Bones

Jonathan Kellerman

Published by Headline

Extract

All text is copyright of the author

This opening extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.
Please print off and read at your leisure.

Copyright © 2008 Jonathan Kellerman

The right of Jonathan Kellerman to be identified as the Author of
the Work has been asserted by him in accordance with
the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

First published in the United States in 2008 by Ballantine Books,
an imprint of The Random House Publishing Group,
a division of Random House Inc., New York

First published in Great Britain in 2008
by HEADLINE PUBLISHING GROUP

First published in paperback in Great Britain in 2009
by HEADLINE PUBLISHING GROUP

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Apart from any use permitted under UK copyright law, this publication may
only be reproduced, stored, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means,
with prior permission in writing of the publishers or, in the case of reprographic production,
in accordance with the terms of licences issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency.

All characters in this publication are fictitious
and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead,
is purely coincidental.

Cataloguing in Publication Data is available from the British Library

ISBN 978 0 7553 4269 3

Typeset in Fournier MT by Palimpsest Book Production Limited,
Grangemouth, Stirlingshire

Printed in the UK by CPI Mackays, Chatham ME5 8TD

Headline's policy is to use papers that are natural, renewable and recyclable products and
made from wood grown in sustainable forests. The logging and manufacturing processes are
expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

HEADLINE PUBLISHING GROUP
An Hachette UK Company
338 Euston Road
London NW1 3BH

www.headline.co.uk
www.hachettelivre.co.uk

1

EVERYONE DOES it is not a defense!

Wrong.

If everyone did it, that made it normal, right? And after Chance did the research he knew he did *nothing* wrong.

Googling *high school cheating* because writing an essay was part of the punishment.

Finding out four out of five high school students – that's eighty frickin' *percent* – did it.

Majority rules. Just like that thing on his Social Action study sheet . . . social norms.

Social norms are the cement that holds societies together.

There you go, he was being a big help to society!

When he tried to joke about that with the parental units, they didn't laugh.

Same as when he told them it was civil rights, no

way could the school force him to do community service outside the school property. That was against the Constitution. Time to call the ACLU.

That got Dad's eyes all squinty. Chance turned to Mom but she made sure not to give him any eye contact.

'The ACLU?' Big wet Dad throat clear, like after too many cigars. 'Because we make a significant monetary contribution to the ACLU?' Starting to breathe hard. 'Every goddamn *year*. That's what you're saying?'

Chance didn't answer.

'Cute, extremely cute. That's your point? Well let me tell you something: You cheated. Period. That is *not* the kind of thing the *ACLU* gives half a *shit* about.'

'Language, Steve—' Mom broke in.

'Don't *start*, Susan. We've got a goddamn fucking serious problem here and I seem to be the only one who fucking *gets* it.'

Mom got all tight-mouthed, started plucking at her nails. Turned her back on both of them and did something with dishes on the kitchen counter.

'It's his problem, Susan, not ours and unless he owns up to it, we can kiss Occidental – or any other halfway decent college – fucking *good-bye*.'

Chance said, 'I'll own up to it, Dad.' Working on what Sarabeth called his Mr Sincere look.

Laughing as she undid her bra. *Everyone buys Mr Sincere but me, Chancy. I know it's Mr Bogus.*

Dad stared at him.

'Hey,' said Chance, 'at least give me credit for hand-eye coordination.'

Dad let out a stream of curses and stomped out of the kitchen.

Mom said, 'He'll get over it,' but she left, too.

Chance waited to make sure neither of them was coming back before he smiled.

Feeling good because his hand-eye *had* been cool.

Setting his Razr on vibrate and positioning it perfectly in a side pocket of his loosest cargo pants, the phone resting on a bunch of shit he'd stuffed in there to make kind of a little table.

Sarabeth three rows up, texting him the answers to the test. Chance being cool about it, knowing he'd never get caught because Shapiro was a nearsighted loser who stayed at his desk and missed everything.

Who'd figure Barclay would come in to tell Shapiro something, look clear to the back of the room, and spot Chance peeking into his pocket?

The whole class doing the same exact thing, everyone's pockets vibing. Everyone cracking up the

moment the test started because Shapiro was such a clueless loser, the whole semester had been like this, the asshole would've missed Paris Hilton walking in nude and spreading.

Everyone does it is not a defense!

Rumley looking down his big nose and talking all sad like at a funeral. What Chance wanted to say was, *Then it frickin' should be, dude.*

Instead, he sat in Rumley's office, squeezed between his parents, his head all down, trying to look all sorry and thinking about the shape of Sarabeth's ass in her thong while Rumley went on forever about honor and ethics and the history of Windward Prep and how if the school so chose they had the option of informing the Occidental admissions office and causing dire consequences for his college career.

That made Mom burst into tears.

Dad just sat there, looking angry at the world, didn't make a move to even give her a tissue from the box on Rumley's desk so Rumley had to do it, standing up and handing it to Mom and looking pissed at Dad for making him stretch.

Rumley sat back down and moved his mouth some more.

Chance pretended to listen, Mom sniffled, Dad looked ready to hit someone. When Rumley finally finished,

Dad started talking about the family's 'contributions to Windward,' mentioning Chance's performance on the basketball team, bringing up his own time on the football team.

In the end the adults reached an agreement and wore small, satisfied smiles. Chance felt like a puppet but he made sure he looked all serious, being happy would be a *ba-ad* move.

Punishment 1: He'd have to take another version of the test – Shapiro would make one up.

Punishment 2: No more cell phone at school.

'Maybe this unfortunate event will have positive ramifications, young man,' said Rumley. 'We've been thinking about a schoolwide ban.'

There you go, thought Chance. I did you guys a favor, not only shouldn't you punish me, you should be payin' me, like some sort of consulting deal.

So far, so good, for a second Chance thought he'd got off real easy. Then:

Punishment 3: The essay. Chance hated to write, usually Sarabeth did his essays, but she couldn't do this one because he had to do it at school, in Rumley's office.

Still, no big deal.

Then came Punishment 4. 'Because substantive accountability has to be part of the package, Master Brandt.'

Mom and Dad agreeing. The three of them going all al-Qaida on him.

Chance pretended to agree.

Yes, sir, I need to pay my debt and I will do so with industrious alacrity.

Throwing in some SAT vocab words. Dad staring at him, like who are you kidding, dude, but Mom and Rumley looked really impressed.

Rumley moved his mouth.

Community service. Oh, shit.

And here the frick he was.

Sitting in the Save the Marsh office on night eleven of his thirty-night sentence. Shitty little puke-colored room with pictures of ducks and bugs, whatever, on the wall. One dirty window looking out to a parking lot where no one but him and Duboff parked. Stacks of bumper stickers in the corner he was supposed to hand out to anyone who walked in.

No one walked in and Duboff left him by himself so he could run off to investigate how global warming got up a duck's butt, what made birds hurl, did bugs have big dicks, whatever.

Thirty frickin' nights of this, nuking his summer vacation.

Five to ten P.M., instead of hanging after school

with Sarabeth and his friends, all because of a *social norm* four out of five people did.

When the phone did ring, he mostly ignored it. When he did answer, it was always some loser wanting directions to the marsh.

Go on the frickin' website or use MapQuest, Rainman!

He wasn't allowed to make outgoing calls but since yesterday he'd started to hook up with Sarabeth for cell phone sex. She was loving him even more for not ratting her to Rumley.

He sat there. Drank from his can of Jolt, now warm. Felt the Baggie in his pant pocket and thought *Later*.

Nineteen more nights of supermax confinement, he was starting to feel like one of those Aryan Brotherhood dudes.

Two and a half more frickin' weeks until he was free at last, doing his Luther King thing. He checked his TAG Heuer. Nine twenty-four. Thirty-six minutes and he'd be good to go.

The phone rang.

He ignored it.

It kept going, ten times.

He let it die a natural death.

A minute later, it rang again and he figured maybe he should answer it, what if it was Rumley testing him?

Clearing his throat and getting Mr Sincere ready, he picked up. 'Save the Marsh.'

Silence on the other end made him smile.

One of his friends pranking him, probably Ethan. Or Ben or Jared.

'Dude,' he said. 'What's up?'

A weird, kind of hissy voice said, 'Up?' Weird laughter. 'Something's *down*. As in buried in your marsh.'

'OK, dude—'

'Shut up and listen.'

Being talked to like that made Chance's face go all hot, like when he was ready to sneak a flagrant in on some loser on the opposing team, then get all innocent when the dude wailed about being nut-jammed.

He said, 'Fuck off, dude.'

The hissy voice said, 'East side of the marsh. Look and you'll find it.'

'Like I give a—'

'Dead,' said Hissy. 'Something real real *dead*.' Laughter. '*Dude*.'

Hanging up before Chance could tell him to shove dead up his . . .

A voice from the door said, 'Hey, man, how's it shaking?'

Chance's face was still hot as he hung up, but he put on Mr Sincere and looked over.

There in the doorway was Duboff, wearing his *Save the Marsh* T-shirt, geek shorts showing too much skinny white thigh, plastic sandals, that stupid gray beard.

'Hey, Mr Duboff,' said Chance.

'Hey, man.' Duboff gave a clenched-fist salute. 'Did you have a chance to check out the herons before you got here?'

'Not yet, sir.'

'They're incredible animals, man. Magnificent. Wingspread like this.' Unfolding scrawny arms to the max.

You've obviously mistaken me for someone who gives half a shit.

Duboff came closer, smelling gross, that organic deodorant he'd tried to convince Chance to use. 'Like pterodactyls, man. Master fishers.'

Chance had thought a heron *was* a fish until Duboff told him different.

Duboff edged near the desk, showed those gross teeth of his. 'Rich folk in Beverly Hills don't like when the herons swoop in during hatching season and eat their rich-folk koi. Koi are aberrations. Mutations, people messing with brown carp, screwing up the DNA to get those colors. Herons are Nature, brilliant predators. They feed their young and restore nature to true balance. Screw those Beverly Hillbillies, huh?'

Chance smiled.

Maybe it wasn't a big enough smile because Duboff suddenly looked nervous. 'You don't live there, do I recall correctly?'

'No, sir.'

'You live in . . .'

'Brentwood.'

'Brentwood,' said Duboff, as if trying to figure out what that meant. 'Your parents don't keep koi, do they?'

'Nope. We don't even have a dog.'

'Good for you guys,' said Duboff, patting Chance's shoulder. 'It's all servitude. Pets, I mean. The whole concept is like slavery.'

Keeping his hand on the shoulder. Was the guy a fag?

'Yeah,' said Chance, inching away.

Duboff scratched his knee. Frowned and rubbed a pink bump. 'Stopped by the marsh to check for trash. Musta got bit by something.'

'Providing food for the little guys,' said Chance. 'That's a good thing, sir.'

Duboff stared at him, trying to figure out if Chance was messing with his head.

Chance brought out Mr Sincere and Duboff decided Chance was being righteous and smiled. 'Guess you're

right . . . anyway, I just thought I'd stop in, see how you're doing before your shift ends.'

'I'm fine, sir.'

'OK, check you out later, man.'

Chance said, 'Uh, sir, it's kinda close to the end.'

Duboff smiled. 'So it is. At ten, you can lock up. I'll be by later.' Walking to the door, he stopped, looked back. 'It's a noble thing you're doing, Chance. Whatever the circumstances.'

'Absolutely, sir.'

'Call me Sil.'

'You got it, Sil.'

Duboff said, 'Anything I should know about?'

'Like what, sir?'

'Calls, messages?'

Chance grinned, flashing perfect white chompers, courtesy five years of Dr Wasserman.

'Nothing, Sil,' he said, with utter confidence.

2

Bob Hernandez needed the money.

Nothing but money would get him out here this early.

At five a.m., Pacific Public Storage was a fog-shrouded dump – like one of those gloomy places they used for serial killer and drug shootout movies. Twenty-four-hour facility, but most of the bulbs supposed to light up the passageways between the units were out and the auctioneer had to use a flashlight.

At this hour, no one was fully awake except for the Asian guy. Lousy turnout compared with the other auctions Bob had attended. Just him and four other people and the auctioneer, a white-haired guy named Pete in a suit and tie. The suit was cheap and brown and the tie needed Viagra. Guy reminded Bob of those shabby lawyers hanging around the

downtown court building, waiting to be assigned to a case.

LA law but nothing like *LA Law*. Or *Boston Legal*, for that matter.

Bob would've loved to get hooked up with a good-looking girl attorney like on those shows, real passionate about defending him. Passionate about other stuff, too, after she saves his butt, the two of them . . .

Instead he got Mason Soto from the PD's office, guy went to Berkeley, let that fact slip into the conversation three separate times. Trying to bond with Bob, like they were homeboys, talking about immigration, La Raza.

Mason Soto had grown up in San Francisco and thought the country should open its borders to everyone. Bob had been raised in West Covina by a third-generation Mexican American ex-marine firefighter dad and a fourth-generation Swedish American police dispatcher mom and both his brothers were cops and the whole family, including Bob, thought people should play by the rules and anyone who didn't should get their ass kicked out.

He told Soto, 'I hear you,' hoping that would get Soto to put out some extra effort, get him totally clear of the traffic warrants as well as the failure to appear.

Soto yawned through the trial and Bob ended up with a massive fine and ten days at County Jail, cut to five. Then reduced to an overnight stay because of overcrowding but, man, one day in that hellhole was enough.

The fine was a more enduring problem. Thirty-five hundred bucks that he needed to come up with in sixty days and none of his landscaping jobs had come through and he was already behind on his rent. Not to mention the child support. If Kathy decided to make trouble for him, he was screwed.

He missed the kids living in Houston with Kathy's folks.

Truth be told, he missed Kathy.

His own damn fault. Screwing around with women he didn't even care about, he still didn't understand why he kept doing it.

He'd borrowed five hundred dollars from his mom, telling her it would go toward the fine. But the city wouldn't take partial payment and he needed something to generate income so he could square up his rent as well as the fine.

Yesterday, the tree-moving company out in Saugus had called back, told him to come in, fill out forms, maybe that would pan out.

Meanwhile, he was doing what he could.

Up at four A.M., making sure he'd sail on the drive from Alhambra to Playa Del Rey, be at the storage facility when it opened.

He'd read about abandoned property auctions on the Internet a few months ago, forgot about it until being slapped with the fine. Not stupid enough to think he was going to come up with one of those treasures that made the papers – a Honus Wagner baseball card or a rare painting – his hopes were pinned on eBay.

Because people bought anything on eBay. You could sell a *stool* sample on eBay.

So far, he'd attended four auctions, driving as far as Goleta – which turned out to be a total bust. But striking gold – silver, actually – right close to home.

Pasadena facility, seven-by-seven room piled high with neatly sealed boxes. Most of it turned out to be old moldy clothes that he ended up tossing in a Goodwill box, but there were also some jeans full of holes and a wad of rock-concert T-shirts from the eighties that eBayed pretty good.

Plus the bag. Little blue velvet Crown Royal drawstring full of coins, including buffalo-head nickels and a few silver dollars. Bob took all that to a coin dealer in Santa Monica, walked away with two hundred twenty bucks, which was a fantastic profit,

considering his bid on the entire contents had been sixty-five.

He thought of paying his mom back, but decided to wait until everything was squared up.

A yawn overtook him and his eye blurred. Pete the auctioneer coughed, then said, 'OK, next unit: fourteen fifty-five,' and everyone dragged themselves up the murky tunnel-like hallway to one of the padlocked doors that lined the cement block walls.

Flimsy doors, flimsy locks, Bob could've kicked any of them in. The storage facility got two hundred a month per, talk about a good scam.

'Fourteen fifty-five,' Pete repeated unnecessarily. Rubbing a rummy nose, he fiddled with a ring of keys.

The other bidders worked hard at looking disinterested. Two were chunky old women with braided hair, looked like sisters, maybe even twins. They'd gotten a sealed steamer trunk for forty-eight bucks. Behind them was a tall, skinny heavy-metal type wearing an AC/DC tee, fake leather pants, and motorcycle boots, veiny arms more tattoo-blue than white skin. He'd just won the last two lots: a room full of dirty-looking, mostly creased paperback books for a hundred and fifty and what looked to be rusty junk for thirty.

The last participant was the Asian guy, midthirties, athletic-looking, wearing a spotless royal blue polo

shirt, pressed black slacks, and black loafers without socks. So far he'd bid on nothing.

Freshly shaved and aftershaved, the guy looked sharp in the Beemer convertible he drove up in. Bob wondered if he was some kind of art dealer, had the *nose*.

Worth keeping his eye on.

Pete found his key to 1455, released the lock, opened the door.

'Stand back, folks, private property,' he said. Saying the same darn thing every time.

Due to some weird state law, abandoned goods belonged to the owner until the moment they sold. Meaning you couldn't approach them or touch them until you'd bought them. Then poof, the owner's rights disappeared like a minor fart.

Bob had never understood the legal system. When lawyers talked at him, it might as well have been in Martian.

Pete ran his flashlight over the contents of the cell-like space. Bob had heard of people jerry-rigging electricity and bunking down in storage units, but he didn't believe it. You'd go nuts.

'OK,' said Pete. 'Let's start the bidding.'

The Asian guy said, 'Could you please illuminate it one more time.'

Pete frowned, but obliged. The space was mostly empty, except for half a bicycle frame and two black garbage bags.

Pete coughed again. 'See what you need to?'

The Asian guy nodded, turned his back on the unit. Maybe a fakeout, planning to jump in at the last moment. Or maybe he really didn't want it.

Bob didn't see any point in bidding on this one. So far he'd found that garbage bags held mostly garbage. Though he needed *something* to eBay, so if no one bid and it went cheap enough . . .

'Let's hear a bid,' said Pete, not waiting before adding: 'Fifty, do I hear fifty, fifty dollars, fifty, fifty dollars.'

Silence.

'Forty, forty dollars, bargain at forty dollars, metal on the bike is forty dollars.' Running the spiel, but without enthusiasm. So far, his commission hadn't even added up to chump change.

'Forty? Nothing at forty? Do I hear thirty-five—'

Without turning around, the Asian guy said, 'Twenty,' and Bob sensed something in his voice. Not shifty, more like . . . calculated.

Figuring the metal on the bike was worth something – just the pedals might be valuable to someone who needed pedals – Bob said, 'Twenty-five.'

Silence.

Pete said, 'Twenty-five, do I hear thirty, let's hear thirty, thirty dollars—'

'Sure,' said the Asian guy. Shrugging, like he couldn't care less.

Bob waited until Pete spieled a bit more, then came in for thirty-five.

Asian half turned. 'Forty.'

Bob said, 'Forty-five.'

The old ladies started looking interested. *Uh-oh*.

But they just stood there.

Heavy Metal edged closer to the open unit. 'Fifty,' he whispered.

'Sixty,' said Asian.

The mood in the passageway got alert and tight, like strong coffee kicking in for everyone.

Asian pulled out a BlackBerry, read the screen, turned it off.

Maybe the bike was super-rare and even half of it would bring serious bucks. Bob had heard of old Schwinns – like the one he'd ditched when he turned sixteen and got his license – going for crazy money—

'Sixty-five,' said Heavy Metal.

Asian hesitated.

Bob said, 'Seventy.'

Asian said, 'Seventy-five.'

'Eighty,' a voice awfully like Bob's nearly shouted.

Everyone stared at him.

Asian shrugged.

Pete looked at Heavy Metal, who'd already walked away and was massaging a tattoo.

'Eighty dollars for this trove,' said Pete. 'Do I hear eighty-five? Eighty-five dollars, still a bargain at eighty-five.'

Going through the motions, not pushing it. 'Going once, going twice . . . eighty it is.'

Banging that little plastic palm-gavel against his clipboard. Scrawling on his sheet and telling Bob, 'You're the lucky winner of the trove. Eighty bucks, cash on the barrel.'

Holding out a mottled palm for payment.

Everyone smiling. Like there was some private joke and Bob was the butt. A cold, soupy feeling filled his stomach.

'Cash, sir,' said Pete.

Bob dug into his pocket.

Later, out in the parking lot, loading the bags and the half bike into his truck, he caught the Asian guy before he got in his Beemer.

'You do this a lot?'

'Me?' Guy smiled pleasantly. 'First time, actually. I'm an anesthesiologist, have to be at Marina Mercy by six, thought it might help wake me up. And it kind of did.'

'What got you bidding on fourteen fifty-five?'

Guy looked surprised by the question. 'I was going to ask you the same thing.'

Back home by seven, flies buzzing around the yucca plants that fronted his apartment building, a cruel sun fizzing through his dusty windows, Bob unloaded the garbage bags onto the floor of his grubby little living room.

Figuring he'd catch some sleep before the first Bloody Mary of the day, then go through his haul, then call the tree farm in Saugus.

He collapsed in his bed, still wearing dusty auction clothes. Closed his eyes.

Thought about Kathy. His fine. What his brothers said behind his back.

Got up and fetched a kitchen knife and sliced through the first garbage bag.

Inside were game boxes – Monopoly, Scrabble, Risk. But cracked and messed up, missing everything except the boards.

Great.

The second bag – the heavier one – held crumpled-up newspapers. Period. Why would someone pay to store shit like this?

With a real bad stomachache coming on, Bob got down on the floor and pawed through weeks of LA *Times*. Nothing antique, no historic headlines, just newsprint and those stupid ad inserts that fell all over the place.

Oh, man, he should've stayed in bed.

He said, 'Idiot,' out loud and examined the half bike.

Cheap, flimsy junk. *Made in China* sticker pasted to what remained of a crossbar that Bob could bend with his hands.

Disgusted, he mixed a Mary in the kitchenette, sat down on the floor, and drank. Thinking about eighty wasted bucks made him more tired than ever, but leaving the bags around reminded him he was an idiot.

Time to haul the whole damn load out back to the Dumpsters.

Finishing his Mary, he labored to his feet, tossed the papers back in the second bag, lifted.

Something rattled. Bottom of the bag.

Probably his imagination. He shook the bag hard.

Rattle rattle rattle – like one of those maracas they sold on Olvera Street. Kathy had bought him a pair

of those when they were dating. Figuring, what? He was half Mexican, so he'd half like it?

He pawed through the papers, reached bottom, found the source of the noise.

Wooden box, dark, shiny. Long as a shoe box but wider, with curly brass inlay, nice lacquer finish, little brass latch holding it shut.

EBay here we come! The box alone . . . he'd call it exotic, imported, whatever, maybe make up a story about it coming from . . . Malaysia? No, something more mysterious, where was Mount Everest – Tibet . . . *Nepal*.

Exotic box – exotic jewel *case – from the Nepal alps, made of solid choice mountain* . . . looked like mahogany, he could play that up . . . *solid choice rare Asian mahogany*. Maybe stick on a *Buy It Now* for a hundred, hundred thirty. Now, let's see what's inside. And if it was dry beans, who cared? The box alone meant he was No Longer An Idiot.

He freed the brass latch, raised the lid. Inside was a gold velvet tray.

Empty; the noise was coming from below.

He lifted the tray, exposed a bottom compartment. Inside were . . . little white knobby things.

He picked one up. Smooth and white, with a pointy tip, and all of a sudden Bob knew what it was without being told.

Even though biology had never been his strong point, he'd flunked it once in high school, repeated, managed a D.

A bone.

Like from a hand or a foot. Or a paw.

Lots of little bones, so many they nearly filled the compartment, didn't make that much noise.

Had to be what . . . three, four dozen.

Bob counted.

Forty-two.

He examined his own hand. Three bones on each of the four fingers, two for the thumb, making . . . fourteen per hand.

Three hands' worth. Or three paws' worth. No reason to think these weren't from an animal. Then he thought of something – maybe these came from one of those skeletons they used in medical schools, people willing their bodies to science.

Getting cut up and examined and reconstructed into skeletons using wires to hold it all together.

Nope, none of these bones had holes for wires.

Weird.

Bob picked up another of the smallest ones, held it alongside the top joint of his own index finger.

Not as big as his.

Maybe a small dog.

Or a woman.

Or a kid . . .

No, that was too . . . had to be a dog. Or a cat. How many bones in a paw or a claw?

Too small for a cat.

A medium-sized dog, like Alf. Yeah, this might fit Alf.

He missed Alf, living in Dallas with Kathy.

Was thinking about all that when he shut the latch.

The box rattled.

Bones.

He'd do a little research on the Internet. Maybe sell the collection as antiques – like from an Indian archeology dig. Out in . . . Utah. Or Colorado, Colorado sounded more . . . exotic.

Antique collection of exotic bones.

Stuff like that eBayed great.