



*Becky* by Courtney Eldridge

from *Post Road 2*

Selected by Rick Moody, author of *Right Livelihoods*, *The Diviners*, *The Black Veil*, *Demonology*, *Purple America*, *The Ring of Brightest Angels Around Heaven*, *The Ice Storm*, and *Garden State*.

*I think I was sort of around for the beginning of this piece, in that I read a lot of Eldridge's stories as they were coming out of the printer. This was always one of my favorites—consisting of a series of increasingly unhinged answering machine messages by a woman whose problems only start with compulsive overeating. Normally, I tell younger writers to avoid stories with only one character, but Becky (or Becky Sue) is so obsessed with Rachel, on whose voice mail she is leaving these messages, that Rachel becomes a complex character whether we ever get a genuine sentence out of her mouth or not. In less adroit hands, this kind of structure would never get off the ground at all. And yet it's Eldridge's gift that she sees how the story will move (into ever more operatic fits of scatology and self-recrimination), feels it intuitively, believes in it. Moreover, however funny might be the manifest content here, the story wouldn't be memorable if we did not feel, in the end, a keen sympathy for the overweight, wheelchair bound, vegetable-hating protagonist. Eldridge, I think, loves Becky. Never looks down on her at all. Which*

*is why, in addition to being very funny, this story is uniquely painful. It's just the sort of thing I, for one, cannot forget. – RM.*

"Oh, hi, Rachel, this is Becky. Um, I'm the girl in the wheel chair. Um, you know, the lunch seems a little bit too much for me. A little bit. Maybe because I went to lie down, kind of—I'm *tired*, you know. And I have a hiatal hernia—I don't know if you know what that is—and I'm only supposed to eat small bits of food at a time. And I'm lying here in bed and I don't *feel* so good and I really have to sit up. But I'm a little concerned because the dinners are so big. You know, sometimes that's too much for my stomach at one time. I don't know, I have a doctor, I'll talk to him about it, see what he wants me to do. But other than that, I'm with the food plan, you know. I'm not eating so much, you know, dairy every time I'm turning around and a million other things for breakfast. And although I've loved it, I don't think I've lost a pound on this program. And when I was at FAA, you know, well, maybe because I'm so sedentary. I've been going on the exercycle...Anyway, my number is 212-477-1232. I'm glad to see you, you know, in this program, and you know, you're so beautiful and it was so nice to see you. It's nice just to look at you. And uh, I just thought you'd be home. It's about 3:41 or a little earlier. 3:41, I think. Okay. Bye-bye."

"Hello, Rachel, this is Becky. How are you? I thought, uh, since it says I could call

anytime that perhaps I could reach you around this time. Um, I'm doing well in my program. I hope you are too and um, I'm making just a program call and good to hear your voice. Your voice is pretty, too. My name is Becky, or Becky Sue. I'm at 212-477-1232. And I tend to be home, you know, rather late. You know, it could be nine or ten. It could be seven, eight, nine, or ten. It could be six—six is good, too, but I'm usually eating then, but six is fine, if you need six. And it could be like anything, you know. I don't know if I'm—sometimes I go to other programs at the Realization Center. Um...you know, they have ACOA, and they have CODA—CODA's only on Wednesday night, at um...I think it's seven forty-five, but tomorrow, at six, they got ACOA, but, um, I mean today or tomorrow. Tomorrow I go to the doctor, you know. My internist is tomorrow at 11:00 AM, so I've got that first thing, tomorrow morning. So just not tomorrow morning at eleven, but any other time, if it's not too late. It could be any time but tomorrow morning, because I won't be here then. Or I could call you back. That reminds me. Okay. Take care. Be well. Bye-bye."

"Hi, Rachel, this is Becky Goldberg, at 477-1232. 2-1-2-4-7-7-1-2-3-2. I'm doing a lot of *crying*, I'm *upset*, I don't know what to do. Um, yes, I'm holding my food and I guess my body just needs to adjust to this plan, all these salads and vegetables. It's a shock to my system, you know. Uh, I don't know what to do about going to Jeremy Robinson and this doctor, Dr. Weinstein. They're both food addiction people, you know, and the people I have now, I'm very comfortable with, but they're not food addiction people. But I don't know if I should leave what I have. I have a good psychiatrist, I don't want to leave him,

and I have a good internist, I don't want to leave him. But this Dr. Weinstein is um, some sort of medical doctor. As a Jewish man, he seems very nice. He's up by Bloomingdale's. I'm sure you know where that is, Bloomingdale's. I don't have the address right here, but I'm sure you know where it is. I thought I might see you at Bloomingdale's, but I didn't see you there today. I just popped in after my appointment, but I didn't see you at cosmetics or perfume, so I turned back around. I think you'd know me if you saw me, if you saw me there. I'm Becky Sue, I'm the one in the wheelchair, you know. But um, Jeremy Robinson, he, uh, he—I get the feeling he's very *hard*. I don't know, he upset me, he said he didn't think I was very serious. I'm as serious as death. Just that if it gets too hard for me, I lose interest. Okay then, that, too. Okay. Bye-bye."

"Hello, Rachel, this is Becky Sue. I'm at 477-1232, that's 212-477-1232. I'm just calling to say hello, how are you? I just want to know if you have trouble with all these vegetables. And the beans, Jesus Christ, they put me over the top, you know. So my stomach's been a little bit upset, too, you know. Um, I tried to get on the exercycle but then I felt too *gassy*, like I was about to explode. My doctor said not to push it, just a little every day. Um, I think it's the vegetables. It's the healthy things that give you the worst gas, in my experience. So I might try later today, we'll see how I feel a little later. It's just this awful pain in my abdomen. And I was talking to my doctor, that one I told you, Dr. Weinstein, I was talking to him about you today. I happened to notice that he has no ring on his finger and I told him I know a very beautiful woman he might like to meet. I don't know if you're Jewish or not, but you're so beautiful I said you were. He's a little bit older,

maybe forty, or mid-forties, but I'm sure he's very stable and he would take very good care of you. Because he has very clean hands. And good teeth, although I noticed some fillings, so he might eat too much sugar, himself, but um. I told him you seem like a very clean girl, too, I don't see any piercings or tattoos to worry about. Your earrings are very pretty, too. I think earrings are fine. I like earrings, myself, now and again, just nothing cheap, you know. It can't be anything but 24-carot gold or my ears get all infected and *pussy*. Ugh, what a mess. What can you do, though, you know? So as I was saying, then I looked at the phone list, after my appointment with Dr. Weinstein today, and um, your last name's not exactly Jewish, but maybe on your mother's side? Rachel's a Jewish name, so I'm sure. And you said you have a cat, a little cat. Wasn't that you, with the cat? I like cats all right. I would get myself a cat, but I have these allergies. Like pollen, and I'm also allergic to furs. Um, not like coats, like cat fur. And dog fur, you know. I just get all swollen and puffy and sneezy, like I'm retaining water or something. But I think it would be nice to have something to pet and hold, like a little something that didn't want to have sex with you whenever you pet it. But I have Arthur, my helper. He's almost as good. Um, as I was saying, I told my doctor you were so beautiful, he should really think about it, because he must be into his forties or mid-forties now, and he's not pick-of-the-litter anymore, himself. I'm not saying he's too old for you, just yet. Soon, maybe, but. I don't think it would be right, like ethical, you know, for me to get sexually involved with my own doctor. Because then I'd have to look for another and I don't have the time for that, it's just too draining, what with where I am right now. And uh, well, he's not going to get the chance to meet too many beautiful women like you anymore. I told him there comes a time when you have to take a leap of faith. Women might like that hard-to-get business,

but there comes a time when a man is nothing she's going to want to tell her friends about if he's fifty, for chrissakes. He's got a good two, three years left in him, max, and then it's going to be a cold, cruel world, he's going to get something of a wake-up call, himself, and I told him so. Women know; they can sense it. That old man smell, you know? I think it would be good for his practice, too, if he had a pretty picture or two of a beautiful woman like you in his office and he could tell his patients when they asked, he could say, That's my *wife*, you know. I think patients would trust him more, to know he was stable and loving. You know, when you go to the doctor, you aren't supposed to be worrying about whatever the hell their problem is, and I have to wonder about that when I don't see any pretty pictures, you know. He's there to help me, you know, and I should feel reassured about him being loving and stable, so something needs to be done about that. I don't know what he is, because he doesn't wear a ring. He might just be divorced. But I'm sure he likes women, I think. Maybe he likes them too much, but like I said, you gotta have faith. I'll find out for you, okay. That's good. Well, now I best go birth this gas baby, so... Well, yeah, okay, then. Bye-bye."

"Hello, Rachel. This is Becky. Yes I forgot to talk to him about a discount, though. Well, my insurance covers most of it, or a lot of it, but I still have a hard time with all these bills he keeps sending me, every other time I time I turn around. They upset my stomach, you know, worse than the dairy. It's really hard to stick with the food plan when he keeps sending me all these bills, every time I open my box. And he's a food addiction person, himself, so he should know how these things upset me. What sorts of things happen if I

get too upset, you know. I was thinking maybe if he couldn't give me a little discount, or he might take me to temple, and you could come with. He would probably have enough room in his car, if he has a trunk for my wheelchair. He should probably have a car if he's a doctor, you know. You would think, huh? Because I wouldn't want to taxi, though, if he doesn't have a car, that gets too expensive unless he offers to pay. You'd think his mother taught him manners, he'd know how to treat a lady, for god sake. Well, if not, he could drop me off first, then pick you up, and you could have some time to get to know each other. Um, that's another thing, sometimes when we talk about God or our higher power I see how you get all those little wrinkles in your fore-head and you stare at your hands or you pass. You're still very, very beautiful, though, even with those little wrinkles, and I'm always happy to see you. Stick to the big book, and just keep coming back, keep coming to the rooms, you know. It works. Okay, bye-bye."

"Hi, Rachel, this is Becky or you might know me as Becky Sue, I go by both, whichever you prefer...Uh, I don't know, it could just be indigestion. My stomach feels *bloated* and I feel sick and I ate a *chicken wing* today. I don't know if that was such a good thing, um, eating the barbecued chicken wing. My stomach's *hurting* and I just took a lie down, but nothing's helping. My psychiatrist hasn't called me back yet, and I just paged my other doctor, but I've got these horrible pains, you know. I don't know if it's my hiatal hernia or if I'm having a gall bladder attack. Those things come on fast with rich foods. I've got to watch myself with the sauces, barbecue and Hollandaise. Ugh, I love the Hollandaise, like Eggs Benedict, *to die*. But uh, I'm thinking maybe that's what's caused this, maybe the

chicken wing was too rich? Or maybe the meat was bad? Because I don't usually eat chicken for my protein. I don't know if I'll be able to keep my metabolic down at four o'clock, if I have to go to the hospital. I should probably talk to my sponsor about all this milk and chicken. I like my sponsor all right, but she's very, very strict with me, like if I call five minutes late to hand over my food, she gets on my case, and I think there are times when we have to bend the rules a little if it's not working. Because she needs to remember, I'm in a wheelchair, you know, it's not the same. And if I feel this bad, that can't be right. And I don't like most fish, and, you know, but Mrs. Fields I like, and McDonald's Filet O'Fish, but that's the thing, because fish leads to french fries. Turkey, maybe. Or I could try a little sliced turkey breast. Or maybe some honey-roasted ham. Not now, you know, but maybe next time. Okay, I just thought you might be home, but I guess not. Bye-bye."

"Hello, Rachel, this is Becky. I did a little time on the exercycle and now I'm going to try to eat my lunch. But nothing's wrong, I'm just calling to ask if you were you at Bloomingdale's today? I thought I saw you, and I tried to follow, but I couldn't keep up. And you shouldn't walk so fast like that, because it's always so busy there, and I'm in the wheelchair, you know. Um, it gives me a *cramp*, it, um, it hurts my *wrists*, and with my arthritis, if I have to try to keep up with you and you're walking so fast. It's hard for me to keep up with people who walk like that unless it's on a quiet street. And I have to be very, very careful with my arthritis, not overdoing it. So I paged Dr. Weinstein about it, but he didn't call me back in time. If he had been there with me at Bloomingdale's, I would've

made him run ahead so he could introduce himself to you. I'm still waiting for him to call me, but you can call me back, anyway. I'm at 477-1232, that's the 212, 2-1-2, area code, maybe in an hour or so. You don't have to worry, I have call waiting, in case my doctor calls while you call, so it shouldn't be a problem. Um, so I'm going to try to eat my lunch now. I think I'm ready. Bye-bye."

"Hello, Rachel, this is Becky Sue, at 212-477-1232. I just ate a green salad at dinner tonight. Fresh lettuce, I tried to eat those sprouts, like people are talking about, but it tasted like *dirt* and I had to rinse my mouth out, I thought I was going to gag. I went out to dinner just the other night, like last night, and I made doubly sure they put the dressing on the side, but sometimes, I don't know. I tried to ask, but the waitress wasn't very nice when I asked her to help me with my scale because my wrists were hurting me. She upset me, you know. I think it's the cold, too. I thought maybe you could recommend some restaurants to me where people are friendlier and more understanding. I know you must go out to dinner all the time. But I don't want anything too fancy, you know. Nice, but not *too* fancy. Uh, and I was wondering if you wanted to meet for lunch at Bloomingdale's. I can meet you there on Thursday afternoon. My doctor's office is right up near there, and maybe you could just pick me up at his office? Maybe this Thursday, about one or one-thirty. Sometimes he runs late, but I'd wait for you. Last week, he kept me waiting an hour. Or if you eat your lunch earlier than that, I could change my appointment to mid-morning. But I think if he just sees you, he'll know what I said was true. Or maybe we three could go out to lunch at a nice place you know. He seems very nice. I'm sure he's

smart, too, to be a doctor like that. So, let's see, it's 7:38, or there about. I'll be up late, nine or ten or so, you can call me then. Okay, bye-bye."

"Oh, hi, Rachel, this is Becky, at 212-477-1232. I'm sorry I missed your call. I was out. Uh, I'm very sorry you won't be able to meet at Bloomingdale's this week, but maybe next week? We can go any week you like. Um, next week or the week after next week or anytime we could work it out. My hiatal hernia seems a little better, you know, you don't need to worry about that. One day at a time. Maybe a little better, I can't tell what it is, between this new food plan and my new doctor and all the changes. It's hard on a system, all this shock. Because I need a regular program, or things happen like this. It's hard for me to tell what's upsetting me the most. Yesterday, I was crying and crying. I couldn't get out of bed. I didn't know what was wrong, just everything seemed *wrong*. Uh, I think it's because I don't have two metabolics anymore. If there's no ten o'clock metabolic, I get anxious. I start worrying at dinner. I don't know if that's going to work for me. I want to stick to this food plan, but I need more metabolics or my blood sugar goes haywire, and then I think I'm gonna lose my mind. And with my diabetes, you know. I have to go now. Be well. Bye-bye."

"Hi, Rachel, this is Becky. And you walked out while was saying that my mother was very *critical*, you know. Um, she was pick, pick, pick, pick, pick. Always picking on me. She was a very critical woman, my mother. I never really felt like a part of my own

family, even though it was only the three of us, you know. I think my father wanted a boy, I don't know. They had me much later in life, and I talk to my psychiatrist about this. How they probably got used to the idea of not having a baby, and then I came along. I try to understand, you know, like if I found out I was pregnant today, that would be the death of me, so I imagine that's how she must've felt, my mother. I think forgiveness is very important, and I'm trying to forgive her, but it's hard when she's no longer alive, and I can't tell her how angry I am. Um, and she made me eat food I didn't *want* to eat. Prune juice every breakfast. Every goddamn morning. That's why I have a hard time giving it up to a higher power. Because I don't want to eat things I don't want to eat. I still don't like breakfast even though this food plan doesn't make me drink juices. I think someone's going to criticize me when that happens, though. When I think about breakfast, I start to think about prune juice, and I don't feel so good, you know. I'm feeling okay now; I got through breakfast all right. I'll be up late again, so you can call me at nine, as late as ten or so. Ten is fine, too. Um, I haven't been sleeping very well. I can't tell if it's my stomach or my heart. The pain starts at my heart and goes all the way down to my stomach, I don't know. It could just be indigestion, but it feels like my heart, like a big knot, not like heartburn, but I don't know what. I paged my internist, and he should be calling me back soon. Okay. I hope you're doing well. Bye-bye."

"Hi, Rachel, you're a very, very attractive woman, and I'm sure you go out on a lot of dates. My name is Becky; I'm at 212-477-1232, 212-4-7-7-1-2-3-2. How do you handle it when someone asks you out on a date and takes you to a fancy restaurant, and you gotta

eat exactly what's on the food plan, and maybe they have something gourmet that you'd like to taste. I mean, I may not—y-y-you and I may be very different, maybe you don't mind if you don't get noshes every—or you don't get bagels and lox. Or you don't get um, *breast of chicken with mushrooms*, or you know, or—or you don't get an apple *fritter* at Theresa's Restaurant. Maybe you don't care about it. I don't know, like, to me, I'm missing *the whole world*—if I can't have a particular item of food when I'm on a date, I—I go crazy. I go out of my mind. And then when I want to binge, the bingeing seems like the most important thing in my life that I want to do. And if I'm on Atkins, I can eat and eat and eat and eat, which, I don't know, Rachel, I need to talk to you—but I don't want you to tell me what to do, okay. I want you to share what *you* feel, and what you go through, and how you are able to stay in these programs. I'd like to know how you do it. Is it like the love in the program that keeps you there? That makes it not necessary to get the love of the food? I would like to understand it. Oh, by the way, I started doing my writing again. See, it was at CEAHOW, I had Andrea as my sponsor, she's not my sponsor anymore—I-I don't know if I can do these programs. My doctor wants me to go on the Atkins, which I lost one-hundred-and-twelve pounds. One-hundred-and-twelve pounds! And I did the Atkins, it was a miracle. I don't know why I did it. I don't know what made me stay on that, and I stayed on it, Rachel. But like with the CEAHOW, I started gagging on all the vegetables, you know, and three days, you got fifteen cups of frickin' vegetables, you know, whereas on Atkins, you're not counting your meat, and you do the best you can, and you get a lot of bacon and eggs—bacon, and when I first started eating bacon and eggs for breakfast. When I first went on CEAHOW, I-I-I cheated, right away, I had six pieces of bacon with my two eggs. I felt—you know, now I—I'm with the

CEAHOW and I'm—you know, I'm still doing the CEAHOW on my own now, and I'm making the calls in the program, and maybe I'll come back to the meetings—I don't know, I can't go to the meetings when there's steps—you know that, right? Maybe I would get out of the wheelchair if I stick to something, you know? But—I—uh, I'm angry at CEAHOW. I like Atkins better, but I eventually got angry at Atkins. But what I really want is my freedom, and I want to be able to choose what I want to do when I want to do it, and that's—that's the major problem. And last night, I had like a spiritual awakening, and I understood if I'm in the group, I'm supposed to do what the group is doing. And that's where my strength is supposed to come from. But my feeling is, do I *want* to be in the group? You know, I was extremely rebellious in my whole life and I'm not saying it did me bad, it did me a lot of bad, at times, there were terrible things that happened, and in other ways, I-I became a very open-minded person who learned a lot about the world that, the—ninety percent of the people don't live the way I do, and then I feel it's because I'm an artist, and that's part of it. I think artists are very open and they don't put themselves into so much, uh, structure, but my lack, the lack of structure has hurt me, too. The lack of structure actually hurts. But I-I-I-I can't stay on any structure too long. I—I go *berserk*. Anyway, I wanted to talk to you about it, I wanted to hear what *you* have to say. If you can identify with any- thing I'm saying, and what *you* feel, but I don't want you to preach at me, all right, Rachel? Well, I also had lack of structure, but now I'm in CEAHOW, and I'm so great! *Great!* Well, great, *great, GREAT!* Last night I didn't binge, I wanted to binge. I had Brussels sprouts and—and a fish, and I didn't binge! But I wanted honey, and put that butter on there, and then I was thinking about ordering some stuff from Passover, and I wanted that egg nosh? You know, I could go *wild* with jelly on

the egg nosh, so you know, I have it all planned already, terrible, *terrible*...And anyway, take care, sweetheart, bye-bye, and—well, please don't be afraid to call me back, oh—there's the—."

"Hello, Rachel, this is Becky. Some people call me Becky Sue. I'm the one who just called a minute ago, and your machine cut me off. It's fine, though, don't worry about it. I spoke to Dr. Weinstein about my discount, and he said he'd think about it. Well, I'm thinking about it, too, and I'm thinking maybe twenty or twenty-five percent off would be enough. I don't know. I told him that or temple, and he said he'd get back to me on that, too. He seems like a smart man, so I know he'll do the right thing. He's a food addiction person, and he's also some sort of medical doctor, you know, and he says he sees no problem with the *chicken wing*, but if it's upsetting to my stomach, I probably shouldn't eat the chicken wings then. And he says it's probably the milk that's causing all these mucous problems. Maybe I'm allergic to dairy. I talked to my sponsor, but she said if I want to go off dairy, then I have to get a doctor's note, but I forgot to talk to my doctor about the doctor's note. I think if I ask him for the note then he'll probably want to take a lot of tests, and that'll be expensive, and I'll get more bills from him and that'll upset my stomach more than the milk, so, um...I don't know. I lie down, but I can't fall asleep if my stomach's upset like it is. And I feel so *phlegmy*, you know. It's my chest and my sinuses, all the phlegm, then with my bowels, I can't take it. I try to spit it up but it doesn't help and it hurts my stomach more. Okay, well, bye-bye."

"And all of my life, as far back as I can remember, all I ever wanted was to be as beautiful as you are, Rachel. Just to know for one day what that felt like, to look like you do. To wake up and look in the mirror...You know, for people to like, say, just to *look* at me, and see me as *beautiful* and want to be next to me, and touch me, and to want to have sex with me when they look at me, and for me to be able to look back at them, at all the people looking at me and wanting me, I mean. Or just to be as beautiful as you are and then to be able to look back at me and think nothing of it, just continue about my business. I'm telling you, Rachel, I would've *died* or given up my right arm, my left arm, both these legs, my soul or whatever, you know, whatever, just for one goddamn day. So...that's why I'm calling, really. I just want to know, honestly, what's it like? I want to know. I'm telling you, I'm serious, I want you to tell me how it feels to be you, to get to take it all for granted. Because there are some days that I wish you could know what it was to be me, too. I really do. So you would know. Because sometimes, the way you look at me when you catch me looking at you in a meeting, and all I'm thinking is that I want to be as pretty as you are. Because I can tell you don't know what I'm thinking. Or, I don't know, you know, maybe you do know what I must be thinking. Maybe that's the only time you're grateful and you don't take it for granted, all you have. When you're looking at me, you know? Because it's like, I'm a *Cosmo* girl, and all. I read what those cover models have to say about their awful childhoods, how no one paid attention to them, or called them names, and all the teasing they took...*Puh-lease*, like I don't have enough troubles I have to hear them yammering on, I mean, look at them, or look at you, and look at me...Because, you know, I don't think I've told you this before, but when I was a little

girl, I wanted to learn how to fly. I was never very healthy, you know, and all I wanted to do was fly. So I used to go down to the basement in our house, and I'd try to learn to fly down there, jumping off the fourth or fifth step, flapping my arms. And every time I'd fall on the ground, my mother would shout down, What was that? Becky Sue, what are you doing down there?! Come up here now, so I can see what you're up to. And sometimes I think those falls might've contributed to my health problems, now. It probably would've been better to learn to fly on the front yard, but we didn't have a front yard or grass or anything. I mean, you'd think, where was I going to fly in the basement? Oh, I don't know...Maybe every kid thinks they can fly, but it was like the most important thing in the world to me. I thought I'd show them, my parents, and then they wouldn't be sorry anymore. I'd be the girl who could fly and my mother could tell all her friends and everyone could watch me. Well, anyway, that's all I wanted to ask. I just want to know how it feels to be as beautiful as you are, if you ever think about it, or what? You can be honest with me, too. I'll understand. Okay, that's all. Hope you're well, honey. Bye-bye."

"Hi, Rachel, this is Becky Sue. I'm at 212-477-1232. And my helper, Arthur, he's like my personal assistant, I brought him to the meeting last week. Um, you might have seen him sitting by me in the back? He helped me, and I took him to meet Dr. Weinstein, and uh, Arthur thought he seemed like a good match for you. I pointed you out at the meeting, so he knows who you are. Arthur, he said, what, with your looks and the father's brains. And um, you wouldn't have to get a tutor, if your kids had questions about math or science. I needed a *tutor*, but my parents couldn't afford to get me one, so I had a hard time. That

leaves scars, you know. You'll be spared that. Or you could always ask Arthur for help, he does all my taxes, every year. Taxes are a bit complicated with my disability, you know. Arthur's not really a food addiction person, but he comes to meetings as part of my network. If you're too shy, we could all go out together. Dinner, maybe, the four of us. Or lunch or dinner. Or breakfast or lunch or dinner. I just can't wait until brunch, you know. That's too much, too late, but they'd understand. You might not want to get involved until you have one year under your belt, but if Dr. Weinstein could only *see* you, I'm sure he would wait. Um, he's waited this long, what's another year? All right, then, be well. Bye-bye."

"Hello, Rachel, this is Becky Sue. And Dr. Weinstein said maybe he could arrange a ride for me next week, so maybe you should just come meet him this one time, tomorrow, pop your head in and say hello, then he'll decide to drive me, himself. I think you two would have a lot to talk about, with him being a food addiction person and you being a food addict. I didn't tell him that about you, don't worry. You can tell him yourself, and maybe if you have any questions about your meal plan, he could give you his advice. I don't think he'd charge you if you were dating, or you could charge him back for looking at you, you're so pretty and all. I keep telling him that, but he doesn't seem to believe me. *Uh*, I have to go have my lie down now, or I can't get myself to my meetings, you know. I want to make it to CODA, but I just feel so *tired* on this meal plan and sometimes I just want to cry and cry and I can barely get out of bed, you know. I'm not feeling too good today. And I have some information on a singles group that I thought you might enjoy

because I can't use it, you know. I could probably go with you, though, just to have a look. We'll see. Well, I hope you're well. Bye-bye."

"Hi, Rachel, this is Becky. I got your message. I'm at 212-477-1232, and I got your message. I just got home from the doctor and I'm home now if you want to call me back. But I, uh, I didn't really understand what you were saying, what, with the thing about your not being Jewish? Are you saying you won't go out on a date with my doctor, Dr. Weinstein? I don't understand what you're saying. Are you saying you're anti-Semitic? I don't think you have any business pointing fingers. If that's what you're saying, I think you should take a long, hard look in the mirror. And you're very, very pretty; it's true, but still. Don't think that's all right with me. I'm just asking for a little help. I know I need help and at least I can admit it and ask for it, but you—I'm just asking you to keep an open mind, that's all. Because if you can't do that, then what's the point of your being in program? The rooms don't need you with that uppity attitude of yours, with your skinny ass and your nose up in the frickin' air like that. I know you'll at least meet him, that's all I'm asking, because you can help a friend. It's not ideal, but you could always convert, so don't worry. Just keep an open mind. Don't be afraid to ask for help. Okay, I hope you're well. Bye-bye."

"Hi, Rachel, this is Becky, or Becky Sue. I'm just wondering what you know about this Oprah Diet. Oprah Winfrey, you know her? I don't know if you've been on this one, it's

the one where you have two set meals per day. And they're very, very set meals, you know, really strict, but then you get one hour of the day when you get to eat anything you want, you know? Like one hour, you have to time it. When you hear the bell, then you have to stop eating, though. That's the rule. So I'm working this one now, you know. Arthur sets the timer for me, and I spend most of my day planning my free hour. I had a row of mushroom knishes lined up, they were so good, and I had a strawberry upside down cake, and I had a bag of salty pecans, and then I ate as much Jiffy Nut as I could stand. Sweet, then salty, you know. And ten links of spicy sausage, too. I love the spicy sausage. I don't know how you feel about it, but my life just isn't the same if I'm not allowed sausage. Arthur fried it up for me, while I was working on my Ho-Ho's. And I swear to God, it was the best sausage I ever ate! Um, and my friend Jean, she says it really works, this plan, she's already lost twelve pounds, if you can believe it. Swear to God, she did, but Jean, she's not a food addiction person, she's just fat, so I don't know. I know she's a spiritual person, and I think she's making some real headway in that direction, along her path, but I'm not sure if Oprah knows what sort of effect this plan can have on a food addiction person, as I am, because I can't think of anything but my free hour, and what I'm going to eat, and getting everything prepared for my hour. I like to save my free hour for later in the day, like five or six, so I have something to look forward to, to keep me going. But still, you know, even if I haven't lost any weight yet, I get the structure and I get the freedom, so it seems a good balance for me. Structure and freedom. I don't know how to reach her to ask, though, I don't know how, but maybe I'll write her a letter or call the number they give on the show. I think they have a 1-800 number, I think. *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, if you watch that ever? Ugh, that was my

stomach. You heard for yourself, didn't you? I'm hungry and I'm just waiting for my free hour, you know. Watching the clock, every second I'm a little closer. But I was outside today, and I passed a newsstand, and I saw a recent picture of Oprah, and she's not looking so thin, herself, so I don't know, am I supposed to believe it works if she's on the heavy side? Looks like she packed away her thin jeans for the winter. I don't know what's going on with her program, if she's sticking to it, but if she's taking two hours, only giving us one, I don't think that's fair. Well, I hope you're doing good on whatever program you're doing, sweetheart. Oh, another thing, Arthur took a picture of Dr. Weinstein for you, so you can see what he looks like. Arthur caught him pushing me, as we were coming out of the exam room, and Dr. Weinstein looks a little surprised in the picture, and the flash made his eyes red, but you'll see. His first name is Irving, so you know. Irving Weinstein, M.D. Okay. Bye-bye."

"Hello, Rachel, this is Becky. My number is 212-477-1232, and I'm trying not to get discouraged about not losing a pound. I'm rotating between the Oprah Plan and CEAHOW, but I'm not feeling very good today. I'm overjoyed to be back in meetings, but I'm feeling very *upset*, you know. The structure is such a shock, and I have to hand over my food, and I don't know if that's what I really need. But I really appreciated what you had to say about the milk today, but what was it you said about soy milk? I couldn't hear very well because I have to sit at the back of the room, you know, because of my being in a wheelchair, and there wasn't any room on your side. I thought I might give that soy milk a try, because, uh, what the dairy does to me. But I heard somewhere that too much soy

isn't good. That the body can develop an allergy to it. So I'll need to be careful, keep an eye out. Um, but I just wanted to know what brand you buy of soy milk, what kind did you say it was? Is it low-fat? Because I can't take all the fat, you know, especially when I'm not feeling so good. Okay. I'm Becky, you know. I was wondering why you sat in the back and then you got up and walked out before the meeting was over. I don't know what your problems are, but I don't think you should be isolating. It's not good to isolate when you're not doing well with your program. We all have pain, trust me, I know all about that. I have pain you can't imagine, it's so bad. My pain is so bad no one can begin to imagine what I experience in a day. I wouldn't wish that on anybody. I don't even know why you're in this program, you're so beautiful and all. Uh, I'm a little tired, so you probably shouldn't call too late, like after nine or so, but I'll be okay. I just need a little rest. Talk soon. Bye-bye."

"Hi, Rachel, this is Becky. I'm Becky Sue, at 212-477-1232. I'm serious about this program, but if I don't have *support*, I see people not calling me back, not doing anything, and I don't know why, you know, what's wrong, you know. I'm trying to help you, but you won't help *me*? That's hateful. I, I-I-I'll tell you this, I have more days of abstinence than you do, so who the hell are you to look down on me? Where do you get off, missy? Jesus fuckin' Christ, because I-I called *you*, I called Carol, I called—well, I did—Mary wants to speak to me, and Robert and Vicky have both spoken to me. But I don't know what you all want me to say that you don't call me back. You know, what, I'm not *perfect* enough for you? I'm sorry. I'm really, really sorry that I can't be more perfect than I am.

I'm a very, very sick girl—you shouldn't have what I have. I have a right, because whatever is wrong with me, I don't know what it is with you, if it's bingeing or purging, whatever you do—that's somewhat controllable, but my hip is not controllable. I have no control over my arthritis and artificial limbs and pain. I don't have control over that, you understand? *I don't have control over that!* You have no idea what it's like. Just thank your lucky stars you don't know my pain. You hear me, Rachel? I have to wait for a ride in the pouring *rain*, stuck in this motherfucking wheelchair, getting soaked to the goddamn bone just so I can get to all these goddamn *doctors*, who never even pick up the goddamn *phone* when all their hands seem to work just fine to me. They go to school to become doctors for all those years, but they don't understand what pain means, they have no idea, those fuckers. Treating me like I'm an animal, like I'm a piece of meat, I-I-I'm *nothing?* Nothing, nothing, *NOTHING?* For starters, how am I supposed to trust all these people when they don't even call me *back...?* So there's that, too. Um, all right, anyway. Let me go now. Thanks for calling. Bye-bye."

Courtney Eldridge lives in New York City.