

OCTOBER

It was that time of year. As surely as leaves were dropping from the maples and oaks around campus, scores of emails of a certain genre came fluttering into his inbox. Donna swept most away before he even saw them, but some would escape her periodic purges. These he would delete himself, though every once in a while, he clicked on one out of curiosity or boredom, or just by accident. They all had similar titles. *Duquesne Digest*, *Northwestern Law Notes*, *HLS Happenings* (one would have thought Harvard could do better than that), and so on. And they all had similar “exciting news to share” about how they were preparing students “for leadership in law practice,” or something else equally grandiose and clichéd. There would be smiling headshots of newly hired faculty members (always “leaders in their field” doing “cutting-edge scholarship”); gushy accounts of students winning obscure moot court competitions; and descriptions of the latest classroom renovations or other enhancements of a school’s physical plant.

Law porn. That’s what someone had dubbed it years ago, when schools first began spamming each other with these emails, and both the practice and the appellation had stuck. The mid-autumn timing of each school’s fusillade was, of course, no coincidence: The emails, sent to all deans and professors, arrived around the same time as the *Lex News* reputational survey, and their sole purpose was to try to sway the rankings. Once a few schools started doing it, many others followed, producing a deluge so great that the way most people dealt with it was by dispatching all of the missives directly

to their trash folders. Inundation resulting in neutralization. BLS had its own entry in this derby, but he viewed the whole exercise as so pointless that he had told Barker to scrap it. Barker pleaded with him to reconsider. Every top school sent one out, he said, and he didn't want BLS to "miss an opportunity to be part of the conversation." Or some such bullshit. Also, Barker said, the *BLS Bulletin* had an open rate of 9 percent, which he deemed "fabulous."

He relented and granted the *Bulletin* a stay of execution, and in fact the latest version had gone out just moments ago, meaning it was crossing paths in the ether with ones from Minnesota, UVA, and WashU that showed up on his screen in quick succession. *Ping, ping, ping*. Delete, delete, delete. Sitting in his office, with a stack of reports to plow through before that afternoon's faculty meeting, he executed a quarter turn in his chair and grabbed the first. It was a memorandum to the Curriculum Committee from Simpson, who was proposing an upper-level course titled The Law of Martian Settlement. As a specialist in the law of the sea, he knew he ought to be more sympathetic to the idea, but it just seemed so . . . out there. He grabbed the next report and got in 30 minutes of uninterrupted reading before Donna buzzed him.

"Leclerc is on the line."

Looking at his phone, he debated not picking up, but then punched the speakerphone button. Before he could even say hello, he was greeted with a torrent of . . . of . . . He listened closely. Leclerc was agitated and speaking exceptionally fast, and he had no idea if he was speaking French or English. He picked up the handset to see if the words became clearer, but they might as well have been Catalan.

Ping, ping, ping, ping.

Odd. The deans of several law schools had emailed him.

"I don't know what to say, Paul," he told Leclerc, which he thought was a decent stall that had the virtue of being true.

The subject lines of the emails were all basically the same: “BLS Bulletin” or “Your Bulletin.” Leclerc, who seemed prone to calling at particularly bad times, was continuing to rant, so he began clicking the emails open. Each was short and cryptic. “This will get people’s attention!” Chicago’s dean wrote. “Is this part of your expanded practical training?” the dean from Wisconsin asked. “I know it when I see it,” wrote Tulane’s, followed by a smiley face. Yale’s dean simply wrote, “FYI,” followed by a link. It was to *Above the Law*.

“Paul, Paul,” he said sharply, “this sounds important, and we should discuss it in person. I’m going to ask Donna to schedule a meeting.” He barked at Donna over the intercom, hung up on the call, and clicked on the link.

A photo loaded on his screen. It showed a man and a woman in a cave-like space. The man was suspended upside down from the ceiling by a chain. More chains were shackling his hands and feet, his mouth was gagged, and he was blindfolded. Tight, glossy black material covered most of his body, with one exception: his crotch, which was not covered at all. Standing near him was a woman in a mask. She was also clad head to toe in tight, glossy black material, with two areas excepted: her crotch and her breasts, which were on full view. She was holding a whip.

“Legal Education Gets Kinky,” read the large *ATL* headline. And then, in only slightly smaller font, the subhead: “BLS: Bondage, Latex, and S&M?” The accompanying story had a lead that, as the saying goes, wrote itself:

Brown University Law School has given new meaning to “law porn,” or perhaps it is just the first school to finally take the term seriously. The BLS Bulletin that went out today—one of scores of tedious email newsletters that schools bombard each other with at this time of year—was less tedious than most. Sure, it was peppered with links to boring tidbits on the school’s website

about faculty members and students, but three of the links went, well, elsewhere.

Click on a photo of BLS Dean Charles Dean, for example, and you'll be taken not to his CV, but to an instructional video on "dungeon bondage" at kink.com. (Is "hardcore rope bondage" a prerequisite, we wonder?) We don't think that's Dean Dean hanging from the ceiling, but there's not a lot to go on to make a positive ID. Then there is what would seem to be a link to an item about BLS's annual securities law conference (yawn!), which instead takes you to a discussion forum on lesbian foot worship (yes!). Finally, would you like to read about the new emphasis on financial literacy in BLS's curriculum? No, neither did we, but fortunately that link took us to a page at an online sex toy emporium featuring "Bartender Miguel," a 7-inch dildo with a "realistic tip and veined shaft." It's also, we were relieved to learn, phthalate-free.

No doubt other schools will now try to match . . .

His face flushed hot as a mixture of astonishment and anger coursed through his body. Emails from myriad .edu domains were now arriving at such a rate that the pings began to run together as a single sound. For a brief moment, he allowed himself to think this was all a huge mistake, or some kind of joke. But many of the emails pouring in were simply forwards of the *BLS Bulletin*, with comments like "you might want to check a few of these links." So he did, and when the images that appeared were just as *ATL* had described them, he plunged back into the abyss of fury and humiliation.

"Donna!" he screamed, not even bothering with the intercom, and she came running into his office.

"Oh my," she said, looking at the wall behind him.

He had been so discombobulated that he had accidentally hit the key that fed the image on his computer screen to the giant monitor mounted on his wall. Displayed there now, realistically veined shaft and all, was a 2-foot-long image of the Bartender Miguel dildo.

