

ELSA

Projection: ELSA JONES-EISENBLITZ, Literary Agent, New York, N.Y.

Spotlight on ELSA [played by PUNDIT or JEN]. She is wearing big eyeglasses, a shawl.)

ELSA. Humans need five things ... four of which we share with other animals: water, food, shelter and sex. The unique fifth thing humans need is story. The sixth thing is stories about sex—hell, I'm kidding!

But, seriously, there are like seven billion people that inhabit our planet, and every one of us has a story. Some, like my father, keep their story inside; most, like my mother, tell theirs to the neighbors, and a few like, 2 billion people, take the time to jot something down for posterity.

Writing a book is hard work. It takes heart. It takes discipline; it even sometimes takes, God help me, talent.

I can't even tell you how many millions of manuscripts are submitted each year, but it's a friggin' heartbreaking colossal number. And these are the facts. Of the millions and millions of manuscripts that are submitted each year only 250,000 are published. And out of the 250,000 books that are published, most Americans read an average of less than three. You do the math.

Writing a book takes courage. Getting it published takes luck.

But getting someone to read your book takes a friggin' miracle.

(Lights out.)

FRANK

FRANK. Book Clubs? Yeah, I know about Book Clubs. I've been in a Secret Service Book Club for fifteen years.

My favorite books are *A Farewell to Arms*, *The Old Man and the Sea* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, all by Ernest Hemingway.

The most important part of my life is Book Club. People come and go, but the Book Club stays. There are certain unalterable rules you must follow if you want Book Club to survive and thrive.

One: Trust no one. Everyone must be vetted by the Book Club. Sure so-and-so might be someone's best friend, but that doesn't mean he won't pose a serious threat to Book Club.

Two: Take no prisoners. If a rogue element does somehow infiltrate Book Club, you must be ruthless, absolutely ruthless, in removing him.

Three: Protect your leader. Book Club will collapse without the firm hand of authority and rule of law.

Ignore these rules at your Book Club's peril.

You have been warned.

SAM

Projection: SAM W. THOMPSON, Stock Manager for Wal-Mart, Amarillo, Texas.

Spotlight on PUNDIT or ROB wearing a blue Wal-Mart vest with a nametag and smiley-face button.)

SAM. I can say without doubt that Book Clubs are truly an economic phenomenon and Wal-Mart is a proud participant, feeding the nation's hunger for books. Our pricing policies enable most families to be able to own and enjoy novels, biographies and bestsellers. And the numbers speak for themselves: over a million copies sold of *The Da Vinci Code*; *Harry Potter*, can't keep him on the shelf. *The Chicken Soup* books, sell like hot cakes.

And you know, not only do we encourage America to read, we encourage our employees by offering them a significant employee discount. I do believe we might have some intra-Wal-Mart Book Clubs, where employees from all Wal-Marts in a twenty-five-mile radius get together to discuss novels. And let me say something that I have no way of qualifying, but I believe that employees find these Book Clubs so satisfying that it has made the issue of unions completely irrelevant in our organization. *(Beat.)*

My favorite book? A personal question, no sure, I'm happy to address that ... Just remember ... not to judge a book by its cover. My favorite book ... I would have to say is: well, I'll say it: *Lolita* by Vladimir Nabokov. Why? His use of language, humor, his ability to take the most horrid of situations and find a voice of humanity. Each turn of the phrase lands you in an unexpectedly original yet real place. *(Pause.)*

No, I'm afraid Wal-Mart does not carry *Lolita*.

Carl

Projection: Carl Banks, Book Dealer, Bay State Correctional Center, Framington, Massachusetts.

Played by PUNDIT or ALEX in an orange jumpsuit.)

CARL. Here in the big house. We have a different sort of currency. Long days here, in the joint. And everyone is looking for some kind of release.

They call me "The Bookend." It goes like this. First three chapters, I am able to provide for free. You like that and want more, well ... the next three will cost you three cigs.

Hooked and need another fix? Well chapters seven to nine will be a whole pack. And the book junkies ... they come and beg for the last chapters. Ha! That's where the price jacks up to full chocolate bar. And that's when the craziness begins, the begging, the threats, the altercations. Shoot, one punk is in solitary today for perpetrating on my person to cut me if I didn't tell him the ending to *Presumed Innocent* by Scott Turow.

I protect myself and I do not read one word from those books. It's simple freakenomics. If you want to stay safe ... never dabble in what you deal.

Mrs. Simpson

**Projection: Mrs. Edith P. Simpson, Retired Librarian,
High Point, North Carolina.**

Spotlight on EDITH [played by PUNDIT or LILY]. Wind is blowing. She is wearing goggles and a helmet and is about to jump out of a plane.)

MRS. SIMPSON. I am Mrs. Simpson. And today I am thrilled to be learning to sky dive.

Old Librarians can be crazy that way.

I am delighted to give you chickadees two little bits of advice.

One: read books. Real books. Books you can hold in your hand and carry in your head and your heart. My life has been decorated by every one of my foster kids and by every book I've ever read. In fact, yesterday, after sixty-two years of trying, I finally finished reading *Ulysses* by James Joyce.

Which brings me to my second bit of advice which is this: Get off your ass and do something with what you read. Because reading about life is not the same as living your life. Not the same at all. WHEEEEE! (*Jumps.*)