



*Zack Lencioni*

**FROM THE CONTINUING  
ADVENTURES OF ABE AND ANNA, OR, THE  
SIBLING DETECTIVES II OR, WILLIAM F.  
BUCKLEY AND OZZIE SMITH: REUNITED  
AND IT FEELS SO GOOD**

“Life now totters between the months of August and September, the ineluctable progress of time assuring its eventual tip toward the latter, but the torpid air tugging nevertheless at its back and succeeding at least in manufacturing a pervasive mood of stasis and staleness. And humidity...always the humidity.” Abe Pieruccini’s lips closed at the same moment his eyes narrowed. He squared his feet, shod in bright white and brown golf shoes, with his shoulders, which wriggled slightly as he situated the driver so that it hovered an inch behind the small white ball on which his gaze was fixed. As he contorted his body for the backswing his shoulder blades showed through the thin cotton polo, pale lavender, which he had purchased along with the shoes and an off-white pair of pants for the driving range the day prior at Nordstrom’s. He brought the club down with a halting motion

and clipped the edge of its intended target, sending it a few yards in a direction forty-five degrees from straight.

“Give up,” implored his sister.

“I’m almost through with the basket,” he said as he set another ball on the tee. Unbeknownst to him the basket had been artificially thinned, Anna having taken every available opportunity to pluck a ball and hurl it behind her back.

“I meant the narration,” she said.

“Well, you insist on being petulant and silent. You have even neglected to compliment the Bisquick pancakes I served you this morning.”

“I will say that I have never before been offered such a varied plate of pancakes without there being some humorous intent involved. Blackened pancakes the size of medium pizzas. Pale drippy ones the size of silver dollars. And everything in between.”

“Such an attitude. I will now take the opportunity to mention that I did not call you on the fact that you were awake and downstairs a full twenty-five minutes past nine.”

Abe (age sixteen) had been adamant about maintaining an orderly household for himself and Anna (age ten) ever since their parents had, in their capacity as adventurologists, left for Egypt in the early summer of that year, 2004 , to recover an ancient shoehorn-relic from an underground army of

gnomes. In the meantime the quasi-orphans were working as a team of sibling detectives as a means to finance their parents' expedition, while skimming a bit off the top for discretionary funds. There were other advantages to the sibling detective racket: Abe considered it good training for a possible future career in adventurology, while Anna greatly appreciated the glamour of it all.

Abe was on a self-discipline kick, which led to the formulation of a set of rules agreed upon by Anna and him. They were recorded in green spiral notebook, labeled in black permanent marker on the cover: "Rules Governing Our Domestic Lives as Temporary Orphans."

The list began:

1. No sleeping past nine; eleven on weekends.
2. No wearing the same piece of clothing two days in a row.
3. Abe must purchase the newspaper daily.
4. Anna must not annotate, tear, or muss up the fold of the pages of the newspaper before Abe has read it.
5. Two meals a day must be prepared and consumed at home.
6. No trite orphan indulgences--including, but not limited to: candy for breakfast; purchase of exotic animals; silly string inside the house.

As the list went on the rules became catty and were added by one sibling without the other's consent, typically as an expression of the pet peeves of each in regards to the other:

43. Abe must not pompously insist that culinary is pronounced cue-linary, because cull-inary is just as acceptable, as evidenced by the inclusion of both pronunciations in Anna's American Heritage Dictionary...

67. Anna must not laugh at her own puns.

Anna, in no mood for puns, sat behind Abe, beside the white wire basket of balls, cross-legged, her shoulders hunched as her forearms rested on her bare knees, picking listlessly at blades of grass. Abe had ambitiously insisted upon purchasing also an outfit for Anna--not matching, but closely coordinated--which she had refused to wear. To her mind it was too hot to heed either the dictates of fashion or the club's dress code. She wore khaki shorts and a t-shirt purchased the year before as a souvenir at a flamboyant lake-side city in Michigan.

Here it must be clarified that the presence of the siblings at a "club" does not indicate that they could be described as moneyed or snobbish. They

came from a background that might be described as humbly comfortable. No, this was not a club of the sort that populates itself on the basis of wealth and Protestantism. This was the club of the St. Louis branch of the National Geographic Society. It provided wide verdant lawns and darkened rooms smelling of brandy and cigars for archaeologists, anthropologists, geographers, cartographers, and others who were active in certain fields with names derived from the Greek language. As well as, of course, members of their immediate families.

“I don’t want to be here,” began Anna, keeping—with superhuman effort,—most of the whine out of her voice. “If I can’t be watching TV at home you could at least let me read a magazine or something in the lodge.” The magazine or something to which she referred was almost certainly *French Vogue*, a publication she was experiencing a certain mania for at the moment.

“I want you to keep in my sight. If you’re in the club, I know my luck, two forensic anthropologists will get to discussing Kennewick Man and you’ll have your skull cracked open by a flying table lamp in the riot that follows.” Abe was still, at this early stage in their detective career, a rather overprotective surrogate quasi-parent/elder fellow quasi-orphan.

Abe placed another ball on the tee. The club’s head glanced the top of its target by the barest of margins. Abe stared for a while with amused disgust at the white, dimpled orb resting in the grass three feet in front of him.

“And another thing—” Abe began, swiveling abruptly, about to lower a slightly puritanical objection to his ten year old sister’s affection for *French Vogue*. He had caught her in the act of hurling a ball off into the patch of trees behind her. “Now, what’s this—”

“Sir?”

The Pieruccini siblings glanced sharply around at the National Geographic Society Club’s servant boy, Geoffrey. He was a small southwest Asian child--small by virtue of genetics, age (eight or so), and a touch of malnourishment--with a disconcerting cockney accent. The club had purchased Geoffrey, dressed him up in a uniform of wool knickerbockers, waistcoat, and pageboy hat, and ordered him to shine shoes, mix drinks, run errands, keep the lounge tidy, and sundry other tasks. It was really a very nice club.

“Yes, Geoffrey?” said Abe.

“Telephone for you, Mr. Pieruccini, sir.”

Geoffrey’s sudden appearance had suggested he possessed powers of teleportation, but his audible panting made quiet sprinting a more likely explanation.

“Mr. Pieruccini is my father’s name, Geoffrey. Call me Master Pieruccini.”

Anna rolled her eyes at the obviously rehearsed line.

“Telephone for you, Master Pieruccini, sir,” said Geoffrey, quavering.

“Who is it calling?”

“I’m afraid they wouldn’t say, sir.”

“I’ll take it in the billiards room. Thank you, Geoffrey.”

Geoffrey dashed off, having, as he always did, two tasks to perform at any given moment.

“Follow me,” said Abe to Anna as he put his driver to his shoulder and set off for the lounge.

Anna followed a step behind her brother. “I never could see how the club managed to purchase a child and set him to work. It seems like it would be illegal in a number of ways.”

“Naturally,” said Abe. “But Anna, you see, there’s not a law enforcement agency on earth that would dare meddle in the affairs of the National Geographic Society. The Society would ruin them. Ruin them, you see?”

“They’re not above the law.”

“But they are. That’s exactly what they are.”

“Even presidents aren’t above the law.”

“The National Geographic Society isn’t on the level of a public servant such as the president of the United States. You have a precocious sort of intelligence, Anna, but you haven’t any idea of the order of the world.

Multinational corporations! Geographic societies! Ninja brotherhoods! Monastery orders! Professional guilds! And so on. These things know no government. They are their own government.”

In the billiard room, Anna took to twirling a cue around, missing narrowly with every pass the pewter vases from the Song Dynasty situated in a row upon the mantle. Abe took the speaker to his ear and held his mouth up to the receiver. That is to say it was a quaintly old-timey telephone.

“Hello? This is Abraham Pieruccini.”

A moment of crackling. “Be at the parking garage across from Busch Stadium at ten this evening.”

“Who is this? Is this Jimmy? You crazy S.O.B., how are you?”

“The third level, by the fire exit.”

“Oh. You’re serious?”

“Yes,” said the voice flatly.

“Not Jimmy, then, I suppose. I say, this is mysterious, isn’t it?”

“I guess.”

“I suppose you can’t identify yourself,” said Abe.

“No.”

“Right. What time, then?”

“Ten,” said the voice. Then it continued: “Third level, by the fire exit.”

“That was my next question! You’re on the ball, aren’t you?”

“Try to.”

“Good show. See you at ten.”

Abe clicked off.

“You have a terrible habit of talking like a character in a British novel when you’re on the phone,” said Anna.

“I thought I was doing all right until ‘good show.’ That, I admit, was awful.”

“You absolutely were *not* doing all right; you’d already said, ‘I say.’”

“I like ‘I say.’”

“It’s so effected,” said Anna.

“No, it’s ‘affected,’” said Abe.

“Glad you agree.”

“Well, we both have the terrible habit of being too clever by half,” said Abe with some unappealing self-satisfaction. “What say you we head for home?”

“I say, I left my driver at the range.”

“Now it’s you saying ‘I say.’ I say we have Geoffrey fetch it while we have a good sit on those overstuffed leather armchairs in the next room.”

“Agreed,” said Anna.

“Oh Geoffrey!”

At half past ten Abe parked the Pieruccini family's 1978 mother-of-pearl Cadillac Coupe deVille at the designated meeting point. Anna occupied the passenger seat. She had been brought along for two reasons: firstly, she had a painfully well-established habit of flying into a physical rage at there being stated aloud the possibility of a babysitter; secondly, to ensure Abe's safety in the eventuality that he was being lured into a trap by thugs in the employ of the rival Zanzinger family or one of the Zanzinger's numerous, nefarious associates. To this end, Anna had been allowed to hang on to a cattle prod which was to be used only in the event that Abe's physical person were to come under attack. She had grudgingly agreed at Abe's insistence that she otherwise remain inconspicuous in the Caddy.

Standing in front of the fire exit and doing a full examination of his surroundings, Abe saw no one. Startled, he saw from the corner of his eye a small flame rise, followed by the blazing terminus of a cigarette. This light allowed his eyes to pick out in a shadowy corner the faintest of silhouettes.

"You're late," came the voice from the corner.

"Sorry--traffic, you know."

"There isn't any traffic at ten at night."

"You're right. Actually it's because I had to stop along the way to buy a cattle prod."

"Cattle prod?"

“Yes. Do you have any idea how many types of cattle prods there are on the market? It took forever to pick one out.”

“I had no idea.”

“Well, exactly! If I’d known that beforehand I’d have left the house earlier. But anyhow--what’s this all about, if I may ask?”

“Follow the money.”

“How so? I don’t understand.”

Abe discerned from the movement of the cigarette that the shadowy figure was gesturing to a spot on the concrete floor near where Abe stood. Abe observed there to be a penny. Two feet from the penny was another penny and two feet from that penny was yet another penny and so on in a line. He turned to face the form in the corner, hoping for some form of explanation.

“You will find a letter at the end.”

“Why is it you couldn’t have just given me the letter?”

“I could have, certainly, but I thought, ‘Hey, why not make it a game? It’ll be fun. People like games.’”

Of course, Abe couldn’t argue with that.

And so Abe set out parallel to the pennies. The line ran straight for a ways before going into hysterics: curlicues, doubling back, over and under cars, up the wall, on the ceiling. The end of the trail was but fifty feet as the crow flies from the point at which Abe had begun. He knelt to pick up the

letter and turned again to face the darkened corner, only to see there was no longer any form to be found occupying it. Abe furrowed his brow and returned to the Caddy.

“Where did he go?” Abe asked Anna. “Did you see who he was?”

“I wasn’t paying attention.”

“You were goofing around with cattle prod weren’t you? I knew it was a bad idea to give you a cattle prod. It’s not a toy.”

“I just didn’t happen to be paying attention! The cattle prod had nothing to do with it. Couldn’t you tell who it was?”

“Jeffy from Family Circus, maybe. He gave me, after a fashion, this letter.”

As Abe held up the letter, Anna took the opportunity to snatch it from him. Before Abe could undertake a counter-measure, they froze. The siblings’ two heads then snapped to peer upon the passenger window, its having been knocked upon thrice by the firm, assured knuckles of St. Louis’ own Hall-of-Fame shortstop, Ozzie Smith.

“My battery is dead,” he said through the glass. “Do you think you could give me a hand?” His tone was sheepish, disappointed, as he knew his voice, in addition to his very presence, revealed assuredly it was he who had been engaged but a moment before in the role of courier. Ozzie Smith liked

mystery, you see: mystery was fun. Ozzie Smith was a fun guy. Hence Ozzie Smith was mysterious. Q.E.D.

“Certainly,” said Abe as he moved to exit the vehicle.

Anna took the opportunity to read the letter. She was not paying attention to the fumbling attempt at mechanics taking place a hundred feet from her open window, but if she had, she would have heard the following dialogue echoing about the empty parking garage:

“Take that--the red one. The other red one. Then you’re supposed--does it say? Is that what it says? Or does it just--let me. Do you--is it that one or the other one? Is it on all the way? I think you’re--no, that--yeah, like that. It needs to be on there good. Like, tight. Try it. Did you try it? It’s on there like it says in the thing. Here, look--see? It needs to be on good. Try it--there. All right. All right. There we go. All right.”

Ozzie Smith departed.

“Letter’s dull,” said Anna as Abe got back in the Caddy.

“I didn’t tell you that you could read the letter.”

“Please. If you’d read the letter, you’d have known it was addressed to the both of us.”

“Mother and father?”

“*Da.*”

“Why are they communicating with us through Ozzie Smith?” said Abe in a high, quiet voice as he narrowed his eyes and pursed his lips.

“Letter doesn’t say.”

“I was asking myself.”

“Well, then stop talking to yourself,” said Anna.

“Stop hitting yourself. Stop hitting yourself. Stop hitting yourself.” As Abe said this, he took hold of Anna’s arm and directed it in such a way as to cause her limp hand to strike repeatedly her jaw and cheek.

“Mature,” muttered Anna.

“*Danke*,” simpered Abe.

Abe piloted Anna and himself northwest along I-70 toward the Pieruccini home. Nas’s *Illmatic* played over the stereo, as Abe was ignoring Anna’s high pitched exhortations that they opt for Jay-Z’s *Reasonable Doubt* instead. Finally Anna made an idle threat concerning the use of the cattle prod should she not get her way, whereupon Abe snatched the husbandry tool from his sister and flung it from his window, leaving a small mystery laying next to the center median for observant drivers during the next day’s morning rush.