

SUCKLE

A novel

by Benjamin Salmon

March 26

Manuscript arrived today. Gave it a quick run-through. Rough but has a certain raw appeal. Amazing story, actually. Probably sell a million copies if the press likes it. Why wouldn't they? They liked it when it first broke, so why wouldn't they like it now? Remember reading about it in the Times myself a year ago. Had no idea then that I'd be working on the book.

Talked with John Fairfax on the phone to find out what he wants. Keep the voice intact, as much as possible. Lots of first-person inserts. Flesh out the back story. Add details. In a word: research.

Already set up appointment to meet with B. S. later this week. Flying out (coach) to Oregon for a couple months. I figure it'll be easier to work out there.

Gavin not at all impressed that I'm leaving during beach season on the Jersey shore. For the other side of the continent, no less, in cowboy country. Yeehaw! (Note to self: Is Oregon cowboy country?)

March 31

Checked into a hotel with a moose head over the front desk. My god! I thought Jersey was a forest. Dopey looking animal, the moose is. But the room is nice enough. Modern with just a twang of back country to it. At least there's a small desk-like piece of furniture in the corner of my room. Oh, and a well-stocked mini-bar. John F. will undoubtedly rue the day he agreed to let me work in backwater Oregon when he gets the tab from the Pinewood Lodge.

No cowboys, so far.

Went through B. S.'s manuscript again on the plane here. Marked it up this time. Lots of loose ends. Leads to follow up. I'm starting to wonder if I'll make it back to the Jersey shore at all this summer.

Who I Am and the Thing That Happened to Me

My name is Benjamin Salmon but people call me Benny mostly. Not counting my wife Sam who called me Benjy when she was trying real hard to get my attention. And I have to say sometimes it could be real hard getting my attention if I was busy with my trains or something but I guess it dont matter much now shes gone anyway. Nobody calls me Benjy no more. Mom called me Benjamin like it was supposed to make me smarter or something but it didnt and I guess it dont matter mostly neither now shes gone too. My dad called me Ben till I was seven but he left after that so then he never called me nothing at all. My stepbrother Ray called me shit-for-brains mostly or whatever else that had shit in it and my stepdad Jack pretty much never said nothing to me cause I guess he was hoping Id just disappear or something someday and I guess I pretty much did. But thats another story or the back story like Mr. Fairfux at the publishers says so I guess therell be more about that later. A short introduction and get to the story he says so I guess there it was and her it is.

My life was pretty much normal until a few months back. Thats when this thing happened to me. Mr. Fairfux says its something real special and I should write about it cause its the heart of the story and Im pretty sure this things not normal cause Mr. Fairfux wouldnt ask me to write about it in the first place if it was something normal. Anyway I never heard of it before and Phil never heard of it neither. Phil is my brother-in-law and I never told nobody about it but him. I mean I guess I told Mr. Fairfux about it but it was after everyone else heard about it too in the newspapers. But when it first happened I just told Phil and I only told him cause he had this thing with his testicles a few years back. Cancer I guess it was. I dont know why it was real important to me but it was. I guess I just thought he had some weird stuff going on with his body too so maybe hed think mine wasnt so weird. When I showed him he looked up at me from his plate of soggy eggs shocked some and said You oughta take that fuckin shit on the road Benny. But that was just Phil always making jokes but mostly meaning nothing by it. It was like part of his makeup or something or like the grain of his wood I guess you could say. Phil works for KNOB a local radio station with stupidly bad call letters.

Thats what Phil says and I guess I pretty much agree. Phils not a disc jockey like he was before. Now he says hes an on-air personality cause he dont spin tunes no more but other people say hes just a shock jock like its something bad or something. Phils one of them radio guys thats always calling celebrities at home and telling them theyre fat or saying some actor or hockey player is a fag or calling some politician a douchebag. But Phil never said nothing like that or not on the radio anyway. He cant really call anyone a fag or a douchebag on the radio but he might be able to call someone fat if its not a sponsor or something and as long as they really are fat. Like I said KNOB is a local station so it cant be real shocking so I guess the real truth is Phil just tells kinda mean jokes for a living and thats about it.

Not like me I watch people for a living. Im a security guard. Its not my dream job or nothing but I could have worse jobs and I guess Im mostly lucky I got the job back at all after what happened. But I guess I shouldnt go into that yet cause that comes at the end of the story. Anyway Phil got me the security guard job after me and Sam got an apartment together and got hitched right

after that. He said it wasn't right for a new husband to be unemployed and I guess he was right especially cause we had a little one on the way by then too. I mean I had a job before that but I got fired or I guess they say let go now. So like I said I got let go from my job. Before my security guard job I work for West Coast Vending getting coins out of vending machines. The day I got let go was like every other day mostly until my last stop. I emptied them coins into a canvas bag just like I was supposed to and put it on the ground to close up the machine and I guess that was my mistake cause I never saw the black dog coming. I guess it was a Rottweiler or a Pitt bull or one of them other mean kinda dogs. It ran by and all but knocked me down and just like that the satchel was gone and the money too. I chased that dog for a while but I guess it was in better shape than me cause I couldn't keep up and after a while it was mostly a small black dot on the road ahead so I gave up and went back to the vending machine. That's when I saw it was emptied out and the keys were gone too. My boss at West Coast Vending didn't believe my story and I got let go that same day. You know how much fuckin work it is to change the fuckin lock on every fuckin machine on your fuckin route? He said to me. I said no cause the truth was

I didnt know how much work it was. Youre fuckin out of here he said. Get your fuckin stuff and get gone he said. I mean I guess I didnt really blame him mostly cause I dont think I woulda believed me neither if I was him and if it didnt really happen to me. But then a week later that dog did the same thing again to a bunch of other West Coast Vending guys like the exact same way it did to me. I guess it was trained like that or something. Anyway my boss said I could have my job back if I wanted but I said no cause Phil already got me a security guard job. No more vending machines for me I said.

So now I watch people mostly come and go all day downtown in the offices of Tower Plaza on a greasy security monitor and I have to say its not exciting like I thought it was gonna be. I mean security guard sounds kinda exciting and important too I guess like I might be guarding something valuable and stopping robberies or something but its nothing like that. Its pretty much the opposite of exciting. Boring I guess you could say. Not like Phils job. But there was some excitement a few months back when I caught a janitor putting his man-thing all over this chubby girls office stuff at night. I felt kinda bad cause he lost

his job after that but Phil said I did the right thing cause the old perv was a real fuckin sicko and it was primo shock jock material. I remember it real good cause it was right about then this weird thing happened to me. Its kinda hard to explain so Ill just come out and say it. I started to lactate. I know thats what its called cause I looked it up. Lactate: to secrete milk. Secrete: to produce. But I guess I thought it was just mothers who lactate and I guess I dont need to say Im not a mother. Im not even a woman. When I said this to Phil he said No shit Benny. And when he wanted to see me lactate right there I said Right here? In Big Boys? And he said Yeah why not? Give me a shot in my coffee. Ha ha I said but it wasnt a real laugh but just the words ha ha. I told him its not like that. I said I have to be kinda excited. Phil picked up his coffee mug. What do you mean? Like Super Bowl excited? He stuck his fat lips on the rim and slurped real loud. At first I thought he was joking but then I saw he wasnt. He was serious so I said excited like sexy kinda excited. Phils Adams apple did this kinda tap dance thing under his chin and I could tell he come near to spraying coffee all over the booth. Jesus Benny! Is this some sick way of tricking me into a homo thing with you? Has it really

been that long? So I pulled my fake Lacoste shirt tight against my man-boobs and I told him to watch. Then I thought about Rosie until it was like I could see the top of her head moving around down there or something and pretty soon a wet spot soaked the little green alligator with man-milk and thats when Phil said his thing about taking that fuckin shit on the road.

April 3

Met Benny for the first time today. We had lunch at Big Boy's. Yes, the same that he and Phil frequented back in the day (and yes there really is a big boy in front of it—creepy if you ask me!) Must admit to being curious about the author of the ms. Having read it through three times now. On the phone B. described himself as “short, bald, and dumpy mostly.” He wasn't what you'd call short. Medium-height, more accurately. And not bald, but balding. The glossy, plastic-like skin stretched tautly across his skull retreated a few hard-fought paces back from the front lines of where a hairline had once barricaded itself against the inevitable march of time (not sure where I read that, but it's not mine—probably some dusty project from my past). In a word, B.'s hairline was receding. Only thing about his description that was accurate was his weight. Dumpy? Yeah, in that his stature was thick. Although he wasn't flabby. And not dumpy in the sense of disheveled. Far from it. He was neat. The sort who might press his underwear. But dumpy, as in overweight? Yeah, he was that.

If he were a woman, he'd be full-bodied. Maybe even Rubenesque. His breasts were full and round beneath a too-tight, knit golf shirt. Yes, his man-boobs were impressive. Tried not to stare but having just read his story (three times), it was a challenge to keep my gaze above his neckline.

He sprung up from the booth to say hello. Extended my hand in greeting but this only seemed to confuse him. Socially, a bit backwards, perhaps. No surprise, really. We sat and ordered food. Me a garden salad with an oil vinaigrette and he a bacon double cheeseburger with fries, chocolate-banana milkshake, and a side of tater tots and coleslaw. Eats when he's nervous, he said. So I asked him what he was nervous about. He was nervous about meeting me. When I asked him why he was nervous about meeting me he said because I knew everything about him. Not everything, I said, but I planned to learn a lot more if it was all right with him. He said it was OK.