

* One time I tried keeping track of the things that happened to me in a journal. I figured that I'm gonna be OLD and DEAD one day and the only way of making sure that anything would get remembered by me or anyone else was if I wrote it down and since nobody else could do it for me I took on the job myself. I charged a composition book on my parents' account at the school store. It had black and white speckles on the cover. It looked like TV static. I wrote my name inside.

The first few entries were daily. I would write the date at the top of every one. That sort of detail felt important. Sometimes the entries were short and sometimes they kind of like rambled, but they were never very good. The journal was boring because nothing exciting ever seemed to happen and I usually forgot to write about it afterwards when it did. Or I'd try to write it out as accurately as I could but it'd just end up seeming dull and even sort of made-up when I went to reread it. So I stopped writing in the book everyday. Instead of listing all the dumb little events that happened, I tried to write about my FEELINGS when I had them instead. I wouldn't have to be so meticulous or disciplined if I was going to write about FEELINGS, was what I figured. But I had problems with that too, because I didn't actually HAVE that many SPECIFIC feelings to speak of. And whenever I did feel something it was just like what I was talking about earlier. I'd forget the details afterward - whatever made the feeling seem important in the first place - like the way you forget a dream when you go to replay it in the morning.

And a lot of the time I was just too lazy to write in my journal. Whenever I *would* get a feeling down on paper, it'd come off as stupid or shallow or embarrassing to have even had in the first place. Unworthy. And then there were the times when I knew there was stuff I should've put in the journal but when I sat on my bed and tried to write it out, I couldn't do it. I was scared or something. Even though I knew nobody else was going to read it. And even then I doubt they

could decipher my handwriting. One thing about me is that I was never what you call particularly courageous. And my script is fucking awful.

Anyway the journal sucked and after a while I ended up tossing it out with the trash. The notebook was mostly empty anyhow. I was probably nine or ten years old at the time. Now the whole thing seems pretty fucking stupid. But then again, here I am writing this stuff down in a composition book just like when I was a little kid so I guess I'll let you figure out who and what stupid is for yourself. I let most people call me 'Retard' for instance, although my real name is Miles Lover.

* I don't know how people started calling me Retard. A lot of people get called that I'm sure. I say it all the time for instance. But for some reason with me the name stuck and even managed to take on the status of a proper noun. Maybe it was my handwriting. Maybe not. When I was little I thought it was on account of the purple birthmark that covers my right eye like a bruise. My mother calls it a 'winespot.' Having a winespot doesn't mean I'm actually retarded or anything like that, but I used to be pretty fucking sensitive about it. So I guess I just assumed it had something to do with my nickname. Now that I'm older and not such a pussy about it, I realize it's probably something else. It might be I'm called 'Retard' because of the way it fits in front of my last name, but I doubt it. There are other things that would fit better, make more sense, like Dick...Maybe it's because I talk too loud. People are always making signs at me to lower my voice. And I vomit often. I get dizzy and nauseous. Especially this time of year. Allergies, I think. The pollen is awful. The whole world is yellow-green around the edges. I sneeze. It's everything else too. My fingers bleed because I bite my nails. I'm always spitting on

the sidewalk. I draw on my sneakers and the back of my hands when I ought to be listening to people that are smarter than me. I fidget. I chew on my pens until they explode in my mouth and the ink gets stuck in the cracks between my teeth and people laugh. My shoelaces are always coming untied. I sweat in my sleep and wake up very cold. My short-term memory sucks donkey wang. Everything I touch somehow gets lost. People tell me I look confused. I'm always getting in trouble for it, for not listening. I exist in a constant state of reprimand. I squint...But fuck all that. I don't know. It's gotta be something else. Something bigger. Something about me. A quality. Something that shouts: RETARD!

Anyway, people are always introducing me to strangers that way. And I don't bother to correct them. I'm too proud.

They must have started calling me Retard when I was pretty young I think, because I remember hearing it a whole lot when I was a kid...I thought I was so damn clever back then. My favorite thing was to be completely literal about stuff, which would really get under peoples' skin. That's probably why I did it in the first place. For instance, whenever somebody called me "ignorant" I'd explain how "ignorant" means "untaught" and that I was quite well-educated for my age, which was like seven or eight or whatever. Likewise, the first few times anyone called me "retarded" I probably told them the word meant "slow" before running off at top speed, grinning like a lunatic.

So I guess I *was* pretty retarded as a little kid or whatever, but who isn't? And this thing with being really literal about everything was only a phase thank god. After that I didn't say anything when people called me ignorant or retarded. I embraced it. "Retard" was even sewn on the back of my windbreaker after my rec league lacrosse team won the 'C' division championship in sixth grade. Miles "Retard" Lover. My coach got WAY ANGRY about it

though. I felt bad because I figured he probably knew somebody for real retarded. And I had reminded him of a bad situation or whatever. Don't worry, I stopped wearing the jacket after that. I'm not some kind of asshole.

* My mother harbors a superstition that on the first day of every month when you wake up the first two words you are supposed to say are "RABBIT, RABBIT." It's true. Not the superstition I mean, but that she believes it. Just like that, "RABBIT, RABBIT," twice in a row. If you do this you will have good luck until the end of the month. Then you have to do it all over again for the next month. If you forget to say "RABBIT, RABBIT" when you wake up on the first and you say another two words instead, like "Good morning" or "OJ, please," you will have very bad luck for the rest of the month. Except there is a way around this. To reverse the bad luck you have to walk up and down the stairs ten times backwards, repeating the phrase over and over again as you do it.

My mother claims the origin of this superstition goes way back, but none of my aunts ever remember it when I ask them. I always suspected she made the whole thing up. She must've started passing the superstition on pretty early though, because I've known about it ever since I can remember. I even did it myself for a while. Or tried to at least. I usually forgot missing the first of the month until well into the next one. But I tried. And this was long after I stopped believing in things like Santa Claus. I thought it was fun to walk up and down the steps backwards, I guess.

* I'm at my father's new place watching a show about reptiles on his big plasma screen - he didn't buy one until he moved out the last time and was living all by himself, the selfish prick - and right now he's in the office either sifting through piles of paperwork or copying music or playing internet bridge I'm sure. The show I'm watching is in awesome high definition and the footage is profoundly clear. I don't even need to squint without my glasses, which I refuse to wear ever until I can drive and still maybe not even then. Anyway, the reptiles on the screen look giant and realer than real. The rain falls like bullets all around me out of my father's surround sound. I can feel the jungle. The water, the life. I'm absolutely astounded. I'm also totally stoned off some gross shwag I smoked in the back lot behind my father's rowhome, which is full of crows and high grasses and random bulldozers and cracked mud patches until this Mexican work crew finishes building all the houses that are supposed to go there.

The narrator of the show is profiling the strangest creature I ever saw, a long snaky kind of lizard with tiny, almost useless legs. He kind of walks, kind of slithers through this thick rainforest all by himself. An endangered species that lives all alone. I'm fixated by him. He eats a small mousy thing. Apparently only once a year, in the springtime, which is like our fall or whatever, does this animal, which I like to call a "snizard" - him being part snake part lizard - ever seek out another one of its own. And that's only for a single violent fuck in the bush. They bite each other when they do it. I watched. So the snizard's life strikes me as a pretty lonely one. All alone in the jungle. No friends. Nowhere to belong. He can't hang with the snakes for being too much a lizard and visa-versa with the lizards for being too much a snake. A snizard fears and is feared alike by his peers. Actually...He has no peers. He's a loner. A freak. Born with outcast status. Forced by nature to walk alone. But a snizard can barely walk...

I'm even starting to find this thing pretty cute, with its soft round head and pathetic little

claws, when I hear my dad moving around in the kitchen. He's probably making a Turkey Spam sandwich, which I personally find disgusting. He eats a lot of these now. He eats them cold with cheese. Gross. Sometimes he offers to make me one. I just say no.

So I'm listening cautiously to his movements on the other side of the wall. I actually hear him fart in there. I cringe when I hear it. I know he's going to come in the living room and sit down. I sort of tense up, which I kind of feel bad about, which makes me even more tense. He comes in and stands over me in his worn-out khakis and his old college sweatshirt, smiling. I can smell the sandwich in his hand. I cover my nose with my sleeve.

"Whatcha watchin', kiddo?" he asks me. He has this big dumb smile on his mug. Like he is about to play with a toddler. Or a Martian. He hasn't sat down yet. He's still standing there.

"Television," I say.

He looks over at the screen. I try not to look at him.

"Anything good?"

"Um, no. Just, um, tv. You know. Television in general."

"Just TV?"

I nod, but don't say anything, eyeballs glued to the screen like I have blinders on.

I know my dad hates channel surfing. He finds it annoying. He would rather just sit and watch a TV show all the way through. Even the commercials! So I bring up the interactive guide and start flipping around like a madman, going back and forth through all this shit I know he's probably too old to enjoy anyway. After a minute he just sort of slides back out of the room in his socks. I can hear him in the hallway, shuffling off to look at the computer. My muscles go all loose with relief.

When I go back to the reptile program to check up on the snizard, the narrator has moved

on to something else. It's a giant chameleon-thing with a forked tongue and sharp-looking scales like feathers and a chest that can be puffed out all proud until you can see right through it and tell that it is hollow inside.