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**I Found Your Address in a Fortune Cookie**

**a novel**

**Jonathan Goldstein**

**A Thesis**

**in**

**The Department**

**of**

**English**

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts at  
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## **Abstract**

### **I Found Your Address in a Fortune Cookie**

**Jonathan Goldstein**

*I Found Your Address in a Fortune Cookie* is a short novel documenting a man's life from childhood to death-bed. It is structured as a series of fragments that, while not strictly chronological, play off one another to create an emotional landscape. The narrative voice shifts between the first and third person.

Although going about his life with the semblance of routine, Joshua, the protagonist, is thirsting for something unnamable. His desire runs from mundane, sensual pleasures like lying in bed or drinking coffee to desires for which there are no easy names, like the desire to escape the body. The novel is composed of a series of romantic relationships that span Joshua's early adolescence to his middle age. Approaching death, he withdraws into a dream world in which the messiah has arrived; but even salvation offers little in the way of providing a bottom line to existence. The messianic age proves only to be a continuance of the mundane.

**For my parents**

Before he sat down, Josh always checked the toilet water. There were stories of snakes that had crawled up miles of pipe looking for sunlight. Sometimes, right in the middle of everything, he would get up and look down between his legs.

His mother's name was Frieda. She talked on the phone and popped packaging bubbles, one by one. His father's name was Chick. Chick read a book about the Nixon administration. Chick's face looked like it was being squeezed through a small hole.

The story was, Josh had fainted at his own birth.

Chick had a fight with Frieda. He stomped into the little orange den at the front of the apartment and took each of his diplomas off the wall, his US Army discharge and a certificate of appreciation from his students. It had a drawing of Snoopy wearing a graduation cap.

He threw them into the trunk of his car and peeled off.

Your father's feeling very sad, Frieda said.

At McDonald's, when I'm throwing out the stuff on my tray, there's a point where I get scared that my wallet could have been on there, too. I always feel, as everything is tumbling into the garbage, that I might have tossed my wallet down onto the tray and forgotten about it. I always feel that it's at least a possibility.



⊕

**His mother was scrubbing the toilet with his old underwear. What if someone saw?**

**Everything got funnier as he got older. He figured by the time he reached his deathbed, he'd be in stitches around the clock.**

**When it finally happened, the nurse in charge was so patronizing.**

**I used to be a very handsome man, he'd say, with an excellent head for figures.**

**That's good, she'd say.**

**Life is quick, he'd say. It's a fucking dream.**

## II

I'll never do stuff like that when I'm a father, Josh said.

You are a better man than I, Gunga-Din, Chick said.

Chick once told Josh this story about an old army buddy of his who went around kissing women on the hand every time he was introduced. One day he kissed the cherry on the end of a woman's lit cigarette. His lip was so bad he had to go to a speech therapist. This was one of his father's *this-is-what-you-get* stories.

Chick laughed whenever a bald man drove by in a convertible.

There was a pretty fifteen year old girl who babysat him. Once, while she was talking on the phone, she painted his finger nails red. He held his hands out as steady as he could. The girl said that Josh had the hands of a surgeon.

Chick saw his fingers tiptoe across the piano keys. Somewhere in the middle of *The Entertainer*, a telephone fell off the kitchen counter. Frieda kept telling Chick to leave her son alone.

Chick smacked his thighs, searching. Frieda called it the car key dance.

Φ

It's incredible, said Chick. With a photo-novel you can get the same pictures as in the movie but you take it at your own pace-- and it's better than the movie because you can actually see what they're thinking. Like Danny Zuko might be saying, 'Ya, I'd love to meet your parents Sandy,' but the thought balloon tells another story.

I really, really hate you, he said.

Oh now we're *definitely* not going, Chick said.

Chick dreamt that they had made him the pope.

I can't speak Latin, he kept telling them.

He sat in the park, all dressed up like the pope. He felt very lonely and depressed about it.

### III

Frieda told Josh a story about a boy whose father was going to take him to the circus. The boy was so excited he couldn't sleep the night before. In the morning he was very tired and excited.

It was only once they were at the circus that the boy realized he had forgotten to put on pants.

What did he do? Josh asked.

Chick's dad was a very smily man who died of cancer. One time, after the beach, Josh took a shower with him. He remembered seeing someone through the soap in his eyes who had a face like an open faced sandwich. It was so full of love.

Chick had a brother named Melvin. Melvin had a hunched back that no one seemed to notice. He was four years older than Chick and looked a little like him but nastier. He was a teacher in a prison in upstate New York. One summer they visited Melvin and his family. Melvin had this kind of dog that they kept telling Josh was the biggest kind there was. They lived in a mobile home. Josh had never been in one and thought it was cool but not quite right.

Is that your IQ? asked Melvin's son pointing at the single digit on the front of Josh's T-shirt.

Just answer, his cousin kept saying. Yes or no.

ϕ

Before he sat down on the toilet, he checked behind the shower curtain. Melvin's curtain had pictures of Marilyn Monroe. Josh pulled up his shirt. It was the first time he had ever really looked at his own nipple.

46... 47... 48... 49..., everyone was saying.

50, said his father. He got up off the kitchen floor. He was sweating. He looked uncertain.

Go ahead, he said.

No, thanks, Melvin said. He was smiling with a drink in his hand.

That's because you can't, said Chick putting on his shirt.

Frieda was crying.

He was sitting in the living room barefoot when his cousin Edie walked in. He tried to hide his feet under a throw cushion.

Chick's mother's name was Doris. Now she lived with Melvin and his family. After her husband's funeral, she rolled out the death certificate like it were a deed from a Monopoly set.

A real cold fish, Chick would say.

Her old apartment used to smell like books. She taught Josh magic tricks. His other grandmother was always in a house coat, cooking big pots of chicken stew. Doris subscribed to *TV Guide*.

The last time he ever saw her was in a photo. She was in a chair in an old age home. His father and uncle were sitting on each of the arm rests.

I love you all, she kept saying that day.

Josh's penis was his best pal. He twiddled it in the back seat, his coat over his lap.

You and your cousin decide on a pizza together, said his mother from out of the front. You either share like normal people or we're going home.

#### IV

Sometimes when I drink a particularly amazing fruit juice, I get all nervous. As it goes down my throat I think, *it doesn't ever get any better than this.*

On the first day of school, he pounded the door from the inside.

They're beating me in here, he said.

They brought him to a red room where his foot kept falling asleep. They had him make a bus out of pipe cleaners and a milk carton.

One day, you will be a daddy and you can give this to *your* son.

Everything ends, Josh said to his son. Everything. He wanted someone to blow him out like a candle. He just wished he could eat chala bread.

I brought out my frog like Kaliozakis told me. He was my best friend but he was also a maniac. When he talked about girls, he would smooch his penis into the wall. For some reason he reminded me of my grandfather. Kaliozakis once found a pair of old underwear on a driveway. He put them on over his pants and hopped around singing the "Underoos" song until his little brother Richie almost pissed his pants.

The frog's gotta die, Kaliozakis said.

I kept the frog in a yogurt container with a rock and some water in it. He poked a stick in there. He made the same noise he made when his cock was against the wall. Richie was there, too. He was a few years younger than both of us. Richie put his hand over my eyes.

You shouldn't see this, he said. He was crying. His father used to beat the shit out of him.

Richie thought I was pure.

Josh wanted to be the man who entered strangely into people's lives, parking a car with foreign plates in their driveways.

In their kitchens, he would sit and wait for them to pour him a whiskey.

ϕ



Kaliozakis's little brother Richie was seven years old and slightly retarded. Richie sat in his room in his pajamas all day and listened to novelty records on his little phonograph. He would listen and chew on the cuffs of his pajama top.

The greatest thing Kaliozakis felt he knew how to do was this thing he did to Richie.

Kaliozakis would walk into Richie's room and sit on the edge of his bed. He would watch Richie with a very serious look on his face. When Richie looked back, Kaliozakis would sing:

Don't cry out loud  
Keep it inside  
Learn how to hide your feelings.

But I'm not crying, Richie would say over and over. He would keep saying it until he started to cry. Kaliozakis was then ready for the second part. He would sing while he pinched Richie's cheeks:

Baby face  
You've got the cutest little  
Baby face.

That would really get Richie going, rolling across the carpet. He would look at the ceiling with his mouth open, panting, like there was a burning meatball on his tongue.

I wanted Richie to turn into this thing that I knew was possible. I didn't care if Richie had to die for it. I knew it was out there and I just wanted to see it already. Kaliozakis was making it happen for us.

## VI

**When you're nine, the Globe Trotters are sex.**

**He rubbed his feet back and forth on the library carpet. When she walked by he touched her with the tip of his index finger.**

**Chick taught biology. When Josh was eleven, he took him to the school on a professional day. He was supposed to help his father put the report cards into alphabetical order. Josh looked into the other classrooms and saw teachers doing their report cards. They had neat piles on their desks. They picked up a report card, wrote something on it and quickly moved it onto another pile. Josh hoped that maybe he could get a blank one just to mess with.**

***Your son is really stupid. Have you thought of a special school?***

***I'm not sure we have the facilities here. Please make sure your***

***son bathes before coming to class. His raunchy stench is disruptive.***

**His father had this whole other system. They had to move in a long collapsible table from the art room. His father laid out all the report cards alongside one another. Everything had to be made into a Twister mat.**

**In the staff room there was a Coke machine. An old music teacher bought him a Five Alive. It was the first time he had ever drank one. It was an awful thing to drink when you were looking at a Coke machine.**

There was a pretty young teacher named Jill who was moving cushions and looking under chairs.

Chick, have you seen my book? Jill asked.

Why would I want your book?

Everyone in the room got very quiet.

I got my own books.

Josh knew he stood no chance with Jill now.

At home in the kitchen, Chick explained the story to Frieda. He said Jill had been giving him the needles all week and he finally let her have it.

The last thing someone wants to do is fall into my mouth, he said.

Her name was Talia and she was in from Israel with her family. She was staying downstairs with our Israeli neighbours. She couldn't speak a word of English and I couldn't speak Hebrew but it was the summer that *Grease* came out and I invited her and her younger sister up to our apartment to listen to the soundtrack while I danced for them.

I would fall down dead at the end of each song like I had just given them my all but I'd always get up for the next one and they would laugh.

Before Talia left back to Israel, I gave her ten Archie Digests. I stacked them so all the spines lined up perfectly. I wanted them to look solemn and substantial, like a package wrapped in rope from the old country.

It's how I feel about you.

**I want to say that to somebody someday and tell them about the Archie Digests and how I always wanted to say that to someone and how I am finally saying it and it is to you.**

**There was a story that Frieda always told.**

**When she was a girl, her family had a country house and one night someone left the back screen door open. In the middle of the night, when she walked into the kitchen, she saw one of the walls covered in moths of all sizes.**

**It looked like wallpaper, she said.**

**He was riding on the bus. He looked at the back of the seat in front of him and he forgot what shirt he was wearing. He looked straight ahead and tried to see how long he could keep a thing like that forgotten.**

## VII

I must sit beside her. She might like me. She might find me not so bad.

Mara was friends with his neighbour. She remembered him from the time she was playing Chinese checkers on the front porch and his father was giving him a haircut on the driveway. His mother was shouting directions from out the bedroom window.

Your mom's pretty high strung, she said.

Hi.

Hi.

What's up?

The sky.

Joshua, you'd better clean your room. It's disgusting.

I like it like this. It's cozy.

It looks like a crazy person lives here.

Maybe one does.

At least clean the dishes and put them away. I get depressed looking at them.

You are so beautiful, he thought.

Mara looked out the window of the bus. The way her hands twisted in her lap made his heart break. *After school, those are the fingers that pull fried chicken from the basket.*

So what's your favorite song?

Probably something by the Beatles, said Mara.

When he went home he listened to his dad's copy of *Rubber Soul*. He lay on the carpet, the big brown earphones squished into the sides of his head. He stared at his Dad's high school diploma on the wall and thought about Mara when she was a little girl dancing to *Michelle*. Her parents must have loved her very much.

Do you remember when I was a kid and you'd buy those steaks on a stick and you'd call them lollies? How the hell is a steak anything like a lollipop?

It was on a lollipop stick, his mother said, and you used to lick and lick them. You used to eat carrots like corn on the cob. You said it was how the kung fu experts did it.

After dinner, Joshua looked up Mara's name in the phone book. Her father's name was Jack. Seeing it there on the page made him horny.

Hello.

Hi. It's Josh.

Hey.

**There's a documentary on Paul McCartney tonight. I thought you might want to see it.**

**We don't get cable.**

**I could tape it for you.**

**We don't have a VCR.**

**Ah.**

**It doesn't matter. He isn't that hot a Beatle anyway.**

**Who's your favorite?**

**Ringo.**

**Why Ringo?**

**He's so harmless.**

## VIII

### **fantasy #M5039**

They wanted to participate in the miniskirt contest but they weren't wearing miniskirts.

"Let's get up on stage in our panties," one said. "I can't remember but if I'm wearing my black ones I'm sure to win. No one knows us here anyway."



## IX

A double decker bus cruising down the highway inhabited by a renegade pack of girls that were a combo of ones I went to school with and TV stars. Scarlet Wu, the toughest girl in my junior high, was their leader and Brooke Shields drove the bus. They all wore nothing but panties and T-shirts. Breasts weren't a big part of my fantasy life but the mere fact that panties existed was enough to set my wee-wee on fire. I remember once going so far as watching the neighbour's panties strung out on the clothesline through a pair of binoculars.

Another fantasy: Mia sticks her hand into my rugby pants and underwear and flutters her hand around like a trapped bird. She goes, "Woo, woo," to make her friends laugh.

To try and analyse these things would be like ripping apart a colourful balloon to see what was inside that made it so colourful.

When our parents all went out, I slept over at Kaliozakis's. We watched *The Love Boat* in his den, waiting anxious-fisted for the poolside scenes.

Kaliozakis jerked with both hands, like he was rolling Play-Dough into a thin hot-dog.

We capped off the evening by pranking people in his mother's address book and eating frozen TV dinners.

There is nothing comparable to being screamed at by a beautiful lifeguard when you're twelve, squinting from the sun in a wet bathing suit. I purposely soaked my feet at the side of

the pool during adult swim just to make her blow the whistle. I wanted her to blow the whistle right in my ear.

What can compare with coming home from the 'Y' pool and jerking off while listening to your own '45 of *Heart of Glass*? You can never desire an older woman the way you do when you are eleven years old and pulling off a wet bathing suit. The shrivelled nut sack, balls retreating like frightened mice, what?

There was this idea that turned me on: a woman sticking my beach towel into the crotch of her bikini, peeing all over it and handing it back to me. And laughing, too.

I was playing volleyball at the pool and the ball came down on the tip of my finger and pushed it out of joint. Tony, the head life guard, was playing backgammon with a bunch of girls. He tried to push it back to normal. When it just wouldn't go, he couldn't help but start to giggle, and so did the girls and so did I just because I wanted to be a part of it all.

I went to the hospital and they had to set it and wrap it in gauze.

All summer, when I jerked off in the basement, I would put my nose to the wrap and smell the medicinal odour. I don't know what it reminded me of, but just that it smelt so foreign from everything else around me, Jewish food, carpeting, laundry, onions. I began to think of it as the smell of some beautiful nurse lying in my arms. It made me as hard as an ice pick.

All summer I snorted away at my mummied hand and thought about the women who existed out there who didn't smell like anything I had ever imagined. I smelt that hand all summer long until it ended up smelling just like me and everything else in the house and it really didn't do anything for me one way or the other.

Spence's head was under the stall door.

I am looking, Spence said, but I ain't laughing.

I ain't laughing, he kept saying. His face was deadly serious.

When they tried to gross each other out, Josh talked about the day he found Kaliozakis's mother in the backyard raking leaves in her underwear. Her ass was so damn cute, he said.

Kaliozakis talked about Josh's aunt Betty. She had a mole on her cheek the size of a grapefruit and Kaliozakis went on about how wild she got when he gnawed on it.

I once bought her a nipple tassel for it and taught her to spin it clockwise *and* counter-clockwise. She's a talented old bird.

The day they kicked each other's asses in front of the library was so ugly, the windows shaking, the librarians running outside screaming.

I'll stick a bug so far up your ass, Kaliozakis said as three cute librarians tore Josh's head out from his armpit.

In Josh's basement, they started inventing their own language. "Orange julep" was "unslep." "French fries" was "enchify." "Hot dog" was "otenhog." They only got three words into the whole thing.

Sometimes they'd lie in the basement at night and talk about what they'd do if they were downtown.

I'd go up to some girl, Kaliozakis said, and I'd make her love me.

**What if all of this is a dream? Josh said.**

**I'm pretty sure it isn't, Kaliozakis said.**

**Some of the girls thought Spence looked like the Fonz. When things like that happened, Josh thought about how Spence had proven himself to be such a big baby in Kindergarten, crying his head off and yelling, I'm color blind. I'm color blind.**

**So there he was in the school yard staring at a caterpillar when Spence came up to him.**

**If you step on it, Spence said, I'll be your best friend.**

**Josh stepped on it before Spence could even finish the sentence. He looked down at the splotch of light green juice and orange fur. Spence's voice trailed away.**

**Pussy, they shouted.**

**One of them shot a rock at a bum who was sitting in a doorway and someone else asked a girl if she was wearing panties tonight.**

**You're really disgusting, the girl said.**

**Then why are you talking to me? he asked.**

**He liked jerking off to flappers. These women were all dead but their spirit lived on in his erection and when he came they died all over again.**

**fantasy # H6852**

**“This underwear is too tight,” she cried. “I want a pair that does not rub my clitoris to the point of orgasm so. These type, which you have just fitted me into, are upsetting me. They floss my anus devilishly. I know for certain they are not the proper size. They are exposing the edges of my pubis and are putting my ass globes on full display! Please Sir, won’t you recheck my file for some type of error.”**

## XII

Sharing a locker with Vered in grade ten was one of the luckiest things to ever happen to me. Just knowing, that no matter what, our lockers were alone in the dark for six hours a day was enough to make me feel like at least something in my life was going right.

The first time I ever phoned her up, I was lying on my stomach on my parents' bed. I had my hand inside the front of my pants. I was watching myself in the dresser mirror. It was about locker business, about how I was wondering if she had seen this watch-pen of mine. When I had the poison control sticker just about peeled off the receiver, I launched into a long speech about the Three Stooges and how she should definitely check out their stuff. Then I asked her out.

We went to see the Eurythmics at this outdoor concert and I don't know where I came up with the idea, but I wanted to hold her from behind and sway with her to the music. I knew that if I didn't do it I would hate myself.

Vered's friend Deborah was driving and we had to stop in the city to pick up her boyfriend. At his apartment, he opened the door in a bath towel. I had never seen a boy that hairy. He looked like he was about forty-five. In the car on the way to the show, he handed me back a piece of licorice candy that almost burnt a hole through my tongue.

During a slow song, I snuck up behind Vered and put my sweaty pocket hands on her hips. I tried to ease us both into some kind of *groove*, but I only ended up almost ripping off her sneakers. For the rest of the evening, she was afraid to go near me. Deborah's boyfriend held them both, dancing with them in perfect unison like they were his back-up singers.

At home that night I ate a bowl of cereal while staring at a bottle of nail polish. Carefully, I painted my nails. In bed, my fingers spider-walked the length of my ribs. *Quit tickling me. I have a plane to catch in the morning.*

My mother's friend Lois had made it for my Bar Mitzvah. It was a plate with little coloured bits of felt glued on it. It was supposed to be a portrait of me. It hung on a wall in the kitchen. My mother said Lois was talented.

One day, I was going to fry up some eggs, pull the plate off the wall and slide the eggs right onto it. When I was finished, I'd put it right back where I found it.

Vered was the kind of girl who playfully sprayed her breasts with the garden hose during the dog days.

Have you ever fantasized about me? she asked. Do you see me in short dresses dancing to that shitty folk music you like? What colour do you think my nipples are? Pink? Red? Flesh? Brown?

At the loser table, we ate egg salad out of Tupperware. At the popular table they ate cold cut sandwiches and drank soda. The popular table was in the corner, right beside the soft ice cream machine. When there was a birthday, they popped each other in the face with soft ice cream sandwiches. They had the whole machine to themselves.

Φ

Kaliozakis had this thing he did where he'd go up to people and ask them what time it was. All the while, his naked ass was popped out of his sweat pants so just Josh could see. There he'd be, having the most serious conversations while Josh could see his ass right there on the street.



### XIII

Whenever Vered called, Josh left right off the bat. Her house was four blocks away and he cycled over on pure ball steam. She was eating limp fries on her front porch. She made it look exotic. She kept pouring salt all over the plate.

I'm gonna die from salt, she said.

In her room, she said she might as well show him her tits because she already showed them to her brother-in-law. She was wearing a brown sweat shirt that she lifted up two times, really fast.

She put on music and sat on his lap in front of the mirror.

Let's see what we look like together, she said.

Vered gave him a piece of gum from her purse. It was so sour that he squinted. She said he looked like he was having an orgasm.

On Monday, in art class, he watched the teacher talk about how much he loved his nana and how sad he was now that his nana was dead. Vered was sitting on the table facing him, flashing her panties until the word "nana" sounded like the stupidest thing in the world.

## XIV

There was something about the way Vered danced that scared the crap out of him. It was like she was squishing out a cigarette with her foot. Over and over. He never understood that side of her. All her moves were straight from the cunt.

Spence made him feel like he was nine years old and out for dinner with his family at the Ponderosa steak house and had run into his French teacher and his mother invited her to dine with them.

Spence made him feel like he was sitting in a public bathroom stall and someone had come into the bathroom and began singing a song about what a stinky bastard he was while he was in there sweating it out.

Spence made him feel like someone had taken the red Tonka fire engine he had always wanted and painfully corkscrewed it up his ass.

Spence made him feel like the ice-cream man had just rolled by and all his dead grandparents were mooning him from out the truck window.

I am doing my swimming. Using the palms of my hands, I pull myself along the wooden floor of her room on my stomach. Her bed is the life boat. She is sitting up, reading a book. I beg her to pull me aboard. After a lot of begging and drowning, she offers me a foot. I grab hold of it.

What's my foot's name? she asks.

Maureen, I answer.

**The emphaticness of my answer makes her giggle.**

**My hair, she says.**

**Priscilla.**

**My nose.**

**Mumtaz the Magnificent.**

**My breasts.**

**Dolores and Delilah.**

**My eyes.**

**Sinclair. They are both Sinclair.**

**My ass.**

**Henry.**

**My right nipple.**

**I'm not sure.**

**She pulls down the neck of her T-shirt and a pink little nipple pokes out. It's like it uses an independent personality to look me straight in the face. It clears my sinuses with a sharpness that almost makes my nose bleed.**

**J.R., I whisper.**

**If you could jerk off to something else, like a hamburger, could you imagine the delight in being alive? I'm sure the golden age will have something of that to it.**

## XV

He wrote down everything about Vered he could think of:

1. Her nose like a turtle.
2. Her twisted up tights in the glove compartment of the car.
3. Her sweet-talking cab drivers for a few extra blocks.
4. Her wetting herself with drunken laughter.
5. The stories with no point.
6. The way the wind always lifted her skirt up over her waist, no matter how unwindy it was.
7. The way she said she'd call and wouldn't.
8. The way she got turned off by the least show of emotion.
9. The way she never knew how hard money was to come by.
10. The way she was so formal whenever she wrote a letter.
11. How she always wrote "Hollywood" over and over when she was doodling.
12. How the first time I was at her house and she made a big bowl of meat sauce and a tall glass of milk and didn't offer me any.
13. How she was so hairy and sometimes when she wore a dress it was like a caveman trying to fit in.
14. How she was so good at ping pong because her folks had such a big basement.
15. How she'd lick my hands just after I fingered her.

**Fantasy #B7458**

**“Now it is time for payback,” said Delores from atop the muscly black man’s shoulders. “Webbington will now tickle your tender tummy until you pee your pretty panties. That will show you not to ever buy a pair of panties that I explicitly forbided you from buying. After you have thoroughly soaked the panties, Webbington will put them in your mouth and you will chew them like breaded veal. Do you enjoy veal, princess? Oh. So you refuse to answer me, do you? Now, you will *definitely* incur the ultimate in humiliation. Webbington! Start doing to her everything that I have just outlined.”**

## XVII

**This is marriage: You live with someone for thirty years and then one day you say to your true love, *put on some pants. I'm trying to eat a sandwich here.***

**He began to think about salvation and how it would go on forever and ever. It seemed as awful as death. He couldn't sleep at night. He alternated between sitting on the toilet and lying in bed with the lights on. At school he tried to explain the situation of going on forever but nobody understood. He didn't try too hard because he didn't want to depress anyone and he still didn't understand it exactly.**

**If I was Jesus, Kaliozakis said, my mother would have scratched a Roman's face. When they put the first nail in my hand, she would have gone ballistic. She would have screamed, no, no. It would have been too much. Somebody would have had to kill her.**

**It was so loud in the club that he had to repeat everything three times.**

**Do you like music? he asked.**

**In asking this he believed he was confronting something.**

**He looked at the dental floss floating at the top of the toilet bowl. It cast a shadow against the bottom. Things could get as insignificant as that. It was all a part of God's master plan.**

**Φ**

He rode his bicycle home and stopped in every alley along the way. He looked through all the garbage. When he found that little address book he felt good to be alive. Under "L" there was someone called *Loco Amoure*.

Josh took driving lessons with the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. He would think of her for the rest of his life whenever he smelt that kind of shampoo. On their breaks, he would wrap his legs around her waist from behind. He would say it was for her own good.

One night he dreamt that she was talking on a pay phone in the recreotecque and he pulled down her pants. Her anus was perfectly hairless and pink. It smelt like that shampoo. She cupped the receiver whispering something.

## XVIII

Lenny Bruce said that and Lenny Bruce said this, he was saying.

Lenny Bruce was king of the Jews and he was trying to impress Kay. She was on her way to an art history class. She said he should come over for fish sticks some time. She was wearing green leotards. He couldn't believe it.

My mother's food, hah! Are you kidding... uncle Shlepsy almost... ah! The ice-cream man doesn't stop in front of our house anymore...what a character... my father, a wild man: "Where's the car keys? Who left the stereo on?"

Jewish men can be really sexy, she said.

Josh looked through her bathroom garbage. Kay was cute and a good dancer. He looked through her garbage for anything. He didn't know what he was looking for. It wasn't like he had said, I hope I find some toenail clippings. He didn't have a single idea. When he stuck his hand in there and moved it around in the toilet tissue and the Q-tips, he hadn't an idea in Hell as to what he was looking for.

Oh there is definitely something wrong with my uncle Rupert, Kay said. He asked if I had ever heard of the joy buzzer tampon and then he stuck his finger in my crotch and vibrated it. I laughed just because I didn't want him to feel bad. Dad says he's really insecure and vulnerable since his divorce.

Φ



What a horrible humiliation, Josh said. To get your dog fucked! If you really want to show a man who's boss, you fuck his dog, plain and simple-- and you try to make the dog really like it.

The bird of her ass might take flight anytime now, he thought.

Remember when the Six Million Dollar Man had to push the moon back into orbit?

They were in the basement. He hit *play*.

Kay settled into this position on the couch. Her ass was perfectly pressed against the back of his forearm. He kept his arm there, as nervous and still as a hummingbird. The glass of ginger-ale in that hand, he now accessed with the other hand. He had never been as happy on that couch as he was right then.

The images on the screen were sunk in pea soup.

That night he dreamt they attacked each other on the street, ripping each other's clothes off while people in restaurant windows watched.

His parents had gone to the Poconos for the weekend so they took over their bedroom. Josh moved in the stereo. They listened to The Clash and moved things from the freezer into the microwave. They made love for the first time. Afterwards, Kay lay beside him and cried.

Do you want me to sleep on the floor? he asked.

That would only make it worse, she said.

Φ

Her family went on a bus tour when Kay was three years old. The whole bus played Bingo. At the front, Kay read out numbers into a microphone. She read the numbers off the balls as someone handed them to her. She read each number twice. She sounded like a child star.

The bus driver was smiling. He tried to tell her a joke.

Shut up and keep your eyes on the road, she said.

It was Kay's idea to move the bed over to the window. In the morning, he rolled over and looked outside. There wasn't a cloud in the sky. The red brick building across the street looked like the most real thing in the world. He thought of waking her so she could see. He didn't know what it was he wanted her to see.

You will never forget this, he thought.

## XIX

### **An excerpt from a romantic comedy in progress**

**Tony:**

I wanna lady who'll stick around when I get *diarear*. I don't wanna say, 'Honey, I got *diarear*' and have her tell me she's goin' out dancin' wit her girl friens. Dat don't rule my world. I want someone who's gonna squat down beside me while it's soupin' outta me. I want someone to mop my forehead down wit a cold wet rag. I want someone who's gonna bring me sandwiches cut into little triangles.

**Kay's Uncle Rupert is an architect**

**"My name's not Bebba," said Bebba thrusting her pelvis into Uncle Rupert's technical drawing table causing his hand to slip in what would be the birth of the jagged wall reform synagogue craze.**

**Kay's uncle Rupert is a flatulence enthusiast**

**"That one was a mushrooming hen-house bomb," he said to the embarrassed young lady beside him in the office elevator. "It blossoms in the anal abyss embodying a rather rodeo-like atmosphere. It calls to mind the lusty equine kicking at his true love's stable door and defecating all the while. If I close my eyes and sniff about, I envision two horses morbidly in love, dry humping in the back seat of a mini-bus. Their chauffeur tries ineffectively to keep his eyes out of the rear-view mirror."**

**Kay's uncle Shecky loves The Waltons**

**"Jimeney Stewart," shrieked uncle Rupert withdrawing his blood engorged dork from the girl scout leader's squack. After several jerks, he deposited a dollop of love scum onto the side of her cheek in an attempt at endowing her with a John-Boy Walton-like beauty mark.**

### **Kay's uncle Rupert tutors his son**

**Rupert kept smacking Jordy's forehead into the keyboard until it hit the space bar.**

**He wanted to show him that 'ice cream' was two words.**

## XXI

Once she pointed out the hum of the fluorescent light he couldn't stop hearing it. The library was almost empty so they spent a lot of time kissing. Josh was reading a book on cruelty and comedy and she was reading a book on Shelley.

In the library bathroom he rooted through the garbage. He washed his hands, scrubbing them with soap and then rinsing them over and over.

Aside from that, Mrs. Lincoln, how did you enjoy the play?

In the margin, in light pencil, was written, "I love you."

They lay in bed and she put on a show for him, her face an inch away from his. She kicked up her fingers like show girl legs. She played a match book like a piano.

Kay's father once got drunk and asked her if she'd had sex yet.

She told him to fuck off and started crying.

Josh felt her legs in the doorway. He had never wanted anyone this badly. He told her he could look at her forever. He was scared by how much he wanted her.

My uncle touched my ass once, she said. She was drunk and talking to the taxi driver. Everyone was in the other room. He slung me over his lap and pulled my pants down. His living room was real plush: candy dishes full of toffee, thick carpeting.

Everyone was in the kitchen eating rolie-polies and looking at wedding pictures. I was laughing my head off. They said he was feeble in the head.

She would only come over if she could get some sleep first.

Nap from now until three a.m. and cycle over, I said.

Desperado, Kay said.

I heard her coming up the stairs with her bike. It didn't wake me up because I hadn't ever fallen asleep.

She was wearing pajamas and was all sweaty. The mix tape she brought over had a song by the Smurfs. At the end of side B she slipped one in by Leonard Cohen. I called him Leonard Groan. It was about a girl who blew bubbles, spun her own dresses and baked fresh bread.

A few months later, someone at a party recognized her. He said there was a plank of wood on the street, outside his window. Cars kept going over it and waking him up so when he couldn't take it anymore, he went outside to move it and a girl on her bike sped past. She was in her P.J.'s, a tooth brush clamped between her teeth like a pipe. To hear him tell it, that girl just about made his night.

**excerpts from Kay's grade 7 journal**

The songs that I like best are the ones that I hate hearing the most when I'm with my parents. Sometimes when I'm in the back seat and we've been driving for hours, I can almost forget.

\*

My nerves all started in grade six, around the time Pinkie locked me in my locker. After that it got hard to look at lockers in the same way, once I knew how dark they got with the door closed and how bad my mother's sandwiches made them smell in the end.

\*

Today I had gym and I know that one of these days I'm going to slip on that stupid beam and crack my whole crotch open like a walnut. Mrs. Tessler's whistle goes through me like a wet cold and makes me feel like I'm actually *inside* a whistle.

Lenny, who's totally retarded and failed six grades and has a full beard, brought one of the girls into the boys' locker room. She said she kept her eyes closed the whole time which I think is a pretty dorky thing to do. Come on!



\*

Mrs. Sternfeldt knocks Hal's desk over almost every single day. She scatters his stuff all over the floor with the tip of her loafer. It's like the whole world is made of dog shit except for her and that loafer. She leafs through his reader and claims she can tell exactly what he had for dinner each night just by looking at the condiment smudged into the page. Yellow means he had hot-dogs on the night of Monday's assignment. Knowing that I had hot-dogs with my family on a Monday night strikes me as a very creepy thing for a teacher to know.

\*

Dear Arthur,

Thank-you so much for being such a big asshole and yes, you are good looking, but so was Hitler to some people. You are my brother's best friend but you are still mean and stupid and one day you will find yourself alone and you will then know what it feels like to feel like crap. I sincerely hope that you have a good life, because I can never be happy. You are a jerk and you and Pinkie deserve each other. I understand her father owns some big factory and I am sure that if you play your cards right, you will one day have people around to treat like shit, but then you will still die a miserable jerk.

\*

**The best lunch I ever brought was this one time my mother forgot to buy bread and she gave me crackers and cheese. Don't ask me why this was so great.**

## XXIII

He wanted all the air he would ever breathe to smell like her. Maybe the air he already breathed smelled like God. Maybe he had gotten so used to it from smelling it every day that it didn't smell like anything any more. It just smelled like air.

Everything made him sad. One time he saw a middle-aged man with a big belly riding a delivery bicycle and it just about ruined his summer.

He wanted Kay to understand. He told her about the man who had ordered a strawberry milkshake in the Burger King that night after his shift. He was so small and skinny and it was after midnight and that was all he ordered. Just the shake. He needed her to understand.

The man went back to his table, pulled an oversized calculator out of a crumpled plastic bag and started punching buttons. He went back to the counter.

You charged me too much tax, he said to the girl.

She called her manager over. No one knew what the man was talking about. He went back to his seat and punched buttons on the calculator like he was dialing an ambulance, a piece of finger on the bathroom floor. He looked over at Josh sitting in the booth.

Fifteen percent I'll pay with a smile.

He wanted her to understand how sick and small this man was.

Φ

Sex doesn't turn me on any more, Kay's father said. I don't know what I live for.

All the gin made him want the truth so badly. He looked at his daughter like she knew something. After all, she came out of him.

Josh was always joking about things. Be serious, Kay said. Josh had a routine with the hotel night clerk: *The candy in the machine is an illusion. The ice machine's button? The roar. The cups in plastic, like an old woman's head in a shower cap!*

Even the cups reminded him of old women.

*The toilets of perfection! The darkness!*

The air-conditioning and that she didn't know him as a kid.

She said that once they were in the hotel room she would do a dance for him, but now she was sleeping. The bedspreads were like-- he had an aunt who had a dress just like that. His aunt was proud of how hard her ass was. Try to pinch it, she said. It was like trying to pinch a balloon. He pinched the bed spread. Kay was under the covers.

*In the morning, we'll eat breakfast and I'll like my eggs how I liked them the day before. I'll never know what you're thinking when you look over at the other tables.*

She called me up to tell me how she had lain across the bar and allowed all these boys to put Skittles in her belly button.

I filled a pillow case with all my shoes. I swung it over my head like a propeller.

He tried to fit too much of her foot into his mouth. He felt himself start to gag. He hadn't thrown up in over ten years. If he was going to throw up he wanted it to happen

outside an all-you-can-eat Chinese buffet. He wanted little Chinese boys and girls to scream in horror and delight. He wondered what it felt like for her to have so much foot in there.

The script he was writing revolved around a private dick named Luco who has a passion for jerking off. The way other film noire types drank in bars between fist fights and stake-outs, this guy would masturbate. During the opening credits, there would be a close up of his face coming behind the wheel of his car, his shoulders moving up and down and Lou Reed's "Sweet Jane" playing.

Who's going to watch a movie like that? Kay asked.

Angry little pubescent boys, Kay answered.

As she walked through the arch onto the campus, Josh wanted to run her over.

What the hell did you do to the steering wheel? Frieda asked.

Kay's father sat outside on the patio and looked at the papers on the kitchen table. He had wanted to name Kay *Anna*. His wife wouldn't let because she'd once worked with someone named Anna and she would never be able to get that woman's face out of her mind. Anna, he said.

Kay attached a laser beam to me, your honor. She used it to make me do silly things. Some evil things, too. The way I barked at my mother! Certainly your honor has a mother that he loves most dearly.

## XXIV

### Script idea

Blame is a cowboy's son going through puberty. One day, walking along the ranch, he finds a gooey, biomorphic hole in the ground. Every day he comes by and has sex with it. He is curious about the origin and meaning of the hole so one day he decides to dig around it in hope of discovering its source. He is horrified and disgusted to find that the hole is the rotting remainder of his grandmother's mouth. It seems that his father had decapitated the old woman over a dispute about cattle and had buried her head on the property. Blame begins to throw up. When he is finished, he confronts his father. They have an exchange.

*sample dialogue:*

Blame: How could you?

Father: That ain't yer business, varmint.

Blame's father shoots Blame directly through the forehead. He then buries Blame under a tree with Blame's grandmother's head nestled between his legs. The father remembers something he had once heard about poetry and murder, then he says something about this being their "final resting place." Then he forces himself to laugh. Then he thinks: but seriously, life is odd.

**The second part takes place in Heaven. The set is made mostly of white bed sheets and toilet paper.**

**God is bored because once you've been going on forever, it's near impossible to see or feel anything new at a certain point. He says to his angels: Make the dead dance for My amusement. This is something he has done before. Perhaps He doesn't remember but probably He is pretending He doesn't remember. The angels bring Him Blame and his grandmother's head to dance before His Heavenly throne.**

**Blame's grandmother opens her mouth in surprise when she sees the face of God and all of Blame's semen starts to spray all over the place. God is touched and says to his angels: "Those sperms will all become babies and all the babies will dance before their lord God forevermore, and I shall never grow bored again."**

**if Josh was named Martin and had a horrible temper**

“You ruined the last slice of bread, you lumbering, fumbling, blundering, two-timing, meandering, feeble-nuttled lummoX,” intoned Martin with lowered reading glasses.

**if Kay’s name was Mildred**

When Senator F came to the mall he shook everybody’s hand. Josh waited in line like everybody else. When it came his turn, the Senator titty-whistled him.

There was a news crew there. They played the titty-whistle at six and eleven.

Mildred’s friend’s husband video-taped it.

“For Pete’s sake, Mildred. It was a harmless little titty-whistle.”

**in the perfect marriage Kay’s name would be Jasmina**

“Could you smell these for me and tell me if they’re still wearable or not?”

She put them under his nose. He was in the middle of writing a book.

“For God’s sake, Jasmina, ask the bloody gardener! I haven’t time for your shenanigans. Two days before we were married your mother took me aside and said ‘this one is a wild one.’ You laughed and danced in the other room until the dishes in the cupboard began to clack.”



## XXVI

**This is my favourite song on Earth, Kay said.**

**She got up to dance. He knew he was watching one of the most beautiful things he would ever see.**

**He woke up in the middle of the night and felt nothing but that he was alive. This was the panic he kept trying to describe. *Being.***

***Cripes, Eddy, he would say to God, I'm really over a barrel here.***

**He liked doing it doggie-style because Kay had an ass full of personality.**

**He wished he could put her head on the lower part of her back like Shroeder did with the bust of Beethoven on his piano.**

**She had a lovely face and he often got quite lonely back there without it.**

**Josh was glad Kay was wearing her Pizza Delivery cap. It made her look like the hot girl next door in a teen picture with plenty of Jackson Brown music. What she called hat head, he found incredibly sexy. Her hair was so thick. She once convinced a little boy that it was transplanted from a horse's tail.**

**They walked to the gas station for smokes. It was after midnight and she kept wanting to stop and sit on the curb.**

It was the first time he had worn the new Levi's from way in the back of his drawer. They fit him too loose. They were stiff and loose. It made him feel like a little kid playing dress-up with everyone walking in.

Hey Spence, Kay said. Spence poked the gas nozzle into his Hyundai. He was flipping through his wallet like a man with a stacked liquor cabinet and a kitchen full of clean white appliances.

Going, going, gone, said Spence pointing at Josh's hairline.

You know Spence? she asked.

It would be awful if there was a bully and the bully made me take off my clothes. It would be just terrible if this was on the street where a little girl could see me and ask her father if I was the same kind of monkey that Tarzan had in the cartoons.

**the books Spence has read**

1. Salem's Lot
2. The Pearl (for school)
3. Lord of the Flies (for school)
4. A biography of Reggie Jackson
5. Blubber

## XXVIII

Josh once read a book where things went on forever. That book was only three hundred and twelve pages.

He was holding out a melted Three Musketeers bar and she was so cool and aloof, rolling her eyes and reading Simone de Beauvoir. If I was Jean Paul Sartre, he thought, I would stick my thumb in her ass and she would beg for more.

She put down her book and asked him if she could look into his pee-hole.

I let you look into me, she said.

When he was four, something had happened with hot Chinese mustard when he was naked and running around a coffee table. Now he pretended his pee-hole didn't exist.

She held it like a pirate telescope. His hands were sweaty. He slicked back his hair. I love you very much, he said. She looked so serious. He wanted her to smile.

There was one time he waited in her bed over an hour, naked, just wearing his cowboy boots and reading an Archie Digest. The look on her face when she walked in, it hardly seemed worth the wait.

Certain things Reggie pulled on Archie made him horny. One time, lying in bed with his mother, he read a story where Reggie and Archie were stuck on a roof. They had to get down so Reggie told Archie to take off his pants so he could use them as a rope. On his way down, they ripped and Reggie just walked off. So long sucker, he said.

What do you see in there, he asked.

Wouldn't interest you, she said.

Φ

Imagine you were a doctor, Kaliozakis said, and you were delivering a baby and just as it was about to come out you fucked the mother and inside her, your penis was pushed into her baby's face.

One time they were eating Chinese food and running out of things to say. She picked up his knuckle between two chop sticks and made like she was eating him up.

He humped her and thought about her surrender. When that was no longer enough, he said to himself, It looks like Ms. Power Suit has been taken down a notch. After that he would close his eyes when he thrust thinking about girls in his class from grade eleven hobbling down the corridor with their pants around their ankles.

It is as though, being raised on a farm, Spence often had to spank the pigs to tenderize and make juicy their bacon.

His laugh is so smug and invincible, it's like he has a pipe clenched between his teeth during the opening song to his own Christmas special.

Josh's favorite was when she kissed him and jerked him off at the same time. It helped him feel the kiss the way it should be. Everything was often so dead and a little hand was like a jumper cable.

Φ

**Kay came trotting down the stairs into the basement. She was in her underwear and he was playing video games. He watched her, the sound of men dying in the background.**

**If Josh was Kay's retarded child named Rickie**

1

**"Not a loaf of *sweet* loaf," said Rickie to the baker, wagging his tongue with glee.**

**"*sweet* loaf."**

**"Come along Ricky," said his mother pulling him out of the bakery by a lock of stringy, hippie hair.**

**"Take it easy, Ma," said Ricky choking back a sob.**

**"Helda Newcastle was in that bakery," said Ricky's mother choking back a sob.**

2

**"I bought my mother an electric juicer," said Ricky to the stranger riding beside him on the metro.**

XXX

Did you see the matzo ball your mom gave me, said Kay. It wasn't even a ball.

She pinched his ass. He said he couldn't feel a thing. You're pinching the cloth of my underwear, he said. You haven't really got any ass there.

Kay went to a high school with a swimming pool.

You had to swim in gym class? Josh asked.

Yes, she said.

You mean you had to get into a bathing suit and get wet? What if you were hairy?  
What if you hated the cold?

She didn't know. She didn't have those problems.

There were these Korean kids, she said. They always stayed in the shallow end. While we were doing the butterfly stroke and learning water polo, they were popping their heads out of the shallow end, spraying water from their mouths and bouncing around. They always showed up wearing goggles and bathing caps.

He figured he would have just hung with the Koreans.

Kaliozakis gave his cat a voice. It was a southern belle sort of thing. He made his voice high pitched. He talked to Richie in the voice and Richie would talk back to the cat. Just as Richie started to get into it, telling it about all the stuff that happens at school and



even arguing with it, Kaliozakis looked him straight in the eye. In his regular voice he said: Why are you talking to a cat?

Kay imitated his mother. She put the throw cushions from the couch in her pants to make her ass real big. She picked things off the coffee table and looked at them trying like crazy not to laugh.

Oh, these are nice, she said. But Barney's mother can get you the same ones for next to nothing.

Later on, he was getting light-headed. He was snorting those cushions hard enough for something in his brain to pop.

So there he was, waddling around with this terrible love for her. It gave him insomnia and diarrhea. He did awful things to better understand her. He read her diary and got really angry. He watched her while she slept and pretended she was dead. He'd go at it until his cheeks were shiny.

Love was like a work-out. A crazy work out with jumping jacks in the steam bath and punch in the stomach sit-ups.

After a while, he was pretty convinced he was going to throw up.

If there is going to be a film about my life, there should be a scene where I fall off the couch in my sleep.

Don't dismantle me the room, his mother said.

It's just milk crates, he said.

He woke up that morning and put on cowboy boots and jeans. It was the middle of the summer and he would be lugging a refrigerator up two flights of stairs but he saw himself moving into his new place wearing cowboy boots.

His boots made this noise on the roof of the van that made him feel like Paul Newman.

His mother sat on his bed, playing with his Rubic's Cube key chain.

There were six of them on New Year's. They were at Josh's new place. He didn't have any furniture yet so they sat on bridge chairs in a circle. Kay brought along a bottle of champagne and one of the guys popped it and then no one had anything to say. She started to cry as a joke.

Josh had a strand of the shawl her aunt made her and he kept it in the pocket of his jean jacket. He would press it under his finger nail until it hurt.

Kay eats crackers as fast as she can. She pretends she's the Cookie Monster until a terrible thought makes her choke.

Josh cracks open a carton of juice and drinks. He feels like a little kid home all

alone. He goes to the fridge and throws out an entire broccoli. I mean really throws that thing out-- an overhand fastball right through the open kitchen window and into the alley.

Fuck broccoli, he thinks.

Where the car's parked? How much margarine is left? My finger tips are starting to look like something out of a documentary about heart surgery.

We had just finished eating the sushi she had made and we were lying on my bed. We were very happy, and she said, I want you to meet my mother.

She called her up and held the phone so that I could hear, too.

Her mother told amusing anecdotes in a light British accent. There was never a point to anything my mother ever said. My mother's stories usually ended with: *and I bargained him down to half*. Kay's mother's stories had buttons.

Kay said, I'd like you to meet Joshua, and handed me the phone.

There was this joke I wanted to make. I should have written it down. There were long pauses after everything I said. The receiver was getting sweaty. I was making conversation and she was making pauses.

She was trying very hard to hear something in my voice. I couldn't control all those terrible things that kept coming out of me.

Kaliozakis would bring Richie into the room with all of his friends. He was only seven years old but Kaliozakis would force him to lie down and be still and when he

couldn't be still enough, he'd pin down his shoulders to the carpet and pull down his pants and show everything to his friends.

He wanted to be in charge of inserting each one of her tampons and she wanted to use his penis for a tooth brush. They were in love. Kay called him "honey." No one, not even his grandmother, had ever called him that.

Kay made this friend at work. His name was Reggie and he was also a writer. He even once peed beside Leonard Cohen in the bathroom at Ben's Delicatessen. Josh began giving every guy beside him at the urinal the once over. He was starting to think of himself as plain ordinary.

He's a very fine writer, she said. He writes with a quill on rice paper.

She told him that he could never meet Reggie because Reggie was very particular about who he met. Then she started saying things like: I told Reggie what you said to me and he said that if he was there he would have punched you in the nose.

So one day he went to meet her after work to see who this Reggie was. He waited outside, across the street. He worked a Mr. Freeze, casual-like.

When they came outside, Kay was laughing, flinging her long blond hair around like she owned the joint. Reggie was making points, his hands out and wagging, his eyebrows lifted high up as though to say: isn't life the way I describe it a wild yet beautiful trip?

That Mr. Freeze was sucking something out of him.

Hey, Josh said.

He caught her eye and she was looking at him the way she looked at other people when she was with him.

**This is Reggie, she said when they were on the same side of the street.**

**So why don't you start punching me in the nose, he asked as Reggie's shaking hand just hung there.**

**You are such an asshole, said Kay.**

**I wanna be an asshole, he said.**

**He couldn't sleep, so at four-thirty in the morning he went outside on the front porch. He hopped down the stairs with his pants around his ankles.**

**excerpts from Kay's grade 10 journal**

I once loved this guy so much I didn't care what made sense. I bit his nose until he cried and even then I couldn't stop.

\*

My mother wanted to talk with me. I found this in your coat, she said. I rolled over, my face to the wall. Oh, mom, I love you. I don't want you to die.

Why can't you ever be serious, she said.

\*

It was night and it was raining so hard that something felt spiteful. It was like breathing underwater. I stopped in front of three men standing under a fruit store awning. They checked me out. I was wearing black jeans and I looked at them and just peed and peed.

They never could have known.

## XXXIV

Archie sat at the counter, eating a pizza pie at Pop Tate's. Reggie snuck up behind him and dealt him a wedgie so cruel and meaningless that Archie's asshole bled for the next two days.

Archie lay on his stomach, naked in his bed, all day long. Jughead visited each evening. He'd have to shoo Hotdog away when he started licking the blood.

It smelt like a cross between a ten year old crapping his pants while hanging from the monkey bars and a brand new board game. The Stooges were playing so the walls were dripping attitude like runny wallpaper glue.

I put a latke at the bottom of the cereal bowl, Josh said. He was trying to give Kay a sense.

Why? she asked.

To surprise myself.

I don't like dance music because it reminds me of when my mother smacked me at the pool when I was eight.

I know that story. It makes me almost cry.

There's no feeling worse than getting smacked when you're in a wet bathing suit with all your friends around.

Shit. I'll phone you right back. It's for my brother, she said.

Φ



Josh ate a whole family-sized box of Glossettes just to keep his hands busy in a room full of strangers.

Are you having a good time, she asked out of breath.

House music, he said

Remember that time we shared a grapefruit and I said we are like two halves of the same fruit and you laughed and then Lianne called and you said you had to leave because your grandmother had died?

You were such a petulant brat on the down part of the see-saw looking up at me about to drop my mini-sip. *First you have to calm down* and I got an eyeful of grape.

I remember the look on your dad's face pulling my underwear out of his tailpipe. Keep him away from me, he said.

Kay coughed out a beautiful white dove and then she died of a heart attack and then the dove died of a heart attack.

Josh watched Sophia Loren being interviewed on PBS. She sat in front of a black backdrop.

My life is like a fairy tale, she said.

At one point, the interviewer asked her why she was smiling.

I don't know, she said. She said it like a little girl, playing with her fingers. She was playing with her fingers on TV.

**He imagined Kay saying, "I don't know" when she's in her sixties. She would also say it like a little girl. He knew this. It made him sick that he knew this.**

There were balloons falling and I was thinking about taking some home. I thought of how it would make me feel to see them shriveling down to nothing on the basement couch.

I was dancing. I wanted you to see. I thought you had come to the party with me. You were a classy girl but this wasn't classy at all. You were poking those carrots in like that dip was your bitch. You were working that thing like you used to work me. Like the way you used to jerk me while watching TV.

I saw you both walk into the den that was filled with books from top to bottom. I know that you must have said "Kerouac" to him several times and I'm sure he said other names back to you. I couldn't hear anything with all my dancing.

You were in that room saying things about books and the people who write them. I kicked a balloon over to the door. I started dancing just outside the door. I thought I heard, "Kerouac, Kerouac." My feet were wet in my shoes. My face wasn't shaved right. I wanted to pop balloons but everyone would have known what a little boy I was.

I would still have sex with you even if you were sixty. I would do it if you were eighty. Even if you were only twelve. I would have sex with you even if you had a penis. I would let you shove it in me. I would yelp. I would stare at the wall and yelp.

He burped and it stank so bad she felt herself falling out of love. The depanneur owner and she exchanged looks. The whole place smelt like a New York delicatessen.

Φ

He watched Kay's eyelids when she slept. There was something about her face that made him think of his grandfather. Kay had pudgy Flintstone feet.

Joshua watched her in the grass, too nervous to sleep because of the ants. They were surrounded by beer bottles and opened cheeses. He looked up at the top of the trees and the sky. It was very simple up there. She was wearing a mini-skirt and she said that when she woke up she would take off her panties.

He's so sensual, she said. In the winter he slithers down the sidewalk on his stomach. Everyone dies of laughter.

On the metro they didn't speak a word. A guy in a cowboy hat asked her for directions.

She was drifting over the buildings. She was a pink Chagall cow. He was a neurotic Jewish rooster pecking at her foot.

## XXXVI

### 3 anecdotes about soap

1

Thanks. It's just Oil of Olay, she said.

On his way home, he stopped at the pharmacy.

At home, sitting on the coffee table, he unwrapped it and put it under his nose.

2

She reminded him of a brand new bar of Ivory soap placed at the very center of a white doily.

3

Inside her bathroom he cracked a bar of soap in half.

## XXXVII

He has this whole other side to him that you just can't figure, said Kay.

At one time that could have meant he was a superhero, said Josh. Now it probably means he's a serial killer.

They had a colourful wheel of sushi between them.

My brother used to hit me even when I was talking to a teacher on the phone, Kay said.

It didn't matter that Reggie watched *Last Tango in Paris* every night before he went to bed. Nothing mattered at all.

He wanted to smooch her into his hands and fall to his knees for a little of the old beseeching the heavens routine. But that shtick was so eighteen eighty-nine.

I didn't say you were a fucking idiot, Josh said. I said you were *like* a fucking idiot.

Kay was cleaning out his room of all her things. She was a methodical zamboni.

After she left he saw a shimmering ring of celestial light in the middle of the double parlor, and when he stepped through it he was in the bathroom of his childhood house. He was crying on the floor, pulling toilet paper off the spool with both hands like he was climbing a rope.

## XXXVIII

### An excerpt from a script in progress

Chicho:

Betty, sweetheart, they whacked Sal. He did the saddest thing with his lips. They looked like cut up caterpillars thinking *why me* in this big sad world. His eyes were like they were saying *take me*-- like maybe they didn't have to go-- like I could rush them to you in a cigar box, to let them see you one more time. He loved you, Betty. That I know. Winter is coming and we'll do what we can to help, but each of the seasons will be sad and hard in a new way without him around. He said he had something he wanted to give you and he kept pinching his stomach. I'll be damned if I could figure it out.

## XXXIX

Josh swims in Kay's eyes. The grass stains the seat of her pants in a manner that makes him brittle hard.

She takes off a white sock sitting on the closed lid of the toilet, her eyes focused into slits. Kay loves so fiercely someone could lose an eye.

It would be great if you had a bee in your pants. It would be so sexy. I could pull your pants down and set it free. I would pull down your pants to set the poor bee free.

Remember, Josh said, it is I who is eating you. It is I who makes you feel pleasure.

Kay was lying back thinking about Reggie. She imagined him pumping her on the back of a motorcycle in the middle of a circle of screaming frat boys. There was an exchange of money. She would wake up the next morning on a lawn chair wearing Ray-Ban sunglasses.

Who's your daddy, demanded Josh.

I just want someone to stick their lips against my anus and play me like a shiny brass trumpet, Josh said.

Oh, and that's *real* normal, Kay said.

Φ



His dad used to call mucus *goojoo*. It was dripping out of him like he was a cracked egg about to lose his yolk.

I love you, I love you, he kept saying.

Your laugh is like a mouse running out of your pant leg. When I first met you, I wanted to make you laugh until you cried, Josh said.

You just skipped the laughing part, she said.

## XL

Josh showed up at her house because he just happened to be in the neighborhood. He just so happened to be wandering around in Kay's neck of the woods.

As he was climbing the stairs to her apartment he had this funny idea. He was going to knock really hard on her door and when she asked who it was he was going to say, "It's the Big Ragoo!" He was going to say it like a real New York Italian tough guy who ate cow's balls and salami for breakfast.

He faced her door and put one hand in his windbreaker pocket to get all into it. It's the big Ragoo, he kept saying to himself.

He had never banged on a door that hard in his life. All the dogs in the apartment next door started barking. A man in shorts and beach thongs opened his door. The smell of Campbell's soup flooded the hallway.

Josh faced Kay's door and inside he heard the TV. He waited for the squeak of her wooden floor boards to grow louder.

**Kay and Josh's relationship presented as a day at the farm**

1

As the electric cattle prod tapped his nut sack, Josh did a spazzy dance that Kay believed meant the onset of neurological damage.

2

Josh continued to dance about like, as Kay jotted down in her journal later that evening, an imbecile.

3

A cow seemed to laugh as a squeak escaped Josh's lips. He made being tortured seem nerdy.

4

Josh went 'meeyag' as the pain became too great for words.

**I don't even think I want to date this guy anymore, thought Kay.**

**Life sucks, Josh would have thought if the brain damage had not been so excessive.**

## XLII

### A Parable

**“The worst thing one could do to O,” said the inspector, “would be to rob him of his dignity. This would require an act of thievery that is abrupt and efficient.”**

**“What do you have in mind?” asked Max, his accountant.**

**“Something quite simple. We must pay a waiter to defecate onto his breakfast plate. In that way, we could say that we have truly robbed him.”**

**“How emphatic,” said Max. “You must also pay a beautiful woman to laugh at his predicament from an adjacent table.”**

**“So it shall be done,” said the inspector, a smile spreading across his face like an egg broken in the pan.**

**Two weekends later O, as expected, was eating breakfast at the Cafe R. The waiter, a drifter for whom they’d got the job a week earlier, was paid handsomely, as was an attractive woman with large breasts and a rather irritating laugh.**

**O was eating his omelet and reading the Globe. When he reclined in his chair and relit his pipe, the “waiter” got onto the chair opposite him, stepped onto the table, pulled down his pants and squatted over his plate.**

**After close to a minute, it became clear the man was constipated.**

**“We’ll be ruined,” said Max.**

**O, with exaggerated casualness, struck a match. Looking up from his newspaper, he spoke: “If you want to instill the feeling of one having had their breakfast plate**

defecated upon, then you must actually defecate on the breakfast plate. There is no room for verisimilitude. I recognize and read the squat but that is not enough. The squat denotes the shit but the squat does not denote what the shit denotes. You have accomplished nothing.”

### XLIII

He saw a made-for-TV horror movie with Shirley Jackson when he was a kid. She wrote something on a bathroom mirror in red lipstick.

After it ended he wanted to sleep with his parents but they didn't want to start with that. He was scared to close his eyes. He was afraid someone would smear his nipples with lipstick.

When he woke up in the morning, he was in the foyer outside his parents' door. It was the first time he had ever woken up with his shoes on.

At the end of the night in the park she tells him she hasn't nipped from the bottle at all. Every time he passed it to her she only pretended.

That was the way she was and now he was twice as drunk as he should have been.

If he had a son and his son came up to him one day and said, My poopie hurts, he couldn't begin to say what this would make him feel. Jesus! He had a feeling it might make him feel awfully sad and scared. He hoped that if one day he should have a son that the boy would never come up to him and say anything like that.

He wondered why the woman behind the counter kept saying 'won-ton' but she was saying one ten. His coffee was one ten.

## XLIV

There was a man in the mall who sold Mexican jumping beans. He kept them on a mirror under a bright light. They were little beans and they jerked around on the mirror. Chick said there was an insect inside each bean and that was what made the bean move. They were born stuck inside a little bean. It looked like a jerky little shit nugget. Chick bought him two of them. At home he watched them on his dresser. They didn't move that much. He pretended they had fallen out of his nose. After a couple of days they just stopped altogether, so he cut one open. There was nothing but goo inside.

In the literature section of the bookstore, Josh had to shit so bad. He picked up a copy of *The Brothers Karamazov* and it felt like a giant chunk of something great. He clamped his ass cheeks together.

He sat at the bright yellow kitchen table. When he was drunk he always wanted to put his head down. And after that, the night was never any good.

It was like he was getting drunk and gearing up his whole life to write this one thing. He would need curtains to rip off the wall.

There was something so horrible out there. Something that made you forget everything, even your own name. Sometimes he got cold, naked flashes of it. Sometimes he would catch it in the middle of the night.

He thought he was just sleeping.



Sometimes when someone starts looking at you like you're greasy, you start acting the part. You move towards them like you're both in a big aquarium of Vaseline. You wear the same pair of underwear day after day until you can pop a boner right through the material. Then it's out there, floating around in goo.

Schopenhauer thought that everything was will. You had eyes because you willed yourself to see. You had hands because you willed yourself to grab things. The blood that ran through you was because of your will to *be*.

At first there was this vague sludge, part Jell-O and part dust, and deep inside it, there was some *I* that had willed itself to lick Kay's toes.

One day he would say: I don't want to write about anything. I want to create consciousness itself; I want raw emotion. He would be wearing sun glasses and he'd be wondering if he'd just said the right thing.

## XLV

One time, when he was a kid, he stayed up late. He was wearing his mother's pink night gown at the kitchen table. He was eating raisin toast and reading an Archie Digest. His mother came up from the back staircase. She was home from night school. She saw him sitting there.

Did you find out about the telescope, he asked.

Work was getting so bad he had to go to the bathroom four times an hour to put cold water on his face.

He left there feeling sad and crazy.

At first he tried to buy magazines, ones with glossy pages, cologne samples and interviews with people who thanked God for everything.

When that didn't work, he did panicky things like making sketches with light blue eye shadow. He looked out the window and prayed to see something that would set him straight.

There was an Indian girl in the office and she was going to be getting married any day. He couldn't stop thinking about her. He didn't feel young any more. He had diarrhea every day. It wasn't that she was so beautiful. There was always the chance she wouldn't get married.

There was a man in the office who asked him each day to go eat Chinese food with him. The man had the same hair as his father. He kept running into him on the street. His

roommates thought the man might be stalking him. It was very sad how he kept asking him to go eat Chinese food.

His father used to promise to take him for Chinese food almost every weekend.

You said we were going to go for Chinese.

Well, we're not going to go.

But you said we would.

So your old man's a liar.

It was Saturday night. He slept on the couch because he was lonely.

He woke up at midnight and couldn't feel his arm.

## XLVI

Everyone runs around trying to find a place where they still serve breakfast because eating breakfast, even if it's 5 o'clock in the afternoon, is a sign that the day has just begun and good things can still happen. Having lunch is like throwing in the towel.

They were in the washroom at work. At work everyone washed their hands very carefully and dried them very well. Everyone wanted to kill time.

I slam the pussy, said the new guy. I don't fuck around when it comes to the pussy. I step to the mother-fucker.

This guy was making him nervous.

Step to it? What're you, M.C. Hammer? Josh grabbed onto the sink with one hand and put the other hand on his left buttock. You got to make *little* circles. He swirled his hips and smacked the sink. A gentleman never uses both hands. A gentleman always keeps one hand on the derriere for lower back support. And you *never* want an arm to get in the way of the camera.

He turned on the faucet and put his hand under the water.

Feel how wet that is, he said.

When he was finished zoning out in class he thought it was possible he hadn't been zoning out at all but had been showing everybody his penis. And then afterwards, he wasn't able to remember any of it. The children in his class might have been superb actors

and his mother might have begged them all so sweetly that they went along with it, never letting on a thing to him. His mother just wanted him to have a normal life.

Josh had been drinking coffee all night. He thought of each cup as the laying down of a stone for a magnificent pyramid that he would one day inhabit.

After his twenty-eighth cup, he set out for Kay's house.

His jingle-bones made him think of his childhood: a father's keys jangling in the door when he came home from work. I am a golem made entirely of jangly keys, he thought.

It was three o'clock in the morning when he reached her apartment building. Her voice coming out of the lobby intercom sounded frightened.

It's me, he said and the buzzer went. Again, he was reminded of his father as the unlocking of the front door went *Ch-Chick*.

What I want, he said once inside her apartment, is the atmosphere of a wet dream.

He produced fat ripe tomatoes from his overcoat pocket. He was going to use them to clog up all the drains.

## XLVII

They believed that the man who would be the messiah was the Great Rebbe. He lived in New York and had a long white beard. Every year, on his birthday, he got a letter from Jimmy Carter. There were stories of the things he had done. The Great Rebbe had remembered someone's middle name who he had met fifty years earlier.

They told him that the Moschiach was so close to coming that it could happen any second. It could happen even now, they said. He could feel in his bones exactly what they meant. What if he were to come *right now*, he thought.

Josh and his rabbi and all the others pounded the table and sang: "We want Moschiach now, we want Moschiach now, we want Moschiach now and we don't want to wait." Josh didn't want to go to school any more. He didn't see the point.

On the day the Great Rebbe died, his followers wandered the streets pulling their hair out and throwing themselves on the ground. There was a squad of specialists who came to work with them. They knew how to deal with this kind of thing.

There was this one time he tried to stare his father down. But that wasn't how it started. They were at opposite ends of the kitchen table about to eat dinner. It came out of nowhere. Joshua looked at him and his father looked at him back. They kept looking and looking. His father's hands were clamped behind his head. It began to feel too long. His father started to look like something else. Josh started to laugh. The look on his father's face didn't change. Josh rubbed his eyes, still laughing. His mother's meatballs looked weird and too orange.

Sometimes when I can't sleep at night I just can't get that stupid song out of my head. *Ain't nothin' gonna break-a my stride/ ain't nothin' gonna slow me down.*

I put the pillows over my head and sleep on top of the blankets. I feel frightened.

One night he dreamt that he was house-sitting for someone. He looked at all the closed cabinets and was afraid to open a single one. He got this feeling that he was boring God to death.

Then he heard a voice.

Don't be a pipsqueak in the Lord's bedroom, the voice said.

He was naked and sitting on the edge of their daughter's bed. When he got up, there were butterfly wings of ass sweat on the spread.

He dressed like a clown. He played the piano in his underwear. He enjoyed the smell of his plastic toys. That is what he was. Now he is frightened of the nothing.

## XLVIII

Joe the super had wild dogs in his apartment. The whole building smelt like dogs. There were three old women who lived there. They were sisters. They were trying to calm Josh down. They all looked like Spiderman's aunt. Josh was using his hands while he talked. They were playing cards.

It kept coming out, he told them. My mother couldn't believe it and then my dad came in and he couldn't believe it. And I went and went and I couldn't stop. I kept going and my dad had to eat dinner so he left the bathroom but he came in after a while and said, "Still?" but I couldn't stop.

He pulled a king can out of the fridge at the dep. There was a boy in there. He was stacking bottles on the other end of the shelves. He looked at him as he shut the door. He drank his beer later on and thought about the boy. He pretended that the boy made all the beer in a little room back there.

All along there was too much room for something that could not be there. He got used to it that way but sometimes while he was sleeping, he would wake up and remember something. It made his sinuses clear.

With all their singing about wanting *Moschiach*, something got stuck in him. Even though he knew nothing was coming, he felt like there should be something coming. When you masturbate, you know what's supposed to happen. Now he was waiting for something that was like coming.



He wished they hadn't got him thinking about the sense it made, because now he couldn't get it out of his head and nothing was making sense at all.

## XLIX

Skateboard wheels rolling down the sidewalk give me a hard on, she said. It means cute boys are coming.

She was wearing one of those seventies plastic airplane bags his grandfather was always trying to unload on him. It was slung over her shoulder, separating her small breasts like a bandoleer. She had blue hair and looked like a blue nymph that lived in a blue forest, hanging from trees upside down.

She told him how strong she was.

Let me give you a piggyback, she said.

Josh blew bubbles from his ass. They were brown and looked like they had smoke in them. When they popped, it felt like a mouth was opening into an "o." It was his first date with Gina and he couldn't believe this was happening. He thought of trying to pass it off as some kind of *sttick*. He considered pulling up his pants but that would be so obvious. Someday we will laugh about this, he thought.

Do you wannashottascotch? Gina smiled. This was their only inside joke and it wasn't even funny.

Gina worked at a bar. It took her until four in the morning to count the cash because she was always so drunk. When she was finished they walked back to her place and sat on the couch.

When Josh first met her he told her he had just gotten out of prison and was looking forward to dancing with women again. Gina laughed and asked him what they put him in for. *Aerobisize*, he said. *And murder*.

They sat on the couch, her crazy roommate talking to the TV in the other room. Josh didn't know what to say.

You're so pretty, he said.

You are too, she said.

She really thought she was being clever.

Josh and Gina sat on the couch and watched late night television. One night, after all the infomercials had ended, they faced each other in that intimate way people in encounter groups in the seventies must have done when they told of the uncle who took pictures of them sitting naked on a beach ball. They looked at each other while they spoke and they felt cozy and good. They were talking about how sometimes you can reach a wonderful truth based on a lie and at five in the morning, they held hands.

The first time she slept with him, as he was dozing off, he thought she put something on his tongue. In the morning, when he ordered his eggs sunny-side up he thought he might be on drugs.

My fat ass it ain't, Gina said.

He had never heard anyone use the word "ain't" in a serious way.

I never heard anyone say "ain't" without being highly ironic, he said.

**Well now you have, honey.**

**She reached out and pinched the head of his penis. She said something like “woo-woo” or “woo-hoo.”**

**Joshua woke up in a shock of stars. He woke up struck with what it would feel like to have his penis pulled off. He couldn't shake the feeling.**

**Gina got up with him and sat him down on the carpet in the hallway. She gave him a cigarette. At that moment, it looked like the cleanest thing in the world.**

**There was a hot dog joint around the corner from Gina's house and right before he went over, he'd stop in to use the bathroom.**

**He forced himself to crap and afterwards he would wipe his ass with a determination and vigor that entailed half a roll of toilet paper. He wanted to make sure that he was clean, just in case.**

**The last time he went over, he had a clean ass for nothing.**

L

**Gina begged him for a poem**

**cunts have personalities!  
yours reminds me of  
Honest Abe Lincoln**

**An excerpt from Gina's last letter to Josh**

**Primates have auras and are capable of love and hate just as "humans" like me and you are. Read science magazines and you'll see what I mean.**

## LII

After the filing job in Toronto, after the kitchen Tai Chi, the French existentialism, pacing in an attic bedroom in a Portuguese neighborhood, after it had all failed, Josh went home to his parents. They wanted him to call his old rabbi. The rabbi invited him over for dinner.

They were painting the dining room so they ate in the kitchen. Josh made the flat egg noodle on his plate into an "s" with as many curves as he could.

I can't even stand to look at birds, he said.

It's not a good way to think, the rabbi said after dinner.

I knew another boy your age who began to think those things and now he isn't doing very well.

Josh held up his hand and told the rabbi he really didn't need to be hearing this.

At midnight, he was back in his parents' basement watching *A Day at the Circus*. Groucho climbed the walls, his neck tie over one shoulder like an aviator's scarf. He was frightened by how much he wanted to be a Marx Brother.

He wrote in his note book: It was as hard and pure as a ten year-old's erection.

The first time, it was like struggling with something. I was making Hong-Kong action picture faces. The harder I pushed, the more silent things got. I liked to push. I gripped each side of the toilet seat. My parents stood in the doorway, promising me things. Jigsaw puzzles, stuffed animals. It came out of me like a saw, and when it

separated it was like having a dog break its leash and run away with your soul in its teeth.

There must be something wrong when you remember something like that.

He felt like the guy in silent movies who's always getting kicked in the ass off a roof.



### LIII

Man is two. He is holy but he is also a scumbag. He is a sentimentalist but he is also a murderer. He is one but he is also many. Perhaps he is not just two. He is more than two. Perhaps thirty or so.

Boo hoo, she went.

What if this was all, titter, a comic book, he said.

Please, she cried. I don't know what I am. I don't know what my consciousness is coming from.

Egad, he said.

The yellow kippa was his bad luck kippa. It was from his cousin Sheldon's Bar-Mitzvah. He was wearing it in the synagogue bathroom when his uncle wouldn't stop tickling him until he hit his head on the urinal.

Hidden in my closet, behind a stack of old board games, is a stuffed animal that I've had since I was a kid. When I was eleven, I used to come on it almost every day. It was a purple rabbit, the fur all stiff.

I keep telling myself that one day I'll take it down to the laundromat and wash it. What a day that will make.

Φ

**The girl walking by said to her friend, he always, always wears jeans.**

**He tried to imagine what that guy was like.**

When Frieda's hair started falling out the neighbor's little girl bought her a baseball cap. It said *#1 Mom*. She took to wearing colourful scarves around her head. She looked like an eccentric old blues singer. No one ever figured her for that type.

When she began to feel like there wasn't much time, Frieda started taking Chick on tours of the kitchen.

Chick used to go into the fridge whenever he needed sandwich bags. He would eat whatever was inside the bags and then use them to store cuff links.

Frieda was smiling.

This is the cutlery drawer, she said and Chick began to cry.

There came a point when there wasn't anything you could say. All you could do was rub her legs.

He was coming down the staircase when he saw Chick on the landing. He looked down at his face and knew Frieda was dead. He and his father had never looked at each other like that.

When he moved back home, the first thing he did was clean out the big freezer in the basement. Inside he found ice-cream containers filled with blocks of spaghetti sauce.

*Pretty soon I'll never be able to eat her sauce again.*

At the shiva, he did a magic trick for a little boy and everybody watched. Josh opened up his hand, one finger at a time like petals blooming in time lapse. There was nothing in there.

There's ten thousand dollars worth of mirrors in this room, Josh said.

The night before Frieda died, he spoon-fed her crushed ice. She kept taking away the spoon from him to feed herself and he thought everything was going to turn out fine.

For five months, he slept on a fold-out bed.

One night he looked through his mother's night table and found his baby book. Frieda had kept it going way into his twenties. Scotch taped to the first page was a cigar wrapped in plastic. There was a red sticker on it that said "it's a boy."

He went out for a coffee and made sure he was completely spread out in the booth before he unwrapped it. He sucked at it until the girl who worked there told him to stop.

After everyone had gone home, he went into the garage and poked around. He found the old Atari and connected it up. He turned off all the lights in the basement and sat on the floor. Chick was sleeping on the couch, a book open on his chest. The TV screen looked like a Miró.

Someone was playing with the springy door stopper on the other side of the wall. He listened to it. He looked at the hamburger on his plate and listened to that stupid springy sound.

He wrote to the chip company. His letter spoke of a recipe which involved soaking chips in milk for an hour and then serving it in a bowl and eating it with a spoon like cereal. An after-school treat, he wrote. They sent him three free coupons and told him that his letter was up on a special bulletin board. He wondered what it looked like up there.

The way he ate apple sauce was he would make a path through it from one side of the bowl to the other. He would keep on making the path until there was nothing left.

At the shopping mall there was a teenage boy who handed out pieces of paper.

You are going to die, the papers read.

They thought they were getting coupons. That boy probably watched their faces really good.

He told the pretty girl at the bar that he raised pigs. He thought this would create the basis for some witty repartee. He thought she would say, Oh really, or something. Something coy. But instead she asked him what his name was. He was taken aback. He

thought that this was a lucky thing. He said his name was Joshua. She said, good-bye, Joshua. He said his name wasn't even Joshua. It hurt the way she said good-bye, Joshua.

Kaliozakis used to have thick long hair. Josh would brush it up and out until his head looked like a pompom. Josh said it was the latest style. He called it "The Beethoven."

Now Kaliozakis was bald with a small scar on his forehead. He drove a cab and when he said "but um," he pronounced the "t" very hard.

Kaliozakis told Josh about the woman from the night before who got into his taxi with an open umbrella. She had milky, pale blue eyes and when he took a fast corner, he heard her head hit the door and her eyes in the rear-view mirror didn't blink.

The inside of my cab still smells like shepherd's pie, he said.

I have to tell you. You're so beautiful and life is... what a blur! But you-- you have racing stripes! And life? Life is not knowing. It's treading water for hours and days and years. And you are a stab. A very pointy stab. Ouch!

If he was a porn reviewer he would use words like "Cuntilicious" or "Twateriffic." He might have problems with the editor but he would stand his ground.

The words stay, or I leave, he would say.

What am I going to do with you? The kid's an artist! The editor would bite his fist or pinch his cheek, or something like that.

⊕

Josh kept telling himself he was relaxed. *Take it easy, kid.* He had never, not once, been relaxed in his entire life so he thought it was only normal to not be able to see it for what it was. He always thought that after three hundred milligrams of Atavan, that's what being relaxed was like. But this was different.

He wanted to see what the world was like when you were relaxed so he put on a bathrobe and slippers and took a walk through his neighborhood. He carried a paper cup of orange juice. He wanted to feel like the world was a hospital solarium and the doctors were very pleased with his progress.

I'd like a girlfriend with a limp, he said.



**notes towards a telephone conversation with Kay**

- glad you caught her
- sounding effervescent as always (joke)
- how was your summer

only if things are going well:

- I think about you a lot-- the stuff about the little girl on the boardwalk, candy apple, bag of Cheezies.
- just want to see your face-- miss seeing it.
- you were the best thing that ever happened to me.

## LVIII

Josh wanted to show Kay that things had changed. Where there were once black Converse high tops there were now black combat boots. Where he used to walk like he was trailing yarn between his fingers, he now walked like he was looking for some punk who owed him money.

He waited for her in the booth near the window. When she slid in, there were already five Gitanes squished into the tray like he meant it.

Sometimes when you keep telling someone you love them, she said, you have to wonder who's the one you're really trying to convince.

She dropped him off at his parents' house. Chick was sleeping. Josh watched Benny Hill in the basement and masturbated with his left hand for the first time. He kept at it until footsteps on the stairs killed his erection.

He was about to take his first shower. Before, it had always been baths. Now, he was standing up waiting for the water. He turned away from the nozzle and squinted up his eyes. Through tiny slits he saw his father's penis.

Lawrence called it the curse of self-consciousness. I wanted to protect you from having to be. I didn't want you to have to ever think about it.

## LIX

The girl selling kisses was named Jill. She had frizzy red hair. There was something about her that made him think of a glass of orange juice slimed with ketchup fingers, but she was selling kisses and he was hard up.

Her booth was right beside the haunted house. Jill was busy applying lip gloss as he pulled out a crumpled ball from his pocket and flattened it against his leg into a nice respectable dollar bill.

That was magical, she said afterwards.

Sure, he said.

No really, she said.

No really, he said.

Chick had a red record. Josh used to hold it up to his face and watch TV through it. He always wanted to ask his father how he got it and how come it was red. It didn't make sense. He never knew what was on it.

I can't concentrate long enough to be in love, Josh said to the doctor. For the highs I watch Harold Lloyd films. To feel creepy, I listen to E.L.O.

On the bus ride back he saw up a girl's skirt.

When he got home he masturbated for over an hour and nothing happened.

Φ

When he first met her, he asked: "Do you believe in God?" It had been years since he had asked anybody that. It used to seem like it was the only question there was.

She was wearing a superman T-shirt and her head was aslant, her legs twisted around each other. She looked like a little girl making her first decision of consequence. Years later he wouldn't be able to remember whether she said yes or no.

He shaved his head and walked into the bakery he always went to.

Hey Kojack, said the Chinese lady who worked there and, like usual, he ordered one sugar doughnut.

**LX**

**woke up  
with that smell  
of crying deep  
in my nose**

## LXI

I loved her enough to eat her childhood tutu. I'd finish it and say, I love you that much!

Kaliozakis needs a job. He runs through the streets in a cold sweat, resumes flying everywhere. Bologna, mom will say when he gets home. Bologna.

He is a grown man and he still reads comics when he eats breakfast.

I don't want you eating my fruit cups any more. I need them for work.

He finishes the crossword and leaves it out on the kitchen table so she will see.

Stop leaving your garbage around, she says. The least you can do is put on pants and warm up the car.

He applied the flesh-coloured lipstick to the tip of his penis.

They had stopped dating years ago when he found a pubic hair of Kay's between the pages of a Lou Reed bio under the couch. He was in the middle of cleaning up but he sat down and studied it for close to half an hour.

When he was done, he stuck it in his nose.

Frieda used to remind him of how he thought the strawberries on the cover of the cereal box were meatballs.

Φ

As he moved from room to room at the Giacometti exhibit, things got skinnier and skinnier. *Pretty soon we'll be looking at yo-yo string.*

My mother used to make me take off my pants before trying on shoes, he said, and now I have many problems.

You're a fast talker, she said, and from the moment I saw you on the metro, I knew you were a good sleeper.

When he woke up in the middle of the night, the blankets in her room looked like an old man's face, thinking.

He tried to keep her baby entertained. He emptied out the danishes onto the car seat and dropped the bag over his fist. He called him Mr. Bag.

In almost every one of the pictures from my childhood, I'm playing a toy piano in my underwear. You'd think my whole youth was just underwear and pianos.

My aunt... she was fat, he confessed.

She withdrew her hand from his.

Please forgive me. He was starting to cry.

I forgive nothing, she said.

I can change, he said.

Hand smacking the table. Those big, glorious American flag watermelons of hers. smacking the table. Hoots. Smacking the table. Those yabadabahoneydoos. Smacking the table. Night sweats. One day dead. No money in the account. What life-affirming jiggly monster trucks.

I used to like talking about my bouts with diarrhea. I romanticized it way out of proportion. I turned it into a late night drunken velvet shirt and sunglasses thing. I conditioned myself to go all saucy and fluid just to make sure I'd always have what to talk about.



⊕

She was in her underwear and she was very shy but he had talked her into sitting on his chest. He was patting her knees.

Exactly what's happening right now? she asked.

**LXIII**

**I drink a bottle  
of liquid paper**

**& say  
I'm starting over**

## LXIV

It was a loft party. It was winter and everyone rolled their coats up into balls and stuck them behind arm chairs and couches. There was only one bathroom and the line was long. Josh walked out onto the balcony. There was a girl sitting out there all by herself. He handed her his bottle and peed off the balcony. It was the beginning of Christmas vacation and he felt free and good.

He brought her back inside and asked her to sit with him. Her name was Honey.

He wanted her to like him. He didn't know what to say. He pulled out his wallet and poured out everything onto her lap. She looked down at all the cards, money, coupons and bus transfers. He figured she wouldn't ever be able to get up.

With certain people I ramble on because I just don't want to have to hear their voices, said Honey. With people I like, I get shy and quiet. I ramble on with you because I feel comfortable with you.

Honey and her sisters would go into their grandmother's bedroom in the middle of the afternoon and wrap themselves up in the electric blanket. The old woman would chase them out with her fingers full of ointment.

Honey went to this terrible day care where they never let her change out of her wet bathing suit. Her mother sent her there each day with just a thermos full of coffee. He imagined her tap dancing around the play mat for all the boys, never seeing the fat woman

in the black polyester pants who wanted to set her straight. She was dancing the way she did at home on the kitchen table. The fat woman had a hand full of slaps for her since the day she first saw her.

The first time he showed up at Honey's house, he brought along an old colour TV, the tan plug dangled down the stairs like a lion's tail.

In the morning she put on Bob Dylan and he wondered if it was Dylan for the opening credits or Dylan for the closing credits.

Josh told her he wanted to eat her ass. Honey laughed and he said don't laugh because I'm dead serious. He leaned her against the wall and pulled down her pants. He had never eaten an ass before and didn't know where to start.

Honey ordered half a grapefruit and cottage cheese and he ordered soft boiled eggs.

I ought to have my head read, Josh said. If they don't bring me one of those little egg cups to put them in, do you know what a pain in the ass I'm in for? There's a trick for getting the shell off but I'll be damned if I can remember it.

Will you relax, she said.

It's probably not too late to catch the waitress.

They sat in the basement. The left end of the coffee table was broken so it looked like a ramp. Josh put his feet up anyway.

The thing about coffee tables, he said, is that they make you feel like you're a part of society.

After several weeks, it was starting to look like a dog with its head cut off. Underneath the overflowing ashtray was one of Honey's nylons. There was an Archie comic under a bicycle lock.

Do you still love me? she asked.

He was examining the remote control when he noticed a button he had never seen before. It was orange and when he pressed it, everything in the room got very dark and quiet.

Josh refused to wear a white shirt with the suit.

Light blue is very in these days, he said.

At the wedding, Honey kept telling him that they should dance. She was worried her family wouldn't think she was normal.

This sherbet tastes like aftershave, Josh said to the little boy seated beside him.

Everyone did this dance move. They did it in unison like the Solid Gold dancers. Josh danced like he was trying to catch a glass of tomato juice that was falling off the fridge.

Honey talked to her aunt who sat in a chair the whole night.

If I could do it again, her aunt said, I wouldn't be such a hot shot.

Well I had a perfectly lovely time, he said as they drove home.

She has braces for God's sake, she said. When I was a little girl, I wanted braces so bad I made some out of pipe cleaners.

Her hands were balled up into the tiniest fists. He could have fit the two of them in his mouth.

⊕

She was saving the Miami Beach ashtrays. The phone was ringing. He couldn't find paper towel. She showed up and it was pissing outside.

I was happy to be left alone, he said.

I was saving those, she cried. I've been saving those since I was a little girl.

LXVI

**in the theatre  
her mouth moved warm  
& sure right over you**

**in the darkness  
while she worked  
you thought you  
were making eye  
contact with some guy**

**you felt sorry for him**



## LXVII

**They were at the place they liked, the place that served wings.**

**Let's ask them if they deliver on Christmas, she said. It'll be so pathetic.**

**The way Honey found green glass so pretty, even if it was broken, hurt his heart.**

**I told you I was making the place more cozy, she said.**

**Her feet smelled like his childhood.**

**She watched a man break dance in the park. He was dancing with a broom and had underwear on his head. She was in the mood for a sandwich with something breaded in it. He kept asking her to bend her shoe a certain way. It really looked like it was turning him on.**

**Josh fucked her and tickled her at the same time.**

**She said that there was a tribe called the Haman Warriors and they hated the white man so much. She told him a story and in it she was their leader. She ordered them to keep him tied to a post for a whole year, at the end of which he looked like a stick.**

**One day Walt Whitman came around and Josh said, still tied to the post, Mr. Whitman, I'm a great, great fan of your work, and Walt Whitman said, My God! A talking stick!**

Φ

He loved the feeling of creaming onto her ass. It was all over, it always felt like. Everything was completely over and done with. After he creamed her ass, he just wanted to be thrown into an open grave. He didn't want to just go to bed. That wasn't what this was about at all.

## LXVIII

I felt like a psycho when I stared at her face too long, in the kitchen, on the fire-escape, finally, while she was sleeping, naked over the summer blankets. Honey was so lost and gorgeous. You could just die. Sometimes I did.

She had this smell and I thought what an incredible thing to have a smell and how wonderful that I am here to smell it. We got drunk and moved in and out of the things we said and we truly meant them for a while.

Out of nowhere, the winter came and Honey put away her dresses and began to wear stretch pants and carry around tons of pictures cut from magazines in her brown leather school bag. She would shlep it behind her like a tired little kid on her way home from school. That's how she was and I would meet her at the metro and take it off her shoulder.

One night she showed up after the metros had stopped running. Lying down on the basement couch, she took off her pants, tights, and underwear in one elegant move.

I want the one hundred dollar massage, she said.

She stretched out her hair with both hands to show how far it could go. Her face looked like it was stuck in the middle of a clothesline.

LXIX

on a small uncomfortable  
couch  
we came together

the back door open  
it was summer

the dishes were dirty  
but you would clean them  
in the morning

When he was first getting to know her, she only had sixty dollars to her name. When she got into the car, she gave him thirty. It was in a wad. A real wad. Money was such bullshit, but money divided that gracefully moved him more than a butterfly kiss.

Her panties were the last stop before reality. He played with them. He pulled them and twisted them up and down her thighs until they looked like rope.

When she got nervous she would start blinking really hard, like blinking was no longer like breathing, like it was something you had to always be thinking about or your eyeballs would dry up. There were many nights when Josh lay beside her and rubbed the side of her face. He did it with the kind of concentration Frieda used to say wiped away her migraines.

If someone had to chop off my arm, I would make sure I got that arm to somehow fall asleep. I would get it good and fallen asleep and I would look them right in the eye while the blood was spraying all over their faces.

The thing that destroyed their relationship happened late one night while he was taking out the garbage. In the window beside the waste box was a young blonde woman in white socks and white panties. She looked right at him while she spun a globe on her desk. She ran her finger along the equator.

He thought about her every day. The girl in the window was every girl he ever wanted that looked at him like he was carrying garbage.

Seven years later, he would be telling a girl about his twenty year old Tabby who had gone blind and had wandered out of the house one day.

After twenty years service, she walked off and that was it.

The girl said: I think I had a minor heart attack today.

It was several weeks after that when he thought about the garbage girl and it just clicked: he no longer felt a thing.

LXXI

she was going away  
& he wanted to fill her  
with hamburgers  
milk shakes  
& fries  
like it were  
light

## LXXII

For a time I thought, what a pretty train wreck of a life, in water colours and mangled carousel horses, all shiny in the sun-- extra shiny, all smeared in french fry grease-- polaroids laying in the potted plants, pictures of Georges Bataille & Kurt Cobain, pictures of her father's cancer that tore him open like a love-sick shark.

Some nights, I lay awake and try to recall a smell that was more real to me than the four walls of my room or the open book on my chest.

McDonald's was unexpected with her. Ronald McDonald was a Spanish, sad-mouthed whore wandering aimless, too depressed to care about the rent.

Tonight it feels like to have come in her arms is as far away as having once been born.



LXXIII

what makes me especially  
sad is when I remember her saying  
*I'm just going to curl up into  
your armpit & stay  
out of trouble*

## LXXIV

Sex at eighteen had been like eating saltines over the sink in the middle of the night. Petting a dog to make someone happy. Saying hello over and over, faster and faster. Eating a sandwich with tiny bites until you reach a point where you think you're never going to finish.

God Bless the man I saw on the metro last night. He was eating out of two brown bags filled with french fries. The whole metro car smelled of french fries. He weighed at least three hundred pounds. What made me sad was imagining mean teenagers going up to him and saying, I'm sure your mother's very proud of you, and then high-fiving each other. What would be even worse would be if they got off the metro and I was alone on the car with him. Just me and him. I wouldn't know how much to look at him, the whole metro car smelling like french fries. God bless that man.

He dreamt that night his mother was alive. They were fighting in the street.

I have no more room in the house for toilet paper, he screamed.

To make me happy, she said.

Outside the window, it was raining. He saw a girl walk by in a dress of paper towels.

This is very hard for me to tell. There was one time I was in my mother's room and I took something and I did something with it and now when I'm with girls, I want theirs too and they can't figure it out and I can't figure it out. This is how you become a certain way. This is how you become who you are.

He played with a yellow toy car on the kitchen floor. He rolled the wheels across his cheek like a man who needs a shave.

Now I will show you what happens when you are dead, God said.

I don't believe you, he said.

But I haven't even done anything yet.

We remember moments not minutes, Josh said to the girl.

He would remember saying that several years later. He would not be able to picture the girl's face. He would be eating a sandwich.

I'll be right back, he said and in the bathroom of the Chinese restaurant, he saw something black on top of all the white in the trash can.

When he put the pantyhose in his front pocket he felt like he had just gotten laid.

Φ

I find a little pencil in my coat pocket. I must have taken it off the Keno tables. I start a sketch on my place mat. It's of the young man in the booth in front of me. After a while, we make eye contact. I wave my arm. He sits stock still and goes back to reading his book. For him, it's like deciding not to answer the phone.

When he was ten, and he concentrated really hard on the sound of the hair dryer, he could hear a hundred voices yelling in unison. His mother called it cabin fever.

He ran through the snow and all he could see was white. It was as if he was dead and nobody could see him. At the depanneur, he walked through the aisles and pretended he was car exhaust.

The toilet brush always goes in the little stand. No, no. That's perfectly fine, my little tulip. How could you have known?

Lou Reed is doing this version of *Satellite of Love*. It sounds like a song you make up when you're seven, the way he's singing it. It sounds like the kind of song you make up during a long drive, just to make everybody in the car crazy. That song he's doing is the kind of song that would have had my father going nuts. My father would have screamed, shut your fucking mouth. Why can't you just shut your filthy mouth. If my father was Lou Reed's father, Lou Reed would have been dead by now.

Thinking about it and trying to make sure he was feeling something would make his stomach all watery. There wasn't a way you could *know* anything. You couldn't know what it felt like to have a penis.

It feels nice, he imagined saying to the reporter.

He had read that the penis was the least oxygenated part on the body. He wasn't sure what that meant but thought it might be why he always felt like it was suffocating.

He ordered the most expensive thing on the menu and thought about plopping it onto the floor.

In the dream, I was in this religion where everyone prayed to this awful woman who made them bite her toes and read to her. She made them read to her and when she would start to fall asleep, they would stop but then she would wake up and say, keep reading, I'm not asleep yet. In the beginning they liked reading to her. In the beginning it was something that they thought was nice. They were flattered, in a way. Do you see what I'm getting at here?

He wished he had just slept over at his grandparents like he did every Saturday night.

In the corner of his parents' bedroom, on the orange shag rug, he cried so hard his whole mouth tasted of carpet.

**LXXVII**

**to keep cool  
I fill my belly  
button  
w/ water**

**it gives me a thimble  
of oasis**

## LXXVIII

He kept saying *I* and inventing new *I*'s to say *I* with. It was like those Russian dolls. He was getting further and further away from something and closer and closer to nothing.

There was a team of Russian dancers who came to the home. This one guy was hell bent on making Josh smile. There was even a TV crew there for the six o'clock news. This guy was kicking his legs like a wild man, coming at him like all that kicking was as if to say, here is life! I am life!

Josh watched him plow across the floor getting closer and closer. He felt a lifetime of hard-boiled eggs come up on him.

If I were Chinese, I'd be a bald Chinese man. If I had a little girl she would be a little Chinese girl.

I wish I had a Chinese daughter to eat pizza with.

He wanted there to be sushi and tuxedos. Singing. Old lovers. And honesty! He wanted everyone to crawl into bed with him and get cozy under the blankets.

His mother talked to her mother five times a day on the phone. She didn't know how she could go on without her.



They were trying to roll him over so they could change the sheets.

I'm colour blind, he said in a high-pitched baby voice, I'm colour blind.

Well what colour is my uniform then, the nurse asked.

Shut up, Josh said and the smaller nurse laughed.

The lamp that bore his likeness was defective. It never worked properly. Have your likeness immortalized as a lamp, the ad read. Have friends and family "turn you on." That piece of crap never worked right from day one.

There was this thing they used to do called *giggle pussy*. It was demented. There were fingers and laughter. Sometimes it took place in public but mostly it happened late at night under the blankets.

There were times Josh thought he could remember, when the words *giggle pussy* seemed to recall a smell, something like plastic or Play Dough. Sometimes he would think that he was growing hard.

Josh thought it might be cute if he started calling the small blond nurse *giggle pussy*. He thought it might make it all come back to him.

She put unsweetened orange down on the table beside him.

Giggly Puss, Giggly Puss, he said.

He kept telling himself that he could never fall in love with a woman whose knees were as big as hers. That was what kept him securely anchored. He couldn't even bring himself to look at them for too long.

**And then one day he found himself licking at them. It made him feel like a homo.**

***It's a Wonderful Life* is on in the TV room, the orderly said.**

**Oh, it's a wonderful life, he said.**

LXXIX

**what if she were a life guard  
when you were a kid  
at the top of the high diving  
board?**

**would she blow her whistle  
at you til you forgot how to  
dive**

LXXX

She said she was Louise and that she was her daughter

She said her mother said many things about me.

She said it was a pleasure to finally make my acquaintance.

She said her mother would have been glad that she had come to see me.

She was fatter than her mother.

I wondered what her legs felt like.

We're all going to die, Doris said. She left the television on all the time. *That's why there's television. It's like having God.*

He had no appetite anymore. Everything tasted like silly putty. His throat felt like an elevator shaft made of melba toast.

One morning he got an idea.

Everything tastes better on a wooden ice-cream paddle, he said. Get me one of those and then we're in business.

He told three nurses. He told an orderly. He told a doctor. Eventually he just shut up.

I was going to stick my foot up your ass, but now I'm not so sure, he said.

Pops, are you alright.

Shut your yap, ya little prick, he said.

**Pops is getting old, someone said.**

**He shit in his pants. Then he sat down. Then he started to masturbate. Then they were seeing him. There was a dripping down his face. It didn't smell so bad. It really didn't smell like anything so weird.**

**He pulled out and creamed all over her ass.**

**Sorry, he said.**

**She turned around and smiled at him.**

**Just when it seemed like all was lost Harpo honked everyone in the room with sleeping gas from out of his horn and Chico said, good work, now let's get out of here but Harpo sprayed Groucho, too. Then he sprayed Chico. Then he laid down in a beautiful woman's arms and sprayed himself. Everyone was asleep when the credits rolled.**

It's weird that I'm here, she said.

I'll be your best friend. Josh was holding the orderly's hand from off the side of the bed.

Joshie. Joshie, an old man was crying from a bridge chair. He drove the orderlies crazy with his drama.

Nurses came in and spoke in loud kindergarten teacher voices. Everything was hurting so badly. There was a country song coming from a transistor in the room next door.

They brought Josh back from his bath without his mustache and nobody even noticed. It was like a slip of paper had blown off a desk.

Now you're senile and shit but you did some wacked-out shit in the day, said the orderly. I seen pictures of you goose-stepping through shopping malls.

Get off my bed!

I ought to yank the wire on a cruel dude like you.

After they finished dinner, using the tips of her fingers, she picked up his napkin.

Look at yours, Kay said. Now look at mine.

Normal, she said. Not normal.

Φ

He was braced in the bed. His grip was weak but he still managed to get all his fingers around the metal.

He was everything. He couldn't go because without him there was nothing. He held the bed and thought that as long as he was holding on he was still there. If he stayed focused then he couldn't disappear. *It doesn't make sense to not be here.*

There was something that was finally making sense. The light was squeezing him out. The light didn't have room for him anymore. It was going to happen. Everything was snowy and he was beginning to lack confidence. He wasn't sure if he was.

## LXXXII

On the morning that he heard the shofar blast he was standing outside with wet hair. He was squinting up at the sun. The more the sound kept going, the more real it got. After a few minutes people were crying right on the street. The shofar made a sound that went all at once: "The president's dead. Your cat is dead. You're really adopted. You're really a girl."

It was happening so fast. He had this funny feeling that it might be him. It might be him what this was all about.

Josh put on his mother's blue leotards with his underwear over them. He tied a towel around his neck and smiled bravely.

The Moschiach looked a lot like superman except he didn't fly as much. When he did fly, he'd look down and nod as if to say "carry on." He was like The Fonz with a twist of Alan Alda's *schmuchiness*. The Moschiach was a shmuchy-face.

They had a good-natured fat neighbour named Teddy who had died of a heart-attack decades earlier. And now here he was. He had a lei around his neck.

No one cared about astronomy. Nobody recorded anything. There was something called a penis orchard.

His grandmother was alive and she smelt just like her kitchen.

I love you, baby, Tommy said.

I love you, sweetie, Pam said.



Then there was silence. Then you saw his cock in her bald cunt.

That's how we regenerate the species, Josh said. We stick our things together to make new things that will one day do the same.

We kept going and going until one day the Moschiach showed up and said things are about to get revealed. We all saw that we were really the size of Chrysler buildings and sex was about angels dying from the sheer beauty of it all and that the greatest pornography of all was the human imagination.

I'm talking about these two people we used to have. They were called Tommy and Pam and they were lovely. They made the angels die and everyone watched but nobody could have ever guessed.

When the Moschiach arrived, they projected Buster Keaton films onto the sides of buildings. There was a man giving away hot blintzes. Josh even saw a Kernatzle tree. All the metros were made of milk carton.

In the days of the Moschiach, there was a great deal of sex to be had.

Josh once made love to Sharon Stone. They had met in a video arcade. He was playing Missile Command when she appeared behind him and with her arm around his waist, she asked if she could fire.

She had perfect control over her cunt muscles. The room was air-conditioned. There was a soothing hum. She was smiling and chewing gum with her mouth closed. She did this jerky thing where her mouth got all crooked.

She didn't wait for him to come. She started talking about her uncle.

Her uncle had polio when he was a young man and as a result he lost the use of his legs, so he dragged himself around on crutches. Once when he was over he asked her to sit on his lap. His legs were like string inside his pants. The thought of sitting on his make-believe lap scared her to death. She said she was too old for that. He ended up leaving all his money to her cousin. She never understood how he was her uncle in the first place.

Sharon Stone stared at the ceiling, thinking about it.

## LXXXIII

Josh started running into the Moschiach almost everywhere. He figured they had to be robots because no one could be everywhere at once. Maybe the Moschiach thought the same about him.

They wanted the Moschiach to have a cameo on Baywatch. He laughed when they asked him.

How much, he said still laughing.

You'll play yourself, of course, they said.

Oh, I don't know if it would be so appropriate, he said.

It will be tasteful and it'll be very smart. We'll give you chance to say a little something, too.

What would I say?

You could just sort of give them the thumbs up.

There was always so much to do and although a lot of people loved the Moschiach, no one really gave him much of a hand. He had no time for anything. His wife was starting to get real angry. The messiah had a wife and she couldn't take it anymore.

He put his hand on Sharon Stone's knee and said: When I was twelve, I jerked off every night thinking about you.

In her head she was trying to count how many cars she had ever driven. She got to eight when the car radio started to play *Shaddapayou Face*.

Whatsamatta you, they sang in unison.

They had never actually been formally introduced. He knew it was stupid to think, but it was like the Moschiach had been purposely avoiding him. The most he ever got was a quick nod.

Josh ran up to him on the street and smacked him on the back. That was what everybody did. Everybody smacked everybody on the back in the early days of the Messiah.

He dug it out of his pocket to show the Moschiach. It was a switchblade but instead of a knife, his penis popped out.

Cute, the Moschiach said.

They said that to stink uncontrollably was a virtue in the early days of the Moschiach, but it wasn't all days of roses.

My balls smell like a homeless man, said Kaliozakis. We were told not to bathe, so I don't bathe. They said there was no need-- and now, I stink, Goddamit! I smell simply awful!

What was that? asked the Moschiach rounding the corner.

Oh nothing, said Kaliozakis visibly rattled by this awful stroke of timing.

No, no. Go ahead. What were you saying to your friends. Is there anything wrong?

You had to admit: there was something so cozy and reassuring about having the Messiah around. It was like the sound of an old movie playing in the other room. It was like carpeting and books and the smell of pipe smoke.

No, I was just saying about how you told us that there was no need to shower, but I think that I might be smelling bad a little.

Well, said the Messiah, we're still ironing out a lot of the kinks. I've got such a backlog. It's absolutely *meshugeh*.

Is there anything I can do to help, asked Kaliozakis.

Maybe. It's just that there are certain people who simply shouldn't *be*. They're ruining the *vibe*. There's this one cat named Josh and I think he lives around here. Maybe you could speak to him about nodding out.

**In the Messianic age, everyone was sounding more and more like Lenny Bruce.**

**2**

**Joshua was eating a plate of eggs and bacon at the diner counter. He was wearing a pair of boxer shorts and an undershirt. Frieda was dressed like a waitress. She was making coffee and singing kooky, happy songs.**

**Kaliozakis sat down beside him.**

**Word is, said Kaliozakis, you're ruining it for everyone. Smell how bad I smell.**

**I'm eating over here, said Josh.**

**This whole thing that's taking place-- it's not for you. Do you understand? This isn't your *trip*, you dig?**

**What are you telling me? Wow, this is some egg they make!**

**All I'm saying is that you shouldn't *be*. It's for the good of the world.**

**Josh knew it was bound to catch up with him.**

**He squinted his eyes and tried to cease to be.**

**It's no use. I can't do it.**

**That's because you don't want to do it. You have to want to do it. You have to want to not be.**

**Well let's say that I can't?**

**That's why you have to make yourself.**

**How can I make myself when the me that's making me agrees with the me who doesn't want to not be?**

**You have to find a *me* that can get the whole thing going. Listen, this stinkin' business isn't for you anyway! Angels? Eternity? Bah. You'll be climbing the walls in a couple of years. A guy like you needs something to put his hands to. A wart to pick. A trade to ply. Try again, and think about what a rip off this whole thing is and how you'd be better off not to be.**

**His hands were in tight little fists that meant business. He squinted his eyes even harder. He grit his teeth and held his breath. His stress vein started to twitch.**

**Hey, don't shit your pants!**

**Joshua let out a pffhht sound. He smacked the counter. He smacked Kaliozakis's back.**

**It's good to be here, he said.**