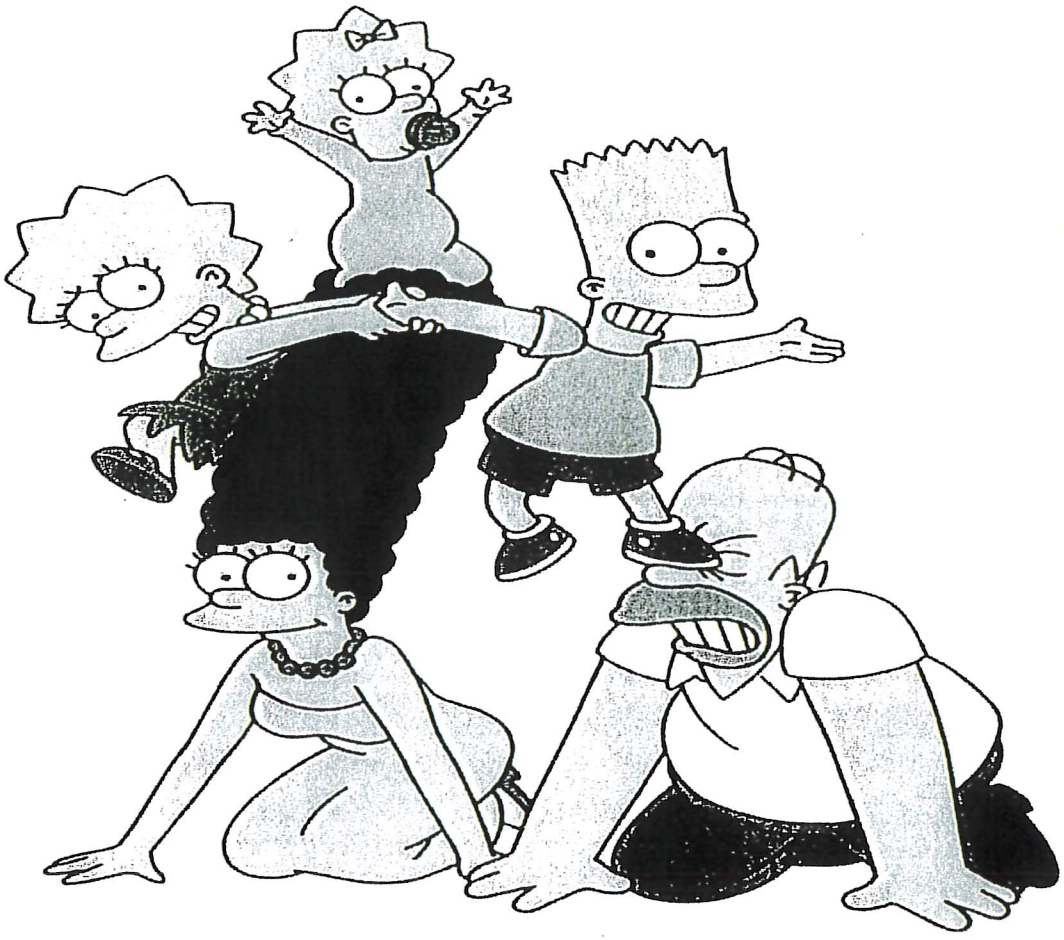
Family Relations



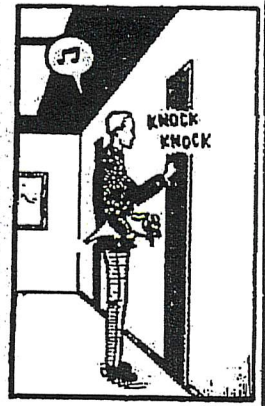
"Parents can only give good advice or put them on the right paths, but the final forming of a person's character lies in their own hands."
— Anne Frank

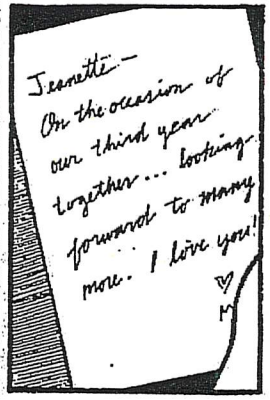
"Growing up is losing some illusions, in order to acquire others."
— Virginia Woolf

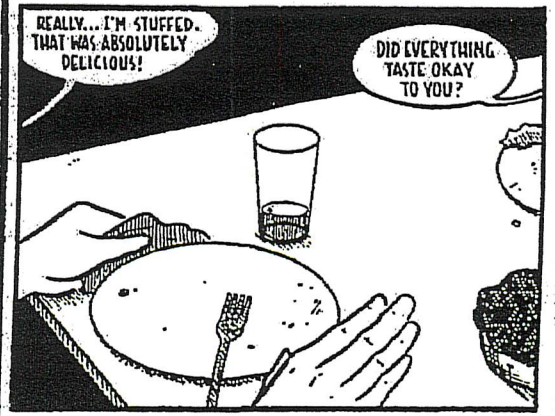
"When I became a man I put away childish things, including the fear of childishness and the desire to be very grown up."
— C.S. Lewis

TEXT 1

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY







1.

2.


WELL, THE CHICKEN WAS A LITTLE OVER-COOKED...
NAH... IT WAS PERFECT. JUST THE WAY I LIKE IT.
HA-HA... YOU'RE JUST EASY TO PLEASE.
...WE'LL BE RIGHT BACK AFTER THESE MESSAGES...
HON, CAN I... CAN I ASK YOU SOMETHING?
YEAH, SURE.
ARE YOU HAPPY?
WHAT DO YOU MEAN? ABOUT WHAT?
I DON'T KNOW... ABOUT ME. WITH THE RELATIONSHIP.
WHY? I MEAN, WHAT'S THE MATTER?

3.


I DON'T KNOW. I WAS JUST WONDERING.
BUT WHY? WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU SAYING? IF YOU'RE TRYING TO SAY YOU WANNA... BREAK UP, OR...
I DON'T KNOW WHAT I'M TRYING TO SAY. IS THAT WHAT YOU WANT?
NO... NOT AT ALL...
WHY WOULD I WANT THAT? I LOVE YOU...
C'MON... LET'S NOT WRECK OUR ANNIVERSARY.
OKAY, BABY. I'M SORRY.
Y'KNOW, I THINK A LOT OF TIMES YOU DON'T SAY WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND.

4.


YOU KEEP A LOT INSIDE. I JUST WANTED TO KNOW.
I MEAN, SOMETIMES PEOPLE STAY TOGETHER OUT OF HABIT... OR INDIFFERENCE...
...BOTH OF THEM AFRAID TO SAY ANYTHING.
SOMETIMES I JUST THINK MAYBE...
LISTEN...YOU'RE ABOUT THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IN MY LIFE RIGHT NOW. I GUESS I SHOULD SHOW IT MORE.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT I'D DO IF WE EVER...
I'M SORRY I GOT MAD TONIGHT, BUT YOU SCARED ME.
IT'S OKAY. I KNOW.

5.


CLICK
AT94

6.

TEXT 2

40–Love

by Roger McGough

middle aged
couple playing
ten nis
when the
game ends
and they
go home
the net
will still
be be
tween them.

TEXT 3

1

So things were ticking along quite nicely. In fact, I'd say that good stuff had been happening pretty solidly for about six months.

– For example: Mum got rid of Steve, her rubbish boyfriend.

– For example: Mrs Gillett, my art and design teacher, took me to one side after a lesson and asked whether I'd thought of doing art at college.

– For example: I'd learned two new skating tricks, suddenly, after weeks of making an idiot of myself in public. (I'm guessing that not all of you are skaters, so I should say something straight away, just so there are no terrible misunderstandings. Skating = skateboarding. We never say skateboarding, usually, so this is the only time I'll use the word in this whole story. And if you keep thinking of me messing around on ice, then it's your own stupid fault.)

All that, and I'd met Alicia too.

I was going to say that maybe you should know something about me before I go off on one about my mum and Alicia and all that. If you knew something about me, you might actually care about some of those things. But then, looking at what I just wrote, you know quite a lot already, or at least you could have guessed a lot of it. . . .

from : Nick Hornby : SLAM

John Cheever

REUNION

(Fra: The Lift af Alsing-Børgesen, Bissenbaakker m.fl., Gyldendal 1993)

The last time I saw my father was in Grand Central Station. I was going from my grandmother's in the Adirondacks to a cottage on the Cape that my mother had rented, and I wrote my father that I would be in New York between trains for an hour and a half, and asked if we could have lunch together. His secretary wrote to say that he would meet me at the information booth at noon, and at twelve o' clock sharp I saw him coming through the crowd.

He was a stranger to me — my mother divorced him three years ago and I hadn't been with him since — but as soon as I saw him I felt that he was my father, my flesh and blood, my future and my doom. I knew that when I was grown I would be something like him; I would have to plan my campaigns within his limitations. He was a big, good-looking man, and I was terribly happy to see him again. He struck me on the back and shook my hand. "Hi, Charlie," he said, "Hi, boy. I'd like to take you up to my club, but it's in the Sixties, and if you have to catch an early train I guess we'd better get something to eat around here." He put his arm around me, and I smelled my father the way my mother sniffs a rose. It was a rich compound of whiskey and after-shave lotion, shoe polish, woolens, and the rankness of a mature male. I hoped that someone would see us together. I wished that we could be photographed. I wanted some record of our having been together.

We went out of the station and up a side street to a restaurant. It was still early, and the place was empty. The bartender was quarreling with a delivery boy, and there was one very old waiter in a red coat down by the kitchen floor. We sat down and my father hailed the waiter in a loud voice.

"Kellner!" he shouted. "Garcon! Cameriere! You!"

His boisterousness in the empty restaurant seemed out of place.

"Could we have a little service here?!" he shouted. "Chop-chop." Then he clapped his hands. This caught the waiter's attention, and he shuffled over to our table.

"Were you clapping your hands at me?" he asked.

"Calm down, calm down, Sommelier", my father said. "If it isn't too much to ask of you — if it wouldn't be too much above and beyond the call of duty, we would like a couple of Beefeater Gibsons."

"I don't like to be clapped at", the waiter said.

"I should have brought my whistle", my father said. "I have a whistle that is audible only to the ears of old waiters. Now, take out your little pad and your little pencil and see if you can get this straight: two Beefeater Gibsons. Repeat after me: two Beefeater Gibsons."

"I think you'd better go somewhere else", the waiter said quietly.

"That", said my father, "is one of the most brilliant suggestions I have ever heard. C'mon, Charlie, let's get the hell out of here."

I followed my father out of that restaurant and into another. He was not so boisterous this time. Our drinks came, and he cross-questioned me about the baseball season. He then struck the edge of his empty glass with his knife and began shouting again. "Garcon! Kellner! Cameriere! You! Could we trouble you to bring us two more of the same?"

"How old is the boy?"

"That is none of your God-damned business."

"I'm sorry, sir", the waiter said, "but I won't serve the boy another drink."
"Well, I have some news for you", my father said. "I have some very interesting news for you. This doesn't happen to be the only restaurant in New York. They've opened another on the corner. C'mon, Charlie."

He paid the bill, and I followed him out of that restaurant into another. Here the waiters wore pink jackets like hunting coats, and there was a lot of horse tack on the walls. We sat down, and my father began to shout again. "Master of the hounds! Tallyhoo and all that sort of thing. We'd like a little something in the way of a stirrup cup. Namely, two Bibson Geefeaters."

"Two Bibson Geefeaters?" the waiter asked, smiling.

"You know damned well what I want", my father said angrily. "I want two Beefeater Gibsons, and make it snappy. Things have changed in jolly old England. So my friend the duke tells me. Let's see what England can produce in the way of a cocktail."

"This isn't England," the waiter said.

"Don't argue with me", my father said. "Just do as you're told."

"I just thought you might like to know where you are", the waiter said.

"If there is one thing I cannot tolerate," my father said, "it is an impudent domestic. C'mon, Charlie."

The fourth place we went to was Italian. "Per favore, possiamo avere due cocktail americani, forti, forti. Molto gin, poco vermut."

"I don't understand Italian," the waiter said.

"Oh, come off it," my father said. "You understand Italian, and you damned well you do. Vogliamo due cocktail Americano. Subito."

The waiter left us and spoke with the captain, who came over to our table and said, "I'm sorry, sir, but this table is reserved."

"All right, my father said. Get us another table."

"All the tables are reserved," the captain said.

"I get it," my father said. "You don't desire our patronage. Is that it? Well, the hell with you. Vada all' inferno. Let's go, Charlie."

"I have to get my train," I said.

"I'm sorry, sonny," my father said. "I'm terribly sorry." He put his arm around me and pressed me against him. "I'll walk you back to the station. If there had only been time to go up to my club."

"That's all right, Daddy," I said.

"I'll get you a paper," he said. "I'll get you a paper to read on the train."

Then he went up to a newsstand and said, "Kind sir, will you be good enough to favor me with one of your God-damned, no-good, ten-cent afternoon papers?" The clerk turned away from him and stared at a magazine cover. "Is it asking too much, kind sir," my father said, "is it asking too much for you to sell me one of your disgusting specimens of yellow journalism?"

"I have to go, Daddy," I said. "It's late."

"Now, just wait a second, sonny," he said. "Just wait a second. I want to get a rise out of this chap."

"Goodbye, Daddy," I said, and I went down the stairs and got my train, and that was the last time I saw my father.

(1962)

Ernest Hemingway: *A Day's Wait* (1933)

He came into the room to shut the windows while we were still in bed and I saw he looked ill. He was shivering, his face was white, and he walked slowly as though it ached to move. 'What's the matter, Schatz?'

'I've got a headache.'

'You better go back to bed.'

'No, I'm all right.'

'You go to bed. I'll see you when I'm dressed.' But when I came downstairs he was dressed, sitting by the fire, looking a very sick and miserable boy of nine years. When I put my hand on his forehead I knew he had a fever.

'You go up to bed,' I said, 'you're sick.'

'I'm all right,' he said.

When the doctor came he took the boy's temperature.

'What is it?' I asked him.

'One hundred and two.'

Downstairs, the doctor left three different medicines in different colored capsules with instructions for giving them. One was to bring down the fever, another a purgative, the third to overcome an acid condition. The germs of influenza can only exist in an acid condition, he explained. He seemed to know all about influenza and said there was nothing to worry about if the fever did not go above one hundred and four degrees. This was a light epidemic of flu and there was no danger if you avoided pneumonia. Back in the room I wrote the boy's temperature down and made a note of the time to give the various capsules. 'Do you want me to read to you?'

'All right. If you want to,' said the boy. His face was very white and there were dark areas under his eyes. He lay still in bed and seemed very detached from what was going on. I read aloud from Howard Pyle's Book of Pirates; but I could see he was not following what I was reading.

'How do you feel, Schatz?' I asked him.

'Just the same, so far,' he said.

I sat at the foot of the bed and read to myself while I waited for it to be time to give another capsule. It would have been natural for him to go to sleep, but when I looked up he was looking at the foot of the bed, looking very strangely.

'Why don't you try to go to sleep? I'll wake you up for the medicine.'

'I'd rather stay awake.' After a while he said to me, 'You don't have to stay here with me, Papa, if it

bothers you.'

'It doesn't bother me.'

'No, I mean you don't have to stay if it's going to bother you.'

I thought perhaps he was a little light-headed and after giving him the prescribed capsule at eleven o'clock I went out for a while.

It was a bright, cold day, the ground covered with a sleet that had frozen so that it seemed as if all the bare trees, the bushes, the cut brush and all the grass and the bare ground had been varnished with ice. I took the young Irish setter for a little walk up the road and along a frozen creek, but it was difficult to stand or walk on the glassy surface and the red dog slipped and slithered and fell twice, hard, once dropping my gun and having it slide over the ice. We flushed a covey of quail under a high clay bank with overhanging brush and killed two as they went out of sight over the top of the bank. Some of the covey lit the trees, but most of them scattered into brush piles and it was necessary to jump on the ice-coated mounds of brush several times before they would flush. Coming out while you were poised unsteadily on the icy, springy brush they made difficult shooting and killed two, missed five, and started back pleased to have found a covey close to the house and happy there were so many left to find on another day.

At the house they said the boy had refused to let anyone come into the room.

'You can't come in,' he said. 'You mustn't get what I have.'

I went up to him and found him in exactly the position I had left him, white- faced, but with the tops of his cheeks flushed by the fever, staring still, as he had stared, at the foot of the bed. I took his temperature. 'What is it?'

'Something like a hundred,' I said. It was one hundred and two and four tenth.

'It was a hundred and two,' he said.

'Who said so?'

'The doctor.'

'Your temperature is all right,' I said. It's nothing to worry about.'

'I don't worry,' he said, 'but I can't keep from thinking.'

'Don't think,' I said. 'Just take it easy.'

'I'm taking it easy,' he said and looked straight ahead. He was evidently holding tight onto himself about something.

'Take this with water.'

'Do you think it will do any good?'

'Of course it will.' I sat down and opened the Pirate book and commenced to read, but I could see he was not following, so I stopped.

'About what time do you think I'm going to die?' he asked.

'What?'

'About how long will it be before I die?'

'You aren't going to die. What's the matter with you?'

Oh, yes, I am. I heard him say a hundred and two.'

'People don't die with a fever of one hundred and two. That's a silly way to talk.'

'I know they do. At school in France the boys told me you can't live with forty-four degrees. I've got a hundred and two.' He had been waiting to die all day, ever since nine o'clock in the morning.

'You poor Schatz,' I said. 'Poor old Schatz. It's like miles and kilometers. You aren't going to die. That's a different thermometer. On that 95 thermometer thirty-seven is normal. On this kind it's ninety-eight.'

'Are you sure?'

'Absolutely,' I said. 'It's like miles and kilometers. You know, like how many kilometers we make when we do seventy in the car?'

'Oh,' he said.

But his gaze at the foot of his bed relaxed slowly. The hold over himself relaxed too, finally, and the next day it was very slack and he cried very easily at little things that were of no importance.


REPORTED HERE
FISHED FOR THESE
STRUGGLED WITH THIS
WROTE THESE
TO HAVE & HAVE NOT
A FAREWELL TO ARMS
THE SUN ALSO RISES
FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS
ISLANDS IN THE STREAM
THE OLD MAN & THE SEA
THE GARDEN OF EDEN
WAS AWARDED THIS
LIVED HERE
SPICED RUM
DRANK THIS
CRASHED IN THIS, TWICE!
COMMITTED SUICIDE WITH THIS
NOBEL PRIZE
WAS AWARDED THIS IN 1954
PETTED THIS
SUGAR
COULDN'T EAT THIS
(OPPOSABLE THUMBS!)
DROVE THIS
LOVED THIS
chased German U-boats in this

CLARA'S DAY

by Penelope Lively

When Clara Tilling was fifteen and a half she took off all her clothes one morning in school assembly.[1] She walked naked through the lines of girls, past the headmistress at her lectern and the other staff ranged behind her, and out into the entrance lobby. She had left off her bra and pants already, so that all she had to do was unbutton her blouse, remove it to the floor, and then undo the zipper of her skirt and let that fall. She slipped her feet out of her shoes at the same time and so walked barefoot as well as naked. It all happened very quickly. One or two people giggled and a sort of rustling noise ran through the assembly hall, like a sudden wind among trees, The Head hesitated for a moment-she was reading out the tennis team list- and then went on again, firmly. Clara opened the big glass doors and let herself out.

The entrance lobby was empty. The floor was highly polished and she could see her own reflection, a foreshortened pink blur. There was a big bright modern painting on one wall and several comfortable chairs for waiting parents, arranged round an enormous rubber plant and ashtrays on chrome stalks. Clara had sat there herself once, with her mother, waiting for an interview with the Head.

She walked along the corridor to her form-room, which was also quite empty, with thick gold bars of sunlight falling on the desks and a peaceful feeling, as though no one had been here for a long time nor ever would come. Clara opened the cupboard in the corner, took out one of the science overalls and put it on, and then sat down at her desk and a peaceful feeling, as though no one has been here for a long time nor ever would come. Clara opened the cupboard in the corner, took out one of the science overalls and put it on, and then sat down at her desk. After about a minute Mrs Mayhew came in carrying her clothes and her shoes. She said, "I should put these on now, Clara," and stood beside her while she did so. "Would you like to go home?" she asked, and when Clara said that she wouldn't, thank you, Mrs Mayhew went on briskly. "Right you are, then, Clara. You'd better get on with some prep, then, till the first period."

All morning people kept coming up to her to say, "Well done!" or just to pat her on the back. She was a celebrity right up till dinner-time but after that it tailed off a bit. Half-way through the morning one of the prefects came in and told her the Head wanted to see her straight after school.

The Head's study was more like a sitting-room, except for the big paper-strewn[2] desk that she sat behind. There were squashy chairs and nice pictures on the walls and photos of the Head's husband and her children on the mantelpiece and a Marks & Spencer carrier bag dumped down in one corner. The window was open on to the playing-fields from which came the cheerful incomprehensible noise, like birds singing, of people calling to each other. Except for the distant rumble of traffic you wouldn't think you were in London.

The Head was busy writing when Clara came in. She just looked up to say, "Hello, Clara. Sit down. Do you mind if I just finish these reports off? I won't be a minute." She went on writing and Clara sat and looked at the photo of her husband, who had square sensible-looking glasses and her three boys who were all the same but different sizes. Then the Head slapped the pile of reports together and pushed her chair back. "There... Well now...So what was all that about, this morning?"

"I don't know," said Clara.

The Head looked at her, thoughtfully, and Clara looked back. Just before the silence became really embarrassing the Head pushed a hand through her short untidy fair hair, making it even untidier and said, "I daresay you don't. Were you trying to attract attention?"

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[1] morgensamling

[2] overstrøet med papirer

Clara considered. "Well, I would, wouldn't I? Doing a thing like that. I mean-you'd be bound to."

The Head nodded. "Quite. Silly question."

" Oh no," said Clara hastily. " I meant you'd be bound to attract attention, not be bound to be trying to."

The Head, a linguist, also considered. "Well ... That's a fine point, I think. How do you feel about it now?"

Clara tried to examine her feelings, which slithered away like fish. In the end she said, "I don't really feel anything," which was, in a way, truthful.

The Head nodded again. She looked at her husband on the mantelpiece, almost as though asking for advice. "Everything all right at home?"

"Oh fine," Clara assured her. "Absolutely fine."

"Good," said the Head. "Of course ... I was just thinking, there are quite a lot of people in Four B with separated parents, aren't there? Bryony and Susie Tallance and Rachel."

"And Midge," said Clara. "And Lucy Potter."

"Yes. Five. Six, with you."

"Twenty-five per cent," said Clara. "Just about."

"Quite. As a matter of fact that's the national average, did you know? One marriage in four."

"No, I didn't actually," said Clara.

"Well, it is, I'm afraid. Anyway ..." She looked over at her husband again. " You're not fussing about O-levels, are You?"

"Not really," said Clara. "I mean, I don't *like* exams, but I don't mind as much as some people."

"Your mocks were fine," said the Head "Physics and chemistry could have been a bit better. But there shouldn't be any great problems there. So ... Are you still going around with Liz Raymond?"

"Mostly" said Clara. "And Stephanie."

"I want people to come and talk to me if there's anything they're worried about," said the Head. "Even things that may seem silly. You Know. It doesn't have to be large obvious things. Exams and stuff. Anything."

"Yes," said Clara.

The phone rang. The Head picked it up and said no, she hadn't, and yes, she'd be along as soon as she could and tell them to wait. She put the receiver down and said, "It wasn't like you, Clara, was it. I mean-there are a few people one wouldn't be all that surprised, if they suddenly did something idiotic or unexpected. But you aren't really like that, are you?"

Clara agreed that she wasn't, really.

"I'll be writing a note to your mother. And if you have an urge to do something like that again come and have a talk to me first, right?" The Head smiled and Clara smiled back. That was all, evidently. Clara got up and left. As she was closing the door she saw the Head looking after her, not smiling now, her expression rather bleak.

Most of the school had gone home but all those in Clara's form who had boyfriends at St Benet's which was practically everyone, were hanging around the bus station deliberately not catching buses because St Benet's came out half an hour later. Clara hung around for a bit too, just to be sociable, and then got on her bus. She sat on the top deck by herself and looked down on to the pavements. It was very hot; everyone young had bare legs, roadmenders were stripped to the waist, everywhere there was flesh-brown backs and white knees and glimpses of the hair under people's arms and the clefts between breasts and buttocks. In the park, the grass was strewn with sunbathers; there were girls in bikinis sprawled like starfish face down with a rag of material between their legs and the strings of the top half undone. Clara, with no bra or pants on, could feel warm air washing around between her skin and her clothes.

Coming down the stairs as the bus approached her stop she sad to hold her skirt in case it blew up.

Her mother was already home. She worked part-time as a dentist's receptionist and had what were called flexible hours, which meant more or less that she worked when it suited her. Afternoons, nowadays, often didn't suit because Stan, her friend, who was an actor, was only free in the afternoons.

Stan wasn't there today, though. Clara came into the kitchen where her mother was drinking tea and looking at a magazine. "Hi!" she said. " Any news?" which was what she said most days. Clara said that there was no news and her mother went on reading an article in the magazine called, Clara could see upside down across the table, "Orgasm – Fact or Fantasy?" Presently she yawned, pushed the magazine over to Clara and went upstairs to have a bath. Clara had another cup of tea and leafed through the magazine, which was mostly advertisements for tampons and deodorants, and then began to do her prep.

The Head's letter came a couple of days later. Clara heard the post flop on to the doormat and when she looked over the banister she knew at once what the typed envelope must be. At the same moment Stan, who had stayed the night, came out of her mother's room on his way to the bathroom. He wore underpants and had a towel slung round his neck like a football scarf, and was humming to himself. When he saw her he said, "Wotcha! How's tricks, then?" and Clara pulled her dressing-gown more closely round her and said, "Fine, thanks"

"That's the stuff," said Stan vaguely. "Hey-I got you a couple of tickets for the show. Bring a friend, O.K.?" He was a stocky muscular man with a lot black hair on his chest. The smell of him, across the landing, was powerful-a huge inescapable wave of man smell: sweat and aftershave and something you could not put your finger on. Clara always knew when he was in the house before she opened the sitting room door because whiffs of him gushed about the place. She said, "Thanks very much. That would be super," and edged into her room.

When she came down they were both having breakfast. Her mother was just opening the post. She said, "Coffee on the stove, lovey. Oh goody - my tax rebate's come." She opened the Head's letter and began to read. First she stared at it with a puzzled look and then she began to laugh. She clapped her hand over her mouth, spluttering. "I don't believe it!" she cried. "Clara, I simply do not believe it!" Stan, just listen to this ... Isn't she the most incredible girl! Guess what she did! She took off all her clothes in school assembly and walked out starkers!" She handed the letter to Stan and went on laughing.

Stan read the letter. Grinning hugely, he looked up at Clara. "She'll have done it for a dare, I bet. Good on yer, Clara. Terrific! God-I wish I'd been there! " He patted Clara's arm and Clara froze. She went completely rigid, as though she had turned to cement, and when eventually she moved a leg it seemed as though it should make a cracking noise.

Her mother had stopped laughing and was talking again. " ... the last thing anyone would have expected of you, lovey. You've always been such a prude. Ever since you were a toddler. Talk about modest! Honestly, Stan, she was hilarious, as a little kid- I can see her now, sitting on the beach at Camber clutching a towel around her in case anyone got a glimpse of her bum when she was changing. Aged ten. And when her bust grew she used to sit hunched over like a spoon so no one would notice it, and if she had to strip off for the doctor you'd have thought he'd been about to rape her, from her expression. Even now I can't get her out of that Victorian one-piece school regulation bathing costume-and it's not as though she's not got a nice shape.

..."-"Smashing!" said Stan, slurping coffee-"... spot of puppy fat still but that's going, good hips, my legs if I may say so. Which is what makes this such an absolute scream. Honestly, sweetie, I wouldn't have thought you had it in you. I mean, I've not been allowed to see her in the buff myself since she was twelve. Honestly, I've wondered once or twice if there was something *wrong* with the girl." Her mother beamed across the breakfast table. "Anyway, old Mrs Whatsit doesn't seem to be making a fuss. She just thinks I ought to know. More coffee,

anyone? God-look at the time! And I say I'd be early today... I'm off. Leave the breakfast things, lovely - we'll do them lather. Coming, Stan?"

Clara went on sitting at the table. She ate a piece of toast and drank her coffee. Her mother and Stan bustled about collecting her purse and his jacket and banged out of the house, shouting goodbye. The front gate clicked, the car door slammed, and then Clara began to cry, the tears dripping from her chin on to her folded arms and her face screwed up like a small child's.

This Be the Verse

They fuck you up, your mum and dad.
They may not mean to, but they do.
They fill you with the faults they had
And add some extra, just for you.

But they were fucked up in their turn
By fools in old-style hats and coats,
Who half the time were soppy-stern
And half at one another's throats.

Man hands on misery to man.
It deepens like a coastal shelf.
Get out as early as you can,
And don't have any kids yourself.

(1974)

Group/Class Work

1. Try to express the meaning of the first stanza in your own words.
2. Why does Philip Larkin use as strong a word as "fuck"?
3. Why do parents "fuck up" their children? Look for a reason in stanza two, and add some extra reasons of your own.
4. Find the words that describe parents, and what they do to their children. What is Larkin's advice to parents? Does Larkin understand / forgive parents for what they do?
5. How do the parents in stanza two get along? Compare with the case in "Parents Who Love in a Living Hell".
6. What does Philip Larkin mean by the phrase "soppy-stern"? Compare with "Parents Who Love in a Living Hell".
7. What is said in the last stanza? Use your own words.
8. What is meant by "It deepens like a coastal shelf?" Why does it deepen? Is that true?
9. What do you think of Larkin's advice?

BEL KAUFMANN

Sunday in the Park

It was still warm in the late-afternoon sun, and the city noises came muffled through the trees in the park. She put her book down on the bench, removed her sunglasses, and sighed contentedly. Morton was reading the *Times Magazine* section, one arm flung around her shoulder; their three-year-old son, Larry, was playing in the sandbox: a faint breeze fanned her hair softly against her cheek. It was five-thirty of a Sunday afternoon, and the small playground, tucked away in a corner of the park, was all but deserted. The swings and seesaws stood motionless and abandoned, the slides were empty, and only in the sandbox two little boys squatted diligently side by side. *How good this is*, she thought, and almost smiled at her sense of well-being. They must go out in the sun more often; Morton was so city-pale, cooped up all week inside the gray factorylike university. She squeezed his arm affectionately and glanced at Larry, delighting in the pointed little face frowning in concentration over the tunnel he was digging. The other boy suddenly stood up and with a quick, deliberate swing of his chubby arm threw a spadeful of sand at Larry. It just missed his head. Larry continued digging; the boy remained standing, raised, stolid and impassive.

"No, no, little boy." She shook her finger at him, her eyes searching for the child's mother or nurse. "We mustn't throw sand. It may get in someone's eyes and hurt. We must play nicely in the nice sandbox." The boy looked at her in unblinking expectancy. He was about Larry's age but perhaps ten pounds heavier, a husky little boy with none of Larry's quickness and sensitivity in his face. Where was his mother? The only other people left in the playground were two women and a little girl on roller skates leaving now through the gate, and a man on a bench a few feet away. He was a big man, and he seemed to be taking up the whole bench as he held the Sunday comics close to his face. She supposed he was the child's father. He did not look up from his comics, but spat once deftly out of the corner of his mouth. She turned her eyes away.

At that moment, as swiftly as before, the fat little boy threw another spadeful of sand at Larry. This time some of it landed on his hair and fore-

head. Larry looked up at his mother, his mouth tentative; her expression would tell him whether to cry or not.

Her first instinct was to rush to her son, brush the sand out of his hair, and punish the other child, but she controlled it. She always said that she wanted Larry to learn to fight his own battles.

"Don't do that, little boy," she said sharply, leaning forward on the bench. "You mustn't throw sand!"

The man on the bench moved his mouth as if to spit again, but instead he spoke. He did not look at her, but at the boy only.

"You go right ahead, Joe," he said loudly. "Throw all you want. This here is a *public* sandbox."

She felt a sudden weakness in her knees as she glanced at Morton. He had become aware of what was happening. He put his Times down carefully on his lap and turned his fine, lean face toward the man, smiling the shy, apologetic smile he might have offered a student in pointing out an error in his thinking. When he spoke to the man, it was with his usual reasonableness.

"You're quite right," he said pleasantly, "but just because this is a public place. ..."

The man lowered his funnies and looked at Morton. He looked at him from head to foot, slowly and deliberately. "Yeah?" His insolent voice was edged with menace. "My kid's got just as good right here as yours, and if he feels like throwing sand, he'll throw it, and if you don't like it, you can take your kid the hell out of here."

The children were listening, their eyes and mouths wide open, their spades forgotten in small fists. She noticed the muscle in Morton's jaw tighten. He was rarely angry; he seldom lost his temper. She was suffused with a tenderness for her husband and an impotent rage against the man for involving him in a situation so alien and so distasteful to him.

"Now, just a minute," Morton said courteously, "you must realize. ..."

"Aw, shut up," said the man.

Her heart began to pound. Morton half rose; the Times slid to the ground. Slowly the other man stood up. He took a couple of steps toward Morton, then stopped. He flexed his great arms, waiting. She pressed her trembling knees together. Would there be violence, fighting? How dreadful, how incredible. ... She must do something, stop them, call for help. She wanted to put her hand on her husband's sleeve, to pull him down, but for some reason she didn't.

Morton adjusted his glasses. He was very pale. "This is ridiculous," he said unevenly. "I must ask you. ..."

"Oh, yeah?" said the man. He stood with his legs spread apart, rocking a little at Morton with utter scorn. "You and who else?"

For a moment the two men looked at each other nakedly. Then Morton turned his back on the man and said quietly, "Come on, let's get out of here." He walked awkwardly, almost limping with self-consciousness, to the sandbox. He stooped and lifted Larry and his shovel out.

At once Larry came to life; his face lost its rapt expression and he began to kick and cry. "I don't *want* to go home, I *want* to play better, I don't want any supper, I don't *like* supper. ..." It became a chant as they walked, pulling their child between them, his feet dragging on the ground. In order to get to the exit gate they had to pass the bench where the man sat sprawling again. She was careful not to look at him. With all the dignity she could summon, she pulled Larry's sandy, perspiring little hand, while Morton pulled the other. Slowly and with head high she walked with her husband and child out of the playground.

Her first feeling was one of relief that a fight had been avoided, that no one was hurt. Yet beneath it there was a layer of something else, something heavy and inescapable. She sensed that it was more than just an unpleasant incident, more than defeat of reason by force. She felt dimly it had something to do with her and Morton, something acutely personal, familiar, and important.

Suddenly Morton spoke. "It wouldn't have proved anything."

"What?" she asked.

"A fight. It wouldn't have proved anything beyond the fact that he's bigger than I am."

"Of course," she said.

"The only possible outcome," he continued reasonably, "would have been – what? My glasses broken, perhaps a tooth or two replaced, a couple of days' work missed – and for what? For justice? For truth?"

"Of course," she repeated. She quickened her step. She wanted only to get home and to busy herself with her familiar tasks; perhaps then the feeling, glued like heavy plaster on her heart, would be gone. *Of all the stupid despicable bullies*, she thought, pulling harder on Larry's hand. The child was still crying. Always before she had felt a tender pity for his defenseless little body, the frail arms, the narrow shoulders with sharp, wing-like shoulder blades, the thin and unsure legs, but now her mouth tightened in resentment.

"Stop crying," she said sharply. "I'm ashamed of you!" She felt as if all three of them were tracking mud along the street. The child cried louder.

If there had been an issue involved, she thought, *if there had been something to fight for... But what else could he possibly have done? Allow himself to be beaten? Attempt to educate the man? Call a policeman? "Officer, there's a man in the park who won't stop his child from throwing sand on mine..."* The whole thing was as silly as that, and not worth thinking about.

"Can't you keep him quiet, for Pete's sake?" Morton asked irritably.

Larry pulled back, dragging his feet.

"If you can't discipline this child, I will," Morton snapped making a move toward the boy.

But her voice stopped him. She was shocked to hear it, thin and cold and penetrating with contempt. "Indeed?" she heard herself say. "You and who else?"

(1985)

The Beatles: She's Leaving Home

(From the album *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, 1967)

1.) Wednesday morning at five o'clock as the day begins
Silently closing her bedroom door
Leaving the note that she hoped would say more
She goes down the stairs to the kitchen clutching her handkerchief
Quietly turning the backdoor key
Stepping outside she is free

[Chorus]
She (We gave her most of our lives)
Is leaving (Sacrificed most of our lives)
Home (We gave her everything money could buy)
She's leaving home after living alone
For so many years

2.) Father snores as his wife gets into her dressing gown
Picks up the letter that's lying there
Standing alone at the top of the stairs
She breaks down and cries to her husband Daddy our baby's gone
Why would she treat us so thoughtlessly
How could she do this to me

[Chorus]
She (We never thought of ourselves)
Is leaving (Never a thought for ourselves)
Home (We struggled hard all our lives to get by)
She's leaving home after living alone
For so many years (Bye Bye)

[Bridge]
Friday morning at nine o'clock she is far away
Waiting to keep the appointment she made
Meeting a man from the motor trade

[Chorus]
She (What did we do that was wrong)
Is having (We didn't know it was wrong)
Fun (Fun is the one thing that money can't buy)
Something inside that was always denied
For so many years (Bye Bye)
She's leaving home Bye, bye

Britney Spears: "I'm Not a Girl, Not Yet a Woman" (2002)

[Verse 1]
I used to think I had the answers to everything
But now I know
That life doesn't always go my way, yeah
Feels like I'm caught in the middle
That's when I realized

[Chorus]
I'm not a girl
Not yet a woman
All I need is time, a moment that is mine
While I'm in between
I'm not a girl

[Verse 2]
There is no need to protect me
It's time that I learn to face up to this on my own
I've seen so much more than you know now
So don't tell me to shut my eyes

[Chorus]
I'm not a girl (Not a girl, not yet a woman)
Not yet a woman
(I'm just trying to find the woman in me)
All I need is time, a moment that is mine
While I'm in between
I'm not a girl
[Bridge]
But if you look at me closely
You will see it in my eyes
This girl will always find her way

[Chorus]
(I'm not a girl) I'm not a girl, don't tell me what to believe
(Not yet a woman) I'm just trying to find the woman in me, yeah
(All I need is time) All I need is time, a moment that is mine
While I'm in between
I'm not a girl (Not a girl, not yet a woman)
Not yet a woman
(I'm just trying to find the woman in me) Not now

Pink: "Family Portrait" (2002)

Uh, uh, some deep shit, uh, uh

Momma please stop cryin, I can't stand the sound
Your pain is painful and its tearin' me down
I hear glasses breakin as I sit up in my bed
I told dad you didn't mean those nasty things you
Said

You fight about money, bout me and my brother
And this I come home to, this is my shelter
It ain't easy growin up in World War III
Never knowin what love could be, you'll see
I don't want love to destroy me like it has done
My family

Can we work it out? Can we be a family?
I promise I'll be better, Mommy I'll do anything
Can we work it out? Can we be a family?
I promise I'll be better, Daddy please don't
Leave

Daddy please stop yellin, I can't stand the sound

Make mama stop cryin, cuz I need you around
My mama she loves you, no matter what she says
It's true
I know that she hurts you, but remember I love
You, too

I ran away today, ran from the noise, ran away
Don't wanna go back to that place, but don't have
No choice, no way
It ain't easy growin up in World War III
Never knowin what love could be, well I've seen
I don't want love to destroy me like it did my
Family

Can we work it out? Can we be a family?
I promise I'll be better, Mommy I'll do anything
Can we work it out? Can we be a family?
I promise I'll be better, Daddy please don't

Leave

In our family portrait, we look pretty happy
Let's play pretend, let's act like it comes
Naturally
I don't wanna have to split the holidays
I don't want two addresses
I don't want a step-brother anyways
And I don't want my mom to have to change her
Last name

In our family portrait we look pretty happy
We look pretty normal, let's go back to that
In our family portrait we look pretty happy
Let's play pretend, act like it goes naturally

In our family portrait we look pretty happy
(Can we work it out? Can we be a family?)
We look pretty normal, let's go back to that
(I promise I'll be better, Mommy I'll do
Anything)
In our family portrait we look pretty happy
(Can we work it out? Can we be a family?)
Let's play pretend act and like it comes so
Naturally
(I promise I'll be better, Daddy please don't
Leave)
In our family portrait we look pretty happy
(Can we work it out? Can we be a family?)
We look pretty normal, let's go back to that
(I promise I'll be better, Daddy please don't
Leave)

Daddy don't leave
Daddy don't leave
Daddy don't leave
Turn around please
Remember that the night you left you took my
Shining star?
Daddy don't leave
Daddy don't leave
Daddy don't leave
Don't leave us here alone

Mom will be nicer
I'll be so much better, I'll tell my brother
Oh, I won't spill the milk at dinner
I'll be so much better, I'll do everything right
I'll be your little girl forever
I'll go to sleep at night

Lukas Graham: "7 years" (2015)

[Chorus 1]
Once I was seven years old my momma told me
Go make yourself some friends or you'll be lonely
Once I was seven years old

[Verse 1]
It was a big big world, but we thought we were bigger
Pushing each other to the limits, we were learning quicker
By eleven smoking herb and drinking burning liquor
Never rich so we were out to make that steady figure

[Chorus 2]
Once I was 11 years old my daddy told me
Go get yourself a wife or you'll be lonely
Once I was 11 years old

[Verse 2]
I always had that dream like my daddy before me
So I started writing songs, I started writing stories
Something about that glory just always seemed to bore me
Cause only those I really love will ever really know me

[Chorus 3]
Once I was 20 years old, my story got told
Before the morning sun, when life was lonely
Once I was 20 years old

[Verse 3]
I only see my goals, I don't believe in failure
Cause I know the smallest voices, they can make it major
I got my boys with me at least those in favor
And if we don't meet before I leave, I hope I'll see you later

[Chorus 4]
Once I was 20 years old, my story got told
I was writing 'bout everything, I saw before me
Once I was 20 years old
Soon we'll be 30 years old, our songs have been sold
We've traveled around the world and we're still roaming
Soon we'll be 30 years old

[Verse 4]
I'm still learning about life
My woman brought children for me

So I can sing them all my songs
And I can tell them stories
Most of my boys are with me
Some are still out seeking glory
And some I had to leave behind
My brother I'm still sorry

[Bridge]
Soon I'll be 60 years old, my daddy got 61
Remember life and then your life becomes a better one
I made a man so happy when I wrote a letter once
I hope my children come and visit, once or twice a month

[Chorus 5]
Soon I'll be 60 years old, will I think the world is cold
Or will I have a lot of children who can warm me
Soon I'll be 60 years old
Soon I'll be 60 years old, will I think the world is cold
Or will I have a lot of children who can hold me
Soon I'll be 60 years old

[Outro]
Once I was seven years old, my momma told me
Go make yourself some friends or you'll be lonely
Once I was seven years old

Once I was seven years old