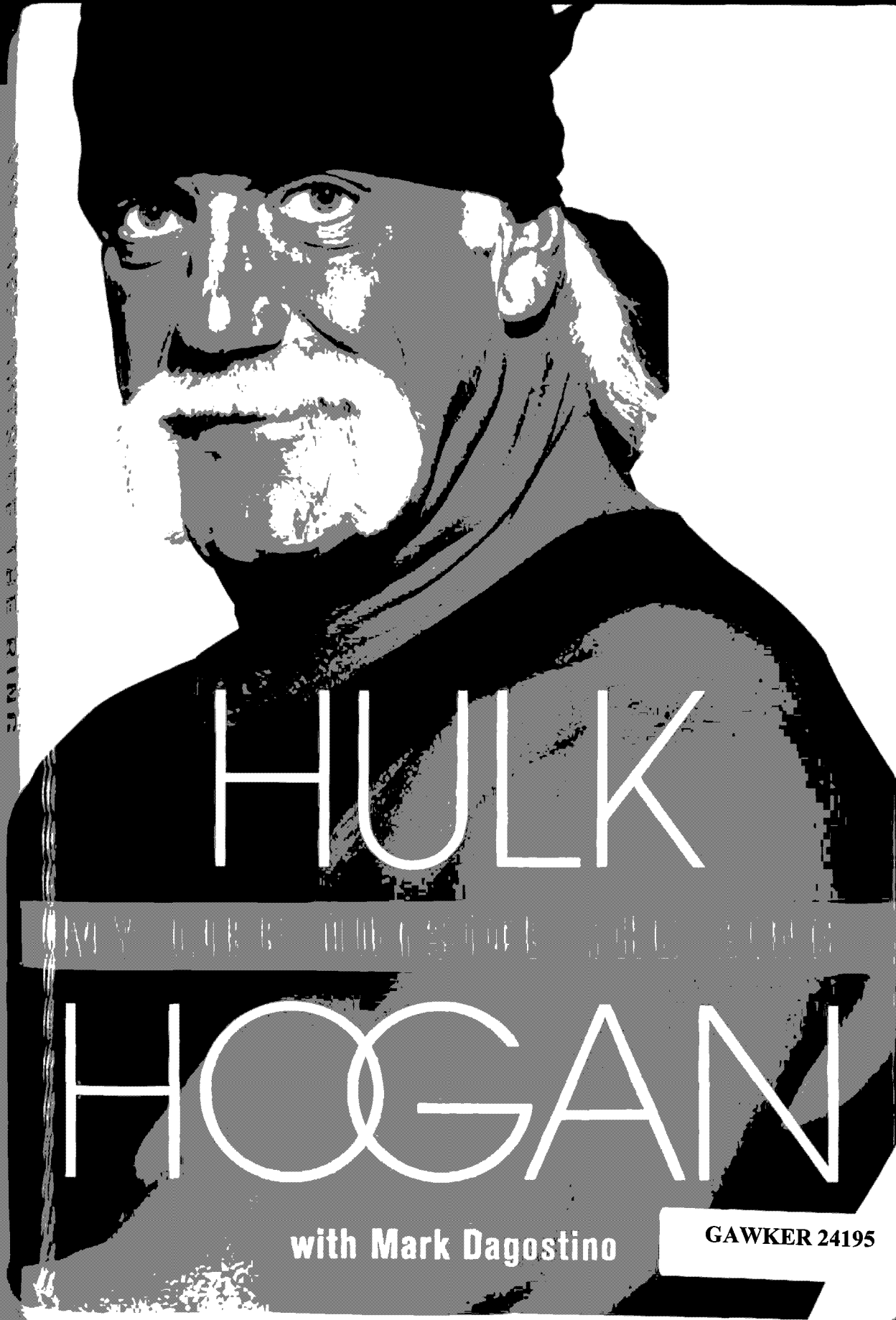


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HULK

THE LIFE OF
HOGAN

with Mark Dagostino

GAWKER 24195

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Christiane knew what Linda had been pulling. She heard about it all from Brooke, and witnessed plenty of Linda's behavior firsthand. She knew how much trouble Brooke had been having, and she sympathized with my situation. "I don't know why she's doing this to you and Brooke."

Over the phone that day, Christiane gave me a shoulder to lean on, at least verbally. I can't tell you how much I needed that.

Maybe a month or so later, Brooke made an appearance up in New York City, and I went along to introduce her from the stage. Christiane was along for that trip, and the three of us—she, Brooke, and I—went out to dinner afterward. Back at the hotel that night, Christiane and I both stopped by Brooke's room to check on her at the same time. I eventually left the two of them there and went downstairs to my room. A half hour or so later, because I'm always over the top and have to check one more time, I called Brooke's room again just to make sure she was okay.

Christiane answered the phone. She said Brooke was going to bed and she was just leaving. Then she asked me what I was doing.

"I'm probably gonna drink a glass of wine and just hang out," I said. Then words came from my mouth that I didn't expect. "Why don't you come down and join me?"

It felt like two seconds later we were in a room together. We were both drinking a glass of wine, just talking, but I felt like she wanted to do more than that, you know? I was real attracted to her, for so many reasons—and my wife and I hadn't been intimate in so long that I can't even tell you how long it had been.

All of a sudden, Christiane reached her arm over to put her hand on my back—and I ducked. It was a weird instinct. I ducked the way a dog that's been hit too many times would cower when someone raises a hand.

"Are you okay?" Christiane asked. Apparently it surprised her, too.

"Yeah, yeah. You just caught me off guard there," I said.

Next thing I know, the two of us started kissing. Not to sound perverted or anything, but it was fantastic. Here I am in my fifties now, and this was a really attractive thirty-four-year-old woman,

with dark hair and a curvaceous body. And just to have some affection and genuine caring mixed in with that kind of physical attraction? It felt good. It was such an emotional and physical release.

We didn't have sex that night, but it opened the door. Over the course of the next two months we did have sex, maybe five different times. That was it.

Linda had no idea. For a while it had that sort of naughty appeal, like a kid sneaking some chocolate that he's not supposed to have. Just seeing Christiane during the course of a normal business day with Brooke became this real exciting thing. It was an entirely new experience for me. Like I said, I had never done anything like this in twenty-two years of marriage.

In a way, that Christiane excitement kept me going for a couple of months. It helped me just to get through the days.

It was no coincidence that the very first episode of the final season of our reality show was called "Wedlock Headlock." I think the crew filming our visit to a marriage counselor was as much for their benefit as it was ours.

Yes, Linda and I kissed and made up on TV, but things went right back to the way they'd been whenever the cameras stopped rolling. Heck, even when the cameras *were* rolling. We couldn't hide it anymore. But the really bad stuff hit the editing room floor.

They call it "reality," but I guess the real inner workings of the Hogan family's married life didn't make for good TV.

To get away from all of the headaches, the scripts seemed to go further out on a limb to put us in funny situations. They sent us to a dude ranch in Wyoming for vacation. We went up to Universal Studios in Orlando, where we figured the only way we could ever have a normal day of family fun without being mobbed by fans was to wear all this prosthetic makeup and go into that park in disguise.

the inevitable: the heartbreak, the pain that was about to be unleashed.

Christiane was real nervous about it, of course, and she didn't think she could keep it together and make sense of it all in a phone call. So rather than call Brooke back, Christiane decided to send Brooke a letter—a letter in which she admitted the affair and apologized for letting it happen.

At this point, Brooke was just about 100 percent in Linda's camp as far as this divorce was concerned. I couldn't understand why, and I wouldn't understand until much later. What happened next made the whole situation a lot worse.

First, Brooke confronted me. She wanted to know if it was true. She wanted to know why I'd done it. I told her the truth. "There's two sides to every story, Brooke," is what I said. I tried to explain that her mother and I were so broken, and I was so lonely and hurt, that when this thing with Christiane presented itself, I almost couldn't help myself. I wasn't making excuses, I was just trying to explain where I was coming from, and how I found myself in that situation.

Brooke wouldn't hear it. "There aren't two sides, Dad. There's right and wrong." My daughter, who had barely been speaking to me anyway for months, suddenly stopped communicating with me at all.

Two days after Brooke received that letter, a reporter from the *National Enquirer* knocked on Christiane's door. Her personal letter to Brooke had somehow found its way into that tabloid's hands. They cornered Christiane and left her no choice but to respond. So on February 28, my affair became national news. I don't think there's a blog or entertainment show in America that didn't run with the story of Hulk Hogan cheating on his wife.

I was humiliated. I was angry. I didn't know what to do. There was no one to sue—the story was true. I couldn't even figure out who to be angry with, except for myself for letting it happen in the first place.

Then something remarkable happened. After about a day's worth of wallowing in all this self-pity and frustration, I stopped.