

BALANCE

27 OCTOBER 2006

Message press one: ONE

Lindsay, its Ben, said in a dark solemn tone.

First of all, please don't call me at work, umm... I try to keep my private and professional life separate.

Sigh, sigh, sigh, Secondly, ah, I'm, I'm a little amazed that you're surprised that I don't wish to speak with you, you're a, a, my, ah, I've become a little angry, sigh, how tragic?

But anyhow, that being said, I'm not going to let anyone else's accusations, a, ah, affect my life.

And, umm, I'm working as hard as I can to figure out a way to get my stuff - sigh quotient, nearing completion.

Ah, when you're available, ah, I will have to be in touch with you tomorrow. Ah, I haven't found anybody as of yet.

Insert dollar: crank machine, to deluded, and continue, I have, I have no place to stay. And, ah, anyhow, not to burden you with my problems, I will, ah, I will, ah, try to be in touch with you tomorrow. And, in the meantime, you're welcome to leave messages on my umm... cell phone.

Taking it home with conviction, Ah, and, if you feel that you need to get rid of my stuff, and, uh, uh, put it into storage, and uh, I'll have no idea how that will work, but please keep me informed. Umm, thank you, bye - with a loud CLICK for effect.

That culminates the great roommate experiment of October 2006. I claim to be a reasonably intelligent person, a good judge of character, I think I missed the boat on this one, bought tickets from an unscrupulous scalper, and when I went to take my seat - it was already occupied.

FLASHBACK TO AUGUST

I was out for a few drinks when a friend, more like an acquaintance, Ben, joined our table. I've known Ben for three years and always had gotten along amicably with him. Doesn't take much, he laughed at my rapid-fire quips, and showered me with: *You crack me up.*

Then he'd butter the other side of my ego: *Your comedy is brilliant,* and then the beginning-of-the-end: *I need to find a place to stay - starting in October.*

Was an opportunity dropping onto my lap, a roommate?

A roommate could fund a vacation.

Go brain calculator: six months times - say, five bills = sunshine here I come.

Slow down big boy - you'd be letting someone into your inner sanctum.

Into my what, what are you implying?

Hey Ben, if you're in a jam at the end of September don't sweat it, you can always move into my spare room for a few months.

That felt good, a gesture of friendship and a chance to fatten my bankroll, win fucking win. And really, what's the downside; I've known him three years - he works fulltime at a funeral home, and to top it off when he needed a car to take his driver's test, I volunteered mine.

If anybody were to value my generosity, it certainly would be him.

Life cranks by. The end of September is upon us.

I hadn't seen Ben since the offer - when out of nowhere, appears, Ben.

Did you just drop from the sky? I didn't see you coming. Are you magic?

He simply laughed and drank.

Where are you going to stay in October?

Your place, I'll pay you five bills per month.

With those simple words, my independence and solitude were to be extinguished. Hell, company might even be fun.

You-is-a-fool-boy; you didn't want a roommate. Why are you doing this?

Past twenty-five... okay, I'll up it to thirty because of inflation, roommates, are ridiculous - a moronic idea, masturbation in every room when the whim strikes POOF - gone.

I don't masturbate. I gave it up long ago.

You can't fool me...

Who are you?

Get out of my story.

I rarely touch myself that way anymore. It'd take some special winds to put me in the mood - my privates are strictly for the enjoyment of others, now; therefore, roommate-it-up - tropics, here I cum; I mean, come - all over your pristine white sand beaches.

Fortunately, it'll blend in.

FRIDAY 30 SEPTEMBER 2006

I'll be by at one with my stuff. A friend is helping with his truck.

I think he just ordered me to be home to let him move in a day early - he'd better laugh extra hard at something I say. I don't like orders. I like some orders. Touch me there - NOW, I'll bake you some cookies if you do. I like cookies: so touch, touch, touchity, touch.

You got the rent money?

The thing is - can I get it to you next week?

SATURDAY 1 OCTOBER 2006

Saturday morning is when I'm at my creative best. The booze from the previous night, usually in the neighbourhood of four pints, liquefies me, as I've entered the era of lightweight drinker, and a place where the morning feeling like shit, thrusts me in front of my computer screen in an attempt to pretend I feel fine. I don't. Typing soothes me. And, my brain needs to fire quickly if it wants to avoid queasiness.

Type, type, type, type

Shit, I have a roommate; I prefer; flatmate. He's been sitting in front of the computer all night, and now, into the morning. Fuck, I need to type, to create.

Kick him off.

No. It's his first morning - don't want to start-off with rules.

You're spineless.

Oh no, here comes queasy.

Four hours later, he finally quit his incestuous online chatting.

Ben, I'm trying to finish my memoir. Saturday morning is when I'm at my best... that's okay - I should've said something.

I'll need to get back on later; I have lots of...to get done, Ben stated.

You're a spineless sap. You're a spineless...

Five bills... I can let a little slide for five bills. And besides, I don't live alone, anymore.

FRIDAY/SATURDAY 6/7 OCTOBER 2006

I work nights during the week.

Ben works days.

Could this be the perfect flatmate scenario?

We'd never see each other. I can let a little slide, and hell, if we survive the weekends...

Home for nine am - Ben's sleeping.

I normally turn on the tube for background noise, company in a sense, but since he's sleeping in the sunroom, his bedroom, which is next to the TV, his sleeping can be my company.

You're a justification freak.

That wind feels fine, kind of stirring up... go figure as soon as the special winds arrive, flatmate.

Type, type, type, type... memoir material is flowing freely...

Lunchtime - two pm - turn - Ben is still sleeping.

First, up: the gym, followed by a bite to eat and a stroll.

I returned home at five pm - Ben was still sleeping. Out for drinks - return home, four pint, maybe six pint queasy - Ben is still sleeping.

Off to bed by eleven. I wondered if I should wake Ben to tell him it is bedtime.

I dreamt of typing in the morning, something that made my PJ's tight, and "*That cold north wind they call (French word starting with La...), is swirling round about my knees. Trees are crying leaves into the river. I'm huddled in this French café. I never thought I'd see the day but winters here and summers, really over (where the hell, did fall go?). Even the birds have packed up and gone. They've flown south with their song. And my love, she too has, gone - she had to fly...*"

Oh, pants, becoming really, tight...

Stevie, it's Saturday morning, he's been down for at least twenty-four hours. It's freaking me out. Who sleeps that long? Ben. I guess the answer is... Ben. He had a problem with Crystal - you wouldn't sleep that long on Crystal. My place is looking cleaner than ever. I know meth-heads clean. And hallucinate. What to do, he can't sleep like this - not at my place. Fuck. I've found some powder on the counter.

Do you think its Crystal? Bring it over. I'll be able to tell you. If it is, you've got to boot him out.

I don't know, Steve, could be salt, it could be a spice; I've watched CSI, I know, I'll taste it; doesn't taste good. Fuck, am I hooked on Crystal now?

Eleven in the morning I inquired, *Ben, what the fucks going on? You've been out for at least twenty-six hours. That's not normal.*

Ben rolled over, I work hard. My body shuts down. I'll get up in a few hours. I'll get the rent money for you today.

Can you evict someone for sleeping?

Five bills greeted me on the kitchen counter.

I can let sleep slide - it's freaky - but sliding, is an option.

DURING THE WEEK

Craig, my fucking roommate slept for at least twenty-six consecutive hours on the weekend. It freaked me out. Do you think it is a sign of drug usage? Can I kick him out for that?

You should consider yourself lucky. At least he doesn't make a lot of noise. I had a roommate in college - he'd smoke pot - then he'd sleep - and then he'd repeat the cycle. You've likely got nothing to worry about.

I didn't want to buy Craig's spin on the situation but five bills per month. Ben's an excellent sleeper. It's just something he's good at.

Hey, what's this switch up here for - by my brain, on/off, flip-off!

FRIDAY - MONDAY 13 - 17 OCTOBER 2006

A wee bit past nine am I rolled into my home; to my surprise - Ben was having a nap.

I may have forgotten to mention Ben used to have a problem with Crystal - he's told me he kicked it. I believed him - he's held the same job for the last three years, and he's

a somewhat intelligent individual.

Study, work, and with effort, he pulled himself off the party circuit. He's a survivor. He was upfront about his past – I respect that.

What's this on my computer desk?

A rolled up twenty dollar bill.

Shit, his Sky Train transfers are rolled up, too.

Maybe he just fidgets. I fidget. That's it; he fidgets.

O' crap, a baggy with white powder in it, fuck, I must deal with this – he can't be using and living here.

Ben, you don't have to get up – what's with the baggy? You're not on Crystal again, are you?

He barely rolled over.

No. No. A friend came over and he had a little bit of Coke. Not Crystal.

He rolled back to his original position.

Can't turn the switch to a more off position – I know, I'll remove the fuse.

That's better, nice and dark.

At least he's not doing Crystal – it's reasonable, a once addicted man can switch to Co-fucking-caine and be okay.

I've entered the land of dumb-smart guy.

Ben, I think it's for the best no drugs come into this house. That's my one rule. I don't care if you do them elsewhere – just not here, okay... good.

Nap time for me. Rise at noon – Ben is sleeping.

Run some errands, grab lunch, almost achieve world peace, return home at four – (fill in the blank yourself).

Head out for drinks at six, return at eleven – he's snoring. Disturbing; yet, somehow amazing.

Up at eight – Ben's not.

Type, type, type... lunch, walk, go to the gym, return home at four – can I read you a bedtime story?

Type, type, type... justify a little – I'm getting to use the computer without interruption.

Time for a night on the town – do I wake him and see if he'd like to come, nah, he's dreaming WAR & PEACE – he needs more time.

Return from my night out at seven am, Ben's just gotten up, he's off to work; ballpark sleep time: forty-six hours. That's fucking normal.

Spin it brain! It's really, dark, in here.

Go for the switch, ouch, quit flicking my ear.

The day passes, not before my mind was consumed by naughty sexual thoughts.

No touching – remember it's only for others now. I hope some others – happen to saunter into my place. That feels nice; ah, that's the spot!

Relaxed, I head out to grab a bite, returning home by seven, Ben must've had a rough day with the dead people, he's already in bed.

Do I ever go to bed at seven?

No.

He's not me, he is paying rent and as Craig says, he's quiet. No noise complaints are heading my way. He'll probably get up in a bit.

Not a peep out of him, ten is upon me, time to crash, it has been a very relaxing day, with the exception of death in my spare room.

Up at five-thirty for work – I'll let this slide, it is normal to be in bed at five-thirty.

Drive, drive, drive... rush home to rest at nine.

Ben, don't you work today? Didn't your alarm go off?

I phoned in sick.

Dead, he should've phoned in dead.

This really isn't normal. Einstein, great logic – let's rip out the whole fuse box.

Ouch, quit flicking my eye. Stop it.

Noon – sleeping, return home at four – sleeping, leave for my night of work at five-thirty – sleeping.

I've now become extremely animated.

Craig, forty-six hours, followed by eight hours work, now he's on... arms flailing ...hour twenty-four.

Wow. He must be really, tired. I had a roommate once...

I've got a corpse.

TUESDAY

On Tuesday, Ben returned to work, he got up at seven; sleep total: Sunday at seven pm – downtime, until Tuesday at seven am, let's see – a thirty-six hour bout of dreaming.

He seems to-really-like dreaming.

OUT OF SITE

I'm at work – he's at home.

I'm home – he's at work.

Cool – he's cleaning places I've avoided for years. That's worth his price of admission.

That is a nice justification!

You like that one; I have more.

Why's one of my data discs on the chair beside Ben's bed?

THE EVOLUTION OF A CRYSTAL METH ADDICT

Crystal Meth Addiction - uncanny clarity - sharp-firing synapses - incredible wit - increased sexual drive - a spotlessly clean home - the loss of that incredibly clean home - isolation, and then:

Why is the wind talking about me?

Why is that tree looking at me funny?

Who came up with such a ridiculous idea?

Me. I think it's best if I ignore my reasoning - Ben's the exception to the rule. Work just tires him out.

Craig...

You're lucky.

Our paths crossed - Wednesday at five pm.

Hey, Lindsay, this is rare, never thought we'd see each other during the week.

Yeah, about seeing each other, I see you horizontal all weekend, it's freaking me out. Remember the eagle camera on the Gulf Island where the man installed the camera to try to capture the hatching of eggs; it was getting millions of hits per day.

I needed to take a deep breath, instead, I continued, *Yeah, I'm thinking of installing one in your room: DEAD GUY CAMERA. How many hits do you think it would get? See if death rises. I'm figuring, lots.*

He laughed a bit.

Ben, you're freaking out the cat. She came to me yesterday and said: What's with the dead guy? He sleeps more than I do. I can't sleep anymore because he's making me me-fucking-ow nervous. You know how hard it is to sleep with both eyes open.

Seriously, that's what she said.

Breathe in and release.

What the fuck is going on with you? You slept for over eighty hours in less than four of days. I won't let you do that here. You can't do that anymore. What's going on?

I suffer from bouts of depression.

Can I throw a guy out for depression?

He probably should've told me before I let him move in. Oh well - five bills.

Removing the fuse box doesn't seem to be enough - grab a sledgehammer it's time to work on the walls.

What are you implying?

Ben continues: *Did you see the IOU? I borrowed eight dollars from you - left a note on your dresser.*

FRIDAY - SATURDAY 20/21 OCTOBER 2006

Self-imposed memoir deadline weekend. Nothing will throw me off.

Home from work at nine am Friday - Ben's not sleeping; he's out for the day running errands and living. He's not dead, good, probably.

Sleep, eat and type, type, type...it's flowing freely...

Ben paid back the eight dollars.

Ben has company - they head out for the night, a little young for him?

Don't be judgmental.

Yeah, judging is not the right thing to do here. He's up – that's a good start – rejoice – celebrate.

Out for drinks, return by eleven – Ben's still out.

Smile.

Someone's sleeping on my couch – it's my home, I'm still getting up and working on my memoir, this is completion day – a day of great significance – a day of rebirth.

Ben's put up curtains – making his room private.

Type, type, type... eleven is upon me.

A second stranger is in my living room, a little young... type, type, type...

Ben is about to leave.

I do a little reading for the audience of nameless faces.

My book reads well; a quick glance over my shoulder – a third stranger.

Shit, you startled me. Where did you come from?

He answered silently, as I can't remember hearing a voice.

Solitude is upon me. Type, type, type... gym, lunch, return, type...

Ben is working on school projects, except for a little young, he seems to be normal and more importantly, alive.

We chat, normal.

I do a reading; he listens.

He continues to work, no sign of collapse.

7:33 PM

People matter. It is as simple as that.

The accomplishment can never be subtracted from my life plot.

Smile.

Pat myself on my back.

The words above are the last penned words of my memoir: RUSSIANS, CLOWNS & DRAG QUEENS.

Significance to be determined, fuck that, you can't take it away from me – it's my life, and it is: relevant. Whether the memoir turns into a rousing success or not – it's time to take a humble bow.

Celebratory pints are in order.

Pints hoisted, I head out for the night – head held high.

As for Ben – he was still up when I returned and left again at eleven, roommate – not so bad.

Still prefer my place to myself – but if he's alive and studying, I can let it slide, five bills.

WE ALL FALL DOWN

NINE AM

Ewe...someone's been sleeping in my bed, oh God...someone's been...

Wayne, I have a problem.

Nervous energy caused my pulse to spike. Nauseous spiralled into my stomach and began to stir, stir, stir...

"On my floor, in my room – sex paraphernalia. Fuck, next to it, a lid... I have a secret stash of cash, coins and bills. You'd have to have dismantled the room to find it; the lid, the fucking lid was from the cash. How much... ..I pulled it out, the bills were no longer covered by the change and it seemed lighter. One-hundred-sixty in bills, and about seventy in change - mostly loonies and toonies"

I felt like puking.

I have no choice – he's got to go. He's evicted. It makes me feel sick. He had sex in my room and stole from me. Fuck.

Get your locks changed. Find out if you can today. If you can't... don't let him know you're on to him. You must go to work tonight – if you don't, you'll be out another couple hundred dollars. Get the rest of your cash out of there. Change the locks then let him know. Not before.

I threw up in my mouth.

Locks changed – I did it by myself – pat on my back. Not entirely by myself, my neighbour, helped.

Did you want me to hold the lock in place for you? You're roommate stole. He seems to have lots of strange people over.

I threw up some more.

Leave message after the tone: Ben, bad news: money is missing and there is sex stuff on my floor. You don't live here anymore. I don't care what the circumstances are. The locks have been changed and your key card is cancelled. I'm sorry it has come to this. Get a hold of me with what you want me to do with your stuff. Sorry. You're not allowed into the building, anymore.

What's this on Ben's dresser; a jar of change, seventy dollars. That's odd - he was broke until payday, Friday, now he's change rich.

I need a voice on the other end of the phone.

Hey, Lindsay, what's up?

Ben, you don't live here anymore.



What? What happened?

Money's missing. Two-hundred-thirty dollars, one-hundred-sixty in bills, and, you had sex in

my room. There was crap, remnants on the floor. You can't live here anymore.

A pause for effect, followed by pause and by more pause, finally gasping, Oh god. I don't have one-hundred-sixty... I had someone over... I was grabbing a towel out of your room... the stuff must've fallen...

...out of your ass, Ben? The stuff fell from your ass. Don't lie. The change I'm missing is in your room.

You know how I'm saving change?

No... I don't. You were broke on Thursday and now you have... what did you do - buy twenty-three cokes with five-dollar bills? I feel sick.

I do, too. My guest must've...

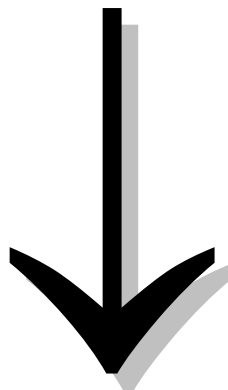
You didn't hear the seventy dollars in change being stolen - and besides, it was hidden extremely well and everything but the lid was fucking returned.

Take the change. You can have it. I stepped out for a minute. I'll make a call. Someone's going to be hearing from me today. You'll get everything back.

The locks have been changed. You're card is cancelled. If you step foot in the building the police will be called. You don't live here anymore.

I'll move out in a week.

You don't live here, anymore.



BALANCE

FRIDAY 27 OCTOBER 2006

Hello. Did Ben used to live here?

Yes. Come in. My name is Don.

Thanks. I had to change my locks and evict him. He stole. Why did he leave here - did he steal?

I came home one day and looked in his eyes - I told him he had to be out the next day. Something was fucked in the way he looked. I couldn't have that here.

More insight was shared in detail.

Thanks for your time. I'm sorry I bothered you. I think he's spiralling down out of control and he's heading for the bottom soon. He left me a strange message about picking up his stuff... normally the type of message he left, would have sent me to a place of guilt. You know... I feel bad for someone being homeless. I stood still waiting for guilt's arrival - nothing.

Don was eagerly listening as we walked to my car.

Some people may say it was my fault for leaving the cash around. I'm glad I did. If it would've only been a twenty - I may have let it slide or not have been sure about things. Don, he's crashing, burning bridges. He only has the clothes on his back. He's in trouble. He could even kill himself. You know what; I wouldn't lose much sleep if he did. Callous?

I closed my door, smiled, and rolled-down the window. Maybe a bit - but the way I see it, somebody has to crash for someone else to rise. We need people to crash and burn. If they don't, others can't rise. I believe it all balances out. One goes down - one goes up. I need Ben to crash so I can...

That's an interesting way of looking at things, Don said as I pulled away from the curb.

NOTE: I completed writing this part of the story on November 11---nineteen days have passed since Ben's eviction. He was evicted with only the clothes on his back. He still hasn't picked up his stuff.