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“Nothing this funny, erudite, and moving has come along in ages. Delson is a true talent, generous with his characters and lovingly describing the world they inhabit. Here is a novel with invention and energy on every page.” —Andrew Sean Greer, author of *The Confessions of Max Tivoli*

“*Maynard & Jennica* is courageously hilarious and intimately human. Rudolph Delson is one of the most exciting new writers I have come across in a long time, and this book is the reason we should all read first novels.” —Mohsin Hamid, author of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

“Delson’s prose shimmers when describing the magic and romance of falling in love in New York.” —*Publishers Weekly*

“Delson’s clever debut is sharp and energetic, a highly original contemporary love story set against New York’s invigorating urban landscape.” —*Booklist*

“Boldly inventive . . . this work has something fresh that needs to be embraced and will resonate with a wide audience.” —*Library Journal*

MAYNARD & JENNICA

Rudolph Delson

When Rudolph Delson was twelve years old, he sent a letter to Stephen King, telling him that he wanted to be a novelist. “I tried my best,” Delson says now, “but I guess it took twenty years.” In the meantime, he went to college and wrote one-man plays about adolescence in California; he lived in Berlin and supported himself by selling

subscriptions of his (by turns lyrical and risqué) personal letters; he studied law in New York City and then worked (by turns vigorously and miserably) at a law firm.

Then, one afternoon when he was still in law school, as he was walking through Brooklyn (headed to the co-op to buy orange juice) he realized that he wanted to write about a misanthrope named Maynard. “When I turned the corner at Seventh Avenue I was thinking about nothing in particular, and by the end of the block I was snickering about the idea of actually naming a character Maynard. It was about six months later that I realized that his girlfriend should be a romantic named Jennica, and that their story should be a novel.” He quit his job at the law firm on the eve of his thirtieth birthday to finish **MAYNARD & JENNICA (Houghton Mifflin, September 18, 2007)**. It’s at once a simple, timeless romance and a devilishly funny compendium of our talkative times. Translation rights have already been sold in five countries, and film rights have been optioned by Scott Rudin.

In **MAYNARD & JENNICA**, Delson has given us a pair of lovers who are human, flawed, complex—at once eccentric and deeply familiar. Maynard is a defeated musician who makes a hobby of filming the fashion faux pas of subway commuters. He meets Jennica, a lovely and nostalgic Californian, who wants to live an “illustrious” New York life, but who calculates that she’s been lonesome 68.53% of the time. In addition to illuminating and skewering much that is true and often horrifying about our times (from our obsessions with hip-hop, yoga, and real estate to our collective post-9/11 response) **MAYNARD & JENNICA** introduces an astonishing number of narrators—35 in all: Maynard’s cunning grandmother, Maynard’s longsuffering mother, Maynard’s shabby lawyer. And Jennica’s wry parents, her compost-happy brother, and her long-lost best friend. Plus a wild-haired German con artist and a bombastic hip-hop impresario. Even the emergency brake on the number 6 train gets its say.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Rudolph Delson was raised in San Jose, California, and went to Stanford University and N.Y.U. Law School. Except for a brief stint in Berlin, where he earned money by selling subscriptions to his occasionally risqué personal letters, he has made a living, miscellaneously, as a paralegal, a law clerk, and a litigation associate. He quit his job at the law firm on the eve of his thirtieth birthday to write this, his first novel. Translation rights have already sold in five countries, and film rights to *Maynard & Jennica* have been optioned by Scott Rudin. Rudolph Delson lives in Brooklyn.

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**Questions and Answers with
Rudolph Delson
author of *Maynard & Jennica***

Q: I have the galleys of *Maynard & Jennica* in front of me, and on pages 295 and 296 there is a list of the book's narrators. And there are dozens of them. What brought this on?

A: One pleasure of living in New York—it's maddening and it's a pleasure—is how crowded it always is. Having a big cast of characters and letting all of them have their say are, at least in part, an effort to evoke that pleasure, the pleasure of a crowd.

Very early in the book a scene plays out in a New York City subway car—it's August, the train is stalled, the air conditioning is out, the passengers are feuding. Maynard and Jennica are in that car, watching each other; but with the many voices and the different witnesses reporting on the scene, the reader doesn't know what will happen, or if Maynard and Jennica will even meet. And that's the pleasure of a crowd. You board a subway car; it might be full of strangers you will never see again; or there might be some man or woman on board whom you are about to fall in love with, and who will make you very happy. Or very unhappy.

Q: Of course, whether they end up happy or unhappy, in a romantic comedy the question is . . . You made an unhappy face when I said "romantic comedy."

A: I'm sorry.

Q: Well, the book is about Maynard and Jennica and their feelings for each other, right? It's a comedy about romance, right?

A: Absolutely. Ask me what you were going to ask me, but later on, don't forget to ask me about romantic comedies.

Q: Okay. Who is Maynard Gogarty?

A: Maynard is a misanthrope. He's full of vitriol and high sentence. But when the novel opens, Maynard has decided to make amends, to try to be nice. Which is hard for him because he has so many scruples, aesthetic scruples, which he has rolled together into a theory of "dignity." He dresses like a man from another era—always in a jacket and a coat. He wants to write piano music, but he doesn't quite have the talent, and so he supports himself with all sorts of schemes. The problem is that his schemes center less on making money than on making fun of people. In the late 1980s, for example, Maynard

could not believe how bad the coffee was that people in Manhattan were willing to drink in the morning. He decided that he could make it rich off that—not by selling Manhattanites a better cup of coffee, but by making an equally bad breakfast muffin. He’s a native New Yorker who hates New Yorkers. But who wants to make amends.

Q: And Jennica Green?

A: Jennica is a romantic. And, in contrast to Maynard, as the novel opens, Jennica has begun to realize that she needs to be more shrewd because she is not getting everything she dreamed of out of her life. She grew up in middle-class, suburban California and thought of New York as the height of American illustriousness. She takes out enormous loans to go to college and finds herself, in the mid-1990s, living in an expensive little apartment in Greenwich Village. She’s unable to fall in love and unable to afford the life that she wants—of fashion and culture and intellectual engagement—because she works long hours at a bank. She is utterly sincere, utterly comfortable expressing herself in the vernacular, and genuinely perplexed about why she’s so unhappy.

Q: We also meet Maynard’s and Jennica’s entire families. But looking at page 295, we also meet some other families. The Hanamotos—who is Nadine Hanamoto?

A: Nadine is Jennica’s long-lost friend from California. A high school friend, from the 1980s. But in the years since Jennica left California, Nadine has actually gotten engaged and had a daughter and bought a house—all the things Jennica wants for herself.

Q: And then there are all of these other people, these other New Yorkers. Puppy Jones?

A: He’s a hip-hop performer who makes a fortune by sampling Maynard’s music. He sets it to a beat, and adds, as lyrics, a list of words that rhyme. That’s on pages 146 through 148. Three weeks of my life were lost to compiling that list.

Q: And on page 296 we also have a whole family of Kaganovas. Who is Ana Kaganova?

A: Ana is a fraud and a lunatic. She’s also a photographer, and as the plot unfolds, we see that she and Maynard have a long history. But mainly, she’s a fraud and a lunatic, with an unwieldy German accent.

Q: I see. Where did you learn to imitate a German accent?

A: Well, my mother is German. And I lived in Berlin in 1998 and 1999, which was when I made my first effort to support myself as a writer. It’s a good story, that time in Berlin.

I wasn’t able to make any money freelancing, so I wound up selling subscriptions to my personal letters. I had a couple of dozen subscribers, all of them in America, most of them in California. The deal was that, for \$200, they would each get one letter every two

weeks for one year. What can I say? It was 1998; people in California had money to burn. My friends signed up, my parents' friends signed up, strangers who saw my advertisements signed up. I made enough money to pay the rent on a tiny flat in the old East Berlin. I spent my time that year befriending hipsters and lunatics and . . . shambling expatriate wrecks, and then writing letters about them. Every two weeks I would compose a letter, photocopy it for my subscribers, and mail it to America. So that's when I really learned to imitate Germans.

Q: I was supposed to ask you about romantic comedies. Why did you make a face when I asked you about them?

A: Here is the thing about romantic comedies. Just as each speaker in *Maynard & Jennica* has different diction and a different spirit, each also has different dreams for the future. And it's true, Jennica, with great sincerity, aspires to the dream that has motivated the heroine of every romantic comedy. She wants to fall in love. And the half of the book that concerns Jennica's family and friends has the mood of a romantic comedy. But Maynard inhabits a different sort of comedy—one more in line with the great misanthropes of literature. The characters in Maynard's half of the novel aren't really living out a romantic comedy—they're living out a misanthropic comedy.

Anyway, *comedy* seems like a more neutral term, and a more theatrical one.

Q: Theatrical?

A: When playwrights compose a story for the stage, they can rely on the fact that every actor will speak with a different timbre and cadence, will have a different nose, a different slouch, a different laugh. Which makes it easier for playwrights to keep their characters distinct and thus to create more characters. I always envied that about playwrights, and I wanted to write a novel with some theatricality to it. A comedy of innumerable conflicting motives. Hence the cast of characters on pages 295 and 296.

Q: By the way, I'm getting the sense that you, Rudolph Delson, are writing both the Q half and the A half of this dialogue.

A: My publisher tells me that's how it's done. It seems very Dave Barry to me. Like, Dave Barry circa 1987.

Q: Oh? Is Dave Barry an influence for you?

A: Um.

Q: Well, if not Dave Barry, then who?

What—a list? Among the living, Joan Didion and Philip Roth and Alan Hollinghurst. Among the recently dead, W. G. Sebald and Kenneth Koch and Saul Bellow and Eudora Welty. Among the long dead, Proust and Georg Büchner and Shakespeare and Horace

and I suppose Emily Brontë. When I was younger, Anne Carson and Spalding Gray and Woody Allen. And Robert Benchley, whom no one reads anymore for some reason, just like they don't read H. L. Mencken. And when I was even younger, Stephen King.

Q: Stephen King? How young?

A: Like, ten. I didn't really enjoy reading until about fourth grade, when I started checking adult books out of the library, from the Fantasy and Horror section. They had a little black sticker on the spine, above the Dewey decimal numbers, which I think was supposed to indicate that they were *evil*. Anyway, I discovered Stephen King.

His novel *It* was the first book I bought with my own money. In hardcover, no less—three weeks of allowance money! And I think that by the time I finished *It*, I wanted to be a writer. I was eleven years old, what did I know? Just because you love to read doesn't mean it's a good idea for you to write. Anyway, I sent a letter to Stephen King, telling him I wanted to be a novelist and asking, would he meet with me? He wrote back a very polite letter, wishing me luck and telling me to stay the hell away from Bangor.

Q: So, are you Maynard?

Everyone asks me that, and no one ever asks me if I am Jennica.

Q: So, are you Jennica?

Which is an easier question, because then I can do my Flaubert impersonation and say, "*La Jennica, c'est moi.*" And I've successfully avoided the issue.

Q: And why do you want to avoid the issue?

Because when people ask me if I am Maynard or if I am Jennica, and I say no, they seem disappointed. And I think the reason they're disappointed is because if I am Maynard or if I am Jennica, then that explains why I wrote the book. I never know what to do when someone needs to know why I wrote the book. It makes me nervous. When someone asks me, "Why did you write this book?" I feel like I'm being accused of a crime.

I guess what people want to know is whether *Maynard & Jennica* is autobiographical, or semi-autobiographical, or surreptitiously nonfictional, or "based on actual events." And it's not—not to any significant degree or in any systematic way. I did attend a horrifying luau in Hawaii, just as Maynard and Jennica do. An ingenious friend of mine did call himself "Puppy Jones" for a while. I did once witness a pigeon on top of a whirlybird. And the instant I saw it, I thought to myself, "Well, that's how I can end the book."

Q: So, if you won't tell me *why* you wrote it, at least tell me *how* you did it.

A: In 1999, in Berlin, living in a joyless apartment, making money by writing personal letters—I needed a source of income that wasn't writing. As a matter of self-respect. So, to make a long story short, I decided to go to law school in New York. My plan was to write a novel during law school, sell it, and never actually be a lawyer *for real*. But it didn't work. So I concocted another plan—a sort of last ditch effort—and, if it didn't work, I would make myself give up on literature for good. As a matter of self-respect.

I would go to work at a white-shoe law firm in midtown Manhattan—the job with the cruelest hours, but the highest salary. I would work eighty hours a week. I would have no time for girls or exercise or anything, but I would live frugally, and I would squirrel away half of every paycheck. And then I would quit, live off of my savings, and finish my book. That was my plan. So from November of 2003 until March of 2005, I worked as an associate in a litigation department of a law firm in Manhattan. And indeed, I worked eighty hours a week. And indeed, I had no time for girls, or exercise, or, some weeks, sleeping. But indeed, I squirreled away half of every paycheck. And at 5 P.M. on March 25, 2005, the day before I turned thirty, I quit. Handed in my resignation and set about finishing the novel I'd been trying to write since 2002. It took about a year. But at about 5 P.M. on May 8, 2006, Anjali Singh at Houghton Mifflin called me to say she'd like to buy the book I'd written, *Maynard & Jennica*. To make a long story short.

Q: So are you working as a lawyer these days, or writing?

A: Writing. I am so grateful and so relieved to say that I am writing.

Q: Another comedy?

A: It's a novel about a troll.

Q: A troll. As in the creature that lives under bridges in Scandinavia and kidnaps children?

A: Well, the troll lives in San Jose, California. But, yes, bridges, kidnappings.

Q: It sounds like *It*.

A: Do you suppose they'll have to put a little black sticker above the Dewey decimal numbers in the San Jose Public Library? That would give me some dark writerly pleasure, to know that the librarians in my hometown had labeled me as *evil*.