

## EXCERPT FROM “SIX-HUNDRED HOURS OF A LIFE”

*A Novel by Craig Lancaster*  
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It’s an odd and embarrassing thought that stirs me from sleep:

What if Joy wants to have sex with me tonight? This is not an eventuality I have remotely planned for, and it seems so preposterous (I love the word “preposterous”) on the face of it that I am inclined to just lie back down and return to sleep.

And yet, I cannot. So I watch time peel off my digital clock in the darkness as I ponder this.

5:57 ... 5:58 ... 5:59 ...

I keep coming back to what Dr. Buckley said: “I hope that’s not on the agenda for your first date.” No, it’s not. We don’t have an agenda. We are meeting at the new wine bar downtown, the one on Broadway. Everything after that is uncertain — including, and most especially, the question of whether we are having sex.

6:00 ... 6:01 ... 6:02 ...

I must make a confession: I have never had sex, at least not with another human being. I am 39 years old and so, yes, I have discovered self-satisfaction. There’s no need to be excessively descriptive or gross about it. I read Dear Abby every morning in The Billings Gazette, and I remember her saying something years ago about self-satisfaction: Half of men do it, and the other half lie when they say they don’t do it. That’s what Dear Abby said, and that’s good enough for me. Dear Abby is a very logical woman.

6:03 ... 6:04 ... 6:05 ...

So since I’ve never had sex, you can probably understand why I am now wiggling out about it. (I love the slang phrase “wiggling out.”) Setting aside the obvious questions — such as, how does one arrive at the decision to have sex on a first date; does one just say, “This is a delicious salad. I look forward to telling you more about it later, when we’re having sex”? — I have to say that I am very uncomfortable with the idea. It seems like an irresponsible thing to do.

6:06 ... 6:07 ... 6:08 ...

But let’s say for argument’s sake that we were to have sex. This is a hypothetical situation. Where does it happen? Do we drive all the way back to Broadview and have sex at her house? We cannot have sex at this house; that simply is not a possibility. Among other potential problems, my father would be apoplectic if he found out. If Joy and I drive all the way back to Broadview, how do we have sex and leave enough time for me to get back to Billings to see tonight’s episode of “Dragnet”? I don’t see how it would be possible. I couldn’t have sex with that kind of time pressure. I’m not sure I can have sex at all, seeing as how I never have. I’m simply saying that, even if the physical act of love were possible, I would not be able to concentrate on it knowing that I might miss “Dragnet.”

6:09 ... 6:10 ... 6:11 ...

So what? A hotel room? That still brings up the “Dragnet” problem. A nice hotel, like the Crowne Plaza, might be willing to put a videocassette player in the room, but then I would have to make sure to bring my “Dragnet” tape along, not knowing whether I would actually need it.

I think that would be awkward:

Joy: "Hi, Edward. Why do you have your 'Dragnet' tape?"

Me: "Hi, Joy. I thought we might have sex, so I wanted to be ready. I can't miss 'Dragnet.' "

That's absurd.

Also, the Crowne Plaza is not the sort of place that would rent us a room for the sole purpose of having sex. The sort of place that would rent us a room for sex — and I don't know how to find such a place — might not have a videocassette player to lend me. It would probably just want us to have sex and leave.

*6:12 ... 6:13 ... 6:14 ...*

It's settled. We're not having sex, even if Joy wants to. Even if I want to. There is just no way this can happen. I will have to apply the lessons I've learned from Dr. Buckley about saying no to this situation. I can say no to sex with Joy while still treating her with dignity and grace.

I should practice at this.

"Sex? I'm ever so sorry, Joy, but it's just not possible tonight. I do hope you understand."

"Under normal circumstances, Joy, I would love to have sex with you, but it's simply not a good night tonight."

"I am so appreciative of the offer, but I cannot. Perhaps I could take a rain check."

Yes, any of those will work.

If she's aggressive and grabs my wiener, though, I may have to come up with another plan. I have seen that sort of thing happen on late-night cable television, and I think it's only prudent that I be ready for it.