

Creepy Kid
Book I:
Mommy Issues

A memory memoir

Survived by

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It is a clear, crisp day. I am gazing off into the distance. A look of great confidence and contentment is on my face.

As I look off, the imaginer, me, reaches for my happy, content, and fully realized self, the image I have yearned for every second of every moment of my life, the image I know I am meant to be, and that's when it happens -- my fingers touch the outer rim of the dream and as they do, the image, my destiny, breaks apart and disappears, like pale dandelion tufts floating into a summer day, vanishing, never meant to be a cohesive whole, beautiful and fragmented and fragile.

Dumb fucking dandelions.

***Creepy Kid:
Mommy Issues***

The Necessary Karmic Disclaimer for Books About Memoirs

I have called this a “memory memoir.” Why? Because this is my memory of numerous true events which took place in my life, and as such, I had no choice but to take liberties.

It is impossible for anyone to remember entire conversations they had at the age of eleven; memory is a selective and delicate thing. While all of the events and the people I have written about are true, I was forced to succumb to my unconscious process and kick-start my conscious process in elaborating conversations, compressing time, and expanding true events.

Except for a few lone exceptions of immediate family members, all other names have been changed out of respect for their privacy and out of respect for the very real effect of karmic retribution. I have also changed the names of all companies, and I’ve changed locations as a further attempt to respect individual privacy and the image of certain companies and their stockholders (this is a special note to blustery and red-faced lawyers who have better things to do than sue a broke writer).

For those reading this who recognize themselves and wish to throw the book across the room, please keep in mind I have taken great moral pains not to write anything hurtful or vindictive. My goal was to shed light on the shattering bundle of neuroses I was when we knew each other. Self-deprecation of my own follies was the goal – not the unveiling and public flogging of yours.

And finally, for those who cry wolf, saying my elaboration on the truth does not make this a memoir, well -- I’m glad you know how you feel about what does or does not constitute a memoir, and good for you. Details are important, yes, yes, but the unveiling of a deeper, emotional truth – answers to the questions “Who are we?” and “Why are we here?” and “How do I lose ten more pounds?” expanded through imagination while based on true events -- will always take greater precedence.

Namaste, motherfuckers.

So shines a good deed in a weary world...

Shakespeare

Conrad? What's your theory on Jude Fawley? Was he powerless in the grip of circumstances or could he have helped himself?

I don't...powerless?

Ordinary People

***Life's too short for you to die
So grab yourself an alibi
Heaven knows your mother lied
Mon cher
Separate your right from wrongs
Come and sing a different song
The kettle's on so don't be long
Mon cher***

***So come on let me entertain you
Let me entertain you***

Robbie Williams

Let's start at the very beginning!
It's a very good place to start!

The Other Side of the Rainbow

My life was always on the cusp of falling apart, but the beginning of my spectacular free-fall into nearly two decades of drugs, sex, and neurosis began in a nearly deserted movie theater in the Chelsea section of Manhattan.

For those of you who haven't been to the Chelsea section of Manhattan, the history is simple: once it was the gay Mecca of New York City, and now it's not.

In the days of yesteryear, gay couples could be seen walking hand-in-hand-in-hand down the street (most notably after having had a three- or four- or five-way the night prior, now basking in their post-orgy accomplishment).

Today, gays complain that heterosexual couples and their love of all things baby have pushed them out of the West Village and into Chelsea and then into Hell's Kitchen, which is preposterous. They're just mad they have to share an apartment wall with the types of people who ridiculed and beat them up in high school.

The night before, I had been out dancing with two friends; Ed, a transvestite with a penchant for purple eye shadow and inappropriately waving his penis in public; and Freddie, my Bronx-raised, one-hundred percent Italian-Guido-American roommate. Freddie and I lived in a large two-story apartment in the Park Slope section of Brooklyn. Today, Brooklyn is inhabited by a curious breed of people who shout about the importance of individualism, yet all sport the same dark, old-fashioned glasses, the same rolled-up jeans, the same distressed shoes, and the same air of detachment and vague elitism.

Freddie was muscular and hairy. A gay Popeye. He was also an elementary school teacher by day, owned and managed the lovely two-story townhouse we shared by night, cooked feast after feast like no other man I'd ever met, and took so many recreational drugs that he made Iggy Pop look like Pippi Longstocking.

Living with Freddie was like living in a 3-D version of *Looking for Mr. Goodbar*, the notorious 1977 movie about the sexual exploits of a New York City schoolteacher and her vicious murder.

I had seen *Mr. Goodbar* when I was thirteen. My mother had taken me to it, despite the fact it was known for its graphic sexuality. “Best you learn now how disgusting the body is, that’s all I’m saying,” was her advice as we walked into the movie theater. “Plus, that weirdo Diane Keaton is in it, and she’s funny as hell in *Annie Hall*. How bad can it be?” When the horrifying final image of Diane Keaton’s ghost face flashed on the screen and the end credits rolled, my mother looked at me, jutted out her bottom lip, and said in a booming voice, “That was the biggest piece of horseshit, I’ve ever seen.”

She dragged me out of the theater, muttering over and over, “Horseshit, just a big load of horseshit!” When we got into the car, she blew out lungful after lungful of air as if she had come from a long run. “Well, that is what you get for fucking anything that moves, I’ll tell you that much. That New York City. You can keep it, man. What was she thinking, doing that movie? Dear *Lord*.”

I knew my roommate, Freddie, was into the darker aspects of clubbing. He used to leave our apartment around midnight wearing tight jeans, black boots, a leather vest, and nipple clamps with a chain strung between them. Each night, I waited in anticipation for the call from the ER saying he was recovering from a torn nipple.

Freddie was the only man I knew who could make homemade gnocchi with one hand while sniffing lines of cocaine off a rolling pin with the other. It may sound easy, but the balancing act would have turned *The Amazing Kreskin* green with envy.

Before we went dancing the night before, Ed had given me a hit of the drug Ecstasy. I had reluctantly accepted. The drug came in a tiny dot on a piece of paper and reminded me of the hits of acid I used to take in my late teens and early twenties.

Acid wasn’t a good drug for me. I kept waiting for the Jim Morrison poetry explosion everyone said they felt when they dropped it, but the only thing I felt dropping was my tenuous grip on reality. Ed assured me the Ecstasy was pure and wouldn’t kill me, which, of course, gave me so much anxiety I couldn’t shit for two days.

As I looked at the Hello Kitty-shaped blot of mind-altering drug, I had a flash of my mother pushing her way through throngs of naked dancing gay men to

identify my body, screaming, “Well, Christ on a fucking crutch. Will you look at that? Dead as a doornail and never even saw forty. It’s *Looking for Mr. Gaybar*.”

Ed said it took time for the drug to hit, so we decided to take in a movie before we went to the club. At the Ziegfeld Theater, a mammoth single-screen house in midtown Manhattan, *The Mirror Has Two Faces* was directed, produced, written, scored, photographed, edited, conceived, art directed, associate produced, and distributed (domestically and internationally) by Ms. Barbra Streisand was playing.

“The mirror has TWO faces!” Ed screamed as we ran down the giant yawn of a red-carpeted aisle and took our seats.

As a young boy, I was obsessed with Streisand. I didn’t realize how gay I was until years later I told my boyfriend of thirteen years, Leo, that I had over seventeen scrapbooks filled with Barbra Streisand photos as a boy. I saved all my ticket stubs when I went to her movies, I listened to all of her albums at least a hundred times, and I had memorized giant blocks of dialogue from *Hello Dolly*, *What’s Up, Doc?*, *A Star Is Born*, and, of course, *Funny Girl*.

When I told this to Leo, he pushed his glasses up his perky Italian and Middle Eastern face and scrunched his nose, and said, “Wow. You were really gay. I have to say, I never understood what the big deal was about her. I mean, okay, she can sing, but that’s shit my mother used to listen to before she died.”

Back at the Ziegfeld, Ed and I endured poor Jeff Bridges acting as if Barbra needed a breath mint during their big kissing scene. The audience gave a collective groan. “I’ve seen better acting in the Bowery,” said a woman with a thick, Russian accent sitting two rows in front of us. With a great *whooshing* sound, she stood up and hit her husband across his bald head with such a slap, Ed and I both cringed. “We need to eat. I’m starving,” she said, pulling her tattered fake fur coat around her ears. Her husband, a tiny man no bigger than a hobbit, stood up with a tremendous sigh and placed a black fedora on his head. He inhaled deeply, turned, looked at us, and said when his wife was out of earshot, “Don’t ever get married. Trust me. It’s like a slow murder.”

Somehow, Ed and I made it to the dance club. The cab ride was a blur, as were our first, second, and third shots. I was angry. The drug wasn’t working. Ed dragged me out onto the dance floor, but I refused to dance. I stood in place, like a spoiled child.

The night progressed, and I kept checking my watch to see if it worked. After I checked for the fourth time in three minutes, Ed yelled at me across the crowded dance floor, “It takes time, you crazy faggot.”

He was right. I was crazy, and I was worried. I had taken a drug I didn’t want to take, and now I was living in mortal fear of dying from the drug. I knew once it was in my bloodstream, it would kill me. I knew, with every cell in my body, that I was going to be the dead gay everyone used as the poster boy for drug abuse. I hated drugs, but I hated reality more, so when presented with an option, drugs always won out.

In a flurry of awkward joviality, Ed proceeded to circle me and dance. When I glared at him with a look that would have made Maria Braun stumble, he did what any other unbalanced wanna-be transsexual would do – he pulled out his penis. I looked down and watched as his withered and curiously flexible cock flapped in the amyl nitrate-laden breeze, a piece of taffy in the air, a long wad of gum falling over a cliff.

“Ed, please. That’s making me very uncomfortable. Please put your penis away.” Ed laughed and laughed and threw his head back, his tear-shaped tonsils bobbing up and down in the back of his red, inflamed throat like a pair of garish, faux red-jeweled earrings. “Just because you’re uncomfortable with your gender doesn’t mean I am,” he half-screamed at me.

He was higher than a kite. For some reason, the drug had failed with me. I wasn’t surprised. My life was a perfect trajectory of one failure after another. I had been fired from nearly thirty jobs at that point, had never had a real lover, was unable to distinguish between reality and fantasy, and was so terrified of sex that I hadn’t seen another erect penis besides my own in over a year.

I went to grab my coat and leave. As I stepped off of the dance floor and headed down the long, narrow hallway, passing naked, sweaty gay men smelling as if they had taken a two-week bath in Jean Paul Gaultier, a feeling of such absolute joy overtook me that I stopped dead in my tracks.

“Oh, she’s feeling it now.”

This came from an obese man with blue hair, a pink-and-blue dyed beard, and pink tassels atop his swollen nipples. He was right. I was feeling it. A rush of pure happiness seeped into my bloodstream. I wanted to run down the street and

tell the Indian grocery store clerk how sorry I was I said her dress looked like an old tablecloth. I wanted to call my mother and tell her I forgave her for all the terrible things she had done to me. I knew when *that* thought came I *must* be high.

I cried and danced in the club called Splash in Chelsea, the gay ghetto that once was. I cried because I was finally the man I always wanted to be. I was open, happy, and happy. I'd never felt such white streams of happiness. It touched my toes and traveled up my spine and ran its fingers through my bushy hair and kissed my wet lips and ran its hands down my belly and tickled my hairless stomach and enveloped me in a warm embrace.

The evening turned on its head. I craned my neck back and watched as the lights on the ceiling moved back and forth, bathing me in a bright yellow and then dark blue and then red, red, red. I closed my eyes and felt the bass in the music erupting from the seven-foot-high speakers as it moved through me, up my legs, and into my cock. I was hard. I unzipped my zipper and danced. I wanted to be naked. I wanted to fuck. The room smelled of sex. It clung to the walls and rolled down the bare body parts all around me.

Strange joints arrived between my lips, and one-hit bottles of cocaine drifted into my nose. I was horny, I was fucked up, I was exhausted, I was thrilled, I was terrified, and I felt like I was about to die.

In a facsimile of a dance move I'd seen in the movie *Xanadu*, I pivoted at the precise moment the dance song hit a jarring crescendo, and I was Ms. Newton-John with a dick; I was the anima and animus; I was All the One, Buddha, Universe, a dancing GOD.

SLAM!

I fell face-first onto the dance floor. My nose kissed the wet and rancid floor and I immediately raised myself onto my hands. In front of me was a pair of bare feet. Bile rose in my throat. I hated feet, had always hated feet. My aversion to them had turned into a minor fetish. I was slightly obsessed with women in high heels. I knew where this obsession came from, and it was disturbing that it originated where everything had always originated with me.

The Mother. Always, The Mother.

My mother had a habit of running her bare feet against the plush carpet of my childhood home and humming to herself. I used to watch her feet as they moved back and forth and back and forth. They were hypnotizing.

She'd see me looking at her feet, raise them in the air, point her toes, and say, "Don't I have pretty feet?" I'd cringe. "Dear Christ, Creepy Kid. It's just a foot. Get a grip. You really are a mess. Messy Mikey! Oh, I like that. That's a new one. Let's call you that this week. *Messy Mikey, Messy Mikey, Messy Mikey!*"

Back in the dirty, sex-filled Manhattan nightclub, I stared at the bare feet on the dance floor. The nails were clipped (thank the Lord for small favors), and one of the pinkie toes was painted black. Around the left ankle was a bracelet. It was a charm bracelet. The words *Rock and roll forever* hung from it.

I stood and came face to face with a gay Jesus. He wore overalls and nothing else. One of the straps was undone, exposing his furry, vaguely muscular chest. He had an enormous beard and smelled of patchouli and cinnamon. His long hair was a knotted, blond mess as it cascaded over his shoulders and rode high into the air, fluttering in the breeze caused by an enormous fan whirling away in the corner of the club.

I had always had a fondness for hippies since obsessing over Treat Williams in the movie version of the musical *Hair*. Treat's thick hair and his wiry smile and the glint of sweetness, but something dirty and nasty in his eyes always appealed to me. Plus, his name was Treat. Yeah, right, he was *born* with that name.

I danced with Jesus until the sun came up. We kissed and made out on the dance floor. I wondered if I'd catch anything from kissing, so I slipped into a bodega before we went to his house and got mouthwash and Lysol hand wipes. I asked the befuddled, older clerk behind the counter if he had any dental dams. He said he didn't, but he suggested I use Saran Wrap. "Worked once for me when I ate this hooker's pussy that smelled funny," he explained as we walked down the aisle and he pointed to the bright yellow box on the top shelf. I grabbed the long box, paid for my impromptu Saran anus cover, and ran out of the bodega, still feeling the effects of the seven different narcotics coursing through my veins.

I had tried to say goodbye to Freddie before I left, but Ed told me we had lost him hours before. "He left to go to a really classy orgy," Ed screamed over the numbing dance music as he smoked a cigarette and chewed fluorescent gum. "He told me they serve *hors d'oeuvres* before sex, which makes no sense to me.

Before an orgy? Who the fuck does that? Must be straight people. Oh, wait. Bears. Oh, fuck. He's going to an orgy with fat, hairy men. That's *funny*. They probably have a buffet set up next to the rubbers."

Jesus and I stumbled into his grungy seventh-floor walk-up near the West Side Highway, a massive freeway that bracketed Manhattan. The view from his living room afforded a panorama of the jagged, sweeping cliffs of New Jersey across the water.

Far below, on the pavement, used condom wrappers fluttered past, old McDonald's take-out containers rose into the air and fell away, and two rolls of toilet paper ricocheted back and forth between the cars on the freeway like white pinballs in a giant machine.

We had fumbling and awkward sex and then cuddled and cooed and fell asleep. In the morning, I woke in a dead panic. I felt as if I had inadvertently stumbled into a time machine and was suffering the effects of being left for dead in a Turkish prison, but my version of Brad David from *Midnight Express* lying next to me was looking worse for the wear.

His long hair wasn't as shiny and sweet-smelling as I remembered. A piece of soy pepperoni was stuck to one side of his head, and a thick line of creamy saliva slid down his hairy face. Lying beside him was the Saran Wrap container. It had been torn in half, and reams of used, thin plastic sheets coated the bed like a dirty, foul-smelling spider web. The bed smelled like stale copper and aging cheddar. I felt like I was going to throw up.

I sat up, and the room spun. I couldn't see in front of me. I closed my eyes and tried to remember what I had done that would result in my using almost an entire roll of Saran Wrap with gay Jesus. It wouldn't come to me. I couldn't remember. A slow feeling of dread arose. I was Diane Keaton from *Looking for Mr. Goodbar*. I was doing the exact same thing she had, and here I was, lying butt naked next to a man who looked like Jesus after he had done mushrooms and rolled around in the mud at Woodstock.

I carefully stood up and gently slid my pants over my naked body. After searching for my underwear for twenty minutes, I gave up and decided it was best to leave them (and my shame) in the apartment with my snoring and decidedly disheveled gay demi-God.

Before I pulled on my pants, I rubbed my privates and body with half the bottle of Lysol wipes. It stung so bad I almost cried, but burnt skin was a small price to pay for not catching an STD.

I nearly fell out of the doorway of Jesus' apartment and onto the pavement. My heart was beating in my chest at such a rabbit-fast pace, I knew people could hear it. I didn't know what I had done. I had no idea what I had done in bed with this strange man. What if I caught something? Had I fucked up my entire life?

The sun was strong and terrible and hurtful. It drove into my eyes and scrambled my brain. I had to shade my eyes lest I turn into dust. My head was throbbing *and and and...*

...something else was happening.

I was rumbling, I was shaking, I was feeling very sick, very wrong. Not *me*.

A horror rose in me then, unlike anything I'd felt before. It was a rising sickness, a hellish grip that took hold of my insides and twisted them into a tiny ball and then threw them around inside of my body, like a bloody game of racquetball.

I was OD'ing. That was it. I was going to OD on the streets of New York. I had the symptoms. I had done so many drugs, the fact that I was still standing was a miracle. I had to do something, I had to move, I had to take action, I had to get to the ER.

I ran to a nearby pay phone and called Ed. I knew he lived nearby, but wasn't sure exactly where. Most New Yorkers never saw the inside of another New Yorker's apartment. We all simply congregated in formation, like ants at a hill, in bars or clubs or restaurants.

Ed answered on the second ring. "Speak, bitch."

"Ed. Oh my God. Ed, it's--"

"Did you go home with that guy last night?"

"Yes, yes, I did. But I need to see you."

"You have a thing for boys who might be girls who might be boys. You sure like to mix it up. Come over and tell me everything!"

He hung up. I stared at the phone, trying to find my breath. I felt intense foreboding building in me. I glanced at the passing traffic, and a strong sense of wanting to walk *into* it crossed my mind. I called Ed back.

“Speak, bitch.”

“Ed, it’s me. I don’t have your address.”

“Silly, girl. Tricks are for whores! Ready?”

I had nothing to write it down on, so I said it three times aloud before hanging up. I muttered the address repeatedly as I ran down the street, sweat pouring down my face. My feet didn’t feel as if they were touching the ground. A bird flew overhead, and I thought it was screaming my name.

A flash of the thin clouds I used to stare at for hours in Seattle as a child came to me in a rush. The cold air, the clouds, the wet earth all around me, the smell of earth, and the dampness that filled everything everywhere. I was seeing my childhood home because I was about to die. It’s what all people who survived an OD said. This was my moment. This was the flash of my life before my death. I knew it. I knew I was dying.

Ed opened the door of his shockingly large brownstone on Tenth Street near Seventh Avenue. “You smell like ass!” he said as he grabbed me by the collar and pulled me into his apartment. He may have smelled penis on me, but the dominant smell in his apartment was cat shit.

Ed careened down the tiny hallway of his feline-laden apartment. I counted four cats on our way to his bright, oval-shaped living room. The sunlight hurt my eyes. Overnight, I had turned into a vampire. I was going to burst into flames, and that would be that. Everything was turning black, and I felt like I was a moment away from dying.

“Come! Sit! Sniff!” Ed screeched as he patted the edge of his tattered, feline-infested maroon couch.

I sat next to him and glanced in the direction where he was pointing. On the scratched glass table in front of us were four lines of cocaine, cut and ready to be snorted. “I thought it would be appropriate,” he said, indicating the crucifix pattern he had made with the cocaine across a sprawling photo of Marilyn Monroe.

With a dramatic and well-rehearsed gesture, Ed rolled a twenty-dollar bill between his chubby fingers, leaned over, and sniffed up two lines of cocaine. "Mama's happy!" he screamed, rocketing to his feet and dancing to an inner disco beat only he could hear.

I looked out the window and saw a Hasidic couple walking with their four small children to synagogue. I was in another world, in another dimension. When did I go from being a charming and overly sensitive child in Seattle to sniffing cocaine at 8:45 a.m. on a Sunday as an unassuming Hasidic family headed off to confess their sins?

Ed frantically paced back and forth. "You got the Ecstasy blues. This will cure you right up. Trust me. I could make a speedball. Want a speedball? I got some horse around here somewhere."

"I don't need that."

"You done heroin yet?"

"No. Please. Me?"

"You spent the entire night snorting coke, smoking weed, and drinking like a drunk."

"Give me the bill," I said, snatching it out of his hand, distracting Ed from adding heroin to the mix. I knew what happened when people mixed heroin and speed and booze. I may have been self-destructive, but I wasn't hell-bent on killing myself. Not yet.

I looked at the two lines of cocaine before me. Poor Marilyn. Ed had positioned the lines in such a way that they crisscrossed over Marilyn's deeply sad and dark eyes. "Here I come," I muttered as I leaned over and placed the tip of the rolled currency up my right nostril. "I may not be famous yet, but I may be joining you soon, Norma Jean," I whispered as I sniffed four lines of cocaine, one after the other.

The burn was immediate. It felt like my nose was on fire. I knew I was going to sneeze. I inhaled sharply through my mouth. Ed rushed to my side and clamped his hand over my mouth. Somehow he had found the time to throw on a pink wig. "Don't you dare, Mary Beth."

I held it in, my eyes latching on his. The pupils in his eyes were tiny pinpricks and they seemed to dance back and forth, tiny constellations in a whirling vortex of madness. I felt my eyes close, and I savored the coppery taste of the drug as it slid down the back of my throat. I moaned. My cock became hard. I licked my lips. "Oh, I love that part, too," Ed whispered as he kissed me on the lips and rubbed his hands playfully over my crotch.

My eyes fell on Marilyn, and I latched onto her doomed expression of external sadness. Was this how it happened when you fucked Bobby Kennedy? You got high and then died as he kissed you? Did he also smell of aging meatballs, and did he wear a pink wig? Here I come, Marilyn, here I come.

"Okay, my trick is coming over. I need you to go and enjoy this wonderful day!" Ed grabbed me by the collar and led me to the front door, gently pushing aside cat number four with the blunt end of his foot. I noticed his toenails were painted deep purple.

"Call me later," he said as he pushed me into the hallway and closed the door. I stared at the door for a moment, unsure of what to do next. Everything was very bright, and my skin tingled. I was on fire, I was alive, and I was ready for anything. The cocaine was running through my veins, little white men with pitchforks pushing me and pushing me ahead.

Flashes of sex hours ago floated to the surface; gay Jesus brushing my body with this long hair as The Doors played in the background, sheets of Saran Wrap floating through the air like forgotten plastic bags, the rush of his body against mine, his hands fucking me and my tongue teasing his.

I stopped dead in my tracks. He didn't fuck me. Oh, thank God. We fucked around but didn't fuck. Oh, praise Jesus indeed!

I turned and jumped down the stairs, three at a time, until I was outside, the huge wooden door to Ed's building slamming shut behind me. I squinted. My body felt too sensitive to the touch of the sun. I needed to go somewhere and do something. Anything. Run! Runrunrun.

I feel good, this is really good, this is fucking amazing, I'm good, I'm so good, I can do anything, I've got a purpose, I can write a million-dollar script, I can act, I can sing, I can dance, fucker!

The drug pushed me forward, lifted me up where I belonged, to a place where nobody dares to go, up and up and up, higher than I'd ever flown. *Fuck me this is brilliant*, I said to myself, *this is fucking amazing*.

I ran down the streets of Manhattan until I felt I had to sit somewhere, anywhere. I had a long trek back to Brooklyn and knew being underground was probably the worst possible thing for me. The black wave returned. I felt sick, like I was going to throw up.

My mother's voice came to me then. She towered over me, her hands on her hips, the flesh from her body sagging, dripping onto the carpet, her mouth set in a grimace, her eyes bearing into me, cutting my insides apart, her voice laced with disgust. She kicked me over and over again with her bare foot and taunted me and teased me. "Get a grip, Creepy Kid." *Kick. Kick.* "Creepy kid." *Kick.* "You're a fucking wreck." *Kick.*

I stopped when I came to a movie theater. A movie. Good. A movie would be smart. Go inside, relax and wait for the effects of the coke to ease out of my body. I bought my ticket, ran past the ticket taker, and vaulted up the four flights of stairs to the movie theater.

Being a city movie house, everything was built *up* since there was no room to spread *out*. I thought at the time such a design must have been created by a coke addict who just loved running up and down stairs, because at that moment I was Icarus, I was the winged god ready to face his death in a fiery pit.

I saw a bank of stairs in the far corner. Stairs. Yes! Up the stairs I ran, two at a time, my shirt now soaked with sweat, my mouth filled with the deep copper taste of the coke running down my throat. I moaned. The taste turned me on. Cocaine always kicked up after a bit, reminded you it was in your body. It was the drug that kept on giving and giving and giving.

I spotted my auditorium. I ran across the deserted floor and into the theater. It was dark. And cold. Very good. The air conditioning was on full blast. Just what I needed.

I ran down the aisle and nearly somersaulted into a chair in the far right-hand corner. I lifted my feet and willed them to touch the ground. I felt the hard concrete floor; I felt the chair pressing against my back. I looked up at the screen

as the previews ended, and it was then I saw an image that has been seared into my mind ever since.

Endless fields of amber-colored sand. Waves upon waves. It was like being in a dream filled with light and warmth and hope. A low hum emerged from the screen and as it did, the credits began. I was about to see *The English Patient*. Boring, pretentious and long. Ideal.

I put both of my hands into my lap, crossed my legs, and looked up at the screen. I relaxed into the chair and was enveloped by the moody music and the sand—lots and lots of sand. I was fully engrossed, and at the same time, I felt as if someone were taking a cheese grater and peeling off my skin.

Sweat freely poured from my face. My back was drenched. My heart thumped in my chest at an alarming rate. I had to move, I had to leave. I felt as if I were going to die.

I could see the red sign indicating an exit. Too far. I had to get out of the theater *now*. I turned around so fast I lost my balance and fell over. I saw an exit sign inches from my seat. Without a moment's hesitation, I jumped over the row of seats in front of me, pushed the bar to the door, ran down the cold, concrete steps, and nearly flew out of the theater.

I'm not sure how, but I ended up on a train as it rode over the center rail of the Brooklyn Bridge. As the train emerged from the underground tunnel and into the light of day, I relaxed. I felt my body unravel and realized how much tension I had been holding. I felt as if I had run the New York City Marathon. I hurt. My muscles hurt, my face hurt.

I turned to look at Manhattan retreating into the distance as we slowly inched toward Brooklyn. The sun was white-hot bright, and the seats on the train, despite the air conditioning, were scalding hot to the touch.

I eased back into my chair on the train. All I wanted to do was sleep, to forget the day had ever happened. I was exhausted in a way I'd never been exhausted before. It was tired, buried deep inside the marrow of my bones.

It was the drugs. I had done Ecstasy and cocaine. I had smoked more pot than I could remember and taken at least twenty shots at the bar. Of course, I felt ill. I had never felt as awful as in the movie theater, but I blamed that on the movie.

I closed my eyes and willed myself back into my tiny bunk bed in my room in Brooklyn. I was exhausted and couldn't see in front of me. I was tired. This life wasn't for me. I wanted to sleep and not wake up.

The train slowly screeched to a stop. My body stopped, swaying to the train's movement, and when it did, I knew I was doomed. The train's movement had lulled me. The rhythm had distracted me from the rising panic I was feeling.

I stared out of the filthy, graffiti-laden windows. I felt, with absolute certainty, that I was going to die. The realization was crisp and sharp. It cut through my fear and I gave into it. I closed my eyes, and I said aloud, "God, take me away. I'm done. I'm truly done."

"What a crock of shit."

I opened my eyes. A homeless woman sat across from me. She wore layer upon layer of dense clothing. The temperature outside was near 100 degrees, yet she was barely sweating. Her hat was made up entirely of Budweiser beer cans, her fingernails were cracked and yellowed, and her face was, well – refined. She sported a light shade of red lipstick and pale green eye shadow. She smiled at me, her eyes filled with a certain mischievous awareness. Her teeth were broken and dirty, like rows of ravaged tenement house buildings.

"You high?" she asked.

"What's it to you?"

"You're high."

The clouds overhead parted, and white light filled the car and pierced me in the eye. I cried out. The homeless woman laughed and laughed, slapped her thick pant leg and exposing her red, swollen tongue. "He's a vampire!"

I stood up. "Don't leave," she said. "Sit." She stared at me with a hurt look on her face, as if I had refused a tray of cookies. "I won't talk, don't worry."

I didn't know what to do. I wanted to leave, but I felt too weak. My clothes were soaked with sweat. If I tried to go to the next car, I knew I might throw up. I needed to sit down to let this feeling of doom pass.

"Breathe through your stomach," she said as she thumped her dirty hand on her stomach twice. "Through the stomach!"

I sat down and forced myself to breathe through my stomach. “Again,” she said, her voice softer but still angry, impatient. “God isn’t gonna take you today, you drughead. Breathe.”

We rode in silence all the way to Brooklyn. I kept looking over at her, but she never looked at me again. Instead, I chose to read an old *Wall Street Journal* magazine she had found in the garbage.

When the train came to a stop, and the doors opened next to her, I stood up, and she muttered, “Slowly does it.” I stepped off the train and ran as fast as I could to my apartment.

At the front door, I plunged my slick, sweaty hand into the soaking wet pocket of my jeans and pulled out my house keys. My hands shook. I couldn’t get the key into the lock. I finally did, after four tries, shoved open the door with my right foot, and dove inside, slamming the door behind me.

Up the spiral staircase in the corner of the living room, I ran and into my bedroom. I jumped into bed, wrapped the sheet around me, and pressed my head into the pillow.

I stayed like that for the rest of the day. I was afraid to move. I knew if I did, I would risk giving birth to the horrible feeling again. I couldn’t take the chance. I felt like an idiot curled up in a ball with my blanket pressed against my face, but I was sure this was the beginning of my slow descent into my mother’s madness. This was the reckoning. This was the time.

As the sun went down many, many hours later, the tension in my body dissipated slowly. Fourteen hours later, I crawled out of bed and stood alone in my room.

The area where I slept was so small I could reach out and touch the window without stretching. I peeled off my clothes. They were damp and smelled like wet dog. I shivered. My body ached such a deep, pulsing ache it was hard to put one foot in front of the other. I walked across the apartment hallway and into the bathroom, where I stood in the shower for twenty minutes under piping hot water. I cried until I wasn’t sure which were my tears or the water overhead. I finished, brushed my teeth, and walked back to my bathroom when I caught my reflection in a mirror hung near the opening of my room.

My face was white. Dark circles lined my eyes, and my hair, a furious mop of brown and a bit of grey, hung down over my face like a widow's weave.

I was death. I was illness. I was Edward Munch's favorite model.

I swallowed, and a dull ache traveled along the base of my tongue. I stepped up to the mirror and looked inside my mouth. I had bitten the tip of my tongue so severely it was nearly in two. The tip flapped up and down; the image of Ed and his gregarious dick swirling in the disco air haunted me. I grimaced.

I crawled back into my bed, but not before fishing out an item from one of the four boxes I had stored in the basement of the house. The four boxes contained all of my worldly possessions. Three of them were filled with books, and one contained things from my childhood.

I opened the box I wanted and pulled out a small Gund plush animal. I wasn't sure what the animal was. It looked like a cross between a small, sheepish bear and a precocious sea otter. I couldn't remember where I had gotten it, but it was from years prior, after I had fled Seattle, leaving my family far behind.

Up the stairs I walked back to my bedroom, the stuffed animal I had named Herme tucked under my armpit. I avoided looking at my reflection in the mirror, as I couldn't see what I had become.

I settled into my bed, Herme under the wing of my arm. I knew the worst was over. I had survived a night of too much debauchery, but I was better now. It had been a horrible night, but it was all over. I went to sleep, ready to face another day.

All would be fine, I told myself. Tomorrow would be fine.

Oh, if only I'd known.