



the casket
you bought

janet krypers
1996 chapbook
scars publications

an outline to the apex of rites of passage

It was one of those rites of passage. A Bah Mitzvah of sorts. But this was bigger, much bigger than shaving for the first time or getting your period. This was the chance for all young high school men to lose their virginity and a chance for all young high school women to dress up, feel like adults, look pretty. Everyone felt the driving need to go through this rite of passage, to not be left out, to be a part of the group. Either way, you got to take a day off of school.

But like every rite of passage, the high school prom is probably more traumatic than fun, because no matter what, you feel like you have to go, and the entire time you have to look like you're having fun. Especially for the photographers. You have to have a perfect record of your perfect life so you can upstage everyone else.

With every aspect of prom, there was always a conflict, an expense, or an irony. I mean, this is supposed to be one of the best times in your life, and it's wrought with confusion. First, find a date. Has to be someone socially acceptable, otherwise it would be less embarrassing to just not go. Then, go through the trauma of asking your prospective date to actually go with you, or if you're a woman, wait to be asked, which is almost more cruel. Then, see which of your friends are going, organize what group you'll go with to your prom.

Then you have to start working on the details. For men, this meant transportation, the cheapest tuxedo, what kind of corsage to buy, something that pins on, something they wear on their wrist, or

something they carry, like a bouquet. Oh, and don't forget the most important part: enough liquor and/or condoms. Note how suddenly the prospect of multiple hookers performing anything you'd ever want is both less expensive and less of a hassle than this quote-unquote "date." For women, the details meant picking out the right dress, the right shoes, the right purse, the right jewelry, the right perfume, the right make-up, the right hair style. Note how you have to then coordinate your clothing with your date. So much like real life.

Then, beg your parents to let you wear the dress you picked out, or keep the make-up and hair style the way you wanted it. Beg your parents to let you borrow their sports car. Beg you parents for enough money to pay for the limo, the flowers, the clothes, the film for the camera. Beg your parents to let you stay out past curfew, how about 6 a.m., just this once. But, come on, it's prom.

Then the Big Day arrives. Ditch school, because you know, getting you hair done can take hours, and you want to spend some time in the sun, so you don't look as pale as a ghost for the pictures. Then, after getting ready for an inordinate amount of time, meet up and take the pictures. Urgh. This usually entails the man picking up the woman, taking pictures at the woman's parent's house, then going back to the man's parent's house and taking more pictures there. It's almost worse than a wedding.

Then finally arrive at Prom. Take more pictures. Talk to as many friends as you can there, compliment their dresses and tuxedos. Find out what everyone else is doing after prom, see if anyone is doing anything better than you. Note how many women are repeatedly pulling up their strapless dresses so they don't fall out of them. Note how many men are already drunk, and look, it's not even dinner yet. Take lots of pictures with your instamatic camera. Let's do a group shot. Oh, let me take a picture with so-and-so.

Then eat. Try to figure out how to eat your salad without using your knife. Check to see how little all the women are actually eating. Note how many women go to the bathroom in groups. In any case, whatever you do, don't stop feeling awkward. But keep smiling.

Then the dancing. Try to remember what your father taught you. Try not to look stiff. Try not to sweat. Dance in a box. Right foot forward, feet together, left foot left, feet together, right foot backward, feet together, right foot right, feet together. Or go for the high school standby; wrap your arms around each other and sway, occasionally making out in the middle of the dance floor. Note how many women have their lipstick smeared across their cheek, or on their date's collar. Note how many bow ties have loosened.

Then collect your things, say your good-byes, take a few more photos and head out for the after-prom activities. Possible options include a late dinner, a four-hour boat cruise, a walk along the lake, a bonfire, bowling, a hotel party, or the back of dad's sports car. Note how disheveled you look by six a.m.; try to clean yourself up in the car before you get to your driveway, in case your parents are waiting for you. Don't make out for too long as you say your good-byes in front of your house.

Then, get in the house as quietly as possible, drop all your clothes into a pile in the middle of your bedroom floor, and collapse on your bed. Here's a helpful hint: drink a glass of water and take a vitamin and some aspirin before crashing; it will help with the hangover. Try to get some sleep before the day-after-prom amusement park trip, and keep in mind that even though prom is over, your friends will be rehashing it for at least a week. This is the ritual. Now go to sleep.

ladies and gentlemen
high above the dancing elephants
and the clowns driving around
in their little cars
honking their horns

high above the lion tamers
with their whips and chairs

is our main attraction
tonight:
all eyes turn to
Athena, the tightrope walker

athena

see her gracefully step
out onto the paper-thin wire
balance high above everyone else
while all eyes are on her
all without a net

would you like to see her
do a flip? a spin? touch the rope
with her tiny, fragile fingers?

Athena will put on the
grandest of shows for you

imagine, if you will, the fear
she must feel:
with one wrong move
she falls to her death
into the mouths of the lions
in between the running clowns

come, see her perform:
watch her walk
watch her move
watch her shake

this is
the greatest show
on earth

climbing trees.

(written with D.J.)

I

you see, I was a girl, I didn't climb trees,
but I always wished for a tree house,
one with a ladder so it would be easy to get to the top.
So I could see the world from a different view.
So I could feel like I have conquered.

II

Big trees, more fun,
that's what I'd think.
Then when I'd get to about the height of a roof,
our garage as a matter of fact,
then the fear would set in.
Not fear of falling from where I was,
but of going higher.
Higher, then too high.
What is too high?

III

One of my co-workers decided one day that he
wasn't going to try anymore. That no one cared
if he did a good job, so he just wouldn't bother.
And I thought, your coworkers shouldn't be the scale
you judge yourself on. You should be your
scale, you should be trying because you need
to know you can be better than what you are.
Then I thought, maybe he never climbed trees.

eating ·

(written with D.J.)

I can feel it gliding down my throat with a huge push of water like your body, sliding, up against my skin, warm and wet, wet like the feeling and taste of your tongue intertwined with mine. I feel it swirling down my throat, intoxicating me, head spinning almost nauseated by the mere thought of the taste rather than the actual sensation and I swallow the poison; let it cover me from the inside out. There is no pain, just a feeling of regret, what have I now lost with this one trigger I pulled? My life flashes, and what I expect to be a monument of achievements is an abyss. I realize there's nothing left to fear, because there's nothing to remember.

ecstasy

He threw her up against the wall. Her mind was spinning; after all this time she never thought she'd have her arms around him again, save the embrace when they happened to be in the same city on business and were saying their cordial good-byes at the airport. He kissed her. She instinctively pulled at his shirt; two buttons bounced repeatedly on the hardwood floor and spun to a silent halt. He pulled her hair, pulling her head back. Her mouth opened naturally, slightly. She wrapped her arms around him, depending on his strength to keep her standing. He held her tighter, kissed her, knowing she needed this. Her emotions swelled, grew stronger, pulsed, until she couldn't hold herself up any longer. She knew, after all these years, that he was the only one she could love wholly, the only one she loved everything about, from the slope of his nose to the way he never knew current events to the way he worked too hard to the way he loved too much. She knew this was everything. She knew this was life. She fell into his arms.

Gary's Blind Date

A friend of mine had a roommate named Gary
and Gary was a man
who was always down on his luck

So on one particular occasion,
after Gary had a dating dry spell,
my friend decided to set Gary up
on a blind date.

Now, he said, this girl
is beautiful, she's funny,
you'll think she's great. trust me.
Pick her up Friday night.

And Friday came, and Gary,
feeling more and more apprehensive,
said, but I'm not feeling well. I've
been sick all week.

And my friend said, now I don't want to hear
any excuses. You're going.

So Gary got ready for his blind date
and drove over to the girl's house.
She lived with her parents,
so when Gary rang the door bell
the girl's mother answered.

"Oh, you must be Gary, please,
come in," she said.

Once Gary got into the house,
the mother said,
my daughter's still getting ready.
Would you like to wait?

and Gary, still not feeling well,
asked where the washroom was.
She directed him to the newly remodeled basement.

Gary walked into the brand-new bathroom.
New fixtures. Thick, white,
wall-to-wall carpeting.

Gary sat down on this new ivory throne,
still sick. But when he looked over
there was no toilet paper.
He couldn't just stand up, he thought,
this isn't just a regular trip to the bathroom,
I need something
to clean myself off with.
He couldn't use a towel.
So he took off his pants
and used his underwear.

But he couldn't leave the underwear
in the small, open trash can in the corner
of this newly-remodeled
bathroom, he thought.
So he
dropped them
in the toilet

and flushed.

Which caused the toilet to overflow,
causing the newly-remodeled bathroom
to look
less than new.

So here was Gary's dilemma:
he left his underwear in the toilet
and defiled this family's brand-new bathroom
all without even getting the chance
to introduce himself
to his date.

What are his options, what are his options.

So he did the only thing he thought
he could do in this situation:
he climbed out the small
bathroom window
and
drove
home.

When he arrived at his apartment
so early from his date,
his roommate had to ask.

And after that, he never
set Gary up
on a blind date
again.

how are you

The phone rang. Woke me up. I picked up the phone, stumbled out a hello. “Hi, it’s Sara.” Oh, hi, Sara, how are you? “Oh, fine,” she said. “How are things with you?” Oh, fine, I said, work’s been busy. “Oh, I know,” she said, “I was the maid of honor in Carol’s wedding, and tacked on to work I’ve been swamped.” Speaking of work, I said, I’m late. “Oh, okay,” she said, “talk to you later.” Good-bye. “Bye.”

Got into the office. Waved my copy of USA Today at the receptionist’s desk. “Hi, Janet.” Hi Lisa. “How are you?” Fine tired. And you? “Oh, fine, it’s Monday.” And I checked my mailbox and headed for my desk.

Sat at my cubicle. Larry peered in. “Hey, J.” Hey, Lar. “How are you?” Fine. And you? “Same ol, same ol.” And he walked away.

Phone rang. This is Janet, I say. “Hi, this is Don Olsen.” Hey, Don, how are you? “Oh, fine, how are you?” Oh, fine. “Look, Janet, there’s a problem with the order you placed with us last week...”

Got home. Checked messages. “Hey, Janet, it’s your sister. How are you? Give me a call.”

The machine beeped when it was done. I picked up the phone to call her back, then I realized I had nothing to say. I hung up the phone. I walked into my bedroom.

Japanese Television

as reported in the New York Times:

one new television show in Japan
boasts young women in bikinis
who attempt to smash aluminum cans
in between their breasts

another television show in Japan
brings a young boy on stage
to tell him his mother
has been shot and killed
to see how long it takes him
to cry

I wonder what they'd think
of Rosanne
and Married With Children

Kurt Irons
while drinking
drove a stolen
truck
straight
into another
truck
and killed
a woman

according to
police
reports,
Kurt Irons
was
surprised
by the arrest
by the fact
that he was
charged
with
vehicular
homicide

Kurt Irons
was quoted
as saying

“dudes
it’s just a
girl,
man

it’s a girl -
nothing
but a
girl”

Kurt Irons
(it's just a girl)

my mother told me
about one of my father's clients
ed kazinski
he had a stutter
and you couldn't mistake his voice

well he called the house one night
and my father was out with the boys
and so my mother decided to play a trick

she told ed "my husband is out
with ed kazinski
and he won't be home for a while"

joe putz-
a-vucki

and ed stuttered, tried to make an excuse
cover up for my father
and said, "uh, well, tell him
joe putz-a-vucki called"
and he quickly hung up
the telephone
thought my mother didn't know his voice

later he told my father
he covered up for him
and my father said, my wife knows

your stuttering voice, silly
everybody can recognize your voice
she was just playing a joke

and by the way
who is joe putz-a-vucki

ed told my father
that putz-a-vucki was polish
for "under the sidewalk"
and it was just
what came out
of his mouth
when he didn't have time
to think

Lambs to Heaven's Gate

They tell you the meek shall inherit the earth.
Then they lead their lambs to the slaughter
as I do, to the ones who will follow.
You see, the meek wouldn't know what to do
with their inheritance. They know nothing
of property, ownership, power. I teach them
not to understand these values but to fear them.
To sacrifice. To stay meek. I'm the one
who tells them how to dress, how to walk,
how to kill themselves. All they need is a reason
as long as they don't have to think it through.

People will believe anything if you
tell it to them the right way. Give them a few
tokens and they'll create icons out of you.
But not everyone can guide, can lead the lost.
Give themselves to the followers who need them,
with nothing in return. Like the stars,
which seem so small, so meek from here
yet are unfathomable, uncontrollable.
Like the shepherd, quietly guiding his flock
but holding a stick all the while. I'm the one
who guides them, who guides them to their destiny.

losing my best friend.

(written with D.J.)

our yard was a small size
since we lived in a Detroit suburb.
That's why Doc got sent away
to a place I never saw
with a faveless man I never knew

I've never been able to face death;
no one ever wanted to talk about it.
Where were they taking him?
I didn't want him to go,
I loved him,
and I knew he loved me too.
He loved me the most.

My father thought it was best,
and I suppose financially
it might have been,
but at what point is it
that you become an adult,
refer to love as a childhood thing
and value money
over a child's heart

I was playing at my neighbor's
when I went to the fence
and saw the man pulling the van
out of my driveway,
with my dog.
and Doc was yelping.
And I didn't even
get to say good-bye.

That was my dog.
and that was my childhood.

ranting

I don't like to watch movies. Since when did America decide that people need to escape so desperately? Yes, switch off the brain for a few hours because work is such a bitch, trying endlessly to find a infinite number of ways to make it look like you're actually working when actually you're screwing off, so you need to unwind with pictures and sound but not actual interaction or dare I say activity, unwind with pictures and sound of an overly-muscular leading man decorated with ammo belts blowing away a faceless enemy, because we all want to actually kill, don't we?, and this is just a way to live out our sick little fantasies, so we watch this leading man decorated with ammo belts blowing away a faceless enemy, punctuating the scene with a less-than-witty one-liner. Oh, sorry. Was I ranting?

Salamander

when the tail comes off of a salamander
the salamander grows back a new tail

and at twelve, we were amazed
with this little morsel of knowledge

and wanted to catch
a salamander

so we could pull off its tail
and see for ourselves

and i find it amazing and wonderful
and frightening, and disturbing

that our quest for knowledge
is greater than our compassion

Service of others

*Mary called herself
the "handmaid of the Lord"*

*Putting herself at God's service
she also put herself
at the service of others*

*Letter to Women, Message of His Holiness P
OPE JOHN PAUL II, July 10*

coffee, tea, or milk
what could i get you
would you like fries with that
do you need another beer
here, let me take care of that for you
i did your laundry this morning
i hope your eggs aren't too cold
let me wash your feet

Shopping ·

(written with D.J.)

Grocery shopping. Clothes shopping. Car shopping. Casket shopping.
sometimes it sustains us, sometimes it relieves us,
sometimes it kills us.

Sometimes it gets our minds going into a mode where
we want to shop for everything, including people.

Have to get the right price. Have to get the most for your money.

Have to get a bargain. That's the American Way.

Bigger, better, faster. Baseball. Hot dogs.

Apple pie and Chevrolet.

Do your job, get your paycheck,

buy the luxuries, upstage four friends.

Buy your friends.

As an incentive, you'll get some enemies for free.

So you have your friends you bought

and the enemies you've earned

and the luxuries and paychecks

but what else does it get you

when it's all over

and you're lying in the ground

like the next person,

with the casket you bought.

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Freedom & Strength Press



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