

Our Town

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Trinity or Bethany and then “take a stroll around the neighborhood. See what decisions other institutions made when the neighborhood changed—they bolted the doors and left no forwarding address.”

Of course he’s right that Advocate deserves praise for sticking around. And the union and community groups are right when they say that keeping city hospitals open isn’t enough. In a health care system that’s squeezing the poor, a network like Advocate that’s trying to help the poor instead of becoming an all-suburban hospital chain may always be vulnerable to accusations that it’s not doing enough. But it’s hard to see how Advocate helps its case by keeping the relevant data to itself. **B**

Games People Play

Kiss and Blog

A couple of downtown flacks add a little frisson to their office romance.

By Ryan Hubbard

Roughly once a week since September “Olive,” a 25-year-old senior account executive at a downtown PR company, and “Mason,” a 28-year-old management supervisor, have made a bet to determine who will buy the other lunch the following week. On their blog, oliveandmason.com, they’ve provided details of each bet and, as a sort of bonus, reviews of the restaurants. They say they’re pretty sure their relationship hasn’t violated any company policy, but you have to wonder what their boss would think.

Here’s the September 29 bet: Will Olive make out with Mason in his office? Later Olive wrote, “So it was Friday afternoon and my stomach was in knots. Would I actually go through with it? I did a quick survey lap around the office. This was it. I walked into Mason’s office, closed the door and casually said, ‘Hello. I’m here to win a bet.’”

Olive studied journalism at the University of Wisconsin and has done a lot of blogging. Mason majored in English and philosophy at Purdue, has a master’s in Web design from Columbia College, and plays guitar in a band he says sounds sort of like Postal Service. They officially became

For the next bet Mason dared Olive to call in sick after a long night out. On Thursday, October 29, their firm lost a full day’s work from both of them.

[snip] “**To my generation, the church has always been the People of God,**” writes Tara Dix in *U.S. Catholic*. “The priest has always faced the congregation, the Mass has always been said in the vernacular, and many of us girls were even altar servers. So every time I

hear someone bemoaning the fact that the church hasn’t kept the promises of Vatican II or that the clock has been turned back, I think it’s about time somebody opened up another window and let in some new fresh air because the reformers are getting stale.” —**HH**

more than friends in May but decided not to tell anyone at work. “There is certain subject matter,” says Mason, “that we don’t want to fall into the hands of our coworkers.”

“Anonymity allows me to indulge my shyness,” says Olive. “For a period of about three months, I wouldn’t even look at Mason if we were in an office-wide meeting together. When we lunched together we left and returned at separate times and ducked around corners to avoid being seen together.”

They started using code for their flirting. “It’d always be initiated by a phone call or instant message with a random work-related question like ‘Can you edit this?’” says Mason. “If he said, ‘Sure,’” Olive adds, “then no, there are other people around. But if he said, ‘Fuck off,’ then yes.”

Slowly the dallying became more daring. In the presence of colleagues one might coyly ask the other, “So, what did you do last night?” At office get-togethers they’d let each other know with a signal—like putting on a backpack—when it was time to leave. Once at a happy hour, with Olive standing next to him, Mason enthusiastically told their boss he had to get going because he had a date with a woman named Olive.

The blog seemed like the next logical step. “It just sounded like something we’d like to read,” says Olive. “And we knew it would be great fun to write.” Mason says they fantasized that oliveandmason.com “would grow

without a start, as they say, there can never be a finish.”

For Olive to win, two things had to happen: “The french would have to last a minimum of twenty seconds and would need to . . . accelerate into what has become known in certain circles as a ‘deep french,’” and “even if it wasn’t the case, Olive would need to at least appear to be enjoying herself.”

Mason figured he’d easily win because Olive was, as she put it, “vehemently opposed” to office displays of affection. That day, Olive wrote in a later post, “the office was quiet, I was on fire, and Mason didn’t suspect a thing.” Mason wrote, “I still cannot for the life of me believe that she actually frenched me in my office. . . . She even had that ‘I just brushed my teeth in preparation for this moment’ taste.” The two posts detailing the brief but risky make-out session (and Olive’s free lunch at Volare) garnered more reader comments than any previous dare; “I’m all hot and bothered,” read one.

For the next bet Mason upped the ante by compromising their productivity altogether. He dared Olive to call in sick after a long night out. On Thursday, October 29, their firm lost a full day’s work from both of them. In fact, over the past several months Olive and Mason have spent every sick, personal, and vacation day together, about a dozen total. Mason devoted a section of one post to calling in, which he claims to



“Olive” and “Mason”

in popularity to the point where our readers would not only suggest bets and lunch destinations, but also try and seek us out at restaurants” and “uncover our true identities.”

The first bets they posted were boring. Who will bowl more strikes? Who can come closest to guessing what time it is? But then: Would Olive “spill the beans” about their relationship at an office function? She didn’t, and Mason bought lunch at Grand Lux Cafe. Six readers posted comments. “Here’s hoping that fire still burns hotter,” wrote one.

In the setup for the September 29 make-out bet Olive posted, “Since the beginning of the throws”—their euphemism for both dating and getting it on—“Mason has been chomping at the bit to get my tongue in his mouth during working hours.” Mason wrote, “A tongue is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to office shenanigans. But it’s a start. And

have “perfected . . . into somewhat of an art form” with excuses like “I have an extremely debilitating case of tennis elbow” and “I’ve broken out in a full body rash as a result of cleaning my tarantula’s cage.”

Their latest bet concerned the company’s holiday party. Again the question was whether one would “spill the beans,” but this time both parties were certain one of them would, either by talking about it or touching the other “quite obviously beyond office etiquette.” The subterfuge had been fun, they admitted, but they’d grown weary of the game. Four readers picked Olive to lose, three picked Mason, and one predicted “a draw.”

At the party both Olive and Mason were several hard drinks deep when one of Olive’s closest work friends asked her if she and Mason were dating. Stunned, Olive said yes. Unfazed, her

What Are You Wearing?



Mariah Colbert

The Illusion of Chaos

Mariah Colbert, 23, works in an upscale specialty food shop and hosts French wine tastings.

Where did that dress come from?

It was in my friend Colleen’s closet and I think I smiled at it so many times that she was like, “You can have that.”

This is like a bitch belt—or a witch belt.

Witch. Yep. That’s my new theme. A couple days ago I bought Fleetwood Mac’s *Tusk* album and I like the Stevie stuff the best, obviously.

So how are you incorporating this theme into your life?

It started out because my friend Sara and I were talking about things that will get us through winter, instead of getting bummed out about it.

What else did you guys come up with?

Black metal, Native American spirituality, *Dr. Zhivago*—but that kind of got booted out—and the Marble Faun.

The Hawthorne novel?

No, the character in *Grey Gardens*.

What’re you doing to be witchy?

I’m looking to purchase some longer clothing. I want to move into long skirts but it’s hard because I’m short. It’s a new thing that isn’t fully developed. I’ve been into patterns and bright colors for a long time.

Last time I saw you, you told me someone came up to you at a party and said, “Oh, you decided not to match today.”

In my mind everything is always matching because I’m really careful about colors, but everything I own is intensely patterned with lots of bright colors. It’s more challenging to match them to other crazy patterns and colors. So I wouldn’t expect her to think that it’s awesome. It’s more fun that she didn’t.

Lots of people are into dressing for ease. You’re into the challenge?

Maybe the patterns are calming to me. I had a dream one time I was talking to people in a room. I asked how many tones do they have? Someone said four. I had six. In my dream, “tones” were how many colors and shades you could be wearing that coordinated perfectly. I woke up and thought, What the fuck was that about? —**Liz Armstrong**

friend said, “I mean, pretty much everyone in the office thought you guys were dating.”

The gossip spread quickly around the party. “Many responded with shouts of personal vindication,” says Mason, “as if they had just found out who killed Laura Palmer.” The only surprise seemed to be that they’d been together since May. “We were pretty confident in our slyness,” says Mason, “but apparently the joke was on us.”

Their boss couldn’t make it to the party. “So the jury’s still out on how or even if this will affect our jobs,” says Mason. But “if one or both of us were fired, we would be forced to second-guess why we even work where we do.” **B**