

GUIDE
READERS' PICK
INSIDE

THE SUGAR FROSTED NUTSACK

A NOVEL

**MARK
LEYNER**

"America should treasure its rare, true original voices,
and Mark Leyner is one of them. So treasure him already,
you bastards!" —Gary Shteyngart

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MARK LEYNER



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There was never *nothing*. But before the debut of the Gods, about fourteen billion years ago, things happened without any discernable context. There were no recognizable patterns. It was all incoherent. Isolated, disjointed events would take place, only to be engulfed by an opaque black void, their relative meaning, their *significance*, annulled by the eons of entropic silence that estranged one from the next. A terrarium containing three tiny teenage girls mouthing a lot of high-pitched gibberish (like Mothra's fairies, except for their wasted pallors, acne, big tits, and T-shirts that read "I Don't Do White Guys") would inexplicably materialize, and then, just as inexplicably, disappear. And then millions and millions of years would pass, until, seemingly out of nowhere, there'd be, fleetingly...the smell of fresh rolls. Then several more billion years of inert monotony...and then...a houndstooth pattern EVERYWHERE for approximately 10^{-37} seconds...followed by, again, the fade to immutable blackness and another eternal interstice...and then, suddenly, what might be cicadas or the chafing sound of some obese jogger's nylon track pants...and then the sepia-tinged photograph from a 1933 *Encyclopedia Britannica* of a man with elephantiasis of the testicles...robots roasting freshly gutted fish at a river's edge...the strobe-like fulgurations of ultraviolet emission nebulae...the unmistakable sound of a koto being plucked...and then a toilet flushing. And this last enigmatic event—the flushing of a toilet—was followed by the most inconceivably long hiatus of them all, a sepulchral interregnum of several trillion years. And, as time went on, it began to seem less and less likely that another event would ever occur. Finally, nothing was taking place but the place. There was a definite room tone—that hum, that hymn to pure ontology—but that was all. And in this interminable void, in this black hyperborean stillness, deep in the farthest flung recesses of empty space, at that vanishing point in the infinite distance where parallel lines ultimately converge...two headlights appeared. And there was the sound, barely audible, of something akin to the *Mister Softee* jingle. Now, of course, it wasn't the *Mister Softee* truck whose headlights, like stars light-years in the distance, were barely visible. And it wasn't the *Mister Softee* jingle per se. It was the beginning of something—a few recursive, foretoking measures of music that were curiously familiar, though unidentifiable, and addictively catchy—something akin to the beginning of "Surry with the Fringe on Top" or "Under My Thumb" or "Tears of a Clown" or "White Wedding." And it repeated ad infinitum as those tiny twinkling headlights became imperceptibly larger and drew incrementally closer over the course of the million trillion years that it took for the Gods to finally arrive.

These drunken Gods had been driven by bus to a place they did not recognize. (It's almost as if they'd been on some sort of "Spring Break," as if they'd "gone wild.") At first, they were like frozen aphids. They were so out of it, as if in a state of suspended animation. It took them several more million years just to come to, to sort of "thaw out." The first God to emerge, momentarily, from the bus was called *El Brazo* ("The Arm"). Also known as *Das Unheimlichste des Unheimlichen* ("The Strangest of the Strange"), he was bare-chested and wore white/Columbia-blue polyester dazzle basketball shorts. He would soon be worshipped as the God of Virility, the God of Urology, the God of Pornography, etc. *El Brazo* leaned out of the bus and struck a contrapposto pose, his head turned away from the torso, an image endlessly reproduced in paintings, sculptures, temple carvings, coins, maritime flags, postage stamps, movie studio logos, souvenir snow globes, take-out coffee cups, playing cards, cigarette packs, condom wrappers, etc. His pomaded hair swept back into a frothy nap

of curls like the wake of a speedboat, he reconnoitered the void with an impassive, take-it-or-leave-it gaze, then scowled dyspeptically, immediately turned around, and returned to the bus, where he sullenly ensconced himself, along with the rest of the Gods, for another 1.6 million years. It's extraordinary that, among these sulking, hungover deities who chose to forever doze and fidget in a bus, there were several with enough joie de vivre to continue beatboxing that hypnotic riff for an eternity—that music that's been so persistently likened to a dance mix of the *Mister Softee* jingle. Perhaps it was a fragment of their alma mater's fight song. They did act, after all, like classmates, as if they'd grown up together in the same small town.

One of the first things the Gods did, once they sobered up and finally vacated that bus, was basically put things in order, make them comprehensible, provide context, institute recognizable patterns. (The Gods imposed coherence and meaning, one suspects, as an act of postbender penance.) And that spot in space where they'd fatefully decamped became consecrated forevermore as the celestial *downtown*, the capital of a very hip, but unforgiving, meritocracy. It was very much the Manhattan Project meets Warhol's Factory. And there was that chilly vibe of militant exclusivity, the cordon sanitaire, that velvet rope which segregated the Gods from everyone and everything else. From the outset, it was clear that these Gods had very rigid opinions about who *could* and who *couldn't* be part of their exclusive little clique. No socialites. No dilettantes. No one who was merely "famous for being famous." Just Gods. But their affect was so labile that, depending on your angle, they'd appear completely different from one instant to the next. It was like those lenticular greeting cards. There they'd be, ostensibly a group of elegantly accoutered eighteenth-century aristocrats, straight out of Watteau's rococo *Fête Galante* paintings, amorously cavorting in some sylvan glade with the lutes and the translucent parasols and the flying cupids...but if you shifted your vantage point ever so slightly, they'd look exactly like the members of some Japanese noise band smoking cigarettes backstage at All Tomorrow's Parties at Kutsher's Hotel in Monticello. One minute they'd have assumed the guise of a bunch of tan, well-heeled, ostentatiously casual CEOs chitchatting at the annual Allen & Company Sun Valley media conference...but then you'd tilt your head a bit, and they'd have metamorphosed into a little army of street urchins with matted hair and yellow eyes scavenging for food in garbage dumps, sucking on bags of glue. And because they were omniscient and so tight-knit, they could be very adolescent and pretentious in the way they flaunted their superiority. It wouldn't be unusual for a God to use Ningdu Chinese, Etruscan, Ket (a moribund language spoken by just five hundred people in central Siberia), Mexican Mafia prison code, Klingon dolphin echolocation clicks, ant pheromones, and honeybee dance steps—all in one sentence. It's the kind of thing where you'd be like, was that *really* necessary?

Everything we are and know comes from the Gods. From their most phantasmagoric dreams and lurid hallucinations, we derive our mathematics and physics. Even their most offhanded mannerisms and nonchalant, lackadaisical gestures could determine the fundamental physical and temporal structures of our world. There was once a birthday party for the God of Money, *Doc Hickory*, who was also known as *El Mas Gordo* ("The Fattest One"). Exhausted from feasting, El Mas Gordo fell asleep on his stomach across his bed. *Lady Rukia* (the Goddess of Scrabble, Jellied Candies, and Harness Racing), who'd been lusting after El Mas Gordo the entire night, crept stealthily into his bedroom, rubbed a squeaking balloon across the bosom of her cashmere sweater, and then waved it back and forth over his hairy back. The way the static electricity reconfigured the hair on his back would become the template for the drift of continental landmasses on earth. Another great example would be, of course, the God *Rikidozen*, also known as *Santo Malandro* ("Holy Thug"). Rikidozen was once absently tapping a Sharpie on the lip of a coffee mug, and the unvarying cadence of that tap-tap-tap

became the basis for the standard 124 beats-per-minute in house music. The Gods were the original (and ultimate) bricoleurs. They created almost everything from their own bodies. From their intestinal gas—their flatus—we get nitrous oxide, which we use today as a dental anesthetic and in our whipped cream aerosol cans (our “whippits”). From the silver-white secretions that crystallize in the corners of their eyes after a night’s sleep, we obtain lithium, which we use to make rechargeable batteries for our cellphones and laptops. Once the God named *Koji Mizokami* had a small teratoma—a tumor with hair and teeth—removed from one of his testicles. He took it home and fashioned it into the composer Béla Bartók. He went outside in order to fling him into the future. But he wasn’t sure into whose uterus (and into what epoch and milieu) he wanted to jettison the musical genius. Several Gods happened to be strolling by at that moment. They were the ones known as *The Pince-Nez 44s* or *Los Vatos Locos* (“The Crazy Guys”). Frequently, they had completely off-the-wall suggestions, but sometimes these actually turned out to be pretty decent ideas. “Why don’t you have him born to a family of racist Mormons?” one of them suggested. Mizokami looked down at the wriggling larval Bartók in the palm of his hand. “I’m not at all sure about that,” he said, in his languid drawl. And then someone else said, “Maybe it would be funnier if he were Joel Madden and Nicole Richie’s son? Or make him a Taliban baby.” (Eventually, of course, Mizokami-san decided to hurl Béla Bartók into the womb of a woman in Nagyszentmiklós, Austria-Hungary, in the 1880s.)

Generally, the proprietary realms of the Gods were organized and assigned in a very conscientious collegial manner. There’d usually be some taxonomic category that would ensure a high degree of structural and/or functional relatedness among the various domains that fell under a particular God’s purview. But, occasionally, the link between jurisdictions was so tenuous and slapdash that it smacke of reckless endangerment or criminal negligence. For instance, the giantess *C46*, the Goddess of Clear Thinking (i.e., *lucidity*) was, for a brief period, also the Goddess of Clear Skin! It’s said that at the end of a long, grueling day, *Shanice* (the very cute, unfailingly effervescent Goddess who functioned as a sort of traffic manager at meetings) noticed that no one had claimed Clear Skin, and she was like, “C46, since you already do Clear Thinking, how about taking this one?” And everyone was so fried at that point that they all just shrugged and acquiesced. On the first Wednesday of the next month, though, everyone realized that Clear Skin should have obviously gone to the God of Dermatology, *José Fleischman* (who was sometimes called *The Jew from Peru*). And, without objection, C46 courteously relinquished the realm to The Jew from Peru (who was also known as *The Valiant One* and *He Who Never Shrinks from Anything Pus-Filled*). The point here is that even these kinds of remedial decisions were almost always made by consensus. But sometimes there were disagreements over turf which would escalate into savage internecine conflicts among the Gods, intractable conflicts with ever-widening ramifications.

El Burbuja, the God of Bubbles—a stubby, pockmarked, severely astigmatic deity—originally just ruled over the realm of inflated globules. At first, everyone assumed he’d be satisfied as a kind of geeky “party God” whose dominion would be limited to basically balloons and champagne. And no one paid much attention when he published an almost impenetrably technical paper in some obscure peer-reviewed journal in which he claimed sovereignty over Anything Enveloping Something Else. He then named himself, in rapid succession, God of Ravioli, God of Kishkes, God of Piñatas, God of Enema Bags, God of Chanel Diamond Forever Bags, God of Balloon Angioplasty, and then God of Balloon Swallowers (the drug smugglers who swallow condoms full of drugs). This then enabled him to proclaim himself God of the Movie *Maria Full of Grace*, which gave him entrée not only into the movie industry but—by simply parsing words in that title—into the music business. He immediately became God of the Song “How Do You Solve a Problem Like Maria” and then claimed the entire

Rodgers and Hammerstein music catalogue as his own. This all happened, of course, millions of years before these songs were even written. A shrewd, uncannily prescient, and relentlessly enterprising businessman, El Burbuja quietly parlayed a series of discreet lateral “acquisitions”—kielbasa, snow globes, inflatable bounce houses, boba balls (the tapioca balls used in bubble tea), and soft gel encapsulation—into a vast empire of interlocking realms that included Asian magnesium smelting, automated slot machines, first-person shooter games, social networking websites, and iTunes—again eons before any of these things existed. If ever there were a God destined to appear on the cover of *Cigar Aficionado* magazine, it would be El Burbuja. Probably the most stunning example of how El Burbuja tirelessly maneuvered under the radar to expand his empire is when he proclaimed himself God of Those Blue *New York Times* Bags People Use to Pick Up Their Dogs’ Shit. The other Gods’ initial reaction to this was, predictably, one of complete befuddlement. Who’d want *that*? But El Burbuja was playing many moves ahead of the others. He quickly assumed the mantle of God of Dog God of New York, and God of Shit. Again, this is before there was ever such a thing as “New York” or “dogs” or even “shit.” (The Gods’ excrement is called “loot drops.” It’s a slurry of coltan—the metallic ore used today in many cellphones and laptop computers.) No one seemed to even notice or particularly care when he took the next logical step and made himself God of Times, because all that really entailed was track and field records and multiplex showtimes (e.g., 11:50 AM, 2:15 PM, 4:45 PM, 7:20 PM, 9:45 PM, 12:15 AM). But then El Burbuja, on a late Friday afternoon before a long holiday weekend—and as he’d been planning to do all along—lopped the “s” off “Times” and became the God of Time. It was a characteristically ingenious, some might say cynical, even unscrupulous, ploy, but once everyone realized that what had appeared to be a proofreading correction was actually a coup of epic proportions, it was too late—they were presented with a *fait accompli* and had no other choice than to acquiesce. And that is how this unprepossessing, chubby God with the bad skin and the weak eyes parlayed jurisdiction over bags of warm crap into irrefutable control over one of the fundamental dimensions in the universe, thereby making himself one of the most formidable Gods in the whole fucking pantheon! But even though El Burbuja had clearly finagled for himself the vast Realm of Time, the other Gods continued to indulge the astigmatic “Mogul Magoo” (as he came to be called) basically because he was *so* homely and *such* an obsessive workaholic, and they just found his insatiable acquisitiveness sort of...*cute*. They’d say, “Oh, that’s just how little Mogul Magoo rolls” or “Oh, that’s just Mogul Magoo being Mogul Magoo.” (And they knew, of course, that he was destined to become the tutelary divinity of plutocrats and rich, pampered celebrities.) Granted, sometimes the other Gods were like, “Magoo, what the fuck? Relax.” But no one ever really felt like begrudging him the fruits of his monomaniacal labor. It was something relatively mundane that caused Magoo to run afoul of the irascible El Brazo, who sometimes referred to Magoo as *Fräulein Luftblase* (“Miss Bubble”)—a taunting homophobic slur. Without any fanfare, one day, Magoo had asserted himself as the God of the Breast Implant and God of the Nutsack. He dutifully submitted his boilerplate rationale: Anything Enveloping Something Else. Just as a bubble is a globule of water that contains air, the scrotum is a pouch of skin and muscle that contains the testicles, and the breast implant is an elastomer-coated sac containing a thick silicone gel. Ergo, it’s perfectly logical and reasonable to conclude that both spheres fall within my purview. This completely infuriated El Brazo, who, as the God of Urology and the God of Pornography, considered the nutsack and the breast implant his inviolable domains. The antipathy that developed between these two Gods (and, subsequently, between Magoo and the Goddess *La Felina*) would have significant consequences throughout the age. El Brazo began to routinely, and very publically, threaten Magoo and his cohorts with liquidation in a sort of Night of the Long Knives. And Magoo began traveling around with a posse of “Pistoleras”—

half a dozen divine, ax-wielding mercenary vixens who were total fitness freaks with rock-hard bodies. Each of them had a venomous black mamba snake growing out of the back of her head, which she'd pull through the size-adjustment cutout on the back of her baseball cap. And this is the origin of today's fashion in which women gather their hair into a ponytail or a braid and allow it to hang through the hole in the backs of their caps.

The Gods used a drug called "Gravy," also known as *Pozole* ("stew"). Their drug use was heavy and appeared to be both ritualistic and recreational. At one time, it was considered to be what actually made the Gods deities, and there was speculation that consumption by human beings might bestow certain divine qualities on them. Gravy was originally thought to be a smokable version of the Vedic drug Soma and assumed to be hallucinogenic and derived from psilocybin mushrooms or *Amanita muscaria* (psychoactive basidiomycete fungus). Some have speculated that Gravy is a form of hallucinogenic borscht—a theory endorsed by such scholars as Mircea Eliade, Georges Dumézil, and University of Chicago Professor of the History of Religions Wendy Doniger. Today, though, many experts believe that Gravy is a solvent similar to what's found in glue, paint thinner, and felt-tip markers. This theory has gained considerable support among a wide range of prominent people, including TMZ's Harvey Levin, forensic pathologist Cyril Wecht, criminal defense attorney Mark Geragos, and professional beach volleyball player Misty May-Treanor. Before the imbibing of Gravy, ritual protocol required the recitation of a sacred oath, and then the guest would clink his golden chalice against that of his divine host and solemnly ask, "You gonna shoot that or sip it?" There are about fourteen Weight Watchers Points in a half-cup serving of the rich hallucinogenic beverage. Smokable Gravy—made by heating liquid Gravy and baking soda until small pinkish-white precipitates ("rocks") form—is more quickly absorbed into the bloodstream, reaching the brain in about eight seconds. (Side effects can include: Progeria, Necrotizing Fasciitis, Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy, Craniopagus Twins, Elephantiasis of the Testicles, Projectile Anal Hemorrhaging, and Gangrene of the Eyeballs.)

Yagyū—a God who was also known as *Dark Cuervo* ("Dark Raven") and *Fast-Cooking Ali*—created "Woman's Ass," which was considered his masterpiece. Nothing he'd done before prepared the other Gods for the stunning, unprecedented triumph that was "Woman's Ass." His previous accomplishments had been deliberately banal. He'd created the Platitudes, for instance. When the Gods first came to—once they'd finally recovered from whatever dissipated spree they'd been on—they came to with a jolt, pulsing with intensity and ambition. They worked nonstop, didn't sleep, their pupils were dilated, they were jittery, quivering with nervous tics, and they talked incessantly—they had this self-indulgent, hyperintellectual diarrhea of the mouth. Like, instead of just muttering "Fuck," a God who cut himself shaving would launch into an anguished soliloquy in the iambic tetrameter of John Milton's *Il Penseroso*. And the simplest, most perfunctory questions, like "Hey, how's it going?" would elicit long, recondite Spinozan disquisitions on "attributes" and "modes" and discursive, inferential perception. Fast-Cooking Ali was a very shy, introspective, solitary individual. So he created a series of stock phrases that more reticent, self-effacing Gods like himself could use in response to the query "Hey, how's it going?" These included "It's going," "Hangin' in there," "Same shit, different day," and "If you want to live, don't come any closer." Fast-Cooking Ali's bromides quickly became part of the standard repertoire, but he pretty much disappeared from the scene and became a recluse and no one after that knew what he was working on or if he was even working on anything. It was said that he was spending his days holed up in a room somewhere, by himself, smoking Gravy, muttering to himself, lost in masturbatory fantasies about loop quantum gravity and

supersymmetric particles. And then one day he emerged with “Woman’s Ass.” El Brazo was the first to see it. “That’s so fucking hot! It’s genius,” he exclaimed, immediately summoning the other Gods. There was considerable discussion about hair—how much, how little (final decision: none on the cheeks, some along the perineum, downy fuzz above the crack)—and the pigmentation of the skin around the anus (final decision: slightly darker for white women). Despite the great acclaim he received for “Woman’s Ass,” Fast-Cooking Ali dropped out of sight again. Although it would not become public knowledge for millions of years, he had begun a very secret, very intense affair with La Felina, the Goddess of Humility. La Felina would, over the course of time, have many relationships with mortal men. She has a heavy sexual thing for Hasidic and Amish guys, as well as anarcho-primitivists, including Theodore Kaczynski (the Unabomber). Sometimes she wears a Japanese schoolgirl sailor outfit. La Felina hates the rich and she hates celebrities. (She has recently tried to induce a deranged person to stalk and kill the designer Marc Jacobs.) El Brazo is the God who fills our bodies with desires that can never be satisfied. But La Felina is the Goddess responsible for making ugly women more erotic than beautiful women.

The God of Head Trauma (who was also, of course, the God of Concussions, the God of Dementia, the God of Alcoholic Blackouts, the God of Brainwashing, Implanted Thoughts, and Cultural Amnesia) was called *El Cucho* (“The Old Man”). This was a facetious epithet because El Cucho had a lustroously youthful appearance—a million-watt smile and a streaming surfer-boy mane of blond hair. He wore a tiger-skin loincloth. In the eternal schism between El Brazo and La Felina on one side versus Mogul Magoo and his snake-headed Pistoleras on the other, El Cucho (who was also known as “Kid Coma” and “XOXO”) was firmly in the El Brazo / La Felina camp. XOXO liked sitting around with circus performers and hockey players and boxers and plying them with drugged sherbet. He liked to mess with people’s minds—to make them forget things or put alien ideas in their heads. (Year after year, he was consistently voted both “Most Sadistic” and “Friendliest” God by his peers!) Once, he gave Pittsburgh Penguin center Evgeni Malkin a concussion during a game at Mellon Arena, and although Malkin’s body (his “mortal husk”) lay unconscious on the ice for about ten human-minutes, XOXO actually “kidnapped” Malkin’s soul and took it to his garish hyperborean hermitage miles beneath the earth’s surface in what is now Antarctica, where he kept it captive for two and a half God years. There was a suffocatingly sweet smell at the hermitage, as if Eggnog Febreze was being continuously pumped in through the ventilation system. XOXO served Malkin’s soul drugged sherbet which made Malkin’s soul woozy and disinhibited enough that it agreed to be dressed up in a U.S. Marines tank top and PVC diaper briefs. Then the two of them played a card game called snarples, and every so often XOXO would chastely kiss Malkin’s soul on the mouth. Then XOXO shampooed and cornrowed Malkin’s soul’s hair, and, using a sharp periodontal curette, he carved short secret phrases into the furrows on his scalp (like “Puppy Love” and “Book Club” and “New You”). It was creepy. Each time XOXO would kiss him, he’d exhale fervently into his mouth. It was really more like CPR than making out. XOXO’s breath was like mentholated Freon. And when Malkin finally came to on the ice at Mellon Arena, he pawed violently at his throat saying over and over again in Russian, “My uvula is frozen!” All Malkin could remember was being given a ticker tape parade. But then he realized with a shudder that it wasn’t ticker tape at all but the gossamer scales of his own molting mind that were falling all over the streets of Pittsburgh! XOXO also delighted in abducting legal proofreaders from midtown office buildings in the middle of the night and taking their souls to his remote, sweet-scented hermitage, where he’d keep them captive and toy with them for years. They’d wake up back in their office cubicles thinking they’d lost consciousness from anaphylactic allergic reactions to ingesting peanuts in candy bars they’d gotten out of the vending machines. XOXO had

once shown a poem he'd written to Shanice, the irrepressibly chipper Goddess of Management—the adorable one with the awesome organizational skill set—and her reaction was uncharacteristically negative. XOXO had literally asked for it, though. He had explicitly requested that Shanice not give him one of those glib “Oh, it's really great!” responses, but to take her time, read it over carefully, and provide him with a very honest critique. And he told her, furthermore, that the more unsparing the critique was, the more meaningful it would be to him, and that he was only showing the poem to her because he considered her the most trustworthy of all the Gods and he could depend on her, and only her, to be completely candid with him. What Shanice didn't realize at the time—although she would eventually—was that the offering of the poem was a gesture of seduction. Not that the content of the poem was seductive per se—it was not a “love poem” in any sense. The poem depicts a group of businessmen who are returning home from work one evening. On a lark, they diverge from their customary route and end up deep in the woods. They gang up on the “new guy” (someone who'd only recently been transferred to their division), and, in what appears to be a sort of hazing ritual, they tie him to a tree and whip him with his own belt. His pants fall to his ankles, and it's obvious that he's aroused. *But*—as the poem goes on to suggest—he's aroused not by the robust flagellation but because he sees an ineffably beautiful butterfly flit by. Everyone had always considered XOXO to be kind of frivolous. He actively pursued his hobby of snatching hockey players' souls and messing with their minds and what not, but he didn't seem to apply himself diligently to much of anything else. He came across as something of a dilettante and an underachiever. XOXO thought that the poem would show Shanice a more serious side and a more delicately registered sensibility than he was usually given credit for. Shanice had always assumed that XOXO was unequivocally gay—something confirmed, in her mind, by the homoerotic tenor of the poem. One could certainly discern an element of shame in the poem or at least a desire on the part of the poem's protagonist to displace or mitigate the cause of his arousal. And Shanice did, in fact, discern this strain of discomfort in the poem. She wasn't at all what she seemed either. And, in this way, she had a great deal in common with XOXO. They both felt underestimated by the other Gods. (It was Shanice's sense that the other Gods considered her to be affable and competent, but basically pedestrian.) Anyway, if Shanice had realized at the time that XOXO was offering her the poem to read and critique as a gesture of seduction, she probably would have finessed her evaluation a bit. But she didn't. And it was quite a blow. The incident made things tense between Shanice and XOXO, left them somewhat estranged, and undoubtedly influenced Shanice—whether she was conscious of it or not—to align herself with Mogul Magoo (on whom she soon developed an insane crush). It also left XOXO embittered and implacably hostile to anyone who ever tried to put his or her thoughts and feelings into words. And so XOXO, this resentful poet *manqué*, became the God who delights in spitefully snatching brilliant thoughts from people's minds and casting them into oblivion. When you're lying in bed, in that hypnagogic state, neither awake nor asleep, and you have a lovely idea that seems to evanesce almost as soon as you're conscious of it—that's XOXO snatching it away. And when you're high and you have an extraordinarily inspired and unprecedented idea and then you wake up the next day and have to glumly acknowledge how banal and derivative it actually was—that's also XOXO's doing. During the night he came down and sabotaged the idea, gutted it—leaving only the banal and derivative. He keeps a vast cache of stolen ideas in his hyperborean hermitage.

Why Do Gods Like Having Sex With Humans So Much?

For them it's a kind of slumming, rough trade, a *nostalgie de la boue* ("nostalgia for the mud"). And many of the Gods—including several of the *major* deities—feel that human beings' finite life expectancies and their comparatively limited intelligence simply make them SUPER-SEXY! These Gods find human existential angst—being aware that death is inevitable, but not knowing, at any given moment, exactly when or how it might occur—to be a total TURN-ON! They paradoxically find those very characteristics that so definitively subordinate human beings to the Gods—mortality, benightedness, and impotence—to be HOT, HOT! HOT!! And the very thought of abjectly defiling themselves—of *wallowing*—in all the pungent excretions and effluvia of the human body maddens them with desire. This is the good news. The bad news is that, for a human, having a sexual/romantic relationship with a God can be a daunting, traumatic, and even tragic experience. You have to be very careful! Gods are self-important. They tend to have ADD. They love to fuck with your head. Because they're immortal, they tend to be late all the time. And because they're omnipotent, they usually exhibit a complete lack of empathy. They are narcissistic and furiously self-absorbed. If they want to have sex with you, it doesn't really matter to them how you're feeling or what you're going through. So don't expect understanding or patience from a God just because you're getting your period or you have to study for your SATs or you're leaving the next day for a tour of duty in Afghanistan. And if a God does seem to evince some concern or betray any vulnerability, you have to be very skeptical because their behavior is frequently insincere and manipulative. And they're supermercurial and you have to always put up with their cryptic moods and petulant fatwas. And they can come and go (i.e., materialize and disappear) so that no one else can see them—which can make you feel very isolated from other people. Mi-Hyun, age twenty-nine, worked at a florist shop. She was *very* pretty. She had a pageboy with cute blunt-cut bangs. One day, *Bosco Hifikepunye*, the God of Miscellany (including Fibromyalgia, Chicken Tenders, Sports Memorabilia, SteamVac Carpet Cleaners, etc., etc.) espied Mi-Hyun as she smoked a Parliament Light outside the florist shop. He couldn't believe how HOT she was! And soon the God and his "Little Flower Girl" were having completely insane sex-a-thons. But, of course, Hifikepunye would arrive and depart invisibly, unbeknownst to anyone but Mi-Hyun. Mi-Hyun's neighbors—the old Dominican ladies—would always tease her: "You're a pretty girl, Mi-Hyun. When are you going to get a boyfriend?" And Mi-Hyun would be like, "I have boyfriend. He visits me every night." "But we never see him," the old ladies would reply. "We never see *anyone* visit you." And soon they started to think that Mi-Hyun was crazy. At first, it didn't really bother Mi-Hyun. She was too happy. The God, Hifikepunye, was GREAT in bed! He'd anoint her clitoris with Witches' Flying Ointment (aka *Lamiarum Unguenta* or "Witches' Unguent"), a mixture of Gravy, belladonna, chimney soot, clove oil, and the fat of an unbaptized child. Once he made her fifty feet tall and put the mummified body of King Tutankhamen into her ass as she came. She liked that so much that he turned Lenin's corpse and Ted Williams's cryonically preserved head into anal sex toys too! These are things that, of course, Mi-Hyun would excitedly tell her coworkers at the florist shop the next morning, but they would just shake their heads and say, "Mi-Hyun, you need to see a psychiatrist." Soon Mi-Hyun was let go from the florist shop. And she became alienated from her neighbors. And, worst of all, the Goddess Lady Rukia (Scrabble, Jellied Candies, Harness Racing), who coveted Hifikepunye and was jealous of his mortal paramour, gave Mi-Hyun periodontal disease so she'd have bad breath and bleeding gums and be less alluring to the God. Sure enough, Hifikepunye lost interest in her and stopped coming around. (One Christmas, he felt guilty and put a winning Pick 6 Lotto number into or

of her dreams. But XOXO made her forget it as soon as she woke up.) Heartbroken, lonely, penniless and now dying from the high levels of bacterial endotoxins that her infected gums had released into her bloodstream, Mi-Hyun lay across the tracks at the West Side Rail Yards one freezing night and waited for a freight train to end her misery....She was picked up by the police and brought to the Emergency Room at Bellevue Hospital where she was admitted with a fever of 104 degrees, refractor hypotension, tachypnea, and a white blood cell count of 14,000 cells/mm³. She was immediately administered oxygen, fluids, and antibiotics and transferred to the ICU where she was given an APACHE II score of 25 and diagnosed with severe sepsis. She was put on norepinephrine and a continuous infusion of piperacillin-tazobactam with aminoglycoside. Three weeks later, it was determined that she was healthy enough to be transferred to the psychiatric unit. After telling psychiatrists and nurses about her sexual liaisons with the God Bosco Hifikepunye and about how he made her fifty feet tall and used Ted Williams's cryonically preserved head as an anal sex toy and about how XOXO, the God of Dementia and Implanted Thoughts, had made her forget the winning Pick 6 Lotto number that Hifikepunye had hidden in her dreams and about how Lady Rukia, the Goddess of Scrabble and Jellied Candies, in a jealous rage, had given her periodontal disease that eventually developed into endotoxemia and sepsis...she was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia and put on 15 mg per day of the antipsychotic drug Zyprexa. When she failed to respond to the medication (i.e., when she continued to insist upon the veracity of her stories about the Gods), she was given electroconvulsive therapy four times a week for the following several months. And although this resulted in severe retrograde amnesia (she no longer has *any* memories of her parents or her childhood), her memory of being fifty feet tall and fucking a God remains vividly intact. And this memory, like a single calligraphic stroke on the white page of her erased mind, caused a dreamy smile to permanently settle across the catatonic impassivity of her face. XOXO had ineradicably inscribed the memory in Mi-Hyun's mind at the behest of La Felina (who detests the vain, the rich, the celebrated and champions the humble, the indigent, the anonymous, the unknown and inaccessible, the marginalized, the deranged, the antimodernists, the anarcho-primitivists, the fanatical Luddites, the bedraggled, plump, sweaty working-class women with hairy pussies, etc.). The Gods glorify chosen mortals ("the elect") by having XOXO ineradicably inscribe in their minds the story of the Gods. Now this particular story brings up a very interesting point about the Gods and their complex and often opaque relationships. Why would XOXO ineradicably inscribe into the mind of a mortal woman an amorous memory about Bosco Hifikepunye (who was also sometimes known as *Cara de Papa* ("Potato Face"))? After all, wasn't XOXO aligned with the El Brazo / La Felina / Fast-Cooking Ali axis, which generally contended against the Mogul Magoo / Shanice / Lady Rukia / Hifikepunye camp? Yes, but although the Gods' roiling antipathies and interpersonal feuds were genuine and their larger schisms intractable and polarizing, they constituted, in the grand scheme of things, a kind of "play." The Gods disported themselves by endlessly acting out their essential natures, the affirmation of their own wills and the fulfillment of their own desires—this "sport" perpetually reproducing (as it inadvertently) the harsh patterns and eternal recurrences of human life. The settlement of divine differences inevitably results in human collateral damage for which the Gods feel absolutely no responsibility or remorse. But the bonds of kinship among them are indestructible. And their protocols—their lordly code of precedence and etiquette vis-à-vis one another—as inscrutable as it will forever remain to us, is scrupulously observed, without dissent, by them. When, by some unspoken consensus, the Gods determine to glorify a chosen mortal by having XOXO ineradicably inscribe in his or her mind the story of the Gods, it's done, regardless of whomever's proxy or fuck-buddy that mortal might have been. Just as when, by some unspoken consensus, the Gods determined one day that their

Belle Époque was over and that it was time to disperse for a while, for each God and Goddess to go home or her own way.

During the Belle Époque—that period of time, about fourteen billion years ago, after the Gods were delivered by bus from some sort of “Spring Break” during which they are said to have “gone wild”—the Gods put things in order, made them comprehensible, provided context, imposed coherence and meaning, i.e., they created the world as we know it today. But although, as it’s been said, they abide by a stern, hieratic protocol, these Gods—Rikidozen, Los Vatos Locos, José Fleischman, The Pistoleras, etc.—when viewed from a certain perspective, can seem like harebrained cartoon characters lurching haphazardly from one debacle to another, motivated as much by mischievousness and perversity as anything resembling intent or design. For instance, most of the butt-calls that people make today are the result of bored Gods just fucking around. And a lot of the weird, unexplained things that happen to people in Florida are the work of the Gods. In a Gravy-fueled tantrum one night in a Pensacola Motel 6, the Dwarf Goddess *La Muñeca* (“The Doll”) turned her mortal girlfriend Francesca DiPasquale, a Chief Warrant Officer in the U.S. Navy, into a macadamia nut, then a jai alai ball, and then into 100,000 shares of Schering-Plough stock. How credible did Pensacola Chief of Police Ellis Moynihan consider speculation that a lesbian Dwarf Goddess high on a smokable form of hallucinogenic borscht called “Gravy” might have turned the missing DiPasquale into Schering-Plough stock? In other words—was Moynihan one of the *elect*, one of the *illuminati*? Unfortunately, we’ll never know. Two weeks after DiPasquale disappeared, Moynihan died of anaphylactic shock from a severe allergic reaction to peanuts in a vending machine candy bar. Strange, isn’t it? Moynihan had never previously shown *any* symptoms of even a mild sensitivity to peanuts. In fact, he *loved* peanuts and consumed them in such quantities that his coworkers in the squad room had begun referring to him as *El Hombre Elefante* (“The Elephant Man”). (Although, perhaps, as Desk Sergeant Nate Seabrook confided with a nudge and a wink, that nickname actually derived from the massive plexiform neurofibroma that obscured half of Moynihan’s face.) Stranger still—when officers looked frantically for the epinephrine auto-injector in the emergency first-aid kit, they found that someone had replaced it with a whippet, a small cartridge of nitrous oxide (aka “Laughing Gas”). A taunting cosmic joke? Yeah, maybe. But what does this wild oscillation between the sublime (e.g., the creation of musical harmony, the electromagnetic spectrum, prime numbers and the Riemann Zeta Function, etc.) and the gratuitously sadistic (e.g., giving someone a grotesquely disfiguring facial tumor) reveal to us about the Gods? *La Muñeca* was the Goddess of Architecture—she designed some of the most spectacular of the Gods’ hyperborean hermitages, in addition to the huge biomorphic resin and silicone dining table for the Hall of the Slain that’s considered as radical today as it was eleven billion years ago when she first impulsively sketched the design on a napkin at a club! Doesn’t sabotaging a first-aid kit in a Pensacola, Florida, police station so that someone suffocates to death, someone whose only offense seems to have been suspecting that you turned your girlfriend into a jai alai ball when you were high—doesn’t this, in addition to being mind-bogglingly petty and vindictive, seem like a colossal waste of time for the Goddess of Architecture? Well, first of all, a God would contend, you can’t waste something of which you have an inexhaustible supply. And secondly, since anything a God does is an expression of that God’s essential nature and thus imparts meaning and transfigures the manifold totality of the real, gradations of significance don’t exist—everything is equally important.

Think of the sweetest, most wonderful things you’ve ever experienced in your life...just randomly off the top of your head...things as ineffably sublime as the beautiful butterfly which aroused the businessman in XOXO’s poem....Now, make a list. For instance:

- It's 1960 in Jersey City and you're falling asleep in your mom's lap on a Hudson Boulevard bus ~~to the metronomic cadence of the windshield wipers and the sound of the tires on the rainy street~~ and sitting all around you are nuns and stooped gray men in fedoras.
- Egg-drop soup and egg rolls at the Jade Restaurant in Journal Square, Jersey City.
- The gurgle of watercoolers and the pungent aroma of legal accordion folders in the supply room at 26 Journal Square.
- Mid-1960s, late afternoon, drinking Yoo-hoo with your dad at the driving range, and then, later that night, sitting in front of the TV with him and the intro for *Combat!* comes on ("*Combat!* Starring Vic Morrow and Rick Jason"), and your dad offers you a stick of Black Jack gum.
- Eating tea sandwiches with your mom at the Bird Cage in Lord & Taylor, in Millburn, New Jersey.
- The first movie scenes that gave you a hard-on: when seaman John Mills (played by Richard Harris) gets flogged with a cat-o'-nine-tails in *Mutiny on the Bounty* (also Harris's O-Kee-Pa suspension initiation ritual in *A Man Called Horse*); and when Candace Hilligoss gets out of the bathtub in *Carnival of Souls* (to creepy organ music), also the scene where Candace Hilligoss tries different stations on the car radio (but can only get creepy organ music), and the scene where Candace Hilligoss takes her clothes off in the dressing room at the department store (to creepy organ music); and also when Martine Carol emerges from her bathtub in *Lucrece Borgia* (aka *Sins of the Borgias*), and also, in the same movie, when she's whipped by her brother, Cesare (played by Pedro Armendáriz).
- That moment in the early '90s when there were three made-for-TV movies about Amy Fisher: *The Amy Fisher Story* (Drew Barrymore), *Amy Fisher: My Story* (Noelle Parker), and *Casualties of Love: The Long Island Lolita Story* (Alyssa Milano); and then, soon, Tonya Harding and Jeff Gillooly's "Wedding Video" sex tape came out.
- That total goose bump moment in the Pet Shop Boys song "What Have I Done to Deserve This?" when Dusty Springfield starts to sing ("Since you went away, I've been hanging around / I've been wondering why I'm feeling down").
- In 2004, the long-awaited pedestrian bridge over Kennedy Boulevard (formerly Hudson Boulevard) links the East Campus and the West Campus of St. Peter's College in Jersey City.
- Nice and drunk on Chivas Regal, eating ravioli, first heavy snow falling outside, fat girl at the bar (nice and drunk too) smiles at you.

Each of these numinous moments, these epiphanies, is *of the Gods, a manifestation, a Godding (Götterung)*, and in each we are able to unmistakably discern the hand of a specific God. Mogul Magoo's fingerprints are all over those egg rolls at the Jade in Journal Square. And, surely, we can identify, in the pedestrian bridge that spans Kennedy Boulevard, linking the two campuses of St. Peter's College, the animating spirit of La Muñeca. And who else could have been behind the unprecedented phenomenon of Amy Fisher and Tonya Harding but La Felina, the fanatical champion of unsublimated passion and base motives, who glories in authentic intensities like lust, jealousy, and vengeance? The Fisher/Harding upheaval seemed to augur an astonishing revolution in the sociology of glamour—the erotic exaltation of the homely, unscrupulous, working-class girl. But it was so short-lived as to actually be a last gasp, because reality entertainment almost immediately reverted to a depressingly predictable perversion of all that, exalting instead the Hilton/Richie/Kardashian axis of "beautiful" celebuitantes. This development so infuriated La Felina that, at one point, she was about to unleash a hybrid of Charles Manson and Pol Pot on America to completely purge it of every single

“beautiful” celebuntante when Fast-Cooking Ali dissuaded her at the very last minute, not because he was against the idea but because they were incredibly late to something, and La Felina—who exalts the physically deformed and the mentally unbalanced and the sans-culottes and the scum of the earth and who wet her pants during the September Massacres of 1792—decided to shelve the plan for another time.

By some unspoken consensus, the Gods determined one day that their Belle Époque was over and that it was time to disperse for a while, for each God and Goddess to go his or her own way. This was the Diaspora of the Gods. Several stayed in the vicinity of the Gods’ original “bus stop,” which experts have speculatively situated in the Abell 1835 Galaxy, some 13 billion light-years from Earth, while others place it in the Markarian 421 Galaxy, which is located in the constellation Ursa Major, a mere 360 million light-years away. Some Gods (e.g., El Brazo), of course, moved into Versailles-like corals and onyx palaces and sumptuous frangipani-scented hermitages miles underground in what is now Antarctica. Los Vatos Locos submerged themselves in a peat bog in Denmark for several million years. While some pursued esoteric, purely theoretical existences in strange, impalpable, zero-dimensional realms, others chose drab, quotidian lives (à la Jenny from the block) in small cities in the Midwest. Mogul Magoo, Shanice, and the Pistoleras inhabited the lush mountains of the Gondwana supercontinent. Lady Rukia and Doc Hickory lived on a cul-de-sac in Chula Vista, California. The lovers La Felina and Fast-Cooking Ali—both avatars of humility and self-denial—shrunk themselves down to about three micrometers tall (the size of a typical yeast cell) and lived in the anal scent-gland of a capybara named *Dawson* in the remote Caura forest in southern Venezuela. And then, one day in 1973, by some unspoken consensus, the Gods determined that their Diaspora was over and that they would all reconvene and, from here on in, occupy the top floors of the world’s tallest and most opulent skyscraper. Thus began a nomadic period during which the Gods constantly moved, en masse, from what had become the former tallest-building-in-the-world to the latest tallest building-the-world. So, in the summer of 1973, the Gods and Goddesses all moved into the top floors of the Sears Tower (now known as the Willis Tower) in Chicago, Illinois. They then relocated, in 1998, to the Petronas Twin Towers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; the Taipei 101 in Taiwan, in 2004; the Shanghai World Financial Center in China, in 2008; and finally, in 2009, the Burj Khalifa in the Business Bay district of Dubai, United Arab Emirates. The Burj Khalifa is 2,717 feet tall. And this is where the Gods currently reside.

The Sugar Frosted Nutsack is the story of a man, a mortal, an unemployed butcher, in fact, who lives in Jersey City, New Jersey, in a two-story brick house that is approximately twenty feet tall. This man is the hero IKE KARTON. The epic ends with Ike’s violent death. If only Ike had used for his defense “silence, exile, and cunning.” But that isn’t Ike. Ike is the Warlord of his Stoop. Ike is a man who is “singled out.” A man marked by fate. A man of Gods, attuned to the Gods. A man anathematized by his neighbors. A man beloved by La Felina and Fast-Cooking Ali, and a man whose mind is ineradicably inscribed by XOXO. Ike’s brain is riddled with the tiny, meticulous longhand of the mind-fucking God XOXO, whose very name bespeaks life’s irreconcilable contradictions, symbolizing both *love* (hugs and kisses) and *war* (the diagramming of football plays).

What will give us goose bumps and make us teary-eyed when, in the end, Ike dies? It’s the same thing that gave us goose bumps and made us teary-eyed when we heard Dusty Springfield sing “Since you went away, I’ve been hanging around / I’ve been wondering why I’m feeling down” in the song “What Have I Done to Deserve This?” It’s the same thing that makes all pop music so heartbreaking.

Even when Miley Cyrus sings “So I put my hands up, they’re playin’ my song / The butterflies fly away / I’m noddin’ my head like ‘Yeah!’ / Movin’ my hips like ‘Yeah!’” in her song “Party in the U.S.A.” It’s that chirping mirth against a backdrop of despair, that juxtaposition of blithe optimism against all the crushing brutalities and inadequacies of life. The image of an ineffably beautiful butterfly flitting by the shattered windows of a dilapidated, abandoned factory is not so poignant because it highlights the indomitable life force. To the contrary, the butterfly (and the pop song) is like a PowerPoint cursor; it’s there to whet our perception of and strengthen our affinity for what’s moribund, for what’s always dying before our eyes. Loving the moribund is our way of signaling the dead from this shore: “We are your kinsmen...”

When Ike dies, at the hands of the ATF snipers or Mossad assassins or Interpol agents, or is beset by a swarm of nano-drones (depending on which story you choose to believe), he dies with a metaphysical coquettishness that befits a true hero, greeting his violent demise with silly, sweet, uninhibited laughter. All the Gods are suddenly talking at once; it’s this Babel, this incomprehensible cacophony, that just degenerates into white noise. And then it’s as if he’s stepped into an empty elevator shaft on the top floor of the world’s tallest building, and as he plummets down, he whistles the *Mister Softee* jingle—“those recursive, foretokening measures of music; that hypnotic riff”—over and over and over and over again to himself...

A hero.

1.

*What subculture is evinced by **Ike**'s clothes and his shtick, by the non-Semitic contours of his nose and his dick, by the feral fatalism of all his loony tics—like the petit-mal fluttering of his long-lashed lids and the **Mussolini** torticollis of his Schick-nicked neck, and the staring and the glaring and the daring and the hectoring, and the tapping on the table with his aluminum wedding ring, as he hums those tunes from his childhood albums and, after a spasm of **Keith Moon** air-drums, returns to his lewd mandala of Italian breadcrumbs?*

So begins the story of **Ike Karton**, a story variously called throughout history *Ike's Agony*, *T.G.I.F. (Ten Gods I'd Fuck)*, and *The Sugar Frosted Nutsack*. This is a story that's been told, how many times?—over and over and over again, essentially verbatim, with the same insistent, mesmerizing cadences, and the same voodoo tapping of a big clunky ring against some table.

Every new improvisational flourish, every editorial interpolation and aside, every ex post facto declaration, exegetical commentary and meta-commentary, every cough, snuffle, and hiccough on the part of the rhapsode is officially subsumed into the story, and is then required in each subsequent performance. So, for instance, the next time *The Sugar Frosted Nutsack* is recited, the audience will expect that the sentence “Every new improvisational flourish, every editorial interpolation and aside, every ex post facto declaration, exegetical commentary and meta-commentary, every cough, snuffle, and hiccough on the part of the rhapsode is officially subsumed into the story, and is then required in each subsequent performance” be included in the recitation, and if it's not, they'll feel—and justifiably so—that something vital and integral has been left out.

The audience will, in fact, demand that the sentence “So, for instance, the next time *The Sugar Frosted Nutsack* is recited, the audience will expect that the sentence ‘Every new improvisational flourish, every editorial interpolation and aside, every ex post facto declaration, exegetical commentary and meta-commentary, every cough, snuffle, and hiccough on the part of the rhapsode is officially subsumed into the story, and is then required in each subsequent performance’ be included in the recitation, and if it's not, they'll feel—and justifiably so—that something vital and integral has been left out” *also* be included in the recitation. And also the sentence that begins “The audience will in fact, demand that the sentence ‘So, for instance, the next time *The Sugar Frosted Nutsack* is recited, the audience will expect that the sentence “Every new improvisational flourish...,”” etc. And also the sentence that begins “And also the sentence that begins...” And also the sentence that begins “And also the sentence that begins ‘And also the sentence that begins...’” Et cetera, et cetera.

To a critical degree, this infinite recursion of bracketed redundancies is what gives *The Sugar Frosted Nutsack* its peculiarly numinous and incantatory quality. Everything *about* it becomes *it*.

Keep in mind that the original story (what we've gleaned from cave walls, cuneiform on clay tablets, and papyrus fragments) was only one paragraph long, consisting in its entirety of: *What subculture is evinced by **Ike**'s clothes and his shtick, by the non-Semitic contours of his nose and his dick, by the feral fatalism of all his loony tics—like the petit-mal fluttering of his long-lashed lids and the **Mussolini** torticollis of his Schick-nicked neck, and the staring and the glaring and the daring and the hectoring, and the tapping on the table with his aluminum wedding ring, as he hums those tunes from his childhood albums and, after a spasm of **Keith Moon** air-drums, returns to his lewd mandala of Italian breadcrumbs?*

For hundreds, even thousands, of years, this was all there was to the “epic” story of **Ike**, the 5'7" unemployed butcher, incorrigible heretic, and feral dandy who slicked his jet-black hair back with perfumed pomade and dyed his armpit hair a light chestnut color and who was dear to the Gods (themselves ageless, deathless).

Then, sometime circa 700 B.C., the subhead **Ike Always Keeps It Simple and Sexy** was added. And over the ensuing centuries, as this was told and retold, and with the accretion of new material with each successive iteration, the complete story that we all know today as *The Sugar Frosted Nutsack* came into being.

Don't expect soaring “epic” rhetoric from the 5'7" forty-eight-year-old **Ike Karton**. **Ike**'s first extended speech wholly concerns itself with the mundanity of breakfast. (“I can't decide what to have for breakfast today. I don't want something *breakfasty*—that's the problem. You know what I'd really like? A shawarma and a malt. But you can't find good shawarma in this fuckin' town now that it's full of Jews and Freemasons...I'm *serious!* So I'm either gonna have a pastrami and sliced beef tongue with cole slaw and Russian dressing on rye and a Sunkist orange soda, or maybe just a big bowl of Beefaroni and some chocolate milk or something.”) He's an unassuming, plain-spoken (albeit delusional and anti-Semitic) man. He speaks with the air of a hero accustomed to—even weary of—fame (even though he's completely unknown outside the small Jersey City neighborhood of attached and identical two-story brick homes where he's considered an unstable and occasionally menacing presence—although it must be added that women overwhelmingly find him extremely charming and sexy, and many suspect that **Ike** playacts his indefensible anti-Semitism only to make himself a more loathsome pariah on his block, i.e., to make himself even *more* charming and sexy).

As you hear this or read it, the God **XOXO** is indelibly inscribing it into your brain. But **XOXO** is a puzzling figure. It's not possible to characterize him as “good” or “bad”—these terms are meaningless when applied to the Gods. He's mischievous—a trickster. Though frequently innocuous or merely “naughty,” his meddling can cause enormous inconvenience and suffering, i.e., it can be wicked in its consequences. And it certainly seems as if he often acts under the compulsion of his own ancient grievances—primarily the humiliation he suffered when the Goddess **Shanice** criticized his poem about the businessman who became so terribly aroused when he was flogged in the woods by some of his colleagues. Like some disturbed stenographer, interjecting his own thoughts into the court record, **XOXO** will constantly try to insinuate his own lurid “poetry” into this story. For instance, you will soon come upon the unfortunate passage “Pumping her shiksa ass full of hot Jew jizz.” Now that may be an appropriate phrase for some **Philip Roth** novel, but it has no place in *The Sugar Frosted Nutsack*. This is a perfect example of a gratuitous interpolation on the part of **XOXO**. This is **XOXO**—the embittered poet manqué—trying to ruin the book, trying to give the book Tourette's, trying to kidnap the soul of the book and ply it with drugged sherbet. And make no mistake about it—he *will* try to kidnap the soul of the book and ply it with drugged sherbet.

You can actually help preserve the integrity of *The Sugar Frosted Nutsack*. You can help wrest

control of the story back from **XOXO**. When you come upon a patently adventitious phrase, one that can, with a reasonable degree of certainty, be attributed to **XOXO**, like “Pumping her shiksa ass full of hot Jew jizz,” you can ward off the meddlesome mind-fucking God with the rapid staccato chant of “**Ike, Ike, Ike, Ike, Ike!**” It should sound like **Popeye** laughing, or like **Billy Joel** in “Movin’ Out (Anthony’s Song)” — “But working too hard can give you / A heart attack, ack, ack, ack, ack, ack.” It’s similar to that moment when, after **Captain Hook** has poisoned **Tinkerbell**, **Peter Pan** asks the audience to clap their hands if they believe in fairies, or when, in *The Tempest*, **Prospero** beseeches the audience, in the play’s epilogue, to “Release me from my bands / With the help of your good hands....As you from crimes would pardoned be, / Let your indulgence set me free.” But remember, when you chant “**Ike, Ike, Ike, Ike, Ike!**” to fend off the spiteful interpolations of **XOXO**, it absolutely has to sound like **Popeye** laughing or like **Billy Joel** in “Movin’ Out (Anthony’s Song),” or it won’t work.

2.

Each section of *The Sugar Frosted Nutsack* is called a “session.” The sessions were produced—over the course of hundreds, even thousands, of years—by nameless, typically blind men high on ecstasy or ketamine, sipping orange soda from a large hollowed-out gourd or a communal bucket or a jerrycan. The brand of orange soda traditionally associated with *The Sugar Frosted Nutsack* is Sunkist.

The first session, the ninety-six-word paragraph beginning with the phrase “*What subculture is evinced by Ike’s clothes and his shtick, by the non-Semitic contours of his nose and his dick*” is considered the only original session. Everything else is considered a later addition to, or a corruption of, that original session. But if one were to recite or perform only the original session without all the later additions and corruptions, the audience would feel—and justifiably so—cheated. And they would probably feel completely justified in killing and ritualistically dismembering and cannibalizing the blind, drug-addled bard. At the very least, they’d demand their money back.

Some experts have gone so far as to propose the hypothesis that that “original” ninety-six-word paragraph is itself an addition and a corruption, and that the only true, historically valid version of *The Sugar Frosted Nutsack* (the urtext) is the four-word phrase “The Sugar Frosted Nutsack.” They surmise that blind men high on ecstasy, seated in a circle, and sipping orange soda from a jerrycan would chant the words “The Sugar Frosted Nutsack” over and over and over again, for hours upon hours, usually until dawn. As time went on, a stray word or phrase would be appended, resulting, eventually, in the ninety-six-word paragraph now generally accepted as part of the first session, under the subtitle: **Ike Always Keeps It Simple and Sexy.**

The Sugar Frosted Nutsack was never actually “written.” A recursive aggregate of excerpts, interpolations, and commentaries, it’s been “produced” through layering and augmentation, repetition, and redundancy. Composition has tended to more closely resemble the loop-based step sequencing we associate with Detroit techno music than with traditional “writing.”

3.

Session One Is All Wrong

You can clearly see in the tabloid style of the First Session, with its boldface names and the breathless, staccato, exclamatory sentences (e.g., *He's wearing a hot little white wifebeater! It works for his body and he goes for it! It exaggerates his ripped torso—those monster pecs and sick, big-ass pipes!*), an attempt to hyperbolize **Ike** and his wife, **Ruthie**, both of whom are unusually reserved people. It's a distorted depiction that makes them appear more glamorous and significantly more scandalous (and inane) than they actually are (were). For instance, the idea that **Ruthie**, in public, would put her hand down the back of her husband's sweatpants and tickle his butt-crack (*Like she's checking his prostate!* cackles the First Session) is absolutely ludicrous. So is the notion of the relatively modest **Ruthie** (*She's an anarcho-primitivist too!*) parading around on her front lawn, wearing a transparent "prairie dress" and no underwear. And so, most egregiously, is the idea that **Ike** would build some garishly obscene statue of the Goddess **La Felina** (*naked, dildo-impaled!*), when it's so much more likely that he'd construct something elegant and self-contained to propitiate the Goddess, something akin to one of **Joseph Cornell's** enchanting little shadow boxes. But, obviously, generations of blind, spaced-out, Sunkist-swilling bards who—over hundreds, if not thousands, of years—mixed and remixed the First Session felt obliged to pander to an audience which prized the salacious over the subtle and preferred their heroes loony and rotten to the core. Or **XOXO** sabotaged the First Session. (One can't discount, even for a second, the possibility that **XOXO** kidnapped the First Session and plied it with drugged sherbet.) Over the years, a number of experts including **William Arrowsmith**, **Richmond Lattimore**, **Bernard Knox**, and most recently the Dutch classical scholar, expert on circumpolar populations, and milliner **Pym Voorjans**, aka **DJ Doorjamb**, whose wife has a spectacular big-ass ass (courtesy of **Fast-Cooking Ali**), have each provided incisive analyses of one of the most glaring errors in the First Session: **Ike** raising his voice (*"And they're gonna eat my fuckin' Italian breadcrumb mandala!" he screams with mock consternation, then crack up...*). **Ike** only speaks in a whisper. In point of fact, he is said to be frequently inaudible. **Ike** is reticent and sometimes abjectly bashful. He is so self-effacing that one wonders where his galvanic charisma, his *magnificence*, derive from. Aside from this erroneous characterization of **Ike** screaming in the First Session, there are only two instances in *The Sugar Frosted Nutsack* in which **Ike** actually raises his voice above a whisper: in Session Nine, when he eulogizes his late father and threatens to destroy the synagogue, and in the Final Session when he chants the entirety of *The Sugar Frosted Nutsack* to his half-divine infant grandson, **Colter Dale**—a recitation that, of course, includes this paragraph about the only instances during which **Ike** actually raises his voice above a whisper. Had **Ike** neglected to include this paragraph—if for no other reason than the fact that, as he was chanting, the ATF or the FBI or the British SAS or the Dutch Korps Commandotroepen or (most likely) the Mossad was firing 3-Methylfentanyl (the aerosolized fentanyl derivative that Russian Spetsnaz force used against Chechen separatists in the 2002 Moscow theater hostage crisis) into his modest, brick, two-story *hermitage* in Jersey City, causing **Ike** to consider, under the circumstances, a slightly abridged version—**Colter Dale** would have felt—and justifiably so—cheated. Also, **Ike** scrupulously eschews the use of profanity, although, unfortunately, you wouldn't know that from the First Session. He would never say, for instance, "my fuckin' Italian breadcrumb mandala!" or "you can't find good shawarma in this fuckin' town now that it's full of Jews and Freemasons." He can be wrenchingly graphic in his hypersexualized flirtations (even this, though, is invariably delivered in his gentle, barely audible murmur), and his truculent asides to other men can be phantasmagorically violent, but

they're always discreetly conveyed *sotto voce* into the ear of his antagonist, and the language, as bellicose as it may be, is never vulgar or profane. **Ike**'s a Taurus and an autodidact, and his diction tends to be Victorian, actually (think **Matthew Arnold** and **Thomas Hardy**). The "real" **Ike** is such a sweetheart, such a pussycat in a way...although he's capable of unprovoked spasms of explosive violence where you're like:

I cannot believe

He just did that.

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