

Ms. Z—

I'm in like 45 different text groups. It's the same 8 people but with like one person missing in each one.

Last night we robbed the 7-11. Everyone except Rob. He missed it bc wrong text group.

We didn't really rob it tho. Kevin Slurpee works there on Thursday so we just took every fucking hotdog and emptied out the chili n cheese dispenser. Kevin Slurpee is Rob Slurpee's brother, no cap.

It's like, we're not supposed to be interested in sex anymore. Who came up with that? Ok boomer.

Last night I had sex with Ace. Ace supposedly accordingly doesn't like sex but we did. We were both on our own Porn Hub.

My brother said they're trying to put advertising in space. They'll put ads for Kate Bush in the night sky. If that happens I'll have to be a terrorist.

I'm really in love with Zendaya. Not her actual name but pretty much the same hair same complexion. God I love her. God I love her. God I love her.

Mom loves me. She'll put her hands right in the trash and lift me up. I'll be in the dirt and she'll lift me right the fuck up. I love her and Zendaya and Ace and Rob.

I'll be a terrorist for them if I have to. I'll be a terrorist for anyone who comes after them and for anyone who puts that shit in space and for anyone who shoots a wolf. That's who I am. You shoot a wolf and I'm coming the fuck for you.

The Platypus

You've got too much violence...in your eyes.

You've got too much violence...in your life.

Doo doo doo-doo doo-doo da doo-doo-doo doo doo

Doo doo doo-doo doo-doo da doo-doo-doo doo doo

—The Clean

I've never been to New Zealand, but that doesn't mean I'm not an expert. I've never shot the Queen either, but that doesn't mean I won't.

In New Zealand, you know, they have the platypus. The platypus has a goose bill, a muskrat tail, and snake venom in its foot. It keeps its baby in its pouch—hoppity-hop.

How do you find your prey if you're a platypus? Electrolocation. I can hear ya muscles, mate! That's what they say in New Zealand.

The Queen is queen of New Zealand. I wish they'd get rid of her. All she does is muck about, waving her little hand. My father and my father's father were peat farmers in the way-back times. They hated the wee lass. They were practically her slave.

My grandmother, she hated violence. She stood firmly on its head—would not send her boys to fight. This not discounting the beatings my grandfather gave her. I never met the son of a bitch, peat fork, peat hat, peat hands, peat eyes.

My granddaughter is coming this afternoon. She loves the animal book. She starts at the aardvark clear through to the zebra. She says it like Debra. The Zebra called Debra. We linger over the platypus too: What a charmer.

Grandpa? Would you save me if someone tried to nap me? She looks at me with one eye. I can't have anybody nap me. What she says when she means kidnap. Why she hollers when it's time to sleep.

Darling, I would never let them. I am your knight in armor. They would not, could not, dare.

She looks at me skeptically, with only one eye. Grandpa, they always do. *Always*.

What a strange beast—bioluminescent in the dark afternoon room—and I am in love.

Princess Cecilie Viktoria Anastasia Zeta Thyra Adelheid of Prussia

Uncle Binn works at the helium reserve. Basically, he handles a wrench, loosening and unloosening things all the day long. A billion meters of gas! he's prone to say, his voice rising to a hilariously high pitch.

Auntie Binn dreamt of being a country music star. In her dream she wore an all-yellow Nudie Suit, carried a yellow guitar, called herself The Amarillo Rose. Pretty sure I woulda done it, she says. I had the sweetest voice. That was before Cousin Binn, the sweetest brain-damaged boy you'd ever meet.

Me and Cousin Binn go out to the Ranch. Now that I got my license, it's easy for us. We slide out at evening time, when I get off from work, as the sun sits down on the prairie. It's not the

Cadillacs we go out to see—neither of us cares a whit. It's the hot wind, or the thunderheads off west, or the coyotes trotting home with jackrabbits in their jaw.

Cousin Binn can say No, Yes, Hungry, and Tired. He has trouble with Hungry, cries when he's Tired, teases his sister with No, eyes spark like winter with Yes. Yes is his favorite. Yes, yes, and yes, all the day long.

Everyone calls Cousin Binn Cousin Binn and his sister is Sister Binns. Sister Binns is two years younger and she is a jar of whoop de doo fuck. When the pastor said Halloween is a sin she rushed home to work on her costume. For three years running she's been Princess Cecilie Viktoria Anastasia Zeta Thyra Adelheid of Prussia.

Mom says Cousin Binn won't be around too long. It's a wonder, she says, we've had him as long as we have. Some people say it's because of the factory for nuclear bombs. Some people say some people have brains full of shit.

Cousin Binn and I go out to the Ranch. I hope he stays around until I'm done with school. What with that and the job I don't have enough time. We wander into the prairie and stand by a tangle of butterweed. After four years, there's hope that rain could fall. Cousin Binn is happy. He angles his arm to touch me in the ribs.

Aha Again

My dad is angry. I should say: again. He's talking about Pharaoh Aha.

"Aha," my dad says, "he was the guy who did it, you see?" My dad is sitting at the head of the table, looking through the window at the yard. The oak trees are turning color and tossing their leaves at the ground.

"*He* was the one to unify Egypt. He took all those little...principalities? Yes. He took all those *principalities*—" My dad pauses to glare at us, my sister and I, dares us to challenge the term. "And he fashions a kingdom."

The housekeeper Charli is upstairs vacuuming. There's the low thunder of its wheels on the rug, the offhand collisions with the furniture. The windowpane through which my dad is viewing the yard shimmers with the efforts of Charli.

"But," my dad says, and here he's getting going, "they—some of them—claim it was Aha's father. His father!" he shouts. The underside of my dad's jaw is turning blue: He's really getting going. "His fucking father!"

Across the lawn the swans look to hover. They sit their placid way upon the water and the water is the color of the daylight moon. The swans look to hover on the surface of the moon.

My sister laughs. She is the golden child. “Aha!” she shouts, and it bounces about our paneled room. “It was your dad, Aha!”

My dad’s heart contracts, hidden in his ribs. He is angry. His father. His father’s father. He looks at me and divines a dynasty of anger. Charli is shouting at the cat. Charli is running through the hall after the cat. My dad looks at my sister and sees the royal Serekh of love.

The Return

The bottle is blue, plastic, a red cap, filled with a medicated powder. When it is empty and thrown away, it rides nearly to the dump, bouncing out of the truck’s hopper and into the culvert. A heavy rain pushes it a half mile to the tidal creek. When the tide comes in, then out again, the bottle bobs along, past stands of reeds, a sweep of ducks, and into the bay.

The man is in his small boat, lifting his pots by their lengths of rope. In each pot a crab or two waves its claws, blue and bright in the faintly falling rain. Mostly they are too small, or female, or the man feels sorry for them, and he drops them over the side to sink elegantly back to their murky bottom. Most times the boat sputters home with few to no catches at all.

The man in his boat spies the bottle amidst a float of bay grass loosened from its roots. He guides the boat close, reaches out with his net, brings the bottle aboard. Into the hull it goes, alongside pieces of Styrofoam buoys—sun and salt faded—a potato chip bag, a half-empty bottle of red Mountain Dew.

Before 9 the rain clears and the sun comes out, biting and white. The man, without his hat today, steers the boat towards home. It’s a quarter mile across the open water, chopping at the keel. The wind freshens, dries the sweat across his arms, from the sockets of his eyes. At the small wooden dock of home, he is home.

The pieces of buoy, the potato chip bag, the plastic bottles go into the trash. This makes the man feel strong, less than his 75 years. He has done good unto the world. He has done well. At the rear door to his home he turns back to look at the bay, loudly blue under the sky. He has done well. He is hungry. His ailing wife is asleep in their bed, her breath catching, quitting, starting again.

Tall Grass

He liked all the cool bands—Sephio, Animal Cache, Tariq Atell—though he didn't like to think of himself that way. Just a music nerd, he'd say, and his friends would agree, roll their eyes, or shrug as was their predisposition.

He was predisposed to Cheerios. Loved them, any time of day.

His girlfriend Betty was about to enter grad school. Oh was she sarcastic! She made the kinds of jokes that made people uncomfortable. She wanted to work with terminally ill children.

Betty and Dylan were engaged. They were both the type to have eschewed the idea of marriage when they were young. Things change. Love.

Dylan was excited to have tickets for the show. Betty always said that upcoming shows made her boyfriend horny. This was true.

Just after they got married Dylan lost his job. He spent six months unemployed. He argued with Betty more than usual—but it was ok. In fact they remained together until Betty got breast cancer, 7 years later.

I love you, she said, but there's just certain things. She moved to, and then died in, Argentina.

Dylan became a music engineer. He got to work with a few of his favorite bands. He was especially fond of musicians just starting out.

Seven years after Betty left him Dylan got remarried. She was nothing like Betty. Well, in some ways she was. Love.

After 7 years Dylan took a trip to Argentina. The beauty took the breath from him. The tall grass kept opening toward the mountains.