Arlie Russell Hochschild

THE OUTSOURCED SELF

Intimate Life in Market Times

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METROPOLITAN BOOKS
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Chapter 1

You Have Three Seconds

A century ago in America, courtship was mostly a community affair. We can imagine my grandfather James Porter Russell, age twenty-three in the summer of 1900. He is riding his penny-farthing bicycle, with its large thin front wheel and smaller back one, over twenty-nine miles of dusty, washboard road from his home in Farmington to the farm in Turner. Five hours coming, five hours back, all in one day. Once there, he courts Edith, and her younger sister, Alice, local schoolteachers. One of the two will become my grandmother, the other the wife of a ne'er-do-well farmer. While paid matchmakers plied their trade in the ethnic enclaves of the great cities, they seldom entered the parlors of small-town New England where courtship tended to be a do-it-yourself thing.

The sisters and their visitor might well have been seated on the front porch of the farmhouse facing the dirt road. A neighbor's son, passing by, might have raised a palm to wave. The girls' father, a shy man who fought with the 16th Maine Regiment in the Civil War, would likely have been milking cows in the barn with his two hired hands. Their mother, chronically ill, was probably resting but would have come out if one of the girls called for her. This was
the sort of situation an honorable suitor in 1900 might have found himself in: expected to court under the watchful eye of family, neighbor, and village. J. Porter, as he called himself, had met Alice at a teacher's training college in Farmington and took a liking to her. But once he met Edith, the spunkier of the two, and saw her combing her resplendent brown hair in the sun—so the story goes—he made up his mind to choose her as his wife.

J. Porter was looking for a traditional girl, a homemaker and future mother, in a traditional way: a face-to-face meeting arranged through friends who also knew each other face-to-face. A typical turn-of-the-century advice book would have recommended he search for a modest, frugal, clean, courteous, industrious woman who reflected in her comportment “sobriety of conduct” and “chastity of intention.” One such advice book cautioned a suitor to “marry no woman who sleeps till breakfast” because early risers “exhilarate the mind and induce prosperity.” Another warned a man not to propose “before you have had time to notice whether her front hair and back hair match.”

One hundred and nine years after J. Porter pedaled his bike to Turner in search of a wife, Marcel Singer began his twenty-first-century courtship of Grace Weaver.* While J. Porter courted Edith in the presence of family and neighbors, Marcel and Grace first met through Match.com, a commercial Internet dating site, and Grace, who lives in Boston, received advice by phone from her love coach in Los Angeles.

“I Need a Consultant”

Grace's Internet profile photo on Match.com showed a green-eyed woman with loosely curled short blond hair and a radiant smile. At age forty-nine, she was a full-time engineer and the divorced mother of a twelve-year-old daughter. She was looking not so much for a husband, as for what she called a “partner for the long term,” an “emotionally engaged” new-fashioned guy, in a new-fashioned—screen-to-screen—way. Grace's ideal had far less to do with frugality, modesty, or industry than with emotional warmth, openness to mutual self-disclosure, and sexual fulfillment. Compared to J. Porter, she was seeking a far more intimate bond in a far less intimate way.

Her voice was spritely and warm when I called for the first of a series of telephone interviews. I began by asking her how she came to hire a love coach.

I remember waking up the morning after going out to a New Year's Eve party. I felt disappointed I hadn’t met any interesting men. I flipped on the television and watched a Wall Street Journal show on Internet dating. I'd always thought Internet dating would be tacky, and leave me feeling icky, overexposed, and naked. But then I heard this coach Evan Katz say, “Come on, guys. There’s nothing embarrassing about Internet dating.” I jotted down his name and wondered if this shouldn’t be my New Year's resolution: hire a coach, take control of my life.

To do that Grace would need to leave behind the last remnants of J. Porter's face-to-face village and outsource to a paid professional what has, for the last century, been imagined to be a personal matter. When friends still inhabiting that older world asked her, "A coach? Are you out of your mind? Get us to set you up. Pass the word. Join clubs. Meet a guy naturally," she told them, "I tried that, and I don't want to waste more time."

I work 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. With cooking, shopping, driving my daughter around, beekeeping, and gardening, I don't have time to look for a long-term permanent relationship—the basic thing I feel is missing from my life. My sister-in-law set

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* I have changed the names of all interviewees—except those who didn’t mind being identified—as well as many defining characteristics. But I have tried to faithfully describe their experiences and accurately report what they have said.
me up with perfectly nice friends of friends, but no one special.
Once you exhaust those possibilities, what do you do?

Then one morning as she rode her bedroom exercise bicycle, the thought came to her: Finding love is like an engineering project. I need a consultant.

So Grace Googled Evan Katz, whose online name was e-Cyrano—named after the secret wooer who fed lines to his handsome, lovelorn but clueless friend—and whose website read: “I am a PERSONAL TRAINER for women who want to FALL IN LOVE.” (Evan actually had male clients, too.) She signed up for his medium-level $1,500 Premium Package and simultaneously enrolled at Match.com for $17.99 per month. (In 2009 Match.com was charging its 1,438,000 paid subscribers $34.99 for one month or $17.99 a month for a six-month contract.) Grace declined Match.com’s further offer (and fee) to advise on the next step—getting a prospective date to exchange phone numbers. She also declined “First Impressions,” a service that, for yet another fee, moved messages to the top of the inbox of all new Match.com subscribers.

Wondering how a love coach went about his work, I flew to Burbank, California, to interview Evan Katz. He answered the doorbell and, with a friendly nod, welcomed me in, head tilted into his cell phone, alternating silence with soothing words to a client. Thirty-five years old, Evan was a tall, lean, wide-stepping man with a halo of curly brown hair and alert, curious, slightly worried blue eyes. Over tea, he described with disarming modesty his initial venture into coaching, “I had a BA from Duke in English literature, and I wanted to write romantic comedy screenplays for television. That didn’t work out but I thought I’d hold on to the romance part and try this.”

With the help of a business coach, Evan launched what became a highly successful company. He was featured at the International Internet Dating Convention in San Francisco, and has been a panelist on the Flirt-A-Thon Expert Panel in Los Angeles. He appeared on NBC, ABC, and CBS. He was the author of Why

You’re Still Single: Things Your Friends Would Tell You If You Promised Not to Get Mad. He maintains a monthly newsletter, and has produced audio CDs based on a tele-class (an interactive workshop via telephone) on “How to Write a Profile that Attracts People You Want to Meet.” When I met him, in May of 2009, he had written more than five hundred personal profiles for his clients, most of them heterosexual women.

Recalling Grace’s hesitation, I asked Evan if his clients felt ashamed to hire him. “Oh, I’m their dirty little secret! They think they’re supposed to be able to do this on their own,” he answered. A lot of them believe that “when you’re ready, love finds you.” But actually, he said, “finding love takes skill and work.” And to learn that skill, you need to pay an expert.

Evan offers three coaching packages for online daters—Basic, Premium, and VIP. For the Basic package, he helps clients write a profile for the online dating Web site of their choice; pick a headshot from LookBetterOnline, a photo service for online daters; create an alluring username; and write a catchy subject line. He also gives tips on how to correspond with an interested party—that is, date online, and how to date I.R.L., that is, In Real Life, afterward. The Premium package included a month of private coaching sessions. The VIP package adds sixteen hour-long coaching sessions over four months.

Like other love coaches, Evan also offered to read all the responses sent to Grace’s online profile and help pick out the most promising. But that felt “over the line” to Grace. “I’m the only one who can tell who is and isn’t promising. Plus, I want to be able to tell my partner, once we’re together, I chose you myself.” Unlike Evan Katz’s service, eHarmony, another Internet dating service, sets out guidelines for what to talk about after a couple has decided they are seriously interested in each other. But Grace found that unacceptable, too: “If one coach is feeding lines to the guy and another is feeding lines to the woman, isn’t that one coach courting the other?” A Double-Cyrano, for Grace, was just “too much.”

In all of these decisions, Grace had to consider the extent to
which she should adopt Evan’s businesslike approach to finding love. To begin with, he told her that looking for love was like finding a job. That made a certain sense to her:

I’m an engineer. So it was easy for me to think of dating as a work project. Just get it done. I know that sounds unromantic, but that’s okay, so long as I get to my goal. Evan kept my nose to the grindstone.

Other online daters writing on Evan’s blog also seemed determined to stoically embrace courtship as work. One woman said she was “working at” meeting men online and even on “putting in face time.” Another who identified herself as offthemarket4now described her schedule: “I kept plugging away, TableForSix [a service that sets up dinners with other singles], poetry readings, volunteering, and it’s hard work.” One playful poster remarked, “If dating is work, you may want to avoid people who have too many dates, like employers avoid job-hoppers.” Another wrote defiantly, “Looking for love is not like work.”

According to Evan, however, looking was work:

When you’re unemployed, what do you do to find work? When you are single, what do you do to find love? I’m not telling clients to spend forty hours a week looking for love, but I tell them, “You can give it three. Do the numbers—and don’t resent it.”

More than not resenting this work, Evan believed a person should enjoy it. In fact, trying to enjoy the work was part of the work.

Evan advised Grace to relax and to “put her real self out there.”

As Grace recalled:

Evan told me: “Okay, Gracey, you can’t hide behind generalities—fun-loving, athletic, musical. You have to show the real you through real stories.”

So Grace proposed a real story:

I once paid good money to go to a Zen monastery where I was guided to get on my hands and knees and scrub the men’s bathroom, to teach humility. And I didn’t mind. I’d cleaned Trudy’s [her daughter’s] bottom many times.

“That might be a little too out there,” Evan cautioned. “Why don’t you save that for when you’re actually on a date?” In other words, he urged her to be “real” but not “too real,” distinguishing between off-putting and enticing real stories.

The best real self, Evan assured Grace, was an “average” one. The Internet was not, as he saw it, a brilliant new medium for like-minded oddballs to find each other. It was a place for one wide-appeal average to meet another. “Everyone needs to aim for the middle so they can widen their market,” he counseled. “Don’t appeal to a small niche.” It was a common mistake clients made, Evan said:

I had this MIT brainy double-helix guy who worked for a suicide hotline, but I told him, “You can’t lay that out on the first date. It’s too much. You have to learn to talk about the weather.”

So part of getting the “real you” out there required the suppression of the too-real you. In your local community, Evan reasoned, a simple “this-is-me” approach would work, since people have had years to inquire of others and observe who you are. But the Internet, Evan said with awe, has revolutionized courtship:

The Internet is the world’s biggest love mall. And to go there, you have to brand yourself well because you only have three seconds. When I help a client brand herself, I’m helping her put herself forward to catch that all-important glimpse. A profile could say, “I talk about myself a lot. I go through bouts of depression and Zoloft usually works.” That might be the truth, but it’s not going into her brand.
Nor would excessive reticence do the trick:

One client told me, “I’m really good with my nieces and nephews.” But I told him, “Look, man, this is your job interview. Bring on the A-game. You don’t want a woman to ditch you because you bored her. The burden’s on you to reach out, not for her to see through your shy mask.” It’s a bitter pill to swallow.

Evan urged clients to use humor to persuade others that the edited sliver of their “real” self was them. He told me proudly of a success story.

Tony was bald and short, five foot two. I didn’t deny he was short, but I also didn’t focus on the height he didn’t have. I focused on the sense of humor he did have. We put “Are you afraid of spilling things on me? Don’t answer my e-mail. Worried about falling objects? Look for a taller person. A man you can look up to.” Before the new profile, he was hardly getting any e-mail response. Now he gets fifty or sixty page views and ten to twelve e-mails a week. I made the guy larger than life.

Applying Evan’s approach, one inspired online dater wrote: “Putting the ‘rarin’ back into ‘librarian.’”

Pressing the Button

Grace was ready. She had paid her fees and, with Evan’s help, had written her profile, posed for her photograph, collected additional shots of herself gardening, skiing, and hiking. She had prepared an e-mail subject line: “Nature Girl Looking for Serious Relationship.” Now all she had to do was click “submit.” Her voice trembled slightly as she recalled the moment:

I froze. It was hard to push the button. That was my photo, and there are twenty million viewers who are going to see it. What if some creep downloads my photo? I work in a state office building. What if someone walks in and recognizes me? It made me squirm. But Evan kept telling me, “You can do it.” So I pushed the button.

The next day, Grace’s profile went online, and, given her beautiful smile and artful description, e-mail responses flooded in.

Wow! People deluged me. Look at all these men interested in me. I felt so good about myself. A few hundred page views every few days—e-mails and winks [a Match.com option by which a viewer can express interest in a post]. I was like a kid in a candy store.

Grace felt she had to cull these responses on her own, without Evan’s help. Going through the messages gave her a sense of who was genuinely looking for love, and who was out for sport.

I discarded men who seemed to want a fling, or serial monogamy or pretend-monogamy. I wanted someone to grow old with, someone as morally upstanding as my dad, a sex god, and crazy about me, physically active and emotionally and spiritually mature. With this much choice I felt I didn’t have to settle for someone who wasn’t really exceptional.

“You’re getting good ROI,” Evan told Grace—Return on Investment, a term widely used on Internet dating blogs. Having now invested money and time, Grace focused on results; if dating was a job, you measured success by the quantity of high-quality responses.

Grace corresponded with many men. Some were sweet but implausible—like an Alaskan musher with forty dogs who’d noted that she owned a Labrador retriever and thought they might share a
love of dogs. Others were unnerving, like the man who, when she met him in person at a bar, turned out to be twenty-five years older than he’d claimed to be online—a fact he tried to remedy by applying a great deal of face cream and powder. As a friend put it to Grace, “You have to kiss a lot of frogs.”

But Evan didn’t talk about frogs and princes; he talked about numbers. As he explained, “Even if daters don’t think in numbers, numbers apply to them and they should know it.” His rating system went from 1 to 10. “I see a lot of 5 men looking for 10 women, and that leaves the 4 and 5 women in the dust,” Evan observed. A “10” woman, as he explained it, was twenty-four, never married, had a sexy 36–24–36 figure, a face like Nicole Kidman’s, a warm personality, a successful but flexible career, and a love of gourmet cooking. Grace was very pretty and sexy but older, divorced, and low on time for gourmet cooking. So maybe she was a “6.” How volatile such numbers were, Grace realized when she updated her profile the day after turning fifty. “Like stock prices, overnight, my ratings fell by half. I asked myself, ‘What happened? I’m the same person I was a day ago—but not the same number. Now I’m a 3 and a half’.”

Complaints sprinkled through Evan’s Internet blog were often couched in numerical terms. A woman who described herself as “nice, average looking, intellectually fun and creative” wrote, “I am SO SICK of these men who are fives (or lower) who think they’re going to wind up with supermodels.”

Before she met Marcel, Grace had had two half-year-long relationships. In each case the relationship ended because the man couldn’t get along with her preteen daughter. But what shocked Grace was how casually these men treated the breakups and how confident they were about their future prospects. “It was eerie,” she told me.

The first guy said, “I’m getting back on Match.com. It was so easy to find you; there must be others out there like you.”

I said, “Are you kidding me?”

He came back months later, “Oh, my God! What did I do? There are no other you’s out there.”

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I said, “It’s too late.” I’m not dealing with someone who thinks people come in fashions. It’s very weird, but the second guy said exactly the same thing. “It was so easy to find you.” Ten months later, he tells me, “There’s nobody out here like you.” In his mind, I was a box of cereal on the shelf with dozens of others. I was replaceable.

Both suitors had taken the idea of a “6” to heart. One 6 seemed equal to another. So if you lose one, you can get another just like it. In Grace’s eyes, they had taken market logic “too far.” Grace might be using the market to find a man but she didn’t want to end up with a man who saw her in a marketlike way.

One day, in a moment of great loneliness, Grace’s second boyfriend paid her a late-evening visit. Despite her strong reservations, she was tempted by his profuse apologies and entreaties. But Evan counseled her, “Gracey, has anything changed? Does he get along with Trudy any better? Has he grown more flexible? No? So don’t take him back. Mr. Right is out there. Keep going.” Here Evan was more than her guide to self-marketing. He was a friend, or at least friendlike. Maybe the suitor didn’t see who she really was, but her coach evidently did.

A few months later, Grace met Marcel, a twice-married musician and teacher. “The first thing that impressed me was that he put himself out for me. We live an hour and a half’s drive apart. But he told me, ‘I’m happy to drive to you.’ From the start, he was generous-hearted.” Something else also struck her. Many of Marcel’s attributes did not match the list of desirable traits she had given Evan earlier in the process: tall, good looking, possibly an accountant or engineer. Evan hadn’t put much stock in her list, and now she saw he was right.

The first time Marcel came to my house, he serenaded my Labrador retriever and me with his tenor saxophone. As I was watching him, I realized Marcel didn’t have many checks on my list. I wasn’t looking for a musician. I wasn’t looking for a
bald man. And he's tattooed! But he's gone out of his way to introduce me to his friends and family, and they all smile knowingly and say they've heard all about me and they're thrilled for him. After he'd known me for less than a month, he invited me to his high school reunion that was to take place four months later. We've been dating for just five months now, but already it feels deep.

Part of Marcel's appeal, never considered on Grace's list, may have been his own readiness to weave her into his life in nonmarket ways.

When I talked to Marcel by phone, he explained that his decision to put his money down for Match.com evoked little of the anxiety Grace had felt, even though he was, as he put it, "an Internet dating virgin":

I just sat at my computer one summer day, punched in my Visa number, attached my photo and—zip—I was online. I didn't hire a coach and didn't have a shopping list. But I was excited to try it out. I'd gone on a bunch of ordinary dates but it was the sweetness in Grace's eyes and smile in that photo that caught my attention.

After Marcel and Grace had exchanged messages, he visited her. "On the second date," he recalled, "Grace packed a sushi lunch and a bottle of wine, and she asked to kidnap me to drive to a place very special to her—an organic herb farm. She was as sweet inside as out. She's a giving person."

Marcel had never heard of 1 to 10 ratings, brands, or ROIs. After meeting him, Grace, too, began brushing them aside. "I never would have gone out with him if I'd stuck to my checklist!" The old language of romance crept back into her dating life. "It seemed to happen organically," she said. "We feel natural with each other." At one point, she even mused, "The way I think about it now, I wonder if meeting Marcel wasn't fated. It's like he was sent to me." In the realm of love, Grace had entered the market, exposed herself to its ratings of investment and gain, encountered men who saw her strictly as a commodity, and recoiled. The market could take you only so far. It might make the introduction, but for the rest what was required was the spirit of the gift.

Others Not So Lucky

Grace was one of Evan's success stories. She had achieved her goal and felt happy to have hired Evan and gone on Match.com. Other Internet love-seekers, though, were not so lucky and ultimately felt hurt by their experiences online. As a woman who posted on Evan's blog remarked:

There probably isn't a single guy I wouldn't have given a second chance to, but out of the many, many men I met, only two ever gave me a second date. You may read this and think I'm a terrible date. But I'm not. And I'm not looking for a movie star. I don't care if he has money, career, or a car. I'm just looking for a guy who's nice to me, makes me laugh, and uses his brain. Personally I don't feel the need to subject myself to this kind of rejection anymore. You know what I'm doing? I'm having a rich and active LIFE . . .

A chorus of sympathetic online nods followed: "I know what you mean. . . . I'm in the same boat." Men overrate themselves, women complained, leaving more women—especially older women—forced to lower their standards and demean themselves to elicit interest. One woman sadly admitted that in order to attract a man, she had falsely claimed she wasn't interested in marriage. Another proposed mobilizing a voluntary nationwide women's cartel against callous men in order to raise the general standard of respect for women. "We should all refuse to go out with men who treat other women poorly," she suggested. But this idea fell
by the wayside in the unregulated, nonunionized market of love. Evan countered with a simple “Sorry, darlin’.”

Internet dating could be hard on men, too, Marcel explained:

I didn’t anticipate some of the anger you can run into out there on the Internet and in person. I remember I asked a woman out. And when she got out of her car, I saw she was thirty pounds heavier than her photo showed. We had drinks. Then when I was walking her to her car, she recriminated men who cared about a woman's weight. When I later e-mailed her to say that I didn’t think we were a match, she wrote a venomous reply. It was hands down the worst date I ever had.

Thinking of Marcel’s experience, I asked Evan Katz why he thought Internet dating was so unrewarding for so many. For one thing, he felt, some people were simply too old, too fat, too unattractive in person or personality; their “numbers” were low. What about the fact that so many divorced men remarried much younger women, leaving attractive older women with fewer options? Nothing to be done about that. Work hard. Tough it out, he advised.

More to the point, he felt, was a general lack of clarity about just how close a bond really was:

People get very confused. They want to know when a relationship is serious. Here’s how it is: A relationship isn’t real until you’ve committed to being boyfriend/girlfriend. Everything prior to that—phoning, e-mailing, dating, preliminary sex—all that isn’t real until you have each committed. I’ve had clients devastated to realize that they’ve fallen in love with someone who is still looking online.

Another reason Evan gave for failure was—paradoxically—that his clients acted too much like shoppers:

People think they are shopping, and they are. But they want to quickly comb through the racks and snap their fingers, next... next...next... They make low-investment dates, so they can quickly move on to the next appointment, and they set up a short meeting at Starbucks where all they have time to say is, “Oh, is that a soy latte?”

You need to slow down. Hold out for high-investment dates—a nice dinner, a play afterward. You can be too efficient, too focused on your list of desired characteristics, so intent on getting the best deal that you pass over the right one.

Many clients clicked through dates—next, next, next—out of anxiety, Evan surmised. Part of his job, he said, was to tell them, “Relax. You have time.”

And even as shoppers, he pointed out, his clients often misunderstood the market. Many held the illusion, for example, that highly desirable partners were there for the picking.

Imagine you talk one-to-one to a beautiful woman at a party. She seems available. You feel lucky. Maybe a guy comes up; you see your competition. But what if, after you talk with her, you notice a line of five hundred men behind you. It’s like that on the Internet. If the supply of competitors goes up, your rating goes down. You just can’t see it.

On the farmhouse front porch in 1900, my grandmother was, lore has it, sitting next to her competition, her sister. It was a village courtship, and surely for her sister, all the more painful for that. To Grace, Marcel, and millions of other American online daters, however, the competition was anonymous; so for disappointments, there seemed no one to blame but oneself.

Evan also cautioned against looking for just what many love coaches professed to sell—a soul mate. Clients, he was convinced, were often scanning the listings for the wrong thing. As he observed ironically:
Online daters listen to coaching ads. “Find your soul mate. Find perfect chemistry. Fall in love.” And so they come into my office with long lists of characteristics they want: The man should be successful, tall, handsome, funny, kind, and family oriented. The checklist goes on. Does he like to dance? Is he a film aficionado? A real reader? They want a charismatic guy who doesn’t flirt, a CEO who’s home by 5:00 p.m. Some women are so touchy about not wanting to settle for less than their complete list that they price themselves out of the market. Then they get discouraged and conclude it’s impossible to find real love.

“Soul mate,” as Evan saw it, was a retrospective category. “It’s only when you look back after twenty years together that you can say, ‘We’ve been soul mates,’” he observed. The term implied, even created, a certain chemistry. So Evan didn’t use it. Still, many people do. Eighty-five percent of online daters in a 2004 study by Dr. Courtney Johnson said they believed “everyone has a soul mate.” Over three-quarters believed in “love at first sight.”

How might all this have looked to J. Porter? I wondered. For one thing, the search for a soul mate with great sexual chemistry would probably have startled him, given his era’s greater focus on a woman’s steadiness of character and motherliness. He would have been astonished, too, at the modern celebration of—and expansion of—choice in the world’s “biggest candy store.” After all, as far as we know, his choice was between Edith and Alice seated together on the same farmhouse porch. Grace Weaver’s Match.com profile, on the other hand, went out to many millions of viewers, 1.3 million of whom paid for the right to reply to her or other paying clients. In 2009, Match.com reported 56 million introductory e-mails sent, and 132 million “winks.”

J. Porter might also have been nonplussed by the very idea of a hired Cyrano, self-branding, 1–10 ratings, and ROI. He would have been baffled by the paradox of the love mall: if everyone is invited to shop for ready-made, off-the-shelf love, the opportunity gained in numbers may be lost in the brusque efficiency with which seekers treat prospective partners. “Isn’t it strange,” Evan later mused, “how we forget the biggest thing—kindness?”

There were other problems in Internet dating that Evan did not mention. Some daters lied about their age, drug habits, and marital status. In the absence of a watchful community, some felt free to brand themselves in deceptive ways. Some were rude, mean, or worse. One Internet dater I interviewed contracted a venereal disease from a man who lied about having it. This woman confided her revenge fantasy: “I wanted my brother to go over to that guy’s house and spray-paint ‘clap’ on the front of his garage. I wanted people to know.” Another woman had a similar revenge fantasy about a man who, she later discovered, was married. “When he told me not to call him at home because he was visiting his sister, I got suspicious. And he wouldn’t give me his cell phone number. The clues added up. That was the one thing I specified in my post: no married men. I felt like calling his wife to warn her—but I didn’t have her number.”

And that was not the worst.8 Marcel related a disturbing story he heard through a close friend. A woman, a divorcée with two children, met a man on Match.com and agreed to go to his apartment for a drink. He drugged her, raped her, and stole all her money. Stunned and drowsy, she managed to dress herself and begged for money to get a taxi home. The rapist threw her twenty dollars and she staggered out the door. Wanting to shield her children, she didn’t prosecute the man. Nor did she report it to Match.com. As far as Marcel knew, that man was still on the dating Web site.9

A Booming Love Business

In one out of six new marriages, the couple met through an Internet dating site.8 Of those I spoke to who were looking for love, all were intrigued by Internet dating but kept it as a backup in case friends’ parties and office meet-ups—more “natural” ways of
meeting—didn’t work out. But within the Internet dating industry, Gian Gonzaga, senior director of research and development at eHarmony explained, such person-to-person meetings are called “off-line dates.” Others in the industry call them “dating in the wild.” Match.com is only one of many Internet sites, and estimates vary on how many people click in. A 2005 Pew Center survey of online dating found that 16 million people—“11 percent of all American Internet-using adults”—had visited an online dating Web site at some point. During the September to December period of the survey, 10 million single Internet users said they were currently searching for romantic partners, and over a third—3.7 million—were doing so through dating Web sites. A third of all Americans at that time said they knew of someone who’d visited a dating Web site. A quarter said they knew someone who had gone on a date with someone they met through such a site, and 15 percent—or 30 million people—said they knew someone who had been in a long-term relationship or married someone he or she had met online. Estimates of online daters vary wildly—from 20 million unique users now visiting online dating sites in the United States to 40 million—or about half of all single adults in the United States.9

A 2007 survey of a random sample of nearly one thousand Californians of every age tends to confirm the estimate of 20 million. I asked people to “Imagine that you’re looking for a serious romantic partner, haven’t been able to find one, and you had enough money to pay for what you needed. Where would you go for help first? Family and friends? Religious leaders? TV or radio figures? Free Internet dating service? A for-pay dating service that finds you a partner and leaves it at that? A for-pay dating service that finds you a partner and sets up a meeting with him or her? Or a for-pay service that finds you a partner and provides monthly checkups to keep the relationship in good order?” Extrapolating from the survey, of all Californians, more than two million of the state’s twenty-eight million residents would opt for one of the for-pay services. Extrapolating to the United States, that would add up to some twenty-three million for-pay potential daters.10

You Have Three Seconds

The second largest online dating company, eHarmony, administers a 458-item questionnaire. It matches new members’ answers with those of other paid clients, thereby preselecting a few theoretically suitable applicants. eHarmony’s goal, according to its publicist, is to “capture the M market”—marriage market—by applying science to love. In 2011 the dating site claimed nearly one hundred thousand marriages a year.11 Perhaps to improve its marriage numbers, eHarmony does not admit physically ill, thrice-married, or—until a 2009 policy change—gay clients. eHarmony also for a while offered a marital tune-up service to help its marriages last.

The company is searching for other ways to improve its numbers, too. Gian Gonzaga, the psychologist who directs eHarmony’s research and development lab, told me in a telephone interview:

We’d love to move into “sparking” or what I call interpersonal attraction. Evidence shows that people are attracted to those with different DNA-based immunity profiles. Those are probably communicated through smell at close contact and are related to sexual responsivity. But we’d need to collect cheek swabs and that would be hard to do.

eHarmony’s technique for predicting long-term compatibility involves proprietary information, which Gonzaga calls a “product.” If the company ever happened to perfect a method to test for sparking, presumably that would become a product, too.

In a recent expression of the spirit of capitalism, eHarmony, Match.com, and other for-profit dating services now post competitive research bulletins on company blogs, each claiming to lead to more, happier, and longer-lasting marriages. At one point Match.com claimed that twice as many recently married U.S. couples met on its site than on its closest competitor’s site. eHarmony countered that its clients enjoyed longer and happier marriages than those of all other companies.12 The eHarmony survey used pie charts and graphs, rates of statistical significance, and a Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI), and claims to duplicate the sample size and selection
criteria of a recent study by Match.com. It also boasts clients who suffer less “loss of spark”—a state they refer to as LOS.

eHarmony also claims that its clients are less likely to suffer LOS or divorce than do married couples who meet at bars and clubs, work or school—and even through family and friends. Company-sponsored research on both sides is often based on Internet-recruited samples and doesn’t say whether the service attracts people who for well-documented reasons (such as higher education, higher income, and professional status) tend to stay together, regardless of how they met.

Behind the spirited contest between different company-funded researchers is, of course, the great profit to be made. In 2011 American fee-based dating sites grossed over a billion dollars. In 2008, Match.com was grossing $365,500,000—a million dollars a day. That amounted to $83,000 in subscription revenue for every marriage it claimed. When the stock market dipped that year, traffic on Match.com rose. The more insecure jobs become, some speculate, the more people seek security elsewhere. (The sale of pets went up, too.) And now such Web sites are looking abroad. As Jeff Titterton, the president of PlanetOut—a for-profit Web site featuring personals for gay clients—observed, “The money is in the international markets. . . . The next big wave is to go overseas. Let’s see what happens there.”

eHarmony’s Gian Gonzaga spoke excitedly about the company’s future:

Our compatibility matching systems is a good product; we’re already in fifteen countries, including Brazil, Japan, the UK, Australia, and Canada. And we have a partnership with eDarling which services Eastern and Western Europe. I’d love to set up labs in São Paulo and Tokyo.

The company is also expanding its business into other kinds of relationships—the selection of college roommates and company work teams, for example. And it is following married couples into later stages of life, such as parenthood.

Given the profits to be made, it comes as no surprise to see the current explosion of online dating sites: Kiss.com, craigslist, Yahoo! Personals, Chemistry.com, Matchmaker, LoveHappens, GreatExpectations, OKCupid, TheRightOne, PerfectMatch, and more. Sites devoted to matching daters by religion—including Catholic Mingle, AdventistSingles, LDS Mingle—are now commonplace. As are sites focused on particular ethnicity or race, such as AsianSinglesConnection, Filipina Heart, LatinSinglesConnection, JDDate, or InterracialMatch. Others address elderly daters: Silver Singles, Prime Singles, and Senior Friendfinder. Still others specify levels of intelligence (GoodGenes), education (TheRight-Stuff), occupation (FarmsOnly, MilitaryCupid), sexual orientation (GayCupid, PinkCupid, Adam4Adam), or disabilities (DeafSinglesConnection).

One company has carried paid dating services one step further—men pay outright for actual dates, the company getting a cut. In the first month after WhatsYourPrice.com went online March 29, 2011, it attracted 50,000 sign-ups and brokered over 5000 dates. As Singapore-born MIT grad, Brandon Wade, its founder, argues, “It’s a matter of free market principles really.” After all, he points out, a man usually pays for dinner, drinks, maybe a show on a date in America. His middle-man cut only adds a bit more. As for first-date etiquette, he recommends that women accept no personal checks or cashier’s checks, and that men pay the women half the price at the start of the date and half at the end. The Web site features images of women, often each body part separately, with captions reading “Wants $80” or “Wants $60.” Through other dating sites, too—SeekingArrangement.com, which connects Sugar Daddies (rich old men) with Sugar Babies (pretty young women), and SeekingMillionaire.com, for example—Wade creates many stopping points along a continuum between conventional dating and the clear commercial encounter.
Terms of Engagement

If in the search for love some of us have left the village, people like Grace are developing the ability, it seems, to keep personal life feeling personal in strange new market times. Grace hired an expert to help her. She countered her anxiety about entering the “love mall” by insisting on making her own decisions at various key points—drafting her own self-description and scanning all responses to it. To some degree, Grace was doing as Evan directed, but she carefully reserved a space where she felt in charge: “I’ll pay you to do this; I want to do that myself.”

Grace was lucky to have encountered a coach who taught her both how to “shop” in the online dating mall and how to stop thinking in shopping terms. Evan helped her think of herself as a brand with a market rating but also intimated the need to go beyond a brand mentality in her personal dealings with people. He guided her around an obvious but hidden paradox: if we shop for love in too commercial a way, we may never find it.

And how had things worked out for the master of the modern mall, the thirty-five-year-old Evan himself? I imagined that, as a national expert in online dating, Evan would certainly find his true love online if he hadn’t already. Maybe she would be a 9 or 10; he would get extraordinary ROI. And once he found her he might call on Sarah Pease of Brilliant Event Planning, “the go-to expert for designing your marriage proposal idea,” to “coordinate every moment until she says yes.” So I was surprised to hear Evan confess that, although he had been on two hundred online-initiated dates, he’d met his fiancée-to-be at a friend’s party and proposed in the ordinary way. Maybe it wasn’t J. Porter and Edith’s front-porch courtship, but then again, it was closer to that than to the “love mall” that provided his living. As we spoke, his mother was en route from Florida with his grandmother’s wedding ring. Bemused by the irony, Evan reflected:

I was looking for a never-married, Jewish, Ivy League woman, a little younger than me. Brigitte is Catholic, divorced, older, and a community college graduate. I never would have dated her on Match.com. But I am so lucky to find a kind, considerate person who loves me for who I am. You can’t put that kind of kindness in a profile. It takes time to reveal itself.

Soul mate and chemistry—these were the core ideals of the industry’s love-seekers. Yet Evan did not believe these were something one could instantly find, much less buy. Perhaps it was the abundance of apparent choice that made the ideals seem tantalizingly within reach. Or maybe the intent focus on finding the “right mate” right away reflected an impoverishment in other relationships—with friends, family, coworkers, neighbors. Whatever the reason, Evan was convinced that the imperative to find your instant soul mate was actually preventing his clients from recognizing the soul in the potential mate. That was because they were told to train their attention on finding—not making—connection. They were preparing to become consumers, not creators, of love.

His own case to the contrary, Evan was sure that love coaching and Internet dating were the wave of the future, and Grace agreed. “My twelve-year-old daughter, Trudy, is on Facebook a quarter of an hour in the morning and two hours at night talking to her ‘three hundred friends.’ She has a whole different sense of what’s public.”

When I talked to Trudy by phone, she, too, said her three hundred Facebook “friends” were a big part of her life. Yet when I asked her whether someday she thought she would like to go online to find a mate and maybe hire a coach, too, she replied, “No, I’d like to meet him at a friend’s party.” But when I told my aunt Elizabeth that the people I was interviewing were seeking soul mates on Match.com, she tilted her head back and chuckled in disbelief. Then, to my surprise, she added, “If other ways of meeting someone don’t work, maybe a person should try it.”
“Just get me home,” she pleaded each time I visited. “I’ll be fine on my own.”

That was not possible. However, after a near century of living like a church mouse, she had saved enough to pay for care. We found some useless, uncanceled checks quirkily tucked in an old telephone book. In fact, I discovered that bringing her home would cost less than the nursing home. I just had to find someone to be with her.  

I began calling around for a live-in caregiver. I called a suspicious-sounding woman living in a trailer park off Route 4 who declined due to a bad back. I called a farmer’s wife who needed the money but couldn’t leave her ailing husband’s side. I contacted all my friends and their friends, and their friends’ friends. The search was on. 

Chapter 4

Our Baby, Her Womb

As we drove into the vast parking lot at 10:45 in the morning, mothers in floral summer dresses and flip-flops, fathers in short-sleeved shirts, and girls in strapless tops and capri pants were slowly streaming from every direction toward the auditorium of the Holy Mission Baptist megachurch in Jackson, Louisiana. At the entrance, a young man in a dark suit passed out sheets listing “Events of the Day” and pointed parents with toddlers toward one door, older children toward another. I was led into a great auditorium filled with nearly five thousand seated parishioners facing three enormous screens. Looming above us was the projected image of two earnest singers in a loud and rousing vocal duet of “Jesus Lives,” set to the 1960s tune “Celebration Time.” 

The singers moved on to “Christ Is Alive” and “The Empty Grave Rejoices.” Parishioners were tapping their feet, rocking, bouncing gently in their chairs. A few stood. Hands clapping, hips swaying. Soon a dozen smiling ushers roamed the aisles, tossing in the air dozens of red, white, and blue beach balls for the audience to catch and pitch about the festive auditorium. When the music drew to a close, the Director of the Youth Ministry,
dressed in jeans and a blue shirt with rolled-up sleeves, led us in prayer. He then called on parishioners to stand and shake hands with their neighbors, left and right. “Ask them, What’s your favorite Beach Boys song?” Laughter arose. “I can’t remember . . . ‘California Girls’? ‘Do It Again?’” “Now,” the minister said, “ask the person in front and in back.” More laughter. “‘Good Vibrations.’ ‘Fun, Fun, Fun’ . . . I like that one, too.”

This lighthearted ritual of greeting was part of the church’s open-arms philosophy—one that had attracted Tim and Lili Mason, both born-again Christians. Before they married six years ago, they had been American nomads, moving several times each to new cities and, once settled in Jackson, from one neighborhood to another. The parents of both Lili and Tim lived in other states, and the couple knew neighbors only enough to “wave at.” So it was through Holy Mission Baptist—which served 17,000 believers, Tim told me proudly—that they had discovered a community. In fact, soon after they joined the church, a facilitator proposed that they join a group of young couples looking forward to parenthood. To improve their marriage, they also signed up for church-sponsored marital counseling. All of it offered them a welcome relief from the lonely, restless lives they had lived before marriage and church, though this sense of community also felt, to Tim, somehow moveable. As he said cheerfully, “If we move again, we can find a satellite campus and still feel part of the same community.”

Despite the thousands of people in the audience that Sunday morning, the pastor’s message seemed directed specifically at Lili and Tim and their thwarted hopes for a baby. After describing the heartache of waiting for something that just didn’t happen, the pastor told the biblical story of Sarah, the wife of Abraham, who found herself too old to conceive the child she yearned to have. She “foolishly took tools into her own hands,” the pastor said, and talked Abraham into sleeping with her servant Hagar. When Hagar conceived a son, Sarah flew into a jealous rage and banished her and her baby, Ishmael. Abraham was, the pastor commented wryly, “a wimp for going along with Sarah’s wild scheme,” and now found himself in a fine mess. A murmur of appreciation for the pastor’s frank remarks rose from the rapt congregation.

The message of the sermon was to “leave the tools in God’s hands” and not, like Sarah, take them into one’s own. Little could the pastor have known that two listeners in the front middle row had actually flown halfway around the globe to hire a “Hagar” to bear their child.

This was to be their biological child—the product of Tim’s sperm and Lili’s egg—implanted in the womb of a surrogate who lived in India. The science, the technology, the very idea would have been beyond the wildest fantasies of my grandparents, not to mention Sarah and Abraham. Yet Tim and Lili were not even venturing into the farthest reaches of today’s reproductive possibilities. For a person can now legally purchase an egg from one continent, sperm from another, and implant it in a “womb for rent” in yet another. An Israeli entrepreneur who calls himself “Doron” in the 2009 documentary Google Baby assembles such parts of life for a fee. A client can even purchase the sperm and egg online, have them delivered in liquid nitrogen to a clinic in India, have them implanted in the Indian surrogate, and pick up the baby nine months later. Where, I wondered, was the human touch in all this—the spirit of the gift? I was visiting Lili and Tim to see how they were feeling their way along this part of the market frontier.

After lunch at a nearby mall, we returned to the Mason home through a quiet, leafy neighborhood of dandelion-free lawns, small ornate water fountains, and two-car garages. All was quiet except for the distant roar of a leaf blower and weed whacker down the street near a truck marked TOP TURF LAWN CARE. The elegant homes, the sculpted shrubs, the manicured grass, all spoke of a desire for order and control.

“T’m a talker,” Lili began, handing me a tall glass of iced tea on a porch behind their spacious three-story redbrick home. A pretty, bright-eyed, petite woman, the daughter of Indian immigrants, and a computer programmer, Lili was wearing cutoff shorts, a white
shift, and plastic sandals, an outfit she had worn to church earlier that day. “I’ll tell you anything you want to know,” she offered.

In recent years, Lili had suffered from osteoarthritis and scoliosis, and after a double hip replacement, her doctor advised her to give up on trying to bear a child. But physical problems were not, she offered, the entire reason why she had never had a baby. Like many working women, she had delayed the decision to conceive and, even now at forty, approached the idea of a baby with caution: “I was slow to really want a baby. I was never one of those women who knew from day one she had to be a mother. But I don’t beat myself up about it.”

When I asked Lili about her early years, she slowly tucked her lustrous black hair behind her ears and described, with surprising detachment, the painful memory of her father’s relentless tirades (“You’re filthy. You’re a slut. You’re no good”) and her after-school job cleaning blood and vomit off the floors of mused rooms in her father’s small hotel. “He didn’t want me to turn out like the women who stayed in his hotel. I used to cry, hit myself, pull my hair, and slap myself. There was a railroad track behind the hotel. I used to think about lying down on it. So going through all that, I learned to numb.”

Ironically, her father seemed to push Lili into the very nightmare he imagined himself protecting her from. In her teen years, Lili began experimenting with drugs and sex. “I’m a ‘try stuff’ sort of person,” she said, “so I thought I could handle it. But I couldn’t.” After a series of boyfriends, four abortions, and one failed marriage, Lili found herself living alone in a high-rise apartment building in New Orleans, working a temp job as a file clerk during the day, flipping channels on her television at night, and accepting monthly checks from her worried parents.

“I was so depressed,” she continued. But one late weekend afternoon, she switched the channel to a plain-talking spiritual adviser, Joyce Meyer, and that day, alone in her apartment, she “submitted to Jesus.” Some while later, she moved to another apartment building and met Tim, also a recent convert, who told her he very much wanted a child. They married. With a brightened outlook, a desire to strengthen her bond with Tim and to be a good Christian wife to him, Lili began to try to want to have a child. “There’s still part of me says, ‘Gaaaaa . . . no!’ But another part says, ‘I’d like to do it for Tim.’ Tim is the real go go go guy on getting a baby.”

When I spoke to Tim later, he made no secret of his desire for a child. He was seated on the living-room couch, his leg in a full-length plaster cast propped up on a stack of pillows, the result of a recent fall in their backyard. Stocky, blond, with cherubic blue eyes, it was in a soft voice and slow measures that he described his day job managing warehouse shipments and Saturday afternoons coaching soccer and baseball. “I’m thirty-four and have gotten to a certain stage in my career,” Tim said. “I want to devote the next chapter of my life to being a father.” When he imagined being a parent, Tim pictured quitting his warehouse job, while Lili continued to work, and after Lili got home in the evening, teaching guitar in his basement office.

Refusing to be disheartened by four years of fruitless effort to get pregnant, Tim turned to other possibilities. Before their marriage, he had assumed it would be easy for Lili to get pregnant. But after four years of trying, they turned to in vitro fertilization. For this, the doctor harvested Lili’s eggs, combined them in a petri dish with Tim’s sperm, in hopes of creating an embryo that could be implanted in Lili’s uterus. But try after try, the procedure failed and costs mounted. After Lili’s double hip replacement and her doctor’s disappointing counsel not to carry a child, Tim started to research surrogacy.

I was Googling around and found some articles online about this infertility clinic in Anand, Gujarat, that offers very inexpensive IVF and surrogacy. I gave it to Lili to read and said, “Tell me what you think.” She read it and said, “You want me to go to India for a medical procedure? You must be out of your mind.”
Lili’s parents, naturalized Americans who had been born in India, had never heard of Indian infertility clinics. Nor had word of them come through the _samaaj_, the local Indian community in Jackson that kept up on eligible marriage partners and local dowry prices. Instead, word came to Tim via Google. Lili remembered her response: “No way! I wouldn’t be caught dead in an Indian hospital!” But Tim persisted: “I brought up online images of their modern equipment; it looked just like the IVF equipment the clinics have in Jackson.”

Had they considered adoption? I asked. Yes, but only as a last resort. Had they thought of asking a friend or relative to be their surrogate? Tim replied:

Actually, my brother’s wife and the wife of a friend both offered. We weren’t really entertaining the idea of my brother’s wife as much as Betty, the wife of my childhood buddy. We’re pretty close to them. I was overwhelmed that she offered us this huge gift and was excited to do it for us. They had to stop at one child for financial reasons and she’d enjoyed her pregnancy and wanted to go through it again.

They also felt bad for us. My buddy is a fireman and he told us he goes on calls in bad neighborhoods at 3:30 a.m. or 4:00 a.m. and will see a toddler in the middle of the street. There are so many people with babies that just don’t take care of them. And yet it’s so hard for responsible people to become parents.

“Why not accept Betty’s offer?” I asked. “It’s the cost,” Lili replied. “Insurance doesn’t cover the cost of medically preparing me to produce eggs, the cost of preparing the surrogate’s body to receive them, or the cost of the surrogacy itself.” Tim continued:

Then there’s the cost of the psychological evaluations. Plus lawyer fees. Altogether it would come to between $20,000 and $22,000 just to try. Then if Betty got pregnant, there are labor costs. The total could come to $50,000. We’d obviously want to pay Betty, too. If we hired a stranger here in the States, that alone could range from $25,000 to $40,000. So the total bill could be $80,000 here—and that’s if you have a normal baby. In India the total could be $10,000.

Lili and Tim earned a combined $172,000 a year. I asked them if they had considered moving to a smaller home to save money so they could pay for a surrogate in America. No, they liked the house and needed the basement for Tim’s music lessons. The SUV? It was handy, and at least they didn’t have two cars. Could they accept a gift, I asked Lili, from her well-to-do parents?

My parents wouldn’t hesitate to give us money. But now, at age forty, I have a fifteen percent chance of having it work with my egg and another woman’s womb. I wouldn’t want to spend their money for such a slim chance of success. Who goes with these odds? Do you invest in a stock with such terrible odds of return? No. Even if you have the money, it’s not a wise decision.

So, despite Lili’s hesitation, Tim e-mailed Dr. Nayna Patel at the Akanksha Clinic in Anand. She replied with a series of medical questions. Tim answered these, inquired further, and asked for names and e-mail addresses of references. Thinking over the events that had led them to Anand, still painfully fresh in their minds, Tim recalled: “She gave us the names of three couples, all of whom ended up with babies. We e-mailed all three and spoke by phone with two. They said sometimes you e-mail Dr. Patel and she doesn’t answer and you have to e-mail again, or call late at night. She’s very curt, but it’s not a scam.”

A few months later, Tim and Lili flew to India. “When we decided to go I began to feel, ‘Hey, I really want this baby,’” Lili said. They checked into a small hotel in Anand. The next morning, they took an auto-rickshaw to the clinic, where Dr. Patel’s amiable husband ushered them into her office.
Dr. Patel herself graciously greeted Lili and Tim and, after a short interview, drew back a white curtain separating the front of her office from two examining tables in the back. She asked Lili to undress and lie down. As Lili recalled: “When Dr. Patel examined me with the wand [a medical device used in pelvic exams], it felt like she was driving a stick shift around my abdomen: first gear, reverse. In the United States, a doctor might warn you, ‘You’ll feel a little pressure here or there…’”

Lying on the same table, Lili prepared to have blood drawn. Tim described the scene: “There’s no rain for ten months of the year in Anand. So the ground is very dry with big cracks in the soil, dust over the cars, rickshaws. So this blood-work guy comes into the clinic office with dusty feet.” Lili added:

He looked like a street vendor. He pulled syringes out of what I thought was a dirty camera bag. He entered the exam room with his rubber gloves already on. I thought, “What the heck is this?”

To collect semen, Tim was conducted to a room with a bed (he recalled grimy sheets) and a loose faucet hung over a dirty sink. “They tell you to wash your hands,” another client who completed his task in the same room told Tim, “but my hands were already cleaner than that water.” Lili was then sedated and the doctor retrieved two eggs, which were mixed with Tim’s sperm in a petri dish. Five days later, an embryo formed. They were elated.

The Quiet, Thin Surrogate

The Akanksha Clinic houses the world’s largest-known group of commercial surrogates. A baby a week is born there. Dr. Patel, the director, is especially proud of her clinic’s attention to quality control (most surrogates live on a supervised high-quality diet, often in secluded dormitories) and efficiency (Akanksha encour-

ages highly businesslike relationships between surrogate and client so as to facilitate the easy transfer of the baby).

When Lili and Tim arrived at the clinic to meet the surrogate into whom their precious embryo would be implanted, Dr. Patel handed them her profile. At the top was her name and under it:

Age: 25  
Weight: 44 kilos  
Height: 5 feet  
Complexion: wheatish  
HIV: negative  
Hepatitis: negative  
Occupation: housewife  
Marital Status: married  
Children: one  
Cast [sic]: Hindu  
Education: uneducated

The surrogate, recruited by Dr. Patel herself, was ushered into the main office, her eyes fixed on the floor, as were those of her husband, who filed in behind her. As Tim recounted:

The surrogate was very, very short and very, very, very skinny and she didn’t speak any English at all. She sat down and she smiled. She was bashful and her husband, too. You could tell they were both very nervous. We would ask a question and the translator would give a one- or two-word response. We asked what her husband did for a living, and the age of their child, just to make conversation. I don’t remember the answers. I don’t remember her name.

Surrogates earn more money if they agree to live in the dormitory for the full nine months, which nearly all of them do. Tim continued:
We asked whether she planned to stay in the dormitory or stay with her husband. She said she would live in the dormitory the whole time. Dr. Patel told us her husband would only be allowed to visit for a couple hours and in a crowded room, so there would be no chance they would have sex or that he would transmit any infection.

Lili remembered being nervous about meeting the surrogate:

It was because of this Indian-to-Indian dynamic. Other client couples—American, Canadian—tend to react more emotionally. They hold hands with their surrogate. But to me, that’s weird; we don’t do that touchy-feely thing—especially not for services rendered. You know, “I’m so glad you are doing this for me, let me hold your hand.” I’m a little bit rough around the edges anyway. But to me it’s simple: This girl is poor and she’s just doing it for the money.

But when Lili saw the diminutive woman enter the room, she did feel an urge to reach out.

I didn’t want her to think of me as this big rich American coming in with my money to buy her womb for a while. So I did touch her at some point, I think, her hair or her shoulder. I tried to smile a lot. Through the interpreter I told her, “I am very glad and grateful you are doing this.” I explained that we’d tried to have a baby but couldn’t. I told her not to worry for herself; she would be taken care of. I asked her about her own child. She didn’t look at ease. It was not the unease of “I can’t believe I’m doing this,” but more the unease of the subordinate meeting her boss.

The surrogate and her husband asked Tim and Lili no questions about themselves. “I’m sure to them it’s a pure business transaction,” Tim said. “Payment for surrogacy could equal ten years’ of salary in India. Still, if she’d been more cheerful, maybe we would have talked more.”

The encounter lasted fifteen minutes. The second and last time the Masons met the surrogate, she was lying on a table preparing to have their embryo implanted in her womb. Lili stood by the table and held the surrogate’s hand for about half an hour. A day later, Tim and Lili flew back to Louisiana. Two weeks after that they received an abrupt e-mail from Dr. Patel: “Sorry to inform you that Beta HCG of your surrogate is less than 2, hence pregnancy test negative. Herewith attached is the report of Beta HCG.” In other words, the egg had failed to grow in the surrogate’s uterus.

Had the surrogate been malnourished? Had the procedure been done correctly? It was hard to know. Dr. Patel recommended trying again with Tim’s sperm and a donor’s egg. Weary of the roller coaster of hope and disappointment, they asked about the chances of success. “Sixty percent,” Dr. Patel responded. But she had told a television interviewer it was 44 percent, and still other gynecologists estimated 20 percent. “We couldn’t tell what the real rate was,” Tim said, adjusting his leg cast on the sofa.

But the Masons decided to take the next step. They agreed to purchase a donor egg that would be artificially fertilized by Tim’s sperm and implanted in the womb of another surrogate. For this, Dr. Patel’s clinic needed to locate the right donor.

Several months went by.

At last, Dr. Patel wrote to say that she had found an egg donor. She was already on her seventh day of medication, the doctor explained, to help stimulate egg production. But who was paying for the medication she was already on, Tim and Lili wondered. Other clients? Had they dropped out? If so, why? “It seemed strange, but we wired her the $4,500 she requested,” Tim said. Egg donors at the clinic, Tim later discovered, received $100 to $500 per donation.

Lili and Tim asked to see a photograph of the donor so they could have some idea of what their child might look like. Weeks
passed. No photo arrived. Lili called Dr. Patel. In the notes Tim kept at the time, the exchange between them went like this: “Doctor asked, ‘If you don’t like the picture, will you pull out of the egg donation?’ We said, ‘No, it would just be nice to see the picture.’” A day later, a photo arrived.

She was “small, thin, and fairly pretty,” Lili recalled. Soon after, Dr. Patel implanted the donor egg fertilized with Tim’s sperm into the second surrogate. (To increase the chance of success, the doctor routinely implanted about five embryos at a time, aborting fetuses if they numbered more than two.)

Two weeks later another dispiriting e-mail message appeared on Tim’s computer: “Hello. Sorry to inform you that Beta HCG of your surrogate is less than 2, hence pregnancy test negative. Hereewith attach the report of Beta HCG.”

Tim and Lili never met their egg donor or second surrogate, nor did they see their first surrogate again, nor did they see the dormitory where both surrogates had promised to live for nine months. And when I asked them whether they would have kept in touch with their surrogate had a baby been born, both paused in slight surprise at the question. “I would have left that up to the surrogate,” Lili said.

If she had no preference one way or another, and just gave some polite answer, I probably would have sent some photos of the baby or a letter. If there had been no response, I’d probably have given up. She probably can’t write. The Surrogate Profile Form said “no education.” Even if she could write, I can’t read Gujarati. It’s probably a big cost for them to write letters. And who knows if they’d still be living at the same address.

Although Tim and Lili had no real interest in forming a friend- or family-like bond with their surrogates, it was not a sign of callousness or moral unease. They were caring people who faithfully tithed their income for the poor in India. They objected to any suggestion of exploitation and were disturbed to hear surrogacy mentioned in the same breath as the black market for organs. As Tim reflected:

There are so many activists out there saying that “wombs for rent” are a violation of human rights. I think it’s just a decision people make on their own. It’s not the same as one person buying and another selling a liver on the black market in Mexico. These Indian surrogates are very poor. They may not be the people you drive by, living beneath a tarp by the edge of some Indian road. But they’re not much above that. So why would you not want to help somebody out? What’s wrong with that? If they have a financial incentive, that’s fine.

Simply, Tim and Lili saw their relationship with the surrogate as a mutually beneficial transaction. They imagined themselves as outsourcers paying a stranger to provide a professionally supervised service. They hoped to establish a pleasant, temporary bond with the surrogate, to pay her, thank her, and leave. They sought to create the sort of relationship one might establish with an obstetrician or dentist. In the outsourcer ideal, relations are pleasant and honest, but the point of them is to facilitate the exchange of money for service. In the course of a modern day, the outsourcer manages many such relationships—with a babysitter, psychiatrist, physical trainer, for example—and can’t get “entangled” with them all.

Tim and Lili’s relationship with the Akanksha Clinic came to a decisive end after they received the last of Dr. Patel’s cryptic, disheartening messages, and Tim declared the search for a surrogacy baby at Akanksha over. “We’re now looking into adoption in Nepal,” he said. To prepare for that, they took an adoption class that Lili said had transformed her thinking.

When we were doing the surrogacy, I wasn’t so aware of the mother-child bond. I didn’t know a baby could recognize the voice of the mother who carried it. I guess I felt detached.
But after we took the adoption class, I realized how important contact between the surrogate and baby might be, and so how important it was for me to feel connected to the surrogate. If you’re carrying a child for nine months, and then suddenly it’s delivered and gone, there would inevitably be a void. God didn’t create our bodies to work with IVF and surrogacy. So I now think I would have wanted some relationship with the surrogate—for the sake of the child.

Everything for Sale

The international search for a baby immersed Tim and Lili in a globe-spanning stream of “medical tourists” for which India is a particularly popular destination. Since India declared surrogacy legal in 2002, an estimated three thousand Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) clinics have sprung up nationwide and are predicted to add, from 2012 onward, an annual average $2.3 billion to the nation’s gross domestic product. Advertisements describe India as a “global doctor,” offering First World skills at Third World prices, short waits, privacy, and—especially important in the case of surrogacy—a minimum of legal red tape. The Indian government encourages First World patients to come to India by granting lower tax rates and import duties on medical supplies to private hospitals that treat foreign patients.

The fertility market is flourishing in the United States as well. Had Tim and Lili decided to purchase an egg in the United States, they could have entered the world of ads placed by fertility clinics and prospective parents in college newspapers, on Facebook, and on craigslist. In a 2006 study of more than one hundred advertisements seeking egg donors published in sixty-three college papers, Dr. Aaron Levine, a professor of public policy at the Georgia Institute of Technology, found that a quarter of these offered potential compensation exceeding $10,000. Guidelines issued by the American Society for Reproductive Medicine, the nonprofit arm of an industry group, take no issue with the commercial purchase of eggs but urge limits on their price. A client should pay no more than $10,000 for an egg, they suggest. But ads in newspapers at Harvard, Princeton, and Yale on average promise donors $35,000.

The society also recommends that fertility clinics forbid clients from paying additional fees in return for special “traits” such as a gift for math or music. The society has no means to enforce its guidelines, however. With its Corporate Council members from Good Start Genetics, Freedom Fertility Pharmacy, Merck & Co., Pfizer Inc., and other for-profit companies with a financial interest in the matter, the society is unlikely to question the wisdom of placing reproduction on the market frontier. Dr. Levine discovered that for every extra one hundred points in a university student’s SAT score, the advertised fee rose by two thousand dollars. And dozens of American clinics now offer would-be parents detailed profiles of the characteristics of sperm and egg donors. Xytex Corporation in Atlanta, Georgia, for example, provides potential clients a list of genetically coded attributes—including the length of eyelashes, the presence of freckles, and results of the Keirsey Temperament Sorter test.

Students themselves found the fertility clinic ads unremarkable. One twenty-two-year-old Brown University undergraduate told the New York Times that she was shocked at first that they would target “what they were looking for, like religion, SAT score, and hair color.” But like other things she was first exposed to in college, “the shock wore off.” I asked one of my students at University of California, Berkeley, how she felt about ads for human eggs in the Daily Californian, the college newspaper: “Our tuition is rising,” she said, “and we’re less and less a public university that regular families can afford. I have friends who are looking seriously at those ads. I don’t blame them.”

Tim and Lili had themselves come to accept things that had once seemed unthinkable. In the meantime, they had placed their name on a waiting list, number 375, to adopt a Nepalese child and had settled in for a long wait. It might be a year or two. The
minister at Holy Mission Baptist Church was right, they felt, sometimes waiting can be painfully hard. Still, Lili now saw meaning in the wait. “I need to work on my anxiety and anger issues. Maybe God is giving us time to truly prepare.”

When I contacted the Masons a year later, Lili told me that the Nepal adoption agency had been accused of corruption and that several countries had pulled out, including the United States, through which they had put in their application papers. But Tim had gone online again and discovered a clinic in Hyderabad, which he visited with his father, leaving behind a check for $7,000 and a semen sample. “This clinic keeps trying with surrogates and donors for as long as it takes until one succeeds,” he explained. “The next payment isn’t due until a pregnancy is confirmed at three months. The total will come to $25,000, including the payment to the surrogate, the egg donor, the delivery, everything.” The first donor’s eggs yielded sixteen embryos, which were implanted in three tries over several months. The couple had recently learned that, perhaps due to storage problems, Tim’s sperm had died and the clinic needed more samples.

Lili was resigning herself, it seemed, to life without a child. But Tim, “the upbeat spirit” in their home, as Lili described him, could not. His injured leg had healed badly, robbing him of much feeling in his left foot. This made it impossible to play soccer and took much of the joy out of coaching—another great love in his life. Perhaps for that reason, the wish for a baby loomed ever larger, and, cautiously hopeful, Tim was planning a second trip to Hyderabad.

Chapter 5

My Womb, Their Baby

Tim was right. Anand is dusty. I had come to India to visit friends, but was thinking about the downcast eyes and folded hands of the Masons’ surrogate sitting that day in Dr. Patel’s office at the Akanksha Clinic. What had brought her in? What was she feeling? The clinic guarded surrogate names, and the Masons had forgotten hers. But perhaps I could talk to other surrogates. I decided to try. I was joined on a flight from Mumbai to Ahmedabad by Aditya Ghosh, a journalist with the Hindustan Times, who had covered the expanding Indian surrogacy industry and had offered to come with me and translate. Together we made our way through the town by auto-rickshaw. The driver honked his way through the chaos, swerving around motorbikes, grunting trucks, and ancient large-wheeled bullock-carts packed with bags of fodder and slowly hauled by head-nodding oxen. Both sides of the street were lined with wind-tossed plastic trash and small piles of garbage on which wandering cows fed. The driver turned off the pavement onto a narrow, pitted dirt road, slowed to circumvent a pair of black-and-white-spotted goats, and stopped abruptly outside a dusty courtyard. On one side stood a small white
building with a sign that read, in English and Gujarati, AKANKSHA CLINIC.

Two dozen dainty Indian women’s sandals, toes pointed forward, were lined up in a tidy row along the front step of the clinic. After being greeted by Dr. Patel, the clinic’s director, I followed an embryologist to a small upstairs office to talk with two women, Geeta and Saroj, who had both carried other women’s babies. They entered shyly through a door that led from a large dormitory filled with closely set iron cots. Nearly all of the surrogate mothers who have carried the more than three hundred babies delivered at Akanksha since 2004 have lived in this dormitory or in two others nearby. Each facility has a kitchen, a television, and a prayer room. Small children are allowed to stay with their mothers, but older children and husbands are barred from overnight visits. Surrogates are not permitted to leave their quarters without permission and seldom do. This is partly because they try to hide their pregnancies from disapproving relatives, and partly because they are forbidden to sleep with their husbands during pregnancy. They are offered weekly English lessons (which few attend) and computer lessons (which more do), and they receive daily vitamin injections and nutritious meals served on tin trays.

Geeta, a twenty-two-year-old light-skinned, green-eyed Muslim beauty, was the mother of three daughters. One sat wide-eyed on her lap. Like all the surrogates, Geeta was healthy, married, had the assent of her husband, and was already a mother. As one doctor explained, “If the surrogate has her own children, she’ll be less tempted to claim the baby she’s carrying for a client.”

“How did you decide to become a surrogate?” I asked Geeta.

“It was my husband’s idea,” she replied.

Her husband cooked pav bhaji (a vegetable dish) during the day and served it from a street cart in the afternoon and evening. He heard about surrogacy from a customer. “The man was a Muslim like us,” she told me, “and he said it was a good thing to do.”

So I came to Madam [Dr. Patel] and offered to try. We can’t live on my husband’s earnings and we had no hope of educating our daughters. My husband says if we can afford to send our daughters to school and if they study hard, they won’t have to end up as housemaids and depend on others for money. Today, daughters are better than sons—more studious, loyal, and compassionate. While I’m at the hostel, my husband is cooking and caring for our two older girls.

Geeta leaned forward, adding softly, “Besides my husband, only my mother-in-law knows what I’m doing.” All other surrogates I talked to spoke of carefully guarding their secret from gossiping family and neighbors since surrogates were generally suspected of adultery—a cause for communal shunning or worse. So as to disguise their identity when photographers visited the clinic, they would don white surgical masks that covered all but their eyes. Geeta had even moved with her husband and children from her home village fifty miles away to one nearer to Anand. As one surrogate’s husband remarked darkly, “People don’t understand or approve, and they talk.”

Geeta met her clients twice, the first time for fifteen minutes, and the second time for about thirty. “Where are your clients from?” I asked. “Very far away; I don’t know where,” she answered, adding, “They’re Caucasian, so the baby will come out white.” She had been promised five thousand dollars for delivering the baby, and, deposit by deposit, the money was placed in a bank account in her name.

How, I asked, did she feel about carrying a baby she would have to give up? “I keep myself from getting too attached,” she explained. “Whenever I start to think about the baby inside me, I turn my attention to my own daughter. Here she is.” Geeta bounced the chubby girl on her lap. “That way, I manage.”

Seated next to Geeta was Saroj, a heavy-set, dark-skinned Hindu woman with intense, curious eyes and a slow-dawning smile. Like
other Hindu surrogates at Akanksha, she wore sindoor (red powder
applied to the part in her hair) and mangalsutra (bangles), both
symbols of marriage. She is, she told us, the mother of two girls
and a boy, and the wife of a street vendor who earned one hun-
dred dollars a month. She gave birth to a surrogate child a year
and three months ago, and was now waiting to see whether an
implantation has succeeded so she could carry a second—the
genetic child of Indian parents from Bangalore. Half of Akanksha’s
clients are Indian, I was told, and half are foreign. Of the foreign-
ers, half come from North America. Like Geeta, Saroj knew very
little about her clients: “They came. They saw me. They left,” she
said flatly.

Geeta and Saroj were in seclusion for now. I asked Saroj, who
had done this once before, whether the money she earned made her
feel more respected once she returned home. For the first time, the
two turned to each other and laughed out loud. Then Saroj said:

At first I hid it from my mother-in-law. But when she found
out she said she felt blessed to have a daughter-in-law like me
because she’s never gotten this kind of money from her son.

In a study of forty-two Akanksha surrogates, Amrita Pande, a
sociologist who lived nine months in Anand, found that over half
described themselves as housewives; the rest listed such occupa-
tions as bank teller, farmer, cleaner, waitress, nanny, maid, and
plastic sorter. Hindu, Muslim, and Christian, most had seventh-
to twelfth-grade educations, five were illiterate, and one—who
turned to surrogacy to pay the expenses for a small son’s heart
surgery—had a bachelor of arts. Over three-quarters of them
lived at or below the Indian poverty line.²

Many of these women came to surrogacy through word of
mouth, which was actively spread by recruiters who were them-
selves former surrogates. Many first tried making money by
donating their eggs, five hundred dollars per operation. To donate
eggs, women visit the clinic for weeks beforehand to receive

injections of ovary-stimulating hormones. Then they are sedated,
undergo a procedure that is uncomfortable nevertheless, and are
released to go home. “Women are lining up to have it done,”
Pande told me. “I talked to one woman who had endured six or
seven retrievals and was thinking about an eighth. She told me it
was extremely hard to ride home in a bouncy auto-rickshaw hours
after a painful procedure. Often after egg harvests, the women go
on to become surrogates.”

Acting as a broker, the clinic normally negotiates a fee with the
client on behalf of the surrogate. Fees differ. One dismayed surro-
gate carrying twins for an Indian couple discovered that she was
being paid far less—$3,400—than the surrogate sleeping in the next
cot, who was carrying a single baby for an American couple for
$5,000. Despite the jealousies that arose, the Akanksha surrogates
were glad to share tales about an experience largely invisible to
those outside it.

Anjali at Home

It was dusk.

Aditya Ghosh, Manju (a photographer who has worked with
Aditya in the past), and I were on our way to visit Anjali, a twenty-
seven-year-old commercial surrogate who lived in a village on the
outskirts of Anand. As a Muslim call to prayer hung in the air, we
skirted mud puddles along the ill-lit path through the village.
Sari-clad women balancing pots on their heads, gaggles of skinny
teenage boys, scurrying children, and shuffling elderly men pro-
ceeded along a path lined with brick, tin-roofed shacks and
mildew-stained concrete homes.

Suddenly a man’s voice pierced the dust: “Aditya! . . . Aditya!”
A stocky figure approached. A warm smile. A quick arm wraps
itself around Aditya. It was Anjali’s husband, Chahel, who now
led us along the pathway to his home where his wife was waiting
to receive us, seven months pregnant with her second surrogacy.
“Anjali! We have guests!” he called out. Waving from the second story, Anjali beckoned us up. We shed our shoes and stepped into the family’s bare living room. Two cots with floral bedcovers were flush against opposite walls, serving as seats. Chahel hauled in a white plastic chair from the kitchen. A television with a surround-sound system stood tall in one corner and behind it an array of small gold-framed pictures including one of the elephant god Ganesh, whose help worshippers invoke to overcome all obstacles. Along a bare concrete wall a ledge bore a row of large black-and-white photos. One was of Anjali and her two children playing in a stream, and two others were of Anjali, Dr. Patel, and the entire family inside Dr. Patel’s clinic. Anjali, the doyenne of Anand surrogates, had been the very first surrogate to bravely show her face to curious newspaper photographers who periodically appeared at the clinic and challenged the shame attached to surrogacy. She was now trusted—unlike most others—to live pregnant outside the dormitory.

Married at sixteen, mother of two, she had come to surrogacy through misfortune. Seven years ago, her husband had been a housepainter supervising eight other painters. Mixed into his paint was a caustic ingredient, lye. After accidentally rubbing his eye with a paint-covered finger, Chahel discovered that his eye had become both painful and blind. He was rushed to a doctor who told him he needed treatment that cost far more than he as a painter and Anjali as a shopgirl could afford. Unable to borrow money from struggling kin, they went to the moneylender who charged—as is typical—an annual interest of 40 percent. They soon found themselves in debt, destitute, and ashamed, daily sneaking past neighbors to a nearby temple to eat charity meals.

It was at this point that Anjali applied to become an Akanksha surrogate. She tried to get pregnant for hire altogether seven times, miscarried once, and then carried a baby to term for an Indian couple for $4,000. She earned nothing for her failed attempts and miscarriage, but the $4,000 was more than Chahel could have made in a decade. Anjali paid a contractor to build a two-story concrete house, the first floor of which they rented to another family. With the rest of the money she enrolled their nine-year-old daughter and seven-year-old son in private school. Returning to surrogacy, she failed to conceive four times—each time given shots of powerful hormones—before becoming pregnant again. But this time she negotiated the unusually high fee of $8,000.

Shuffling in her house slippers into her new kitchen, Anjali returned with a tray of teacups, sat down, and asked, “How much does it cost to go to medical school in America? My daughter wants to be a doctor,” she explained. When she learned how expensive it was, she asked Aditya, “Are the surrogates in Mumbai paid more than in Anand?”

“Yes, more.”

“So I’ll come to Mumbai,” she replied. “Give me the addresses of those doctors.” Then, perhaps mindful of her own eagerness, she added, “It’s not for me, but for a friend...”

In fact, Anjali’s practical approach was hardly surprising. Throughout the surrogate process, she had been instructed to remain emotionally detached from her clients, her babies, and even from her womb—which she was asked to imagine as a “carrier.” Further, it was for the services of this carrier that she was paid: $115 on the first month, $115 on the third, $1,250 on the fourth, $115 on the seventh, and $2,750 on delivery. Anjali had done an extraordinarily personal thing—given life to the child of another woman. Paradoxically, during the snowstorm in Turner, my aunt Elizabeth’s rescuers had done a far less personal favor—hauling in an electric generator—in a far more personal way. From every conceivable perspective, my aunt and her rescuers, on one hand, and Anjali and her foreign clients, on the other, stood at opposite ends of a broad spectrum. Elizabeth’s relationship with her neighbors was face-to-face, rooted in the same land, lore, gossip, and religion, involving little direct exchange of money. Anjali’s transactions with her clients were cursory, businesslike, and spanned differences in language, culture, ethnicity, nation, and, most of all, social class.
Before we left, Aditya asked Chahel: “Will Anjali be a surrogate again?”

“No. No. Twice is enough! This is the last time I’ll let her do it. Does a man want his wife to do this? No. I am a man!”

“Yes, but the money is good, isn’t it?”

“I am a man!” Chahel insisted as we approached the door.

We took our leave, thanking Anjali and Chahel, giving them small gifts, and making our way back along the dirt path through the village. We crossed the railroad tracks and walked in total darkness along the edge of a busy street without sidewalks, a jumble of cars, clopping donkeys, and pedicabs streaming past. After a while, Aditya asked Manju, “Do you think Anjali will do it a third time, even if Chahel doesn’t want her to?”

The two mulled it over.

“I think so,” said Manju.

“So do I,” Aditya replied.

Although Tim and Lili were able to imagine the poverty of Indian surrogates, they had no sense of the emotional challenges they faced, especially that of retaining their dignity. Tellingly, dormitory gossip among the surrogates targeted those who were “too practical” about their job. Amrita Pande found, for example, that Anjali was roundly criticized by the other surrogates who felt that she had become too driven, too strategic, and too materialistic. She had her fancy new house, her children in private school, her stereo, her DVDs, and she still wanted more. They all needed money and they were all renting their wombs to earn it. But as a matter of dignity, the surrogates felt there were limits; their bodies were not just moneymaking machines. Granted, there was little talk among them of surrogacy as an act of altruism, and many admitted enjoying aspects of their nine months of dormitory life. “Ice cream, coconut water, and milk, every day—and they are paying for it!” one surrogate told Pande, adding: “I think I deserve it for all I am doing right now.”

Nonetheless, they drew a firm line. Yes, they had babies for money, but they strongly resisted the idea that materialism had suppressed their motherly feelings. As one put it, “We will remember our babies all of our lives.” So some surrogates condemned Anjali for carrying babies only for money, and for being therefore “like a whore”—a dishonor they all feared. Poignantly, even surrogates desperate for money took pride in not becoming too money-minded, and in feeling that they were giving the gift of life.

“Was It My Baby to Give or Was It Bought Before I Gave Birth?”

A week after my visit to Anjali, I was accompanied by Alyfia Khan, another Hindustan Times reporter, on a visit to another fertility clinic, this time on a pockmarked street in Mumbai. Together we headed to Dr. Nandita Palsekar’s office to meet with Leela, a lively twenty-eight-year-old deli waitress who, six months earlier, had given birth to another couple’s baby. Like other surrogates, Leela desperately needed money. But whether because she was not directed to detach from her baby or minimize contact with her clients, or because of her outgoing personality, Leela’s experience seemed a world away from that of the Anand surrogates—far less alienating.

Leela’s black hair was drawn back from her open face into a long braid, which bobbed cheerfully about her back. Dressed in a bright pink sari, she smiled broadly and leaned toward me, eager to talk. How had she become a surrogate? I asked.

My father died young, so my mother raised us three girls on her wages as a maid. She was too poor to offer a dowry when my older sister married. And after the marriage, my brother-in-law’s family hounded my mother mercilessly for money because my brother-in-law wanted to buy a motorbike. One day while my sister was in the kitchen, her husband doused her with kerosene, lit her, and burned her to death. Looking at my sister’s glassy eyes and burnt face, I vowed I would never be poor.
At age eighteen, Leela married a waiter at the deli where she worked and had two children with him.

I didn’t know he was an alcoholic until after we married. My husband ran up a four-thousand-dollar debt with the money-lender, who sent agents to pressure us to repay it. They yelled and knocked on our front door and made my life hell. We had to lock the door and couldn’t leave the house for work. I decided to act. I heard from my sister’s friend that I could get money for donating my eggs, and I did that twice. When I came back to do it a third time, the doctor told me I could earn even more as a surrogate.

The genetic parents paid her well, she felt. “Was she able to pay off her husband’s debt?” With lowered eyes, she replied: “Half of it.”

For the last few months of Leela’s pregnancy, the genetic parents arranged for a maid to come to her home in Mumbai, and, unlike all the other surrogates I spoke with, Leela openly bonded with her baby. “I am the baby’s real mother. I carried him. I felt him kick. I prayed for him. At seven months, I asked the doctor if I and two other surrogates could celebrate Godh Bharai [a ceremony to honor the in utero child]. We had sweets. We took photos. Yes, he is mine. I saw his legs and hands on the sonogram. I suffered the pain of birth. To this day I feel I have three children and one of them I gave as a gift.”

The baby’s genetic parents, Indians from a nearby affluent suburb, presented Leela with a “lovely new sari” for Godh Bharai, and continually reached out to her:

The genetic mother sees me as her little sister and I see her as my big sister. She held my hand during the delivery. When the baby was born, she said, “Look how beautiful our child is.” Afterward she helped me back and forth to the bathroom. They telephone me every month, even now, and call me the baby’s auntie. They asked if I wanted to see him. I said yes. They brought him to my house, but I was disappointed to see he was long and fair, not at all like me.

Although a friendship of sorts arose between the two mothers, Leela’s doctor, like Dr. Patel, discouraged it. “I deleted their phone number from my cell phone list because Madam told me it’s not a good thing to keep contact for long,” Leela says. “But that’s okay. What we had is more than enough for me.”

Most surrogates at the Akanksha Clinic had little contact with their clients and wished for more. Many imagined that their clients were concerned about the details of their pregnancy and were grateful for clients’ all-too-rare check-in messages. Unlike Leela’s client, those at the clinic could be very businesslike. In fact, three surrogates woke up after cesarean deliveries to discover their babies gone. Two years later, one of them, whose clients had been very friendly up until then, still hasn’t gotten over it. “They just took the baby and ran. They never said thank you or good-bye.” Another wondered: “Was it my baby to give or was it bought before I gave birth?”

After giving birth, surrogates are not allowed to breast-feed the baby to avoid enhancing their attachment. Those who got to hold the baby before giving it away reported strong feelings. Another surrogate, named Sharda, said: “When the baby cries I want to start crying as well. It’s hard for me not to be attached.”

As a topic, the surrogate’s attachment to her baby and client arose again and again in unexpected ways. For example, after Anjali’s baby was born, and the joyous Canadian genetic parents traveled to India to claim it, Anjali—a devout Hindu—made what was, to her, a horrifying discovery. As she later told Aditya over the phone, “My clients were Muslim! I am a Hindu. For nine months I carried a Muslim child. I have sinned! They gave me a lot of money, but all my life I must live with this sin. It was a huge mistake. I could have waited for other clients.” For nine months, Anjali had thought of herself as a carrier with little regard for the
identity of the baby inside, much as Dr. Patel had instructed her to do. But now, she realized how much it mattered to her that she was carrying a Hindu baby. Another surrogate told me she would refuse to carry a baby for gay clients, but in a separate interview her obstetrician confided, “If I have gay clients, I don’t tell my surrogates.”

One Delhi–based Hindu surrogate agreed in a written contract with her Sikh clients to visit daily, for the nine months of her pregnancy, the Sikh Gurudwara Temple in Delhi and there listen, for the spiritual sake of the fetus, to chanting from the Sikh holy book. The clients even hired a maid to tend to the surrogate, instructing the maid (the surrogate suspected) to make sure that she went to the temple every day. She was a Hindu surrogate carrying a Sikh baby. But she confided to an interviewer, “Secretly I prayed for the baby to my own Lord.”

Parvati, a thirty-six-year-old Akanksha surrogate, learned, after the fact, that in signing her contract (which was written in English), she had signed over the right to decide whether or not to abort a baby. At Akanksha, surrogates were usually implanted with many eggs, and when three or more survived, Dr. Patel routinely aborted the “extras.” When Parvati found she was pregnant with triplets, Dr. Patel told her that one had to go. Distressed, she told Amrita Pande:

Doctor Madam said that the babies wouldn’t get enough space to move around and grow, so we should get the surgery. I told Doctor Madam that I’ll keep one and Nandinididi (the genetic mother) can keep two. After all, it’s my blood even if it’s their genes. And who knows whether at my age I’ll be able to have more babies.

Against Parvati’s strong wish, Dr. Patel aborted one fetus.

Geeta, Sarej, Sharda, Parvati—all might seem like victims of hypercommodification, a twenty-first-century, female service-sector version of Marx’s “alienated man.” They were paid for their labor. To get paid, they had to agree to terms that severely limited their say over various aspects of their pregnancies, which, in turn, whittled down their autonomy, their selfhood, and, because of this, their capacity and desire to relate to the baby they carried. The less they related, the more like a vessel they felt, and the less they were able to see themselves as giving a gift. The surrogate who awoke from a cesarean birth to discover the baby gone had no sense of “giving” the baby to her clients. The clients took it. It was already theirs. From the transfer of money on, the Hindu surrogate carrying the Sikh baby was also—in the clients’ eyes—carrying their private property. Each Akanksha story was different, but in nearly every one commerce—and the ethos of production, control, and efficiency that went with it—dampened the spirit of the gift.

As did the effort to undermine any possible bond between surrogate and baby. Dr. Patel, for example, required that the egg inside the surrogate must not be her own. In addition, she instructed surrogates to think of their wombs as carriers, bags, suitcases, something external to themselves. The surrogate had no say about whether or not to abort an “extra fetus” or have a cesarean section. At Akanksha virtually all births were by C-section, ostensibly to “reduce infection” but perhaps also to sedate the mother and reduce her memory of the birth. The clinic maintained a policy of no breast-feeding, and a surrogate had no legal right to see or say good-bye to the baby.

The women at Akanksha had experienced pregnancy both as mothers and as surrogates. And there was a difference. This difference did not reside in the fact of surrogacy, according to most people I talked to. As one Mumbai–based gynecologist put it, “surrogacy can be a beautiful thing.” Rather, the difference had to do with giving birth in or outside Akanksha’s culture of mass production. It reminded me of the contrast between early capitalism—where a worker owned his shop, controlled his tools, and took personal pride in his craft—and late capitalism—where a worker labored on a factory assembly line, monitored by efficiency-minded managers. The new Indian fertility clinics
were for-profit “factories,” and Dr. Patel aspired to be the Henry Ford of surrogacy. “There may be surrogacy clinics all over the state, the country, the world,” she told Amrita Pande, “but no one in the world can match our numbers.”

Given the poverty propelling the women into surrogacy, it is not clear whether they were free agents in an open market or exploited workers in a reproduction factory. The surrogates themselves seemed to see it both ways. Some sported the rhetoric of “free choice,” setting aside their dire options. Despite her terrible predicament, Anjali, for example, claimed to be the proud author of her fate. Another surrogate, who got pregnant twice, once with one child and the second time with twins, had very clear objectives: her Israeli clients had promised to buy her tickets to Israel, where she hoped to land a lucrative job and send home remittances. But most surrogates, as Amitra Pande found in her fieldwork at Akanksha, described their “choice” as majboori (a compelled, involuntary act). One broker, hired to recruit surrogates, hung around an abortion clinic, where he could waylay women who’d recently aborted a child they could not afford to keep and draft them into surrogacy. Other brokers preyed on women’s fears of being bad mothers—unable to pay dowries or school fees.

However they saw themselves, surrogates paid a heavy price in emotional labor. For it was by no means natural or automatic to feel as detached as they were required to feel about the baby growing inside them. They worked at their detachment. As Saroj put it not too credibly, “If someone puts a precious jewel in my hand, I don’t covet it as my own.” Others sought to reinforce their detachment with various rationales. “With children you never know,” one said, “kids can leave you in the end.” One who had girls of her own talked about how girls were more loyal and helpful than boys, and so she had no need or desire for more children of her own and no desire for the boy she carried.

Akanksha has become a model for other fertility clinics emerging in India and other countries. Indeed, a certain competition between them for market share seems to be in progress. In One

World, Ready or Not, William Greider describes a “race to the bottom” that unfolds as entrepreneurs seek cheaper and more pliant labor and customers seek cheaper goods and services. At each stage of the race, the company finds workers willing to accept lower wages somewhere else, and at each step, workers’ rights dip lower. Some observers fear a similar race to the bottom in the production of babies.

That race is already under way, Amrita Panda observed, in India: “With so much publicity, and promise of money, you see mom-and-pop infertility clinics opening up all over Delhi.” According to Dr. Thakam Varma, medical director of reproductive medicine at a well-known hospital in Chennai there are now over thirty thousand infertility clinics in India. Many large clinics receive U.S. clients via channels set up with American clinics, such as the Los Angeles–based Planet Hospital, which links treatment with “fertility tourism” to exotic Indian temples. New Life India, like other bigger clinics, also recruits women from Georgia and Ukraine to travel to India and have their white, blue-eyed eggs harvested for sale.

Smaller clinics are getting in on all this, too. Sponsored by drug and medical equipment companies, national conferences on assisted reproduction, once held in major cities, now take place in more provincial Indore, Jodhpur, Cochin, and Guwahati. “With so many new clinics springing up and no regulation, I worry about a proliferation of quacks,” Pande noted. To save costs on the expensive IVF medium, 21 out of 43 small clinics in one recent study even organized test tube conception in batches. Following the dynamics of global capitalism, will Thai entrepreneurs set up clinics that undersell those in Anand and Mumbai and other smaller clinics such as these? Will Cambodia set up clinics that undersell Thailand?

In response to commercial surrogacy and the economic logic that might take hold, the nations of the world are, like individuals, trying to draw the line. And at the moment, they seem highly confused about how and where to do that. In Saudi Arabia, surrogacy was permitted between two wives of the same husband,
though this has now been banned. Israel has legalized commercial surrogacy, and whether provided by public or for-profit clinics, the state pays for it—though only for heterosexual citizens. In Spain, commercial surrogacy is illegal but egg donation is not. The laws in most countries around the world ban commercial surrogacy, although the practice sometimes goes on. Only four countries in Western Europe (Finland, the Netherlands, Belgium, and the United Kingdom) have explicitly legalized nonprofit surrogacy. The United States is a legal patchwork—a 2007 study found that seventeen states and the District of Columbia had passed laws on surrogacy, some to ban it and others to approve and regulate it.

In the midst of evolving legislation, the complexities of surrogacy itself have evolved as well. A PBS documentary, “Surrogacy: Wombs for Rent?” documented what occurred, for example, when clients hired a surrogate but then felt buyer’s remorse. A Los Angeles–based surrogate named Susan Ring agreed to carry a child—twins, as it turned out, from a father’s sperm and a donor’s egg—for the married couple who hired her. But, “when the intended mother handed me the ultrasound photos of the fetus,” Susan reported, “I thought that was odd.” Then she found out the couple was having marital difficulties. Just weeks before she was due to give birth, Susan asked the parents what they planned to do, and the wife replied, “No, what are you going to do?” When the twins were born, Susan recalled, “no one was at the hospital.” The divorcing couple planned to put the babies into foster care and never paid the surrogate. In the end, the surrogate, herself a single mother of two, heroically hired a lawyer to gain custody of the legal orphans. Since she was not the genetic mother, her case was at first denied. She appealed and, after three months, won. She then placed the twins into the loving hands of adoptive parents.

Susan Ring, the Indian surrogates, and their clients all find themselves in uncharted market territory. Some fiercely resist the market ethos. Others circumvent it, while still others earnestly embrace it. Most Akanksha surrogates tried to blend submission to the factory-like rules of the clinic with pride in providing for their own children. And birth after birth, the delivery room hand-offs from poor women to richer went smoothly—for the most part. Before I left, I asked a kindly embryologist, Bhadarka, whether the clinic offered surrogates any psychological counseling. “We explain the scientific process,” she answered, “and they already know what they’re getting into.” Then, looking down and stroking the table between us, she added softly, “In the end, a mother is a mother, isn’t that true? In the birthing room there is the surrogate, the doctor, the nurse, the nurse’s aide, and often the genetic mother. Sometimes we all cry.”
In the sprawling outskirts of San Jose, California, I found myself at the last stop on my journey, standing at the apartment door of Esther James, wantologist. Could it really be, I wondered, that before doing anything else—hiring a love coach, a wedding planner, a surrogate mother, a nameologist, or an elder-care manager—we should enlist a wantologist to help us sort out what we want? Had I arrived, I wondered, at some final telling moment in my search or at the absurdist edge of the market frontier?

A willowy woman of fifty-five, with inquiring blue eyes and a shy manner, Esther beckoned me in. Did I want to take my shoes off, she asked softly as she took my coat. She pointed to a pair of small slippers tucked by the door should I choose to. On her living-room wall hung a framed PhD degree in psychology from New York University, colorful Indian quilts, and a collage of images clipped from magazines—the back of a child’s head, a gnarled tree, a wandering cat—that seemed to invite one to search for a coherent story to connect them. We had met weeks before at a dinner sponsored by the San Francisco chapter of the Professional Coaches and Mentors Association. I’d asked to meet again and
she had kindly invited me to lunch. Between bites of a delicious home-cooked curry chicken, I asked Esther how she had found her way to wantology.

"I practiced for twenty years as a Jungian psychologist," she answered with a disarming smile, "but I've studied many thinkers along the way."

I'm a therapy junky. Ten years ago, I took a nine-day course at the College of Executive Coaching in Pismo Beach, California, and started coaching Silicon Valley executives. I earned two hundred and fifty dollars an hour, but after the economic downturn jobs like that were hard to find. So I got interested in life coaching, and that led me to wantology.

It was originally a method, she explained, invented by Kevin Creitman, an aerospace engineer, designed to help corporate planners double-check their purchasing decisions. ("I help them see that the fantasy they attach to a purchase may not correspond to what it can actually accomplish.") Creitman set up a two-day class to train life coaches in how to apply her (Kevin is a woman) method to individuals and, not long afterward, she certified Esther in the new field. Esther reverently showed me her Wantology Workbook, subtitled: "The first steps to Really Get What You Really Want is to really KNOW what you really want." Printed in large type, the cover featured a solitary man in a white T-shirt facing a large sun illuminating a blue sky. "So how do you practice wantology?" I asked Esther. She explained the first step in thinking about a "want."

First you ask your client, "Are you floating or navigating toward your goal?" A lot of people float. Then, you ask, "What do you want to feel like once you have what you want?" A person can earn four hundred thousand dollars a year, you know, and still not feel secure. We set every kind of trap for ourselves.

Conclusion: The Wantologist

She described a client she had recently helped:

This woman lived in a medium-sized house with a small garden but she wanted a bigger house with a bigger garden. She dreaded telling her husband, who had spent five years renovating their present home. She also feared her son would criticize her for being too materialistic. So she wanted a bigger house and garden but didn't dare ask for it.

Esther took me through her conversation with this woman:

"What do you want?"
"A bigger house."
"How would you feel if you lived in a bigger house?"
"Peaceful."
"What other things make you feel peaceful?"
"Walks by the ocean." (The ocean was an hour's drive away.)
"Do you ever take walks nearer where you live that remind you of the ocean?"
"Certain ones, yes."
"What do you like about those walks?"
"I hear the sound of water and feel surrounded by green."

Through such conversations, Esther helped her client redefine her desire. In the end, the woman dedicated a small room in her home to feeling peaceful. She filled it with a wall-high Benjamin fig tree, an Australian tree fern, and lacy maidenhair ferns, some hanging from the ceiling, others perched on upturned pots. The greenery encircled a bubbling slate-and-rock tabletop fountain. Sitting in her new room, the woman found peace in her newly renovated medium-sized house and garden.

I was touched by the woman's story. Perhaps all she needed was someone wise to help her articulate her desire—an Esther offering her wisdom and working for hire had provided this most
human of services—albeit one with a wacky name. But the mere existence of a paid “wantologist” indicates just how far the market has penetrated our intimate lives. Can it be that we are no longer confident to identify even our most ordinary desires without a professional to guide us?

Over the last century, the world of services has changed greatly. A hundred—or even forty—years ago, human eggs and sperm were not for sale nor were wombs for rent. Online dating companies, nameologists, life coaches, party animators, and paid grave-side visitors did not exist, even as ideas. Nor had a language developed that so seamlessly melded village and market—as in “Rent-a-Mom,” “Rent-a-Dad,” “Rent-a-Grandma,” “Rent-a-Friend”—insinuating itself, half joking, half serious, into our culture.

These services are only likely to proliferate in a world that undermines community, disparages government, marginalizes nonprofits, and believes in the superiority of what’s for sale. A cycle effect gets going: The more anxious and isolated we are and the less help we receive from nonmarket sources, the more we feel tempted to fill the void with market offerings. As our California survey shows, greater isolation results in greater demand for market services and professionals—life coaches, party planners, photograph-album assemblers—to fill in for what’s missing.

The market is now present in our bedrooms, at our breakfast tables, in our love lives, entangled in our deepest joys and sorrows. And the more the market is the main game in town, the more hooked we get on what it sells, and the more convinced that paid expertise is what we lack and an even larger service mall is the only way to go.

The market is ever too willing to oblige. Take eHarmony, for example. This successful champion of the “M” (marriage) market is rapidly expanding its operations into later stages of adult life, into workplace and college relationships, and into relationships in other societies—Japan, Argentina, Australia, and Eastern European countries, with more to come. So as community-starved people come to crave company—provided counsel, comfort, and support, companies extend services—for those who can pay. The cycle takes another turn.

Ironically, the greater our dependence on the market, the greater its power to subtly undermine our intimate life. As the ex-advertising executive and author of In the Absence of the Sacred, Jerry Mander, observed, “With commerce, we always get the good news first and the bad news after a while. First we hear the car goes faster than the horse. Then we hear it clogs freeways and pollutes the air.” The bad news in this case is the capacity of the service market, with all its expertise, to sap self-confidence in our own capacities, and those of friends and family. The professional nameologist finds a more auspicious name than we can recall from our family tree. The professional potty trainer does the job better than the humbling parent or helpful neighbor. Jimmy’s Art Supply sells a better Spanish mission replica kit than your child can build from paint, glue, and a Kleenex box. Happiest Day promises a more personally uplifting wedding. Happy Travels promises a more carefree holiday. Our life coach is more upbeat than our friend. Our imperfect, homemade versions of life seem to us all the poorer by comparison. Consider some recent shifts in language. Care of family and friends is increasingly referred to as “lay care.” The act of meeting a romantic partner at a flesh-and-blood gathering rather than online is disparaged by some Internet coaches as “dating in the wild.” We picture competition as a matter of one business outdoing another. But the fiercest competition may be the quietly ongoing one between the market and private life. As a setter of standards of the ideal experience, it often wins, whether we buy a service or not.

The very ease with which we reach for market services may also prevent us from noticing the remarkable degree to which the market has come to dominate our very ideas about what can or should be for sale or rent, and who should be included in the dramatic cast—buyers, branders, sellers—that we imagine as part of a personal life. Most important of all, it may prevent us from noticing how we devalue what we don’t or can’t buy.
Even more than what we wish, the market alters how we wish. Wallet in hand, we focus in the market on the thing we buy. In the realm of services this is an experience—the perfect wedding, the delicious "traditional" meal, the well-raised child, even the well-gestated baby. What escapes us is the process of getting there—and the appreciation we attach to the small details of it. A busy executive detaches himself from the need for patience. Norma Brown, the wealthy employer of a household manager, detached herself from the act of making out Christmas-present labels. The Headstone Butler does a more efficient job of beautifying a grave. Rivelting our attention on the destination, we detach ourselves from the many small—potentially meaningful—steps in our journey. Confining our sense of achievement to results, to the moment of purchase, so to speak, we unwittingly lose the pleasures of accomplishment, the joy of connecting to others, and even, in the process, our faith in ourselves.

In the face of the market’s depersonalization of our bonds with others, we do what we can, consciously or not, to depersonalize them, to make the market feel less like a market. We blow up the birthday balloons ourselves, we befriend the babysitter, we lie about cooking the lamb roast. We don’t see these moves as defenses against anything; they feel as natural and unproblematic as opening an umbrella in a storm. Reasonably enough, we adapt our identities to life on the market frontier and try to protect ourselves from its potentially depersonalizing effects.

How do we do it? We demarcate symbolic artifacts or places that represent cherished moments of unoutsourced life; we reclaim a home activity that friends and neighbors might have conceded to the realm of paid services; we engage the market via a secret back channel to avoid embarrassment or hurt feelings; we compensate for outsourcing in one area of life by setting up a market-free realm or restoring a human touch by forging an emotional con-

nection to the service provider. We avoid. We substitute. We compensate. We take back. We encapsulate. We compartmentalize. We reach out. We subordinate. We can use several mechanisms of defense, serially or at the same time, or none at all. These can be so strong as to define our whole character, or they can be almost inconsequential. These defenses apply to consumers and service workers both.

It’s so easy to do this, and we do it so automatically, we forget how quickly things that only yesterday seemed bizarre have become the norm today. As a people, Americans are brilliant at adapting to change. In a world that changes so rapidly, it’s a useful skill. But there is a hidden danger attached to it. For without quite naming it, we’re all busily adapting, trying to “regulate” the market from the inside. And what we’re not doing is altering the basic imbalance between market, state, and civic life that caused us to need to draw line after line in the first place.

It’s become common to hear that the market can do no wrong and the government—at least its civilian part—can do no right, and to hear scant mention of community at all. Curiously, many who press to expand the free market are the same people who call for stronger families. But do freer markets lead to stronger families? Those who make this claim point to the service mall, and say yes. Far less visible, however, are the harmful effects of free-market policies—deregulation, service cuts, privatization—on families. Unregulated televisions ads for junk food may be good for the market, for example, but bad for children. Cuts in public funding that shorten library hours, close state parks, or speed up staff turnover in nursing homes may be a plus for the free market, but they are a blow to families. Less visible, too, is the way in which market values subtly distort family values. For the more we apply market language, habits of emotional detachment, and focus on “the purchase moment” to our most intimate life, the more fragile it becomes. And while we’ve become very clever at seeing how market and family mix, we’re less clever at seeing how they don’t.
Capitalism and Freedom, the economist Milton Friedman offered the dream of pure capitalism as an antidote to a monstrous overreach of Russian communism. But every system reflects a contradiction between its ideals and its reality. Soviet-style communism had its Theocracies have theirs. And we have ours.  

What's at stake in ignoring this contradiction is not simply family life, but the marginalization of our entire public realm. Public libraries, parks, wilderness preserves, free information—the commons—all exist outside the for-profit sphere. All are available to rich and poor alike. As the class gap widens, it's the one remaining social space within which the poor can enjoy equal respect. We mostly talk about the balance of power within the government between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, but we badly need to confront the larger and looming imbalance between the market and everything else.

If the wantologist were to put on her couch some of the caregivers in this book and ask them what kind of society they wanted to live in, what would she hear? “If the government had the budget to pay me to help inner-city school dropouts get back on track,” one life coach told me, “I’d take it in a heartbeat.” As the elder-care manager Barbara mused, “I think America needs a lot of people like me dropping in on poor isolated elderly folks—and that’s not going to be a big money maker.” I’d love to play the guitar in children’s cancer wards,” a guitarist who worked private birthday parties told me, “if I could make a living at it.” If jobs corresponded to social needs, they agreed, we’d have plenty of jobs to go around. And more time as well. One Sri Lankan nanny who quit her job in a for-profit nursing home with a low staff-to-patient ratio and high turnover said, “why not bring families into the lives of the old, like we do in Sri Lanka?” And if Maricel, the Filipina nanny, had her way, parents would work shorter hours and send nannies home earlier.

Curiously, it was indirectly, through talk about memories, that I caught a glimpse into the deeper feelings of many people I talked with about the encroachment of the market into their personal lives. The memories they treasured did not center on the professionally planned birthday party, picture-perfect wedding, or hassle-free vacation tour. Instead, they vividly remembered times when things went haywire or otherwise surprised them. One man remembered his dad sitting at a picnic table in the pouring rain, doggedly conversing with a neighbor “as if the sun was shining,” as he rashly predicted it would on the day when he’d organized a picnic. A single working mother remembered laughing with her girls in disbelief at the floor-to-ceiling kitchen mess after a full day of holiday cooking. Other people remembered moments of spontaneity. Rose Whitman fondly recalled her father rousing his sleepy children from bed to go schlumpking to an open field at the edge of town to peer up at the spectacle of the northern lights.

My aunt Elizabeth’s story ended with its own welcome blend of village and market. After a long search, I had, at last, found Shawn DePerrio, a caregiver, to live with my aunt—a lively young woman who instantly bonded with her. At last, she was free to live full-time at home, to admire the peanut butter jar holding up her living-room window, sit back in her favorite chair, and look out on the stony hills her ancestors had long ago tilled.

She recovered her capacity to scold, to tease, and to feel glad to be alive. In Shawn’s hands, my aunt became the kind, bright, funny, and, for the most part, good-humored person of my childhood memory. Shawn planted red geraniums in front of the house and a vegetable garden to the side of it. “We need it larger,” my aunt commented. “Where’s the corn going to grow?”

Often Shawn would pack my aunt into her old car and head out for a nearby apple orchard to “harvest apples” out of a rolled-down passenger-side window. “The apples on this tree are too small,” my aunt would say. “Can you drive a little farther in?” When they’d collected a bag of apples, they went home to bake a pie. Some evenings the two sang together, Shawn related by phone
laughingly, “like Barbra Streisand.” In her last years, Elizabeth totally forgot the time she had passionately refused the idea of “a stranger in the house.”

By the time my aunt died in peace at home at the age of ninety-eight, just as I was finishing this book, she had forgotten quite a lot. But, to the end, she would tilt her head in laughter at the memory of her last Turner Fourth of July parade. Unable to walk, she was transported to the town’s main street by two husky off-duty EMTs in their ambulance and then hoisted onto a stately, white, open-topped buggy pulled by a horse whose tail was braided with red, white, and blue ribbons. The horse stomped and whinnied impatiently, waiting for the parade to begin. The buggy driver, flicking the reins across his steed’s mane, was a kindly neighboring farmer. And, seated beside Elizabeth on a plush red velvet seat was Shawn DePerrio, paid and loving.

First came the beating of a drum strapped to a lean, serious-faced boy. Then came the whole Turner High School band, dressed in white shirts and blue shorts—four horns, clarinets, a flute, and two sets of cymbals—followed by the baton twirlers, two by two. The floats from the Turner History Museum, the flower show, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars—old men waving from wooden chairs set on the back of a flatbed truck—were the heart of the parade, along with a 1920s dairy truck, a reaper, a harvester, and a threshing machine, a giant cricket.

Then came my aunt Elizabeth, waving left and right like a queen, and there was Shawn, beaming at her side. To most observers, my aunt was a white-haired lady in a buggy. To those in the know, she was a lively, strong-willed villager who had needed the help of a range of caretakers, paid and unpaid, in order to sit happily there that day. And to a few townspeople in the crowd, there was the lady who’d taught a parent or grandparent to hold a pencil and sing a song in a one-room schoolhouse long ago.

Notes

Introduction: Villager and Outsourcer

1. In his 1899 *Theory of the Leisure Class*, the Norwegian-born sociologist Thorstein Veblen perversely observed that servants separate the rich from usefulness. The ideal of the upper class—nobility, priests, captains of industry—was to show that it was not they who husked the corn, but they who cultivated cultural taste. Typically the wife “consumes for” the male head of household, he argued, in “conspicuous leisure.” Society had things backward, Veblen felt, the more necessary a person’s work, the less honor attached to it. Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1912 [1899]), p. 63. For their part, my parents soon tired of the high life and occasionally subverted it. One evening my father dressed in a tuxedo and my mother in evening gown arrived at an obligatory cocktail party, for example, apologizing that they had to leave shortly to attend a formal dinner. They made the rounds at the cocktail party, said their good-byes, returned home, and snuck into bed with good books.

from Freud to Erik Erikson and Neil Smelser—on unconscious mechanisms of defense. These are ways of responding to anxiety we sense as violations, large and small, of the principle of the gift exchange, and the generosity we express quite beyond it. Drawing threads from all these works, and adding to them thoughts from my own 1983 book *The Managed Heart*, I focus on small internal moments—which could add up to collective “tipping points” in Gladwell’s sense—in which clients feel anxious that they have outsourced “too much” or “too little” of intimate life or thought about personal things in “too marketlike” a way. Please see references in the bibliography.

17. Extending the market metaphor, Jean Slater, the author of *Hiring the Heavens*, imagines heaven as a great employment agency. Using our “celestial credit card” we can hire a love coach, wedding planner, or personal shopper, although Slater offers her services as a wantologist back down on earth for $195 an hour. Slater pictures the outsourcer sitting with God behind her—but on the same level, thereby elevating the believer into “the director’s chair” from which one manages “staff meetings” and gives orders to “heavenly hires” (Jean Slater, *Hiring the Heavens* [Novato, CA: New World Press, 2005], pp. 24, 34, 45, 62).

18. Indeed, as a style, market ways of talking and thinking began to catch on within the nonmarket world of charities, museums, and volunteer groups. As Mark Friedman, seasoned executive director of Civic Ventures, a nonprofit organization that recruits retired professionals into “make a difference” lines of charity work, described this shift: “We used to describe to our funders the number of retired corporate executives we’d placed in inner city 8th grade math classes—who were taking risks and making a real difference—and they’d say, ‘It’s a miracle. Do it again.’ Now a new bus-ed type has come in who says, ‘Fine. But double it or we don’t fund you.’”

New feeling rules came in with this shift. If the government or the labor union is the main game in town, and things go wrong, you have a right to get mad and want to “kick the bums out.” But if the company goes offshore, you are only justified in feeling sad, since the company—influenced by the modern pure market zeitgeist—was only there for its own profit anyway. The institutions that “owe us something” are weaker, those that “owe us nothing are stronger.


Chapter 1: You Have Three Seconds

1. Rural New England of 1900 had few paid matchmakers, and they were fading from the great cities of the East Coast. Between 1899 and 1900, there was no mention of matchmakers or dating services in the pages of the *New York Times*. Such services were thriving at the time in Europe and Britain, however, where *The Matrimonial Post* and *Fashionable Marriage Advertiser* (founded in 1860) and *The Matrimonial Times* (founded in 1904) had a flourishing readership. Earnest S. Turner, *A History of Courting* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1954). As one matchmaker lamented in an 1898 interview with the *New York Tribune*, “most marriageable men and women [in the Jewish quarter of New York] depended on me to make them happy. Now they believe in love and all that rot. They are making their own marriages.” Another matchmaker complained that the *shadkhan* (Yiddish for matchmaker) was being replaced by city parks and beaches (Elliott Robert Barkan, Hasta R. Diner, and Alan M. Kraut, eds., *From Arrival to Incorporation: Migrants to the U.S. in a Global Era* [New York: New York University Press, 2007], p. 11).

back hair, see Charles Reynolds Brown, The Young Man's Affairs (Oakland, CA: First Congregational Church, 1909).


7. New firms offer to perform background checks to help online date-seekers to screen potential dates. Two retired police officers, Robert Buchholz and Andrew Scott, founded MyMatchChecker.com, which, for $9.95, offers to perform a basic background check on anyone a person has met on a dating site. MiliMate has created a new mobile phone app—the Instant National Criminal Search—which even offers to send background information on a particular date to the client’s friend, just as a precaution. See Stephanie Rosenbloom, “New Online-Date Detectives Can Unmask Mr. or Ms. Wrong,” New York Times, December 19, 2010.


9. For the 2005 Pew study findings, see Mary Madden and Amand Lenhart, “Online Dating” (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2006). One recent article puts the number of dating Web sites at 1,500, and the number of Americans using dating sites at 20 million—“more than double the number 5 years ago,” Rosenbloom, “New Online-Date Detectives Can Unmask Mr. or Ms. Wrong.” The article drew on industry research for this, available through Caitlin Moldavsky, “Dating Game: With Increasing Internet Penetration, Online Dating Is on the Rise” (IBISWorld, Inc., December 2010). For the 40 million figure, see Anita Dufalla, “Online Dating Discovers a New Age,” Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, January 3, 2006. For the quotation about “dating in the wild,” thanks to Jennifer Randles, assistant professor of sociology at Austin College.

10. This survey was administered by UC Berkeley’s Survey Research Center as part of their Golden Bear Omnibus program. Using random digit telephone sampling and computer-assisted telephone interviewing, investigators surveyed Spanish- and English-speaking adults eighteen years of age or older, residing in households with telephones, within the state of California, between April 30, 2007, and September 2, 2007. 1,186 phone interviews were completed, with an overall response rate of 15.9 percent. Our module about engaging personal services was completed by 978 respondents.


14. For-pay companies are engaged in research battles among themselves and with free online sites as well. The general counsel for Match.com (a for-pay company) accused Plentyoffish (a free service) of publishing “misleading and/or false” claims—for example, that it generates 18 million dates a year. But Plentyoffish founder Markus Frind blogged back that Match.com’s claims were “absurd.” Another free site, OKCupid, blogged that “you are 12.4 times more likely to get married this year if you don’t subscribe to Match.com.” The company has since removed that posting following its purchase by Match.com. See Chris Morrison, “Match.com Reveals the Dark Side of the Online Dating Business,” Plentyoffish.com, April 28, 2010; Letter to Markus Frind, http://www.plentyoffish.com/matchcomletter.pdf; and Adrienne Jeffries, “OK Cupid: We Didn’t Censor Our Match.com-Bashing Blog Post,” New York Observer, http://www.observer.com/2011/tech/okcupid-we-didnt-censor-our-matchcom-bashing-blog-post.

In response to skepticism from the scientific community about their “happier eHarmony couple” finding, eHarmony psychologists shared via a conference presentation how they compared eHarmony and non-eHarmony couples. (See Steve Carter and Chadwick Snow, “Helping Singles Enter Better Marriages Using Predictive Models of Marital Success,” poster presented at the sixteenth annual convention of the American Psychological Society, Chicago, IL, May 24–30, 2004.) This, too, met a critical response (e.g., Houran et al., 2004). eHarmony used conceptually questionable measures, the critics argued, and inadequate study design. For example, the critics claimed, eHarmony compared “apples to oranges”—i.e., highly motivated couples who had paid eHarmony to find them a match with less motivated couples who had paid nothing. Without some independent measure of desire to marry, the critics observed, the eHarmony study may have been comparing eager beavers with non-eager beavers. Their results “might well reflect the result of diversity in the . . . characteristics of the samples, and not necessarily in the effectiveness of the matching system.” The eHarmony study argued that it was the program itself, not the different characteristics of those who signed up for it, that led to the “happier” finding. See James Houran, Renee Lange, P. Jason Rentsfrow, and Karen H. Brookner, “Do Online Matchmaking Tests Work? An Assessment of Preliminary Evidence for a Publicized Predictive Model of Marital Success,” North American Journal of Psychology 6, no. 3 (2004): 507–26.


7. StayHitched.com, “Marriage Success Training: Build the Foundation
for Your Lifetime Together,” http://stayhitched.com/#213>prep.htm
8. “In 2007, 44,000 couples met and married through eHarmony,” the
Director of eHarmony lab, Dr. Gian Gonzaga, told me. “That’s a lot
of marriages. And we want them to last.”
10. Available now is an iPhone application, “personal use Cognitive
Behavioral Therapy tool,” that helps you “manage your stress and
anxieties instantly.” On the “Describe” screen, it reads, “I said
something negative about my boss to a coworker, now I’m sure I’ll get
fired. I feel . . .” (you can adjust a dial-like point on the screen) “anxi-
ous, angry, dred” or “add emotion.” At another click the screen
reads “Evaluate”: “I always do these stupid things” or “I dread having
to deal with this. It is going to make my whole life a mess.” It moves
on to “Rationalize” and “In Review” screens, which include “My ration-
all thoughts” (“I need to ask him to keep it private”) and “Now I feel . . .”
(the anxious, angry, and dred gauges point toward empty). iTunes App Store Web site, http://itunes.apple.com/US/App/ibis. There are other applications designed for therapists, includ-
ing one on “Dementia Symptoms” (in case one forgets).
12. In this, he also differed from the hay-trusser in Thomas Hardy’s 1886
novel, The Mayor of Casterbridge. In a rum-soaked moment at a country
fair, he auctions off his quiet wife and baby daughter to a sober and
kindly bidder. Reflecting a mentality of nineteenth-century England,
the bidder didn’t pay the wife directly, or separate out services, each
with its own rate, nor was the seller in his right mind.
13. A June 2009 report by the AARP Public Policy Institute estimates
that “on average, the Medicaid program can provide HCBC [home-
and community-based care] to three people for the cost of serving
one person in a nursing home,” AARP Public Policy Institute, “Pro-
viding More Long-Term Support and Services at Home: Why It’s
Critical for Health Reform” (Washington, DC: AARP Public Policy
Institute, 2009). Researching Medicaid expenditures from 1995 to
2005, H. Stephen Kaye, Mitchell P. LaPlante, and Charlene Harrin-
gton also show that an increase in home-based care could save
states money over the long run (H. Stephen Kaye, Mitchell P.
LaPlante, and Charlene Harrington, “Do Noninstitutional Long-
Term Care Services Reduce Medicaid Spending?” Health Affairs 28,
no. 1 [2009]). See also Joseph Shapiro, “Home Care Might Be
Cheaper, But States Still Fear It,” Home or Nursing Home: America’s
Empty Promise to Give Elderly, Disabled a Choice, NPR, December 2,
—be-cheaper-but-states-still-fear-it.

Chapter 4: Our Baby, Her Womb

1. An American seeking a less costly tooth implant could fly to a clinic
in Cuernavaca. An Englishman could get a cheaper knee replacement
in Delhi. A Canadian might arrange an affordable facelift in São
Paulo. Joining this North to South stream of medical tourists are mil-
ions of northern retirees who live—and sometimes die—in the
global South. According to International Living, the top four American
retirement havens in 2008 were Mexico, Ecuador, Panama, and Ur-
uguay. Nearly 890,000 U.S. citizens live permanently in Mexico and
Panama. The monthly retiree budget that that magazine (targeting
American retirees) proposes to “live well”—which includes “house-
keeper and gardener three days a week”—is $2,135. Many French
retire to Morocco or Tunisia. Some middle-income Japanese and
South Koreans move for a season or longer to Thailand, Singapore, or
Malaysia. With each move, clients of the North are moving to less
expensive service providers in the South. See Chee Heng Leng,
“Medical Tourism in Malaysia: International Movement of Healthcare
Consumers and the Commodification of Healthcare,” Asia
Research Institute Working Paper No. 83, National University of
Singapore, January 2007. Tim and Lili had joined this larger two-way
global flow of client to worker in their poignant search for a baby. See
Arifle Hochschild, “The Back Stage of a Global Free Market: Nannies and
Surrogates,” in Care and Migration, ed. Ursula Apitzsch and Mari-
Anne Schmidbaur (Opladen, Germany, and Farmington Hills, MI:
Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2010).

2. India’s National Commission for Women estimated 3,000 clinics, as
reported here: Shilpa Kannan, “Regulators Eye India’s Surrogacy
bcc.co.uk/2/hi/business/7955768.stm. For the 2012 industry predic-
tion, see Devon M. Herrick, “Medical Tourism: Global Competition
Chapter 5: My Womb, Their Baby

1. Some surrogates are more attached to their babies than others. In Elly Teman's study of Israeli surrogates, she discovered many who felt highly detached. Some blamed their detachment on the “alien” hormones they were forced to take, and called their child “fetus” instead of “him” or “her.” One remarked, “My brain doesn’t even know that I am pregnant.” Elly Teman, “Technological Fragmentation and Women’s Empowerment: Surrogate Motherhood in Israel,” *Women's Studies Quarterly* 31, no. 34 (2001).


6. The Indian gynecologists I spoke with were divided among themselves on whether or not to accept gay clients for surrogacy. Dr. B. N. Chakravarty, the Chair of the National Drafting Committee (to regulate surrogacy) told me, “In India we don’t have this problem” (referring to homosexuality). On the other hand, Dr. Allahbadia of Mumbai’s Rotunda Clinic proudly arranges surrogacy for gay men. Clients also had their attitudes: some rejected potential surrogates “because she looked too dark” even though the woman bore no genetic relation to the child to which she would give birth.

7. Thanks to N. B. Sarojini and Vrinda Marwah of Sama Resource Group for Women and Health, B 45, 2nd Floor, Shivalik Main Road, Malviya Nagar, New Delhi, 110017, India, www.samawomenshealth.org. See N. B. Sarojini and Vrinda Marwah, *Shake Her, She Is Like the Tree that Grows Money!* (New Delhi, India: Sama Resource Group for Women and Health, forthcoming).


9. It seems as though there are “hard rules” set by law and the courts, and “soft rules” set by custom. Since 2002, the hard rules governing Indian commercial surrogacy have changed; it’s legal and unregulated. But the soft rules are various, confusing, and up for grabs. Should the genetic parents try to bond with the surrogate, and accept the baby as a personal gift, as in the gift exchange? Or should they treat this service as a strictly impersonal transaction?


12. Not only are surrogates privately poor but the Indian public sector provisions of health and education are also abysmal. The United Nations recently rated Indian reproductive medical care the seventh worst in the world. Just 17 percent of Indian women have had any contact whatever with a health worker. Ironically, while India, one of the poorest nations in the world, has accomplished little to help women


14. While Dr. Patel focused exclusively on their “carrier” wombs, much else of their person—their ankles, backs, breasts, their appetite, their sleep, their dreams—was affected.


17. Ibid., p. 161.

18. Ibid., p. 165.


21. For reviews of surrogacy and assisted reproduction laws in the United States, see Jessica Arons, “Future Choices: Assisted Reproductive Technologies and the Law” (Washington, DC: Center for American Progress, 2007); Carla Spivack, “The Law of Surrogate Motherhood in the United States,” American Journal of Comparative Law 58, Supplement 1 (2010). A recent article published in a French journal (Jennifer Merchant, “Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) in the United States: Towards a National Regulatory Framework?,” Journal International de Bioethique 20, no. 4 [2009]) describes the contemporary U.S. situation this way: “Four states do not recognize the validity of a surrogacy contract, four states recognize the validity of a surrogacy contract but do not authorize payment for the gestational mother, four states fully recognize the validity of a surrogate contract and authorize payment for the gestational mother, and seven states formally prohibit surrogacy arrangements and have erected severe sanctions” (pp. 68–69). Florida, New Hampshire, and Virginia “recognize the validity of a surrogacy contract but only allow payment to cover medical costs, clothing, food, and salary loss of the gestational mother. These states also signify to the gestational mother that she can change her mind and keep the child without any threat of sanction... The remaining states have no legislation regarding surrogacy and leave it up to the courts to handle conflicts of any kind” (p. 69). Spivack reports that in 27 states—Alaska, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, New Jersey, Ohio,
Chapter 6: It Takes a Service Mall

1. According to the historian Janet Golden, breast-feeding at that time was seen by many upper-class women as "immodest, wearisome and déclassé." In 1906, Dr. Thompson S. Wescott, associate professor at the University of Pennsylvania medical school, noted the passing of wet nurses, Golden writes, "with regret." She continues, "Like servants, whose loyalty and hard work increased in memory as their numbers diminished, wet nurses benefited from misguided nostalgia" (p. 178). In turn-of-the-century Boston, one-third of private-duty wet nurses came from Ireland, one-third from coastal towns of Canada, and most of the rest were native born, primarily, Golden speculates, of Irish descent (p. 109, Table 4.11). Working in the houses of the wealthy, many impoverished wet nurses were tragically forced to leave their own babies in orphanages such as the Massachusetts Infant Asylum, where many languished or died. For quotations in this paragraph of the text, see pages 45, 46, and 57 of Janet Golden, A Social History of Wet Nursing in America: From Breast to Bottle (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996). To my knowledge, the only wet nursing services available today are through Certified Household Staffing in Beverly Hills, California. See Florence Williams, "Human Milk For Sale," New York Times Magazine, December 19, 2010; and Carol Lloyd, "Modern-Day Wet Nursing," Broadsheet, Salon.com, April 26, 2007.

2. The Baby Naming Experience: http://thetabynamingexperience.com/products/consultations.html. Korwitts even offers a "Free Baby Name Report Card," saying on her Web site: "Might as well see how a name is graded regarding things like health, finances, job success, relationship compatibility, and communication ability before you put that name on your baby's birth certificate." (The lower the grade, the more in need of her service, of course.) She also asks the potential client if the spelling of one's child's name is "balanced for success." If not, for seventy-five dollars, one can get a child's name "attuned." As reported in Alexandra Alter, "The Baby-Name Business," Wall Street Journal, June 22, 2007, http://online.wsj.com/article/SB118247444843644288.html, one woman who hired a nameologist remarked, "She was an objective person for me to obsess about it with rather than driving my husband crazy," and Bruce Lansky, author of 100,000+ Baby Names, said, "We live in a marketing-oriented society. People who understand branding know that when you pick the right name, you're giving your child a head start."


4. See the following Web sites for examples of these services: http://thepottytrainer.com; http://www.3daypottytraining.com.


6. Elissa Gootman, "The Job Description: Life of the Party; The Proper

3. These examples are drawn from Sanders (2009) and other Internet sites. George Sanders, “‘Late’ Capital: Amusement andContradiction in the Contemporary Funeral Industry,” _Critical Sociology_ 35, no. 4 (2009): 447–70.


Conclusion: The Wantologist

1. A former trucker and musician, Kevin Creitman also taught career planning to engineering students at San Jose State. She consulted with local governments on supportive housing for the mentally ill, consulted on Total Quality Management in the aerospace industry, and helped Oracle satisfy customers who had purchased expensive IT systems. Now she runs wantology training groups for life coaches and individuals, and estimates she’s trained and treated “a few hundred” people. “Part of what I do,” she explained in an interview, “is help people question the fantasies they attach to the things they buy. They read the ads. They believe them. Often they believe things have magical properties, and then add to those beliefs their own wishes. So a new computer will write the book. A remodeled living room will open a social world. So I ask them what they imagine a thing or service will make them feel. Often it bears no relation to what the thing or service actually does.”

2. Through the UC Berkeley Survey Research Center, I surveyed nearly a thousand Californians from top to bottom of the class ladder in order to learn what, in the world of services, people might want. Consider the idea, I began by asking. “If I had all the money I wanted, I would hire someone to cook all my meals.” About a third answered “yes.” “Cook some of my meals?” I asked. Forty-five percent said yes. “Assemble a personal photo album and label particular photos?” To this, 30 percent agreed. “Select and purchase gifts and cards for friends and family?” Twenty-two percent. “Plan and supervise a birthday party for my children?” Twenty-six percent. “Pay daily or weekly visits to my elderly parent?” Twenty-four percent. Eighteen percent were ready to hire a life coach. A majority of Californians weren’t tempted by such services. Still, a full third wanted to outsource all home cooking. A quarter wanted to hire someone to visit their elderly parents, and a fifth wished to hire a life coach.

The poor wanted all these services more than the rich did. More than twice as many high school dropouts (46 percent) said “yes” to the birthday party planner as did those with a postgraduate education (21 percent). Over twice as many high school dropouts said “yes” to the photo-album assembler, too (39 vs. 19 percent). As for hiring a professional visitor to call on an elderly relative daily or weekly, 44 percent of the less educated would do so but just 21 percent of the more highly educated. Since the more highly educated generally earn higher salaries, a painful irony unfolded; those less interested in such services had the thicker wallets to afford them, and those most interested did not. Wallets and wants did not line up.

The poorest of Americans in this survey, as in others, were the
most socially isolated. They were also the most likely to agree “strongly” with the bleak statement: “You can’t always count on family and friends, but you can always count on money.” If current social trends continue, we will see more poor in America. And if isolation and poverty drive an understandable desire for personal services, more people will turn—at least in fantasy—to the market in search of all that is missing at home.

3. For this and for general encouragement, I’m grateful for a conversation with Erv Polster, 2010.

4. Activists have been working to spread a spirit of “the commons.” In the wake of the 2004 market crash, a Boston-based organizer named Chuck Collins set up a series of “Resilience Circles” (sometimes called Common Security Clubs) through which people gather monthly in one another’s homes to lend one another a helping hand. They set up skill banks (one repairs people’s computers, another babysits, still another cooks casseroles, another organizes closets—each earning time credits they can cash in for the needed service of another, all without exchanging money). They share baby strollers, battery chargers, and other things. They buy food in bulk. Weekends, some groups have wintertized homes, halving heating bills, conserving energy, and later enjoyed potluck dinners. One retired social worker who had become isolated caring for her ill husband, enthused, “I’d been listening to CNN financial news all day alone and getting terrified. Joining this gave me new friends, got me a part-time job, and made me feel a lot safer. Actually, it’s the best thing I ever did.” As of November 2011, there were 125 circles nationwide, and Interfaith Worker Justice and the NAACP were piloting circles for their networks. See www.localcircles.org and Hochschild, “Common Security Clubs Offer the Jobless a Lifeline,” Los Angeles Times, May 23, 2010.

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