



BLESSINGS OF *THE INSTRUCTIONS* AND THE GURIONIC WAR

There is damage. There was always damage and there will be more damage, but not always. Were there always to be more damage, damage would be an aspect of perfection. We would all be angels, one-legged and faceless, seething with endless, hopeless praise.

Bless Adonai for making us better than angels. Blessed is Adonai for making us human.

Some damage is but destructive, and other damage, through destruction, repairs. It is often impossible, especially while the damage is being brought, to distinguish between the one kind and the other, but because You've made scholars who know of the distinction, we fight to forgive You. Because You know that Your mistakes, though a part of You, are nonetheless mistakes, we accept that Your mistakes, though Yours, are ours to repair.

Blessed are You, Adonai, our God, King of the Universe, Who selected us from all the scholars and gave us *The Instructions* and the Gurionic War. Bless You, Adonai, Giver of the second kind of damage. We want only to fix You.

So let us mistake destruction for reparation with no greater frequency than we would blood for loyalty, loyalty for love, or books for weapons. Help us to be more scholarly. Help us damage Your mistakes. Show us, Adonai, when to set aside our books for weapons, for sometimes scholars must become soldiers, Adonai, for sometimes only soldiers can fix You, Adonai, and only while fixing can we forgive You, Adonai, for those times when only soldiers can fix You, Adonai.

(Amen)







The Side of Damage

Verbosity is like the iniquity of idolatry.

—15:23 *Samuel I*





1

ELIZA JUNE WATERMARK

Tuesday, November 14, 2006
2nd–3rd Period





Benji Nakamook thought we should waterboard each other, me and him and Vincie Portite. We wouldn't count the seconds to see who was bravest or whose lungs were deepest—this wasn't for a contest. We'd each be held under til the moment the possibility of death became real to us, and in that moment, according to Benji, we'd have to draw one of the following conclusions: "My best friends are about to accidentally drown me!" or "My best friends are actually trying to drown me!" The point was to learn what it was we feared more: being misunderstood or being betrayed.

"That is *so* fucken stupid," Vincie Portite said. "No way I'd think you were trying to drown me."

"You don't know what you'll think," Nakamook told him. "Right now you're rational. Facing death, you won't be. That's how methods like waterboarding operate." Benji'd been reading a book about torture. "This one guy," he said, "Ali Al-Jahani, specifically stated that—"

"Ali Al-Whatever whatever," said Vincie. "I'll do it if, one, you stop talking about that book—it's getting fucken old—and two, if Gurion's down. But it's stupid."

It did seem stupid, but Benji wasn't stupid, not even remotely, and I hated disappointing him. I said I was down.

Vincie said, "Fuck."

Splashing on a kickfloat a couple feet away was Isadore Momo, a shy foreign chubnik who barely spoke English, but the rest of the class was over in the deep end. Benji reached out, tapped Momo on the ankle. "You're wanted over there," he said, pointing to the others.

"By whom?" Momo said.

"By me," said Benji.

"Sorry. I am sorry. Sorry," said Momo. He got off the kickfloat and fled.



Benji told us: "I'll thrash before my death seems real. You'll have to keep me under for a little while after that."

"How long's a little while?" Vincie Portite said.

"Decide when I'm under. If I know, this won't work."

I clutched one shoulder, palmed the crown of his skull. Vincie clutched the other shoulder and the back of his neck. Benji exhaled all the breath in his body. He let his legs buckle.

We plunged him.

"How long then?" said Vincie.

A thirty-count, I said.

"How about a twenty?"

A twenty then, I said.

Benji started to thrash.

I counted off twenty inside of my head, tried pulling him up, but he wasn't coming up. He just kept thrashing. He was tilted toward Vincie, who was staring at the water.

Vincie, I said.

"Fuck," Vincie said. He pulled Benji up.

Benji sucked air.

Vincie said, "You count fast. Did you do Mississippis? I was doing Mississippis—I only got to twelve. Gurion. Gurion."

In the deep-end, some kids had rhymed "Izzy" with "Jizzy." I'd revolved to see who: Ronrico and the Janitor. Momo told them, "*Izzy*. I am *Izzy*, for Isadore. Isadore Momo. You may call me Izzy Momo." "Jizzy!" said Ronrico. "Jizzy Homo!" said the Janitor. Momo just took it, leaning hard on his kickfloat.

Benji cough-hiccaped, hands on his waist.

So? I said to him. What was the conclusion?

"Both," Benji said.

That doesn't make sense, I said. Which one was first?

"I said, 'Both,'" Benji said.

That doesn't make sense.

"You'll see for yourself in a second," he said.

"No way," Vincie said. "I'm going fucken next. Okay? Okay? I want to be done with this."

We held Vincie under and he started to thrash. We counted fifteen and we pulled him back up.

"Both?" Benji said.



“Neither,” gasped Vincie. His pupils were pinned. His flushed face trembled.

“So what then?” said Benji.

“Who—” Vincie said, but he choked on some air. He showed us his pointer, laid hands on my shoulders. “Who cares?” he said, catching up with his lungs. “I don’t even know. I feel fucken stupid. Dying is fucked. I don’t want to die.”

Then it was my turn. I let all my breath out. My friends held me under. They had a firm hold that I couldn’t have broken, and the water got colder, and my chest drew tighter, and I thought I might drink, take little sips, that a series of sips imbibed at steady intervals could gradually lessen the pressure of the strangle, but before I’d even tested this chomsky hypothesis, air stung my face and fattened my chest. They’d pulled me back up before death seemed real.

What happened? I said.

“We waited and waited. You wouldn’t start thrashing.”

“Vincie thought you passed out.”

I didn’t, I said.

Nakamook asked me, “You want to go again?”

Not really, I said. If you think it’s that important, though—

“*Fuck* ‘go again,’” Vincie Portite said. “I’m out. I’m done. You can drown him by yourself.”

Benji said, “Vincie.”

Vincie said, “Nakamook.”

The whistle got blown. Free swim was over.

Benji said, “Vincie,” and extended a fist.

“What?” Vincie said. “Fine. Okay.” He made his own fist and banged it on Benji’s.

I counted to three and we raced to the showers.

□ □ □ □ □ □ □

Were Isadore gay, I’d have probably hurt the Janitor for calling him a homo, and were he my friend, I’d have certainly avenged him—even just for “Jizzy”—but Momo was neither gay nor my friend. I’d had plans to fight the Janitor since late the night before.

I had never fought anyone without good reason, and I needed to learn





what doing so felt like. I needed to see if it felt any different. I'd been fighting a lot since I got to Aptakisic, and I enjoyed it so much—maybe too much. Each fight was better, more fun than the last, and I worried I was thrilling on the damage alone, rather than the justice the damage was enacting. I worried that the people I'd been getting in fights with might as well have been anyone as far as the fun I had pummeling them went. The only way to find out was to get in a fight without justification. If the thrill was absent, or in some way different, all would be well, I'd cease to worry. If the thrill was the same, though... I didn't know what, but I'd have to change something. So I'd picked a kid at random the night before—at least *somewhat* at random; I disliked the Janitor, he disliked me, we had Gym the same period—and decided I'd fight him in the locker-room.

Benji and Vincie were still in the showers—I'd won the race—and though I wasn't finished dressing, I saw it was time. If my friends got involved it could bance up the test, and I didn't need a shirt to get in a fight. I buckled my belt and ran up on the Janitor. A couple steps short of him, I towel-snapped his neck.

He whined and revolved. He said, "You're B.D. and you smell like cigarettes, it's nasty!"

No thrill yet, but we weren't really fighting.

I snorted up a goozy and twetched it on his toes.

"Towel!" he shouted. "Gimme a towel!" The Janitor dreaded all forms of dishygiene. He hopped on one leg. He threw wild punches. One caught my shoulder.

Now it was a fight.

I towel-snapped his eyes and he fell down sideways.

Someone said, "Your towel, sir."

"No, please, a towel, really!" the Janitor pleaded. He blinked like a lizard. His breathing got labored. He stayed on his side on the floor by his basket and begged for a towel while other kids watched.

The fight was over. No thrill at all.

I returned to my locker to finish getting dressed. My shirt was all tangled but I tried to pull it on. That's when Ronrico Asparagus attacked. He came from behind and charleyed my thigh-horse. I had to lean, but I didn't get deadleg. You only get deadleg if you're willing to kneel.

"Fight!" yelled some kids.

"Pee so pungent!" yelled some other ones.

Twenty came together to form a writhing wall.



I retreated four locker-lengths, struggling with my shirt. My head was through, and my shoulders were right, but the twisted sleeves were blocking the armholes.

Asparagus charged and kicked my flank.

I coughed, saw white. I slumped on the bench.

The wall swelled and hollered, waving its fists. Kids in the back shoved up to the front. Kids in the front popped out and fell down. Asparagus posed, just outside kicking range. "See that?" he said to them. "See that?" he said. "Gurion Maccabee. Big fucken deal." The wall got more dense, inched itself closer, squeezed itself tighter, popped out more kids.

Teeth shone everywhere.

My arms in their sleeves.

"Sit back down," Asparagus said to me.

I snorted and twitched, hung gooze on his ear. It moved like a yo-yo.

Asparagus lunged.

I tagged his grill with my wrist while pivoting. The blow was glancing, but the pivot added torque; he landed on his tailbone, swiping at air.

The air was sweaty.

I limped to my locker and snatched off the padlock, jammed home the U and slid in my pointer and swear to the knuckles.

The wall of kids: silent.

Ronrico had his legs again.

I told him, Be the hero.

"Fucken," he said.

Spring so fast you blur.

He vaulted the bench.

I uppercut the sweetspot under his ribs, that charliest of horses where every nerve's bundled. He stumbled forward folded, hugging himself, the scalp in his part a gleam like the padlock, inviting me to fuse the two in imagistic deathblow.

Instead I kicked his ankles, finishing his chapter. His leftward collapse on the wall of baskets clattered so loud it roused Mr. Desormie.

Desormie didn't mean anything in Italian. He taught Gym in shorts that his wang stretched the crotch of.

"What's all the noise?" said Mr. Desormie. "Who is responsible for this brand of nonsense?" The tip of his collar was curling toward the ceiling. "Why's the Janitor balanced on one of his feet instead of both of his feet?" Desormie said. "And who made Asparagus wheeze and sway like a person



that's dying or fatally wounded?"

"It was Gurion!" "Gurion!" "Gurion did it!"

They ratted me out. I didn't see who; I was staring at the collar.

Desormie scratched his throat and told me, "Go nowhere."

I got on the bench to make an announcement: A kid who tells on another kid's a dead kid.

That was a line from *Over the Edge*, a childsploitation flick starring Matt Dillon.

"Hey!" Desormie said to me. He wanted to punch my nose through my face but wouldn't break rules. He crouched beside Ronrico. "Asparagus," he said. "Hey, Asparagus," he said. He hefted him onto the bench by the pits.

Someone in the distance said, "Kids who tell are dead and dead!"

Blake Acer, Shover President, ran from the bathroom, asking what happened. The Flunky whispered, "Gurion spit on the Janitor, then he whammed Asparagus deep in the solarplaces." Someone near Acer said to someone behind him, "Maccabee pissed on Flunky Bregman's little brougham. Ronrico's xiphoid process is shattered."

The Janitor continued to ask for a towel. Desormie told him to act mature.

Then the elephant sounds of lockers denting, the clicking of shock-numbed hand-bones getting shook.

Someone said, "Gurion battled two guys at once."

"Like that?" said the guy who was punching the lockers.

"Like that," said the guy who the puncher showed off for.

Back by the showers, Nakamook was shouting, "Gurion's my boy! Do not play with us!"

"Do not fucken *play* with us!" flaved Vincie, beside him.

Snarly toplip, eyebrows tensed, I mock-aggressed with my face at Ronrico. He didn't respond. Stunned? I said. He just held his chest. The gym teacher told me, "Cruisin for a bruisin."

I tried to break my fingers, to see if I could. It was something I'd try every couple of hours. I'd match up the tips of right and left and push. They wouldn't ever break. I'd think: They can't. This time was no different.

I stepped off the bench and I leaned on my locker and waited for Desormie to take us to the Office. He waited for Ronrico's wheezing to subside. The Janitor lay there, waiting for a towel. Everyone else in the locker-room verbalized.

"Your knuckles are cut." "It doesn't even hurt." "The Janitor's toe's broke."



“Gangrene set in yet?” “Do not *play* with us!” “No one fucken *plays* with us!” “Look at that latch. That’s blood on that latch.” “I didn’t even notice the blood til you said.” “Do not look at us.” “...not fucken look at us!” “Bleeding’s weird.” “I bet I could take him.” “No one here can take him. He’s from Chicago.” “He’s only, like, ten, though—I’m twelve.” “So’s Asparagus.” “Do not think of us. Do not talk of us. Do not try to be us.” “...much *less* try fucken being us.” “A sock full of flashlight batteries you’re saying.” “I haven’t bled in a really long time.” “Duracell mace.” “Except for hangnails.” “Blew out the ligaments with a special chi-punch.” “Then the bodyslam.” “Bam Slokum could take him.” “Totally beside the point.” “Full-nelson to suplex, closed with a sleeper-hold.” “Blonde Lonnie could take him.” “Blonde Lonnie *couldn’t* take him—he’s standing right there.” “Do it, Blonde Lonnie.” “Blonde Lonnie fakes deafness!” “An axe-kick to the shoulder to top off the evening.”

No one was speaking to any one person. All of them were speaking to every single person. Everyone was going on record. I’d performed specific actions on Ronrico and the Janitor, but the hows and the whos didn’t matter to the rest of them. What mattered was something had messed up the arrangement. They wanted a part of that, so they tried to explain it, but didn’t know how, so they made things up, working together, though none of them knew it, like bouncing molecules forming gases.

“Bleeding doesn’t hurt.” “If your *face* was bleeding, trust me it would hurt.” “And the Flunky’s not stepping up either, is he? And he’s the Janitor’s very own brother!” “A spring-loaded sap like Maholtz has.” “HCl in a two-dollar squirtgun.” “I’ve cut my lip—didn’t ever hurt.” “Boystar, too.” “Boystar! Tch.” “Co-Captain Baxter, then.” “I’ve never seen him fight.” “I’m saying your nose, getting punched in your nose.” “A punch in the nose would hurt cause the bone. It’s snapping the nosebone’s the pain, not the bleeding.” “Boystar and the Flunky and the Co-Captain together, then. Plus Bam Slokum. And Blonde Lonnie.” “There isn’t any nosebone.” “Five guys is cheap. Especially with Slokum.” “Tell it to my nosebone. He’s standing right here.” “A pointed fucking instrument.” “Slokum’s beside the point.” “Nose is all cartilage.” “Slokum’s the *whole* point. Slokum’s indestructible.” “What the fuck’s cartilage?” “He’s fucking immortal.” “He fucking jammed a screwdriver in dude’s *fucking* earhole!”

Desormie yelled, “Quiet down!” at the ceiling.

Vincie Portite yelled, “Quiet down!” at Desormie.

Desormie yelled, “Quiet!” into the floor. To me, he said: “You’ve got trouble coming.”





ADAM LEVIN

I should have said, Bring it. Instead I said, I know.

Someone said, “A dead kid.” Nakamook shouted, “Ve vill crush you like zeh grape!” “Ve vucken vill crush!” Vincie Portite flaved.

Asparagus coughed, then started breathing normal. Desormie said “Good” and sat the Janitor next to him. “The office’ll send for you later,” he told them. “For now you go back to the Cage.”

“Let’s go let’s move,” he said to me.

After counting to seven, I hoisted my bag.

On the way to the door, I looked over my shoulder and saw the Janitor eyeing the gooze that was still on his foot, eyeing a t-shirt laying on the bench, about to decide to wipe one with the other. The t-shirt belonged to Leevon Ray. Leevon was the only black kid at school, unless you count halfie Lost Tribesmen—I don’t—and he refused to speak, which is why he was Cage, but we’d sometimes trade snacks and play slapslap at lunch, so I knew we were friends, and to spread word through kids was no form of ratting, but it took me a second of sorting that out before I cued Leevon to safeguard his shirt. It took me a second because of the fight. My chemicals, after fights, often fired weird; during a fight, they were always reliable, tunneling my thinking so I could be simple, but after a fight the opposite happened and sometimes the tunnel would loop til it knotted and wouldn’t untangle until I noticed.

Your shirt, I told Leevon.

The Janitor flinched.

I entered B-Hall behind Desormie. Up at the B-Hall/2-Hall junction, a red-lettered banner that hung from the ceiling read

JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL
APTAKISIC ^ FOREVER

They had to jam in the “Junior High School” because of genocide and irony. Most of Aptakisic’s people were gone. Aptakisic was a chief. His tribe was called the Potawatami, but the Aptakisic basketball team was called the Indians. I got called a Jew, but Jews were no longer; we were already Israelites.

I took a running start and jumped to tear the banner down. I missed the lower edge by three or four feet.

“Don’t test me, Maccabee,” Desormie said.

You, kinesiologist, will soon be delivered.

He said, “What did you say to me?”

I said, Into my hand, Gym teacher.





THE INSTRUCTIONS

□ □ □ □ □ □ □

Admissions Record: Gurion Maccabee

DOB: 6/16/96

The Solomon Schechter School of Chicago

Admitted	Aug 20, 2001	Kindergarten
Released	May 3, 2006	Grade 4

Brief Description of Release:

Expulsion. Physically assaulted Headmaster.

Northside Hebrew Day School

Admitted	May 8, 2006	Grade 4
Released	June 5, 2006	Grade 6

Brief Description of Release:

Double Promotion followed by Expulsion.

Supplied weapons to students/weapons possession/incitement to use weapons.

Martin Luther King Middle School

Admitted	Aug 21, 2006	Grade 7
Released	Aug 24, 2006	Grade 7

Brief Description of Release:

Expulsion from Evanston Public School System.

Assaulted student w/ brick.

Aptakisic Junior High School

Admitted	Sept 5, 2006	Grade 5 (CAGE Program)
----------	--------------	------------------------

Brief Description of Admission

Demoted to age-appropriate grade-level. Placed probationally (three weeks) in CAGE Program for observation.

Update (September 26, 2006)

Re-promoted to Grade 7.

*Observed to be appropriate for CAGE Program—
placed indefinitely in CAGE Program.*



□ □ □ □ □ □ □

The air in Main Hall was blinky that morning. Dust touched light and the particles twitched. Desormie, ahead of me, hummed out a melody with lipfart percussion and aggressively dance-walked and thought it was strutting. I was thinking how dust was mostly made of people, and that a pile of dust from a one-man home should be as easy to mojo as fingernail clippings, which was probably why Hoodoos were vigilant sweepers (self-protection), when a swollen-lipped Ashley, trailed by Bam Slokum, came out of the lunchroom, and Desormie stopped humming.

“Bammo!” he said.

I pulled on my hoodstrings.

“Hey Coach D,” Bam Slokum said. Superhero-shaped and over six feet tall, Bam was Aptakisic Indians Basketball’s goldenboy. I’d never even exchanged as much as a nod with him. He and Benji Nakamook were long-time arch-enemies.

Desormie said, “You got a hall-pass there, Bammenstein?”

Bam made the noise “Tch” = “I know you don’t care if I’ve got a hall-pass,” and laced his fingers in front of his chest, then pushed out his hands to pop all his knuckles. A thousand dark veins and knotty tendons raised the taut skin on his forearms.

“How about you, young lady? Got a pass?”

“Ashley’s all distraught,” Slokum said to Desormie. “I was helping her out. Process of helping her, we misplaced her pass.”

“Oh,” Desormie said. “Distraught?”

“I’m feeling much better now,” the Ashley told him.

Slokum chinned the air in the direction of A-Hall. The Ashley squeezed his biceps and strode off toward A-Hall.

“Well *alright*,” said Desormie. “*Alright* then,” he said. “We gearing up for a righteous premiere?”

The opening game of the basketball season was scheduled for 5 p.m. on Friday.

“Sure, Coach D,” Bam Slokum said.

“Main Hall Shovers get their new scarves today, boy. Just had Blake Acer in Gym—kid’s *amped*. Comes up to me, tells me, ‘Listen, Mr. D, our new scarves are gonna be so darn flossy, I’m scared once I see ’em, I’ll just go blind.’ Says, ‘Bam’s gonna crush and the Shovers’ll *be* there. Watch it, Twin Groves. Just watch out!’”





“Yeah,” said Bam. “The air’s crackling with pep.”

“Crackling with pep!” Desormie said. “But like what the heck’s ‘flossy’ though? The heck does that mean, right? Heck did it come from? What happened to *killer*? Heck, what happened to *awesome*? When did the Main Hall Shovers turn to funnytalk? Maybe it’s just Acer. Presidents talk weird. Good kid, though, that Acer. Don’t get me wrong. Good kids the lot of them. A tribute to all of us. A boon for the team. All those Shovers. Other teams get pepsquads—pepsquads! *What?* Wussy little pepsquads waving little flags, fancy-dancing on their twinkle-toes, and, I don’t know, lipping. That, Sir Bam, is what other teams get. The Indians, though? We got *Shovers*. We got us Shovers, and they don’t wave flags. We got us Shovers and our Shovers *wear scarves*. Our Shovers wear scarves and they trounce any pepsquad. Right? Am I right? They trounce on the twinkletod all the dang livelong. So what if their hand-eye’s crappier than ours? So what if sometimes you want to give ‘em a wedgie til the tears and the boogers go pouring down their chins? They’re carrying your books. They’re filling the bleachers. They’re loving the Indians. Good kids all of them. A tribute and a boon. It’s how you play the game. All good kids. When they almost fell apart, they could’ve fell apart, except they didn’t fall apart because instead they came together. Overcame differences. All the stronger for it. Intestinal fortitude. Trial by fire. Awesome scarves. No limp flags. Trouncing the lispers. Pep that crackles. How you play the game. Just why the funnytalk from Acer’s what I’m saying.”

“Yeah,” Bam said. “Shovers,” he said.

Desormie made the noise “Tch” ≠ anything meaningful. Bam made the noise “Tch” back at him, and then he chinned the air at me and winked his left eye = “We just made accidental eye-contact and I am only doing what is done when that happens, but still I want you to know that we are in this together.” Except for the hallway, there was nothing that Bam and I were in together. Still, I chinned back at him. His chinning made me feel brotherly. Up close to Slokum for the first time ever, acknowledged, I saw there was something I liked about him, which bothered me a lot, and not just because my best friend despised him. There were certain very few guys like Bam who something about them made me not want to harm them when I should have, or should’ve at least been planning how to. I thought it was probably the faces they made. Whatever it was, though, I knew those had to be the kinds of guys who Adonai used to make kings of, when He still made kings. David ben-Jesse was one of those guys, and Solomon, too; but then so was Saul, and even Jeroboam.



Hashem had to make kings because the Israelites wouldn't be led by the judges, even though the judges were tougher than the kings and knew the law better. It was actually *because* the judges were tougher and knew the law better that they couldn't lead the Israelites. That spooked me out. I didn't think it should be that way. It wasn't up to me, though.

Neither was starting a fight with Slokum. I'd given my word to Benji that I wouldn't, as long as Slokum didn't provoke me. And Slokum, there in Main Hall, wasn't provoking me. Not even a little. I thought that maybe he didn't know who I was—most Aptakisic students outside the Cage didn't—and I wanted to tell him, "I'm Gurion Maccabee, best friend of your number-one enemy, Nakamook," but before I'd said anything, he was walking away, and before he'd walked away, he'd chinned air at me a second time, and I'd chinned back, without even thinking, and felt just as brotherly and bothered as the first time.

"Baaaam Slokum," Desormie said as Slokum turned the corner.

I made the noise Tch = I am not your audience.

Desormie made the noise back = "You're lucky you're not my son."

I said, Hnh = That happens to be true, but not because you say so.

As soon as we started walking again, My Main Man Scott Mookus fell out of the Office. Aptakisic hallways always seemed picaresque.

Main Man stumbled toward us, saying, "Hello Gurion! And hello Mr. Desormie! What a shiny whistle you're wearing around your well-muscl'd neck. I would like to talk about it with you some time. How negligible of me not to have said so, but it is such beautiful weather that we are having today, don't you suppose? I would even go so far as to say that the snow is reminiscent of my youth in the heart of the country. Oh isn't the sky a stage, in a sense, and the snow a sort of spotlight? It is! And what of this rumor being bandied about town surrounding the subject of your tent-pitching acumen? It's truly fantastic! In all sincerity, I do wish you well. And Gurion! My captain! Captain, my captain, my great brother Gurion, the tomorrow after tomorrow's tomorrow you will lead us into battle to separate the head from the body of the heathen droves. What does that feel like? I say the silent fall of this snow won't do, that we pray for a hailstorm to dramatize the atmosphere, the thunder and pattering our background music..."

Desormie had kept us walking while Mookus stayed in the spot where we'd passed him, speaking louder and faster about weather and End Days. It was the disease. Main Man had Williams Cocktail Party Syndrome. His face looked elfy and his grammar, sometimes, sounded seriously official, but he



couldn't understand himself because he was retarded. For the most part he talked because talking was social, a friendly noise, and he was nice. Almost everything he said, whatever the content = "Talk to me and I'll talk to you," and that used to get me sad, but then I figured that almost anything he heard must have also = "Talk to me and I'll talk to you," and I wasn't sad, but I was a little spooked. For a day, I was actually really spooked, and I started to wonder if I was retarded, my parents and friends all secret condescenders for my self-esteem. I even asked my mom. "Retarded?" she said. "You are the smartest and the handsomest." Exactly what I'd say to my retarded son if I wanted to hide the truth. Are you telling me the truth? I'd said to my mom, and my mom said "Yes," and I believed her, or at least I believed she didn't *think* I was retarded, and that was enough to unspook me.

Down the hall, I yelled: Mookus, you are my main man!

"Indeed I am, Gurion! I am indeed!" My Main Man Scott Mookus yelled up the hall back at me.

I wanted to know what else Scott was saying, but I couldn't hear him at all anymore. I could hear my jingling pocket and the ticking of the ball in Desormie's whistle when it swung against his pecs, the clap and squeak of our shoes on the floor, and the buzzing of the panels of light in the ceiling. Everything I could hear was not supposed to get heard. I'd been told by Call-Me-Sandy that this had to do with earlids. Earlids were figurative. They had no flesh. They closed to block out the ambient sounds. People whose A's were D'd didn't have earlids, unless they took Ritalin or Adderal or another form of speed for SpEds that stunts growth. I took no spedspeed, but still wasn't tall. Nakamook took it, but only sometimes. The ones he didn't want he'd stockpile and sell for a buck a pill to a group of sophomores with hair in their eyes who'd drive to the beach from Stevenson High School to meet him each Friday after detention.

Behind me, Scott did the Joy of Living Dance. To do the Joy of Living Dance, My Main Man would two-step and roll his shoulders like a warming-up boxer and clear all the gooze from his throat. It meant he was going to sing. His voice was beautiful and he could perfectly sing things he'd only heard once—mostly songs off the mixes Vincie burned for us weekly—and he did requests.

We took a left into the Office and I never found out what Scott sang that time. It was suck because one day soon My Main Man would never sing again. The Williams made his heart grow wrong: bubbles in his vessels and tears in his atria. These defects shrunk his chambers down. He would outgrow his



pump until it would kill him, the sweetest person. He was proof of why it's flawed to call good people big-hearted. Desormie was more proof—his heart was huge from athletics, probably the biggest heart in school.

I always thought Adonai should kill him instead of Mookus.

It wasn't up to me, though. At least not the instead part.

□ □ □ □ □ □ □

In front of the desk of Miss Virginia Pinge, Desormie tried hooking his thick arm around me. The arm was hairless and tanning-bed orange. I almost hit my head on the elbow as I ducked it, but almost didn't count, so I didn't get dangerous—as a rule I'd get dangerous when my head got touched.*

Miss Pinge said to me, "What happened this time?"

Desormie told her, "Fighting."

Miss Pinge said, "You were fighting again?"

"Socking it out with Ronrico Asparagus and spitting like an animal

* The blossoming Gurionic oral tradition has been making far too much of this. That a touch to my head could cause me to explode is significant enough a fact to mention, but it isn't a fact that anyone should dwell on. I only dwell on it here for the benefit of a certain kind of well-intended scholar who would otherwise waste his patience and energy awaiting revelation of an origin story explaining the fact, or, even worse, fruitlessly searching *The Instructions* for evidence supporting any of those "theories" about the fact's "meaning" that the oral tradition has lately put forth. To clarify further:

1. There is no untold backstory that explains why I would become dangerous when touched on the head. No head-striking abuser haunted my past. I'd never suffered *any* kind of trauma to my head. I'd never inflicted a serious head-trauma, let alone one that I later regretted, nor had I witnessed such a trauma inflicted on anybody else, much less someone close to me. I'd never been forced to perform fellatio. I'd never seen anyone receive fellatio. No one had or would ever use my head or any other of my bodyparts against my will for any sexual purpose.
2. It is true that my head, like anyone else's, contains my brain, and that my brain, like anyone's, generates thoughts that, if unexpressed, cannot be accessed by anyone—including Adonai—but me. The idea, however, that my head-touch-triggered danger would arise because I wanted to protect my "one true sanctum" from "invaders" is patently false. I'd been exploding from head-touches since before I could remember; since the day I was born, according to my mother; since before I could make the (silly) leaps in symbology necessary to conclude that protecting my braincase = guarding my unexpressed thoughts; since before I even knew that I *had* a brain.
3. There is no genetic or biological link between my mother's "ocular neuroses" and my head-touch explosions. As my *Story of Stories* (p. 115) faithfully reports, my mother *learned* to guard her eyes zealously; she wasn't born doing it.

And so, in sum: As a rule I'd get dangerous when my head got touched, and as a rule I'd use my right hand to hold a glass of water. The former fact bears mention because it is peculiar and because it has potentiated important events and decisions I've made, whereas the latter fact doesn't bear mention (except to make this rhetorical point), for it isn't peculiar and it hasn't potentiated anything important. Both facts, however, are *simple* facts, in that they owe to chance, neurology, or the whim of Adonai, depending on the flavor of your reductive urges. Simple facts, good scholar, aren't worthy of your disquisitions, not with so many complex ones at hand.



on the Janitor,” said Desormie. “Probably the Janitor said B.D. to him in a disparaging tone. That’s his new thing he calls people and to me it’s hilarious and ironic.”

“The janitor makes fun of your behavioral disorders?” Miss Pinge said. She should have put her hand on the back of her head, where the lizard brain sits and the alarms blasts out from, but she put it on her chest instead, and kept it there.

“Not Hector with the mop, Miss Pinge, ya big loony toon. That FOB can’t hardly speaky the English. You think he knows what B.D. is? I’m talking about the Flunky’s little brother Mikey Bregman. The neatfreak kid. The Janitor. It’s his nickname. Get it? That’s why it’s so ironic. Cause he’s got the B.D. himself. The Janitor. Tch.”

“That’s not very funny,” Miss Pinge said. “Where are—”

“Hey, now, it’s the kid’s nickname,” said Desormie, “and there’s a reason for that and sometimes you gotta do as the Romans and sometimes you gotta let ’em reap what they sow, cause if you’re B.D. and you start saying B.D. in the disparaging tones? Then it’s just like with the n-word. You’re gonna get treated like you’re the n-word because you’re acting like someone who’s the n-word. Law of the jungle. That’s all I’m saying. It’s the facts of life. These Cage students need to cultivate some intestinal fortitude and stop acting like they hate themselves because we know it’s not very mature and it’s probably why they got put in the Cage in the first place, which is also pretty ironic if you ask me, don’t you think?”

“Where are Mikey and Ronrico?” Miss Pinge asked him.

Not a bad question.

Desormie chinned the air at me. He said, “Brodsky’s last email said this one fights, we bring him in separate from who he fought with.”

It was the first I’d heard of that policy.

Same with Miss Pinge. “Really?” she said = “That doesn’t seem right.”

“I do what Brodsky says,” Desormie said.

Miss Pinge handed him a Complaint Against Students Sheet. Some people called it a CASS. It was the standard document for the STEP System. Cage students like me were outside the STEP system, even though everyone pretended we were in it. If I’d been in the STEP system, I’d have been expelled by then. So would at least half the rest of the Cage. You got expelled after three out-of-school suspensions. Those were OSS’s. You got an OSS after three in-school suspensions in the same semester, which were ISS’s. You got an ISS if you had four detentions for the same reason in one quarter. All



they ever gave me was detentions and once in a while ISS's.

Desormie's auto-tinting eyeglasses were almost as big as laboratory goggles. He took them off and blew steam on the lenses. Then he wiped the lenses on his shirt and put the glasses back on to read the standard document. He'd answered the CASS questions at least five times in front of me, but still he had to mouth the words of them as he went along. I noticed a red lint-string attached to his shirt-hem by static and I wanted it removed but it wouldn't remove itself and I wouldn't ever touch him, so I scratched an itch on my head and read the pervy stories in his face: He was a notorious de-pantser in the hallways of his grade school. The first time he went to the bathroom after eating beets, he looked in the toilet and thought he was dying, so he played with himself. His wife was scared of him was why he married her. He thought *polack* was the Polish word for Polish person. That's the story of his life that his face told. It was the story of a perv in the making. The story of a perv on the make.

And the story was true. He was always caressing between his tits when he talked to women and making girls who wore spandex tights sit in front during sit-ups and leg-stretches. It was all there in the mouth. Its top lip had a pointy edge. Its word-forming movements made it look like he was chewing food that he thought was gross but wouldn't say was gross because it was impolite but he wanted you to know it was gross so he showed you—like the food was so bad he couldn't hide the ugliness of his own mouth-actions so you were supposed to admire how polite he was for not *saying* anything. I hated him. And that's not just an expression. I hated him the way the tongues of smart girls prefer bittersweet chocolate to milk. I hated him the way Jews endangered Jews and burning matter grabs oxygen. I hated him from the moment I met him, and at the moment I met him it was as if I'd always hated him. I hated him the way he hated me. Helplessly, I hated him. Without volition. And it is true that there were others as despicable as Desormie, even within the walls of Aptakisic, but I had to learn to hate those others. They had to teach me how to hate them. Desormie was the only person I ever hated a priori. Our enmity was mystical.

Miss Pinge told me Brodsky was in a meeting. She said I'd have to wait. I was already waiting, but what she meant was I didn't have to wait on my feet. To get that across, she stuck out her pointer and jabbed it back and forth. The jabbing was something Emmanuel Liebman had long ago taught me to call a blinker action. That label referred to the orange blinkers that were mounted on the tops of construction horses; the horse showed you



where it was that you shouldn't go, and the blinker showed you the horse. I.e., it showed you a showing. The jabbing of the finger was a blinker action because it was a pointing at a pointing. It pointed at how the finger was pointing at the three fake-oak waiting-chairs next to the door.

I didn't like it when people blinkered for me—it seemed condescending—but I did like Miss Pinge, so I decided I'd wait just a three- (not a five-) count, before I revolved and went to the chairs. Before I'd even counted to two, though, something flat sailed over my shoulder, then landed with a clap on Miss Pinge's desk. A wooden bathroom pass the size of a textbook.

"I was nice to give you that pass," Pinge said. "It would've been nice of you not to throw it at me."

"I threw it on the blotter," said Eliza June Watermark.

□ □ □ □ □ □ □

No one called her Eliza. They all called her June. I'd seen June around, but never close up. She was flat but so pretty. She sat before I did, and not in the middle chair. I didn't know if I should sit next to her or sit so a chair was empty between us, so I tried to read her face, but I couldn't read her face because she wasn't bat-mitzvah yet—the stories wouldn't tell. They weren't available.

I did a quick eenie-meenie with my chin and the words inside my head so no one would know. I landed on *sit with the chair between us*, then knew I didn't want that, so I sat down next to her and asked why she was there. She said she was there for talking in Spanish.

I said, That's racist.

June said, "Spanish. Class." There were three slim gaps between the teeth of her top-row. She whispered, "Next stop, Frontier Motel."

"Next stop, Frontier Motel," was the first part of a rhyme people said to me on the bus, right before I'd get dropped off at the Frontier Motel. The rest of the rhyme was, "The place where Gurion's fat black dad who fell dwells." They thought I lived at the Frontier Motel, but I only got picked up and dropped off there.

I never knew what to do when I'd hear the rhyme because the guy they called my black dad was the motel owner, Flowers, a three-hundred-pound bachelor hoodooman with silvershot dreadlocks and a chrome-knobbed walking cane who'd written four novels he said cast spells. He said I shouldn't read them; not because of the spells, but because he was my teacher, and his books



would interfere. So I didn't read them, because he was my teacher, and my father's old friend. He was helping me to write my third work of scripture. I.e., he was helping me out with *this* work of scripture, *The Instructions*, although, at the time, I hadn't known its title, let alone its true substance. At the time, all I'd known was that it would be different from my first two scriptures—*The Story of Stories* and *Ulpan*—which I hadn't needed help with from anyone at all, since they were exclusively concerned with my people, who I already knew how to speak to and about. My people, when I'd written those first two scriptures, were the only people I knew.

Apart from forbidding me to read his four novels, though, the only thing Flowers ever forbade was for me to portray him as a wise old black man who gave life-lessons to an Israelite boy, part lost-tribe or not, because, he said, that would signify wrong, and signifying was important to him, and since he wasn't some kind of zealous forbiddier, I knew it should be important to me. And that was the reason I didn't know what to do when people called him my black dad who fell. The first thing I'd think to do was violence, because they were making fun of him, but if I did violence then they could think I was doing violence because they called a black guy my dad and that it made me ashamed. So violence would signify wrong. Plus I didn't know who they were exactly—just that they sat up front with the bandkids. They might have even been the bandkids. So I didn't do anything to them at all. Instead, I'd tell Flowers and he'd give me a book that was by someone else, or sometimes a root he'd tell me to chew. The roots all tasted like chalk.

June didn't say the black guy part of the bus-rhyme, but I was being nice to her, so it was suck of her to say any of it. I didn't even know how she knew the rhyme—she wasn't on my bus. She sneezed after she said it, though, and after she sneezed, I said God bless you. I didn't really want to be mean to her anyway.

Desormie kept trying to talk to Miss Pinge while she typed. "So," he said.

Miss Pinge shrugged = "So what?"

He said, "I guess you're recording attendance."

Miss Pinge nodded = "Yes already."

"I see you've got a system," Desormie said. "You just sorta bring up the name of an absent kid on your spreadsheet, there—Oh! Look at that. You don't even have to type the whole name in. You just sorta type the first couple letters of the last name and then there's like a box pops up you can select from... I see, sometimes it's quicker to just type the whole name in so





you don't have to move your hand off the home-row of the keyboard there to use the mouse or the arrow-pad. There's a coupla systems there, huh? There's the system you're using, like in the computer, and then there's the system you're using of your own. If the kid's last name is Yamowitz—wow, you're already in the Y's and it's barely third period. As I was saying, if the kid's name is Yamowitz—and what a crappy name!—I see you just sorta type in Y A and hit enter cause there aren't any other kids with last names start with Y A in the box and you know that so you just hit enter and there's the kid's file, and then you hit shift-A. Absent! On the record. There you go. I can respect your system. I *do* respect your system. I am Luca Brasi and you are Don Vito Corleone and I am at your daughter's wedding and your daughter's wedding is the system you're using. I like it. You know what I mean?"

I thought: If history's taught us anything, it's that any man can be killed.

That's from *Part II*.

Miss Pinge stopped typing and tilted her head = "*Please* go away, Ron Desormie," but Desormie thought = "Please continue, you interesting gym teacher." He turned around and saw me watching him. Then he made his eyes wide at June and thumbed air at me = "Look at this intermittently disordered exploder who does not attend and is hyper and who thinks you want to sit next to him when what you really want is to sit in my lap." He ran the thumb up and down his cleavage. Then he winked at June and turned back to Miss Pinge.

He said, "I bet there used to be an old system where you didn't have those pop-up boxes and you had to type the entire name in. How fast our technology moves. Jeez. Look at all those absents."

Miss Pinge didn't look.

Desormie said, "What I mean is, there's a whole lot of absents you got there." Then he said, "Gotta teach gym."

He pretended to scratch his arm so he could flex it, and then he left the CASS on the desk and then he left.

I hate that perv, I said to June.

She said, "Me too."

Yeah? I said.

June made the noise "Tch" = "That was a useless thing to say, Gurion." = "What you just asked me was not a real question."

I said, Tch. It sounded inauthentic and I tried to ignore her.

It was hard for me to ignore people, especially pretty ones. It was hard



to ignore noises, too. Call-Me-Sandy said the same thing as my mom said about it. They said that to be a good ignorer you had to concentrate on another thing because if you just concentrated on ignoring what you were supposed to ignore then you wouldn't really be ignoring what you were supposed to ignore because you'd be thinking about ignoring it, which was just another way of thinking about it.

So I concentrated on the face of Miss Pinge instead of June. It was not as fun as concentrating on the face of June. June was pretty and also hot. Miss Pinge was hot but she wasn't pretty. It's the faces she made that were hot. But the face that she had when she was not making a face was not pretty. It was beat-looking, her resting face. When she was my age, she got her period early and her father dragged her in front of a mirror in her pajamas. He forced her to look into it and say, "You are an ugly girl and I hate you." The face she made in the mirror acted powerfully on the bones and muscles of her resting face so that now it was a hint of the mirror-face. Certain kinds of men, on seeing the hint, would try to seduce her in hopes that once they'd gotten her naked, they could say something cruel to her and thereby elicit that original face she'd made for her father. Certain kinds of men like Ron Desormie. What a name. What a pervy name. What a perfect name for a perv like him. It could even be verbed like pasteurize. I thought: It *could* be? No. It *will* be. I thought: From now on, *desormiate* = perv the world, and *rondesormiate* will, for a while, be an acceptable, however overly formal, variant in the vein of *irregardless*, then become archaic, whereas *sorm* and *desorm*, the slang of tomorrow, will eventually dominate, rendering *desormiate* itself the over-formal variant.

At that, I was tapped, though. I'd killed about a minute, but it felt like twenty. On the June-side, my neck ached from fighting my head.

I let my head turn and said, Here's the new adjective you didn't know you asked for.

Miss Pinge said, "Shh."

I whispered, Junish: easy on the eyes, but—

June cut me off. She said, "You need to shave yourself."

A couple people had told me that, but when I looked in the mirror, I could not see where they were talking about. There were no hairs on my face. I looked very hard every day. I wanted big sideburns.

Where? I said.

June said, "Uch." Then she touched me near the area where my apple would obtrude if I grew up to have the neck of my father, and also she touched me right above that, which was the bottom of my chin, which was a part of my





head, but it didn't make me dangerous to get touched there that time. It made me want to hug her in a standing position and nose her in the hair. I wanted to kiss her fingers, too. They were cool on my skin, and I thought they would have a strawberry taste. I was sure that her hair would have a strawberry smell. The hair was red, all kinds of red, and I noticed on her wrist she had a pink freckle, very light pink, shaped like a ♡. I had two like it, one on each thumb-knuck, but mine were as black as felon tattoos and under two layers of waterproof makeup my mom made me apply every morning to hide them. I was going to rub off the makeup right there to show June the freckles, but exit-laughter rumbled behind Brodsky's door. The laughter was the sound of the Boystar family, and once the door opened and Brodsky emerged I couldn't start talking without getting us in trouble, and I worried that if I just rubbed off the makeup to reveal her the letters without a word June might feel creeped. Better, I decided, to show her later.

□ □ □ □ □ □ □

Name: Gurion ben-Judah Maccabee

Grade: ⑤ 6 7 8

Homeroom: The Cage

Date of Detention: 9/22/2006

Complaint Against Student (from Complaint Against Student Sheet)

Fight in the hallway with Kyle McElroy. B-Hall. Passing period (2nd–3rd).
9/19/06. Mr. Novy.

Step 4 Assignment: Write a letter to yourself in which you explain 1) why you are at step 4 (in after-school detention); 2) what you could do in order to avoid step 4 (receiving after-school detention) in the future; 3) what you have learned from being at step 4 (in after-school detention); 4) what you have learned from writing this letter to yourself. Include a Title, an Introduction, a Body, and a Conclusion. This letter will be collected at the end of after-school detention. This letter will be stored in your permanent file.

Title

Face

Introduction

There is snat and there is face. Snat is like water, but invisible. It can become violence, depending on what kind of shape the face is in.

The face is the dam that holds the snat back.



ADAM LEVIN

Body Flood

If the face is suddenly wiped out by an enemy, the snat floods, and the faceless person spends all the snat's violent possibilities in a single burst of attempted tackling, choking, or slamming the enemy's head on the floor.

While the possibilities get spent, the faceless person shakes and cries. His aim is off, and his attack, unless he gets lucky, does no serious damage to the enemy: it is usually very easy for the enemy to dodge the burst.

Once all the snat has flooded out of the faceless person, his muscles disobey him and his fists quit. The enemy can stomp him into pudding without resistance.

Trickle

If, instead of being suddenly wiped out by an enemy, the face just gets cracked a little, then the snat trickles. If the trickler tries to caulk the crack, another crack will form. If he then tries to caulk the second crack, a third crack will form. Caulking a third will form a fourth, and so on. So caulking cracks never saves the face, but not-caulking cracks eventually might.

Cannon

The best is when a brick pops out of the face. It can happen two ways.

The first way is by trickles. Trickles further corrode cracks that go uncaulked. Enough corrosion will cause the snat to pop the brick that's trickling. Snat will cannon through a brick-sized hole, and the person whose hole it is can aim the snat. He can turn the whole face in the direction of the enemy and blast that enemy faceless.

If the blast isn't perfect, the enemy might pop a brick of his own—that is the second way a brick gets popped.

Once the enemy has popped a brick, *he* can aim snat through *his* brick-hole. That's what a fight is: brick-popped enemies aiming their holes til faces wipe out.

After it's over, whoever's not faceless gets all his bricks and snat back.

*Conclusion*

The Judge Samson always knew what kind of shape his face was in. Because the Philistines were running Israel, his face trickled at the sight of them, even if they were sleeping. But Samson knew not to throw down while he was trickling. That is why he spent so much time getting the Philistines to start up with him. They would cheat him or attack him and these actions would pop a brick out of his face. Then Samson would aim his hole and smite everyone. He'd aim his hole as soon as his brick popped and he never waited til his face got completely wiped out. Not til the very last second of his life.

At the very last second of his life, his sense of timing was gone, and his face trickled non-stop, but it wouldn't pop a brick, so Samson got started-up-with by the trickling of the snat itself. His own snat wiped his face out all at once. Because he was Samson, his aim was amazing, even though he was blind, and his strength was astounding, even though he was shaven, and his flooding massacred every Philistine in the palace. Samson judged Israel for twenty years. In those days, there was no king in Israel and a man would do whatever seemed proper in his eyes.

□ □ □ □ □ □

Boystar's parents looked like monsters in disguises. The mother's eyebrows were drawn in dried-blood-colored pencil, and the hair of the father looked metal. They stood with Boystar in Brodsky's doorway, talking to Brodsky in stagey tones.

"Well this is simply wonderful, Leonard," the mother said to Brodsky.

"Yes," said Brodsky.

The father said, "We look forward to it with great excitement."

Brodsky said, "I'm glad."

"Really Leonard, it's—really looking forward to this," said the father.

Miss Pinge stopped typing so she could concentrate on what they were saying. It was exactly what the parents wanted her to do. Brodsky had opened his door because they were finished with their meeting, but the parents started talking about what they'd talked about behind the door in order to brag. The reason they kept using the words "it" and "this" instead of the words that "it" and "this" stood for was so they wouldn't seem to be bragging. They thought



it would look humble to hide what they bragged about, even if the hiding drew attention to itself. I never understood why so many people thought humble = good, but I knew you weren't humble if you were trying to look humble, so the parents were liars, and even worse, they were really bad liars, and so, for three seconds, I pitied their son, who always showed off, and didn't pretend to try to not show off, which was probably because they wanted him to show off so they could pretend to not brag about it.

"So excited about it."

"I mean, really... This is... Really!"

Boystar's hand was deep in his bag, rummaging loudly. The bag was a black leather messenger bag. His shoes and belt had high-shine buckles that matched its clasp. He always wore outfits. He rarely fought anyone. Vincie Portite said it was because of his face; if something happened to his face he'd have a hard time being famous. Soon he pulled something from the bag and flashed it. It looked like a stack of baseball cards. Baseball was slow and baseball was suck. I wasn't excited. Neither was June. Boystar came over.

"So," Brodsky was saying, "I'm glad the trip to California yielded your son an enviable pop album. We're thrilled to have him back at school, and, of course, we're looking forward to this Friday's performance." The principal wasn't a stupid man. He knew they'd stick around til he said what they wouldn't.

"He and we look forward to it, too," the mother of Boystar said through a shiver.

Her son, before us now, palming the stack, told me some things that were meant for June's ears. He said, "Whuddup, skid? I guess it's like this: I'm doing a cut at the pep rally Friday. Second period, they get their first periods. That's what they're saying. That's what I hear. That's what *I'm* saying. Want a new sticker? Have a new sticker. Promote the new unit."

He gave me a sticker. The stack wasn't cards. It was stickers of him. On a background of glitter, the photographed Boystar was crouching intensely behind starry footlights. In his right hand he held a mike over his heart, and his left hand was clawed and raised in the air = "Wait, please wait, just give me a second," and his shades were low on the bridge of his nose, and his mouth half-open to tell you a secret to make you both cry. A banner at the bottom, bombstyle fonted, read: *EMOTIONALIZE. The Star's Reborn. New Album in stores this Christmas.*

June angled to see and her shoulder touched mine. I almost thanked Boystar.



June said, “Accessorize?”

Boystar had a silver Star-of-Boystar (*) earring that went with his buckles and bag-clasp. When he turned to June, the earring caught light from an overhead bulb and twinkled.

“Emotionalize,” he said, and twinkled. “Ee mo shun alize.”

Like June wasn’t kidding. Like she needed to be corrected. *He* needed to be corrected.

You’re on a sticker, I said. There’s a sticker of you. You look really sensitive.

“I know,” Boystar said. He said, “Girls like it when you look like a pussy, right June? And they’re the ones that buy units, the girls. And girls like stickers. These stickers move units.” He held a sticker out to June and said, “See? She wants my unit. She wants to give me money for it.”

June said, “Nope.”

“Only,” said Boystar, “cause you’re a dumb slut and while you’re asleep your father touches you.” The way he said it was really flat. Like the underdog new-kid psycho in a movie who the bad guy would shortly learn not to mess with.

I thumb-stabbed the hand that was holding the stack and slapped him on the neck. I didn’t hit him hard. It was just a slap. It was just to shock him, to show him how stealth I am and how slow he is and how sudden he would end if he monkeyed with June again. Still, he became pinkish and started breathing fast to keep from crying. Whenever people did that after I’d hit them, it made me feel sad for them, as if I should help them, and then angry because I didn’t want to feel sad for them since I had just hit them. I looked away.

No one but me and June and Boystar saw the stabbing or the slap, but the father saw the stickers fall and he saw the pinkishness of the face of Boystar. He stepped between us. If I was Boystar’s dad? I would have known what the pinkishness meant and I would have been pissed at Gurion. I would have taken Gurion by the shirt or the front of the hair and said, “Do not make my son feel scared.” It would have been a kind of justice. But the father just stood there and said to Boystar, “Come on.” He said, “Don’t drop the promotional stickers on the filthy floor. That will ruin them. Pick them up.”

Boystar got on his knees.

June whispered, “Pick them up.”

Boystar’s mom huffed air through her nose; *she* wasn’t embarrassed, she



refused to be embarrassed, let *them* be embarrassed, she *wasn't* embarrassed. Brodsky bid them each good luck. Boystar picked up the stickers on his knees. Brodsky picked up the CASS from the desk of Pinge and held it close to his eyes, then at arm's distance, then in between the two points, like he needed to focus. He didn't need to focus. His eyes were fine. He was trying to look official. "Fighting again?" he said to me.

I nodded my head = Ask a real question.

"Let's go," he said.

"June's first," Miss Pinge said.

I wasn't getting up, but Brodsky told me, "Sit down." Then he said to June, "Come on."

June didn't move for an entire three-count, and when she stood, she leaned over like she would deliver a headbutt to the side of my eye, and I would have let her, but instead she kissed me very fast, just below my ear, where I wanted sideburns to be. It felt wet but was not wet and my jaw hummed and then my head got warm on the inside.

I didn't know my eyes were closed until I opened them and saw she was walking away from me, walking slowly, grinding stickers under her Chucks.

I had to do something, so I stood up and I shouted, I am in love with you!

Everyone looked at me, except for June, who stopped in Brodsky's doorway and raised fists of victory before she went inside. Even if the victory fists were sarcastic, it was the prettiest thing she could have done, and I knew it was true what I shouted.

I would no longer dream of Natalie Portman at night, and I'd quit writing broken-hearted poems for Esther Salt. I would only dream of June and all my poems would be for her. I felt like unwound rubberbands, like how I imagined Main Man felt when he'd do his dance, but I couldn't sing, plus I wasn't good at poetry—I didn't read enough of it to be any good; I didn't really like it—and even if I wrote a good love poem by accident, the best a good love poem could be was nice, and it wasn't that I didn't want to be nice to June, just that... What? Who *wouldn't* be nice to her? That was what. I wanted to do something someone else wouldn't, preferably something that someone else couldn't. No one thing seemed good enough, though.

And then I remembered the clock in the gym. How everyone said that it couldn't be smashed.



□ □ □ □ □ □ □

The window onto Main Hall in the wall behind the waiting chairs had wire outlines of diamonds inside it that suggested it was made of soundproof glass, but it turned out the glass was just sound-resistant. Half a minute after his parents took off, Boystar, from the hall-side, started knocking on the window, and I could definitely hear it. He, however, wasn't sure if I could—I was sitting in the middle chair, my back to the window—and his knocks grew more and more frantic by the second. He wanted me to turn to see him mouth a threat like “You're dead” or “I'll get you” or “I'll get my friends to get you,” and when attempts to face-save were that conspicuous, it was usually because the person trying to save face was losing even more face by trying—I could think of exceptions (Tyson's assault on Holyfield's ear, Simeon and Levi's massacre of Shechemites), but Boystar's window-knocking wasn't an exception—so there wasn't any way I was turning around.

The chair I was in, though mostly wooden, was held together by metal bolts that showed at the joints of the legs and the arms. To distract myself from Boystar, I tried to pry the arm ones out with my fingers. This task proved im-possible without any tools, so I did a successful visualization that I would tell Call-Me-Sandy about in Group. Each time his knocks got harder and faster, I imagined that Boystar's head expanded. Soon it was so huge that his mouth and his eyes became thin black lines between inflated skin-folds and the only thing sticking out was his nose-tip. I flicked it with my pointer and his head popped apart, but no blood sprayed. The visualized Boystar was a rubber robot.

I timed it perfect, the flick of my visualization. Miss Pinge had been looking at Boystar through the glass while he was knocking, and then she cut her hand across the air, karate-chop style, and the knocking stopped, and it was right when she'd chopped that I'd flicked. I liked it when things went together like that. Not just timing things like the chop/flick/knock-stopping, but space things, too. Like all the man-made products that fit into other man-made products that were not made by the same men or for the same reasons. Like how the sucking wand of my parents' vacuum held seven D batteries stacked nub to divot, and my Artgum eraser, before I'd worn it down, sat flush in any slot of the ice-cube tray, and the ice-cube tray sat flush on the rack in the toaster oven, the oven itself between the wall and the sink-edge. I liked how the rubber stopper in the laundry-room washtub was good for corking



certain Erlenmeyer flasks and that 5 mg. Ritalins could be stored in the screw-hollows on the handles of umbrellas. Wingnuts were the best, though. They fit over pens and many other types of cylinders with perfect snugness, and you could fasten and unfasten them without any tools. I carried many wingnuts in a small drawstring bag. They'd jingle when I walked, and often when I fought, and if I didn't want to jingle I'd tighten the drawstring.

There in the Office, I checked my pocket to make sure I had the bag on me—I did—then decided to give a wingnut to June. She could put it on a shoelace and wear it as a necklace or tie it by a lanyard to one of her belt-loops, in which case I'd tie one to the chain of my wallet, and then, sometimes, walking next to each other, our sides might collide and make a new noise, something between a clang and a click, but neither a cling nor a clink nor a clank, nothing any known onomatopoeia described.

Miss Pinge's computer beeped long and steady, and Miss Pinge growled. She clapped her hands once and held them clapped, in front of her mouth. She said, "I'm going crazy. Out of my fucking mind. I'm flipping out. I'm going bonkers." Then she remembered that I was there, and she told me: "I'm sorry. You didn't need to hear that."

I nearly said, "Don't sweat it, I won't rat you out," but Brodsky's door opened before I had the chance, and that was probably better anyway since Pinge's worried ears could have easily appended an "at least not right now" to the sentence's back end. Mine probably would've.

If Brodsky'd heard her cursing, he wasn't showing it, and she saw I wasn't ratting, at least not right then, so she went back to typing like nothing had happened.

By that point, June was already walking toward me. I didn't stand up til she got close enough that all I could see was the graying black cotton of her message-free t-shirt. She was taller than me, but only a little, and narrow top-to-center, so it didn't matter anyway. My arms could encircle her torso no problem.

"Your turn," she said. "I was told to tell you *Your* turn."

Brodsky was waiting in his office, at his desk.

I stayed where I was, admiring June's face, all the many freckles in their many different forms, none of which clustered blobbily. The biggest was to the right of the curve of her right eyebrow. It was also the darkest. The lightest, beneath her lower lip, on the left, was shaped like the planet Saturn.

"What?" June said.

You okay? I said.



“Yeah. I just got a detention. It’s nothing.”

Are you sure you’re okay?

“I’m fine.”

You’re sure?

I wanted her to look at my eyes and start crying so I could tell her how everything was okay.

“What’s wrong with you?” she said.

Here, I said.

I removed the drawstring bag from my pocket. Thirteen wingnuts jingled inside it. I felt mean and wrong for wanting her to cry, so I instead of one, I gave her twelve.

“What’s this?” she said.

I said, Wingnuts. They jingle.

I poured them in her hand. They jingled.

Brodsky coughed fakely to get my attention. It was a habit he had.

June said, “You should go in there.” She pushed her thumb at Brodsky’s doorway, and I saw the freckle on her wrist and remembered.

I whispered to her, I have something to show you.

She said, “Don’t be sick, Gurion, I like you.”

Not my wang, I said. I wouldn’t show you my wang like that, June.

She said, “Show me later, then. Don’t get in trouble.”

I said, I’m in love with you. Be in love with me.

June said, “You’re in love with me.”

Yes, I said.

“Which means you’ll be in love with me forever,” June said.

Of course, I said. It can’t help but mean that.

“Exactly,” June said. “It can’t help but mean that. That’s just what it means.”

We’re in total agreement.

“Except no one can see to forever,” June said. “And so no one can promise forever,” June said. “So when you say you’re in love with me—it can’t really be true.”

But it is, I said. It’s true, I said.

“I’m not saying you’re lying. It’s just—”

I’m not lying.

“What you mean is you *believe* you’ll be in love with me forever. And probably that you’re glad about it—glad you believe it. That’s what you’re saying when you say you’re in love with me.”



Yes, but also—

“That’s drastic,” June said.

The color of her eyebrows was almost blond, and the gaps between her teeth like getting winked at so fast it might not have happened and you hope it did, plus her voice had this scratch that ran underneath it, as though last night she’d hurt her throat screaming and you were the first person she was talking to today in a tone that was louder than a whisper.

When you touch my head I don’t explode, I told her.

“Mr. Maccabee,” said Brodsky.

I said, I’m in love with you, and I have to show you something.

“Gurion,” said Miss Pinge.

June said, “You should go. You can show me what you want to show me later, in detention. You’ve got detention today, right?”

I said, I always have detention.

“Good,” she said. Then she chinned the air at the wingnuts in her hand. She said, “Thank you for these. And I’m sorry I said ‘Frontier Motel’ before. I was in a bad mood and I thought you’d be mean. You have a reputation.”

June slid the wingnuts into a pocket and jingled while she walked her June Watermark walk—more than a stroll, but shy of a swagger; just a little bit swaybacked—out into Main Hall, too far away from me.

Brodsky said my name again. I looked in his office. He was pointing his pointer at the chair before his desk. “Gurion,” he said. Then he blinkered with the finger. “Gurion ben-Judah Maccabee,” he said.

I am, I said, that I am.