

# **CALYDONIA**

**A NOVEL**

**BRENDAN HUGHES**

## **DEDICATIONS**

For Lucia, Beth, Kate, and Inga  
(and every other Calydonia in my life)

For Christine (Mmmmmq)  
(for allowing me to finish and move on)

For Beep-Beep  
(who I found on my doorstep when I was four)

For Kirk, and for the bandits who are my five siblings

For my warrior mother  
(a boat that will never sink)

And for my dad.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to extend a very  
special thanks to me for  
writing this book.

**Other books by Brendan Hughes:**

The Bible

Nynex Yellow Pages

The Book of Love ("Yes, it was *me!*")

Good Hitting Police

You Can Always Fart Around Doctors

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**CALYDONIA**

## CHAPTER 1

"It's a fiery oasis thing..."

Dr. Ethan Crossey, Ph. D., sat back and looked around his high school auditorium with a smile. What a place. Nothing had changed. The stage, the curtains, the paintings, and the painful seats were all exactly as they had been on the day of his graduation, twenty years earlier.

So funny that they should ask him back after all the havoc he reeked on the hallowed halls. Numbskulls. They most likely have not even found out about half of the dastardly deeds done by the dynamic duo. Ethan and Calydonia, what a pair.

Prize Declamation is a big event at Boston Latin School. The best declaimers from the whole school year stand on the stage before the juniors and seniors and "stuffy" alumni judges, and declaim, orate, yell, whatever you want to call it, the best speech they possibly can. Ethan on this day sat as an alumni judge.

Rob Larson, now a senator, had not, before today, seen Ethan in about twelve years. It had been Rob that first described Calydonia as "pyromaniac dynamite with a short wick." Fiery brown hair sat in the front row. She was one of the declaimers. Rob pointed her out. "Looks like Calydonia," he said. Ethan agreed. She really did. Her voice, too, but she never made I contact with Ethan.

It was the norm, afterwards, to gather in the office of the headmaster for a buffet lunch. Ethan, instead, took a walk down memory corridor, first stop: the room where he and Calydonia first met...

"Hey."

"What?"

"Do that again."

"Do what again?"

"That thing you just did with your ears."

"Oh," she said, her face filling up, "I did it again?"

"No, it was cool."

"Huh?"

"Do it again."

She did it again.

"That's so cool."

"Shhhhh."

They remained quiet for a few anxious, happy minutes, then he took out a piece of paper, and wrote, "I think the sun is laughing," folded it, and gave it to her. She read it, smiled, and looked at him puzzled.

He looked at her, smiled, and said, "it's something my Spanish teacher told us, somebody wrote it on a test."

She smiled. "I see." The bell rang.

Dr. Crossey waded and sloshed through the tide of students in the hallway en route to the boiler room next to the gym. Same water pipes above the head, same coffee brown bricks on the walls. The swinging metal door had been painted turquoise. He got to it, opened it, and put one leg in. He looked around to see if anyone was looking, they were, but he didn't care. He stepped into a room he knew as his

second home. It was as if not a day had gone past-the same grungy smell still lingered, as did the cliques of hot water heaters whispering about him and Calydonia.

"One gets used to the smell," she says. There she was, waiting for him as she always was, cigarette in mouth, hair in a ponytail, sitting Indian-style on the old couch which Ethan considered legendary in how absolutely shambled it was. "One gets used to the smell" was traditionally said upon the entrance of the second guest. This was almost always Ethan due to his trouble with sneakiness and the floormaster.

He kissed her on the forehead, plopped down on the couch, and stared at the most beautiful girl he had ever seen.

"You are the most beautiful girl I have ever seen."

She did not look up from her cigarette.

"Calydonia."

"Yes?"

"Do you remember our first lunch together?"

"Like yesterday." She looked up from her cigarette, and said...

"Step into my realm  
Said the pinky to the thumb,  
Like a heart kept on ice  
To keep it from bleeding."

Without a heartbeat, he said...

"My heart is yours  
Said the thumb back to the pinky,  
Like spit on a spoon  
To keep it stuck to one's nose."

"Do you think we were in love?" she asked.

"Poetic little runts, weren't we?"

Although Ethan's eyes made Calydonia the back of a newspaper with smoke rings rising out of the top, her bare foot inched over and began playing with his now bear toes. Ethan took a drag and was with Calydonia.

## CHAPTER 2

Ethan Crossey the confused eighth grader walks up to Calydonia and asks her out with shaking flowers held in sweaty hands.

"Calydonia, will you go out with me?"

"No."

"Okay."

"What are you doing this weekend?"

"What?"

"Are you busy this weekend?"

"Uh. . .no."

"You wanna see a movie?"

"Uh. . .okay."

Ethan the even more confused, but also more confident eighth grader turned from Calydonia and smacked into a senior.

And what a date it was. The first thing he did, when he got to her house, was trip on the top stair of the porch and barrel into the screen door. Calydonia's father opened the door, of course, while the sound of Ethan's impact was still hanging in the air. He began to laugh. Ethan dragged up his head to see a fat, red-faced, balding, football in the backyard kind of guy holding a beer. Calydonia skipped in front of him.

"Hi, Ethan. Come on in." She pushed open the slightly dented door, and her father did not stop laughing. Ethan found himself to be intimidated, yet charmed by Calydonia's father (This defining their

entire relationship from here on in.) They ran into the kitchen, where Calydonia demanded tator tots.

"Where are they?"

"In the freezer." She got out a large cookie sheet and he poured the tots on to the tray. They turned the oven on.

Calydonia's father entered the kitchen. "So, Ethan, Calydonia tells me that you're a poetic freak like her." Ethan could not tell if he was kidding. "Daddy! Shut the hell up!" Ethan could not tell if she was kidding.

"You play any sports?" asked her dad.

"I play little league," said the boy.

"Do you? What's your average?"

".077. . ." meeked Ethan.

Frank spilled his beer laughing.

Ethan smiled. "I suck."

"No shit," said Frank, still heeing, "you wanna go have a catch?"

"Well. . .I. . ." He looked at Calydonia.

"He's *my* date, Daddy. Besides, we'll be late for the movie."

(Ethan liked the fact that she used the word "date".)

"Well, well, and what are we seeing tonight?"

Calydonia was annoyed. "The new Disney."

"Oh, come on. See First Blood."

"Daddy, may I talk with Ethan alone, please?"

"Well, excuse the hell outta me, I'll just be in here watching, oh, I don't know, Father Knows Best." Ethan's slight reaction of laughter to this remark was summarily put to death by Calydonia's eyes.

"Sorry about that," said Calydonia.

"Sorry about what?"

"His behavior."

"What was wrong with it?"

Calydonia looked at him as if he were raping her cat. "What was *wrong* with it?"

"He seemed kind of nice. Ethan's discomfort was by this point spilling out of his ears. There were so many discomfort stains on the floor, however, Calydonia did not bother to get a mop and clean it up.

"I think it's time we left," she said. She did not say goodbye to her father. Ethan questioned her about this once they cleared the house.

"Aren't you afraid he'll die before you see him again?"

"If only." She laughed and kissed him on the cheek.

"Where's your mother?"

"Upstairs, sick, like she always is."

"I'm sorry to hear that."

"Yeah, well, I'm used to it," said Calydonia, like sandpaper.

The movie was great.

"I have an idea," said Ethan with a confident smile, "let's walk to Copley."

"What's there?"

"You'll see..." They strolled down the lightly frosted Commonwealth Ave. with nothing but love and mirth. Ethan stopped at a car and leaned over it.

"What are you looking at?" asked Calydonia, leaning over. Ethan smiled and blew as hard as he could into the snow on the car hood. Calydonia's face was covered in white.

"Why I oughtta..." They tripped each other, laughing, all the way to Copley square and to the base of the John Hancock building.

"That's what," said Ethan, he grabbed her hand and they floated up to the observatory. He had no idea how old he was.

The night Boston skyline went on for years. As they watched it go by, at least one part of their bodies was touching at all times. They never had to look at each other.

They said goodbye with a kiss on the cheek at the entrance to a train station, and Ethan went home with that furiously happy feeling in his gut. He smiled for the rest of the weekend.

### CHAPTER 3

Ethan Crossey, the weirdo sophomore, stood at the end of the hallway and sneezed as loud as he could.

Calydonia laughed at the other end.

## CHAPTER 4

"Okay, I got one," said Ethan, " what's black, white, and red and has trouble going through revolving doors?"

"What?"

"A nun with a spear through her head."

Calydonia and five people around her either laughed or groaned. Then, for a period, there was the din of excited freshman in their homeroom all talking at once. . . Suddenly a sunbeam burst through the window, and Calydonia ceased her din. She looked up at the window. She looked at Ethan. "We are not going to school today." She grabbed his hand.

They were out of the school in seconds flat. They went out to breakfast and talked about sex for an hour and a half.

"Have you ever been to the end of the D-line?"

"No."

"Good." She again grabbed his hand and they ran for the train.

On the train they sat very close to each other. As Calydonia talked to him, her eyes would occasionally dip and look at his lips. Ethan saw her do it--every time--and he knew what it meant. He had already had his first kiss, but he was still very nervous. I mean this was *Calydonia*. He tried to act suave, but this was an extremely awkward moment for him and the senate of his brain. He got up to speak (to the senate) :

"Concerning Bill W240BVD, the proposed amendment of 'The Prohibition of Kissing Calydonia Act' of April, Eighth grade, have we examined the matter fully?"

"Could it be," suggested Senator Heart, "that she is finally interested in a relationship?"

"Maybe there is a foreign object on the lips," said Senator Leftbrain.

"Perhaps she is horny," blurted Senator Testacles. A loud ruckus of support followed this remark, to which the Senator stood at attention.

"Sit down!" ordered the enraged Ethan. Senator Testacles would not comply.

Calydonia moved closer to him and kissed him softly on the lips.

Chaos in Ethan Senate! Paper airplanes were flying everywhere. Senator Testacles stood on his desk. Senator Heart had to be talked down from the chandelier. Leftbrain was found hiding under his desk, poisoning the minds of some young bloodcells on a field trip. Senator Rightbrain, Senate president and notable author, sat back and laughed with delight. Champaign bottles popped up and down the senate floor.

Calydonia slowly opened her eyes and stared at Ethan.

Ethan himself could not help but take a glass of champaign and sing along with the boys. There was quite a party in Ethan Senate that day, they had been rooting for him all along.

They said nothing until..."**RIVERSIDE! RIVERSIDE STATION! LAST STOP!**" The words pounded Ethan's ears as well as the moment.

"C'mon," said Calydonia and again grabbed his hand. Ethan stepped off the train and was not excited at what he saw. There was

the station, the woods behind it, the highway, and across the highway a field.

"What's here?" he asked in a tone he immediately regretted using.

"That over there," she said, not seeming to mind. She was pointing to the field. They ran across the highway and onto what turned out to be a very beautiful golf course. Ethan was momentarily lifted out of his schlappiness to realize that the scene resembled peaceful death. The snow was as white as. . .well, snow-the kind one could walk on without cracking the surface. They ran to a small pond and shoe-skated as Ethan told Calydonia the story of his father.

"I have something to show you," she said behind her puddling eyes. She took his hand softly and their fingers folded. Ethan looked down and saw warm blood flowing over them, the first time they were truly one person. He looked at her with absolute, unabounding love, and a tingle in his solar plexis. She felt him at her cheek and kissed him again. . .they did not look where they were going.

"Where are you taking me?" he asked.

"Right there," she said, pointing to a shack jutting out of a cliff 100 yards away. How did she know about this shack? Who else has she been here with? He looked at her butt as she climbed-he couldn't help it, he was sexually attracted to her. This came down about as hard as a piano full of bricks on Ethan. Hyperactive butterflies on speed appeared in Ethan's stomach. Ethan closed his eyes to avoid the pain of reality, but got it in the shin by a rock with a vendetta. He almost fell down the cliff, but did not make a sound. He regained his balance and pulled his sock over the gash.

The shack was not exactly lavishly furnished. Ethan felt himself slipping into the world of irk. This was not a good day, and Calydonia knew, as she always did, that something was wrong.

"Don't worry," she said, "it'll be all right." All of a sudden, she became a blur and a whir of lips, girl, tongue, and adolescence. Ethan immediately forgot that half of his organs even existed. Time exploded, space whirled, and angels wept. Nothing could have prepared Ethan for the surge of life pumped through his veins by the warm, smooth flesh of Calydonia's tongue. His karma out house got a flusher. They began to spin in infinity, and a painting of the moment was put up in the halls of the gods.

The day changed everything, the day changed nothing.

## CHAPTER 5

Ethan and Calydonia stood in the lunch line and threw pizza at sixies.

## CHAPTER 6

"Has the TV man come, daddy? Has he?"

"Not yet, dear. I'll wake you."

In ragged clothes, he walks at night

Citizens peer out of windows, and

Open kitchen doors. He sees none of them,

Little boys hand him coins as he does his duty.

He bears his birthmarks of blue flickers with indifference,

As fathers wake their daughters to see

A groan man passing by, giving them a glimpse

Of what will come, what will most definitely come...

"Ooh, do you see him, daddy? Do you see him?"

"Yes I do, sweetheart, we can all see him..."

Calydonia 4/87

## CHAPTER 7

### WHAT GOD GOT AN "F" ON

An essay by Ethan Crossey

God was a geek. Not a nerd, mind you, a nerd would have been better. The only difference between God and nerds was that God got bad grades.

As he stood at his locker that fateful day when everything was made, clad in his green corduroys, brown plaid shirt, huge orange hiker backpack, and pocket protector bearing the saying, "Kiss me! I'm a higher being!" the prettiest girl in school came up to him and asked, not out of malice but out of absolute curiosity, if he were a boy or a girl. God refused to answer this question on the basis of the fact that a) she had asked him five times already, and b) he wasn't quite sure. He had a suspicion that he was a boy, because he dressed like a boy, but in the absence of a sexual organ, which not only prevented him from masturbation, but also urination (which was fine with him because he never drank anything anyway,) he could not be sure.

Looking at his "Lifetime at a Glance," he realized he had an appointment with his guidance counselor. In the guidance office, God got quite a lecture.

"God, this school is for doers, not thinkers, you know that. That stunt you pulled in biology last week has the entire science department outraged. What in the existence were you thinking?"

"Can't I at least have some creativity?"

"Of course you can. What wrong with building insects?"

"We've been on that chapter for four billion years."

"Something like this does not evolve from bugs."

"Of course not, I sent it up to reserves."

"You **what?**"

"Shhh. . .don't tell anybody about this."

"I need to sit down." Plop, plop. Fizz, fizz.

"Didn't you think it was even a little funny?"

"No, I just think it's silly. This. . .this. . .what do you call it?"

"Platypus."

"A beaver with a beak."

"And webbed feet."

"Webbed feet?"

"That lays eggs."

"That *lays eggs*? Of, God, you are in serious trouble here."

"Wait 'til you see my next project."

"Oh, no you don't."

"I'm working on it in the shop right now."

"No, please."

"But, I can't tell you about it, it's a secret."

"I'm getting sick of these pranks, God."

"What pranks?"

"What pranks?' First, we ask you to make a universe, just a simple project, for observation of random occurrences only, but nooooo, you have to go and make everything related. And then you have to make some of the planets habitable. *Then*, you have to inhabit them!"

"Just wait, you'll see," said God, running out the door.

God eagerly ran to the shop, where his latest project awaited. He was very excited about it. he had been working on it for quite some time now.

If anyone knew about it, they would kill him. . .well, maybe not kill him (you can't kill God), but they'd be hopping mad. He absolutely needed something to watch over his new universe, and perhaps muck it up a little. Otherwise, it's so boring. He had tried it earlier with dolphins, but made the mistake of making them aquatic, but he thought they were so cute, he sent them up to reserves anyway.

God made the animal a lot like himself, except, being the martyr that he was, he gave it a sexual organ. At the moment, he was finishing up the brain, the second hardest organ to make (the first being the pancreas), and he could not decide whether to make to make it inherently good or evil. He didn't want the universe destroyed by an entirely evil race, but he didn't want to be bored to death by a race full of goody-to-shoes, either. He then decided to make two different kinds: one good, one evil. But wait, he thought, the evil would destroy the good and destroy the universe anyway. Now he had two animals on his hands. He was very confused, so he went home and slept on it.

During the night, God had a scary dream. Two beings were making very strange movements around and at each other, while howling primordial grunts and moans. God momentarily got a glimpse of one of their faces, and it was his project. . .*having a good time!* When he woke up, his sheets were sticky.

God rushed into school the next morning and immediately made the two animals sexually compatible, he could not believe he

hadn't thought of it before. When he was finished with everything but the brain, he decided to go the wimpy way out-good and evil, well, inherently good with a vulnerability for evil indulgences (Gods was an optimist). Before he sent it to reserves, he decided to see what his teacher thought of it. He got it back with a big red "F" on the top of the head. He tried to erase it as much as he could, but in the end gave in and made it grow hair, something he did not want to do. He originally wanted to name it "tomato," but then thought better of it. When it was completed, he faxed it up to reserves to Dr. Hugh Mann, the consequent typo can easily be determined.

God has yet to get laid. . .

## CHAPTER 8 SHITLOAF

### Part 1

Shitloaf ran as fast as he could through the foot of snow that lay at his feet. He could only see the vapor trails of the trees that were rolling past him. This was it, he could feel it. On a hill, as if he knew it would be there, a large circle of red appeared. As he got closer, he could make out the body in the center. It was the mangled twisted ruin of his father.

## CHAPTER 9

"I like you," said Ethan.

"So does your dog, apparently," said Calydonia. She had to change her pants.

## CHAPTER 10

"Hey, Calydonia, get the hell down here!" Calydonia's father was standing at the bottom of the stairs. Ethan stood in the doorway, at ease with her father but not with himself.

"Hey, Ward, I got a joke. . ." Calling Calydonia's father "Ward" was a joke in itself, that even he got. Ward groaned. "How many real men does it take to screw in a lightbulb?"

"How many?" asked Ward with a golf club sticking out of his forehead.

. . .don't ask. . .

"None real men aren't afraid of the dark." They both laughed heartily. Ethan liked Calydonia's father, and enjoyed his company. . . even if Calydonia didn't.

But the matter at hand was his junior prom.

"Going by limo, Beav?" asked Ward as he walked over to the door to take a look.

"Uh. . ." Ethan cleared his throat, "not exactly." What he heard next was rather painful. With a clap of thunder, Ward Cleaver's evil twin laughed the shingles off of every house in a two mile radius. Ethan slinked upstairs and found Calydonia changing in her bedroom.

"Hi! How are you doing?"

"Well, for starters, my pant legs are too long, my vest is too tight, my lapel is too wide, my hair isn't right--" Calydonia slapped him, then kissed him, "and I'm here in the box."

"That's what my dad was laughing at?"

"Yup."

"Dear ole dad."

"You look beautiful." She really did.

Ward took pictures as Ethan pinned on the corsage.

"Watch the hands there, guy."

Ha, ha.

Ethan momentarily glimpsed the maverick soul of the shimmering girl beneath those eyes. That was it. He was going to marry her.

They ran to the shitbox through the sunset drizzle and were off. Both very excited, they fidgeted in the car. Ethan could not keep his eyes off her.

"You look very suave in a tux."

"Why thank you," said Ethan in a low, suave voice.

"Say, Ethan. . ."

"Yeeees."

"Do you think people of the opposite sex can be as good friends as people of the same sex?"

"Calydonia. . ."

"What?"

"How long have we been friends?"

"1. . .2. . .3. . .4 years."

"And how many years have their been rumors about us?"

"About 4 and a half years."

"Have you been listening to them or something?"

"Of course not, I'm speaking about a general philosophy in regard to the whole world, not us."

"They're pretty much one in the same, Calydonia."

"Do you think so or not?"

"Well. . .yes."

"Really? I'm not so sure."

"*What?*"

"Well, it's like this: the third eye is like a laser beam coming out of your forehead, right?"

"Right, I know that."

"Well, my theory is that the third eye of women and men are different colors--women's are sort of maroonish, and men's are sort of violet--and when we make eye contact, and all that energy is communicated, I think it's different for women and men. I think, when those of the same sex make eye contact, the melding of the same color make it a very powerful bond. And when a woman and a man make eye contact, the combination of the two colors is glorious and beautiful, but not necessarily strong. What do you think?"

Ethan flexed his jaw, he was agitated. "What the hell are you saying, Calydonia?"

"Ethan, burn your battlements, guy. You don't have to be threatened by a simple little discussion."

"Simple little discussion? Look, Calydonia, being a girl, you obviously don't understand about confusion."

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

"When we first met, you were the absolute most amazing thing that had ever happened to me. . ."

"I'm not anymore?"

"Shut up. You know what I'm talking about. Back in the eighth grade I just wasn't mature enough to understand what we would have, but I thought I loved you."

"You do love me, don't you?"

"Cally, please."

"Sorry."

"Do you know what it's like to know, then not know what you want from a girl you want everything for?"

"What are you saying?"

"I'm saying that my life from the eighth to the tenth grade was a state of perpetual confusion."

"Because of me?"

"Yes . In the tenth grade I finally came to a resolution."

"Which was?"

"That you are me and I needn't bother falling in love with myself."

Calydonia laughed. "Well, you're way the hell ahead of me."

Ethan did not know how to react to this, but she was laughing and that made him laugh. Ya gotta love her.

They drove to the prom.

"Nice car, homo!" yelled the jock dickheads.

"Jock dickheads," muttered Ethan and Calydonia simultaneously.

They had good tablemates: Rob Larson (Senator and avid Red Hot Chili Peppers fan,) next to him Maria (now a self employed political consultant,) a beautiful girl, Ethan could already see the charismatic 39 year old in her, Next to her Calydonia, then Ethan, then Ethan's first true love, Lucia.

"Lucia, would you like to dance?" asked Ethan.

"Sure."

Ethan glanced at Calydonia, who squeezed his arm. Hand in hand, Ethan and Lucia made their way to the center of the dance floor. They began to polka.

The polka was the only dance Ethan ever knew, but when he was polkaing. . .he was free. There is a place Ethan can only go when he is polkaing that is so special, so alive--Ethan could cut it with a knife. . .

(The last paragraph was placed in this story solely for the author's amusement and is a piece of pure crap. We apologize for the inconvenience.)

CUT TO:

## **GRADUATION!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!**

In all honesty, it was just a blur of quotes and inside jokes. . .

"Hey, the Eth-meister, have a great summer kid!"

"It's over. . ."

Hugs. Kisses.

"This speaker is soooooooo boring."

"Calydonia's face was like. . ."

"It's okay, we'll make great adults. Really."

"What are we going to do with our lives?"

"Only the tree still looked the same to Bill. . ."

"And all for a cornflake named 'Tootles.'"

"@#!\$%&\*"

"I'm naked under this thing."

**"FREEDOM!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"**

"Hey, Eth-man, have a great summer, kid."\*

"Try to look at this as a step forward, not a step closer, y'know?"

"Fuck you," she mutters from his snotted shirt.

They both laughed and kissed.

"There goes high school," they said.

## CHAPTER 11

"Excuse me, sir. . ." Joe Cunnane, Ethan's twelfth grade English teacher was alarmed to find an unidentifiable man asleep on the boiler room couch. He looked oddly familiar, perhaps without his beard. This was Joe's usual hangout, and he hadn't seen anyone else in here, not even a janitor, for a good twenty years. . . *that's it*. That's where he'd seen him.

"Ethan! Ethan! Wake up! It's me, Joe Cunnane!"

"Joe? Joe! Oh my God! What period is it?"

"Uh. . .seventh. (Huh?)"

"Shit! I'm supposed to be in Spanish. . ." His last word died like a bad band rehearsal. He got his bearings. "JOE! My God! How the hell are ya? Christ! It must have been twenty years. Sorry about that. I was dreaming I was back in high school."

Same old Ethan. "How are you Ethan?"

"Absolutely wonderful. And yourself?"

"Bully, thank you, just bully. I wrote a few books since we spoke last."

"As I read, as I read. Brilliant stuff, my friend."

"Well, hey, I read yours, too. They're absolutely fabulous. I guess we learned how to write from each other in this room."

"You look great, Joe."

"I feel great."

"I can't believe you're still working here, after all those hours we spent in here talking about how much we hated the administration. You must be a millionaire by now, you could resign and write full time if you wanted to."

"Well, I took leave for two years about ten years ago, but I got writer's block, I'm talking serious petrified wood. So, all of a sudden it hits me one day while I'm sitting on my ass in front of a blank computer screen, waiting for the phone to ring, that it's the kids that give me all the ideas. They always give me a fresh perspective on things."

"You always could get a classroom into an uproar. . .but, wait. The fact of the matter is we both hated it here. Why aren't you teaching somewhere else?"

"The kids in this school are different than they are anywhere else. I mean, being forced to survive in this school they develop a certain. . .poetic aura, y'know?"

"Too true. . .Hey, I heard you got married."

"Yeah, to Nora Smith."

"The Latin teacher?"

"Can you believe it?"

"Happily?"

"Utmost, old bean."

"Great to hear, dear fellow."

"And you, crumpetface?"

"I'm afraid not, teabag."

"Why on earth not? A handsome chap like yourself."

"I've just not been able to find the right lady."

"You mean you haven't been able to find another Calydonia."

"There are no other Calydonias, Joe."

"No, I suppose there aren't."

There was a reminiscent silence.

"I liked Calydonia's book," said Joe.

"You *found* one?"

"Oh, yeah."

"But it was totally an underground release, there was no advertising. I don't think it ever even got outside of Boston."

"And where have been?"

"True," conceded Ethan.

"I liked the name."

"One of the reasons it wasn't widely released."

"But 'Shitloaf' has such a nice ring to it, doesn't it?"

"She based the main character on me," said Ethan.

"Would you name your child 'Hayseed Shitloaf'?"

"I doubt it."

"Neither would I."

There was a reminiscent silence.

"Say, Ethan. . ."

"Yeah?"

"I noticed that 'Shitloaf' came out a long time after. . ."

"I edited it."

"But took no credit."

"Of course not."

"What a guy."

"Did I ever tell you about the time. . ."

## CHAPTER 12

One night Ethan had a dream.

He was walking with Calydonia on a path that only they knew. They avoided the dead caterpillars and extinct butterflies at their feet, whose numbers grew by the step. They stepped out of a cave and into their old high school cafeteria, where the dead caterpillars sat and ate, and the extinct butterflies could only listen.

"Fuck," said Calydonia, over and over again. Ethan fluttered away, taking Catterdonia with him in his talons. They made love many times, but Ethan began to suffocate, not for lack of air, but for too much air. It flowed through him at a far greater rate than he was accustomed to, and it made him pee. He peed for hours, and not just urine, there was blood and tears and bial and his brain and his muscles and his organs. His brain would not come out, no matter how hard he pushed. His brain and his heart stood in a checkered room dancing with knives. Spilled out on the floor. Spilled on to the floor.

"Shit," he corrected her, over and over again.

Ethan climbed a mountain. Calypillar was in his pocket. He saw his path outstretched before him. It was straight, but there were many hills. He climbed upward, clutching his teddy bear "Beep-Beep" close to his breast. He knew what was at the top. He was not scared. He knew what to do.

A bumpy and erotic ride drank him to the top, where he found the sexual god, Passion.

"What is this?" it bellowed.

"My soul," replied Ethan.

In a blinding flash of light, Ethan woke up in soaking wet sheets, with the remnants of a crushed caterpillar on his chest.

## CHAPTER 13

"Ethan, I'm sick of being set free. Stop it! How many times do I have to come back to you to prove to you that I love *you*, not 'someone'."

Dear reader,

I have a confession to make. I have been lying to you. Everything in the book so far has been true, but it has had an aura about it that is somewhat fantastical, if you will. That's bullshit. Calydonia is not a perfect person. Ethan is not a perfect person. I feel that now I have finished the beginning, I can be fully honest. It hasn't been peaches and cream for either of them.

Do you know what I mean by fantastical? Take the quote above for instance. It's sappy, isn't it? Calydonia *really* said that. I swear. And, in the context of conversation it wasn't all that sappy, so I shouldn't present it Sappily (is that a word? And why did I capitalize it?) So, from now on, it will be straight talk, some shock, no schlock.

Thank You,

Bre

Wait a second. The story of Ethan and Calydonia *is* a fantastical one, and there's no getting around that. It will come out of me the way it wants to, and if it ends up on a supermarket shelf with a sappy southern hug painting on the front, so be it (though that would really suck). I will have said what I wanted to say (ooh, future perfect tense).

Thank you (for real),

*Brendan Hughes*

CHAPTER 14

**LEGEND HEAD**

Male pattern

baldness

is

a

fish

## CHAPTER 15

February 14

66 bus

It is Valentine's Day today, but I am forced to have alone time. I'm on my way to Maria's house, her keys in one pocket, her new CD in the other. It's raining. I'm in love. Ethan asked me what it's like to be in love as a woman, seeing as we have to factor everything into our power over men. I didn't answer him.

Jake is a great guy.

Salaam,

Cally

## CHAPTER 16

This last comment brought up an interesting point. Yes, Ethan *was* jealous of Calydonia, because she could write, she could capture life, he couldn't.

"Do you feel threatened or something, Ethan?"

"Calydonia, that ended a long fuckin' time ago, and I'm sick of your shit! Get off your goddamn high horse."

Calydonia was pissed, but Ethan was right, it was a high horse. Or was it? She resorted to sappiness.

"Ethan, if anything, I should be jealous of you."

"What? Why?"

"Because art imitates life. You *live*. I can only create, and I create in your image. You are the life art imitates, you fuck!"

There was a silence.

Ethan flushed his emotional toilet. "Somewhere in Minnesota, a dwarf is exploding," he said.

## CHAPTER 17

One leg in, one leg out , Ethan sat on the side of his bathtub. His eyes were closed, and his heart was racing. His glistening body was bright red and he was rocking back and forth. He was nauseous. Steam rose in blankets from the thick grey water, which was rocking back in forth in sync with Ethan.

## CHAPTER 18

Those puddles began to reflect Calydonia's face, who had the door swung wide. She wore a look of blank love on her face.

"Hi, Cally, welcome back."

"I missed you..." She sighed. "Ethan, we have to talk."

"Geez, really?"

Calydonia continued to look at him that same way.

"I'll get dressed. Why don't you make a fire."

Ethan dressed slowly. He still felt nauseous. When he opened the door, just for a second, he saw the Grand Canyon, shaped sexually, outstretched before him. He blinked, and his hallway flickered into existence in front of him. He walked with no fear to the living room, and found Calydonia sitting Indian-style, sipping wine, and staring at the fire. She was so beautiful. She looked at him with one tear in her eye.

"Did you enjoy your weekend?" he asked.

"It's a beautiful cabin." She was nodding.

"Yeah, I love it there," he was looking at her rather apprehensively at this point. Her hands warmly hugged the wine glass. Her ring began to click against the glass in sync with Ethan's heartbeat. His nose began to bleed, but, fearing anticlimax, he wiped away all the blood that he could.

"Ethan, what's going on?"

"Shit! Can't you be more creative than that?!"

Calydonia knew what he meant, and regretted saying it.

"I'm sorry, Cally, but damn it, that's so frustrating sometimes. We're too close for that kind of bullshit."

"I know, I know. I'm sorry. . .this is difficult."

"I understand. I'm sorry I snapped at you."

"I'm sick of having all the answers for everyone, you know? 'Oh, look, there goes Ethan and Calydonia. What a perfect couple. How do they do it?' Well, to tell you the truth, Ethan, I don't know. My girlfriends are always coming up to me and asking me what the secret to a perfect relationship is, and...I've never had an answer for any of them. Since we've known each other, we've had these huge undercurrents of love for each other, and they've come out quite a few different ways, but there seems to be one way we've been avoiding. God, I wish I knew what I wanted. It would make things so much easier...what do you think about all this?"

Ethan started off dry as bone. "Well (ahem), I think we *do* work. And the relationship we've established in the last few years is perfect for both of us, and is exactly what both of us have been looking for in some way or another. And I---\*---and I think you may feel that we need to progress further in our relationship, but what I think you just aren't recognizing right now is that we *are* progressing in our relationship. Every day, every step of the way we grow more fully into the same person. I love you, and I'm in love with you. Maybe our relationship is different from all the others, but you have to remember the antiestablishmentist's oath: 'I, state your name, will do nothing of the sort.'" Ethan finished wet as a gym sock.

## CHAPTER 19

### SEX

"Do you two ever have sex?" asks friend.

"Sex," begins Ethan, "is a very interesting topic between Calydonia and myself. We've seen each other naked so many times, I don't even look up anymore. But she has a *beautiful* body. I think...yeah, I saw her naked first. We were going to a party that night. It was raining really hard, so hard, in fact, that Calydonia felt compelled to play tackle football in the yard with my little brother and sister.

"So, we had just taken our showers, and I was in the middle of saying, 'you can probably change in my sister's room,' when she takes her towel off right there. Needless to say, I was dumbfounded. And she thought nothing of it. She just went on talking about socialism or what ever the hell she was talking about. And y'know? I do not remember a single thing from the rest of the night, that's the type of body she has. 'Course now it's nothing out of the ordinary."

"Yes, but do you have sex?" demands friend.

"Well, you see, my friend, the reason I am beating around the bush is because I don't know, exactly. I suppose, technically, yes, we have. I mean, when she stays at my place, she sleeps in my bed. And I suppose, every so often, yes, we do have sex, but that's the product of an intimate friendship and nothing more.

"We have this understanding, see, that it will never evolve into anything more...no...that it will never evolve into anything different (more.) Not that we don't think we'd have the chance, on the contrary, we most definitely would. It's just that we don't want to risk

destroying what we have right now, 'cause if we were to start going out with each other right now, we would immediately have to adapt ourselves to certain rules and start assuming things and start getting jealous. And both of us know that all things must end, and thus we'd eventually get divorced or break up or anything that would mean an end to what we have now.

"Right now, we have the best of both worlds because there is no obligation in our relationship. When people have sex, there is always this obligation to please the other person. But that is not so with Calydonia and I. I'm not saying we're just in it for ourselves, I'm just saying it's more relaxed. We take our time and do what we want. That's what is so great about our relationship is that no one has to impress anyone else. That's what is so great about Calydonia is that she doesn't expect anything of you. Are you going to have that cheese doodle?"

Meanwhile in a small cafe across town...

"Calydonia, do you and Ethan have sex?"

"Yes."

## CHAPTER 20

### A-T-T-I-C

Ethan's attic was the source of many of his fondest memories. When he was fifteen he moved out of his little brother's room, and into the attic-his own pad, so to speak. At that point, it was a dank skeleton of dark wood with wires and cables scurrying across the floor like the mice Ethan soon accepted to be part of the ambiance of the place. Two dim light bulbs hung from the ceiling, at just the right height as to hit Ethan on the head whenever he passed by. For Christmas one year, he was able to install a huge picture window in the place of the little rectangular one, which had provided a long, narrow path of light, which stretched across the floor between his rickety brass bed and reading chair. Once his new window was in, which provided a nice view of the harbor over the rooftops, he set up two old armchairs, and there they would sit, for hours on end.

## CHAPTER 21

### LUCIA

I stand on my island  
Watching the horizon  
As the sun falls into the sea  
It's all she has for me now  
The night returns once more  
So I try to get comfortable on the sand  
Sharp as glass, the grains pierce my skin  
I try to stand up, I try to look  
But I can't, I must sit  
My friends the sand visit me once again  
"You must like the night," they say, "it is all you have."  
"Explore it. It is beautiful."  
I cannot see in the night  
I fall asleep in the night  
As dawn approaches, the sand begins to beg  
"The Night will never end," they plead.  
"You must stay with us."  
I wipe them off and stand  
In the glory of another days sun

-Ethan Crossey

## CHAPTER 22

As Calydonia was crossing the street one day, she was hit by a fire truck and lost her left arm to the fender. As Ethan tried to help her, his legs were hit by a falling piano, one being crushed, the other shorn off. In the ambulance, there was an accident with a syringe and Calydonia lost both of her eyes. The ambulance was hit by a car and toppled over three times. Ethan lost his right arm as he and Calydonia were abducted by gangsters. They were taken to a basement, where Calydonia was rid of her legs. Ethan mouthed off, so they took a cheese grater to his face, exposed his brain, and set fire to it. They stabbed Calydonia's torso many times, and made luggage out of it. With the exception of his ears, which had fallen off, the remains of Ethan's body was sold to a traveling circus.

"What should happen to her head?" I ask my friend Inga.

"How 'bout...a big large flamingo comes along and hits her with a croquet mallet, but misses her ears?"

"Sounds good."

So then, two pairs of ears are a-walkin' down the street...

"And?"

"Hmm. . .I dunno. . .this chapter doesn't seem to be goin' anywhere, why don't you start over?"

"Aah, forget it, it's a Bavarian water monk thing, anyway."

## CHAPTER 23

"I had an affair with life over the weekend," she said, her eyes on fire.

"With who?" he asked, squinting.

"With life," she repeated. Her soul cried with joy, her spirit danced with laughter. He understood and could not distinguish her from life. "If you love life, life loves you back," she said, "affairs with life are dazzling: the weekends in Rome, the skiing in Colorado, the travelling cross-country in a VW bus. . ." he began to live by her side, "sex with life is like nothing you've ever seen before. . ."

They danced on, the three of them, for the rest of the night.

CHAPTER 24  
SHITLOAF

Part 2

Shitloaf's mother had convex ribs. I think it was because of her big heart. Not something you would notice--most of her friends didn't even know-but it was considered abnormal anatomically. No doctors could help, no doctors could ever help. Thirty years and nothing. She got the name of a witch, or spiritual doctor, from a purple friend.

The witch doctor knew what was wrong. 12:30-4:30 AM. Shitloaf's mother merlinesque-ly slid backwards in her life to conception, through screams and moans. The gasses were released from the pipes. She was the product of a rape. Her ribs were cured. She ran, in the dead of night, eight miles to the house of her ex-husband, whom she had not seen or talked to in four years. He was the only one who would be able to tell the difference. And he did. She ripped her shirt off and triumphantly screamed "Look!"

And he could.

## CHAPTER 25

Jacob Stohl was a quiet-on-the-outside boy who first noticed Calydonia in high school, though she never knew this. A lot like Ethan in many ways, he never even spoke to her until his sophomore year in college. They became fast friends and faster lovers. Calydonia acted differently around Jake than she did around Ethan. An alarming conclusion Ethan drew from this fact was that, over the past few years, with the exception of himself, Calydonia had closed herself off to people, and retreated into her self and Ethan. This was not in a superficial way, but far under the skin: one could only get to know her to a certain point. As Jake, a happy-go-lucky, introversial-extroversial type, got closer, she began sending up walls of soldiers, shoulder to shoulder, up the hill towards him. Finally, at a little get together, their friends had to lock them in a room together. . .

### THE CROSSDRESSERS OF VALHALLA

M-What do you want to talk about?

F-(*hostile*) I don't know, what do you want to talk about?

M-(*snapping back*) I don't know, that's why I asked you.

F-Well, shut up and let me think.

M-We're not here to think.

F-Did I ask you?

M-No, but I answered you.

F-Well, shut up.

M-No! It's that introvert-extrovert thing, I talk in order to think, and you think in order to talk. And I'm sick of you telling me to shut up.

In fact, I'm going to keep talking just to annoy you...I'm going to keep talking no matter what you say...*(he comes to a halt )*...bitch.

F-*(Jumping on his words )* Bastard! You know, you always talk and you never say anything. That's probably why we get into so many arguments. It's because I'm *trying* to get some life out of you!

*(Slowly )* You are one of the most boring people I know. *(He is hurt by these last words. )* I don't know what they're trying to do, but I don't think it's going to work.

M-Well, we have quite a bit of time on our hands and I don't want to spend it not talking.

F-We *are* talking.

M-No we're not, we're arguing.

F-Arguing *is* talking.

M-To you maybe.

F-Look, this is obviously getting us nowhere, I'm getting out of here.

*(She walks right and bangs on door.)* C'mon, guys, let me out!

VOICE FROM OFF-No, you're not coming out 'til you've straightened this thing out. *(She walks back and plops on couch.)*

M-They won't let you out; they've done this before. *(She ignores him.)* Some friends, huh? Never thought they'd do it to me.

F-Do it to YOU?! They're doing this to me! You're just a...a pawn.

M-Hey, they put both of us in here didn't they? *(They look forward in an angry silence. Then they look right. . . )*

BOTH-Assholes!! *(They look at each other and laugh, then stop and look forward in angry silence. He stretches across the couch. She shoves his feet off the couch irritably.)*

M-WHY ARE YOU SO HOSTILE ALL THE TIME?!

F-(*Sarcastic.*) Why are you always so cheery?

M-Why do you answer questions with questions"

F-Why shouldn't I?

M-God, why do I put up with you?

F-Why do *you* put. . .

M-Would you shut up?! I'm trying to get a thought out, and I won't have the courage to in ten minutes. Look, it appears to me that things aren't working out between us.

F-Ooh, perceptive.

M-Please, shut up. See, I think the reason we haven't faced this earlier is because we're both scared.

F-Maybe you're scared, but. . .

M-For the last time, shut up! (*He takes a breath.*) I just think maybe (*she begins to speak with him*) we should take a break from each other for a while.

M-What the hell?

F-That's a very famous speech. I can say it backwards for Christ's sake. "While-a-for-other-each-from-break-a-take-should-we."

M-Please, I'm trying to break up with you.

F-So why don't you do it then? Instead of beating around the god damned bush like this.

M-Fine, I'm breaking up with you.

F-Fine.

M-Do you have any emotions, whatsoever?

F-(*she looks at him...*) None.

M-Christ, what in your life has made you so calloused?

F-Nothing, it's my nature.

M-It seems you're only this way around me. (*This gets her somewhere, she hides it.*) Well, you're a clean slate when you're born, something must have made you this way.

F-Nope.

M-Well, now that we're broken up, I suddenly feel I can be honest with you; you're a bitch.

F-You're a bastard.

M-Bitch!

F-Bastard!

M-Bitch!!

F-Bastard!!

M-BITCH!!!

F-BASTARD!!!

(*Silence.*)

F-(*bursting*) What do you mean you can be honest with me now? What, you couldn't be honest with me when we were going out? Is that it?

M-No, no.

F-What have you lied to me about?

M-Nothing.

F-Did you have an affair while we were going out? Did you?

M-No.

F-Did you??

M-No! Why are you being like this? Do you have something to hide? Did you have an affair?

F-(*meekly*) no.

M-What??

F-No.

M-Geez, didn't assert that very much...

F-Maybe I'm just getting tired of fighting, all right?

M-(*stunned at first, then...*) Then stop instigating.

F-I'm not the one that's instigating; you're the one whose instigating.

M-(*grunts in a passionate rage, then collects himself, and, calmly. .*

.) Look, this is getting us absolutely nowhere. Why don't we sit down and calm ourselves. (*She gives in. They sit.*) And we can have a nice, quiet conversation. (*A long pause.*) Am I really boring?

F-Well. . .

M-Be honest.

F-Well, before we started going out, when we were just dating, it was fun, y'know? But after we started going out, things seemed to wind down and get dull. It was as if you ran out of gas.

M-The courtship is always better than the relationship.

F-Perhaps, but the doesn't mean the relationship must have no wind at all. I think the reason I instigate arguments so much is I need some excitement. We never went out. There was no romance.

M-(*pause*) Well, I guess. . .it was sort of a test.

F-A test?

M-Yeah, cuz, y'know how you have a good relationship if, after all the excitement dies down, you can still stand each other?

F-Yeah.

M-Well, I guess I sort of jumped to that.

F-You were testing me?

M-Well, not on purpose.

F-Still, that's not a very nice thing to do. Why didn't you stop?

M-I didn't know I was doing it at the time. I'm figuring all this out right now.

F-I see.

M-Now. . .I'm boring?

F-Well. . .okay, not always.

M-OK, thank you. Now, *when* am I boring?

F-On day to day type things, like when you try to live.

M-(*sarcastic*) Oh, then why don't you tell me how to live.

F-But, it's different with everyone.

M-Well, that's how I live.

F-But, it's boring.

M-I can't help that.

F-Yes! You can! Christ, live! Will you? (*He submits into silence.*)

M-(*pauses*) Well, you're not perfect either.

F-Oh, don't retaliate just because you discovered a flaw.

M-I'm not.

F-Yes, you are.

M-No, I'm not.

F-Yes, you are! God, you have such a sensitive dick.

M-What's that supposed to mean?

F-It means you can't stand being insulted, shorty.

M-I resent that.

F-You should, dickless.

M-Come on.

F-(*laughing*) Oh, I was just kidding.

M-That was mean.

F-Oh, come on, I was only teasing. Tell me, why are men so insulted by that?

M-It's a very vital part of the body, y'know? It's the sexual organ, for Christ's sake. Without it, we wouldn't be able to make love--our only denomination with you.

F-You think it's our only denomination?

M-Well, no, but when it's insulted, it's like saying it's inadequate, and then maybe we aren't getting everything out of sex.

F-(*almost sarcastic*) I never saw it that way.

M-Well, you should have before you got everyone to call me needledick. (*She laughs.*) Can we talk about something else?

F-Sure, anything.

M-OK, good. (*A long silence.*)

F-I got into a really bad fight with my brother again this morning.

M-Justice?

F-Yeah.

M-What about?

F-Him getting a job.

M-He *still* hasn't.

F-Nope. (*Pauses.*) You know that kind of metal that's really hard? It's the kind of metal that's really cold, and you *know* that if you walk by it with bare feet, you'll hit your ankle on it and it will REALLY hurt. Basically, no matter how hard you hit it, it will really hurt. Well, anyway, that's my brother. They're one in the same. God, he makes me so mad sometimes, I want to strangle him. It's been this way ever since we were kids. We used to go sledding on the big hill by the church. But instead of sleds we used these long plastic sheets; mine

was red, his was blue. Over time, his got a rip in it, so he always wanted to use mine. When we'd get to the top of the hill, he would say, "Okay, you go first, I'll push you." I actually fell for it, every time. He would give me a big push, and, once I got going, he would grab the back of the sled, and I would ending sliding down the hill on my face, then my butt, then my face, then my butt.

M-(*chuckling*) you fell for this every time?

F-Well, not every time.

M-You were just kids, though.

F-I think it's rather symbolic, don't you?

M-. . .who won this morning?

F-He just blames it on the current republican in office.

M-Well, has he ever been a waiter?

F-I think so.

M-Well, maybe I could get him a job at the cafe.

F-Would you? (*Thinks.*) Only there's a problem. I don't think he wants to work.

M-That could be a problem.

F-Can we talk about something else? I'm getting depressed.

M-Sure, anything. (*Another long silence.*)

F-I think everything is all set, don't you?

M-(*agreeing*) C'mon. (*They walk R. to door hand in hand.*) Hey, guys! It's okay, you can let us out now.

F-(*who has discovered a note on the ground, reading. . .*) "Went out for pizza, hope all's well."

M-Oh, great. (*They flop on couch, look at each other, and end up kissing. He eventually, and rather abruptly bolts into a standing position.*)

F-What-is-your-problem?

M-We aren't going out anymore.

F-So?

M-(*wide-eyed*) SO??

F-What's the big deal, it was only kissing.

M-ONLY KISSING?? (*She shrugs.*) That's really weird, okay?

F-Whatever you say. . .(*He starts to pace, a silence.*) You seem to have accepted the fact that we're not going out pretty damn quick.

M-Yeah, well, it took me a while to build up the courage.

F-I see. (*Holding back anger.*) So you've been planning to break up with me for a while, have you.

M-(*sensing it*) Well, not for *too* long.

F-(*A little more hostile.*) Lemme ask you something. Why are you so constructed?

M-I'm not constructed.

F-Yes, you are! You always wait 'til the right moment to say something, in EVERY situation. You can't do that your whole life.

M-Why not?

F-Because *life is not a soap opera*!! If you hold your emotions in for too long, they start changing and rotting and, by the time you use them, they're not yours anymore. Or, maybe they're too much yours. See?

M-. . .I'm not that way.

F-We all are.

M-Well, then why are you treating me like it's a problem all my own?

F-Because it's a bad problem.

M-Don't be a hypocrite. If everyone is structured, *you* are structured.

F-That's right.

M-What the hell?

F-Part of my structure is spontaneity. An element which your structure lacks.

M-Hey, if you're too spontaneous, you have to lie, and lying is *not* in my structure.

F-Touche, needledick.

M-Please?

F-Sorry. . .look, after you die, you're going to look back on your life, and come to realize you have not lived, because you planned beyond your death, and you will be disappointed, and you will be considered to have missed.

M-Missed what?

F-Your shot. . .this life is your shot, and you foul it up by planning how you're going to shoot it too much. You've got to shoot from the gut.

M-Look, let's make a compromise. We don't we live every second, and while we're at it, make sure the next second is also worth living.

F-Fair enough.

M-Fair enough. (*A silence.*)

F-You know, my friend and I locked ourselves in our basement with all the detergent and soap and shampoo we could find because we wanted to make a perfume. After an entire afternoon, we finally came up with something that smelled mildly interesting, so we dumped it all

over each other. "The Essence of Tomboy," we called it. 'Cause that's what everyone thought we were, or. . .I was, anyway. Sure I liked to play football in the churchyard, and I didn't have *the* haircut, and maybe I got into an occasional fight, but I did not think I was a tomboy. . .although in the back of my mind, I knew it was true. And I knew whose fault it was, too. Son of a bitch.

Anyway, when my mom, caught us, she sent my friend home, and marched me straight up to the bathtub. And while I was in the bathtub, I heard my father come in, drunk. I could tell he had been fired, I could always tell. And then I heard my mother tell him that I used all the shampoo, detergent, and soap in the house, and she needed more. . .then I heard my father start to yell. I knew what was coming next. I tried to stay in the bathtub forever. It was 8:15 before he finally kicked the door in. He grabbed me out of the bathtub, and carried me to my room, and threw me on the bed. Then he shut the door behind him (*by this point she is reliving it*). I can't remember much after that. Only that when he threw me over his knee, I hit my head on the bed post. "Now, make yourself look good." I HATE HIM! Oh, god, I hate him so much.

M-(*attempting to console her*) Hey, it's OK.

F-(*shoving him*) NO! It's not okay. Do you want to know why I'm so calloused? It's because of him, the bastard. *He* did this to me. I had to learn to put up with so much. . .and if I showed any emotion I was dead. My dad taught me quite a lot in childhood. (*A lengthy silence in which shell fragments fall from her clothes.*)

M-You know what I hate?

F-No what?

M-People with no guilt.

F-Me too.

### BLACKOUT, YET NOT SO

Calydonia left the room beaming with the light of birth, leaving a trail of broken shells behind her.

## CHAPTER 26

Ethan wrote this one early on. . .

He woke up, realized he fell asleep  
And turned over  
There she was, her eyes half open  
Staring back at him  
They both looked like shit  
The 10:00 Sunday sun was escaping through the sides of the blinds  
He laid his hand across her hip  
"Are you happy?" he asked. He'd always wanted to say that.  
"You snore," she laughed.  
He wiped the sleep from his eyes  
It was the best wake up he'd ever had,  
And they didn't even make love.  
They had just cuddled and talked to their friends.  
All night.  
These two now intimate friends.  
He looked at her  
Awed at how this once untouchable, all-powerful entity in his life  
was so permeable to his love's warmth.  
"We're in love. . .platonically," he told all those who suspected. But he  
knew that wasn't true.  
"Let's have coffeecake," she said.  
I love you, he thought to her, and wondered if she heard him.  
She smiled.

## CHAPTER 27

Being a teenager is tough these days. As I'm sure it was in those, and the days before those. Hormones are raging, love is blooming, and polygamy is being explored. . .in a subtle way, of course. I feel bad for Ethan.

To whom it may concern (all the women with whom I am in love),

Love is interesting thing, isn't it? I mean, think about it. It's two very intimate friends getting to know each other, seeing if they can spend the rest of their lives together (if it's mutual, that is). This opinion, however, is one of an outsider. I have never been mutually in love with anyone else; my timing's off. And single-handed love is a large burden to burden (ha). No one handles all that well, probably because they cannot see over the enormous weeds which have grown around the beaten path on which they walk (which leads to sadness, rejection, and generally making an ass of one's self).

Whenever I feel the wind coming up behind me, I can always trick myself into thinking I have been mutually in love, but that only lasts until the wind goes away. I, as I am sure many humans before me have, deeply crave being in love. . .mutually. The kind of love that I have built up in my mind as the end-all-be-all of human existence. The kind of love that old, sneezing men talk about in old folks' homes.

Through my menial follies at this young age, I have already grown weary and begun looking to friends in my search. I do not want to take a risk. . .right now. Not because "I don't want to be hurt" or something wimpy like that, just because I'm sick of the slot machine, I want to win. Is it too much to ask--to be in love? I don't

think so. I want someone like me who has something to offer me, as I have something to offer her.

Please, one of you come forth and do something about this. I am in very dire emotional straits. I need the intimate companionship with a woman.

I am looking for you,

Ethan

P.S. This is what I was thinking as I signed my name:

"Christ, why can't I be structured so this wouldn't affect me?"

\* \* \*

"Ethan, that's just it, you're a flirt."

"A flirt?"

"Yes, and that's why no one will go out with you."

"Really?"

"Are you in love with every girl in the world?"

"No."

"You act it."

"Well, it's not that I'm 'in love' with every girl in the world, I just see the potential for a hugely amazingly great relationship with just about everyone in the world. And besides, I have a strong yearning, y'know?"

"And you figured that if you aim at everyone, someone will eventually get the message and turn herself into a target?"

"Exactly. Exactly."

"That's a faulty plan."

"Why's that?"

"Because every girl in the world thinks you wont stop flirting with every other girl in the world if she goes out with you. Also, this sex thing has got to stop. I mean, it works with you and I but not someone who doesn't know the rules. That's just cruelty. I do it too. (Drag off cig.) I think we get blinded to the fact that not every one in the world is exactly like us, or each other, y'know?"

"Yeah."

"Never saw it all that way, did ya?"

"How did you obtain such worldly knowledge?"

"Talked to Lucia and Maria 'bout all this."

"Me?"

"Yeah."

"Really?"

"*Yeab.*"

"Awright, awright."

"I'd snag one o' those babes, Eth, they're hot pickin's."

"Oh, you mean before you do," said Ethan gleefully.

"Yes," said Calydonia, laughing.

"I don't know about you, Cally, you're a bit more confused than you're letting yourself think."

"As are you, my boy."

"Hey, I know exactly how confused I am. In this world, you don't get smarter, you just find out about more things you don't know."

PURPLEHAZEPURPLEHAZEAPURPLEHAZEHASDESCENDEDVERTHEWORLD

"But, seriously, Ethan, you're a very love oriented person , and there's a lot of love in you, but you're misguided. Yes, there's a lot of

love in you that you want to get out and share with another, but you've forgotten where it comes from. Love yourself, Ethan. That's all you need to do. If you love yourself, instead of showing the world how you could love it, She will come and find you. She'll appear right in front of your eyes, you won't even have to turn your head. Do you know what I mean?"

Ethan entered upon a renaissance period, and a musicians table was set up in the halls of his congress. There she was, in all her glory. Mmmmmq (pronounced "Jim"). Had it already been lost? He had gotten to know her and begun to flirt with her before this monumental mentality makeover. No, perhaps not. She seems oblivious to such things. Good, okay. Shit! I'm doing it again, I'm flirting with yet another person. No, wait. Maybe she has presented herself to me like Calydonia said She would. Is she She? Okay, I'm all right. She's the one for me. Or am I fooling myself into thinking that? Ug, this is not good. And yet (I, squinting, look melodramatically towards the heavens) it is. My, my, my. Okay, I'll just sit back and see what happens. God, this is weird.

## CHAPTER 28

Rob Larson. Senator. Wild man.

Ethan and Rob could resist everything except temptation. They had their idols, and they had their heroes, and neither would admit the other to be his best friend. There was one thing that could ruin Rob's reputation--that he was in love, and there was one thing that could ruin Ethan's reputation--that he'd had a one night stand. Eventually, both were true, but of all the rumors spread about them (among those, that the two were lovers, that they had had a monage a trois with Mmmmmq, and certain allegations of bestiality), all of which were spread by a small horde of ferocious, hating underclassmen girls, these never got around. They were set in concrete at Boston Latin School ("Jimmy Hoffa's real resting place," they mused), resident weirdos.

If you walked with Rob, you talked about sex, if you walked with Ethan, you talked about love. Very few people knew Rob, really knew him, while everyone knew Ethan. Rob would ask Ethan for pointers on dating and being romantic, and Ethan would ask Rob for pointers on sex.

Rob had a hard shell, but a big heart. He lived for, and in, the moment. That's probably what made him so sexy to girls, he was dangerous. They did not, however, know where his energy came from, and if they ever found out it would have scared them.

In the first two years of their knowing each other, Rob would beat on Ethan, in a friend-type way of course, and Rob being bigger and older, and Ethan, himself, one to take such things, anyway, Ethan did not mind. Noticing that the beatings were getting steadily harder,

Ethan realized he was slowly penetrating Rob's wall. Rob, in fact, whole heartedly agreed.

"What'll happen is, you'll finally get all the way in, I'll beat the living shit out of you one last time, and then I'll never touch you again."

"Probably true."

Rob said, acted, and believed that other people's opinions didn't matter to him, but deep down Ethan knew they did. At least among his friends. In an institution like high school, where tension and insecurity reign supreme with titanium fists, it was all that mattered. Rob was never in competition with anyone else (luckily), but he always had to stay funny enough, different enough, abrasive enough to stay sane, or insane.

Rob was in Ethan's house while Ethan was off in a room losing his virginity, knowing exactly what was going on, having almost facilitated it. He was always on Ethan's side in life. And Rob's was the only personal criticism Ethan would even think of heeding.

Rob was the bastard son of a druggie. He never met his father, who drowned in the quarter-inch of water at the bottom of his canoe (stoned). Rob, like Ethan, lived on a commune in his early years, however Rob was molested by members of both sexes. Rob did not speak of this much and most likely did not let it affect him.

Rob was the type to hide talent. Sure, he could act well, we all knew that, but boy could he direct. No one knew he had it in him until that play slammed together so well under him. Maria was in that play.

Rob often said that Ethan was the only friend he'd ever really had, he had moved around so damn much. Ethan had stuck around the longest.

Rob got a key out, and scratched, "I will never love," on the bench. He then filled it with ink. They were at Park Street station, waiting for the train. They were coming from rehearsal. Rob breaks a silence and says he has a problem.

"I might be a father," he said.

"WHAT?" Ethan knew it had been coming, but not this soon.

"This girl from over Christmas vacation calls me up and says, 'we've got a problem.'"

"Holy shit. What are you going to do? Abortion? Adoption? What?"

"I'll marry her, I guess."

Ethan and Rob simultaneously envisioned "Earl" crossed out on a greasy gas station shirt and Rob written in underneath. Maybe now, thought Ethan, Rob will live past thirty. Maybe he'll lose his wildness. Ethan foresaw a tragic marriage.

"Course, it's not definite."

Rob ran into school the next day handing everyone cigars. He was elated.

"The rabbit lived!" He shouted with joy.

A peak before a valley, that's how Rob lived.

## CHAPTER 29

Three silhouetted figures sat laughing in a '48 Chevrolet Fleetmaster, which squatted motionless in Ethan's garage. Light came mistily through all the windows, making them shadows even to each other. Rob lounged in the front seat. Ethan and Mmmmmq, as it had been planned, sat in the back. Their relationship was at this point fetal, but it *had* been conceived.

Mmmmmq put her hand on her mouth, and spazmatically coughed once. A billowing cloud of smoke quickly encircled her head. They all laughed wildly.

"This is my second time," giggled Ethan. Rob, as it had also been planned, went into the house to "go to the bafoom."

But nothing happened. . .

## CHAPTER 30

"God, I hate being white," said Calydonia.

## CHAPTER 31

Ring, ring.

"King Crossey's Castle."

"I just spent the last five hours cutting out paper hearts; I have blisters the size of Nepal."

"Hey, Rob, how're ya doin'?"

"Ethan. . ."

"Yes?"

"How do you know if you're in love?"

"Ha, ha, ha. Our little Robbie's giving into the metaphysical way of the universe, is he?"

"Yeah, yeah. How do you know?"

"Well. . ."

"Cause I've always known I wasn't in love with all those girls I went out with, but this time I'm not so sure."

"That Maria's a great gal, aint she?"

"So how do you know?"

"Exactly that."

"What?"

"Welcome to being a teenager, Mr. Larson. . .finally."

"Yeah, well, when you have sex with a girl before you even have your first crush, it tends to fuck you up a tad."

Soon after, Maria opened her locker.

1,293 paper hearts poured out onto the floor. That night, Rob called Ethan in a near panic.

"Aww, isn't that cute. Rob's having his first anxiety attack, something which should have happened years ago. How does it finally feel, you fuck?" Obviously, Ethan felt no sympathy. Calydonia took the phone from him as Rob was saying, ". . .I don't have the patience for this; usually, I know a girl, what, forty-five minutes and *bam*, y'know?"

"Yeah," said Calydonia.

"Aaahhh! Jesus, Calydonia, I thought you were Ethan."

"It's okay, most people do."

"Heh, heh."

A big, long, awkward, but kinda funny silence.

"Can I talk to Ethan again?"

"Sure."

"So anyway," said Ethan, "every teenager, no every person, has to go through this, Rob, you're not alone."

"I'm not an ordinary person, though."

"Yeah, yeah, big whoop. You won't be a complete person unless you go through this, so tough it out, soldier. And don't worry, she's falling for you."

"Really?"

Ethan hung up.

Ring, ring.

"City morgue--you kill'm, we chill'm."

"Ethan are we on for Saturday night?"

"All set."

"Great! I'm gonna use all the skills I learned last summer in Pasqualino's. I'll make the food on Saturday morning, and then be over around 4:00 or 4:30, okay?"

"Yup."

"Now, you and Mmmmmq are going to be waiter and waitress, right?"

"Yup."

Click.

"My little Rob's becoming a romantic, I knew he had it in him."

## CHAPTER 32

Ethan the wee toddler freshman was falling in love. Walked himself down to Bradlee's, bought himself a blank tape, and walked himself back up to his house, where he recorded "Every Little Thing She Does Is Magic" onto it.

Football rally at school. Ethan and Calydonia stood at the top, Lucia stood at the bottom. Ethan had just gotten his braces on a month earlier. He made his move. Calydonia, who still had not gotten over her cupid-complex, loomed in the clouds and watched. He handed it to her and ran off.

Though it was a "no," they got to know each other quite well over the following months. Him in love with her, and her dealing with that.

Then...

"Going to Italy? For a *year*??"

"It's all right, Ethan," said Calydonia.

"Just my luck." He was right.

## CHAPTER 33

"That's it," said Ethan, he was making a resolution, "from now on you're going to see the real me."

He stood with Mmmmmq on a dock on the Charles River. It was midnight. He had been acting goofy all night. They polkad to the sound of the water lapping up against the dock.

"Uh-oh, what time is it? The last train is at 12:36."

It was quarter to one.

They began to walk.

It was a long way.

"I don't want to lose you," she said at one point in the conversation. Ethan stopped right there and they melted into the sidewalk. They would kiss for the first time that night. They soon got lost in the void that *is* the financial district.

## CHAPTER 34 SHITLOAF

### Part 3

All the boys, Hayseed in particular, felt the spanks for their host. A simple game of blind-man's-bluff had turned into a lamp-shattering, furniture carnage death blossom. It was Shitloaf's fault. There was a burning in Hayseed's ass. His hair, too, was singed by the stares of his comrades, who all knew it was his fault. He would remember this when he was thirty and kill someone.

## CHAPTER 35

### PACIFISM GONE AT EIGHT

Calydonia was eight years old when her first dog, Pacifism, died. Justice had receive the dog as a gift on his eighth birthday. Pacifism was a dumb dog--didn't even understand the theory of catch--but he sure was fun to walk. Justice would love to "let" Calydonia walk him. Pacifism being a great dane, and Calydonia being a small child, the hysterics were endless--especially when Pacifism would see a cat.

She demanded that he get a full funeral when he died, and offered an entire year's allowance to buy a plot in a New Hampshire pet cemetery. The Sunday after his death the whole family hopped in the station wagon, with a full double-stuff trash bag in the back, and headed on up to New Hampshire to bury Pacifism.

Calydonia and her father dug the grave and Justice and his mother lugged the beast over to it. They all hit it with a rolled up news paper one last time and then lowered it into the ground.

"Dad, I have to go to the bathroom, can we stop?"

"Why didn't you think of that at the graveyard?"

"I didn't have to go then, and there wasn't a bathroom."

"Well, we're almost home, keep still."

"Dad, I really have to go. . .Dad. . .Dad?. . .Dad, pleeeeeeease?"

"Just shut up and keep still!" Her father did not want to go in the first place.

"Calydonia, we'll be home in fifteen minutes," said her mother. Sensing the tension, Justice added, "Can we get another dog?"

""Justice, SHUT THE HELL UP!!! Christ, can't we ever have silence in this god damned car?!" He screamed primordial and wailed on the car horn. He was good at that. Even though Calydonia knew it was just her father grieving for the loss of Pacifism, she was still scared. She peed. She sat in a hot puddle for the rest of the way home.

CHAPTER 36

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## CHAPTER 37

### WORSHIP

"Thank You," said Ethan to Mmmmmq.

## CHAPTER 38

"I miss him, I really do," said Calydonia.

"What do you mean? You're with him all the time," said Mmmmmq.

"I know, but something is dead. I feel myself slipping into his head more and more every day."

"Is it me?"

"Honestly? Yes, I think it is. But I don't want to change anything. You are exactly what he needs, exactly what he's always needed."

"So are you," tried Mmmmmq.

"Oh, no. Ethan and I needed each other to learn how to need other people."

"What a home base."

"Yeah, we were lucky ones."

"Still are."

Pause.

"Half of my identity," said Calydonia, "is him."

"Half of his is you, and you each helped construct the other half. Honestly, Calydonia, I don't think Ethan's head is such a bad place to be."

"I hope not."

"Where is he anyway?"

"Playing pool with Jake and my brother."

"They all get along so well."

Across town. . .

"Nice shot."

"Thanks."



## CHAPTER 39

Calydonia and Ethan finally had some alone time.

"You would not believe how free I am," begins Ethan, "around Lucia now."

"Really?"

"Oh, yeah. See, I had formed all these theories and hypotheses about what I was growing into around her, how I was slowly becoming myself and gaining confidence because, y'know, she was the last person in the world I was shy around. But that was all bullshit. There was one thing that could have saved me, and it finally did: falling out of love with her. It's interesting, I got my braces on a month before I fell in love with her, and got them off a month after I fell out.

"It all happened at one moment. With the mention of Mmmmmq's name, I opened some floodgates, and a barrier was lifted. I could finally talk to her, and she could finally talk to me. We were no longer in that dynamic where I was in love with her and she had to deal with that.

"It was sort of, come to think of it, like trying to stand erect in a room where the ceiling was too low. Do you know what I mean? Who woulda thought falling out of love with someone would be so healthy for the relationship? And now she and I are becoming like the best of friends."

There was a pause.

"I can't keep up with all your women," said Calydonia quietly.

It was a tense moment.

Ethan's brain pounded him with a rapid series of possible things to say, but he could not decide. While this was happening, of course, nothing was being said, and the silence played on. How do you accept a gift the giver does not want to give, but has to? He felt victimized.

"What do you want me to do, Calydonia?"

"I don't know!" she threw back. "Anything. Anything to stop it. I wish I was selfless enough to give this to you, but I'm not; I need my life. I'm sorry."

"So am I. I would just as soon you not, but what am I going to do? Calydonia, this was bound to happen to one of us. This is not a fate worse than death, I mean, who needs two parts when you can have one whole?"

"Will you miss me?" she asked and actually began to sob.

This was pain.

They let it go.

She had to accept it.

Ethan's guilt was a wet rock.

## CHAPTER 40

### WORSHIP 2

Yup, thought Ethan, Lucia was the one that got away, and I know exactly what I did wrong. I will never worship again. My mom was telling me that women get resentful when they have to take the initiative *all* the time. He thanked Mmmmmq again. If he were to tell her why he knew it would come out wrong, so that was all he said. She was so approachable to Ethan, so humanly touchable.

And her lips were soft. He felt so real around her. Things were perfect.

Except. . .

He was a junior, she was a senior. In a few months, she would be gone. Off in a college among actual men. This threatened him, but there was nothing he could do, so he lived it up.

## CHAPTER 41

You don't mind, do you Calydonia? It must feel like I'm chewing you up and spitting you out, that I'm using you. Well, you can be angry if you want but you did serve a purpose for me. I created you, god damn it! You were created by a lone teenage boy yearning for the perfect love. Yes, I knew you were doomed from the beginning, but you did, too. I have found what I am looking for in a tangible human being, and I'm sorry but you are not necessary in my life anymore. How can I avoid betraying you? Tell me how, damn it! Don't worry you'll be back. But unfortunately that will be when I need you.

## CHAPTER 42

### TALK SHOW

"The worst job I ever had," begins Calydonia on Ethan's little brother's talk show, "was in a fish market. Oh, it was horrible. My dad got me that job. I spent two months straight waking up at 6:30, going to hell for eight hours, and gutting fish--five days a week. And my boss was such a bitch. She could never lower her voice below a screech, and she would never stop talking. She never inhaled, and she would talk about absolutely nothing. Once I had the luck of working in the potato cell, instead of fish, where I usually worked, but I had the misfortune of sharing my time with her. She spent the entire time talking back and forth about how badly I was peeling the potatoes and her favorite episode of Kojak. Believe me, Brian, fish markets are not the place to be."

"You're not the happiest person, are you?"

"Of course I am. I'm the second happiest person I know."

"Who's the first?" Brian asked.

"You." She tickled him.

Brian was in heaven.

Calydonia was the only girl in the world Brian was in love with that he could be himself around.

"We'll be back after these messages," he said.

"You love your video camera, don't you?" she asked.

"Not as much as I love you."

She laughed.

"Are you and Ethan in love?"

"Brian, how many times have you asked me this?"

"176. How many times have you answered me directly?"

"176."

"Ohhhhh, so close. I'm sorry, the answer is zero, thanks for playing."

A silence. She was thinking.

"Well?"

"How can the same person be in love?"

"I see." He didn't know whether to be disappointed or encouraged. "I love you." he said in his confusion. She was used to this.

"And of course I love you, too. . .platonically."

"And we're back," he said, "I'm here with Calydonia, a very interesting young woman. Now, during the commercial break, correct me if I'm wrong, you said you wanted to have my baby. Is that correct?"

"Yes! Say, would you like to start a small company and spend the rest of our happy lives struggling just enough to stay interested?"

Brian was beside himself. "Erg," he guttered. There was a silence. Calydonia realized what she had done. "Will you deliver my eulogy?" he asked.

"I'd love to."

Brian just stared at her.

"Do you want some tea?" she asked.

"Sure."

Brian remembered perfectly the day he knew Calydonia was the one for him. In an ambulance of all places. . .

\* \* \*

Brian slowly regained consciousness?" he asked.

"I'd love to."

Brian just stared at her.

"Do you want some tea?" she asked.

"Sure."

Brian remembered perfectly the day he knew Calydonia was the  
on for him. In an ambulance of all places. . .

\* \* \*

Brian slowly regained consciousness.

Calydonia's face came into focus. He didn't know where he was  
at first, then it all came back to him.

"How's Bill?" he demanded urgently.

"He's all right, everything is going to be all right."

"What happened?"

"You were shot."

"I was *what?*"

". . .shot."

"WHERE?"

"Your ear."

He reached up and touched the bandage under his head.

"Where's my mother?" he demanded, "why are you here?"

"I'm right here, Brian," said his mother on the other side of him.

"Does it hurt?" she asked. She had been crying.

"Not really," he said.

Calydonia filled up.

"Where is Bill? What happened to Bill?" Brian began to panic. Bill was his best friend.

"It's all right, he's in another ambulance."

"So he was hit?"

"Yes, through the arm," said the paramedic.

"*Through* the arm?"

"Yes, you were hit by the same bullet."

Brian's eyes opened wider than they had ever been before. The use of the word bullet hit hard. He realized he actually was *shot*. He felt his bandage again.

They arrived at the hospital and the doors flew open. Calydonia kissed him on the forehead just as they hulled him out of the ambulance. As he was rushed into E/R, he caught a glimpse of Bill being taken out of his ambulance. A lot of blood. He was rushed down a corridor and remained awake as the doctors cut and stitched. The entire time, he persistently asked the doctors about Bill.

When he was set up in his hospital room, which he and Bill would share, Bill was not there yet, and Brian's nerves were racked. His mother came in.

"Are you okay, honey?"

"I'm fine, mom." He wanted to see Calydonia.

"Are you sure, sweetie?"

"Yes." He wanted to see Calydonia.

"Is there any pain?"

"Mom, I love you, but I'm at a rebellious point in my maturity right now, so any attempt at consolation would be idle." He felt bad

about saying such a thing, but it was the only way to get his mother off his back.

"Well, all right."

"May I see Calydonia?" His mother began to understand.

"Okay, I'll just go to the bathroom. I'll be right back." She left.

Calydonia.

"How are you feeling, sweetie?" she asked.

"Just cut the bullshit, Calydonia. We're getting married. Help me out of this bed and we can make an escape."

She laughed. "You aren't in any pain, are you?"

"None. Let's go." He was out of bed.

"C'mon, we'll have none of that. I can't marry a dead man."

"No, I suppose not." He was back in bed. "Have you heard anything about Bill?"

"Well, it's sort of bad news, I'm af--"

"What? What?"

"Oh, don't worry he's not going to die or anything, it's that his arm may be paralyzed. . .he's pretty weird, y'know."

"How's that?"

"The doctors told us he kept sticking his finger into the bullet hole in his arm."

"Oh gross!"

Ethan thundered in. "Hi. I just got here. I heard what happened."

"Yup," said Brian, "shot in the ear, blew it clear off." He laughed and looked at Calydonia, who did not. He got the message and shoved his hand under the bandage before she could stop him. He felt dried

blood, he felt some stitching wire coming out of his skin, and he felt a huge surge of pain, but he did not feel much of an ear. "Holy shit!"

"You'll reopen it!" yelled Calydonia as she yanked his hand from under the gauze beast."

"Sorry."

"May we be alone for a second?" asked Ethan of Calydonia.

"Sure," she said. She left.

Ethan pulled up a chair, and began.

"Brian, as I was driving over here, all I could think was that you'd been killed. That *really* scared me. I didn't want you to die before I could tell you some stuff. First of all, I want to apologize for the way I treat you sometimes, and I know we're pricks to each other a lot. But I really hate it when we are. It makes me feel so far away. And it makes the good times awkward. . .I love you, you little asshole."

"I love you, too, you big dickhead."

They laughed and embraced.

"Does this resolve anything?" asked Brian.

"I don't think so," said Ethan.

"Are we still going to fight?"

"Let's try not to."

"Dice," said Brian. Their mom came in.

"Are you guys okay?"

"Yeah," said Brian, "I'm sorry about what I said."

"It's all right."

They were all thinking the same thing: this is all very corny.

Brian eventually forced his family to go home, getting a special goodbye from Calydonia. Bill finally came in. And eventually his family did, too. Then Bill forced them to leave.

Bill and Brian were left alone.

"How's your arm?"

"You wanna see me stick my finger through it?"

"Hell no."

"Awe they sewed it up anyway. I could see my finger tip on the other side."

"That's really nasty."

They lay in silence.

"Do you remember what happened?" abrupted Brian.

"Not exactly. I remember sitting in your TV room, looking at you bringing in drinks, then the next thing I knew I was in an ambulance with blood all over me."

"How much did you lose?"

"Pint and a half. You?"

"Three quarters. Feel dizzy?"

"Rather. . .Do you think they'll make us clean up your TV room?"

"Probably. . .what the police think happened is that a random drive-by shooting came through my window, got you through the arm, and then took my ear off."

"Off."

"Yeah."

"I'm really sorry, Brian."

"It's okay, it hasn't really sunk in yet."

They spent the remainder of the night talking about what happened, what the kids at school would think, how they would be welcomed back, sex, and Calydonia. Despite the situation, it was one of the greatest times Brian ever had with Bill.

\* \* \*

"Mint or herbal?" called Calydonia from the kitchen.

"Whichever is more unhealthy."

Calydonia figured mint was more unhealthy, so she brought some in.

They drank for a while.

The camera was running.

"What does Calydonia mean?"

"It means me. . .what does Brian mean?"

"Hip cat."

"I see."

"I was just thinking about the night I was shot."

"You can hardly notice the ear is gone with your new haircut."

"Oh, thanks, you like it. I didn't think you'd noticed."

"Noticed? Of course I noticed; it's the best haircut you've ever had."

"Thanks. Nice semicolon."

"Thanks."

They drank for a while.

The camera was running.

"Who came up with the name Calydonia?"

"My mother."

A silence.

"Did you know me when she died?" she asked.

"Um. . .I don't think so," said Brian.

"I think Ethan did. God, that was morning (Calydonia was not a morning person). I was in this very peaceful sleep, when my father shook and whispered, 'get up, mom is very sick.' It was about 5:30. I got dressed and went downstairs. I found my brother and my aunt in the kitchen. Justice was staring out the window. My father and our live-in nurse were upstairs with my mother. The next hour I must have been running on batteries because I can't remember a thing."

Brian kept waiting for her to say something like, "why am I telling you all this?" But she never did.

"My father came down the stairs, crying for the first time I had ever seen. He didn't have to say she was dead. We all had to fend for ourselves emotionally for the rest of the day. And then. . .that afternoon. . .found my father alone in the kitchen, having a moments peace." She began to cry. "And--I guess I needed someone to blame--I began screaming at him at the top of my lungs for waking me up and not letting me sleep through it. At that point, he was a widower and *not* a father, so he just yelled right back. That's the last fight we had together while I was still scared of him. Because after that, I knew he was human."

They drank for a while.

He consoled her.

The camera clicked off.

## CHAPTER 43

Everything was quiet. There were no cars. The streetlights made everything purple and red. It was snowing.

Ethan's keys jangled and fell to the ground. He grunted as he bent over to pick them up, tipping the celery stalk out of the grocery bag, throwing off the yin and yang of his compact figure in an open trenchcoat, walking through a comfy silent snowfall, the streetlights adding a surreal touch.

Calydonia's apartment key had extremely sharp jags. It had a peace symbol at the head, (Ethan often swooned at the irony). He opened her door and was immediately greeted by Dagmar the superdog. The dog being the only a good half-an-inch off the ground, Ethan had to try his best not to step on the poor thing.

He made it into the kitchen and took a deep breath. He'd always loved the smell of Calydonia's apartment. Well, (sigh) he got everything out of the shopping bag, and began to cook dinner. Spaghetti with oregano/Italian dressing/pepper/salt/meat sauce. And, of course, potato puffs, which they never end up eating.

Staring at the potato puffs, he flashed back to their first date, and in a dusty haze he the view from the Hancock, and the kiss on the cheek.

Who woulda thunk it?

Everyone, that's who. . .

BAM! BAM! CRACK!

Adrenalin flooded Ethan's stomach. Something was wrong. He ran in a frenzy.

BAM! SMASH!

He found the room. He saw a fist slither down the window, leaving a trail of blood. That was warrior blood. The fist blossomed into a hand, and fell off.

The shadows were moving and lurking. When he got outside, he found the squashed rosebud. By the time the ambulance arrived, she was barely alive. His hands found hers.

As they stared into each other, Ethan felt her fading, and he was going with her. His pain was a surge of emptiness from his toes to his head, and his eyes were the only outlet. And they gushed, and gushed, and gushed. She was ready to go.

"Ethan," she said with the last of her energy, "find me in you. . . I love you." The ambulance shut off its siren and rode on silently through the red and purple night.

## CHAPTER 44

Ethan turned the corner, and Calydonia's father's house came into view for what would be the last time. He had given up on umbrellas and was now soaking wet.

He sagged up the stairs and felt a vision of himself barreling into the now absence screen door nine years previous.

The house was a mess. Her father had nearly destroyed it in the last three days, and he was now sitting on the edge of the couch, beer in hand, staring at the TV, which he had obviously kicked in. . . his face was redder than usual.

Ethan began to cry. Calydonia's absence in the house was filled by her dad's pain.

"I loved that girl, Ethan."

Justice was nowhere to be found.

The snow had all melted.

Her wake was to be that night.

"I loved her so god-damn much. . . I guess I had kind of a funny way of showing it." He laughed. A tear sought refuge in the corner of his mouth, "I guess we both did."

"What's on?" asked Ethan.

"Father Knows Best."

Neither of them knew whether to laugh or cry.

"I got the autopsy report today," said her father. Ethan did not want to hear it. "Stabbed fourteen times in the chest, died from a loss of blood."

Ethan said nothing.

"What exactly happened that night, Eth?"

Ethan began reluctantly. "Well, I rented us a movie, and bought food because I was going to cook us dinner. I also bought a rose for the table. Anyway, as I was cooking dinner, I heard this bashing sound, and I knew immediately that something was wrong, so I ran towards it. I think she was banging on the window," he broke down, "to get my attention. Somehow she must have known I was there. But when I got there it was too late." He began to wail and could not stop.

They sat in silence in a puddle of nothingness for about an hour.

"You got a haircut," said her father, pushing out.

"Yeah."

The night before, Ethan had cut his hair to the same style it was before he met Calydonia, a change he felt he needed to make. He hated the haircut, but didn't care. He couldn't look in the mirror and see the same person he saw when she was alive.

Okay, he thought, I just need to put five years between me and this. He had a large black and blue mark on his chest from saying "I". It was a new pronoun for him. "We" was still wrestling it's way out. Five years, that's all I need.

Justice came in.

He went upstairs to her room and Ethan followed. There was not much since she moved out. A bed, and empty dresser on which was a picture of the four of them on a camping trip, in the closet there were some clothes she didn't like, and some boxes.

Snapshots of Rob and Maria at the airport, leaving for Cancun. Some postcards. . .

Cally and Eth-  
Cancun is beautiful.  
WE ARE HERE.  
WISH YOU WERE FINE.  
Love,  
Rob + Maria

Some notes. . .

Cally,  
In case you haven't already  
heard, Rob and Maria broke up on  
the plane ride home. Rob contem-  
plates suicide. I console. Goin' for  
pizza at Al's after prison.  
-Eth

And a manuscript. . .

"SHITLOAF"

boasted the title page. Ethan did not read it. He put it under his  
arm.

Closed coffin.

Wake.

Beautiful.

The funeral.

Beautiful.

The burial.

Emotional and beautiful.

Ethan felt distanced from it all until the burial. She was in that  
box, and it was being lowered into the ground. Gone forever.

And as he shoveled the first clump of dirt into the hole, Dr.  
Ethan "Eth" Crossey, Ph.D., felt his life begin.

## CALYDONIA

"I told you I was sick, Elizabeth. . ."

October 13, 1968-June 11, 1989

**About the author.**

Brendan Hughes, 16, currently lives at home in Boston and will be a senior at Boston Latin School come the fall (hopefully). In his spare time, he enjoys picking his friends' noses and taunting sloths.

He has 25 teeth.