

1.

What makes a life, Sam Waxworth sometimes wondered—self or circumstance?

On the day that Waxworth arrived in New York to write for the *Interviewer*, a man named Herman Nash stood on the rim of the fountain in Washington Square and announced that the world was about to end. After close biblical reading and careful calculation, Nash had settled on November 1 at 10:00 PM as the precise moment of the event he called the “Great Unveiling.” (So far as Waxworth knew, no time zone had been specified; perhaps it would be an incremental apocalypse.) A tourist captured the prediction on video, and more than fifty thousand people watched it on TeeseView that week. Nash appeared at the same time the following Saturday and the one after that, by which point his audience had grown so large that it brought out the police. When he called on his listeners to prepare for a coming battle, at least one took the words literally, throwing a bottle of urine at a mounted officer, who lost control of his horse, which ran him out of the park and several blocks up Fifth. All of this was in turn recorded and posted and viewed. Soon it seemed that Armageddon was everywhere.

Waxworth wasn’t one to find intimations of catastrophe in the pages of a three-thousand-year-old assemblage of myth and poetry

and legal documents. Waxworth was a philosopher—not by training or occupation but, he believed, by disposition. He tried to attend to the facticity of things. The world, in Waxworth's view, was a knowable place, once you stripped away the dead tradition and wishful thinking built up over millennia of misunderstanding. For most of human history—and even today, in places—such an effort could condemn you to death. Conditions were better in Waxworth's particular moment and milieu, but absolute honesty still required a certain amount of courage. In lieu of rack and ropes, the modern skeptic faced social suspicion and familial disappointment. Faced too his own admitted desire that life should carry more meaning than the facts would bear. Which facts were these: we occupied a tiny corner of the universe, minor planet orbiting a minor star, in an even tinier corner of cosmological time. Still we wanted all of it, the sun and the moon and the firmament that held them, to be about us. This want had been bred into humanity, selected by nature, so it must have served some purpose once, but it had long outlived its usefulness, as far as Waxworth was concerned. What was needed now was to *know*.

For all that, he felt an odd admiration for Herman Nash, who'd made a prediction that could be tested against the world and, in so doing, put himself at risk of being wrong. When you stuck to interpreting the past, you could say anything. The sheer amount of available information meant that data could be arranged to support every conceivable idea. The test of knowledge was what it told you about tomorrow. Easy enough to laugh at Herman Nash, but the very things that made his prediction so inviting to mock—its combination of specificity and unlikelihood—were exactly what impressed Waxworth. Nash wasn't using the usual methods would-be prophets relied on to perpetrate their frauds: piggybacking on a reasonably likely outcome, making open-ended predictions that could be fulfilled at any time, spouting vague language that might allow him to

alter his claim when the unveiling failed to occur. There was no mistaking his terms.

“He’s probably a lunatic,” Waxworth admitted to his editor over dinner during his second week in town. “But that’s better than being a con artist.”

“There’s something inspiring about it when you put it that way,” his editor replied.

They were eating at Temps Perdu, a neo-bistro on the Bowery. The host had seated them at a red leather banquette near the back of the room. A large mirror hung over the editor’s head, and Waxworth saw himself in it, framed by distressed brick and pressed tin. In front of Waxworth waited a foie gras terrine with rhubarb compote. French yé-yé pop played softly from speakers above. They were nearly through their first bottle of red, and the editor, whose name was Max Blakeman, was attempting to order a second. It was the spring of 2009. The global economy was in a state of collapse, and Waxworth understood the magazine industry to be more completely collapsed than most, but Mario Adrian—Teaser cofounder, social media billionaire—had lately purchased the *Interviewer*, rendering the publication more or less immune from cyclical pressure. So Blakeman had explained when convincing Waxworth to move half-way across the country to write for him. This introductory dinner seemed designed to prove the point.

“It really gets to the heart of my philosophy,” Waxworth said.

“You have your own philosophy?” Blakeman gave a not-quite smile. “I’ve always wanted one of those, but they seem like so much work to maintain.”

Max Blakeman was attentive and solicitous but had a way of making this solicitous attention feel like an unearned gratuity. That Waxworth should want to impress his new boss was natural enough, but he also wanted, to a greater degree than professional self-interest could explain, to be liked. He wanted to belong in this place.

“I believe in getting things wrong.”

Blakeman smiled in full, almost indulged a laugh.

“I wish you’d told me that before I hired you. I thought you were the guy who got everything right.”

Waxworth was slightly uncomfortable with his recently minted reputation as a seer. He’d been working as a software engineer in Madison the previous fall, when his political projection system had correctly predicted the exact count of the electoral college vote and the outcome of every Senate, House, and gubernatorial race. Naturally he’d been pleased with the attention that had followed this feat, but there was nothing mystical in what he’d done. Quite the opposite: the numbers had been there all along for anyone who cared to look.

“Of course I don’t want to be wrong all the time, but it’s bound to happen eventually. In the long run everyone regresses to the mean.”

“There’s a philosophy,” Blakeman said. “*In the long run everyone regresses to the mean.*”

“The point is, beliefs should be tested against the world. That’s the scientific method. You don’t just try to convince people with arguments. You don’t put reality to a vote. You set up an experiment, and you predict how it will come out. If you’re wrong, you modify your theory, and you start over. Little by little, you arrive at the truth.”

“So this guy should be embraced for giving his ravings some rigor?”

“If anything, more people should do it.”

Blakeman leaned back in appreciation.

“Why All Religious People Should Be Like Herman Nash.” He looked up as though the headline floated in the air between them. “It sounds very shareable.” After a pause, he clarified, “That’s a good thing. Mario is big on *shareability*.”

He said the word with cheerful disgust before raising his hand, waving away further thought of the man who was paying for their meal before gesturing again to the waiter for the next bottle.

“Speaking of shareability,” Blakeman continued as their glasses were refilled, “what do you think of Frank Doyle?”

“In what sense?”

“Did you ever read those old baseball books of his? *The Smell of the Grass. The Crack of the Bat.*”

“Sure I did.”

In fact, the books had been a major feature of Waxworth’s childhood, the reason he’d wanted to write in the first place, but he was embarrassed to mention this, given the current state of Doyle’s reputation.

“How’d you like to do something on him?”

“What is there to say, at this point? That whole story is months old.”

“Fair enough,” Blakeman said. “We’ll start with the end of the world, and see where things go from there.”

Three hours later, Waxworth got off the F train at Fourth Avenue and Ninth Street. A bus that stopped nearby would get him the rest of the way home, but he wasn’t sure it ran at this hour. Anyway, the spring night was cool and clear, and he was in no rush to get back to an empty apartment. While he walked, he called Lucy, who answered after four rings. He could hear the sleep in her voice, though Madison was an hour behind New York. He hadn’t realized how late it was.

“Sorry to wake you,” he said. “I got stuck on the train.”

“That’s all right,” she answered. “I’m glad you called.”

He wanted to tell her about everything—the restaurant, the meal, the wine, the conversation—without sounding like he’d enjoyed himself too much. Lucy still didn’t understand why he’d had to move right away, instead of waiting for her school year to end. She didn’t really understand why they had to move at all.

“We’ve already planned my first post. Just talked it out across the table. It never would have happened over email.” Now he sounded

defensive, relitigating a case that had already been settled in his favor. “How’s everything there?”

“Jeremy bit me on the hand today.” She laughed. “Nearly broke the skin.”

Waxworth couldn’t tell whether he was meant to laugh along or offer sincere sympathy. Lucy liked to joke about her job—she taught special ed—but it was a kind of gallows humor, and he didn’t always feel entitled to share in it. He let out an ambiguous sigh.

“I miss you.”

“You too,” she responded. “I want to hear all about your dinner—in the morning.”

After the election, Waxworth had received some offers that would have allowed them to stay in Madison. Most of the major national publications that had linked to his website throughout the campaign had tried to hire him, but they only wanted to buy his projection system and host his blog. He’d made that mistake before. He’d still been in school when he’d sold his baseball forecasting algorithm, YOUNT, to a website called the Pop-Up. They’d given him a lump sum for the code and paid him fifty dollars a week to update its results. The money had seemed like a lot at the time—enough to clear his student loans and buy an engagement ring—but when he saw what the site charged for subscriptions, he realized that he’d settled for far less than his work was worth. When he finally demanded a raise—he’d wanted enough to live on, so he could leave his job at the university, but he would have settled for a few thousand a year—the Pop-Up found someone else to do the updates. He no longer owned YOUNT, and he’d signed a noncompete that kept him from designing another sports-projection system for at least five years.

He’d been lucky to stumble from there into politics, and he meant to make the most of it. Not learning from mistakes was the

one truly unforgivable sin in Waxworth's view. Max Blakeman had offered more money than anyone else, but this was only part of his appeal. While other editors talked about what readerships they could bring Waxworth, Blakeman had talked about what Waxworth would bring to his readership. The kind of people who read the *Interviewer* needed to learn how to think numerically. That was the age we were living in.

The contract paid one hundred and twenty thousand dollars for five posts a week and four long print articles to be completed over the course of the year. That last item Waxworth had insisted upon himself. Though it wasn't entirely rational—the website had a much larger audience than the weekly magazine—he wanted the validation of print, and he sensed that these longer pieces would help him get the book deal that was his ultimate goal.

For the first few months Waxworth would be the sole writer for the magazine's new data-driven blog, *Quantified World*, but after he'd established the brand he could make his own hires. What excited Waxworth most about the job was the chance to work on a team. Getting out of your own point of view was essential to good forecasting. Aggregation—the foundation of statistical thinking—had long been known simply as “the combination of observations,” and that's what collaboration gave you. If Lucy didn't like New York, they could go back to Madison when his contract was up, by which point his career would be launched.

So ran the justification he'd given to her, which was accurate in its particulars but incomplete. In fact the move had been the great draw of Blakeman's offer, and Waxworth had no intention of returning to Wisconsin. He had an opportunity at greatness, and he belonged in a place worthy of his ambitions. He needed to test his ideas against the world.

For centuries, the primary limit on human knowledge had been record-keeping. We couldn't collect all the facts. Even something

relatively rudimentary like YOUNT would have been impossible when Waxworth was a kid reading box scores in the paper. It depended on a publicly available database of player statistics—every meaningful event at every major and minor league game, recorded in searchable form. We were living through a revolution in counting technologies, and the world needed people who knew what to do with the numbers. Self—or circumstance? Waxworth had no time for such mystical notions as destiny or fate. Pure luck had determined that his particular skills so well suited the needs of the moment into which he'd been born. But this made it only more important that he take his chance.

There was something else, too, which couldn't be said outright. Lucy had grown up happy. She'd had a comfortable childhood in Madison, where both her parents had worked for the university, and all she'd ever wanted for herself was the same comfort. Aspiration had never played a great role in her life. Sam had grown up poor, bouncing from place to place while his mother looked for work, dreaming that things might be better. For Sam their comfortable life in Madison had felt like an achievement, but this very fact prompted the idea that there might be more. Lucy had started at a higher point, but she'd stayed where she was. She'd lived parallel to the x-axis, and she wanted now only for y to remain constant. There had been a slope to Sam's life, and it was only natural that he should extrapolate. New York, the *Interviewer*, dinner at Temps Perdu: these all seemed like suitable next points on the graph.

He looked up at the next corner and read the sign for Sigourney Street. The name was unfamiliar to him. He already knew all the cross streets near the apartment, and this wasn't one of them. He retraced his steps for ten minutes before he found the place where he'd gone wrong. It took another ten to get home from there. The smell told him when he was getting close.

Waxworth had been fairly comprehensive when designing his apartment-search algorithm. He'd limited his range of neighborhoods based on safety, vibrancy, and proximity to a feature (waterfront, public park, major cultural institution), as well as location relative to the *Interviewer's* offices on Union Square and the school in Park Slope where Lucy would be teaching in the fall. He'd calculated distances based on mileage and average commute time. He'd scouted suitable routes for Lucy's morning run. Within these parameters, the main criterion was value, measured in square feet per dollar. One apartment in Red Hook had come out so far ahead of the others that Waxworth worried he was missing something. It wasn't especially well served by public transportation, but this didn't seem sufficient to explain the discrepancy. You could see lower Manhattan from the window. You could walk along the river. Further research suggested that the neighborhood was even a little hip. The algorithm didn't account for this attribute—such subjective preferencing was in fact just the kind of market inefficiency the thing was designed to exploit—but it wouldn't hurt when selling Lucy on the area.

He'd examined the block on TeeseView and found it slightly postindustrial but not at all menacing. The building itself was occupied on its first floor by something called Hun Lee Poultry House, its name written in English and Chinese on a green awning beside cartoon drawings of a chicken and a duck. Waxworth imagined cooking odors coming up from the kitchen, some noise from late-night pickups, but when he adjusted his calculations to account for all this, the apartment still came out on top. If the restaurant was any good, it might become an additional feature of the place.

And so it might have, if the Hun Lee Poultry House had in fact been a restaurant, rather than a wholesale distributor—a warehouse full of live, caged birds. Halfway down the block, one suffered only a mild unpleasantness, as though something run over in the street had been left to rot. As you approached the building, the smell

intensified at a rate not quite exponential but certainly more than linear. In the stairwell, unaccustomed eyes would water. You could practically see the stench in the air. The urgent squawks that passed through the walls all but demanded to be anthropomorphized into pleas for release.

All this made the apartment itself quite bearable by comparison, Waxworth reflected as he finally walked in. It was on the third floor, insulated from the noise, and the smell seemed no worse there than it did a few buildings away. A box spring and mattress had been delivered on the day he arrived, and they sat in the middle of the bedroom, piled with pillows and sheets he'd bought a few days later. He knew he ought to buy a headboard or frame or whatever it was that turned a mattress and box spring into a proper bed. Lucy usually handled such details. She'd handled them for a decade now, since their junior year of college. Like so much that fell under her purview, this was easy to overlook. He was on the cusp of thirty now, but he had no baseline for an adult life in her absence, which made it hard to account for her contributions to his well-being. Waxworth tried to avoid this sort of cognitive bias, but no one could eliminate it entirely. For example, he thought as he lay down unsteadily, perhaps a bit drunker than he'd realized during the walk, he'd never considered, when deciding on the timing of this move, how difficult it would be to sleep alone.

"Late night?" the *Interviewer's* receptionist asked as Waxworth stepped off the elevator the next morning. She'd been reading a book at her desk when he arrived, but she set it aside as though prepared for a lengthy conversation.

Her name was Emily Something. She was twenty-two or -three and notably beautiful, but not in the blonde midwestern way familiar to him. She had chin-length black hair with bangs, and her white tank top revealed a line of Gothic-type German tattooed on the

inside of one pale arm. *You must change your life*, she'd said to Waxworth when she'd caught him staring at it. *Rilke*, she'd added after a moment.

"Do I look that bad?" he asked her now.

"You look just fine. But nights with Blakeman are usually late."

"So I'm learning."

She laughed eagerly, though as far as Waxworth could determine nothing funny had actually been said.

"I'll send an intern out for Advil."

"Thanks," Waxworth said.

He still wasn't used to being treated so enthusiastically by someone so obviously cooler than he was. When Blakeman first introduced them during a brief tour of the office, Waxworth had assumed her zeal was a polite show. But she was actually friendlier in the absence of their boss. Warm greetings were more or less the core of her professional responsibilities, of course, but she seemed almost flustered by his attention. Waxworth had to remind himself that he was the magazine's big new hire, that Emily's great aspiration was probably to have something like the job that he'd just started.

He walked on with no sense of where he was headed. He didn't have his own desk; no one did. The open office plan had apparently been modeled on the Teeser headquarters in Palo Alto. There were couches and armchairs, long tables where you could dock your *Interviewer*-issued laptop, a wraparound deck with an all-weather Ping-Pong table, but no assigned places and no interior walls made of anything but glass. Waxworth didn't even really need to be there—Blakeman had assured him that he could do all his writing from home—but he felt obliged to show himself, if only for Lucy's sake.

The first table after reception had no one seated at it. Waxworth settled there, plugged in his computer, and searched online for information about Herman Nash. A few of Nash's "followers" were treating the thing with irony, or as a kind of performance art, but others obviously

took his prediction seriously. Someone had created a TeesePage with a countdown clock and clips of Nash's preaching. Waxworth opened a video and listened to the man's surprisingly melodic voice. He certainly looked the part—tall and thin, with white hair that shot from his head in electrified waves and the wild gray beard of a prophet of old. Waxworth could see why the performance appealed even to those with little interest in the finer points of homiletics.

"You yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night," Nash said. "While they are saying, 'peace and safety,' destruction will come."

Waxworth thought of his mother, as he did almost any time he heard one of the Bible verses she'd made him memorize as a child. She'd been raised a midwestern Methodist but had not had much interest in religion until Sam's father left a few months after his birth. This departure she'd taken as a sign that she'd sinned against God by having a child with a man—what was worse, a Jew—whom she'd never married. She'd been born again to a rather more consuming Baptist faith, and she'd centered her life around the Lord ever after. Sam knew the story so well because she'd told it repeatedly throughout his childhood, when his father had been named only as the agent that had brought their family back to God. After Sam got to college and announced that he was an atheist, his father somehow became instead the thing that had led her son from the righteous path, though Sam had never even spoken to him.

In the seven years since Sam's wedding—which his mother had refused to attend—they'd spoken only a handful of times. Their last conversation had been so marked by mutual recriminations that it was tough to know which one of them had finally sworn off the other. Even now, he wasn't sure whether his mother knew he was in New York. Still, he was certain that she held out hope for him: her son's apostasy could only be a prelude to a deeper faith, because God had a plan, and they were all a part of it.

Waxworth had spent a great deal of his life thinking about forecasting, and he'd come to conclude that the greatest impediment to predicting the future correctly was the belief that the world held meaning, the belief—as his mother put it—that everything happened for a reason. This was trivially true in the strictest sense that every effect had a cause, but if you expected things to cohere into a sensible story, you were apt to make events fit your preconstructed pattern, to see things as they ought to be instead of as they were. In reality events happened one way that might as easily have happened some other way, and *ought* had nothing to do with it. That was why all good forecasting was probabilistic rather than deterministic. After the fact, we told stories of inevitability, but we were not characters in some book that had already been written. The future wasn't fixed, waiting somewhere for us to arrive. It was brought into being by chance, contingency, unintended consequences. The best we could do was work out the odds.

It's not impossible that the world will end on the first of November, Waxworth typed into his laptop. *It's just very, very unlikely. But exactly how unlikely?* From this beginning, he detoured briefly into Bayesian inference. We could not know for sure that Nash was wrong, since the world (or at least human experience of it) almost certainly would indeed end at *some* point. Instead of simply dismissing the outcome, we should assign it an initial probability. The fact that the world had not ceased to be on any of a countless number of preceding days suggested that we assign a rather low initial probability to its ending at a specific future time, but how much should Nash's supposed evidence move us off this prior assumption? The answer was not much, but the question itself allowed Waxworth to raise his larger point about using predictions to put knowledge to the test.

The argument was a good introduction of his working principles, and Blakeman was right: it was shareable. It became the *Interviewer's* most Teesed story on the day it appeared as the debut post of *Quantified World*. If a quarter of the users who'd shared it on their

feeds had actually opened the link first, it was read by more people than anything Waxworth had ever written before. By the next morning, a dozen responses had appeared on various outlets, and hundreds of readers had commented on the *Interviewer's* site. One of these commenters, who called himself *Lord of the Files*, suggested that Waxworth was being satirical, offering a subtle critique of the notion that everything could be quantified. Waxworth wrote a follow-up post, explaining that everything—at least everything real—*could* be quantified. *That's precisely what makes it real*, he patiently insisted. This post too was widely shared. On Thursday Waxworth wrote a response to the responses to his response. He could have kept this up forever, but Blakeman drew a line.

"We're still establishing your position," he explained over lunch at the Union Square Cafe, down the block from the *Interviewer's* offices. "We need to get you into as many conversations as possible. We're looking for breadth, not depth. People should feel like a story isn't over until it gets the Waxworth treatment."

Blakeman proceeded to run through a list of news items that had flared up in the previous two days. They settled on Rod Blagojevich, the Illinois governor who'd just been indicted for trying to sell the president's open Senate seat.

"Was he getting a good deal?" Blakeman wondered. "How much is a Senate seat actually worth?"

Waxworth spent the afternoon estimating the change in lifetime earnings a person could expect after a term in the Senate. He added a few other values—the concrete perks of the job, the nonmonetary value of the position's prestige—and concluded that Blagojevich could have fairly asked for around a million dollars. Writing up his results took a few more hours. Five minutes after the post went live, *Lord of the Files* submitted a long comment about how misguided the enterprise was, either missing or ignoring the fact that the whole thing was an obvious joke.

“That’s the first sign that you’re a real writer,” Blakeman said over coffee. “When you’ve got readers who can be counted on to hate anything you write before they’ve even read it.”

“You think I’m a real writer?” Waxworth asked impulsively.

Blakeman looked mildly embarrassed by the question.

“I’ve been thinking more about that Frank Doyle thing,” he responded, as though it had been Waxworth’s idea and he was just starting to come around to it. “The time seems right for a reappraisal. Doyle was a big personality in this city for a long time, and he’s just disappeared. People sort of miss him, though no one wants to admit it. The guy who took his place on the *Herald’s* opinion page is so boring. At least Doyle always liked a fight. It hardly seemed to matter what side he was on.”

“What’s there to be quantified?” Waxworth asked. “Maybe I could predict the chances he’ll get his career back, but that seems about as likely as the apocalypse, and I’ve already done that one.”

Blakeman grimaced slightly. He seemed to be one of those people who said nearly every word in jest but expected absolute seriousness from others at unpredictable times.

“I’m not talking about *Quantified World*. I thought it could be your first print feature. I’m sure he’d give you some good quotes. If it goes well we could put it on the cover.”

“You really think the story is cover-worthy?”

“I’ve got a great angle. The Mets are opening their new ballpark next week, and I’ve got two tickets right at field level. Doyle’s first time at a game since his flameout. People will eat it up. Politics and baseball in one go—it should be just your thing.”

“Doyle and I don’t much agree on either.”

Why was he so resistant to writing about the man? All of Blakeman’s instincts had proven sound, and he was now offering Waxworth the cover of the magazine.

“That’s the whole point. We want a little tension. Anyway, we’ve already got the tickets. If you don’t think it will work as a longer

piece, I'm sure you can get a few hundred words out of it for the blog. If nothing else, you'll get to see a game."

Before getting on the train that night, Waxworth stopped at the Union Square Barnes & Noble to look for Doyle's books. He found a single copy of *The Crack of the Bat*, the second collection of his baseball columns.

Sam had been eleven years old when his mother gave him Doyle's first collection, *The Smell of the Grass*. There was no particular occasion for the purchase, which she'd handed over, unwrapped, a look of uncertainty on her face. They didn't have a lot of money, and gifts were so rare that the book had carried a kind of aura for Sam. She took him to the local library every other week, and he always chose baseball books—*Catcher with a Glass Arm*, *The Kid from Tomkinsville*—but this was something else entirely. It was not a single long story but a bunch of shorter ones. In fact, they weren't really stories at all. More like arguments. Doyle made constant reference to names Sam didn't know, not just old ballplayers like Ducky Medwick or Hank Bauer but Carlyle, Tocqueville, Rousseau. Every other page contained unfamiliar words. When Sam asked his mother what they meant, she sent him to the dictionary, and he could tell she didn't know them either. He loved the book, and all the things he found difficult about it only made him love it more. His favorite essay was the one in which Doyle called Robin Yount an "emblem of the working class." Sam was a Brewers fan, and he worshipped Yount. Before long he could recite whole paragraphs of that essay, though he did not understand what most of them meant.

On the train, he took out *The Crack of the Bat* and started looking over it. The book included one of Doyle's most famous columns, about how growing up a Brooklyn Dodgers fan had been "training for liberalism": *It is the liberal's nature not to be disappointed by human failures but to remain hopeful. Not for us the*

tragic view of life. “We’ll get ’em next year” is the liberal’s natural rallying cry. When Sam first read the essay in high school, he hadn’t known anything about Frank Doyle’s politics. He certainly hadn’t known that Doyle was far more famous in most circles as a political commentator than as a baseball writer. Sam and his mother spent every Sunday morning at church, but even if they’d been otherwise unoccupied, they would never have watched the morning talk shows whose roundtable discussions so often featured Doyle. Though an author’s note said that Frank Doyle was a Pulitzer-Prize-winning columnist for the New York *Herald*, Sam had never read the paper, and he’d assumed that Doyle was a sports writer.

In truth, Sam was already starting to move on from Doyle’s brand of gauzy elegy by the time his mother gave him *The Crack of the Bat*. He’d discovered Bill James, the Society for American Baseball Research, and the way of thinking that James called sabermetrics. His favorite baseball book was now James’s *Historical Baseball Abstract*. His second favorite was *The Baseball Encyclopedia*—a collection of pure numbers. Entire sabermetric message boards were dedicated to tearing apart Doyle’s knowing mythologies, and Doyle in turn liked to mock the “bean counters” who tried to pin the game down and dissect it, which always meant killing it first. Doyle’s third baseball book, *The Warning Track*, had come out while Sam was in college. His mother had mailed it to him in hardcover. They weren’t always speaking then, and the gift recalled happier—or at least simpler—days in their relationship. He’d never even opened it, because he knew it would disappoint him, and he didn’t want to feel superior to this thing that his mother had given him in a spirit of reconciliation.

The fact that Doyle had undergone a dramatic rightward shift between his second and third books made little difference to Sam, who’d had no interest in politics before meeting Lucy. When Doyle

turned into a full-throated advocate for war in Iraq, he became an embarrassment to a generation of liberals—Lucy’s parents among them—who’d been reading his column religiously for two decades. But Sam had given up on the man long before.

He hadn’t been watching when Doyle committed his final embarrassment in the broadcast booth, but he’d seen it a few times online. It was inexcusable, of course, but Waxworth had known far longer than most that Frank Doyle was old and out of touch. He felt about the whole incident the sad, somewhat detached feeling of discovering that someone you’d known years before and would probably never have seen again had just died. It was too bad, of course, but it hardly affected him. It had become fashionable to say that Doyle’s sports writing was his only redeeming work, but Waxworth felt the opposite: the real scandal wasn’t Doyle’s stance on stem cells or welfare reform; it was his stance on baseball.

It occurred to Waxworth suddenly that this was exactly what he would write. He would show the general reader that Doyle had been wrong for far longer than they’d ever suspected. He was not going to offer a reconsideration of the man, an opening through which he might return to public life. He was going to bury him once and for all.