



# Cold, Cold, Miserable Failure

1998, RESOLUTION DEADLINE—So how did you do? I myself have a scant twelve hours to buy and learn to operate lip liner, for that was my sole resolution for this year. Odds are good that I will continue to forget to do it, but there's still a chance. After all, it's not a difficult resolution, such as not calling people who pass me on the right so they can make a left turn in front of me in like, a block a bad name (which I enjoy too much to give up anyway). Or that one where I resolved to learn how to make that sound Tom Petty does, the one that sounds like a combination of an "oy" and a cough. That was a miserable failure. I actually applied myself and yet I still sound more like a yenta than a rock star. Not that I ever thought I'd pull off the whole rock star thing, I just wanted the one syllable.

I cast around for resolution imput. I know that Pat's perpetual resolution is to look as good as David Bowie does at fifty when he (Pat) is fifty. That sort of long term thinking is beyond me. Frankly, I'd settle for looking as good as David Bowie does at fifty right now. Scott sent me a list he plagiarized from USAToday. I'll bet if their lawyers found out about that, they'd have a resolution for him. He also resolved to commit violence against me if I started smoking. I filed that in my Why I Should Not Start Smoking column. That would balance out my new Why I Should Start Smoking item, which is "I would get to start taking a lot of smoking breaks which would really infuriate The Pill." Mr Enigma told me told me a discussion of his resolutions would make me uncomfortable, which I utterly believe to be true. From sources too uncool to be subscribers, I got the reply, "I resolved to make no resolutions." I gave them a metaphysical dope slap so I wouldn't be tried for assault.

I would like to have shared more resolutions with you, but I didn't start researching this article until about ten this morning. I suppose I could resolve to be a more conscientious contributor, but a theory is forming in my brain. (You could resolve to refrain from the wisecracks, Pat.) The theory is: Resolutions = Failure. If you don't resolve at all, you release yourself from the condemnation of the scale, MADD, the Marlboro Man, God or Whatever Higher Power You Acknowledge, depending on what your resolution happens to be. It puts me in mind of a song. If we happened to be sitting in a kareoke bar, I'd happily belt it out for you. As we are not you will just have to wait for the official cd of this publication: Hooked on Cobra Classics. Until then, the initian alone will have to suffice, written by Ira Gershwin for music by Kurt Weill.

Kate Moss released from rehab

#### The Saga of Jenny

Jenny made her mind up when she was three, She herself was going to trim the Christmas tree. Christmas Eve she lit the candles-tossed the tapers away. Little Jenny was an orphan on Christmas Day.

Poor Jenny! Bright as a penny! Her equal would be hard to find. She lost one dad and mother, a sister and a brother----But she would make up her mind.

Jenny made her mind up when she was twelve That into foreign languages she would delve; But at seventeen at Vassar it was quite a blow That in twenty-seven languages she couldn't say "no."

Poor Jenny! Bright as a penny! Her equal would be hard to find. To Jenny I'm beholden, her heart was big and golden-But she would make up her mind.

> Jenny made her mind up at twenty-two To get herself a husband was the thing to do. She got herself all dolled up in her satin and furs And she got herself a husband-but he wasn't hers.

Poor Jenny! Bright as a penny! Her equal would be hard to find. Deserved a bed of roses but history discloses That she would make up her mind.

Cont. on page 3

## **Retraction** X

With regret I must announce the dismissal of Sharon McGovern as editor of THE COBRA'S NOSE. Though an eager and hard working employee, she violated the integrity of the newsletter by inadvertently replacing page three of the kill the Pill edition with that of the Burny Edition. The differences are as follows: "HOHOHO" should have read, "UP YOURS", the word "bunnies" should have been "sluts," and "Bunny" "Hooker". She also permitted the malodorous "Ode to Nikos" to stain the page and reputation of this once proud publication.

This issue, starting with page two this issue will guest edited by Ms. Irma Vep. The resumes of any party interested in assuming the role of editor of THE COBRA'S NOSE on a more regular basis will be welcomed by ...

### Publisher/Cobra-in-Chief

Note: Since Pam only reads articles in which she is mentioned, she should look for the following symbol on the title line:  $\aleph$ . If it is there, she is mentioned. -ed

# Asins, Strile, and Star Trek

Also known as Scott Rowley's Movie Opinion. Naturally, I will feel free to interject my own thoughts even though I haven't seen the movies in question. We start with Star Trek: Insurrection, about which he writes, "Obviously (and hopefully) nobody goes to any Star Trek film expecting great art [speak for yourself, pal, but we concur the odd numbered ones are superior, ed.]. Star Trek VIII is no exception. The formulaic plot is as follows: some out of the way idyllic society has something that everyone else wants (in this case, metaphysical radiation that prevents and even reverses the aging process), some Federation insider-bad-guy wants to "ethnically relocate" them, and Jean-Luc and the gang are going to set things right. Along the way, Jean-Luc meets a sweetie, wins over the sweetie, saves the sweetie (and she is a genuine sweetie, I really liked her), and promises to return to the sweetie for some quality time. Maybe in the next film we'll actually see them lock lips. This installment also sees the romance between Riker and Deanna rekindled with the help of a little metaphysical radiation. Unfortunately, we only get to see a little slap and tickle, but there's always next episode! The radiation also reverses Jordy's life long blindness. In a poignant scene we get to enjoy with him his first full-sighted sunrise. And seeing how LaVar Burton [no relation to Lauren and Mike] has some of the best looking eyes in Hollywood, it's nice to finally see them again! [Scott's always going on about his eyes.]

The bad guy is F. Murray Abraham as a loose skinned alien who exudes nastiness. [And how is this different from the part he played in *Amadeus?*] He did a fine job and I loved it when he killed the Federation bad guy by stretching his head.

I did have a couple of complaints. First, there was no real sense of danger. Sure, Jean-Luc's sweetie gets a few rocks dropped on her, but the film lacked the "Spock's in the radiation [the bad kind] field and is giving up his life to save the ship which came THIS CLOSE to blowing up" element. Also, near the beginning Data is involved in some sort of unrest and he is blamed for it, but how it started is never very clear. Then when Jordy "fixes" [are you thinking what I'm thinking?] Data, he removes a number of substantial looking chips. Sure, maybe it fixes Data's problem, but doesn't he really kind of need those? I give it three Junior Mints out of five. It's worth the ride.

Waking Ned Divine was delightful, a beautiful film with some great comedic moments that manages to get a message across with out being preachy. The interpersonal relationships were well developed and explained, more a look At a close knit family, not just a community. There is, of course, one bad apple, and the way in whch she gets "removed from the barrel" is one of the film's high points. The film does require a bit of belief suspension. If someone really did win nearly seven million pounds (just over nine million dollars by my figuring), I think it would create a little more media attention, and certainly more research by the Lotto people than was portrayed. Aside from that, it's a charming must-see. Four Junior Mints out of five.  $\Re \Re \Re \Re \Re$ 



Imagine you are Charlie Rose. You have an Emmy and a Peabody award, but you are largely unknown to prime time audiences until you land a job on 60 Minutes II-and this is your publicity photo? Who did you offend in the marketing department?

## Sex and Lies

This joke comes to us via Mr Enigma. He is a prince among men and has an impeccable sense of humor. (Is that okay? Will you return the kitten safely, now?)

In the late summer an elderly married couple of 50 years were rocking on their rocking chairs.

All of a sudden the old woman gets up and walks over to her aging husband and "POW!" she knocks him out of the chair and onto the floor.

"What the hell did you do that for"? he asked.

"For being a lousy lover all these years."

5 minutes goes by.

All of a sudden the old man gets up and walks over to his aging wife and "POW!" he knocks her out of the chair and onto the floor.

"What the hell did you do that for"? she asked. "For knowing the difference"!  $\otimes \otimes \otimes \otimes \otimes \otimes$ 



This year, Christmas and my darling brother Pat conspired to bring into my life a sweet little bundle of joy without which my former life seems in retrospect as bleak and joyless as a November afternoon in Maryland.

The bundle's name is Violator.

My precious stands about ten inches tall, has glistening silver-gray skin, the most adorable row of spines on his back, and eyes that glow red. Oh yes! And a poison filled spike that shoots out from over his shoulders. He can be *quite* the little terror, no doubt about it. When I get home at night, I could swear he smells the raw meat I bring him the minute I step out of the car, for there he is, waiting with a big grin on his face, clawing at the front door. He's nearly dug his way through, the rascal!

I don't exactly know how little Vi (my nickname for him) spends his days, but I assume it must have something to do with that pile of dead lizards and birds that's accumulating by the back door! I thought that there would be a neighborhood incident when I discovered a rather valuable and very dead macaw among them, but I haven't heard anything yet. At night, he either curls up on the VCR (it's usually warm!) or on a pillow by my head. He awakens me in the morning by romping all over my room, making the most adorable "hiss, hiss" noise. He gets very cranky before he gets his breakfast though. That big bottle of hydrogen peroxide certainly has come in handy.

I can hardly remember how I got by without him!!!

#### From page one

Jenny made her mind up at fifty-one She would write her memoirs before she was done. The very day her book was published, hist'ry relates There were wives who shot their husbands in some thirtythree states.

Jenny made her mind up at seventy-five She would live to be the oldest woman alive. But gin and rum and destiny play funny tricks, And poor Jenny kicked the bucket at seventy-six.

Jenny points a moral with which you cannot quarrel. Makes a lot of common sense! Jenny and her saga prove that you are gaga If you don't keep sitting on the fence. Jenny and her story point the way to glory To all man and womankind. Any one with vision comes to this decision: Don't make up—you shouldn't make up— You mustn't make up—oh never make up— Don't make up your mind!

Well, I hope we've all learned a little something here.  $\Phi\Phi\Phi\Phi\Phi\Phi$ 

### A Mizaele, a Bzoken Thins, a Tzasedy

What a year it's been in the movies! Now here I am to publish a list of my favorite films which I know most of you haven't seen and would probably hate if you did see, but as I am Cobra-in-Chief and you aren't, that hardly matters. Here are my top ten ranked alphabetically, as of January 12, 1999, with the understanding I might change or disavow any of them at my whim.

A Bug's Life, Anastasia, Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas, Henry Fool, The Last Days of Disco, Mulan, Oscar and Lucinda, Pi, Saving Private Ryan, Shakespeare in Love, Starship Troopers, and The Sweet Hereafter.

I know that's twelve films, just deal with it.

Now Laet to make other pronouncements. Best Lead Actor:

### Resolution Update

You may be thinking to yourself, "Gee, I wonder if Sharon managed the lip liner thing after all-I mean, it isn't like she resolved to bring peace to Northern Ireland." Which is just as well, as somebody beat me to that. As a matter of fact, I did partially achieve the lip liner goal, with the timely assistance of my cousin Amy Adams, who, when not haranguing people about how they say their ahr's and esses, is happy to indulge the cosmetically clueless. She produced a lip liner pencil at about 10:30pm New Year's Eve and instructed me in its use. The coolest thing about it is I can pencil over that little lip divot under the nose so I will look more like Katherine Hepburn or Bette Davis did when they were glamming it up in the thirties. That's the theory, anyway. A couple of days later, I bought a lip pencil thing of my own, even though it cost a whopping \$4.99. Come to think of it, that's probably why I didn't get one sooner. The color is "brique" and although I am still in the slutty looking phase that inevitably accompanies any new make up I introduce into my repetoir, I am confident that I will have Cosmo approved lips any time now.

In other news, Jana e-mailed a number of resolutions, all of which make my lip liner thing look rather puny. She wrote:

"I resolve to make myself financially independent by the year 2000.

I resolve to lose (and never find again) 30 lbs. I resolve to stay in better touch with my good friends, and, oh, yeah...you.

I resolve to...isn't that enough???"

More than enough, I'd say, but as I find myself basking in the bright bright light Jana exudes even across this vast nation of ours, I feel moved to make a resolution of my own: I should listen to more Tom Petty. As I have my newly acquired *She's the One* soundtrack album playing on my CD ROM right this second, I'd say I'm well on my way.

Take that, Jenny. งงงงงงง

Edward Norton in *American History X.* Best Lead Actress: Gwenyth Paltrow in *Shakespeare in Love.* Best Supporting Actress: Parker Posey in *Henry Fool.* Best Supporting Actor: Dylan Baker in *Happiness* (a movie none of you should see except maybe Harvest. If you do see it and despise it, which you will, remember, you have been warned.). Best Director: Paul Verhoeven for *Starship Troopers.* Most Wonderful Thing I Saw on Screen this Year: A glass church with Ralph Fiennes in it floating down a Australian river. Most Horrible: Meg Ryan pottering around her apartment in *You've Got Mail* (What was I thinking, going to that movie anyway? Imagine a David and Goliath premise, but Goliath wins the battle, the Babylonians or whoever they were take over the Hebrew nation, and Goliath makes David his punk—and this is considered a happy ending.) Best Theater Mascot: UA's happy red lips. Worst Theater Mascot: AMC's winsome film stock guy. Most Astonishing: Bill Paxton being convincing in *A Simple Plan.* Least Astonishing: That Boring Guy Who Played David Bowie in *Velvet Goldmine.* Best Costume: Ewan McGregor in glitter, *Velvet Goldmine.* Cutest Boy: Joseph Feinnes. Most Pathetic Excuse for a "Sex Symbol": Leonardo di Caprio. Person to Whom the Adjective "Fat" Was Most Grossly Misapplied: Kate Winslet. Person to Whom the Adjective "Fat" Was Most Grossly Underapplied: Tom Hanks (hey—I like him too, but did you check out that neck in *You've Got Mail*? NO actress would get paid twenty mil for a movie if her *thigh* was that big around. I'm pretty sure Meg Ryan's *waist* isn't that big around). The Make It Go Away Prize is awarded to that ghastly song from *Titanic,* and it's singer D'lean Cuisine.

So there you have it-the year in film. Or something. ГГГГГГГ

# XBeset by the Creepins Hand of DeathX

There are times when mortality gives you a good solid smack on the snoot. I'd had run ins with the grim spectre this year, including the third anniversary of my twenty seventh birthday, but I took them lightly until yesterday when I was putting away some dishes. You see, a part of my glamorous career in communications technology is seeing that the office kitchenette is kept spick and span. One of my co-workers, who is a doll in other respects, repeatedly fails to put his stupid (expletive deleted) coffee mug in the dishwasher. He doesn't even rinse out the coffee he didn't drink, he just leaves it all in the sink for the cleaning elves to remove. Yesterday, due to The Pill's sloth, willfulness, and essentially petty evil nature, I came into work to find no dishes at all were washed, the cabinets were coated with dried coffee, and there was that bunny bunny bunny mug in the sink. I was incensed. I began to restore my beautiful kitchenette with beetled brows and a frown when a helpful co-worker handed me the all too familiar Starbucks fat bottomed skinny rimmed mug. "Leave that in the sink," I snarled. "Byron [that's the jackal's name] has got to learn." She put it back and said, "Jeez, that's harsh, *mom.*" Now, I don't know about you, but when I get called "mom" I don't think of my own sainted progenitor—I think of some old lady. And it stopped me in my tracks. I tried to shake the feeling the remark gave me, but I couldn't quite. As always, I gained insight into the problem by contemplating movies.

You may not know this about me, but I see a lot of movies in a year, and when I get to reading various critics' top ten lists, I get nostalgic. What did I see and how would I rank it? I consider the lists. Saving Private Ryan? Sure, that's worthy. Gods and Monsters? Nah. And so forth. Some titles collect in my head. Saving Private Ryan is one, Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas, and Oscar and Lucinda. Definitely A Bug's Life. Mulan was terrific. Would Anastasia count? I know it was made last year, but then so was Oscar and Lucinda and I included...wait a minute. Three children's movies? CARTOONS?! What's going on? I do have Fear and Loathing in to balance them out (and by the way, if you think that's the kind of movie you'd hate you're probably right so don't rent it on my recommendation and then tell me all about how much you hated it, that means you Jana). Still, with the exception of F&L, I'm coming up with some pretty square films, momish (for more on this topic, turn to page three!). I don't know if this realization accounts for my lukewarm reaction to a recent cartoon release, but I would like to think my response to The Prince of Egypt is based in actual disdain rather than defiance. I checked my reaction against Scott Rowley's.

As the movie states twice in the introductory statement, The Prince of Egypt is based on the Moses story in Exodus. The filmmakers consulted with a panel of religious authorities to make sure no major group of ticket buyers would be offended, and as a bonus to eradicate any suggestion of an original artistic statement. As a result, it plays like one of those Bible videos you buy at the mall but with exceptional production values. The thing looked good, no doubt about it. That is where Scott and I agree. We also agree that Ralph Fiennes acquitted himself well in the role of Yul Brynner. To a lesser extent, we agree that Val Kilmer fared less well as Charlton Heston. For one thing, he looks like a little weenie. Scott protested that if he were more robust, Pharaoh would have to be exponentially enlarged and end up looking like a Arnold Friberg hero. (Is there a problem here?) Anyway, Moses didn't look so bad in the beginning, let's say Mel Gibson sized with Pharaoh more along the lines of a Harrison Ford. But when Moses leaves the Valley of the Kings he gets to looking like Anthony Perkins, all big eyed and scrawny. That wouldn't be so bad, I've always liked Anthony Perkins, but this Moses also cries all the time. Scott explained it was because he felt bad about bringing the plagues to Egypt, but I'm not buying it. I wanted to see someone to bitch slap him and tell him to pull himself together. In a good old fashioned biblical epic, you could rely on God to take care of it. I was hoping it would occur when Moses handled the Burning Bush-a booming voice says, "QUIT IT," then gives Moses a nice electric shock (okay, the shock was Scott's idea, but I like it! I like it!). Alas, in this one Val Kilmer does God's voice in a very ethereal manner, so Moses just weeps again. His whole family weeps. Mom, Miriam, Aaron (who is Moses's mouthpiece and second in command in the Bible, but in this movie he mostly grovels and tells his sister to pipe down). I think that would be a more convincing proof of his lineage than that song Moses supposedly remembers his mother singing while he floated down the river as an infant. Even Scott couldn't swallow that conceit.

Moses doesn't quite cry when confronted by the hubba hubba Tzipporah who is given to him by Pharaoh (Ralph's voice implies he himself isn't man enough—as if) but he swallows hard about seventeen times. To be fair, she is pretty intimidating. For one, she looked like she was animated by the same guys who did *Heavy Metal*. Why not? They could probably have been found in the same basement looking at the same magazines since that masterwork hit the screen. Naturally, the first thing that happens to her is a shove into a reflecting pool. (Let the wet tunic contest commence!) Then she is dragged off to Moses's chambers while Moses goes off to get a stiff one. (To drink, you perverts.) When he returns, he is relieved to find she has bound and gagged his bodyguard and fled. Soon after, he abets the amazon in her escape from the city, and is subsequently bullied by his chubby sister Miriam while Aaron cowers in the shadows. Then everybody bursts into tears, with the exception of Tzipporah who has more testosterone then all of the other characters put together. Now *what* are we to make of this scenario? Was the pink triangle crowd consulted along with the priests and rabbis?

Anyway, Moses eventually marries Tzipporah (uh huh) kills a whole bunch of Egyptians, and liberates the slaves. This is where the animators outdid themselves--the Angel of Death and the parted Red Sea look great. Tzipporah and Miriam sing a pretty song and highlights of the departure are shown as a montage. Sort of stuck in the middle of this is a glimpse of Moses with the ten commandments. You don't get to see God carving the tablets out of Mount Horeb (which was hands down the coolest part of *The Ten Commandments*), you don't get to see Moses smashing them on the rocks, and most of all, you don't get to see the famous party with the Golden Calf. What a rip! That's where I can imagine Tzipporah being in her element.

So maybe I haven't gone completely soft, although I know I'll bawl again when the ghosts of Anastasia's family burst out of their picture frames, and when Mulan's dad tells her the greatest honor of all is having her as a daughter. I've been told people lose testosterone as they age (though Tzipporah's levels probably went up), and this accounts for a certain amount of weepiness, and maybe that's right. After all, Moses would be several thousand years old now and apparently he is a teary mess.

By the way, Pam—I'm including you now because I wanted to lure you into reading the second longest article.

# Death Rattle

CHANDLER, PHOENIX, MESA, TEMPE, & UNINCORPORATED—I'll bet you are thinking to yourselves, "Gee, shouldn't Sharon have complained about her car by now?" I agree, it's high time. But my story is a long one and full of woe, so find a comfortable place to sit.

I will begin with events which occurred around Thanksgiving. I had flattened my left front tire (never you mind how—I confessed it to another), and since I had it changed it wobbled whenever I drove faster than 55mph. Yes, I suppose you could hypothesize the Holy Ghost abandoned the vehicle due to excessive speed, but that doesn't cover all the facts, now does it? I needed explanations and a new spare tire (as the little spare that came with the car had at some point died of natural causes). My sister Lauren and her family were in town (that is, in Chandler) for the holiday, so I enlisted her help in solving my problems.

I started by making some calls to used tire places to see if I couldn't find a new wheel, or "rim" as I learned they are also called. My confusion on this point almost cost me one of them, and I was too embarrassed to call and correct my mistake. Fortunately, Mike, my brother-in-law, was there to pretend to be another potential customer interested in a wheel for a '94 Toyota Takoma. That I drive a '91 Toyota Tercell made his cover even more perfect. Lauren overheard how much the tire guy was going to sell the rim for and leaped into action. Certain she could find a better deal, she took over the phone duties. Equally certain she could, I stood back and watched in awe. She located a compatible donor at Gila Car Wrecks (well, it was something like that, but when we saw it's dilapidated sign, we renamed it "Gil's") for a much better price. We headed out to Tempe (then through Tempe as Gil's is in an unincorporated zone) to take a look.

The wheel at Gil's seemed a very good match, and I offered to buy it right away. Lauren wondered if we couldn't trade in the flattened spare and get a few bucks knocked off the cost of the rim. "I have those things stacked this high in the back," said Gil (well, he could have been named Gil). That's when I swung into action. "Will you just take it for free?" I said with authority. "Sure," said Gil. You see, Lauren isn't the only one in the family who can play hard ball.

Anyway, we asked Gil if he knew of a good place to get an alignment. He recommended a place in Mesa and we headed out. We couldn't find the place he suggested, but there was a mechanic in the neighborhood so we gave them a shot. We probably should have literally shot them, because the first thing they did upon obtaining my car keys was to allege the car wouldn't start. This would be a problem in the future, but as of then, starting was one of the things my car still did well. Lauren and I exchanged a doubtful look and went out to see what was going on. The lid was open and about three mechanics were looking inside while one sat behind the steering wheel and revved. The engine would not turn over until Lauren got in and started it. Told you she was a problem solver.

The guys drove it into the shop and lifted it upon one of those posts and looked at the wheel. It wobbled. "Your wheel is wobbling," he told us. I told him the story of the late lamented tire that used to be there, and he said, "That's your problem." Lauren suggested he exchange that wheel for the spare, which he did. Then we got the bill—sixteen dollars for what was essentially a change of a wheel. The gentleman from Kentucky who changed it in the first place did it for free! Lauren talked the owner down to six dollars, which was much better, but still a rip. The mechanic did make one important discovery. The tire on the rim I just bought was smaller than the other tires on the car. I thought I could probably live with that, but Lauren said it should be changed, so back to Gil's we went.

When we got there, we realized the wheel had to be removed so the tire could be changed, so we set about doing that. Okay, Lauren did most of it. When we got the wheel off, this punk kid appeared at the top of the stairs which led to Gil's front door. "You can bring that right up here," he said. "No, *you* can bring it up," Lauren riposted. Chivalry will not die as long as she has anything to do with it. The kid came down and got the tire and we followed him in the shop. Soon he came back with another tire that Lauren rejected as being too worn. "This is the only one I could find," he protested. Lauren gave him a look and Gil told him to try again. Finally, he came back with one all found acceptable, and he applied it to the wheel, then the wheel to the car. I had an appointment to get the tires aligned that afternoon, but I canceled it because I was tired of car stuff.

#### End of Act One.

Act Two began soon after when I had my oil changed. I got one of those hundred dollar lifetime deals from Fletcher (formerly Cobre, until I sued their ass and took their name). As a courtesy/business ploy, the mechanics there gave my car a once over and found a problem with the brakes. Even I know brakes are important, so I gave them the go ahead to fix whatever it was. So, fine. In the next few weeks, I discover oil is coming out of my car way, way faster than I think it should, and since those Fletcher people had their hands in its innards last I figured they might be responsible. I was told they weren't responsible and then presented with a long list of maladies from which my car allegedly suffered, none of them related to an oil leak. When I mentioned that, the mechanic (you can just substitute "foul deamon" for "mechanic" until further notice) told me I must be thinking of the air conditioning fluid, as it looked something like oil when it leaked. I asked if that would make my "check oil" light go on, and he stomped back to take another look. "You have an oil leak, too," he said when he returned.

I became frantic. The status of my car seemed to have gone from outpatient to intensive care in less than an hour. Lauren wasn't there to protect me, so I threw myself on the dubious mercy of the ringleader. I asked him what were the most serious problems and when could they be remedied? A time and place was set.

Once these people got their clutches on my car *again,* they found another couple of problems that would be less expensive to fix now than later. They involved the "timing belt" and the "water pump", and since I had at least heard of these objects I told them to go ahead and do what they needed to do. When I picked up the car, they showed me the damaged parts they replaced. When I mentioned this to Lauren on the phone, she (who sometimes plays the role of that guy in red who sits on my left shoulder and whispers in my ear) said, "Are you sure they were from your car?" But the car did seem to be okay, at least until it started to gasp.

The poor thing had been losing spunk for some time, which I mentioned to the Fletcher people, and (Cont. on 6)

which fact they neglected to address. Too bad, because it could have made them even more money. It developed a difficulty starting. One helpful soul in Tempe told me it was a battery problem and gave me a jump, but the AutoZone people disagreed. I blew it off until the same thing happened again in Phoenix. I called for another jump, but that helpful soul told me it sounded like another sort of problem. The jump worked, anyway, and so I drove straight to AutoZone for some jumper cables. Their prices ranged from under ten dollars to over thirty. I asked the clerk what the difference was and he said something about the amount of power and studliness of the battery or something. I told him I had a '91 Toyota Tercell and what would he recommend? He said the \$6.99 ones should be just fine. Anyway, the car still sighed and coughed, and occasionally backfired, which was something like it having really bad gas.

That Saturday, I had an appointment with Bruce of East Valley Auto Services. This is where you stop thinking of all mechanics as being blackguards, for Bruce and his crew are all saints. I never have been condescended to by them or left their premises with that sick I've-just-been-swindled feeling. Bruce checked the car and told me what was wrong, and it all sounded plausible. Here are some words from our discussion: catilitic converter, gasket, *oil leak*. And he seemed confident that given time he could fix them all. And I believed.

But he had to have the car on a weekday, so I had to do some negotiating—the end result of which was my driving Pat's truck on Monday. And if I might interject (like you can stop me), trucks are awesome. Or as Peggy Hill described them, "a *force.*" Twenty minutes behind the wheel and I was feeling like Auntie Entity. And it went so fast so easily. You'd just look down and notice you were traveling at 80mph. (Don't worry, Mom, I was in the 80mph zone.)

That night I got my own car back with repairs costing well *under* what was projected. My car was running strong, loose, and above all, *quiet*. It's still under the influence of whatever magic mechanics perform to make everything seem extra smooth, and I know it will finally lose some of that. But for now, we are both very happy.

The End...or is it? My next project is getting the car washed, as it has nearly enough dirt on it to grow crops. ΠΠΠΠΠΠΠΠΠΠΠ

## X Christmas Wrap X

SEDONA—As Mom is between homes lately, she treated Pat and I to Christmas in Sedona. You all know Sedona is gorgeous, so I'll skip the wonder-of-nature portion of this article and hit a few of the other highlights. We ate at this cool café called Red Planet which has a diverse menu and an extraterrestrial theme. Stars were painted on the ceiling and little models of grays were suspended from it holding paintbrushes and tiny beers and so forth. When we returned to the hotel, Mom forgot to lock her car door, but using the key chain thingy we locked it from the second story window, which was neat. When it got dark, we went to look at the Christmas displays at Taloqopaki (I know that isn't how it's spelled), some of which were imaginative, others lame, still others downright creepy. We voted for the one with the scorpions, then went on a search for a quiet place to sit and drink something warm, which turned out to be our hotel room.

There, our evening's entertainment was provided by my dear, dear Aunt Karolyn who gave me a book of Mad Libs for Christmas (also a Viscous Sipper). Armed with a bunch of brochures from the hotel lobby (the words "vortex," "healing," and "massage" have never more hilariously been applied) and a book of words (given by my fabulous aunt to my mother) to use if you want to convince everybody that you are a pretentious pain-in-the-neck (we all loved it—and by the way, if somebody calls you a theomaniacal merkin wearing witling, it's not a good thing) we created a good deal of merriment that evening. Most of the details of the game have gone from memory, but the reminder of a meal of sensuous elves is enough to reduce Pat to helpless laughter.

The next morning we went for a nature walk, which I thought should have ended when nature's beauty became obscured by the glittering blobs of oxygen deprivation effect began to swim in front of my eyes, but I was overruled by Xena and Hercules. Then Pat had to return to the valley to work a shift, so Mom and I puttered around Sedona. We actually bought some things from a art fair, though that pleasant experience was marred by this horrible woman who forced me to buy a manicure kit. Now you have to understand, in wintertime I allow my hands to become so dry I could probably grate cheese on the scales. I don't have to scratch an itch with my nails, the back of my hand does fine. Maybe Violator could get some use out of it.

I've left out a lot of details, but overall it was a happy, welcome excursion.

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Now let's put the spotlight on you folks. I received a pitiful number of Christmas cards this year, so everybody except Harvest (who taunted me with "Seinfeld" humor), Pam (who wrote with a fat gold pen something about "crowing through the sheets of New York"), Lee (what Christmas would be complete without a fruitcake joke?), and Katy (who e-mailed a card), should hang your heads in shame. Well, maybe not all of you (like Scott and Jana are off the hook because they e-mail me all the time), but you know who you are.

In other new news, Katy recently ran a marathon in Florida, Disney World, to be exact. She is now in training for another event that would probably be indiscrete to write about here, but best of luck to her. You know, that makes two people in my circle marathon runners (the other being my glamorous cousin Evelyn). Not enough to exert peer pressure, I think, but it's getting scary.

The official quote of Volume 4 is, "*Please!* I'm asking you with my *brain.*" The first one to correctly identify it's source gets a million points....The official song of Volume 4 is "Power Trip" by Monster Magnet....The only comment I heard about last month's selections (aside from a general murmur of approval for Cake) was indeed a Courtney Love related complaint from my co-worker Janet, but as she was careful to note she hated Hole in it's entirety, I thought I'd slip it in....Mr Enigma has been providing invaluable assistance to Ms Vep, the result of which should be more and more spectacular newsletters in the future....Be on the lookout for a *COBRA'S NOSE* supplement entitled "Porno for Mormos," and an amazing pic of my fearless mother sticking her head into the mouth of a dangerous beast (you'll never guess what variety).... And above all WRITE TO ME c/o Sensational Aunt Karolyn/ 5122 W Fairview/Chandler, AZ/85226. Sorry if I forgot you this time, write to me and let me know. Courage. <a href="https://www.commons.com">cspssssssssssss</a>