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DRAFT OF AN OBITUARY (WRITTEN BY THE DECEASED,  
THREE DAYS BEFORE HER DEATH)

Ronald F. Currie, Jr.

Andrea E. 'Andy' LeClair  
1971-2001

GREENVILLE—Andrea Elisabeth LeClair,<sup>1</sup> 30, died Saturday, February 17, 2001, in Greenville,<sup>2</sup> following a long illness.<sup>3</sup> She was born January 2, 1971,<sup>4</sup> in Bangor,<sup>5</sup> the daughter of John<sup>6</sup> and Ellen (Spencer)<sup>7</sup> LeClair.

Andrea attended Greenville schools, and was a member of the Russell High School class of 1988,<sup>8</sup> though she left a year before graduation.<sup>9</sup> After leaving school she moved to Boston, Massachusetts, where she began work as a model.<sup>10</sup> Modeling afforded her the opportunity to travel the country and the world, and over the next seven years she made her home in New York,<sup>11</sup> Paris,<sup>12</sup> Rome,<sup>13</sup> and, for a short time, the tiny island nation of Cyprus.<sup>14</sup>

In 1996 Andrea gave up modeling and returned to Greenville.<sup>15</sup> She bought a house on Webb road, where she lived until her death, tending her garden, playing Scrabble against herself, and reading.

Andrea was predeceased by her father.<sup>16</sup>

Survivors include her husband, Louis Gold, of New York City; mother, Ellen LeClair, of Greenville; aunt, Jody Spencer, also of Greenville; uncle, Joseph LeClair and wife Hillary, of San Antonio, Texas; several cousins, a niece, and two nephews.<sup>17</sup>

There will be no visiting hours. Spring burial will be at the Brown Catholic Cemetery in Greenville. In lieu of flowers, donations can be made in her memory to the Hemlock Society, PO Box 101810, Denver CO 80250.

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<sup>1</sup> I have not loved much in my life—either in quantity or quality. I am, as near as I can determine, constitutionally incapable of love in the way most people

seem to think of or feel it. Maybe it's genetic, like being able to roll your tongue; some people can, and some people can't. Well, most people can love, and I can't. But I have always loved my name—the lilting flow, the way my parents spelled Elisabeth, with an s instead of a z, the capital “C” in LeClair. It's unfortunate that I can't keep it, but it should have gone to someone prettier than I am, anyway. By this I don't mean physically pretty, of course. Despite everything, I am still quite beautiful, and I say that without an ounce of pride or delusion, but out of an absolute and terminal desire to tell the truth, here, in this obituary. The truth is in these footnotes. I've used them as a polite gesture to whichever intern at the local paper sets the body of this obituary for the morning edition some time next week, so that he or she can just type it up or scan it or whatever without having to sanitize it by removing the disjointed, icky, but true details contained herein for the consumption of strangers half-asleep over their bagels and low-fat cream cheese. But for those who are interested (perhaps even you, unnamed and faceless intern), here is the truth: I am beautiful, on the exterior. No one could deny it.

<sup>2</sup> Greenville, Maine is technically speaking a town, but in reality is nothing more than a loose collection of angular, hardy domiciles (most of them seasonal, buried year-round in the trees of the North Woods and for seven months of the year in snow and ice) which lie clustered around Moosehead Lake and offer no justification for being incorporated other than that they are closer to one another than to anything else that gives off even the faintest whiff of civilization. On the lakeshore, in what passes for the center of town, are a small supermarket, a souvenir shop known to locals as the Indian Store because of the wooden Indian glaring perpetually out from the display window, and a restaurant called the Road Kill Café, the motto of which is “You Kill 'Em, We Grill 'Em.” That's it. The rest is trees and water and rolling hills. And in the winter, which is long and dark here, snow. A nice place to be if it's summer and you have someplace else to go and the means to get there when the weather turns. Otherwise I wouldn't recommend it, unless you're into snowmobiling.

<sup>3</sup> An undiagnosable schizo-depressive thing which has been my constant companion (and given fits to scores of psychologists, psychiatrists, psychotherapists, and hopelessly overmatched plain old counselors) basically since I can remember. It drapes the world in gray gauze, dooms every good

intention to failure and makes every kind gesture suspect. Sometimes a low chatter, easily ignored if you're accustomed to it, and sometimes a crashing roar which drowns out all the sounds of a normal life—the steady press and buzz of the machinery of routine, the reassuring murmur of the familial web—it was responsible for my two previous suicide attempts, and can be blamed, I suppose, for the last one. Which, if you are reading this, was successful.

<sup>4</sup> A Christmas baby. Ugh.

<sup>5</sup> The nearest bastion of civilization to Greenville, itself a sorry little hamlet of 30,000 people. For kids growing up here, Bangor was the place to party and take in concerts and movies. It was the place to discover what the orange glow of streetlamps is like. It was where I went, at sixteen, to have an abortion, and it was the first stop on an ultimately fruitless odyssey begun shortly thereafter, when my father found out about the abortion and blackened my eye (the only time he ever put a hand on me) before throwing me out of the house.

<sup>6</sup> My father, who died just two weeks ago. The only man I've known whose love for me was conditional, or ever in doubt. The only man I've known who was not moved by my beauty to devotion, or sacrifice, or forgiveness. He was at various times a seminary student, a minor-league shortstop, a Marine, a welder, a volunteer firefighter, a Shriner. He was at all times a Red Sox fan and a Catholic. He was steady and quiet and loved with deeds, not words. He was, for me, the embodiment of God on Earth. When he died we hadn't spoken for a decade and a half, even though I've been living here in Greenville, two miles from the home where I was raised, for the last five years.

<sup>7</sup> My mother, from whom I inherited both my beauty and my susceptibility to tension, paranoia, and nervous breakdown. Despite her fragile mental state, she has remained beautiful into her fifties (though she was never quite as cripplingly gorgeous as I am). Over the years, sustaining her beauty has become for her a sort of coping mechanism. She has no time, while busy driving to Boston for Botox injections or having her hair stripped and highlighted, to dwell on the daily bombardment of unpleasant stimuli to which she is so vulnerable. In the two weeks since my father died, she's gone to Bangor five times for full spa treatments, including pedicure, manicure, mud bath, full-body massage, and electrolysis.

She changes lipstick shades a dozen times a day. When she isn't preening, or in transit to be preened, she calls me and cries, because she misses my father, and because she is a love junkie and for the first time in her life she is without heavy doses of the stuff. I am fond of my mother, but I have no real love to offer her, and she knows it. What little love I've felt in my life died with my father.

<sup>8</sup> It was while in high school, of course, that I became pregnant. I'd been fending off the advances of boys, and sometimes grown men, since I was twelve. The way they ogled and genuflected, the way they made fools of themselves and fell all over each other vying for my attention and favor, hoping for a single word, a mere glance, the way they talked to my tits, the way they bought me trinkets and candies I neither asked for nor wanted, the way they spluttered the most ridiculous and inane things to impress or flatter me, their minds feverish with the desire, the *compulsion*, to fuck me, to own me—at first it was amusing, as any sort of simple comic performance is amusing to a child. Before long, though, as I came to understand the base appetite behind the performance, amusement gave way to disgust. The only man I knew who did not prostrate himself before me was my father, and he was the only man for whom I felt anything but disdain.

I was lonely, though. I had no girlfriends. They all hated me. You know how they say no one likes the prettiest girl in the room? How do you think they feel about the prettiest girl in the world? And since the boys had no interest in me as anything other than an idol, the divine piece of underage ass, I had no friends. I kept my own counsel. I read tons of books. I sat around the house in the afternoons and adored my father, his back wide and solid as a vault door, his head bowed in prayer over the dinner spread, his mouth a straight, silent line.

But since I'd grown breasts my father would not touch me. Not that he was ever very demonstrative with his love, but at least when I was a freckled androgynous little thing he would brush my hair from time to time, or bounce me on his knee. Now I can see he was frightened of me, but at the time it didn't occur to me that he could be frightened of anything, and I just felt rejected.

And so one night, in the spring of my junior year, I showed up at a party in the woods on the north side of Moosehead Lake. In the flickering yellow light of the bonfire, eyes went wide and jaws dropped when I appeared out of the darkness. And just as casually as you like, I gave the boys what they wanted. But I wouldn't let just one of them have me—there were five, the entirety of Russell

High's wrestling team. Panting, quivering, their chests dotted with pimples and comically bloated from too much time in the weight room. I took them, one after the other. It felt like nothing, and it meant less than that.

Until.

Until I missed my period. At that point I had two options, neither of which was very appealing. I could keep the baby, which would necessitate admitting to my father that A) I'd had sex at age sixteen; B) I'd had sex out of wedlock; C) I'd had sex with five guys; and D) I had no idea which of them was the father. Or I could roll the dice, abort the pregnancy and hope he never found out, because if he did it would be ten times worse than A,B,C, and D rolled into one. Plus, part of me wanted to keep the baby. Something to take care of. Something to touch and love. That's how I thought of it at the time. I didn't think of practical concerns, like how I was sixteen and my sole source of income was babysitting for the Folsoms every other Saturday. I just wanted something that would inspire love in me. So I savored the idea for a few nights, petting and poking my belly in the darkness of my bedroom, imagining how it would swell and stretch and at the end of nine months not only would I have something to touch and love, but my body would be ruined for good and men would leave me alone.

I knew, though, that this was just idle fantasy. I couldn't face my father with this.

So I went to Bangor and had an abortion and he found out anyway, how I still don't know. It was two days later and I was still bleeding when he threw open the door to my bedroom and cursed me and hit me and for what seemed like a long time, cowering on my knees, I couldn't make sense of what was happening. It wasn't until the next morning, when I woke in my aunt's apartment over the Indian store, that I understood.

I stayed with my aunt for less than a week, then took a bus to Boston. I didn't come back for nine years.

<sup>9</sup> At the top of my class, incidentally. This sounds impressive until you consider that there were only 32 people in the class.

<sup>10</sup> This is a gross summary of my first two years in Boston, during which I worked as everything *but* a model—hostess, busgirl, waitress, office temp, toilet scrubber. I even spent time landscaping, planting flowerbeds and digging

trenches for affluent suburbanites, but the attention I suffered from the rest of the crew, comprised almost entirely of sexually ravenous Haitians, drove me away from that line of work. In the summer of '89 I'd been without a job for five months. I was nearly broke, living on peanut butter and chickpeas and deflecting the attentions of my landlord, who in lieu of back rent I couldn't pay was suggesting, less and less subtly, that another arrangement be worked out between us.

Louis discovered me while we were waiting in line, separately, at Dunkin Donuts. I was spending my last three dollars on a Mochaccino. He was an agent for William Morris. I took off the foam-and-mesh *Highlander Laundromat* ballcap I hid my beauty under, to scratch a tingle, and Louis made a strangling noise in his throat. He put a manicured hand to his mouth and stared. At first I ignored him. Men stared; it was a fact of life for me, though in this case it seemed strange, since Louis was so obviously gay. I pulled my hair up and stuffed it back under the cap.

"No!" Louis said. He took the hand from his mouth and thrust it out, as if to grab me. "Take it off again. Please."

I bared my teeth. "Fuck off, creep," I said.

But Louis pulled a business card from his vest pocket and waved it at me. "We're going to be rich," he said. "And you're going to be worshipped the world over."

The money sounded good, anyway.

A week later I was in New York. A week after that I was striking poses in Bali, my skin burned the color of watermelon flesh. On signing the contract for the Balinese shoot, I'd made more money in ten seconds than my father had made in his whole working life. Best of all, I'd found Louis, who was made of love like an omelet is made of eggs, and couldn't have been less interested in fucking me. He dropped his other clients to focus on managing and promoting my face, the likes of which, he said, hadn't blessed the Earth since that Helen of Troy debacle. We traveled together, had dinner together, took long idyllic strolls together through the postcards and movie sets that had suddenly become my life. We played tic-tac-toe on each other's arms. We nursed one another through bouts of dysentery and malaria. Louis could be surprisingly butch, and spent as much time driving off would-be suitors of mine as he did negotiating contracts and planning itineraries.

One night in Botswana I invited him into the shroud of mosquito netting

that hung over my bed. I slept with his arms around me. In Africa I learned that monsters do indeed exist, and that there is reason to be afraid of the dark, and so when something rustled the tall grass outside my hut I woke and clutched Louis's hand and reflexively, embarrassingly, called him Daddy. He squeezed back and soothed me, whispering against my neck. It didn't matter that he was gay.

<sup>11</sup> Where I got my first psychiatrist, a thin man in his fifties who looked and dressed like Tom Wolfe—silvery hair, white linen suits, long, elegantly wrinkled hands. I spent several hours a day in his office, scratching absently at the window with the filed oval of one fingernail, watching cars and people hustle by on the avenue below, and telling him how I was involved with a gay man and hadn't spoken to my parents in three years. He asked me about sex. He went "Hmmm" a lot. He tented his fingers. When he came up behind me and put a hand on my hip, I bit my own forearm hard enough to draw blood, then showed it to him. He said he'd send me to Bellevue. I told him he wasn't worried I would hurt myself and only wanted to put me someplace where I'd be under his control. His face flushed, and he looked away.

Around this time my mother called me out of the blue. She'd seen photos of me in the magazines she was so fond of—*Cosmo*, *Vogue*, *Redbook*—and though I modeled under an assumed name, my phone number and address were in the name she'd given me, so I wasn't hard to track down. I came home from a job in Morocco and heard her voice on my answering machine.

"I saw the Versace spread in *Vogue*," she said. "Honey, I'm so proud. I couldn't be prouder."

What about Dad? I wanted to ask the machine.

"I feel so strange," my mother continued, "talking to you but not actually *talking to you*, you know. After all this time." She paused for a few seconds, and I could picture her dabbing at the corners of her eyes with a handkerchief, careful not to smudge her mascara. "So what's new here, you must be wondering? Nothing, really. Let's see. The Road Kill Café had a fire, but they're rebuilding. That's about it.

"Oh, your father is home," my mother said. "I have to go. Call us, baby. Let us know you're okay. We miss you. Your father, too. He wouldn't say it. You know how he is. But he does. He misses you. He worries."

And I did it, after steeling myself with a bubble bath and several tumblers



of mint schnapps. I called. The line rang three times, then I heard my father's voice, calm and expectant: "LeClair residence."

The warm tingle from the schnapps disappeared instantly, and I froze.

"Hello?" my father said.

*Hi Dad, I thought. How am I, you ask? Oh, fine, fine. There are a million men in my life, and all but two of them want to devour me. But I'm good. How are you?*

My father, never having had much patience with games, hung up before I could unstick my tongue.

<sup>12</sup> Where I was bored and anxious and read all of Graham Greene and did not speak French (though Louis did). In Paris I tried to kill myself by leaping into the Seine from the Pont de l'Alma. It just happened. I looked down at the rippling coffee surface and suddenly I wanted to be on the bottom, suspended, slick with algae, my only company discarded tires and stolen crepe stands. I had on Doc Martens and a heavy flannel shirt (grunge was high fashion by then, even in Paris), and they took on water instantly, yanking me under as though I were tethered to a boulder. Sadly, a waiter had followed me from the Champs-Elysees like some sort of love-struck zombie, and he splashed into the river and fished me out before I could die, dragging me up onto the bank where a small crowd cheered his heroism. He spoke to me in French, and though I didn't understand the words it seemed clear he thought I owed him something. He stood over me, waiting, his long apron soaked and clinging to his thighs. I got to my feet, brushed past him and walked home, leaving a trail of wet footprints two miles long.

Paris was also where I developed my first zit ever, an angry white peak besieged by a blazing red aureole. It was huge, like an infected nipple on my forehead, ugly and impossible to ignore. I loved it, and when it finally healed I spent a full 50-minute hour mourning its loss with my therapist, a sultry, 30-ish Frenchwoman.

"You should be happy," she said to me in heavily accented English. "Your beauty is intact again."

"Don't tell me how to feel," I said. "That's not your job."

She put a finger to her lips. "An-dy," she said, "I should like to make love with you. I'm sorry. I cannot contain it any more."

I looked at her. "You're married," I said. "You have a son."

And she covered her teary eyes with one hand and said, "I should not have

told you about my life. That was wrong.”

<sup>13</sup> Not the ideal place for a woman weary of attention. The men there swarm like libidinous bees, single-minded and tireless.

<sup>14</sup> Where Louis and I were married in a Greek Orthodox ceremony. We kissed, but did not have sex.

“I’m gay, honey,” he said when I asked him to consummate our union. “I married you as my friend, not my lover.”

For our honeymoon we left Nicosia and drove west, through the dusty red hills of the central countryside, around the Troodos mountains, and south to Aphrodite’s rock, a dull chunk of granite jutting out of the shallows of the southern coastline. The story was that Aphrodite had no parents, but was born in a geyser of foam at this very spot when Kronos threw his father Ouranos’s severed penis into the sea. She emerged from the water, flawless and glowing with passion, and proceeded to torment mortal men through the ages.

On the gravel beach surrounding Aphrodite’s rock tourists milled about, the backs of their legs scorched red and their necks laden with camera straps. Most gazed up at the towering, shapeless boulder, shielding their eyes from the sun with cupped hands, probably wondering what the big deal was and why they had driven so far to see this stupid rock. Then Louis and I crested the hill leading down to the beach. Heads turned. Men gawked, and wives punched their shoulders. Two young boys in shorts and sandals stopped throwing pebbles into the water and turned to stare at me.

I looked at Louis, a bitter smile on my lips. “Aphrodite returns,” I said.

And I broke into a run, sprinting down the hill and across the width of the beach. I dove into the water, shoes, backpack and all. I could hear Louis calling to me, his voice tight with alarm. The tourists were still staring when I reached into the backpack and took out the can of spray paint; they raised their cameras as, bobbing like a buoy, I wrote BITCH in large red capitals across the base of Aphrodite’s rock. Then I dropped the can into the water and swam further away from shore. Louis was after me now, cutting through the waves with a strong freestyle stroke, gaining on me as my arms tired. I blew the air from my lungs and sank beneath the surface.

The Cypriot authorities allowed me to convalesce for two days before expelling me from the country.

In my bedroom in Nicosia, Louis said: "Go home, Andy." And I knew what he meant.

<sup>15</sup> The same way I'd left nine years before: by bus, under cover of night. There's no proper bus station in Greenville; the driver deposited me on the sidewalk outside the Indian store. No one was there to greet me. The streets were empty and the one stoplight at the one intersection was blinking yellow. I walked west out of town, carrying only a duffel bag with a pair of jeans, two pairs of socks, two pairs of panties, and a *Cyprus Is For Lovers* t-shirt inside. By the time I reached my parents' home, six miles from the bus stop, the sky behind me was fading from black to pink with the first tendrils of a new day. I didn't dare to knock on their door, so I settled into the grass under an ancient elm in their front yard, put my head on the duffel, and slept.

A few hours later my mother found me. I woke to her kissing me, leaving waxy smears of lipstick on my forehead, my cheeks, my hair. "John!" she called to my father. "John, it's Andy! Andy's come home!"

But my father did not emerge. No long unbelieving stare, no embrace, no exchange of apology and forgiveness. I thought I caught a glimpse of him, gazing out from the window over the kitchen sink, but when I looked closer I saw nothing but the interior of the kitchen, the blue walls, the ceiling fan over the table. For all I could tell my father was not even home. Perhaps he was dead.

I stayed under the elm tree for three days. My mother flitted between me in the yard and my father in the house. She brought sandwiches and lemonade, a blanket, a pillow. I wore a hole in the grass; my elbows and knees were brown with dirt. My mother told me he would come around. She told me I knew how he was. On the afternoon of the third day she told me, while she cried and held my face in her hands, that my father had wood to split and wanted me to leave.

<sup>16</sup> The day of my father's funeral, just two weeks ago, my mother invited me to the house. My nostrils still stung from the flowers at the funeral home. I followed my mother through the front door, but stopped cold in the entryway. I smelled Old Spice. I heard the dried and crinkled pages of the New Testament rustle in the study. My father was not gone from the house. Neither was the ghost of my childhood. I couldn't move a muscle.

My mother gave me my father's pocketknife and wallet. The knife bore the globe-and-anchor insignia of the Marines. In the wallet, among the receipts and

business cards and loose cash, was an insulin dosing schedule.

I did not know, until I opened the wallet, that my father had been a diabetic. I never saw a syringe, or a vial of insulin. I never saw a blood sugar test kit. My mother, who was notoriously bad at keeping secrets, had never said a word to me. Never.

<sup>17</sup> And my baby, whom I killed at the clinic in Bangor so many years ago. I have given him a name, and I have imagined a life for him. His name is John. The details of his life I keep for myself, except to say that he is ugly and happy and will live on long after I am gone.