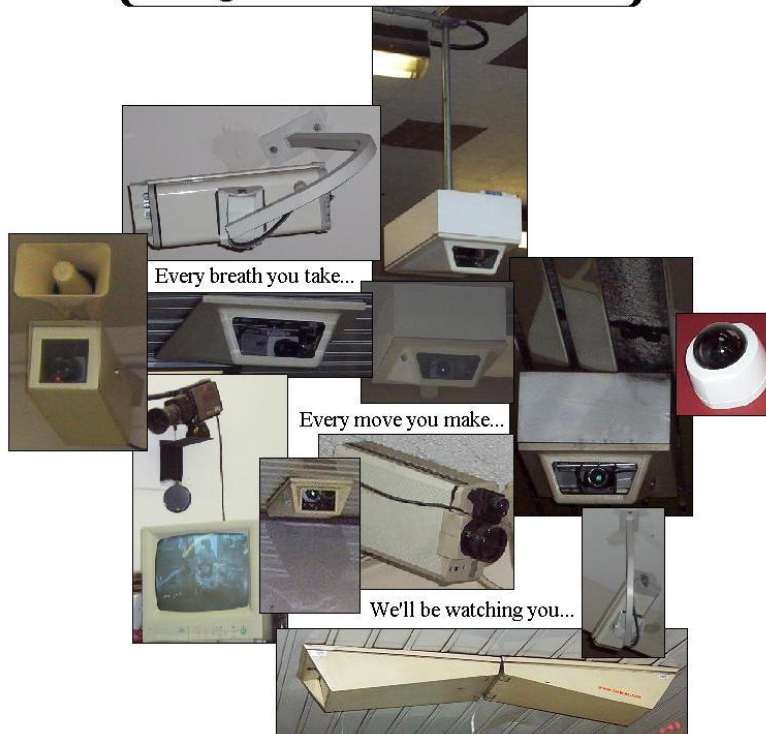
Sometimes, even god needs help getting oriented.

My Toronto



Ceci n'est pas les pipes.

My Toronto



Every breath you take...

Every move you make...

We'll be watching you...

My Toronto



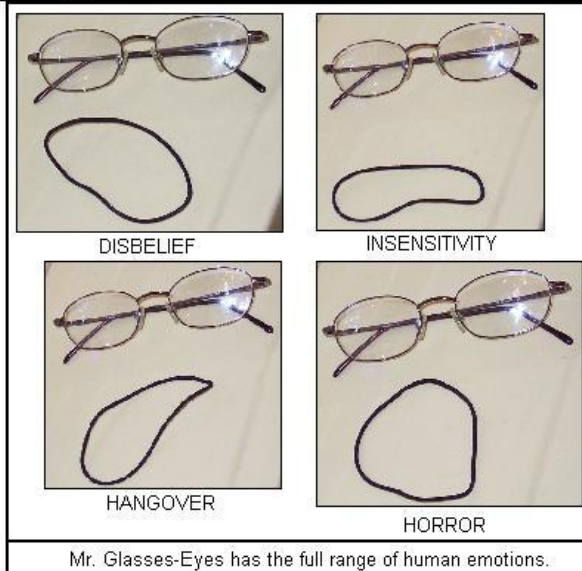
More Schumpeter than Derrida, but what the hell? Condo developers don't know art, but they know what they like.

My Toronto



The next advance in urban transportation: quantum sport utility vehicles. Not only can't you be sure you'll reach your destination, but you can't even be sure you'll be you when you get there!

My Toronto



My Toronto



My Toronto



To discover the hidden cartoon within the cartoon, simply fold the screen of your computer along the dotted lines.

My Toronto



A Real Puzzler

The two images above, although they may seem identical, actually have 14 differences, some of which are quite subtle. Can you find all 14?

My Toronto



When wearing the alien symbiotes on your head became a fashion fad, the more forward-looking people decided to pressure the government to accelerate the Mars immigration programme.

My Toronto

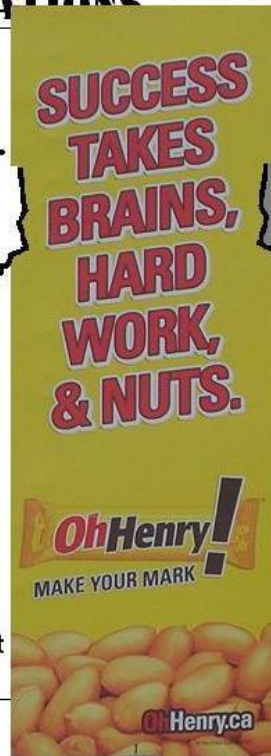


Homer would never forgive Glenn for changing his name and ruining the family act, but it was obvious to everybody that Glenn wasn't happy.

My Toronto

NEGOTIATIONS

Frankie and Lashonda had to admit that the billboard problem in the city had gotten WAY out of control!



My Toronto



Ryerson's Rogers Centre after it hit the iceberg. There were no survivors...

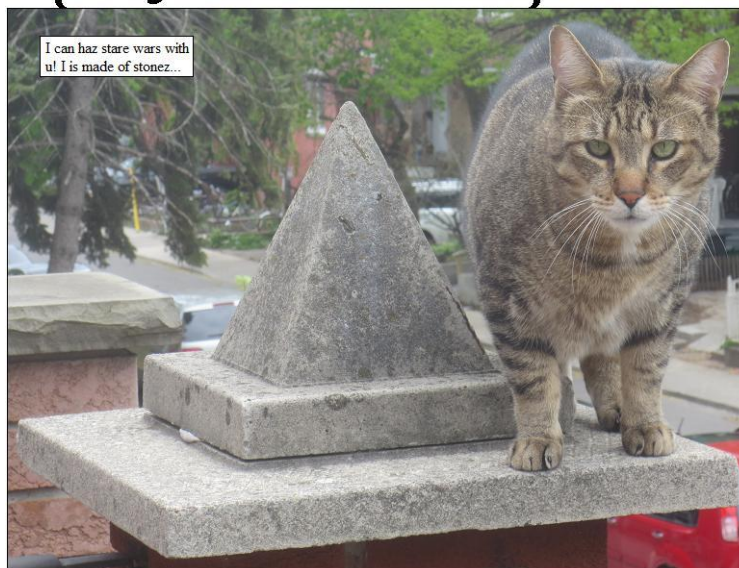
My Toronto



They shot a TV ad on my home street
It had a movie star, it was something 'bout feet
They controlled the traffic, all the cars moving
Well, I love me some movie stars, but this was terribly boring
Yeah, this was terribly boring

Well, sometimes the longer the shoot
The harder it is to care
But you got to remember the dumber the shoot
The shorter will be your career
When you're blowin' hot air
When you're blowin' hot air

My Toronto



I can haz stare wars with
u! I is made of stonz...

My Toronto



The city would come to regret choosing Les Freres Alphonse et Gaston Inc. to create a new marketing slogan for it.

Delicate Negotiations

Delicate **NEGOTIATIONS**

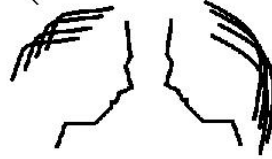
We need to develop realistic characters. You know - with names and jobs and detailed personal histories.

But, if we do that, we won't be able to represent the universal in male/female relationships.

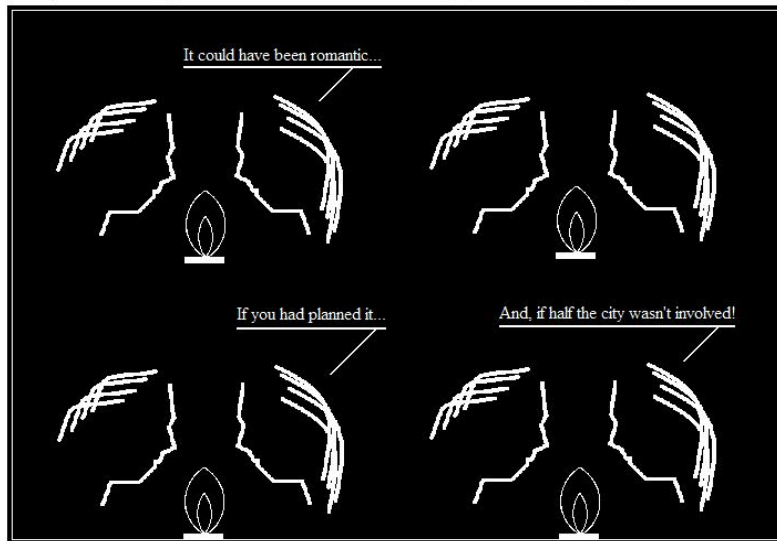
If we don't do it, we will be nothing but caricatures.



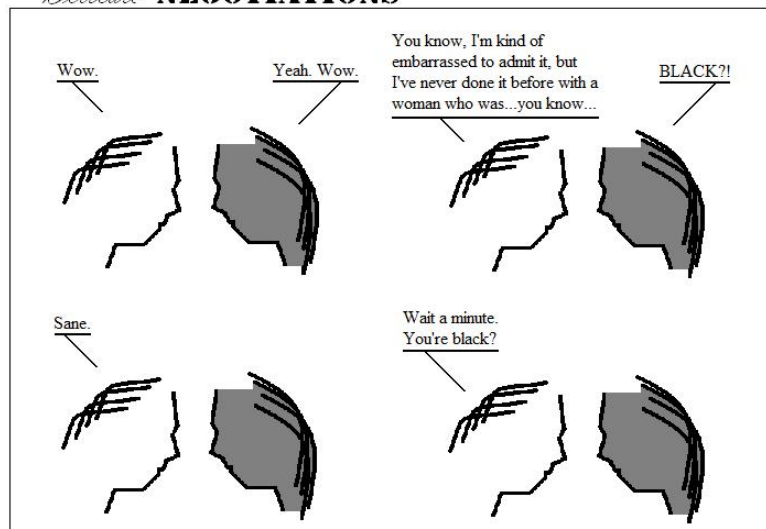
Okay, but still...



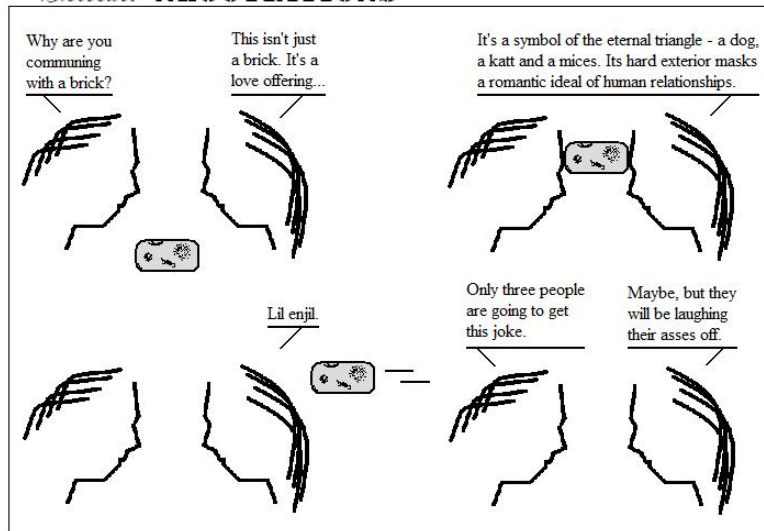
Delicate **Blackout** **NEGOTIATIONS**



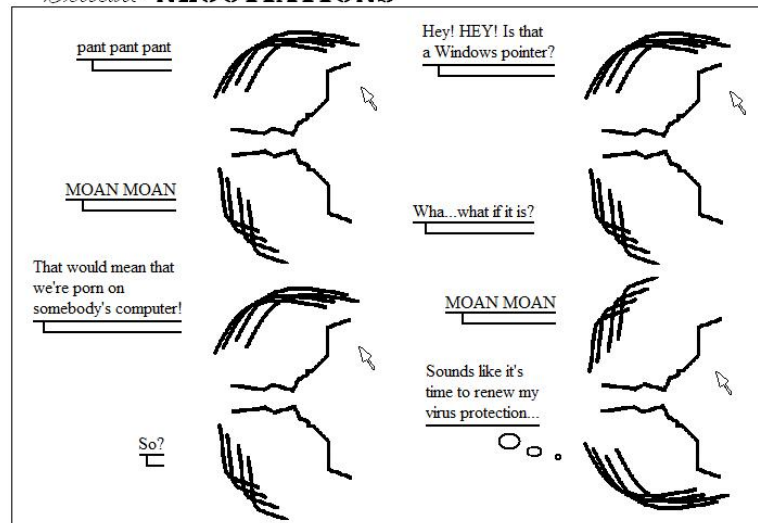
Delicate **NEGOTIATIONS**



Delicate **NEGOTIATIONS**



Delicate **NEGOTIATIONS**



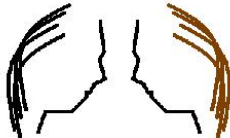
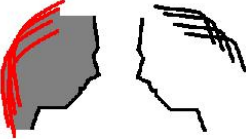
Delicate NEGOTIATIONS

Problems with interspecies communications, #2:

Morning, Mister Snuffles! 	Ooh, babe, cool it with the loud vibes! It's too early in the afternoon, you dig? 	Hungry? 	Ominous longing Steel cutting willing tin can Dinner is served! 
Who's a good kitty? Eh? Who's a good kitty, then? 	I looked into the abyss. The abyss looking back was, like, Garfield! Cra-azy! 	Wanna play with a ball of yarn? 	The light! It burns...it burns! Hey, babe, you seen my shades? 

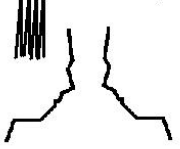
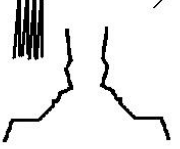
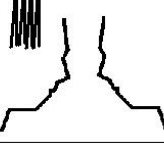
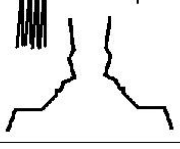
Your cat is hipper than you could ever hope to be.

Delicate NEGOTIATIONS

LINDA wants to teach the world to sing. (How she became a high school <u>math</u> teacher confuses her, as does so much else in life.) If she is so happy, why do sad movies make her cry?		ADELE, Linda's roommate, is secretly in love with her, but covers this up by being mean to everybody. She wears Jerry's contempt as a badge of honour (and secretly ODs on ice cream).
MARC, Linda's boyfriend, doesn't have a care in the world or a thought in his head. Naturally, he's a Conservative fundraiser, but he loves his dogs, so everybody forgives him.		JERRY, Marc's roommate, tries to live up to his belief that he is his own evil twin, but he is in reality a sweetie, and his schemes to cause trouble invariably end in everybody else's amusement.
LENA, Linda's landlord, parties harder than her tenants, a constant source of consternation for all concerned. Yet, she volunteers at a homeless shelter three nights a week.		MARCO, the building super, isn't very good at his job. He is wise beyond his years, however, and not only gives people good advice, but makes them think it was all their idea.

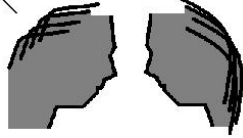
The quiet melancholy of describing characters in a comic without continuity.

Delicate NEGOTIATIONS

Tattoos? 	Six.	Piercings? 	Twelve.
How do you feel about Black Flag? 	I prefer Henry Rollins solo stuff.	This will never work out.	Why not?
I'm looking for a traditional girl. 			

Delicate **NEGOTIATIONS**

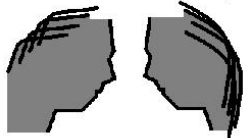
I know how important passion is for people, but passion fades. I think we're missing the more important aspects of relationships: compassion and companionship



It's those quiet moments of just being together, no thought for the future, no concern about the past, that are really important. Yet, it's just that intimacy that we all seem to take for grant --



So, are we gonna fuck, or what?



Delicate **NEGOTIATIONS**

Sure, he's cute, but what do we really know about him?



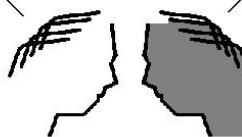
A mysterious stranger arrives in town

Love is...a bad western movie.

It's all happened so fast...



He...he's not coming



But, he never misses poker night!

Bad things start to happen

This man ain't big enough for the both of us!



The Showdown

SHE DUMPED HIM?



She said her work was done here and he hasn't seen her since.

The hero rides off into the sunset

Delicate **NEGOTIATIONS**

It's like... galaxies spinning in their endless rounds of the universe.



That's as may be...



Stars... planets... us, all moving in a vast cosmic dance of which we are sadly unaware.

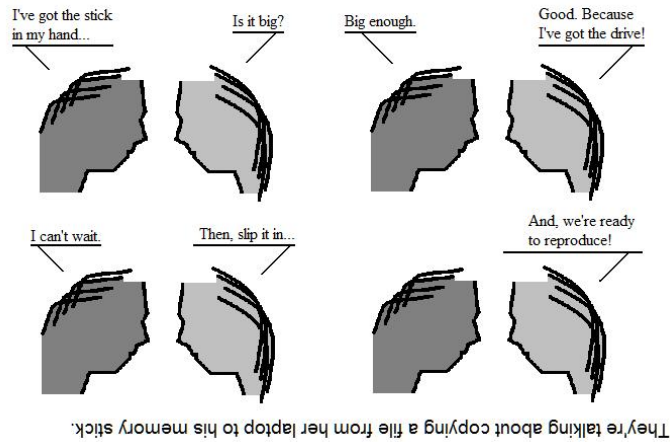


But if you ever drop used shaving cream in the toilet again, I'm leaving you.



Delicate NEGOTIATIONS

You have a dirty mind, proof #237:

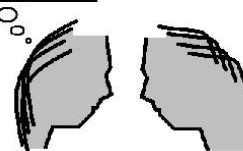
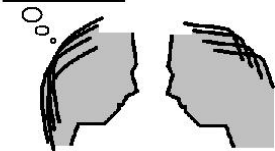


Delicate NEGOTIATIONS

We are all scientists.

We don't talk as much as we used to.

Could Ben be seeing somebody else?

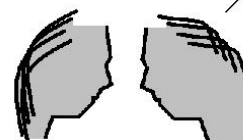
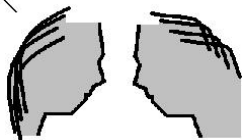


1. We observe phenomena.

2. We hypothesize.

Are you seeing somebody else?

No.



3. We test our hypotheses.

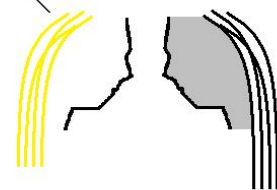
4. We are proven wrong.

I didn't say we were good at it.

Delicate NEGOTIATIONS

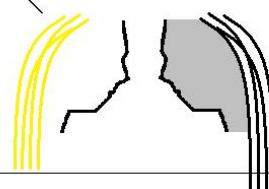
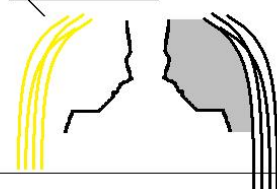
Rule Number One: He must be a homo sapien.

Rule Number Two: He must speak a recognizable human language.

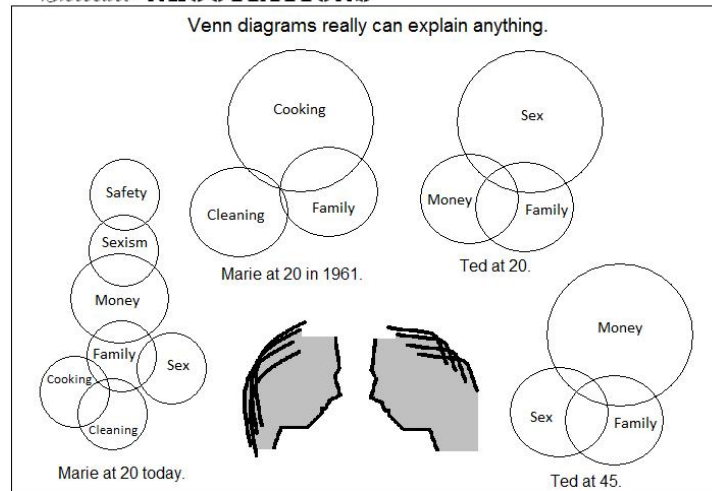


Rule Number Three: No peeing on the couch.

Am I asking too much?

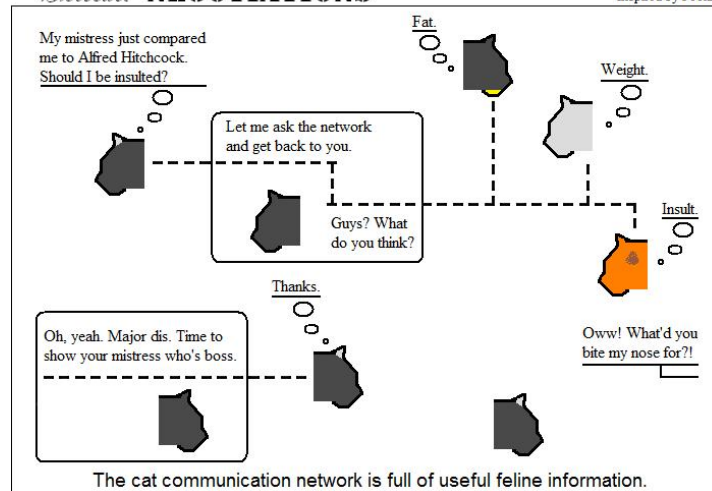


Delicate NEGOTIATIONS

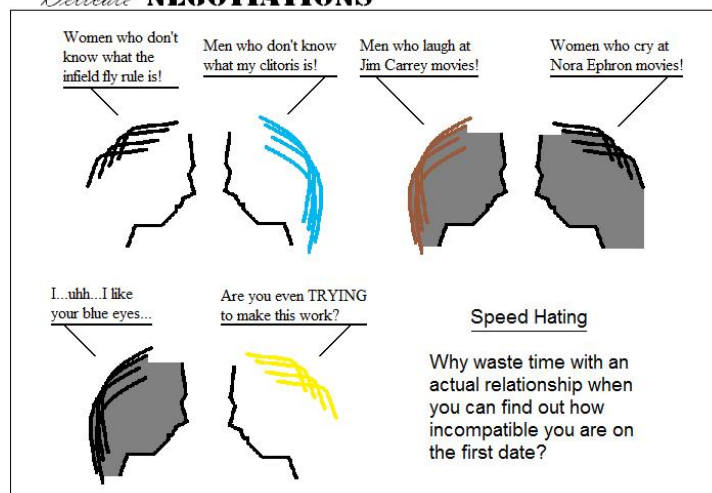


Delicate NEGOTIATIONS

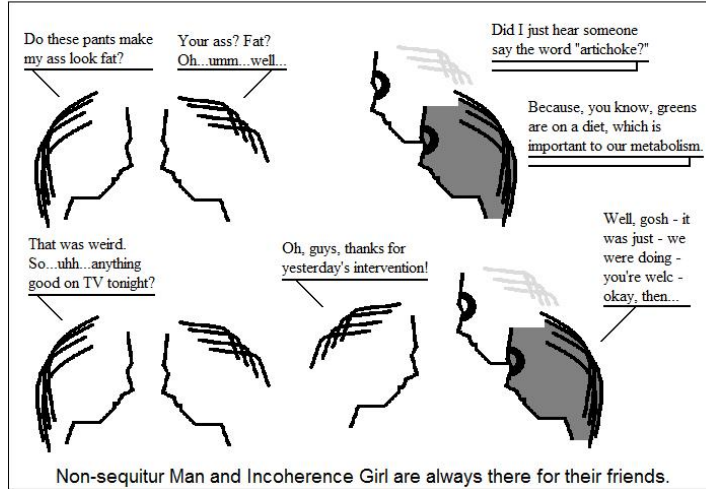
Inspired by Pookie.



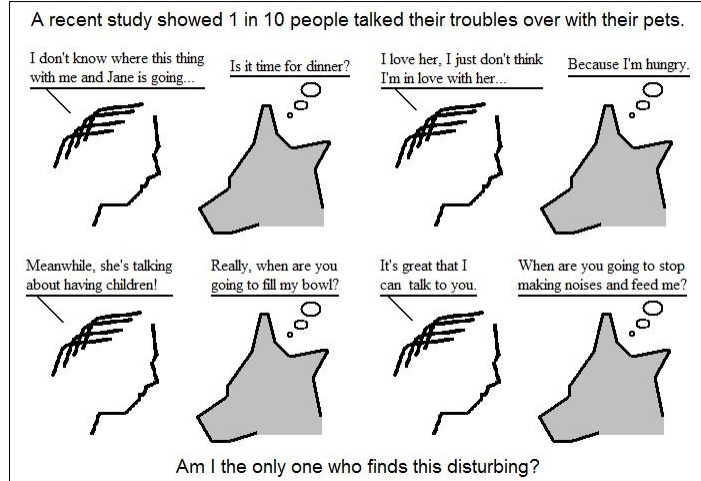
Delicate NEGOTIATIONS



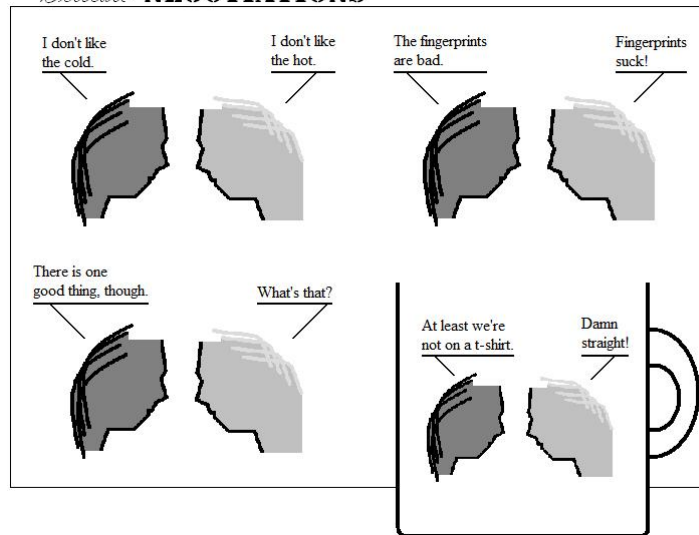
Delicate NEGOTIATIONS



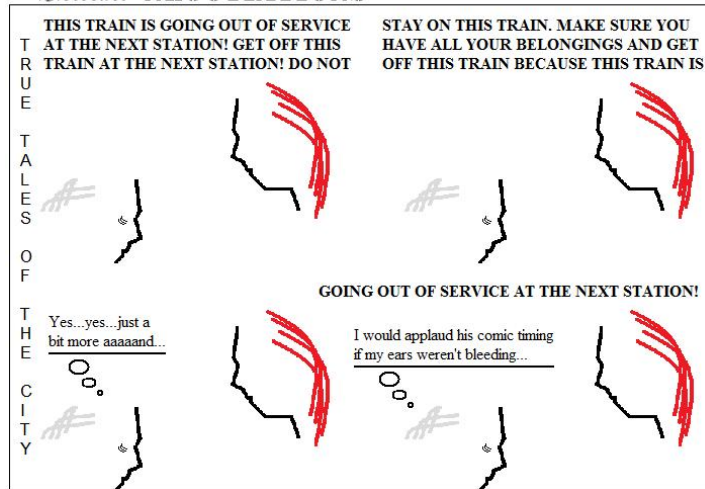
Delicate NEGOTIATIONS



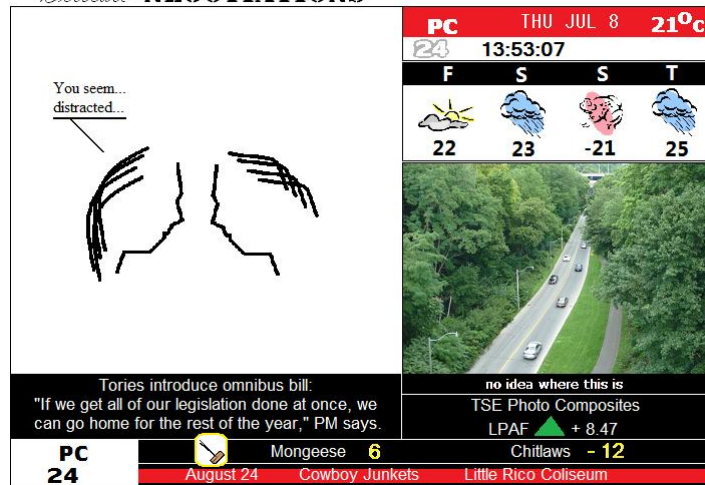
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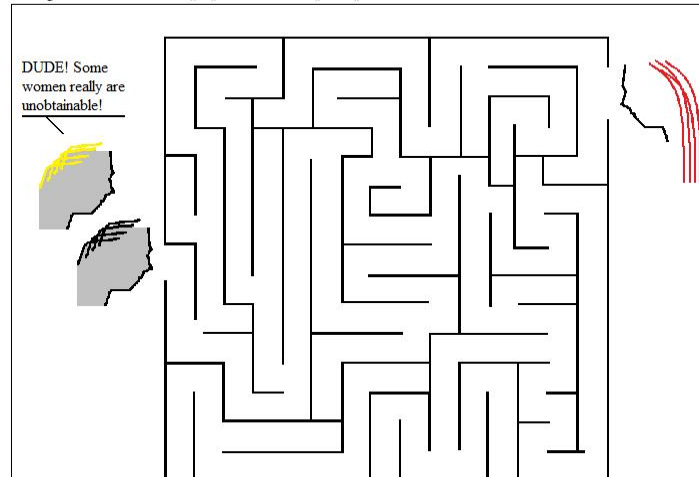
Delicate **NEGOTIATIONS**



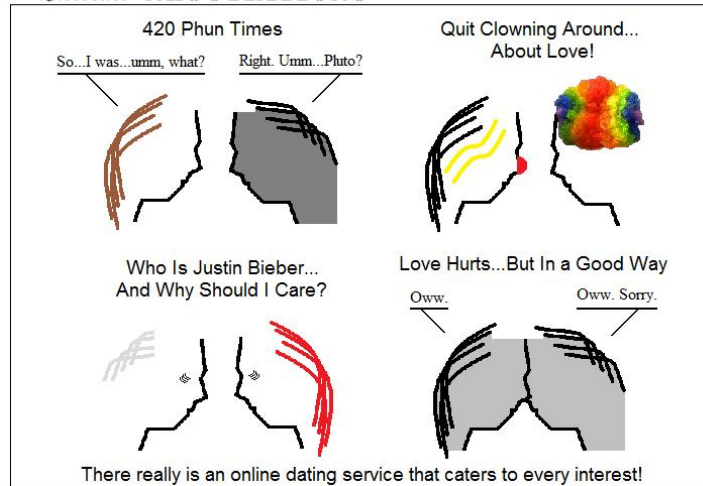
Delicate **NEGOTIATIONS**



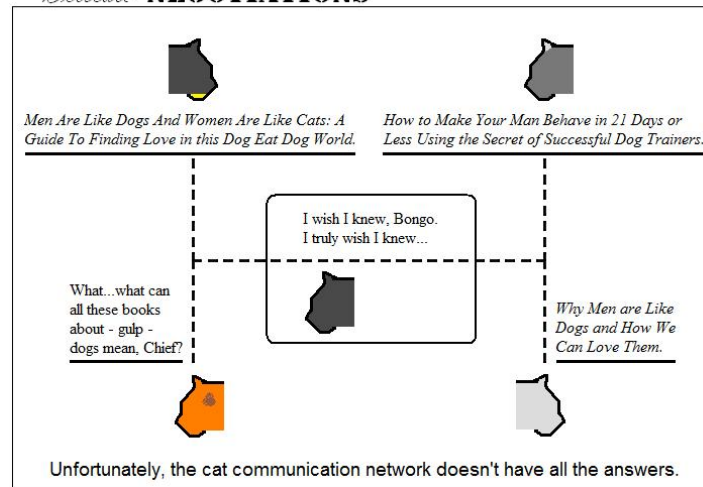
Delicate **NEGOTIATIONS**



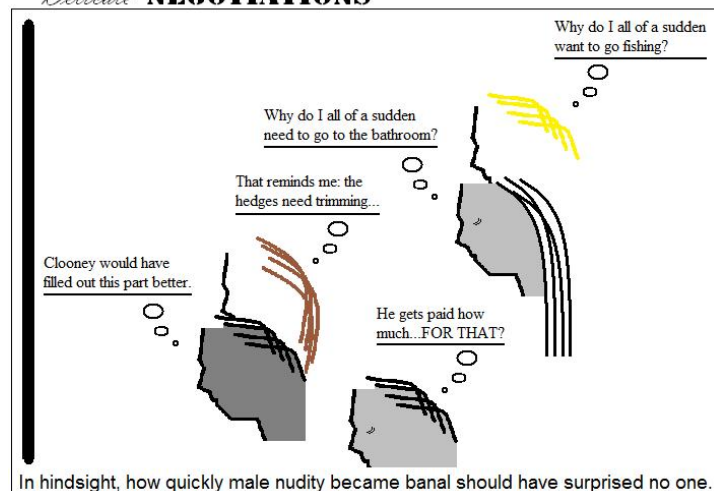
Delicate NEGOTIATIONS



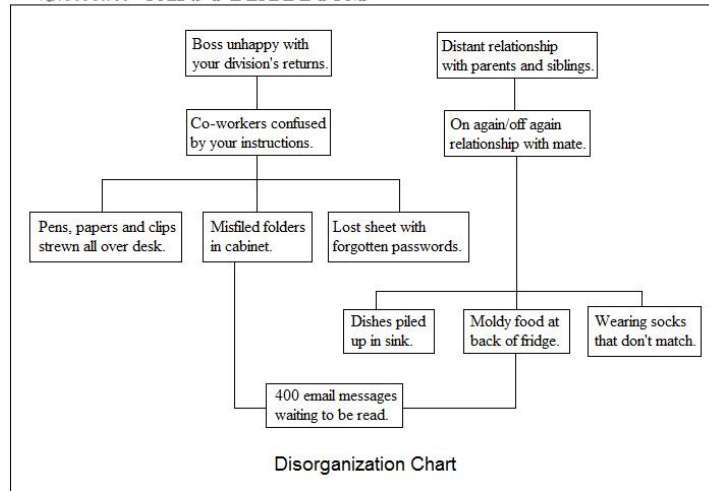
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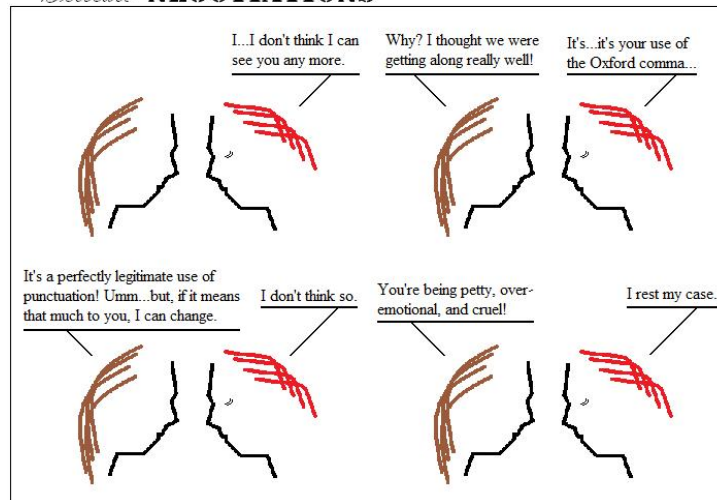
Delicate NEGOTIATIONS



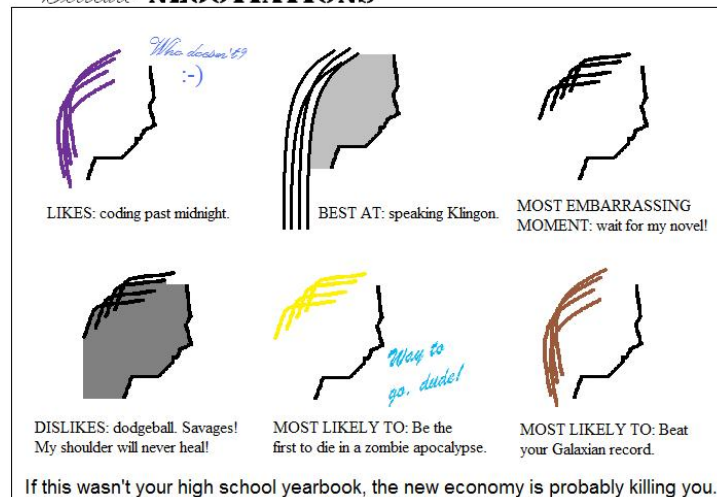
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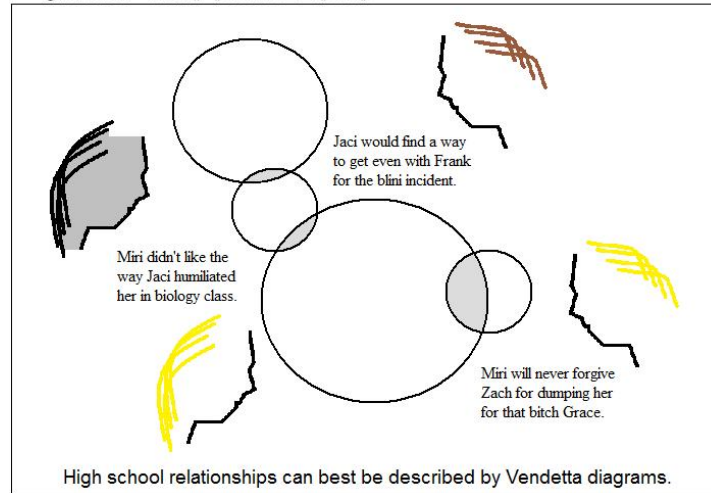
Delicate **NEGOTIATIONS**



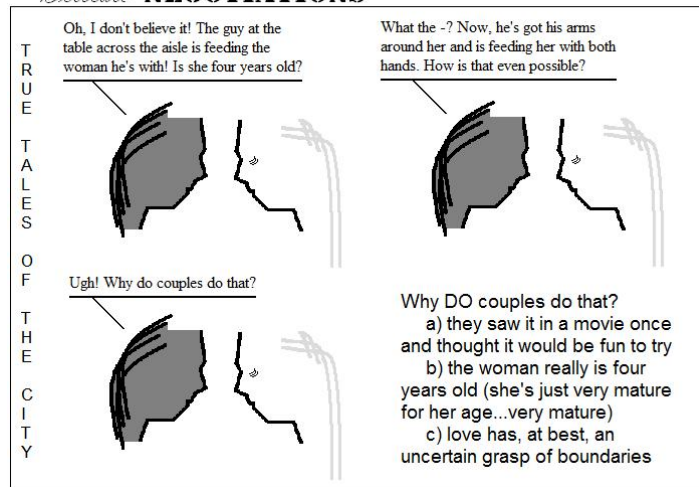
Delicate **NEGOTIATIONS**



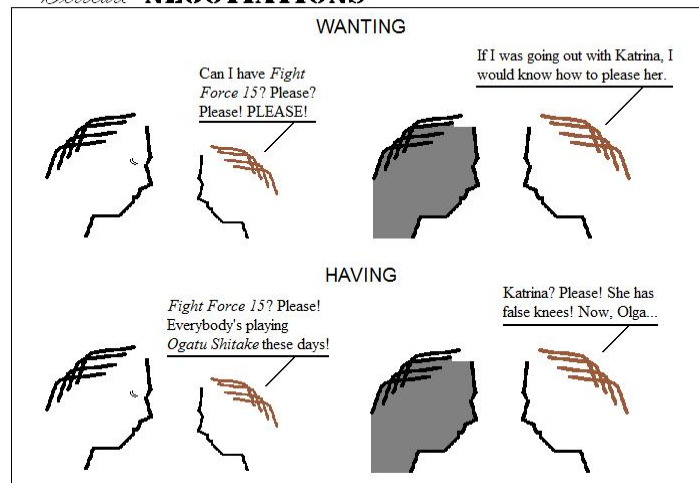
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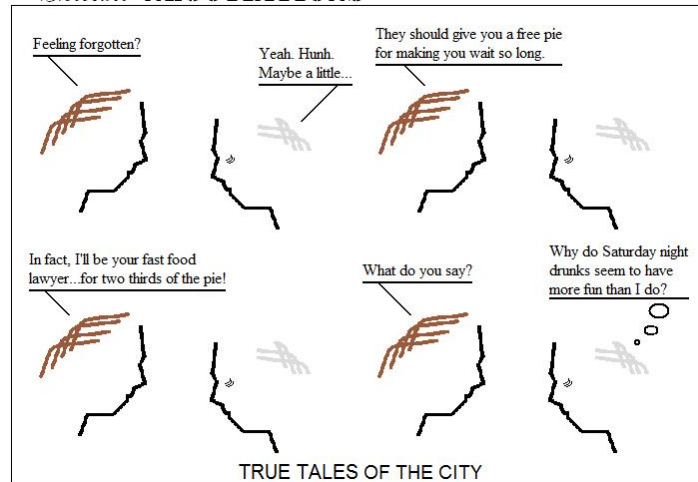
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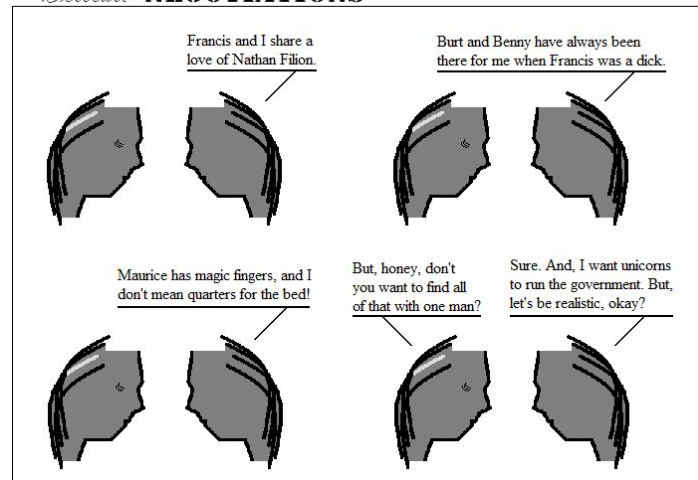
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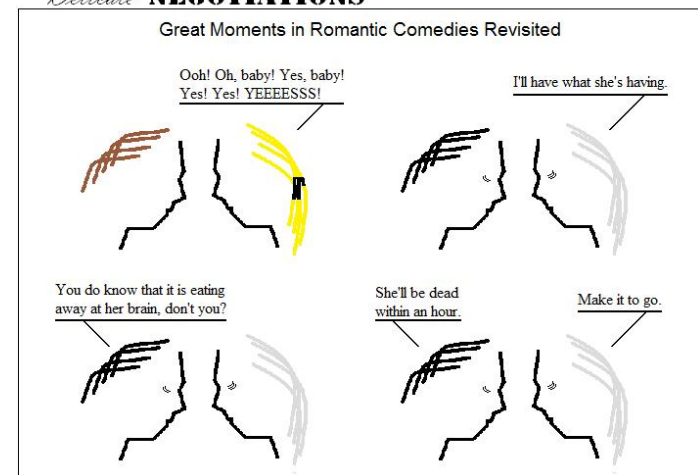
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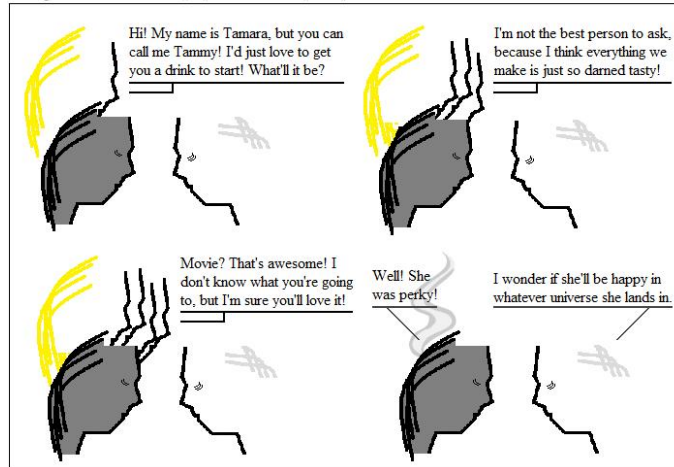
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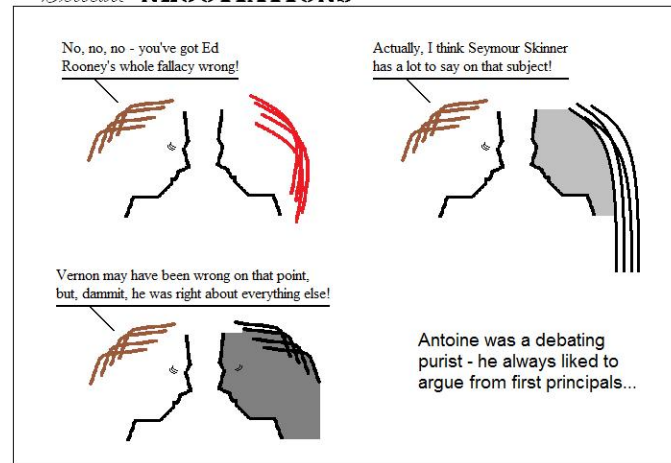
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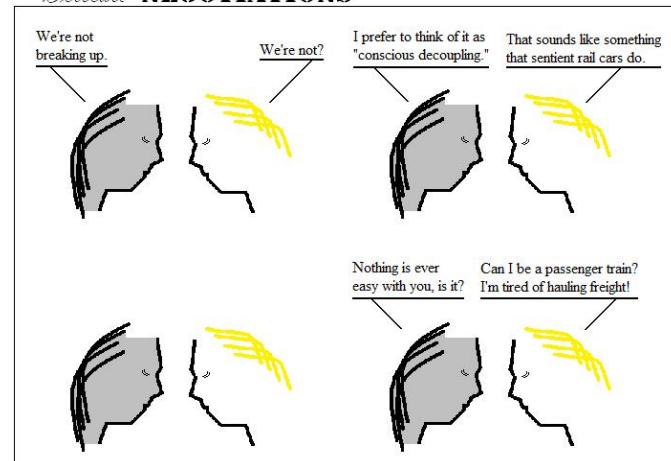
Delicate **NEGOTIATIONS**



Delicate **NEGOTIATIONS**



Delicate **NEGOTIATIONS**



Delicate **NEGOTIATIONS**

DEPRESSION

Can I come out yet?

Delicate **NEGOTIATIONS**

You ate the toast with the
image of Justin Bieber?

I was hungry.



And the chicken nugget with
the profile of Alfred Hitchcock?

I was hungry.



AND the potato latke with
Golda Meir's face on it?

I was hungry.



I'm beginning to
recognize a pattern...

I like to eat?



Delicate **NEGOTIATIONS**

You know, I, uh,
don't want kids, right?

But, I...I really
do want kids!



How people talk in movies.

I, umm, you know,
been feeling kind of -

What? What's that
supposed to - what?

You so do not!

Do

Y
a...aaaaargh!

How people talk in real life.

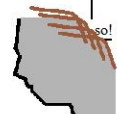
Yeah, yeah, yeah!

I know what
you're gonna say.

Oh, I so do!

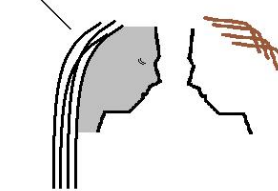
So!

You say
that now...



Delicate **NEGOTIATIONS**

I'd love you if only you were
[INSERT PREFERENCE HERE]!



PREFERENCE CHART

the defendant in a high profile murder trial
wrong once in a while
cross-eyed and painless
a crazed raccoon on roller skates
shorter
taller
richer
nicer to my pet alpaca
a snappier dresser
one of the inventors of Velcro
only happy when it rains
willing to try harder
not so intense
Jackie Robinson's love child
not obsessed by aardvarks
human
on Facebook
on LinkedIn
on Twitter
willing to spend less time on the Internet
a bigger fan of the music of Badfinger
a better kisser
George Clooney
sorry for the mess
kind-of-a-little,-you-know,-maybe-less-certain

Delicate **NEGOTIATIONS**

Great Moments in Romantic Comedies Revisited

You. Complete. Me. How?



You - what? Are you math illiterate
and I can count and add?



No, that's not - Do you have a hole in your
spleen that only my head can fill?



NO! Good. Because last time it took
weeks to get the smell out of my hair!

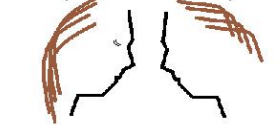


Delicate **NEGOTIATIONS**

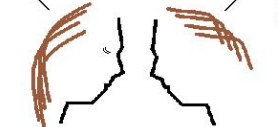
...you don't
own me! As a matter
of fact, I do.



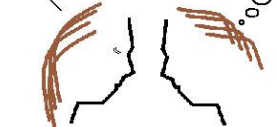
You - what? Here's the contract I was
given when I was born male.



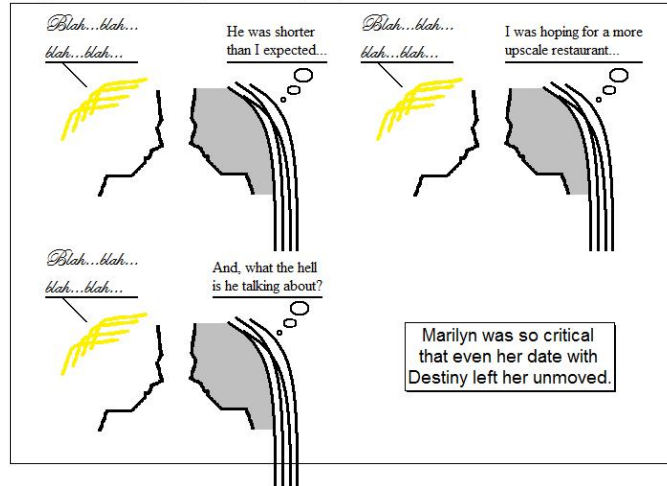
But...but... Check out paragraph 12,
but...but... section c, subsection iv.



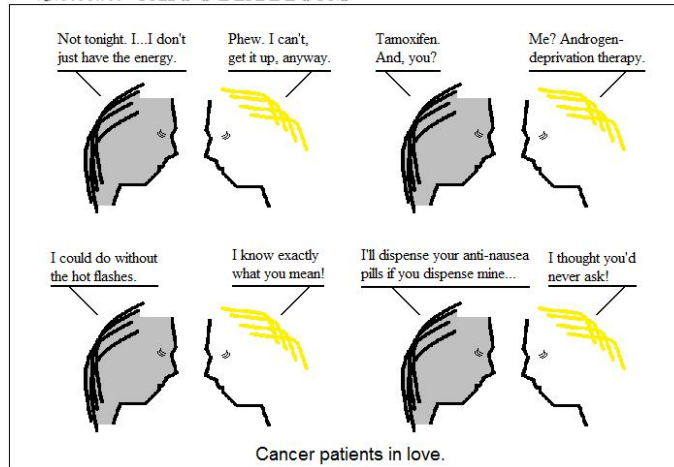
HAROLD! Did you hear
me? You don't own me! * SIGH *
If only...



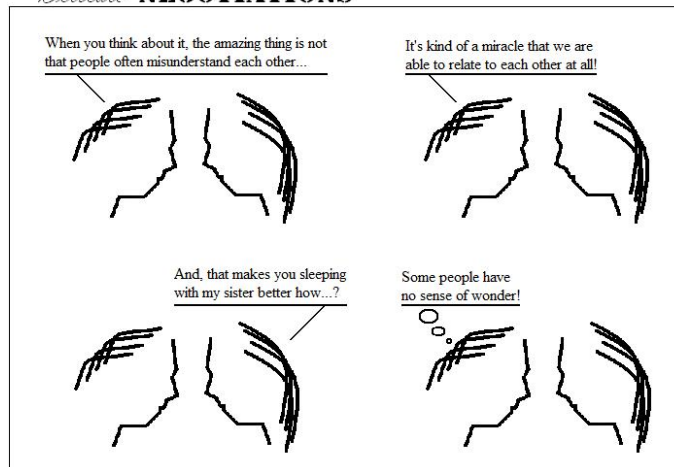
Delicate **NEGOTIATIONS**



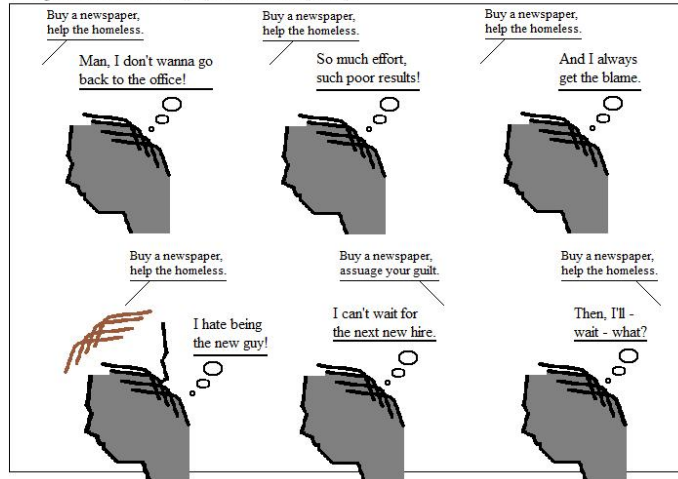
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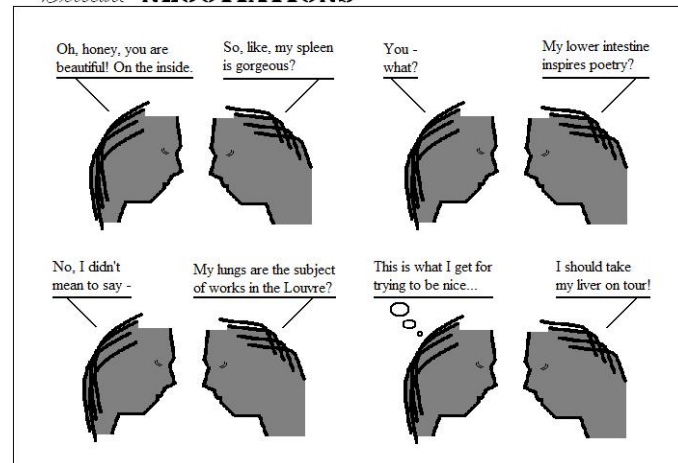
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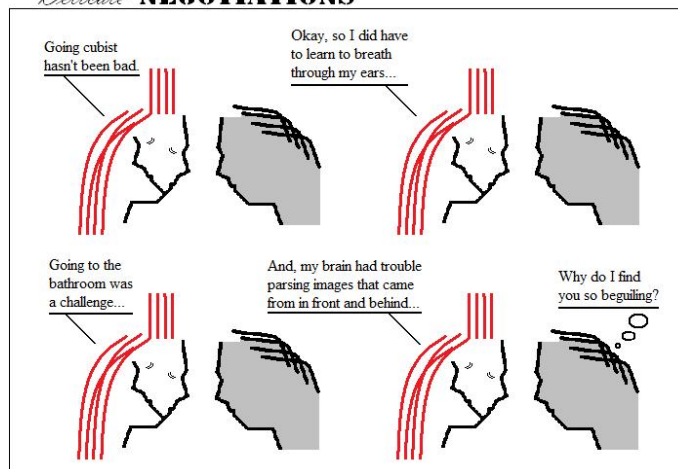
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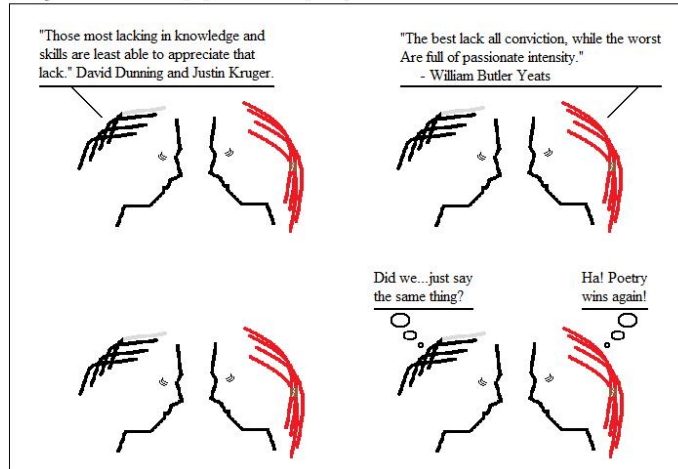
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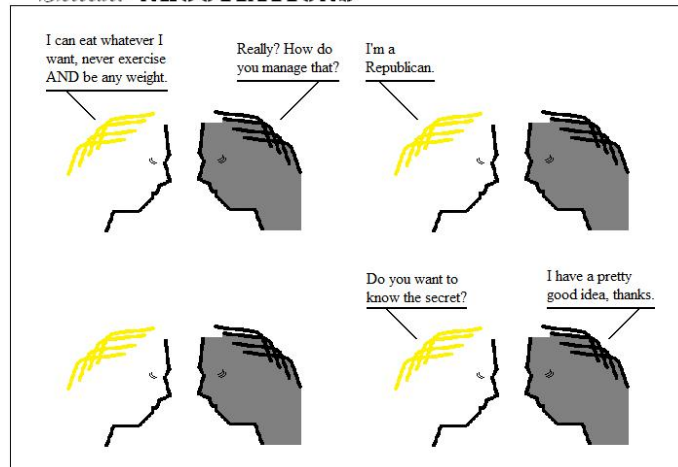
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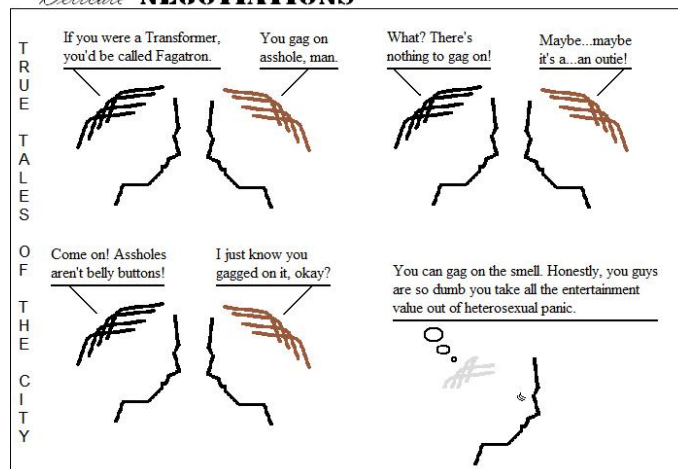
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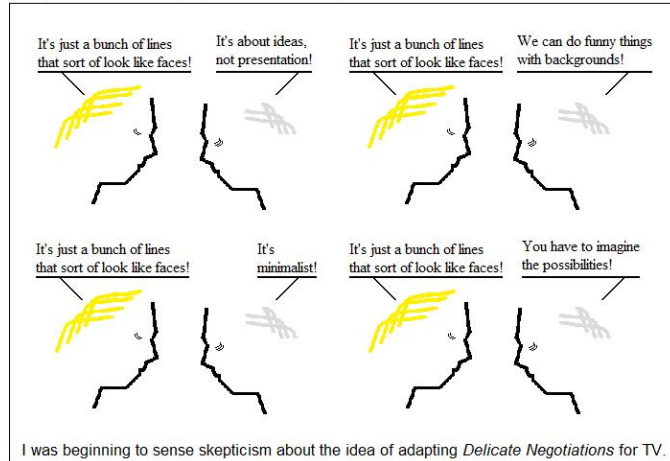
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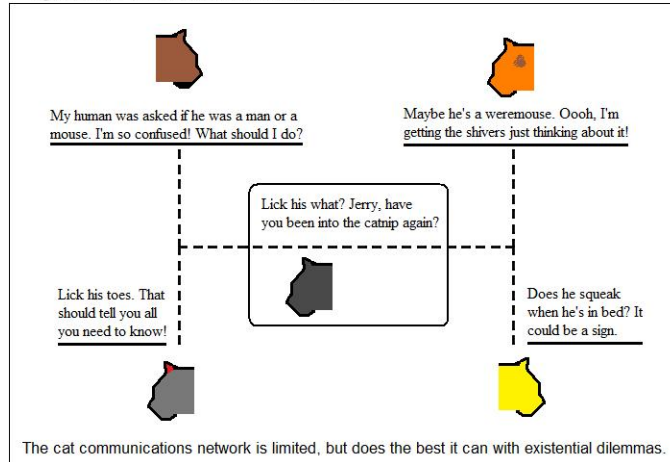
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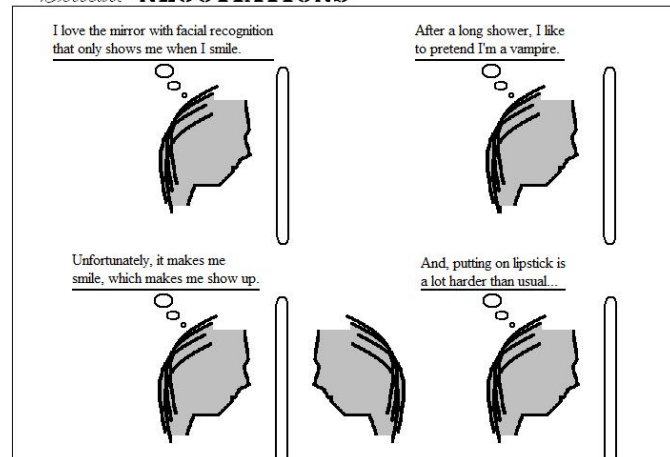
Delicate **NEGOTIATIONS**



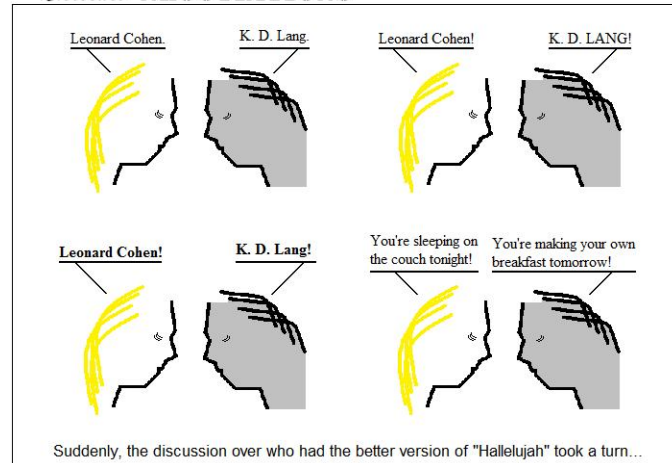
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Delicate **NEGOTIATIONS**

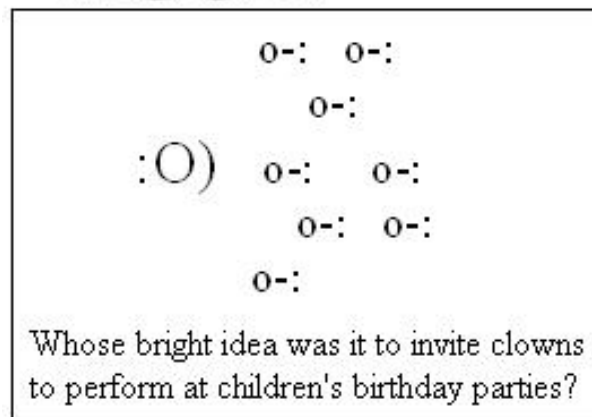


Delicate **NEGOTIATIONS**



Kiss My ASCII

***Kiss My
ASCII***



The next day, nobody would admit to having invited Albert "Life of the Party" Smithers...

A Nayman family legend has it that I decided to devote my life to writing comedy/humour when I was eight years old. Most boys that age wanted to be hockey players or astronauts (or, so I have been told) – why comedy? Through my thirties and forties, it was important to me to understand why I developed the way I did (after a couple of decades filled with unanswerable questions, I decided to stop wondering and

accept myself the way I was), so I gave this question considerable thought. Unfortunately, the best I could come up with was a cliché.

I grew up in an emotionally abusive household (as did many funny people). I realized early on in my life that laughing made me feel better; I figure my first impulse to write humour was to help ease myself through a tough childhood. I also suspect that I thought that if I could make my parents laugh, they might not fight so much, but that turned out not to be the case (intense therapy succeeded where my youthful ambitions failed, but the ambitions remained).

Honestly, if my early life had been any more of a cliché, I would have started this piece with: “It was a dark and stormy night...”

COMEDY HISTORY ASIDE: Years later, I was watching a terrific series called *The Green Room*. Comedian Eddie Izzard was telling the story of how he first met his idol, Richard Pryor. After a few minutes of small talk, they found that they had something in common: they both knew that they wanted to be stand-up comedians when they were four years old. You know how I thought I was precocious because I knew I wanted to be a humourist when I was eight? I was actually already half a lifetime behind the curve!

My original inspiration in my early teens was Art Buchwald. If he is remembered at all these days, it is for being the person who sued Paramount Pictures for stealing his original idea for what would become Eddie Murphy’s *Coming to America*. And, winning. This case exposed the arcane Hollywood bookkeeping that allowed studios to claim films that had grossed a billion dollars never made a profit, and introduced the world to the term “monkey points.” But I remember him as the preeminent newspaper satirist who, in his prime, wrote creative and biting (and very funny) political commentary.

Not a bad role model if that’s what you’re into.

Between 1984 and 1987, I wrote 300 articles for a satirical newspaper column (enough for three books). I called the project *Les Pages aux Folles*, playing off the name of the then popular film *La Cage aux Folles*. I thought the title translated as “cage of crazies,” which would have made my version “page of crazies.” This tickled me. When the English version was released as *The Bird Cage*, I thought, Bird Pages? Okay, *I can make this work*.

Three years into the project, I was no closer to becoming the preeminent newspaper political satirist of the 1980s than when I had started. Years later, I would realize that one wasn’t given a newspaper humour column because one was actually, you know, funny (although some naturally are and others grow into it); they usually went to people who had proven their service to the newspaper in other departments. In defense of my naivete: teenager.

I moved on to scripts and university, but the satirical bug never quite left me. Between 1987 and 2002, I kept coming back to the form, writing over 100 new articles (enough for

a fourth collection). Then, a number of pieces of my life came together to drive me to the internet.

At university, I studied emerging technologies and the arts. My Masters thesis (from the New School for Social Research) was on the challenges interactivity posed for fiction writers. My PhD dissertation was on fiction writers who posted their work to the World Wide Web. I know, I know. Today, that's a big **duh!** But, in 1999, when I wrote the bulk of the dissertation (I was awarded my PhD in 2000), it was still relatively – ahem – novel. ACADEMIC ASIDE: the problems I identified in 1999 have scaled up nicely, with few changes over the years. Was I prophetic? Naah – I was just paying attention.

When I returned to Toronto after three years living in Montreal (a residency requirement of McGill University, where I studied), I volunteered for a public interest web page developer called The Electronic Commons; it was championed by a woman named Liss Jeffrey. The project was run out of a building called Chelsea Mews, deep in the heart of the University of Toronto; that is where I met the woman who would become my Web Goddess, Gisela McKay.

As we got to know each other, Gisela pointed out something odd about my life that hadn't occurred to me: I wrote fiction, and I had studied people who post fiction on the internet, but I hadn't posted any of my own fiction on the internet. While I agreed that that was a bit strange, I demurred; although my Masters degree was done entirely online, I didn't know the first thing about creating or maintaining a web page. Gisela, who, among her many talents, is a professional web developer, offered to design a page and walk me through how to keep it going. To ensure that I couldn't refuse, she offered me free space on her server.

I couldn't refuse.

But, what would I write? Reviving *Les Pages aux Folles* as an online project was the most logical way to proceed. When I started it as a print project, I aimed for each article to be around 700 words (in the mistaken belief that this was standard newspaper column length; depending upon the newspaper and the column, it could actually be anywhere from 400 to 600 words); this relative shortness turned out to be a good length for the internet, where long stories require a lot of scrolling and can give some readers eye fatigue. You don't want to give readers eye fatigue.

So, I immediately started posting fiction to the web? Slow down, speed racer. I took the summer of 2002 to build a stockpile of articles. This wasn't meant to supplant weekly writing (since much of the writing would be topical, it would be best to post pieces soon after they were written, something the internet easily facilitates); it was meant as a safeguard against weeks when I was unable to write an update, whether through life circumstances or lack of inspiration. The wisdom of this choice is most vividly illustrated by my experience in 2005, when I had to have triple bypass heart surgery: I prepared four weeks of updates from my stockpile and posted them a couple of days before going under the knife. (As it happened, although I was advised to give recovery at least a month, I was

eager to get back to writing after about two and half weeks). My stockpile started with 40 articles; it has fluctuated between 10 and 50 (but mostly closer to 10) ever since.

By the first week in September, 2002, I felt comfortable enough with the cushion that I had produced that I took the plunge and went live with *Les Pages aux Folles*. Years of writing had given me the confidence that I could pull it off (although, like most people who start a project like this, I had no idea how much work I was letting myself in for). It had also given me four complete books that I could place in an archive on the site, which helped me avoid the problem that many web sites have when starting out: a paucity of content. There was enough writing on the web site from day one that anybody interested could stay a while, or be encouraged to keep coming back.

The first three books had been written on a manual typewriter; the fourth on an electric typewriter and a computer. Because of this, I had to type the articles into my computer before I could post them. This forced me to reconsider the material I had previously written, which proved salutary. I gather many writers are highly critical of their own work, but I found that I really enjoyed becoming reacquainted with mine. (Having had to read through the entire project to collect stories for these special anniversary issues, I feel more or less the same way.) The worst that I will say about my past writing is: "I wouldn't write exactly that, or in that way now."

PEDANTIC ASIDE: Is *Les Pages aux Folles* a blog? On one hand, it is a regular publication (every week, without fail; by the 20th anniversary, that will entail 1,040 consecutive weeks) written by a single person. On the other hand, blogs automate the process of posting to the internet (with tools such as WordPress), but I code my text by hand and upload it and any images I may create using tools Gisela taught me. Also, blogs tend to be a single page of text with newer posts higher up (occasionally breaking into an archive page or two), while each piece I post is on its own separate page. It may be a moot point, but I am reluctant to call *Les Pages aux Folles* a blog.

Except...

In trying to explain what an achievement 20 years of *Les Pages aux Folles* is, one of the facts I point out is that, depending upon the year they were started, between 80 and 90 per cent of blogs are abandoned within the first six months of their existence (I assume that the numbers for personal web pages are roughly the same, but I'm not aware of that research). Writers can be exhausted by the commitment (I often refer to my web site as "the insatiable maw;" no sooner do I finish one update than I have to immediately start working on the next). Writers can run out of inspiration. Other life priorities can leave writers without time. Lack of a readership can cause writers to quit out of despair (because I was emotionally driven by a need to write, the lack of readers was never a disincentive for me, although lately I do despair of ever finding an audience, if for no other reason than I know there must be a lot of people out there who would enjoy my writing...if they knew that it existed). Some people might lose their internet access. Twenty years on the internet is a looooooong time is what I'm saying.

By the 20th anniversary, I will have written 38 books of prose and produced nine books of cartoons for *Les Pages aux Folles*. The project will contain over 3,500 pieces of writing, and somewhere between two and a quarter and two and a half million words.

Nor has this been my only writing project. In 2010, I decided to write my first novel. Blame Terry Pratchett. I had never wanted to be a novelist; I was happy writing my short articles. But, in 2010 I learned of a contest for first humorous science fiction novels that was sponsored and would be partially judged by Pratchett. This seemed like a great opportunity for me to do what I do best: be goofy. The only problem with entering a novel writing contest, though, is that you have to write a novel to do it. So, I sat down to write what would become *Welcome to the Multiverse**.

I don't usually talk about this, but since we're all friends here, I feel I can state the truth: my first novel took two months to write. Starting from nothing but the desire to write a novel, the first week involved developing the ideas; the next six weeks involved the actual writing; the final week involved rewriting and polishing. This was a stupid short amount of time in which to write 80,000 words (the nine novels I have written since have taken anywhere from six months to a year to produce), but there were extenuating circumstances, your honour. For one thing, by that time I had been writing for 40 years, so unlike many first time novelists, I had already developed my voice and knew my way around a story. More importantly for this essay, many aspects of worldbuilding that contributed to the novel (for instance, the Transdimensional Authority and the Alternate Reality News Service) had been introduced on *Les Pages aux Folles*, so I wasn't exactly starting from nothing.

Perhaps most important: working on the web site taught me how to quickly turn ideas into prose. When you have a weekly deadline, you have to write fast. Under these conditions, there are two ways writers can go. Like a nuclear explosion, they can burn themselves out. Or, like a nuclear chain reaction, their creativity can feed off itself, allowing them to constantly write new material. I was fortunate that my writing took the latter path.

What's next? I have no idea. I know I have a need to write; if life forces me to go a couple of days with writing even a little, I start to get antsy. Humour is not something that a writer can turn on and off: it is a way of looking at and interacting with the world that becomes a constant in your life. At least, it has become that for me. It does help if it has an outlet, though, so I foresee writing as long as I have the words. (Both my father and my grandfather on my mother's side had Alzheimer's, so there is no guarantee that I will always have the words, or for how long.) Regardless of what happens in the future, I already have a creative legacy (including novels, short stories and unproduced screenplays – so many unproduced screenplays!) that I can be proud of.

I hope you enjoy 12 from 20.

* *Sorry for the Inconvenience*