



What are you doing here after all these years, after all the silence?

May I come in?

Jim. You're what, slumming?

That's unkind, Katya. May I come in?

Yes, yes, sure, come in.

Thank you. I like this new place.

How did you—

Mark.

Of course.

He said—

It's okay.

Is it?

Yes. But, okay, quickly, why?

I was thinking about you. I dreamt about you.

Do you contact everyone you dream about?

Of course not. Why are you making this difficult?

Am I? I thought I was trying to clarify things. It's been over three years. We had a -what did we have, Jim? A fling? We had a fling and then you opted out and then *nada*. Nothing for years. An email would have been nice. A note dropped through the letter slot. A Christmas card.

You don't have a letter slot.

A metaphorical letter slot.

Yes.

And now, here you are. Like the ghost of fucking affairs past.

Katya.

Don't. Don't say my name.

Because—

Because you are not to say my name. Because you don't love my name. Because it comes out of your mouth a dead syllable, a stillborn—

I get it.

Good.

This is bad. I'm sorry. This is bad. I shouldn't—

No, you shouldn't.
I have—we0 that is, Dorothea is pregnant.
I know.
Oh, yes, Mark.
Right.
So, that's good. That's wonderful. And your novel.
Yes, the novel was published. It did okay.
Okay.
It, you know, did okay.
I read it.
Did you? I often wondered. Did you like it?
Lord, Jim, I'm in no position to—
You hated it. You read into it—
Stop. I didn't hate it. It was beautifully written.
Thank you.
It was just a little too close—it was embarrassing, I guess.
Really? I'm sorry, Katya. I—
Forget it. Art transcends—
No, not life.
Doesn't it?
No, life first then art.
I thought if, you know, the art was successful, it became conscienceless.
I don't know.
You used life, right? You *used* real people.
You say that with bitterness.
I am bitter, Jim.
I heard you were -involved- with—
No, not anymore. Anyway, you don't know that. Forget you know that.
Right.
Jim—
Katya, look, it's just that with the novel and all -and I guess the pregnancy- I began feeling- I had these feelings—
You're a dangerous man, Jim.
I'm not really. I'm not.
You think it's all fodder. That's it. You think it's all okay, using people, using your whole life as some sort of fucking artistic testing ground.
That's hurtful. You're not that callous.
Fuck you.
Okay. Okay, Katya. I'm leaving. Bad idea- this was a bad idea. I'm sorry—
Jim. Look. Okay. Stop. Sit down. We can talk. It's not so bad that we cannot talk.
Really?
Don't say really like a school boy. Sit down.
Right.
You want anything? Coffee?
I'd love some coffee.
Black?
No, much cream, much sweetener.
Oh, right.
I love my Bosco.
Right.
You need any help?
Mn.
Shit.
What hap—
Nothing. Never mind. Instant okay?
Yes.

Okay, here. It's not really that hot. And I didn't have, you know, real cream.

That's okay. Thanks.

So.

Are you going to sit way over there? Isn't there a chair further away? Is it further or farther?

Don't be breezy, Jim. I think I'm gonna get pissed if you are breezy.

Sorry.

Tell me what it's like, publishing, having success in something that you work so hard at.

Well, success.

It *was* successful.

Well. Locally, here, yeah, it did okay.

And those blurbs.

Well.

So, you don't want to talk about it. This I can't believe.

No, I do.

I thought all artists liked—

I said I do.

Okay. Sorry.

It's just, you know. I can't to you -talk, I don't know. It is fiction, right? I'm tired of talking about it as if it were about my life.

For all that, it is about your life.

In the sense that all art is, that is, about the artist.

In this case—

Look, okay, she's sort of like you and it's sort of about what happened between us. But, you know, as far as the public is concerned, if I can talk about a public, these moppets might as well be the rulers of Pellucidar, or Little Alex and his droogs. Invented. Fictional. Fake. Forged. Counterfeit.

And as far as Dorothea knows.

Right.

I wondered—

Well, of course she asked. I told her pretty much this. She believes it because she wants to believe it. She is—

I know, saintly.

No, she's not. Really she's not.

Better than saintly. Earthly saintly.

Okay.

So, these denizens of Pellucidar, who fuck regularly and wantonly, and exchange fluids as freely as epithets, and who happen to exist in a world much like your little bookstore world -*very much* like your own little bookstore world.

Stop, Katya. Did the book upset you that much?

No. Yes.

Well, that's clear anyway.

Of course it upset me some, Jim. And what upset me more is that I picture you putting the story out there and not giving a good damn whether it troubles me or your wife or your children's teachers.

Actually, one of the teachers wrote a letter.

Really?

Yes, an excoriating letter.

Hmp.

It wasn't really funny.

Sorry.

Well, in retrospect, yeah, it's pretty funny.

Who was this letter to?

Me, cc'd to her principal.

Oh, God. Saying what?

Oh, you can guess. Anyone who has to use such language must be intellectually bankrupt. People should keep their private lives private, that kind of horseshit.

Sorry. Did you hear from the principal?

No, thank God. The whole thing came to nothing. Except still when I see this teacher -and Katey hasn't been in her class for two years- she stares daggers at me. Ice in those eyes. She'd kill me if she could, I think. Without a second thought.

Still, the satisfaction of finishing the story—

As if any story ever ends.

Right.

I mean, I think these people are still talking, just not to me. Is that weird? Pretentious?

Maybe pretentious.

Thanks.

I'm kidding. They're still talking, you just can't hear them.

It's like that. I mean, for a couple years I had their voices in my head -in the bath I'd have to jump out, half-dry and get a snippet of confab down.

Confab.

That's another thing. Since the novel -well, and during its creation- I think I learned every word for talk, for conversation. They are all in my rattling head now. Too many synonyms.

And that's a metaphor for something else.

Yes. It is. It is a metaphor.

Like so much in your life. Nothing is just life, nothing is just, what, a piece of meat, an insincere expression, a kiss. Nothing is simply what it is.

It's not just my life, Sweet.

Don't call me Sweet.

Okay.

You used to call me Sweet.

Did I?

Yes. Forget it.

Sorry. But, really, everything really does mean something else. Doesn't it? Don't you feel that?

Sure, in a sense.

But what?

Well, fuck, Jim. I mean, *it's* not just there for the meaning. You know? It's not just there for your fucking artistic purposes. The -Christ!- the synonym, the choices. I'm not saying this well. Me. Goddammit. *I'm* not just here for your novel—to be the goddamn antagonist

You weren't the—

Shut Up. Damn You!

Just shut up. It doesn't fucking matter whether I use the right word. Okay? It doesn't matter. Just like it doesn't matter that to you I'm a bushel of well-chosen words, a string of similes and synonyms.

Is that how you see me? Is that what you think?

Katya?

Yes.

Well. What can I say?

Jim. Just go. Why are you here?

I wanted to see you. Seemed simple initially. I wanted to see you.

Presumably this wasn't the first time you wanted to see me since, well, then.

No, it isn't, wasn't.

What then? Why is now different? Because your novel is out. Because not many people read it outside of the circle of people to whom it's gonna seem autobiographical? I mean, that must rankle. The fact that its only readers were the people who are going to recognize all your sources. It makes me laugh really. How you must long for someone to take you as fiction. Ha.

I am going.

Sorry. I had no idea you were this unfriendly toward me.
Shit.

Jim. Sit. I am mad. Maybe I didn't know how much. I haven't said any of this to anyone else you know? I think I'm boiling over.

I had no, you know, idea. I.

How could you not -really? Sit. How could you just put that out there and not? You think people don't know too much about me now, about my *personal* life? And think of me as an adulterous little tramp?

No, it's fiction. I made up so much of it -it just doesn't seem- *logical*.

Let's talk about something else. Okay. Anything else.

Books. You wanna talk about the bookstore -what we're reading?

Close but, okay, yes, what are you reading?

I didn't just bring it up so you would ask me -you go first. What are you reading?

Ha ha. Jim. You're priceless. So passive fucking aggressive.

I hate that. I really do. I hate that you said that.

Okay, look, sorry. What -please- what are you reading?

David Markson's *Going Down*.

Shit. You did just want me to ask, didn't you?

No, no, why? Have you read it?

Of course I haven't. It's such a ready answer, isn't it? DavidMarksonsGoingDown. It's such a *phrase*. Plus, you just have to be reading the most obscure -most difficult—

It is difficult -but- rewarding. It's quite beautiful really.

Okay.

Like Faulkner. You know, nobody thinks *Sound and the Fury* is a walk in the park. But, it's so rich the knotty passages are—

You had this all prepared.

Jim.

Yes, in the sense that I have everything premeditated or deliberate. My head is full of conversations. Old, new, borrowed, blue. Dead conversations, conversations that should be dead. Talk about the weather, talk about the Grizzlies, talk about Art Kane's jazz photograph. Talk about the Hobbit-man they dug up. Talk about goddamned Faulkner. Talk about *Talk*. Conversations between me and others, me and God, me and Leonard Cohen.

Ha. You talk to Leonard Cohen?

In my head, sure. Why not?

It's so -okay- it's so you. You really talk to God?

Again, why not?

Because he's not there?

Whether he is or not I am up to talking to Him. That's the point, isn't it? That's fiction -dream- spirituality. That's why I wrote the effing book -it's fiction that's the final truth. The veracity we really live within.

Right, Jim. I had no idea you were spiritual.

We're all spiritual, in the same sense we are all bipeds. There isn't a fucking lot we can do about it.

Okay.

Forget it.

Why are you angry?

Am I? Sorry.

Aren't -never- Jim. Look—

What are you reading?

Oh, um. I am reading Alice Hoffman's new one. Can't remember the ti—

The Probable Future.

Is that it? Is that the newest? Is that what I'm reading? It's here somewhere.

Right. Katya. You break my heart.

Nope. Stop there. That's enough. My heart -your heart- these are off topic—

Okay.

The kids. Tell me about the kids. Tell me about having another one on the way at this point in your life.

My surprise child.

Really? Unplanned?

Oh yeah. A diaphragm baby. Apparently not that rare.

I know, I guess. I have a friend who has a rubber baby. Ha! A rubber baby!

Ha. Yes, I've heard that -of that, too.

I know a woman -three children- and still in her thirties -so she goes to her gynecologist and says, tie em. I've had enough. Tie me off, Doc. So he does and she and the husband relax and sex becomes, well, sort of new again, like they are irresponsible teenagers -they can act out that scenario- you know, and they have spontaneous sex, which of course had been missing in action all these years. And they like do it in the car, in the driveway, and such. You know, really like newlyweds rediscovering the spark. Anyway, long story short she starts feeling bad, you know, down there, and goes back to her gynecologist and she's thinking, oh Jeez cancer, this is my payback for fucking with Mother Nature, well, that's it, the sex was good for a while. My short life is over. And the doctor examines her and leaves and she sits there stewing in her own juices, so to speak. And later, seems like much later, he returns and he's got this sheepish look, and he says, Well, I guess this one's college is on me.

Whoa. Really? She was pregnant?

Yeah, and, fuck she now has four kids and she's like thirty-six.

Unbelievable.

I know. Imagine.

Well, I can. Cuz I sure thought I was past all that. I mean, oh God, diapers again.

That's bad?

It ain't a picnic.

I thought, you like, I don't know, learned to love your own child's shit.

No. Maybe the first one. No, the shit is still shit. It still smells. Oh, God, that smell.

Ha. Back you go. Back and back.

Right.

I just was living in a fool's paradise. You know, kids both fairly responsible and untroubling -and bang, I've got to do the whole baby in arms thing again. I don't know. Dorothea is up for it.

Of course she is.

Don't-

Sorry, it's—

Let's don't. Let's -talk about something else.

Okay. Connie. What's Connie doing?

Well, he's got a girlfriend. That's a big deal.

Yes, it is. You like her?

She's a peach. Shy though. Won't come all the way into a room. Won't talk much except to use her manners, which are pure Southern impeccable. Don't really know much about her I guess.

Pretty?

Of course.

Is he still drawing?

Oh, yes. Quite beautiful stuff.

You have some, something you can show?

Well, no. It's -it's in his computer is the way I understand it. It's -computer generated images- no, that's not quite right.

It's -shit, I don't know. It's not on paper. It's not like sketching, you know?

I guess. It's—

Pixie art -no, not pixilated. Damn, what—

Pixels?

Yeah, that's it. Pixel art.

I don't understand.

Neither do I.

He's your son.

Right, I'm a bad parent, an unobservant parent. I am clueless about my son's most precious thing. Kill me now.

Now—

No, really. I know. I just don't—

It's not that important if—

It is. I think it is. I should know.

Okay. Well, at least, you, you know, care about it.

I care about not understanding. Yeah, that forgives it.
You're so hard on yourself.
You're so hard on me too.
Oh, right. Poor put-upon Jim. C'mon. Lighten up.
Yeah. You called me passive aggressive.
Okay, forget that. Do over. Sorry I said it. Backspace backspace backspace. Okay?
Ha -okay. What are you -I mean- what's new with you?
My brand spanking shiny new relationship is already over.
I know. I'm sorry. What happened?
Younger woman.
No, not really. I mean, you're still—
It's all relative, isn't it? This was really a younger woman. Seventeen. Can you believe it?
Seventeen. Shit. That's harsh.
It is. It's a tough old world. Still in high school. Goes to St. Agnes, or St. Apothecary, St. Pinguid. One of those. Wears those little checkered skirts and white socks. Drives men crazy. Certain men. Men like you.
I thought you were going to steer it my way.
Sorry. George -that was his name- probably still is his name- he just went bonkers for this little teenybopper. Met her at the mall -believe it or not. Had that school-issue uniform on -if they knew what a turn-on those were the Catholics would stop them now -her skin glistening, well, I don't know if her skin -anyway. She puppydog-paddled right up to him, young perky breasts pointing at his nose. He fell, baby, just that quickly. Started writing her emails, letters, stopping by her school, stalking her really. If her parents weren't so permissive, so *liberal*, George'd be in jail now. Instead he's practically living with this little specimen.
I'm sorry, Kat. You know a lot about them—her—
Sure. He told me the whole story. It's very dramatic, rising action, falling action, etc. I was falling action. You would have loved it. You love a good story.
Her name is—
Is that important? Fuck, who cares? Her name is Teeny. Teeny Major. Is that a name for you? Is that a novelist's name?
No respectable writer would name a character that. It's so -precious.
She's precious. Beautiful tanned thighs and an ass like a gorilla. Isn't that what you men crave? A teenager with a gorilla ass?
Yes, I think so. I think you've hit on it. What Men Crave. More than stability, love, hearth and home. More than a perfect cup of coffee, a perfect martini. More than a sweet bowl of tobacco.
You're writing again. Stop.
Was I? Sorry. I seem to be apologizing a lot.
Good, you've got a lot to be sorry for.
Oh, Katya.
Oh, Jim.
Cut me some slack, how about it? Just for the next half hour or so, so we can talk, what say?
Sure. I'll cut you some slack. Go ahead. Be Jim. Be the protagonist.
Fuck you.
Now we're talking. Now we're getting to it. Was this what you had in mind?
Forget it, Katya. Forget it, okay?
Yes.
So.
So, ironically, I have another friend with cancer. Real cancer. Who thought she was pregnant.
No.
Yes. Cervical cancer. Nasty.
That's bad. Real bad.
Cancer's never good, right?
Right.
I'm sure at your age—
I should have cancer.
No, dimwit. You have friends—
Oh, sure, sure.
Who?
Um, actually, I can't think of anyone.
Huh.

Yeah, yeah. I have a cancer story though.

Okay.

Not anyone close -well, it's a cancer story.

Okay.

A month before John Cheever died.

The writer.

John Cheever the Proctologist. Yes, the writer. One of my guiding lights, if you will. I came to him when young and he was just so -solid. So writerly. Anyway, I found out he was sick so I decided to send him a card. Just, you know, I heard you weren't well -hang in there- may you write forever- that kind of thing. And I spent a little bit of time composing the simple, three line note. Always thinking I guess that he was gonna grade it like a term paper. Anyway, I got it just the way I wanted it, licked the little envelope and sent it to him care of his editor at Knopf. And felt real good about such a nice gesture. Until in bed that night a suffocating realization came to me. I had written the note on a little card stationery my sister had given me. Astrological sign stationery. Get it. My sign I was born July twentieth.

Which makes you—

Right. Cancer.

Shit.

Exactly.

And you never heard back.

Of course I never heard back. I mean, he must have thought what kind of a sick fuck would send such a bad joke. Jesus.

And he died a month later?

Yes.

Oh my God.

I know.

I'm sure your card didn't kill him.

You joke, but—

You don't really—

No, no. It's just -well, good intentions are never enough, right? I mean I thought I was making this sweet gesture—

Right.

Right.

So.

Yeah.

What's the best William Powell movie?

Ha. Right.

Really. You know you want to answer. What's the best William Powell movie?

My Man Godfrey.

Not one of the Thin Man movies.

Interesting thing about the Thin Man movies. The Thin Man himself was the bad guy in the first film. See. And then in all the sequels, well, the audience assumed the thin man was Powell, because he was, you know, thin.

That *is* interesting.

It wasn't as fascinating as I thought, once I'd launched into it.

That's okay, Jimbo. I do love your love of movies.

Love the love.

I do.

Seen any good movies lately?

My, the talk is getting small.

Yes, wee.

Tiny.

Miniscule.

Microscopic.

Exiguous.

You win. As always.

Believe me, I don't.

Okay.

You got some music.

Music. I have some. Of music I have some. What did you have in mind?

Van Morrison?

Slyboots.

What?
Never mind. It's—
What?
You wanna dance.
Oh. Okay. Sure.
No, I mean, that you want to dance. And, no, we're not going to -it was- it's become—
I get it.
Dancing, I mean. Slow dancing was one of the—
I remember.
Of course you do.
Slow dancing, cheek to cheek, hands exploring, pulling up close, your exquisite derriere in my—
Nope. Again nope.
Just talking, Katya.
Uh huh.
Still, dancing—
Never gonna happen.
Never is cruel. Never is extravagant. Never is—
Shut up.
Never is as never does.
Jim.
Put some music on anyway, what say?
Sure. Here -here is, uh, the new Lyle Lovett.
Ugh.
You don't like Lyle Lovett?
I do not. For the record I do not. He's a poser.
Meaning.
He doesn't mean it. He's acting. The hipster swinger. He's watered down Tom Waits.
Wow.
What?
It's just such -such a strong sentiment. About a pop star.
Okay.
I'll try again. Uh, Moody Blues.
You're mocking me. You're saying, Jim the guy who lives in the past, in the sixties which he doesn't really know much about, not really. He's a poser himself, a hippie-wannabe. Jim who was fourteen in nineteen sixty-nine, Jim who only thinks *his* music is genuine.
Jeez, I was saying all that with the phrase Moody Blues?
Weren't you?
Ho ho. Jim, what I was saying was, do you want to hear some Moody Blues? It used to be -sort of- our music. I was making a concession.
Oh.
Okay.
It was our music? My memory is so futzed—
Well, maybe only in my mind. We were playing -I was playing- *A Question of Balance* the first time -well- never mind—
I'm sorry. Katya, yes, I remember. Please put some Moody Blues on.
Okay.
Yes.
There. That's—
Wonderful. Like a madeleine—
I know. It's really still so good—
Yes. Katya.

Kiss me.
No, Jim. No.
Okay.

Does that bother you? That you won't ever kiss me again? Is that it -I know you- is it just the finalness of it -one more thing that will never happen again.

Finality. I don't think there is a word, finalness.

Okay. But, that's it right? I mean, it's not me -it could be anyone. Hey, maybe that's what you're doing -visiting all the gals who were lucky enough to fall into the sack with you. Is that it, Jim? Is this part of a sequence? Where am I in this chain-chain-chain?

Enough. Stop. No, this isn't like a twelve step program, okay? You're not part of some healing strategy. You're -Katya-sweet Katya—

Jim, don't.

Katya.

Don't get tender, okay? Let's talk about something else.

Okay.

Basketball! Hey, you said, the Grizzlies. You wanna talk about Shane Battier?

Not really.

Not really?

Well, if only to say -Shane Battier- I wouldn't trade him for -who?- for Kobe. Well, naturally I wouldn't for Kobe -I hate Kobe. For Vince Carter.

Okay.

Shane Battier is the Great Intangible. Look at his stat line on any given morning. He might have eight points, three assists, three rebounds. Doesn't sound that impressive. Then look at minutes played. Forty, forty-one. See. Because Coach knows the team is better with Battier on the floor.

You're hilarious.

What?

You've got such apparent buttons. Your buttons are right out there, I'll give you that. You are easy to push. Basketball. Turner Classic Movies. Blowjob.

Whoa.

See?

Well, blowjobs...

I know.

You just—

Okay, stop. Sorry. Turner Classic Movies.

Don't.

Turner Classic Movies.

Is showing a Claudette Colbert festival tonight.

Ha ha.

Hey, I can talk about other things.

Of course you can.

Well.

How is the store doing? Weathering this wretched economy?

Not entirely, no. It's been rough. It's difficult, I think, in this atmosphere -you know, with an a-literate president, whose wife disinvites poets to the White House. You know, and a nation of sheep who follow him blindly, unquestioningly. He has set this dangerous, anti-intellectual *tenor*...

We were talking bookstore.

We were talking this horrible, oppressive national atmosphere.

Okay.

But, the store, it's okay. We pay our employees. Not well, but—

And you still get to sell books.

Yes. Just not as many.

Ha.

No, it's still the best part. I get to sell smart books to smart people. Sometimes I have to sell dumb books to smart people and sometimes I have to sell smart books to dumb people. But, for the most part—

Is this a shtick? See, you're doing a shtick.

An old man's shtick. A bent shtick.

Prepared?

Look, Sweet, I do occasionally say something halfway witty, off the cuff. The old grey matter still sparks occasionally.

I know, I'm sorry.
You let me call you Sweet.
I did not. Don't.
Sweet.
You're an aggravating man.
At least still a man.
Meaning?
Nothing. I exist. I am.
Right. Just not in this apartment.
Okay.
You *were*.
Funny. You're funny.
Okay, Jimbo. Look. More coffee?
No, thanks.
A beam of light will fill your head
And you'll remember what's been said...
I've always loved that song. I was, I don't know, sixteen when I first heard it. Fifteen? Great song. That would make you—
A tadpole. An intention of a tadpole.
Yes, but you grew into such an agreeable toad.
Frog.
Whatever. I thought, that song, yeah, that's me. The romantic teenage rebel. The Melancholy Man.
You never outgrew that.
That's true. In a way I never did. Am I posing? Am I acting?
I won't lob you a lifeline.
Thanks, pal.
Okay, Jim.
You're so -affronted- so sore
I told you. I got hurt. Your damn book hurt me.
I just had no -I mean- it's words, it's make-believe—
Based on me. Based on me and you.
Okay. Colored? Transmogrified?
Maybe, but—
I know.
It was just too -too close to the marrow- you used words I actually said. You said things I actually said, in heat, between us, like, like that I wanted to *suck you*.
The characters -Sweet- they're gossamer. They're spindrift.
It was just too much, Jim. Too much.
Like many before you, you choked on the sex in the book.
Not very well put, but, well, did you have to put it all on the page? Did you have to be so -pictorial- so graphic? I hate the memory now -that's the worst part. You left nothing to the imagination
It was -it was left- look, it's in dialogue. It was hard depicting such an intimate act with only voice.
It *is* an intimate act -it's private. It was *ours*, Jim. Or, forget us couldn't such things be left private?
Why?
Why? Because people -because it's prurient- because there are privacies—
To which the writer is not welcome.
Well, yes—
No. No, I deny that. It's human -and what's human—
Is fair game. Okay, Okay.
Look, the book isn't for everyone. Right? It's not for Aunt Tessa who has a heart condition. It's not for -who?- preacher's wives. Ach. Defending it is so dispiriting. It's not for Little Billy. It's for adults -you know, *adults*. It's There are others -help me—
I'm sure I don't know. Preachers wives.
Well, not for you know. Anyone outside my purview perhaps. Not for *American Idol* watchers. Not for the black-haired tattooed slackers.
Jim, I have a tattoo.
You do not. I—

Right. Since you. Sorry, I did do some things after you.
Of course.
And one of those things was the tattoo. For my thirty-fifth birthday.
Oh, you're thirty-five. Jeez. Happy birthday.
It was last year.
Right. I'm probably supposed to know that. It's probably one more example of how solipsistic I am.
Probably.
Katya, can you not spare me one tenderness? Is there nothing left of the feelings we engendered.
Nothing.
Really? Katya—
Jim, I have no feelings, okay? I have cauterized them.
You couldn't. I know you—
You don't. You assuredly don't.
Where's your tattoo?
Ha.
Really. Where is it?
Where do you want it to be? Where would you put it if you were writing me? Again.
I have no idea.
Right. You have no idea.
Shoulder.
Nope.
Thigh.
Nope.
Oh, Christ.
That's right, Jimbo.
On your perfect ass.
Not so perfect anymore, but, well—
It still is. I'm sure of it.
Fuck you.
Still.
Always.
Okay.

And it's not the cliché butterfly. You're thinking butterfly. I mean, you're sitting there trying to visualize my hindquarters with a piece of art attached. Right? And you're coming up with butterfly. That's what you're doing.
You're so shrewd.
I know you.
Yet I don't know you. I am oblivious.
Okay. Shut up.
It's a —um- a labyrinth complete with Minotaur. It's a Romanesque church portal festooned with human heads. It's a grail full of my blood. Its—
Jim.
Stop me.
A Chinese dragon.
Really?
Symbolizing?
My desire to have a dragon on my ass.
No, really.
Jim, see. You want it all to mean something. You want it all to knit up. Things don't.
You're not telling me anything—
That you don't tell yourself. I know. You think that absolves you.
I don't.
Okay.
Is it, like, all over your ass? I mean, a dragon, I can see it wending its way through hill and dale.
Ha—

I made you laugh. You laughed.
I did. You're funny. You've always been funny.
May I see it?
Fuck. Jim. What? Because I laughed? This opens the door—this makes me more pliable?
God, you're hard on me.
Someone has to be.
Because I'm not hard on myself? Shit, woman, you have no idea.
Jim, you're smug. You wrote that fucking book and you think that makes it all okay. You think that smoothes it all over.
Because you were able to sew it all together.
I wasn't. The book -nothing is resolved—
Right. Like in life. I read your blurbs.
Okay.
How dare you though. You know? Did you think I was waiting back here, back in the past -still the same old reliable sex toy.
It was never like that. It wasn't. You enjoyed yourself.
I did. You know, I did. I'm sorry, Jim. It was a good time. Then -I don't know- the book came out and it all seemed so – calculated- so trivial. So marginalized. Like I was *in the margins*.
The book did that to you. Jesus. For that I am so sorry. Believe me.
Okay.
Katya.
Jim, the book hurt me. It still hurts.
Oh, fuck. Don't cry. Please. Katya.
It's jus—
Katya.
Forget it -sorry—
Katya.
Okay, Jim. Okay. I'm through.
I'm so sorry.
Forget it.
Katya, I—
It's small.
Excuse me.
The dragon. It's a small dragon. A small dragon that stands for -I'm told- all things animal. As in, you know, the life force.
That's lovely.
I didn't really mean that it doesn't mean anything.
Okay.
It's beautiful. I found it in this book- it's Chinese.
I'm sure it's lovely.
Jim.

Jim. Look. I'll show it to you, okay? But -you know- it's not like it was. This isn't a game, a gambling game—
Of course.
Here. Let me—
Katya.
There.
Jesus. It's beautiful.
See, it sort of sits at the top -well, I can't see it so much. I'd actually appreciate your comments. I think it was a sort of wrong-headed idea to put it where I can't see it.
It's beautiful.
Thanks -is it—
Your ass, so fresh—
Jim, I—
May I just, Katya, touch it?
Jim -Okay, just—

It doesn't feel rough. I thought it would feel rough.

Stop. Stop now. Go sit down.

Right. Sorry.

There now.

Katya, you-

I'm just removing these jeans. Okay? They're too fucking tight. I wanted you to see the tattoo.

Did you?

Well, I thought about it. Your seeing it. I think I wanted to show you that I do things without you, outside of your -I don't know influence? No, that's too strong a word. But, initially, it's like -you know- the guy whose girl dumps him so he cuts his hair -that kind of thing. It's not revenge -it's- autonomy. Anyway, then, just now, I really wanted you to see it so I could gauge your appreciation, I guess. I really wanted you to see it, so, there. I showed it to you.

A gift. Are you going to sit there like that?

Does this bother you? I've got boxers on for Chrissake. Men's boxers.

I know. It's just, you know, sense memory or something. Body memory.

Stop looking there.

Right.

Now.

Your legs are still so perfect.

What do you mean still? I didn't age a decade since you've seen me.

Oh, right.

Jim, you're aroused.

Now, who's looking?

It's fairly -well—

Sorry.

No, no, it's just -fuck- I mean, okay, I'm flattered. It's been a while since—

This last guy wasn't—

No, he wasn't. He made me feel -dammit- he made me feel so unsexy. Okay?

Katya. You're -so desirable.

Jim.

I mean it. That glimpse of your ass -jeez, Sweet- you're so—

Jim. Look. I want you to do something for me. And then I want you to leave. Can you?

What? Anything. Katya, I—

I want you to masturbate.

What—

I want you to take it out and masturbate -all because you saw my ass- because you can't take your eyes off my crotch. I want you to desire me wholeheartedly and I want to sit here and watch you and be unmoved. I want you to see that masturbation, for you, *is* the metaphor. Writing/masturbating. See? I want your pure desire -you pure *want*- and then I want to see it spent and then I want you to leave. Still sticky with your craving for me -you can't even clean it off, okay? Can you do that? Can you do that final thing for me?

I—

And it will be final. Jim. I want you to come and then never come back. I want our last thing to be your unquenchable need for me sexually and my insouciance, my calm uncaring exhibitionism. You owe me that. After that book -after I was exposed- you owe me this debasement.

You want to debase me.

In a way, yes. I want to see that I have control and I want you to see it and then I want you out of my life.

Katya.

If you can't do that—

Of course I can. I want you. I have always wanted you. You're like a drug -I—

Okay, I want you humbled -symbolically- metaphorically, you fucker -I want you on your humble knees.

Okay. This is—

No more talk.

What—

Unzip your pants.—

Right, I—

You've deflated. Pull them down further I want to see it all.

There, I—

It's no good like that.

Katya, I -you want me to—
Shut up. Look. Slowly now. There it is, there's the dragon. Yes?
Oh, Katya—
There now. Look at it, see me roll my hips
Move just—
Shut up. There it is. Ah, that's it, Jim. That's your manhood. See. See, Jim. I have it. I have your manhood -Katya, Jim.
This is me -I'm not a fucking character. Do it, Jim. Stroke it hard. You want to see more, hmm -don't talk to me,
dammit -look, here, Jim, here's Katya's ass, so round, so -what did you say. Such a deep crack. There's my crack, Jim, a
place you can never return to. I'm like a stripper -you can look but you cannot touch. Now, I'm sitting back down and
I'm just going to watch, Jim. It's all about me, now. Stroke it, baby. I am watching you in your need, your pitiful need
Katya, nn—
No, you can't talk about me. Look Jim. Just look, there are my thighs, and the darkness between them right up there,
Jim. That's it -oh, you're so engorged. Do it, dammit! Stroke it harder, goddammit! Let it go, Jim, go -Jim—
Aaahhhh!
Hm.
Aah. Jesus, Katya. I came so hard. Jesus. That was—
Shut up now. Go.
Katya—
I mean it Jim. It's all over. That's it. I did you. See? I fucking did you.
Katya.
Put it away and go. Leave it all on you. Leave it.

So, now you're over. That part is over. My life now—
Did you really need to debase me to get on with—
Shut up. You don't get to analyze. You don't even get to write about this. You dig?
Okay.
Okay.
Katya.
No.
Katya.
Jim. Go home. Go back to your burgeoning family and relish all that you have. You are a selfish self-centered man. Go
home and wallow in it.
Do you hate me that much?
No, Jim. No.
Okay.
Last word. How is the writing going?
Okay. I've got some ideas. I'm not bereft of ideas.
Okay.
Katya—
No.
What. What am I to do?
Go.
I—
Go, Jim. Write. Just not about me, please.
I. I can't. I lied. I have no ideas. I'm -bankrupt- it *was* just masturbating. I'm a one shot artist
No.
I can't
But, you're gonna do a sequel, you
No, never that. No.
No.
No.