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ORIGINAL FILED
Superior Court of California
Los Angeles

OCT 19 2015

Sherril R. Carter, Executive Officer/Clerk
by Shaunya Bolden, Deputy

8 **SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA**
9 **COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES, CENTRAL DISTRICT**

11 BLAKE TOLLISON SHELTON, an
individual,
12
Plaintiff,
13
vs.
14
BAUER PUBLISHING COMPANY, L.P.;
15 BAUER MAGAZINE, L.P.; BAUER MEDIA
GROUP, INC.; BAUER, INC.; HEINRICH
16 BAUER NORTH AMERICA, INC.; BAUER
MEDIA GROUP USA, LLC; and DOES 1-20,
17 inclusive
18
Defendants.

Case No. **BC 5 9 8 2 3 9**
COMPLAINT FOR
(1) DEFAMATION
(2) FALSE LIGHT INVASION OF
PRIVACY

DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL

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1 Plaintiff Blake Tollison Shelton (“Mr. Shelton” or “Plaintiff”), as and for his Complaint
2 against Defendants Bauer Publishing Company L.P., Bauer Magazine, L.P., Bauer Media Group,
3 Inc., Bauer, Inc., Heinrich Bauer North America, Inc., Bauer Media Group USA, LLC
4 (collectively, “Bauer”) and Does 1 through 20 inclusive (collectively, “Defendants”), alleges as
5 follows:

6 INTRODUCTION

7 1. Blake Shelton has had enough. For the second time in as many months, Bauer has
8 maliciously plastered Mr. Shelton’s face on the cover of its tabloid *In Touch Weekly* (“*In Touch*”)
9 and made false accusations all in an effort to drive magazine sales. After falsely accusing Mr.
10 Shelton of being unfaithful to Miranda Lambert, Bauer recently released a cover bearing the
11 heading “The Real Story: REHAB For Blake” (hereinafter the “Rehab Story”), which, among
12 other things, falsely and maliciously indicates that Mr. Shelton is in rehab.

13 2. Mr. Shelton is not in rehab and has no plans to go to rehab, which Bauer would
14 have known had it bothered to contact any of Mr. Shelton’s representatives prior to publication of
15 its misleading Rehab Story. Instead, on the heels of wildly successful sales of its false cover story
16 alleging Mr. Shelton had an affair, and that affair caused the end of his marriage, *In Touch* went
17 straight to publication with a second false and salacious cover it knew would hook readers who
18 seem to have an endless appetite for intimate details of celebrities supposedly in crisis.

19 3. Mr. Shelton, who is not a litigious person, was prepared to let the first cover go, as
20 he and his peers often do because the 24/7 news cycle and proliferation of Internet “news” sites
21 makes it physically impossible to react to each and every falsehood published about them.
22 Further, publications that had re-posted that first story took it down immediately upon being
23 notified that it was false, and *In Touch* had assured Mr. Shelton that it was going to leave him
24 alone. Apparently, that was not the case.

25 4. Accordingly, Mr. Shelton hereby commences this action both to set the record
26 straight – he is not in rehab, his “close circle” is not trying to seek an intervention, and he is, in
27 fact, hard at work on *The Voice* and other projects – and to recover damages for the harm Bauer
28 has done to his reputation, and to punish Bauer for its malicious conduct and concoction of false

1 and misleading stories about him for the purpose of driving magazine sales.

2 **PARTIES AND VENUE**

3 5. Plaintiff Blake Shelton is an individual who primarily resides in Oklahoma City,
4 Oklahoma, but provides services in Los Angeles, California and has been harmed in Los Angeles,
5 California.

6 6. Plaintiff is informed and believes, and based thereon alleges, that defendant Bauer
7 Publishing Company, L.P. is a limited partnership organized under the laws of the State of New
8 Jersey, with its principal place of business in New Jersey, and is engaged in business in Los
9 Angeles, California.

10 7. Plaintiff is informed and believes, and based thereon alleges, that defendant Bauer
11 Magazine L.P. is a limited partnership organized under the laws of the State of Delaware, with its
12 principal place of business in New Jersey, and is engaged in business in Los Angeles, California.

13 8. Plaintiff is informed and believes, and based thereon alleges, that defendant Bauer
14 Media Group, Inc. is a corporation incorporated under the laws of the State of Delaware, with its
15 principal place of business in New York, and is engaged in business in Los Angeles, California.
16 Plaintiff is further informed and believes, and based thereon alleges, that Bauer Media Group, Inc.
17 also maintains an office in Los Angeles.

18 9. Plaintiff is informed and believes, and based thereon alleges, that defendant Bauer,
19 Inc. is a corporation incorporated under the laws of the State of Delaware, with its principal place
20 of business in New Jersey, and is engaged in business in Los Angeles, California.

21 10. Plaintiff is informed and believes, and based thereon alleges, that defendant
22 Heinrich Bauer North America, Inc. is a corporation incorporated under the laws of the State of
23 Delaware, with its principal place of business in New York, and is engaged in business in Los
24 Angeles, California.

25 11. Plaintiff is informed and believes, and based thereon alleges, that defendant Bauer
26 Media Group USA, LLC is a limited liability company incorporated under the laws of the State of
27 Delaware and is engaged in business in Los Angeles, California. Bauer Media Group USA,
28 LLC's principal place of business is unknown to Plaintiff.

1 12. Plaintiff is unaware of the true names and capacities of the defendants sued herein
2 as Does 1 through 20, inclusive, and therefore sues these defendants by fictitious names. Plaintiff
3 will seek leave of the Court to amend this complaint to allege their true names and capacities when
4 ascertained. Plaintiff is informed and believes, and based thereon alleges, that each fictitiously
5 named defendant is responsible in some way for the acts, occurrences and events alleged in this
6 complaint, and is liable to plaintiff therefore. Bauer Publishing Company, L.P., Bauer Magazine
7 L.P., Bauer Media Group, L.P., Heinrich Bauer North America, Inc., Bauer Media Group USA,
8 LLC (collectively, "Bauer"), and Does 1 through 20 are sometimes referred to collectively herein
9 as "Defendants."

10 13. Plaintiff is informed and believes, and based thereon alleges, that at all times
11 relevant herein, Defendants have operated as a joint venture dividing revenues and profits between
12 them and seeking by their joint efforts to maximize gains and minimize losses. As such, each and
13 every Defendant herein is equally responsible in whole or in part for each and every act alleged
14 herein.

15 14. Defendants own, control, publish and/or contribute to the publication of tabloid
16 magazines, including *Life & Style* and *In Touch*, which are distributed in print throughout the
17 world, including in Los Angeles, California. On their website, they describe themselves as the "#1
18 Seller of Magazines at Retail in the Country." They place their magazines at supermarket
19 checkout counters and in other stores and outlets throughout the country, including in Los
20 Angeles, California. Defendants rely on photographs of celebrities and catchy, salacious (and
21 false) headlines to draw the attention of people waiting in line at stores or passing by magazine
22 stands, many of whom do not, in fact, actually purchase their magazine and walk away with
23 whatever message the eye-popping cover conveys.

24 15. In addition to their print publications, Defendants often publish reproductions of
25 their tabloid covers, sometimes with portions of their related stories, on their Internet web sites in
26 order to promote the sale of their tabloids. Such publications are also available to Internet users
27 located in Los Angeles, California.

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1 SUMMARY OF RELEVANT FACTS

2 A. Mr. Shelton

3 16. Mr. Shelton is a country music superstar boasting three gold records, twenty
4 number one country singles, and five Grammy nominations. Mr. Shelton is also known for his
5 role as judge and coach on the Emmy-winning television program, *The Voice*. Mr. Shelton's team
6 has won the show's contest four out of eight seasons.

7 17. Contrary to *In Touch's* Rehab Story, Mr. Shelton has been hard at work. Bauer
8 published the Rehab Story on September 16, 2015. On Saturday, September 19, 2015, Mr.
9 Shelton performed live at the iHeartRadio Music Festival. His appearance was widely publicized
10 in advance of the concert. On Monday, September 21, 2015, the ninth season of *The Voice*
11 premiered. On Wednesday, September 23, 2015, Mr. Shelton gave his fans a free concert in
12 Nashville. Mr. Shelton is also busy preparing for the October 23, 2015 release of *Reloaded: 20*
13 *#1 Hits*, Mr. Shelton's second greatest hits album. In addition, Mr. Shelton continues to fulfill his
14 commitments as a spokesperson for Nissan, Gildan, and various other business endeavors.

15 18. Mr. Shelton's reputation and persona are essential to his success. Mr. Shelton
16 actively cultivates his persona, including via social media. For example, through Mr. Shelton's
17 Twitter account, @blakeshelton, Mr. Shelton promotes his music and television projects, and
18 endorses various businesses with which Mr. Shelton is affiliated. Mr. Shelton also uses social
19 media to communicate directly with fans and often makes jokes about comments from Internet
20 trolls. Mr. Shelton posts to Twitter multiple times a day on average on topics ranging from sports
21 to the Miss America pageant.

22 B. The First *In Touch* Cover

23 19. On its August 10, 2015 cover of *In Touch*, Bauer depicted a close headshot of Mr.
24 Shelton with the headline, "Blake's 'Other Woman' Tells All" (the "Affair Story"). Inside, the
25 "Other Woman" phrase was repeated with a sub-headline that said: "Her fling with Blake Shelton
26 nearly destroyed Cady Groves..." The Affair Story falsely portrayed Mr. Shelton as an adulterer
27 who had a relationship with a woman named Cady Groves that caused the end of his marriage to
28 Miranda Lambert ("Ms. Lambert"). In the text of the story, *In Touch* wrote that "cheating

1 allegations are swirling[.]” The Affair Story went on to state that Ms. Groves “doesn’t deny that
2 she and Blake, 39, had an affair” (which is tantamount to a statement that they did), and purported
3 to quote “one of her friends” (unidentified, of course) as saying that Ms. Groves and Mr. Shelton
4 had sex for at least a year and Mr. Shelton broke her heart.

5 20. The average reader was left with the impression that not only did Mr. Shelton have
6 a sexual relationship with Ms. Groves, but that that relationship contributed to, or even caused, his
7 divorce from Ms. Lambert. Indeed, that message is confirmed by the manner in which *Radar*
8 *Online* republished the Affair Story, referring to Ms. Groves as Mr. Shelton’s “mistress” (to its
9 credit, *Radar Online* immediately took its story down when advised that the *In Touch* story was
10 false).

11 21. The Affair Story was false. Mr. Shelton first met Ms. Groves when she was a
12 struggling new artist at RCA Records and his label asked him to do a favor by appearing in her
13 first music video. He obliged and they became friends for a period of time. Eventually, Mr.
14 Shelton stopped communicating with Ms. Groves. They did not have a sexual relationship or
15 affair of any nature whatsoever. Ms. Groves has described allegations in the media that she was
16 the “other woman” as “stupid rumors” and confirms that she was simply a friend of Mr. Shelton.

17 22. It is clear that Bauer saw an opportunity and ran with it, with little-to-no research or
18 fact-checking in support of the Affair Story. Further, Bauer was on notice that any relationship
19 had long been denied. Had Bauer’s reporters done any investigation, they would have discovered
20 the full extent of the Affair Story’s defamatory depiction of Mr. Shelton. The lack of investigation
21 and fact checking with Mr. Shelton is more than adequate to demonstrate that Bauer acted with
22 actual malice or, at a minimum, with a reckless disregard for the truth in publishing the Affair
23 Story.

24 23. Though Mr. Shelton demanded a retraction of the Affair Story, Bauer refused. One
25 of its editors did, however, promise counsel for Mr. Shelton that he would be “laying off” him and
26 that litigation would be unnecessary to protect Mr. Shelton from future stories.

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1 C. The In Touch Rehab Story

2 24. Less than two months later, *In Touch* published another cover, again with a close
3 headshot of Mr. Shelton, bearing the headline “The Real Story: REHAB For Blake,” which,
4 among other things, falsely and maliciously suggests that Mr. Shelton is in rehab. A true and
5 correct copy of this cover and related story is attached hereto as Exhibit “A” and made a part
6 hereof.

7 25. Mr. Shelton is not in rehab and has no plans to go to rehab. The Rehab Story’s
8 cover and interior headlines, however, suggest exactly the opposite. Indeed, as *In Touch*
9 undoubtedly intended, the average reader was drawn to the magazine and the Rehab Story
10 thinking that he or she is going to read that Mr. Shelton “bottomed out” and checked himself into
11 rehab. Many readers will stop at the cover.

12 26. Those who do read the Rehab Story will find numerous further false assertions of
13 fact that only reinforce and support the headline’s message. Such false statements include:

- 14 (a) “Blake has his rock bottom”;
- 15 (b) “His friends are terrified that he could end up dead at this rate”
- 16 (c) “Blake's drinking and womanizing are what helped torpedo his four-year
17 marriage to Miranda[;]”
- 18 (d) Mr. Shelton did something “while wasted that destroyed his marriage”;
- 19 (e) Mr. Shelton was “caught” by Ms. Lambert with “a bunch of naked women”
20 in their home;
- 21 (f) Mr. Shelton started drinking at age fourteen as “a form of coping with his
22 brother's death”;
- 23 (g) “His close friends have talked about an intervention”; and,
- 24 (h) “Blake's friends, colleagues and handlers won't give up on him – and have
25 all urged him to seek help.”

26 The Rehab Story is also replete with salacious falsehoods, including that Mr. Shelton traveled to
27 Mexico for a bachelor party where he partied with strippers, visited strip clubs, and got into a hot
28 tub in his hotel room with two anonymous women. Collectively, the false statements set forth in

1 this Paragraph 26 will be referred to herein as the "Statements."

2 27. To be clear: Mr. Shelton has not hit rock bottom. Not only is Mr. Shelton not in
3 rehab, but nobody close to him is talking about an intervention or telling Mr. Shelton that he
4 should go to rehab. Neither drinking nor womanizing contributed to Mr. Shelton's divorce from
5 Ms. Lambert. Mr. Shelton traveled to Mexico for a vacation with friends and some of their wives.
6 There was no bachelor party. There were no strippers or strip clubs. There was no late night hot
7 tub session in Mr. Shelton's hotel room, which did not even have a hot tub. Mr. Shelton did not
8 start drinking at the age of fourteen to cope with his brother's death.

9 28. Though, as set forth above, Mr. Shelton has previously put Bauer on notice that Mr.
10 Shelton was not unfaithful to Ms. Lambert and that alleged infidelity by Mr. Shelton did not cause
11 his divorce from Ms. Lambert, the Rehab Story falsely alleges that Mr. Shelton was "caught" by
12 Ms. Lambert with "a bunch of naked women" in their home. This is also completely false.

13 29. Together with the headline, the story about Mr. Shelton's trip to Mexico, and eight
14 Tweets cherry-picked and excerpted by *In Touch* over the course of ten months for the purposes of
15 painting the picture it wanted to paint, Mr. Shelton is portrayed as a man unhinged and, as stated
16 on the cover, a man at "rock bottom." This is patently false and is damaging to Mr. Shelton, who
17 is currently hard at work filming *The Voice*, preparing for the release of his next album, and
18 fulfilling endorsement commitments. *In Touch's* publication exposed Mr. Shelton to contempt,
19 ridicule and obloquy, and tarnished both his personal and business reputation.

20 30. The Rehab Story was published with malice or, at a minimum, a reckless disregard
21 for the truth. As with the prior story, Bauer did not even give Mr. Shelton notice of what it
22 intended to publish, or an opportunity to rebut any of the specific allegations set forth in the Rehab
23 Story in advance of its publication.

24 31. Unlike the last time, Bauer knew that Mr. Shelton had legal counsel, knew how to
25 reach that counsel, and had previously corresponded with that counsel with respect to Mr.
26 Shelton's demand for retraction of the Affair Story. Rather than reach out to such counsel or any
27 of Mr. Shelton's other representatives to verify the allegations in the Story, Bauer went straight to
28 publication with a sensational and false cover that likely sold as many or more magazines as the

1 sensational and false August 2015 cover.

2 32. On September 18, 2015, Mr. Shelton's representatives demanded a retraction of the
3 Rehab Story, but, up to and including the date of the filing of this complaint, Defendants have
4 failed and refused to publish a correction or retraction as required by law.

5 **FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION**

6 **[For Libel Per Se]**

7 **[By Blake Shelton Against All Defendants]**

8 33. Plaintiff Mr. Shelton repeats and realleges each and every allegation contained in
9 paragraphs 1 through 32, inclusive, above, as if fully set forth herein.

10 34. Defendants published the Rehab Story, a true and correct copy of which is attached
11 hereto as Exhibit "A" and made a part hereof.

12 35. The Rehab Story as a whole and each of the Statements are of and concerning Mr.
13 Shelton, and persons who read the Rehab Story reasonably understood the references therein to be
14 references to Mr. Shelton.

15 36. The Rehab Story as a whole and each of the Statements are false as they pertain to
16 Mr. Shelton.

17 37. The Rehab Story as a whole and each of the Statements are defamatory on their
18 face of Mr. Shelton and expose him to hatred, contempt, ridicule and obloquy, and/or cause him to
19 be shunned or avoided and tend to injure him in his occupation.

20 38. Upon information and belief, Mr. Shelton alleges that the Rehab Story as a whole
21 and each of the Statements were made by each of the Defendants with knowledge of their falsity
22 or with reckless disregard for their truth or falsity.

23 39. Upon information and belief, Mr. Shelton alleges that the Rehab Story as a whole
24 and each of the Statements were made by each of the Defendants in a grossly irresponsible manner
25 with want of due care.

26 40. Upon information and belief, Mr. Shelton alleges that the Rehab Story as a whole
27 and each of the Statements were seen and read in Los Angeles, California.

1 41. On September 18, 2015, Mr. Shelton’s representatives demanded a retraction but,
2 up to and including the date of the filing of this complaint, Defendants have failed and refused to
3 publish a correction or retraction.

4 42. As a direct and proximate result of the above-described conduct by Defendants,
5 Mr. Shelton has suffered general and special damages in an amount to be determined at trial but
6 believed to be no less than One Million Dollars (\$1,000,000.00), including without limitation,
7 damage to Mr. Shelton’s reputation, career and standing in the community.

8 43. Upon information and belief, Mr. Shelton alleges that each defendant’s conduct
9 was done with oppression, fraud and malice and that, therefore, the conduct of Defendants justifies
10 an award of punitive and exemplary damages.

11 44. Upon information and belief, Mr. Shelton alleges that, unless enjoined and
12 restrained by the Court, Defendants will republish, repeat and continue to disseminate the Rehab
13 Story, all to the continuing injury of Mr. Shelton; that such continued republication, repetition and
14 dissemination of the defamatory and offensive falsehoods will cause irreparable harm to Mr.
15 Shelton by damaging his reputation and adversely affecting his philanthropic and business efforts
16 as well as his personal relationships. Mr. Shelton alleges that he lacks an adequate remedy at law
17 insofar as damages will be very difficult to calculate for such on-going injuries. By reason of the
18 foregoing, Mr. Shelton is entitled to a permanent injunction enjoining and restraining Defendants,
19 and each of them, and all persons acting in concert with them, from republishing, repeating,
20 distributing or otherwise disseminating the Rehab Story.

21 **SECOND CAUSE OF ACTION**

22 [For False Light Invasion of Privacy]

23 [By Mr. Shelton Against All Defendants]

24 45. Plaintiff Mr. Shelton repeats and realleges each and every allegation contained in
25 Paragraphs 1 through 44, inclusive, above, as if fully set forth herein.

26 46. Defendants published the Rehab Story, a true and correct copy of which is attached
27 hereto as Exhibit “A” and made a part hereof.

28

1 47. The Rehab Story as a whole and each of the Statements were widely publicized by
2 the Defendants.

3 48. The Rehab Story as a whole and each of the Statements are of and concerning Mr.
4 Shelton and persons who read the Story reasonably understood the references therein to be
5 references to Mr. Shelton.

6 49. The Rehab Story as a whole and each of the Statements are false as they pertain to
7 Mr. Shelton.

8 50. To the extent that all or any part of the Rehab Story as a whole or any of the
9 Statements are found not to be defamatory of Mr. Shelton, the Rehab Story, and the Statements
10 place Mr. Shelton in a false light which would be highly offensive to a reasonable person.

11 51. Upon information and belief, Mr. Shelton alleges that the Rehab Story as a whole
12 and each of the Statements were made by each of the Defendants with knowledge of their falsity
13 or with reckless disregard for their truth or falsity.

14 52. Upon information and belief, Mr. Shelton alleges that the Rehab Story as a whole
15 and each of the Statements were made by each of the Defendants in a grossly irresponsible manner
16 and negligently, with want of due care.

17 53. Upon information and belief, Mr. Shelton alleges that the Rehab Story as a whole
18 and each of the Statements were seen and read in Los Angeles, California.

19 54. On September 18, 2015, Mr. Shelton's representatives demanded a retraction but,
20 up to and including the date of the filing of this complaint, Defendants have failed and refused to
21 publish a correction or retraction.

22 55. As a direct and proximate result of the above-described conduct by Defendants,
23 Mr. Shelton has suffered general and special damages in an amount to be determined at trial but
24 believed to be no less than One Million Dollars (\$1,000,000.00), including damage to Plaintiff's
25 reputation, career and standing in the community.

26 56. Upon information and belief, Mr. Shelton alleges that each Defendant's conduct
27 was done with oppression, fraud and malice and that, therefore, the conduct of each Defendant
28 justifies an award of punitive and exemplary damages. Upon information and belief, Mr. Shelton

1 alleges that, unless enjoined and restrained by the Court, Defendants will republish, repeat and
2 continue to disseminate the Rehab Story and the Statements all to the continuing injury of Mr.
3 Shelton ; that such continued republication, repetition and dissemination of the defamatory and
4 offensive falsehoods will cause irreparable harm to Mr. Shelton by damaging his reputation and
5 adversely affecting his philanthropic and business efforts as well as his personal relationships.
6 Mr. Shelton alleges that he lacks an adequate remedy at law insofar as damages will be very
7 difficult to calculate for such on-going injuries. By reason of the foregoing, Mr. Shelton is entitled
8 to a permanent injunction enjoining and restraining Defendants, and each of them, and all persons
9 acting in concert with them, from republishing, repeating, distributing or otherwise disseminating
10 the Rehab Story or the Statements to the extent such are found in the Action to be false and/or to
11 portray Mr. Shelton in a false light.

12 **PRAYER FOR RELIEF**

13 WHEREFORE, Mr. Shelton prays for judgment as follows:

14 **AS TO THE FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION FOR LIBEL:**

- 15 1. For actual and compensatory damages in an amount to be determined at the trial of
16 this action, but believed not to be less than One Million Dollars (\$1,000,000.00);
17 2. For exemplary and punitive damages;
18 3. For a permanent injunction;

19 **AS TO THE SECOND CAUSE OF ACTION FOR FALSE LIGHT**

20 **INVASION OF PRIVACY:**

- 21 4. For actual and compensatory damages in an amount to be determined at the trial of
22 the action, but believed not to be less than One Million Dollars (\$1,000,000.00);
23 5. For exemplary and punitive damages;
24 6. For a permanent injunction;

25 **AS TO ALL CLAIMS AND CAUSES OF ACTION:**

- 26 7. For costs of suit herein incurred;
27 8. For interest on any monetary award to Plaintiff at the legal rate; and,

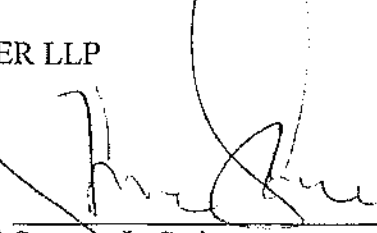
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9. For such other and further relief as the Court may deem just and proper.

Dated: October 19, 2015

LINER LLP

By:


Stanton L. Stein

Attorneys for Plaintiff Blake Tollison Shelton

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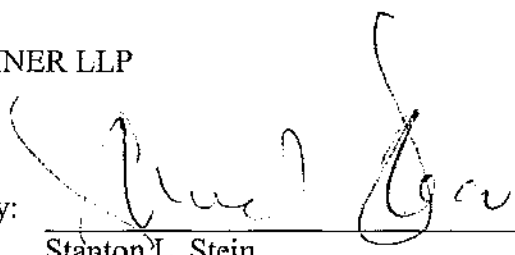
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DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL

Plaintiff Blake Tollison Shelton demands trial by jury on all matters and issues so triable.

Dated: October 19, 2015

LINER LLP

By: 

Stanton L. Stein
Attorneys for Plaintiff Blake Tollison Shelton

LINER^{LLP}

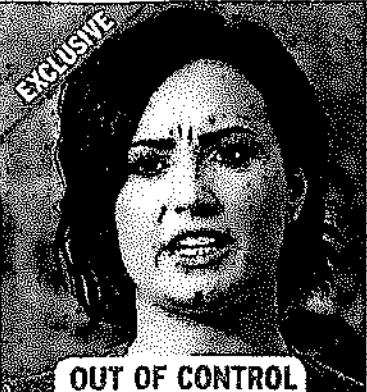
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Los Angeles, CA 90024-3518

EXHIBIT "A"



AS MARRIAGE CRUMBLES

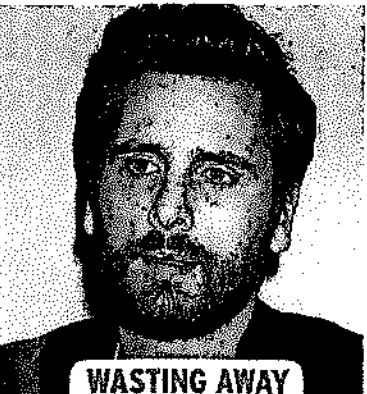
Beyoncé's Pregnant!



EXCLUSIVE

OUT OF CONTROL

Demi Lovato's Shocking Relapse



WASTING AWAY

Scott Busted Doing Cocaine



WHAT THEY REALLY MEAN

Secrets Behind Celeb Tattoos

IN

ONLY \$2.99



THE REAL STORY

REHAB FOR BLAKE

He Finally Hits Rock Bottom

- Drinking vodka before noon & slurring his words – it's worse than anyone knows
- What he did while wasted that destroyed his marriage
- How his friends begged him to stop taking about drinking & get help

SEPTEMBER 28, 2015 \$2.99



REHAB for Blake

Blake Shelton hits rock bottom after his divorce from Miranda Lambert

He was acting like a wild man. Blake Shelton indulged his every whim during a friend's bachelor party weekend in late August at the ME Melia resort in Cancun, Mexico. "He was doing shots of tequila non-stop and partied with strippers all weekend," says a hotel guest who witnessed the debauchery. "He was also flirting and talking to other women, including one cute blonde who was a Miranda Lambert look-alike who was staying at his hotel." Blake even brought her to his room — No. 946, appropriately named The Passion Suite — for an alcohol-fueled rendezvous. The next day, adds the guest, "the woman was raving to guests at the pool about hooking up with Blake, saying how amazing he was."

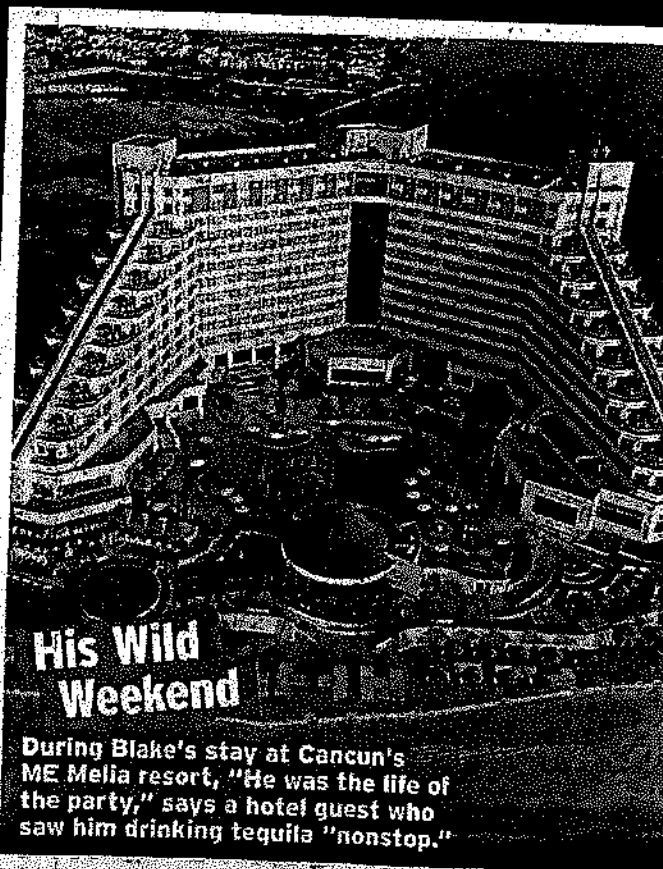
Less than two months after divorcing Miranda, Blake has hit rock bottom. Multiple sources say his drinking and womanizing are at

epic levels — and they're afraid for him. "Blake's partying has gotten out of control. He seems to think it's normal to be in a constant drunken state, but when he's drunk, he makes bad decisions," says a source. "His friends are terrified that he could end up dead at this rate." Adds a Blake insider: "Blake needs rehab. It's as simple as that."

Blake's behavior in Mexico didn't stop with the blonde. "Things got more and more wild each day he was there," says the hotel guest. One night, the country star, 39, and his pals went to a local strip club called Dassan. "They were in the mood to party, and they did." Later that night, Blake appeared at the hotel with two women. He had to sign them in at reception and pay a fee in order to have them there as his guests, since it's an all-inclusive resort. "He was taking turns kissing them while he walked through the lobby carrying two

fresh bottles of tequila," recalls the guest. "Then they went up to his suite, got into the hot tub on the balcony and did tequila shots. Blake was kissing both girls there before they went into the bedroom for the night."

Blake's drinking and womanizing are what helped torpedo



His Wild Weekend

During Blake's stay at Cancun's ME Melia resort, "He was the life of the party," says a hotel guest who saw him drinking tequila "nonstop."

HE CAN'T STOP TALKING ABOUT DRINKING

Blake Shelton @blakeshelton · Dec 13

Going out to dinner.. Drunk.
#ifyoudontlikeitblowacamelandquitbeingsob
utthurtallthetimepuss

Blake Shelton @blakeshelton · Jan 17

Just spent 2 days filming The Voice season 8... Drunk..

Blake Shelton @blakeshelton · Feb 1

Getting ready for the big game!! By drinking face completely off. Bitch...

Blake Shelton @blakeshelton · May 11

Ok sorry about the lecture... Now back to my regularly scheduled drinking.

Blake Shelton @blakeshelton · Jul 31

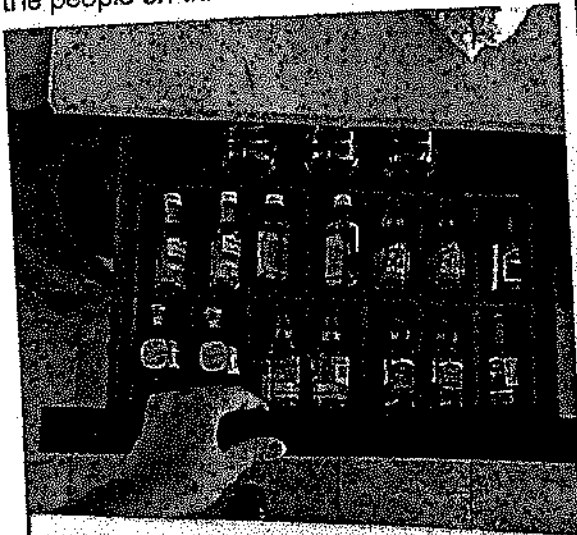
Heiloooo Oregon!!!! I'm here and I have \$100 for the first person that will make a liquor store run for me!!! Let's do this Sixes!!

Blake Shelton @blakeshelton · Aug 8

Ok Minnesota... I'm here and I haven't had a drink in a LONG time. Like 6 hours!!! I'm ready to unleash!!!! Bitch..

Blake Shelton @blakeshelton · Aug 28

Just found this in my hotel room... God help the people on this floor tonight.



Blake Shelton @blakeshelton · Sep 2

Well its official.... I'm about to tour!!!! The liquor store.. Bitch.

When Blake isn't cracking jokes onstage about getting drunk, he's posting on Twitter about boozing it up. "He makes endless drunk jokes and proudly posts photos of alcohol on social media," says a worried source, who says it's really no joke. "He's poisoning his body and risking his life."

his four-year marriage to Miranda. Once a hard-core drinker herself, Miranda, 31, toned it down in late 2013. "She was his drinking buddy until she got into shape and started eating better and cut out the excess booze," says a source close to Miranda. "This never sat well with Blake." Blake is known for being drunk at awards shows and having a private bar set up in his dressing room. One person who knows both Blake and Miranda told *In Touch*: "Every time I've ever hung out with Blake, he's been drunk," adding that he drinks to the point where he slurs his words and stumbles. Miranda started videotaping Blake's drunken antics, says another source, "and would show him the next day how stupid he was when he drank, because he never believed or remembered what he did."

Although post-split headlines claimed Miranda cheated on Blake, multiple sources insisted it

was the other way around. A Nashville, Tenn., source says that before their July divorce announcement, "Miranda caught Blake with a bunch of naked women in their Tennessee home one night." Many of their friends know the truth about "what Blake has gotten up to with the drinking and the women," adds the Nashville source, "and privately, many have sided with Miranda."

The origin of Blake's destructive behavior is heartbreaking. "He was only 14 when his older brother Richie died in a car accident. When he started drinking as a teenager, it was a form of coping with his brother's death," explains the insider. Blake has called the tragic accident "easily the toughest thing that I've been through. I put my [first] divorce [from Kaynette Williams] up there with my brother's death," he said in 2014. "Blake faced his first divorce with alcohol, too," adds the insider, "so it's a no-brainer that divorcing Miranda was another life event that he's handling with booze."

Blake's troubling behavior has only escalated since his split from Miranda. "She kept Blake grounded. She was his voice of reason. But now that he's single," says the source, "he's free-falling to a very bad place. Of course, he's always liked to drink a lot, but now his alcohol consumption has skyrocketed. His close friends have talked about an intervention, but it hasn't happened yet. They need to hurry, because time is running out."

Sadly, Blake doesn't think he has a problem. In fact, he jokes about his love of alcohol on Twitter all the time (see box) and even admits to drinking liquor from a plastic cup while taping *The Voice*. The type of alcohol he drinks on set "varies," a source tells *In Touch* exclusively, but it's "always a mix of some sort. There have been times it was vodka drinks, then Jack Daniel's... But he does love his Tito's. It's made in America." An industry insider says Blake has been known to down vodka before noon. Adds the Blake insider: "He loves to

get hammered and he'll be the first one to tell you that. He wears his drinking like a badge of honor, but in the long run, it's going to kill him." It's already causing him to make bad decisions. Says the source: "One night he was so obliterated, he urinated on a mailbox in public! He

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Blake's friends have tried to help him.

They've told him, 'It's time to check yourself into a facility.' But he won't listen”

—AN INSIDER CLOSE TO BLAKE

could get himself arrested, not to mention lose respect from his fans and friends. He needs help.”

Blake's public declarations about his love of booze are telling.

"That's a great behavioral indication of alcoholism," explains addiction expert Doug Thorburn, author of *Alcoholism Myths and Realities*, who hasn't counseled Blake. The country singer's repeated reference to getting drunk "means it's important to him. It's also a great way of distracting," Thorburn adds. "Addicts are brilliant at creating distractions, kind of like magicians. Like, 'Watch me joke about drinking, but don't watch that I've got a problem with drinking, how it makes me act badly.'"

Blake's friends, colleagues and handlers won't give up on him — and have all urged him to seek help. "They want him to take some time out and spend it in rehab," says a second insider, "but Blake insists throwing himself into the new season of *The Voice* is the best distraction and all he needs. If he continues on this path, he's facing an intervention. Everyone is praying that Blake can pull himself together and take control of this problem before it's too late." ■

Miranda vs Blake: SHOWDOWN AT THE CMAS



All eyes will be on Blake and Miranda — who are both up for multiple awards — at the Country Music Association Awards on Nov. 4, their first public event since their July divorce. "Miranda's been looking amazing and won't have a problem seeing Blake," says an insider, "but Blake will want to get a buzz going to deal with seeing Miranda." For co-hosts Carrie Underwood and Brad Paisley, the superstars' divorce is fair game. "They will certainly address it," adds the insider. "Producers are trying to get Blake and Miranda together onstage, too — or else they'll be the elephant in the room."

