

DAVID MOLteni

The Bee Eater, 2016
Oil on canvas, 30 x 34 in



COURTESY WINFIELD GALLERY

ED PARK

Tell Me Your Dreams

1 My wife is a corporation. I hear her say this to friends over dinner. We eat with our hands at the solid Ethiopian. The ownership has changed but the food is exactly the same. I don't like the wine but I like everything else.

This is a strange part of town where the avenues become streets, the streets become plazas, the birds look confused. Our friends, another couple, are also apparently a corporation. They run a day spa an hour outside the city. It's supposed to be very good. They're thinking of moving because the commute is murder. "But it's a reverse commute," I say, and they look at me like, "Doesn't he know anything?"

We talk about the five-month drought, a movie three of us have seen, a movie none of us has seen but have heard good things about, a spate of recent weird crimes, the president and his mixed record on an assortment of topics. We return to the drought again but this time say it's nature's way. Sometimes I think we all talk too much.

A complex discussion of taxes comes next, allowing me to zen out. I stare at my bottle of Ethiopian beer, the squiggly writing on the label. Before we leave the restaurant, I see them place a batch of business cards on the table by the door. I want to say, in jest, "Can I be a corporation, too?" But the right opportunity never presents itself. Then the rain comes down, for the first time in months.

2 My wife is a corporation and you'll never guess her line of work.

Unless you're in the same racket.
(Wait for it.)
She's a psychic!

3 Let me ask you, what kind of man would marry a woman who claims the gift of second sight, ESP, clairvoyance, term it what you will? Never mind her eyebrows, Frida and Kahlo.

I've never been called stupid, which doesn't mean I'm not. I have an advanced degree in ethics from Rue University, where I wrote my thesis on the concept of reverse psychology. This is the science of getting someone to do what you want by suggesting they do the exact opposite. It's more of an art than a science. I don't want to brag but I did groundbreaking work. That paper still gets cited, though less frequently as the years go by, I find.

In my early days I'd leave little flyers all over the quad, "Tell me your dreams—\$5 for a half hour," with my phone number and the address of the subbasement of the psychology building. Grubby undergrads came by at odd hours, looking for beer money. "You can leave if you like—go ahead," I'd say, after giving a fiver. That was the first experiment. They were supposed to accept the bill, then stick around, uncomfortable with the idea of getting something for nothing. Sixteen of the first twenty participants simply said thanks and split. Come the end of week one, I was out a hundred dollars that I didn't have. The department chair gave me a stern wordless look. There was no week two!

Eventually I graduated. I followed my girlfriend, Jess, to Boston on a whim. Jess wasn't actually my girlfriend, just someone who stalked me and whom I eventually stalked back. Had the stalkings been aligned, we might have been okay. As things stood, the situation fizzled in our new city, and I found myself at loose ends. My ethics degree wasn't opening any doors. I wanted to be—what? A life coach told me to say the first three things that came to mind. I said television critic, carpenter, first violinist of the Cleveland Symphony Orchestra, despite not owning a TV, tool kit, or violin. I have still never been to Cleveland.