

Real Estate 2007

WHEN WILL THE BUBBLE BURST? AND OTHER BURNING QUESTIONS

Los Angeles

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On Top Chefs, Old Dogs & Playing the Jerk

Wicked

Judith Regan revolutionized the book industry—but that was before she signed O.J. and descended into Los Angeles

When everything began to go haywire over at publisher Judith Regan's company in November, six months after she'd moved her imprint to Los Angeles from New York, her book catalog lay tucked away in offices, on desk piles and in trash bins. On its cover was a black-and-white still from an obscure 1930 film called *Madam Satan*. It featured a woman in a glittering mask and a velvet gown lounging on a couch, a lit cigarette in her left hand. On the catalog's third and fourth pages was an aerial midnight view of Los Angeles. *Madam Satan*, it followed, was touching down. ¶ It was an image that Regan had been propagating for years in Manhattan. The femme fatale of the publishing world, she had been turning heads—not to mention stomachs—since starting at Simon & Schuster in 1987. Books by Rush Limbaugh and Howard Stern were early hits. They made Regan famous for injecting a tabloid sensibility into the staid and insular publishing industry. In 1994, Rupert Murdoch gave Regan a multimedia deal that included her own imprint, opportunities to develop film and TV projects, and her own television talk show. She continued her brilliant record of producing best-sellers with diet books (Barry Sears's *The Zone*), political screeds (from leftist Michael Moore's *Stupid White Men* to conservative Sean Hannity's *Deliver Us from Evil*), coffee-table books (Rachel Ashwell's *Shabby Chic*), memoirs (from Marilyn Manson's *The Long Hard Road out of Hell* to Jenna Jameson's *How to Make Love Like a Porn Star*), and fiction (Gregory Maguire's *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West* and Wally Lamb's *I Know This Much Is True*). Regan aspired to be a new kind of publisher, one whose narratives could translate across all media, from TV series to films to merchandise.

By Strawberry Saroyan
Illustration by Mark Summers

She also became known for her abrasive and provocative personality. "One of the 50 most loathsome New Yorkers," pronounced the *New York Press*. "A foul-mouthed tyrant," echoed *Vanity Fair*. ¶ But Regan's move west signaled if not a change in image, then an almost naive sense of possibility. For years she'd been talking about moving into film and TV more aggressively, but now she seemed to believe she could become more herself in L.A. "It had a promised land aspect," says one former employee. Which is why it was surprising that when she arrived in May 2006, most people were not aware she was in town. There were no big announcements in *Variety*, few meet-and-greets with Industry bigwigs, and almost no sightings at high-profile parties. ¶ Then on November 14 came the bombshell: Regan would be publishing O.J. Simpson's *If I Did It*—his account of how he *would* have murdered his ex-wife Nicole Brown and her friend Ron Goldman—and interviewing him for a two-night Fox special. The public outcry was immediate. Thousands deluged Fox and ReganBooks, its parent company HarperCollins, and its parent News Corporation with angry calls and e-mails. Blow-by-blow coverage of the controversy ran everywhere. Even Fox's Geraldo Rivera and Bill O'Reilly chimed in. The latter called for a boycott of advertisers who underwrote the special, in effect arguing for the picketing of his own company.



Six days after Regan's announcement, the project was off. Murdoch called it "ill considered" but vowed no one would be fired. Fast-forward three weeks. On December 15, after Regan allegedly told a HarperCollins lawyer that "a Jewish cabal" was undermining her, she was out. "Judith Regan Terminated," read the headline on the two-sentence press release. HarperCollins CEO and Regan's immediate superior, Jane Friedman, issued the notice, but Murdoch himself reportedly pulled the trigger. In January it was announced that ReganBooks would be shuttered and that projects in the pipeline would be published under the HC imprint. All but a handful of the staff were let go, with the L.A. offices officially closing down on March 1.

Few doubt that Regan, who is 53, will resurface soon. Although she has not spoken publicly, Regan is telling friends that she has lined up investors for a multimedia company. Still, the question remains: How had the woman who's made it her business to go right up to the line of popular taste—but never cross it—gotten it so wrong this time? And did it have anything to do with her move to Los Angeles?

The first public word that Judith Regan was moving to L.A. came in an April 12, 2005, article on the front page of *The New York Times*, in which she said that she wanted to be closer to the film and TV industries. The idea that book publishing needed to be in New York was no longer true, she declared. But the comment

that generated the most heat was that she "would like to create a cultural center" in Los Angeles. The implication was twofold: L.A. had no culture, and Regan, of all people, was the person to provide it. Within the week *The New York Observer* ran a cartoon featuring Regan as Gertrude Stein and her authors Jenna Jameson and former baseball slugger Jose Canseco congregating at an "illiterati" café.

The reasons for her move were more complex. Some were personal. Six years earlier Regan had divorced financier Robert Kleinschmidt, with whom she had had a daughter. To retain custody, Regan had to remain in New York State. In 2005, her daughter entered boarding school, and custody was no longer an issue. Regan's affair with then-New York City police commissioner Bernard Kerik also played a role, say friends. Regan had fallen for the married Kerik after she signed him to write his memoir, *The Lost Son*, which she published in 2001. The relationship ended after a year, when Regan discovered that Kerik had another lover and that his wife was pregnant. After President Bush nominated Kerik to be Secretary of Homeland Security in 2004, his affairs became a tabloid sensation. But it was not so much the press about the relationship that drained Regan emotionally, she told friends. Kerik, she claimed, was stalking her. Regan was convinced he'd had her office bugged. Whether this was true, Kerik certainly behaved erratically toward Regan after the breakup. One night the publisher handed the phone to one of her authors while Kerik, who had been calling incessantly, was on the line. "He starts weeping like a two-year-old baby," says the author, who was so concerned for Regan's well-being that he hid her phone recordings and e-mails from Kerik in a safe place.

The fundamental reason for Regan's move to Los Angeles was that she had a fierce desire to be in front of the camera. In the words of former literary agent Lucianne Goldberg, who has known Regan since the '80s, "She's always wanted to be as big a star, if not bigger, than the people she published."

There were also professional reasons for the move. Regan had sold her shares in ReganBooks back to News Corporation a few years ago. As a result, her imprint was no longer a quasi-independent entity in the company but an official arm of HarperCollins. The shift required Regan to report to Friedman; in the past she was free to consult directly with Murdoch. Regan and Friedman loathed each other. The women's personalities are diametrically opposed—Friedman is formal and nonconfrontational. Regan would insult Friedman openly to her staff. "Whenever she'd get upset with Jane Friedman, she'd start yelling about how the Jews rule New York," says one former editor. By relocating to Los Angeles, Regan would be 3,000 miles away from the woman whose job it was to keep her in line.

But the fundamental reason for Regan's move had little to do with any of this: She had a fierce desire to be in front of the camera. This began in the mid-'80s, when she worked as a producer for Geraldo Rivera and made several appearances on syndicated news shows. It continued with her Fox talk show, variously known as *That Regan Woman* and *Judith Regan Tonight*, which Murdoch kept on the air until 2002 despite disastrously low ratings. Then there were her cover appearances on her catalogs (most recently as a Jessica Rabbit-esque illustration in a man's white shirt and black stilettos) and her book jackets (she is the model for *Redesigning 50: The No-Plastic-Surgery Guide to 21st-Century Age Defiance*). She also showed a propensity for selling herself. In 1996, TriStar optioned the story of her tumultuous divorce; years later she shopped her relationship with Kerik to production companies. In the words of former literary agent Lucianne Goldberg, who has known Regan since the '80s, "She's always wanted to be as big a star, if not bigger, than the people she published."

All this could be taken as back-burner vanity, just a bit of fun in the mix, but colleagues say Regan showed undue devotion to such projects and came to see herself as fitting in with the Industry—the culture, the people, the way of life. "She wanted to go to Hollywood to be among her own," says a former ReganBooks editor. "She thinks the book world doesn't understand her. She found a certain kind of kinship in L.A."

"She's obsessed by celebrity, and she's obsessed by L.A.," echoes a book agent who has worked with her on numerous projects.

Or in the words of her 25-year-old son, Patrick Buckley, "I think she sees her life as a television show."

Fame Fatale:

Regan's tabloid sensibility and brilliant packaging transformed the publishing industry



The first few times I met Regan, at a book signing for Jenna Jameson and at a dinner party for her author Toni Bentley, she was charming and inspiring. In person, Regan is dovelike; she perches wherever she sits. This soft quality is surprising in someone whose image and manner are otherwise hard. (“I sacrificed a lot,” she once barked at me, referring to the effect her career had on her body. “I didn’t work out.”) Her voice—a throaty vibrato that commands attention—makes up for it. One night she called and told me about her difficulties trying to buy a motel to house her L.A. offices. She had the Saharan on Sunset in mind. “Between a titty bar and a library—that just about sums it up for me,” she said and chuckled. In other words, she got it. She understood the absurdity of her own image. I became convinced her reputation was due to that age-old double standard: If you’re brash and confident and a man, you’re a hero; if you’re brash and confident and a woman, you’re a bitch.

But the more time I spent with Regan, the more complicated my view became. One night at the Four Seasons, Regan sat down at her desk and opened her calendar to the current week. “Every

day is insane,” she told me. “Like, what’s today? Look at this, this is Tuesday.” She pointed to a page scrawled with back-to-back meetings. “This would have been an interesting week to follow me,” she continued, typing on her laptop. “Because my best friend killed himself.” It was my first “Judith” moment, the sort of verbal non sequitur that makes you question your own sanity and then hers. “Um. See this?” She summoned me to the computer screen. “I have 1,424 unread e-mails. Okay? That’s like a typical day for me.”

Her cell phone rang. “Hello, it’s Judith. How are you? I am beyond, beyond crazed.” She hung up. Back to me: “I had dinner with him on Friday night in Santa Barbara,” she said about her dead friend, literary agent Al Lowman, “and he was all fucked up, crying.” Type, type. “Um. Yeah, so that was interesting. It happened Sunday morning.” She jumped up and began to complain about a HarperCollins lawyer (“He’s been there for 35 years. He says, ‘Well, we’ve never done a contract like that.’ ‘Well, do you have a problem with that?’”), about the company’s aesthetic sense (“The stupid idiots at HarperCollins rented space for my L.A. offices. I walked in. I walked out. It’s a disgusting space”), and about hot flashes (“I need to work in a refrigerator. I’m not skinny. I’m fat. I’m menopausal, and I took out my radiators in my New York apartment because I hate heat”). For a reporter this was gold. It wasn’t until later, though, that I realized I had



Shock Value:

Porn star Jenna Jameson, disc jockey Howard Stern, and rocker Marilyn Manson were just some of Regan's unlikely best-sellers



just been privy to the Judith Regan Show. She was playing to me, the human camera.

Regan has been starring in her own show since childhood. The daughter of schoolteachers, she grew up on Long Island. Her mother, by her account, was the taskmaster, and her father, movie star handsome, was a gentler soul. Regan was the middle child of five siblings, all of whom are high achievers. One is a spinal surgeon; another manages an arts education program; another is a published author. "She was always looking for that bit of wow," says a childhood friend. As a kid, Regan says, she eschewed feminine chores like ironing in favor of mowing the lawn and was the first female president of her junior high school. After graduating from Vassar College, Regan worked as a secretary at Harvard. In Boston she met David Buckley, a psychiatrist, and the two had Patrick in 1981. She took a job as a reporter for the *National Enquirer*. "I loved that job. Loved it," she told me. "I learned more from that job than any I've ever had." She went on to work at several magazines, including *Woman's World*, and as a producer for Geraldo Rivera and *Entertainment Tonight*. Her relationship with Buckley had been stormy for years—he was convicted of drug trafficking and spent time in prison—and she would later accuse him of physically abusing her (charges he has denied). They broke up after Regan gave birth to a daughter, who died shortly after delivery. Regan found herself a single mother. In 1987, when she had an idea for a book on the American family—a sort of love letter to the idea of Ozzie and Harriet—she pitched it to Jack Romanos, then president of Simon & Schuster's mass market division. The book never happened, but Romanos hired her as a consultant first, then an editor. He had a hunch she'd be good at it.

It was several years before Regan hit the jackpot. Rumors swirled about an affair with Romanos; Regan denied them and later claimed he sexually harassed her. "There was a period where people were like, What the fuck is she doing?" says Dana Isaacson, who worked for Regan from 1997 to 1999 and knew her from her early days in publishing. "They soon found out." Regan started churning out blockbuster after blockbuster. Rush Limbaugh's *The Way Things Ought to Be* stayed at number one on the *New York Times* best-seller list for 24 weeks in 1992; the next year his *See, I Told You So* sold more than 2 million copies. Howard Stern's *Private Parts* also topped the best-seller list in 1993. "After that, the tone was set," says Regan's sister Maureen. "Those are books that save the fiscal year," says Isaacson. They also made many in publishing wince. Regan had a sense of where the culture was going and was able to not only ride the wave but help create it. She'd signed Stern when he had a following but was hardly a phenomenon. She signed Limbaugh just as the talk-radio culture of political vitriol was in its infancy. Publishing books by the World Wrestling Federation's stars proved equally savvy in the sense that they were for people who, quote-unquote, didn't read. Regan was changing the industry.

Sometimes Regan seemed to create trends out of whole cloth. Barry Sears's *The Zone*, released in 1995, was a number one best-seller and led to ten sequels; the series has sold more than 5 million copies. Regan had met the research scientist while he was treating her. Rachel Ashwell's *Shabby Chic*, which came out in 1996, helped to boost the Malibu-based decorator from someone who had a few stores into a mogul overseeing a home furnishings empire. It's too simplistic to say that Regan was responsible for the recent mainstreaming of porn, but she played a significant

role. Within ten months she published five books about sex and the sex industry, culminating in Jameson's 2004 memoir. She had no problem working the other side of the fence: In 2006, she published Rabbi Shmuley Boteach's *Hating Women*, an attack on misogynistic American culture. She was just as equal opportunity when it came to politics. Michael Moore's *Stupid White Men* was so successful that Regan counterprogrammed it by releasing *Michael Moore Is a Big Fat Stupid White Man*—and doubling her profit. Like Murdoch, Regan worshiped not at the altar of left or right, pornography or purity. Her religion was commerciality.

Above all, Regan was a brilliant and counterintuitive packager. Because her ideas were unconventional, she often faced stiff resistance from HarperCollins, but she usually got her way. She transformed Jameson's memoir into an art object with a pulp cover, glossy photographs, and collage-style copy by former *New York Times* staffer Neil Strauss. She told designers to take their cues from Tide and other household brands because corporations like Procter & Gamble understood better than anyone what sells. One night she showed me a mock-up for *The Game*, Strauss's guide to the netherworld of pickup artists. The pages had gilded edges, the jacket was faux black leather, and it came with a red ribbon for readers to mark their place—it looked like the Bible. She turned to me and fumed. "Here's what the people in New York say to me: 'We should get a sticker and put all the flap copy on the back.' This is what they come to me and say. I'm appalled. I ask them, 'What do you think I'm doing?'" She couldn't believe HarperCollins was concerned about spending the extra \$20,000 the package would cost.

Yet for all her obsessiveness, Regan had been oddly restless to get out of the book business from the beginning. People who know her from those years say she has always wanted to go Hollywood. "Books always felt like she was slumming," says one former staffer. Right before she signed with Murdoch in 1994, Regan entered negotiations with producer Jon Peters. According to Peters, the money he offered was comparable to what Murdoch proposed. Regan, though, turned him down. Was it the television show Murdoch had tossed in to sweeten the deal? "That's precisely what tipped it," says Peters. "I couldn't give her that."

The talk show, however, did not make Regan a star. It was given difficult time slots, airing deeper into the night, but Regan's personality doomed it. During interviews, she would bring the conversation back to herself at inopportune moments and direct her free-floating hostility at her guests. The multimedia aspect of Regan's deal with Murdoch also didn't pan out the way she'd hoped. As early as 1996, Regan produced the CBS television film *The Siege at Ruby Ridge*, which was based on a book she published, Jess Walters's *Every Knee Shall Bow*, but her efforts to develop theatrical films all failed. Her only TV hit was *Growing Up Gotti* for A&E. The musical *Wicked* was a particular sore point. Regan had published the novel and asked News Corporation to invest in the show, but her superiors refused. Since opening on Broadway in 2003, *Wicked* has grossed more than \$1 million a week. Regan bitterly regrets having lost the nonbook rights. That "will never happen again," she told *The New York Times*. When I asked Regan about synergy one night over dinner, she spit, "Fuck synergy."

Then there was her rage. "She wasn't a team player, and that's putting it mildly," the *New York Daily News* recently quoted Murdoch as saying. Those who have worked for her alternate between terrified passivity and feral anger. According to former

From Regan's point of view, it's not hard to see the appeal of the O.J. Simpson project: It would announce her move to Los Angeles loudly and put into motion her books-to-TV strategy on an impressive scale. Regan touted *If I Did It to friends as the most important book she had ever published.*

staffers, humiliation was a common tactic. Editorial ideas she didn't like were routinely greeted with "Are you retarded?" or "Are you on drugs?" Another former employee says, "She'd leave notes for people saying, 'If you don't get to the bottom of this problem, I'm going to fucking kill you.'" She broke social taboos with zeal. "I have the biggest cock in the building," she was fond of shouting. In a pitch meeting about a book on cholesterol, she told the prospective author that all she wanted to do was have "monkey sex." She referred to one literary agent as "Mr. HIV-Positive," and she often ranted about the "faggot Mafia." She made fun of Latinos and African Americans, imitating one of her black celebrity authors by talking "jive." One former editor says Regan spoke of removing pieces of the Torah from her Jewish neighbors' mezuzahs and replacing them with ripped-up dollar bills.

People who have worked with Regan say her pattern is to shower new employees with attention and approval—this is the "golden child phase"—and then without warning turn on them. "You get about a three-month window where you can say and do no wrong," says Lisa Hamilton, an editor at ReganBooks from late 2002 to mid-2003. "You think, 'This isn't so bad.' Then there's the moment when that shuts down. It's unclear why the switch clicks, but it's all over." That moment occurred for Hamilton after an argument about a chef during an editorial meeting. "We were thinking about doing a cookbook," she says, "and the discussion was about whether a particular chef was good enough to merit his own." Hamilton thought he was; Regan disagreed and started yelling. Hamilton was soon consigned to edit the porn titles. It made no sense, but that was part of the strategy. "She's a master at keeping people off balance," says Isaacson.

In 2003, three ReganBooks staffers complained to HarperCollins's human resources department and were given sizable payouts. After that, the company tried to rein Regan in. A woman named Carrie Freimuth was given the title senior VP/publishing director and placed in ReganBooks to keep an eye on her, but she lasted less than a year. A human resources staffer was given the same desk but lasted less than six months; another was installed but stayed less than a year. Regan was soon back to her old ways. During the time ReganBooks was in L.A., nine employees quit or were fired.

For those who like her, the flip side of Regan's fury is her passion. "She never stops," says her friend Blair Sabol, who has known Regan for 20 years. "She's up [CONTINUED ON PAGE 236]



Wicked

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 155] all night.” Regan explains her relationship with work this way: “I’m really not interested in anything else. If you could cut off my head and put it on a plate, I’d be happy. Because I live in my head—the body is an encumbrance.”

Why was she so passionate about a line of work she said she wanted to get out of? Could it be that Regan had found a way to transfer her own desire for attention, fame, and stardom to her writers? “They all refract different parts of her personality,” says Hamilton. Or as Maureen Regan put it to her sister after hearing Howard Stern on the radio, “There’s a guy on the radio, and he’s the male version of you.” Many of her prominent

ing a woman with a big strap-on, and fisting her.” Regan looked me in the eyes. “See, the career is all about ‘No one’s going to hurt me.’ Metaphorically and literally, she is on top. And she isn’t going to get fucked anymore. *She’s going to do the fucking.*”

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For someone who said she was moving to L.A. to expand into film and TV, Regan’s actions were odd. In the year and a half following her announcement, she hired only one TV person, a relatively inexperienced former CAA agent, and no one to develop film projects. (In contrast, Regan had 22 staffers in L.A. devoted to books, along with 13 in New York.) Regan canceled virtually every meeting her TV person set up or was so late that she sabotaged relationships. In one case, she refused to attend an important meeting because she doesn’t like to do business in the morning. Projects were announced and then never referred to again. A reality show about Osama bin Laden’s niece, aspiring pop star Wafah Dufour, collapsed. A TV version of Klein’s *Straight Up and Dirty* languished at NBC Universal.

Regan always had a sense of where the culture was going and was able to not only ride the wave but help create it. Early on, she signed Howard Stern.

writers—Rush Limbaugh, Bernard Kerik, Michael Moore—were the same. They were, as Regan has always been, transgressives.

Her similarity to her authors seemed to increase after her 1999 divorce from Kleinschmidt, which dragged out over seven years and was a fixture in the New York tabloids. Regan snapped up stories of women who’d been victimized and, most of the time, triumphed. There was Jameson’s book, blogger Stephanie Klein’s memoir about her failed marriage, *Straight Up and Dirty*, and Texas socialite Georgette Mosbacher’s guide to financial freedom for women who’d been left in the dust by divorce, *It Takes Money, Honey*. Regan churned out so many books about Laci Peterson that it appeared to be a fixation. Regan identified with these women intensely. It’s impossible, for instance, to hear Regan talk about Jenna Jameson without thinking that she’s talking about herself. One night when we were on the terrace of Book Soup, where Jameson was signing her memoir, Regan described watching one of the porn star’s films: “She is anally penetrat-

As for film, many in the Industry questioned whether Regan’s sensibility could cross over into theatrical releases. “There’s a sense that Judith tends to do tabloid-y kind of stuff. Big features rarely grow from that kind of material,” says producer Lynda Obst. “It mystified me when she moved. It’s a very hard time to get into the movie business.”

The truth was, Regan spent a lot of her time in L.A. focused on projects that showcased her. One of these was her Sirius radio show, a weekly two-hour chatfest that generally featured her authors and assorted friends and staffers. She spent two full days a week on it; one former editor says it was her primary commitment. Another show, a reality series about her life, had gone through many incarnations; she’d soft-pitched it to an executive at A&E several years ago but looked set to go into production with Bravo. Footage was being shot in November, and she had asked her friend Blair Sabol to be in it. “Blair, we’ll be Hedda and Louella,” Regan told her. She was also developing a scripted series based on her life.

The problem? Things weren’t going so well on the books front. To put this in context, the week Regan announced her move to L.A. in *The New York Times*, she had four books on the paper’s best-seller list; all had reached number one. By the end of the year, she had 14 *New York Times* best-sellers, including five number ones. But in 2006, ReganBooks had only four best-sellers, none of which reached the top spot. In other words, she needed to keep her eye on the bottom line.

Enter O.J. It’s not hard to see the appeal of the Simpson project: It would announce Regan’s move to Los Angeles loudly and put into motion her books-to-TV strategy on an impressive scale. Regan made the deal with Bret Saxon, a principal at Transactional Marketing Partners (a consultancy run by a man whom *Forbes* has called the “prince of infomercials”). Murdoch and Friedman signed off on the arrangement in May 2005, and Simpson’s representatives were paid \$880,000. Regan brought in an old pal, former *National Enquirer* staffer Pablo Fenjves, as the ghostwriter and turned to ReganBooks editorial director Cal Morgan to edit what was known around the office as “Project Miami.” That summer Regan touted the book to friends, who were not told of its contents, as the most important she had ever published. She also shopped the interview to the networks. In August Barbara Walters expressed interest to the point that when she pulled out, ABC agreed to pay News Corporation a \$1 million kill fee. “I’m a much better interviewer than Barbara Walters!” Regan reportedly screamed over the phone to a colleague when the anchor withdrew. She would have to conduct the interview herself, she told a friend—there was no way around it. Of course, there was a way around it—unless she wanted the exposure. And she did it, as it were. ReganBooks printed 400,000 copies, and Regan set off for Miami to interview Simpson.

Perhaps the first sign that something was amiss was how she looked during the taping. With expertly curled and cascading hair, a fitted black suit, a white shirt with a flared collar, and sky-high stilettos, she was more glamour girl than interrogator. Was there any doubt that this was all about her? If there was, one needed only to look to her statement about why she made the deal with Simpson.

The statement, titled “Why I Did It,” was read by Regan on her Sirius show on November 16—two days into the furor—and headlined *The Drudge Report* that evening. The text begins with Regan sitting with Howard Stern awaiting the verdict in the Simpson case, and it goes on for 2,200 words. In American life, such a lengthy apology holds the public’s attention only if you’re a celebrity, and though

Regan was on her way to becoming one, she wasn't there yet. Regan seemed to believe it was she, not O.J., whom the public was interested in. "I wanted [to conduct this interview] because I had once been that young woman who loved with all of her heart and believed in the goodness of man," she began, referring to her alleged abuse at the hands of David Buckley. "Like Nicole Brown," she continued, "I believed with all my heart...and then got punched in the face."

About halfway through, Regan began to unravel. "I wanted the acknowledgment," she writes, referring to what she called O.J.'s confession, "not for me but for my son, so I could turn to him and say, 'I'm sorry that he was not a father to you. I'm sorry that he could not teach you what it means to be a man. And, finally, he's sorry too.'" This would have made perfect sense if O.J. Simpson were David Buckley or Nicole Brown were Judith Regan. Regan had lost all distance between herself and her subject. She had gone from identifying with Nicole Brown Simpson to believing she was her. In a way, it's not hard to see how Regan thought this was a lucid way to conceptualize things. It had worked for her before—with Jenna Jameson, with Stephanie Klein, with Georgette Mosbacher, even with Laci Peterson. They had all been her in different ways, and she had given them successful books, channeling her rage through their stories into brilliant packages and selling them to America.

It didn't work now. The Goldman family created an online petition, and more than 55,000 people signed it within four days. Nine Fox affiliates refused to air the interview, and more threatened to do so. Borders announced it would be donating profits from the book to a domestic violence charity, and other bookstores followed suit. News Corporation was so concerned it sent an executive vice president and two company lawyers to meet with the Goldmans' lawyer and pledged to give them, Denise Brown, and the Nicole Brown Foundation profits from the book and the TV show. News Corporation, though, had yet to sign up anyone outside intracorporate sponsors for the sweeps week show. Six days after the story broke, Murdoch announced he was pulling the project and promised that every copy would be destroyed. (Subsequently, *Newsweek* acquired the chapter about the murder and *Vanity Fair* the entire book.)

By mid-December Regan was receiving flak once again, this time for another "inventive memoir," one based on Mickey Mantle's life and titled *7*. Author Peter Golenbock portrayed the late baseball great as a sexual predator and casually referred to fellow baseball legend Billy Martin as a rapist. There was talk in book circles that Regan's worth to the

company was dwindling. According to *The Wall Street Journal*, Regan generated an estimated \$50 million in revenue a year, a healthy fraction of HarperCollins's \$1.32 billion total. But the PR hits she regularly took—of which the O.J. debacle was the worst—significantly diminished her value. By December 15, Regan was out. "O.J. has now killed two women," she told an acquaintance in the wake of her firing. But of course he hadn't. Instead, at long last, Regan was a star, a player in a national drama of her own making.

In the ensuing weeks HarperCollins accused Regan of anti-Semitism, citing that as a reason for her firing. Regan denied the charge and retained Hollywood litigator Bert Fields and top PR consultant Mike Sitrick.

Still, Regan's future looks bright. The few people who knew her state of mind during the scandal say she was in good spirits. Naturally, she wasn't happy with the way things were handled, and she remained holed up in her New York apartment or the Sunset Tower hotel. (Regan never found a home in L.A., although she was spotted checking out a \$7 million mansion in Doheny Estates.) It looked like she might return to Manhattan for a while; her circle of West Coast friends—which includes USC law professor and Regan author Susan Estrich; police chief William Bratton and his wife, Rikki Klieman; producers Wendy Finerman and Barry Josephson—might not see her as much as they had planned. Some say she is not only in a positive mood but in her ascendance. "This is her moment. Are you kidding?" Sabol told me. "She loves it." Why not? There's her Sirius show and possibly her reality show. There's the recently published *Because She Can*, a roman à clef about her by a former ReganBooks editor. If Fields files suit soon, as he says he will, it will keep her name in the headlines. After all the years of striving, Regan has gotten her happy Hollywood ending. ■

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