

Rocky Arredondo & My Mom present...

# THE COBRA'S NOSE

Vol. 21

My Name is "Spinach"

24 August 2000

## The Cobra's Notes...

I'm sitting at my desk working on *The Cobra's Nose*. That is to say, I've been playing a lot of computer solitaire. I've discovered "Las Vegas Style," which keeps track of your winnings (or more aptly losings) from game to game. This gives me a sense of purpose.

And because it isn't 100% absorbing, it gives my mind a chance to wander and trip over a conversation in which Mr Enigma was bragging to Mr. Flintstone about the influence he wields over *The Nose* (which I admit is too great to be wholesome).

"Because of me," he said, "it is only six pages long."

"It's always been six pages," I interjected.

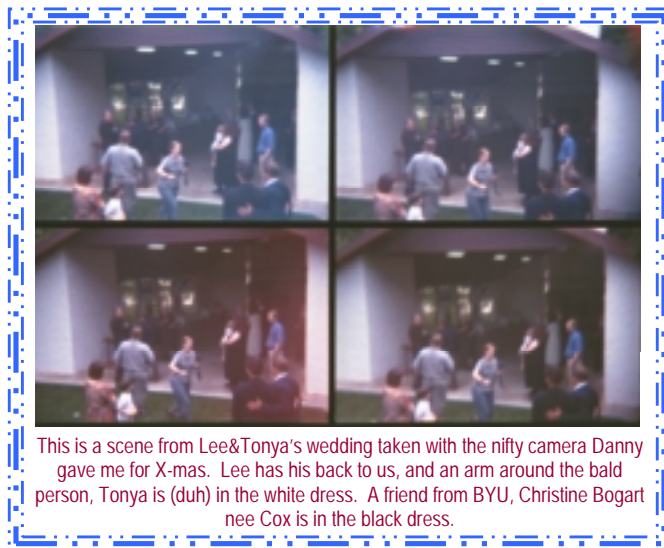
"It should be four."

This may not be the best example of the difficulties of communication between genders, though it is a decent one of Mr Enigma being difficult. Still, it seems as good a place as any to begin a discussion on the former topic.

I write this in August, betwixt weddings. The first was between Lee Follett and his lovely bride Tonya, a union of the most Celtic looking families I've ever seen. The wedding party looked more Scottish than the casts of *Braveheart* and *Local Hero* combined, and was very simple and small—as if it didn't want to put anybody through too much trouble. But you should have seen the bacchanal which followed at The Golden Corral, hoo boy. The one which impends between my Aunt Karolyn and her lovely groom Ben promises to be small and simple as well, even though Mom keeps telling her sister, "How many more times do you expect to do this in your life? Make it an occasion!" Poor Mom, fewer and fewer people obey her.

Anyway, what I'm trying to get at is while I've seen the mechanics of weddings close up, I still don't understand how they manage to happen. I know more about the etymology of "hooking up" than the process, and if it weren't for *The New York Times* Sunday magazine I wouldn't even know that much. Now I'm not cloistered or anything; I talk to men. I listen to them gripe about women and am willing to sympathize with their aggravations with them—us—whatever. I talk to women and definitely understand their litany of complaint re men. Mr Enigma claims bitter antagonism between the sexes is inevitable and takes hold when a person gets to be in his or her thirties. (Then again, he also predicts that in a few years I will be pursuing three-ways, which strikes me as ambitious.) So far I am antipathetic to specific males, like my odious co-worker Pus, but haven't reached a point where I am opposed to them generally. Is that point coming? I don't know.

There is a theory among linguists that states you cannot fully understand a culture unless you understand its language. I believe that theory, and here's why: There is a language, or at least a dialect, between men and



women it eludes me. I recognize most of the words, but there is an additional system of signs and innuendos that I have trouble processing. When I spy on the cute blond in the Break Room interacting with, say, Pus, I can't help but think, Why is she doing that with her hair? Wasn't her voice deeper when she was talking with Audrey a minute ago? And who would have imagined Pus could speak in complete sentences? I've only ever heard him grunt. It's like watching an Eric Rohmer movie—no matter how accurate the subtitles are, I cannot comprehend why French people act the way they do. Flirting, in my experience, is no more intelligible than French, and I am not fluent in either Romance language.

Now this is not going to turn into some woe is me why am I not popular kind of an article. As inept as I am socially, I have realized that my usual mixture of hostility and indifference probably has a lot to do with it. I also realize that I don't really want to be married right now, not due to any particular lifestyle choice or lesbianism (though I appreciate the support some of you have expressed for either). Mostly I just want to be picked. But first, I have to crack that code.

Now if you're thinking this is the concept that launched a thousand Comedy Central routines, I should warn you it won't be nearly so insightful or funny. Fortunately, that's never stopped me before.

Enjoy!

Sharon C McGovern  
Editor/Publisher/Cobra-in-Chief

# Girl Talk

I've spent the past hour or so reading posts about *Sex and the City* on salon.com, hoping to discover why it appeals to and repels me so strongly. Now I'm wondering about the appeal of posts—OMG, what banality. You'd expect better from a multi-person conversation in slow motion, especially one with a potentially worldwide audience. Wouldn't you think they'd use their spell check? I've been graced by a lively e-correspondence with Janet Herman over the past few weeks, any given entry of which has been more witty and enlightening than the entirety of the hundred plus SATC posts I've read so far, and continue to peruse between writing these sentences, to tell you the truth. Her(man's) pro-police brutality stance has been particularly delightful. And those are just *entre nous*, at least until one of us becomes a famous recluse and the other decides it would be financially wise if popularly controversial to sell hard copies to the highest bidder.

Still, there's something compelling about the "who's cuter—Big or Aiden?" chitchat, something I crave in daily life—Girl Talk.

Not all cravings are created equal: I know that. For instance, the impulse that occasionally drives me to eat something leafy and uncooked is the equal and opposite of that age old desire for red meat that leads to excessive Twinkie intake. So is the yearning for Girl Talk most like a salad, or a bowl of ice cream, or heroin?

I recall the hours and hours and days and years sitting by The Pill while she "trained" me to do the job I have now. When I asked her to show me again how she put a caller in voice mail, she would say, "You know, I did it so fast that I don't remember all the steps. Just watch better next time I do it." Then she would resume her monologue about her favorite shirt—a hideous lime green polyester number. "...I got this on sale for three dollars at Contempo? I thought, 'Cool beans, three dollars!' And it fit perfect. It is my favorite shirt. But then when I married...[I'm skipping a *whole* bunch about her husband here] I went on the pill [heh heh] and my breasts got really big! I mean they swelled *up*! And I was so sad! I mean, I couldn't wear my favorite shirt any more because my breasts were too big! But then I got this sports bra? and it makes my breasts look smaller, and I thought, 'Cool beans, now I can wear my favorite shirt again?' And I was really glad because I could wear my favorite shirt again."

And that's the condensed version. Her telling took a couple of hours. Figuring out how to put a caller in voice mail took a couple of days. I would put this variety of Girl Talk in the heroin category—for though far from addictive, it could become a filthy, dangerous habit. This goes for virtually any Girl Talk that involves breasts, specifically mine, and this means you, Leslie Jo. The nadir was a bra shopping expedition my sister led years ago, trying to get me outfitted. Exiting a dressing room, I was mortified to hear her voice on the PA system, summoning a sales clerk to women's underwear to ask if the store stocked sizes any smaller than a double A. (cont. on page five)



## Bill & Suzie Zierle

Their last day in Salt Lake City. They have been taunting me with e-mails from HA ever since.

## Oh, Yeah

So Topper comes up to the Reception Desk and says, "I'm taking an early lunch. If I don't take it now I won't get one, so I'm taking it now." The time is, like, 9:15. That's a.m. I had a caller the other day who asked what time it was in Scottsdale. "About 9:30," I replied, and she said, "a.m.?" and I just let her think it over. She was calling from Mississippi.

So Topper leaves and His Boss calls for him from off property, using his cel phone. I tell him Topper's taken an early lunch. "What do you mean 'he's taken an early lunch'?!" says His Boss. I didn't imagine "he's taken an early lunch" was prone to interpretation like a dream or piece of scripture, so I just let him think it over.

"What do you mean 'he's taken an early lunch'?!" he repeated.

"He's gone," I said. "He told me, 'I'm taking an early lunch' and he left."

"Well, that's interesting because we have a meeting in just a minute," he snapped. I didn't bother to disagree.

A few minutes after that, His Boss pulled into the parking lot, and a couple of minutes after that stormed past the Reception Desk, barking into his cel phone the entire time. The next thing I heard is My Boss on the overhead: "Topper, please call my extension, Topper."

The next thing I heard after that was My Boss rushing up to my side. "Have you seen Topper?"

"He took an early lunch," I said.

"Hmmm...He has a meeting with His Boss right now," she said.

So I just thought it over. "Oh, yeah?" I said.

I have found this is the correct answer to make people go away, or give you a chance to escape. (cont. on page five)

# Ciao, Babies

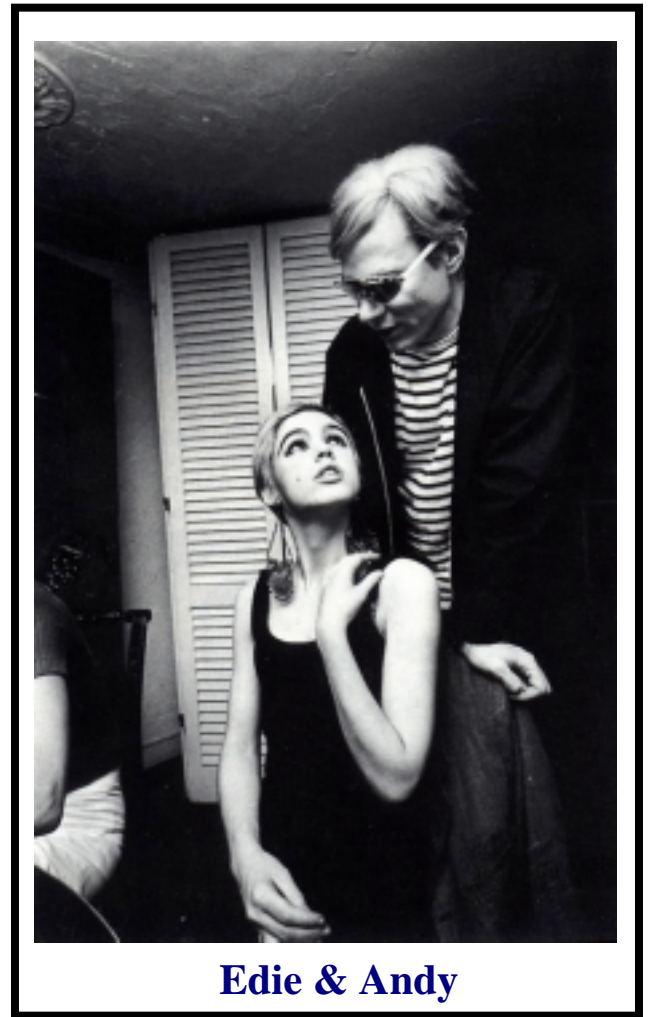
As much as it galls me to admit it, pop, and especially rock music is a largely male enterprise. It's not that women never sing or buy or appreciate it, but that they are a minority group, and of a gender more likely to support a boy band or teen angel than a radical artistic favorite like The Velvet Underground. Even a well meaning campaign of inclusivity like VH1's Top 100 Women of Rock and Roll poll stretched to include Barbara Streisand, Dolly Parton, Ella Fitzgerald, Bessie Smith, and the female (and non-songwriter/producer) halves of the B-52s and ABBA. The top two female choices, Aretha Franklin and Tina Turner are not known as songwriters or producers and did not direct their own careers. In fact, Turner is one of pop culture's most famous survivors of domestic abuse at the hands of her manager/husband. In the broader based list of 100 Greatest Rock Artists, the highest ranked woman (Franklin) is rated twenty first. Only four other female solo artists make the list, plus one girl group (The Supremes, at 94), and four bands with a single female member make the list for a total of *ten* out of the one hundred.

This isn't to give undue credence to VH1 or any other polling body, but the results are compelling. There is no female equivalent for The Beatles, Rolling Stones, or Who; no legendary producer like Phil Spector, George Martin, or Brian Eno. An elegant chameleon like Annie Lennox is far outsold by David Bowie, as is the goddess of pop perversion Tori Amos by the god Trent Reznor. Scratch the surface of pop music and you'll find hit machine Diane Warren and her thirty-nine top ten hits from the past ten years, but you'll have to admit it's a sad day when you hear a band like Aerosmith singing one of them ("I Don't Want to Miss a Thing"). The mighty Madonna (who turned her domestic abuse crisis into disco but didn't crack the top 100 rock stars list), is unique amongst women in her combination of self-determination and pop durability.

In short, as in almost every other art form, depictions of women in rock/pop music are disproportionately generated and perpetuated by men—usually as objects of lust or as irritants. In the one subcategory of rock/pop music in which women are uniformly rendered sympathetically, the Power Ballad, they are tragic fantasy figures, and often die by the end of the song. In this way, they join their sisters in drama, opera, and the musical theater, memorialized on stage, album, and screen by men wearing make-up. Essentially, Power Ballads are *La Boheme* for straight guys.

One of the best Power Ballads is "Edie (Ciao Baby)" by The Cult. It was based on Edie Sedgwick—an upper class crony of Andy Warhol's and one of the first and brightest of his Superstars. She was extensively featured in the Factory workers' films, photographs, and happenings, and allegedly was the inspiration for the Velvet Underground's song "Femme Fatale," and two tracks from Bob Dylan's album *Blonde on Blonde*—"Leopard-Skin Pill Box Hat" and "Just Like a Woman." Eventually, and to Warhol's sorrow, she abandoned the Factory and tried for a place in legitimate fashion and filmmaking. Fame and fortune eluded her, almost certainly due to her drug habit, and she died nearly forgotten and alone in the mid-seventies, in the same sanitarium where her father spent his last days. Her life was chronicled in the documentary film, *Ciao Manhattan*—the movie which inspired Cult front man Ian Astbury to write "Edie (Ciao, Baby)."

Power Ballads, like opera or musical theater, are often lugubrious, even ridiculous. But allow them to work on you and have a brush with the Big Emotions—Love and Despair, Sorrow and Pity—catharsis in your car on the way home from work. Sure, it would be nice if female singer-songwriters would write Power Ballads of their own and mournfully kill off a man or two in song, but for now it's probably sad enough to know that The Cult's most recent release was written by Diane Warren. 🎵 🎵 🎵



**Edie & Andy**

*Said you were a Youthquaker, Edie  
A stormy little world shaker  
Warhol's darling queen, Edie  
An angel with a broken wing*

*The dogs lay at your feet, Edie  
Wind caressed you cheek  
Stars wrapped in your hair, Edie  
Life without a care  
But your not there*

*Caught up in an endless sea, Edie  
Paradise a shattered dream  
Wired on the pills you took, Edie  
Your innocence dripped blood, sweet child*

*The dogs lay at your feet, Edie  
Wind caressed you cheek  
Stars wrapped in your hair, Edie  
Life without a care—Ciao, baby*

*Oh, sweet little sugar talker  
Paradise dream stealer  
Warhol's little queen, Edie  
An angel with a broken wing*

*Why did you kiss the world goodbye—Ciao Baby  
Don't you know paradise takes time—Ciao, Edie*

# Lonely with a Broken Heart

I was reading an article the other day by an author who worried the photographer for his book cover made him look a bit too studly. All the best writers—E.M. Forster, James Joyce, Edith Wharton, et al—were homely, he fretted, and good looks are an impediment to achieving the outsider status vital to great literature. The only exception he could name was F. Scott Fitzgerald, who more than atoned for his physical beauty with a severe mental breakdown and a premature, lonely, impoverished, alcoholic death.

I don't know if he resolved his dilemma because I got bored and stopped reading (I doubt Fitzgerald or anybody else in the Pantheon will have to worry about competition from this particular Adonis), but I'm not sure I like his thesis. Which is not the same as saying it isn't sound. If anything, I suppose I should be encouraged—if his theory holds, I could be the next Gore Vidal. But unless you are a devoted watcher of the Charlie Rose show or "Booknotes," what an author looks like doesn't really signify. Take off the book jacket and pretend they all resemble Ralph Fiennes. In fact, that makes Henry Miller's prose a lot more plausible.

That doesn't work when the writer in question writes songs and sings them successfully enough that the recording industry takes an interest. No matter how I've tried, I cannot persuade myself the Tom Petty from the album covers and videos looks like Ralph Fiennes. But in music, the homely artist ethos makes sense. In every interview I've read with a male singer-songwriter, the subject has stated the impetus behind his career was a desire to attract women. (Strangely, no female singer-songwriters have cited the urge to attract men as their prime motivator. Pat says this is because all women are filthy liars, but I suspect they could find easier ways.)

And it makes sense in an evolutionary psychology kind of way, art as compensation. Some would say my idols Pete Townshend, Mark Knopfler, and Daniel Ash have a bit to compensate for, but the pretty boys of pop music are suspect. Go ahead and throw the likes of Rick Springfield and A-ha at me, I can't help but lump them with those creepy boy bands, and images of fat middle aged managers, homoerotic publicity machines, and genuinely ugly songwriters slipping weepy compositions under some closet door. (I'm sure my fabulous cousin Evelyn will be happy to rebut my libel against Springfield; she can be reached though this publication.) When you do get a spectacular exotic like David Bowie, well, he doesn't spend a lot of time crooning moony how-I-miss-you tunes.

And then there's Chris Isaak. He is as cute as a button, has a pretty tenor voice, has been cast in the movies of directors Jonathan Demme, David Lynch, and Bernardo Bertolucci, has retained his lean, muscular boxer's figure, is a charming and articulate subject in interviews, and he *writes his own songs!* In fact, his whole career has a patina of self-sufficiency that nobody as conventionally handsome as he is can match in pop music.

On the other hand, his career hasn't been as brilliant as you'd think, given his combination of attributes. His only hit song was 1989's "Wicked Game," the video of which showed him



romping in the surf with a topless Helena Christensen—perhaps the only time in the history of videos the artist-supermodel scenario didn't seem grotesque. The last few notes of the song are played over a still photograph of the couple in their vacation clothes. It gives the preceding a melancholy resonance, transforming it from a simple eroticisation of her frailty (screwed up nail polish=screwed up chick) to an evocation of the turbulence which underlies even the most placid seeming relationships. They look happy in the photo, but from the fevered video you *know* they won't last. And that's strangely gratifying. (cont. on page six)

## Take the @#\$\$% Challenge!

A new sound-byte challenge, similar to the "I don't know" challenge of the Gillespie-ColourComp era:

- Step 1: Digitally record The Empress @#\$\$% paging someone to her extension.
- Step 2: Edit The Empress's voice, so that her "new" extension will be "666"
- Step 3: Play the Empress's modified page over the paging system during business hours. (It might be a good idea to do this when the Empress is out of earshot.)

If you do not get caught, you have fulfilled the challenge. Make your identity known to The Man, and you will be granted a reward for your bravery. If you are caught, you are still eligible for the reward so long as you do not reveal the identity of the challengers to the authorities. 📞

**Girl Talk** (cont. from page two) In the “ice cream” category, I would put make-over type conversation. This seems to be an exclusively female pursuit. Aside from the occasional “that shirt is gay,” or “we used to chase any guy who wore those gay boat shoes right out of Annapolis,” which I don’t believe is meant to be constructive, I’ve detected little that could be construed as fashion advice among men. Maybe they save it for male-exclusive talk circles, you guys will have to let me know if it isn’t taboo to discuss such things with a female.

Anyway, I could have used more of this variety of Girl Talk over the years. I’ve been left far too much to my own devices fashion-wise and as a result sport a look that is equal parts Norma Desmond and bag lady. I was thrilled to hear that one of my cousin Evelyn’s stylish friends in LA said something about making me over, but the tiny sizes and inflated prices of clothing (and everything else) in Southern California has made me hesitant about pursuing this lead.

My tiny experience with men and fashion, however, has shown the two rarely mix. Few of them attend to the latest styles, and most of them have been cowed by experience from giving candid opinions to inquiries. Oh, they have opinions galore and will expound upon them freely amongst themselves, but attempts by a female at coaxing a statement or (heaven help her) a compliment out of one of them about herself almost always ends badly. That’s why I don’t understand why some women drag men along on shopping trips. The only ones they (the men) seem to appreciate involve bathing suits or underwear—and to be fair, those tend to make them stupid with joy—but it’s not something I would attempt myself.

All I know is, somebody encourages the office triumvirate of fashion—Empress @#%\$, The Giggler, and The Pill—to wear what they do, and I don’t think they show nearly enough leg to argue for a man’s influence. Maybe their girl friends just have great senses of humor.

There is a variety of woman who always seems so serene, so mature, who carries herself with grace and dignity. She doesn’t so much talk as ask insightful questions, then smiles a little knowing smile. I work with such a woman and not a day goes by that I don’t want to take a swing at her, but I don’t have one in my immediate circle. Deep in my heart, I feel I am misjudging these women, they are likely a hoot and probably a bit insecure to boot, and if I ever gave them a chance perhaps we would become fast friends. The rest of my organs, however, are wary. I imagine their conversation to be well beyond Salad Style Girl Talk and onto something more radically healthy—like a Girl Talk Colonic.

So I’ll stick with the Girl Talk Salads, the contents of which are none of your business (unless you have partaken of them with me in which case you already know). Suffice it to say, there are levels of discourse between women from which men are excluded, and as much as I enjoy and profit from my conversations with men it’s not as if I can go native. Until the day comes when men don’t accuse women of attending secret councils in washrooms, and women don’t shudder to think about what goes down in Tech Support—and that day will never come—at least I’ve got *Sex and the City* to take comfort in and despise. 💬

**Oh, Yeah** (cont. from page two) Like from Topper. He likes to lead discussions to a point where you feel you have no choice but to admire him for his erudition, insight, or courage, and that’s the sort of decision I like to make on my own. “Oh, yeah?” won’t stop a conversation with him, but it gives you something to say before you just walk away, Renee.

But sometimes these diversionary tactics go terribly awry.

Like when I was sitting in the restaurant where Pat works. The proprietor, Nick, rubbed my neck and asked how I was doing that evening. Irritated by the unauthorized touching and not being of a mind to talk about myself, I tried to steer the conversation away from me by snarling something to the effect that his waiter kept calling me fat. It wasn’t true. Pat wouldn’t call me fat even if he thought it was true (and he probably does), though he spitefully said the word several times to my skinny mirror and it hasn’t been the same since. Still, I thought a baseless discussion of Pat’s alleged villainy would be good for a giggle. Instead, I got:

“Fat? Well, anybody would look fat next to Patrick!”

Wait a minute...did he just say I looked fat?

“Besides,” he continued, “You’re not so fat.” He was stroking my hair. “In fact, let’s have a look at you!” He pulled my chair away from the table and I assumed a fetal position. I’ve felt less exposed stark naked. “Years ago, your figure would have been considered very good—like Marilyn Monroe or Jane Mansfield.”

Marilyn Monroe? Jane Mansfield? I thought as I dragged the table back towards me. I recalled Monroe’s figure *Some Like it Hot*, the image of which sent her racing for booze and pills—well, my rear is something like that, and hell, I’d be thrilled if more parts were but they aren’t. The only thing I have in common with Mansfield is that I have touched a Chihuahua or two in my life.

My head was on the table and I was moaning. Pat was doubled over with laughter, thrilled beyond words that my little plan had so spectacularly misfired. Nick patted my back and said, “So what do you wear? A fourteen? A sixteen? That used to be standard.”

A sixteen. Oh my god. “Oh, yeah?” I said weakly, and Nick, with the firm belief that I had finally been comforted regarding my body image, relented—and just let me think it over. 🙄🙄🙄🙄🙄

(cont. from page four) The wonder of a song like Roy Orbison's "Pretty Woman" (lost in Van Halen's blustery cover) comes from the idea that a person as strange looking as Roy Orbison would catch the eye of a pretty woman and in the quickened heartbeat that follows; the wonder of Isaak's work is that a pretty woman would let him slip away and in the heartache that follows. He doesn't sing, as so many singers do, with the voice of the underdog, but as a top dog temporarily brought down. He understands that break ups and unrequited love just happen, so there is no denunciation. Nobody gets called bitch or ho, nobody makes a death threat, nobody is scarred for life. He will recover. But first, he gets very, very sad.

From "Somebody's Crying":

*I know somebody and they called your name  
A million times and still you never came  
They go on loving you just the same  
I know that somebody's trying*

From "Blue Spanish Sky":

*It's a big, blue Spanish sky  
I lay on my back and watch clouds roll by  
I've got the time to wonder why she left me*

*It's a slow, sad Spanish song  
I knew the words, but I sang them wrong  
The one I love has left and gone without me*

*Now she's gone, gone, gone—our world has changed  
Watching a blue sky, thinking of rain*

From "San Francisco Days":

*Walking down to Market Street feeling my heart skip a beat  
To see someone who looks like you, I guess that I'm not through  
Dreaming of the one I love, you know what I'm dreaming of  
San Francisco days, San Francisco nights*

And from "Baby did a Bad Bad Thing":

*You ever toss and turn, lying awake and thinking of the one you love?  
I didn't think so.*



*You ever close your eyes making believe you're  
holding the one you're dreaming of?*

*Well if you say so.*

*It hurts so bad when you finally know just how low  
low low she'll go*

*Baby did a bad, bad thing...feel like crying*

In one album cover after another, Chris Isaak proves it's possible to suffer both sincerely and decorously due to women who keep breaking his heart. To them I say, "Thank you!" and then, "Please stop!" ♥♥♥♥♥

## Cobra Headquarters

📧 Sharon C. McGovern,  
Cobra-in-Chief



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www.geocities.com/cobrasnose/

Use them.

**End Nose...** I was sitting at my desk playing solitaire, that is to say working on The Nose, when The Man walked by. I explained that though I had intended to take August off I got an itch to write it after all. "Sometimes if you wait long enough, itches go away," he said. I think he was just being helpful, but he is a man and therefore inscrutable. As you may have guessed, I'm making no headway in the male-female lingo thing-o, but I'm not sure how much I'm going to let that bother me today. As I age (and I do have a birthday coming up, hint hint), I see a world filling up with veterans of the Gender Wars nursing well founded grievances. They soldier on, as the two weddings attest, and even the bitterest denouncers of the opposite sex (whichever that happens to be) still *date*. I can't figure it out, and I get this feeling that the more I try the more I come off like one of those lovesick robots from *Star Trek*, though not as hot in a green foil bikini. So I'll think instead of the only French movie I ever related to—*Un Coeur en Hiver*—in which Daniel Auteuil plays a game of love and wins it at the cost of his business, his best friend and partner, his favorite coffee house, and the woman whom he realizes too late he loves. He doesn't even sleep with her. It's great, empowering in a strange way to loner types. It makes me think if I never have a Power Ballad written in my honor or break Chris Isaak's heart, that's okay—those are just two small items on my life's to-do list, and way down toward the bottom. If you pay attention and stick it out for the long haul, you too can win at solitaire.

PS I know some of the fonts I used this time are on the small side, but I get tired of The Nose looking like a Little Golden Book.

Best wishes to you all, but especially the Newlyweds—Cobra.