

BABY JACK Sample Chapter

Dear Reader,

Here are the first 70 pages of my new novel BABY JACK. The book will be published October 1 2006 by Carroll and Graf (Avalon NY). These pages are unedited! So forgive any typos. But I want to give you a little taste of my 300 page novel before it hits the stores. When it does I do hope you'll want to read the rest. And please note my offer to book clubs on the book club page.

With every best wish,

Frank

Baby Jack

A Novel

By

Frank Schaeffer

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Advance praise for Baby Jack

“‘I am the repentance that can find no forgiveness.’ Searing, heart-shattering, Baby Jack plunges the reader into the crucible of a son’s sacrifice and his family’s agony, as gold is distilled from the dross of their former brahmin lives.

“Highly topical for today’s treatment of United States military training and the conflict in Iraq, the novel tells at a deeper level the timeless story of young soldiers everywhere and of those who watch them march off to war. This is a tale of blood poured out, of mothers’ milk and fathers’ tears, of words spoken that can never be unspoken -- of passion, courage, cowardice, and shame. It is a chronicle of the brutal madness that attends grief, and the relentless imperative to discover grief’s meaning. In the end, neither death, nor time, nor God himself are as once imagined.

“Above all else, the novel bears witness to undying love, and its power eventually to redeem even our worst atrocities.”

Kimberley C. Patton Professor of the Comparative and Historical Study of Religion Harvard Divinity School and author of *A Communion of Subjects: Animals in Religion, Science and Ethics*.

"Families of American Servicemen and women deployed overseas should be heartened and comforted by this unique and compassionate novel. Civilians, on the other hand, will be treated to a bracing glimpse of what actually happens after that first, fateful trip to the recruitment center."

Carolyn See author of ***Making a Literary Life***

"Todd and God--characters as classic as Updike's Rabbit--compete in post-9/11 America, a hilarious and redemptive tale of sacrifice and selfishness. The sharpest portrait yet written of post-9/11 America, at once hilarious, selfish, noble, tragic and redemptive.

"Schaffer updates the God of G.K. Chesterton, who struggles against self-absorbed Sarah and Todd, characters as memorable as Updike's Rabbit. Boarding schools and elite colleges will ban this novel; it cuts too true about post-9/11 American upper-class society.

"We all know the characters - the upper-class family with the rebel who joins the Marines. Why? How could a young man go so wrong? God, in wickedly humorous and human garb, squares off against Todd, the snobbiest father since Abraham [in this] tale of selfishness and painful redemption."

Bing West author of ***The March Up***

"I had to read BABY JACK in private because it wrapped me up emotionally and left me wrung-out. Frank Schaeffer writes about duty and honor without irony, but without self-righteousness too. He draws a stark portrait of modern America, where most give none, and some give all. It's inspiring, poignant, and painful, because it's true."

Nathaniel Fick, author of ***ONE BULLET AWAY: THE MAKING OF A MARINE OFFICER***

"Frank Schaeffer's Baby Jack is a passionate elegy to the fallen dead of America's wars and to those who mourn them. A scathing social satire as well as a tragic love story, Schaeffer tells a tale that is heartbreaking, redemptive, and surprisingly funny. As in his earlier novels, Portofino, Zermatt, and Saving Grandma, Schaeffer misses no opportunity to point out the ridiculous hypocrisies of his characters. A psychological study of the effects of war on those who serve and those who are left behind, Schaeffer probes the minds and souls of his people, allowing them to reveal themselves through diary entries and letters. Baby Jack is a highly original literary achievement where God makes a brief appearance, as does the Puritan poet, Anne Bradstreet. This timely novel addresses one of the most important themes in American life today: who are the individuals who fight America's wars and who are the ones who do not."

Charlotte Gordon author-***Mistress Bradstreet—The Untold Life Of America's First Poet***

Other Books by Frank Schaeffer

Fiction

The "Calvin Becker Trilogy"

PORTOFINO

ZERMATT

SAVING GRANDMA

Nonfiction

KEEPING FAITH—A Father-Son Story About Love and the United States Marine Corps
(Co-authored with Sgt. John Schaeffer USMC)

FAITH OF OUR SONS—A Father's Wartime Diary

VOICES FROM THE FRONT—Letters Home From America's Military Family

AWOL—The Unexcused Absence of America's Upper Classes From Military Service – And How
It Hurts Our County
(Co-authored with Kathy Roth-Douquet)

www.frankschaeffer.com

For Jennifer Lyons my friend and agent

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Part I

1

A few weeks after Jack turned seventeen he invited a Marine recruiter to our home. I was stunned by the intrusion. Sarah didn't say much at first but her face looked tight. Up till that moment the talk about the Marines had been just that, talk. Worse, Jack broke the cardinal rule and invited him midmorning when he knew I'd be painting.

The man claimed he was a sergeant. He sat bolt upright at the kitchen table. He was wearing a kind of glorified doorman outfit. An enlisted man, not even an officer; officers need to have some sort of college. Even I knew that.

The recruiter brought these little packs of plastic cards with him, the sort of prop a second-rate child psychologist might use to coerce evidence from an eight-year-old in a molestation case. The cards had words like "motivation" and "discipline" stamped on them. They reminded me of the bible memorization cards my father used to leave by my bedside in his effort to interest me in the "things of the Lord." He gave up after I worked them into a collage of centerfolds stuck to a sheet of plywood dashed with sperm and blood donated by my friends at the Boston Museum School. It was my version of Piss Christ. Only I called mine Sticky Jesus and no one paid attention.

"Pick the word that is the reason you want to join," said the sergeant.

I cringed. How could my son have become someone who, after his exposure to the life within our home, after he and I had been such friends—after I allowed him to change high schools—even joke about joining this collection of victims?

Jack picked “discipline.”

I asked the recruiter what Jack would have after they were done with him.

“Have? I don’t understand you, sir.”

“Please call me Todd. What I mean is what benefits will Jack gain?”

“He’ll be a United States Marine, sir.”

“Todd. The name is T-o-d-d!”

“Yes, sir.”

“Todd!”

“Yes, si -- Todd.”

“Will Jack get to call everyone he meets ‘sir’? Is that the benefit?”

“There are other benefits. There’s the GI Bill. But,” the recruiter looked around our kitchen taking in the Subzero refrigerator, granite surfaces, the recessed halogens, and cherry wood cabinets, “I assume that getting money for an education isn’t why Jack wants to volunteer.”

“Maybe he wants the sort of challenge I found at Harvard Law,” said Sarah.

“Jack, why do you really want to do this?” I asked.

“You and I have been through it.”

“You can do a lot better. There are all sorts of ways you can stick it to me!”

“Maybe you want to go ROTC,” said the recruiter.

“No, I want to go enlisted.”

“We need to talk about this more amongst ourselves,” said Sarah.

“Maybe this is a good thing for somebody who would otherwise be in jail or pumping gas, but this is not for you,” I said.

“I’m joining the second I turn eighteen so you might as well sign the fucking paper!” shouted Jack.

There was a dead silence. Even the recruiter looked embarrassed. He shot Jack a disapproving glance.

Up to that moment Jack hadn't said he would outright defy me. That he did this in front of a stranger made me feel as if, literally, I was falling. Sarah turned a bright pink. The recruiter began to speak but I cut him off.

"Don't raise your voice to me, Jack!" I yelled. "If you want to mingle with Bible-thumping white trash then just get a job at Wal-Mart in Seabrook! You must find lots of your recruits there, Sergeant."

"Sir?"

"Todd!"

Sarah looked angry. But she's a big believer in the Rutherford decorum. So she tried to smooth things over.

"A Rutherford cousin did serve in the Navy in the Korean War. Maybe Jack's thinking of him."

"You never told me," said Jack sullenly.

"What does that have to do with anything?" I said. "Jack..."

"There are plenty of parents who object to their sons and daughters joining," said the sergeant. "I have two children and I want the best for them. When they graduate high school I'm not going to push them one way or the other but service is a good option."

"How old are your children?" asked Sarah.

"Seven and nine, ma'am."

"Jack," I said, "...What the hell is going through your brain?"

By the time Jack said he wanted to join the Marines, and everything went to hell, we'd been in our house so long that if I got up in the night to take a leak I didn't even bother to turn on the lights. The paths between furniture, the objects on the shelves, the dusty undisturbed places, were familiar as sunlight. We'd made our home our universe. We were settled. Coffee first thing, then again mid-morning, lunch together on the days when Sarah worked via computer from home, dinner with the children—the "children" having dwindled to Jack when Amanda left. Sarah was still my model from time-to-time. And I was still seducing her in the studio from time-to-time.

Each room had its own season. Christmas belonged to our living room, full of overstuffed, dusty furniture. Sarah and I stood beneath the cracked plaster of the low ceiling, gazing through the windows as the sky behind the maples turned gold and made the bare branches into stark, black silhouettes. Thirty miles north of Boston the sun sets early in winter. Then from late December to late February Sarah would go to her office in Boston almost every day. I painted alone under the skylights in the barn.

Those winter months aged us. The air was cold, dry beyond the help of a humidifier. But sunrises in the kitchen turned Sarah into a golden reincarnation of herself, returned her to who she was on some long ago summer morning in New York as we ran side-by-side along the path around the reservoir in Central Park.

By April grim thoughts receded in proportion to the shoots of green emerging from the tired grass. The green brought the narcissus.

By late May there came a day that almost seemed like a good imitation of summer. Swathed in bulky sweaters we'd eat our first outdoor lunch on the screened porch.

In summer we concentrated on sun-ripened tomatoes and fresh mozzarella salads.

By late October we took our coffee out of doors, had it anywhere, even on the rocks at the bottom of the garden overlooking the marsh. Days were warm, the mosquitoes dead since the first frost.

A day or so after the recruiter episode I was forlornly leafing through our family albums. My many snapshots of Sarah were a reminder of how quickly time had gone by. Amanda moved back to New York and sent photos from NYU. I felt cheated. I'd never figured out how to be a good father to her, and by the time I had a clue she was gone.

Somewhere, I was sure, in our childhood pictures of Amanda and Jack I'd find the reasons as to why Jack was doing this. I thought I'd learned from my mistakes with Amanda, paid attention. I put work second, and curbed my temper. I was there for Jack. I spent half a life patting him to sleep. Whereas Amanda cried for three minutes or so then went down. I didn't mind patting Jack. He was comforting to touch.

When Jack was four I set up a miniature easel next to mine and invited him to paint. Amanda was eleven and jealous. I had never allowed anyone except Sarah in the studio. We were still in New York so it meant Jack got to go to the studio in Williamsburg and Amanda didn't. I was too stupid to see how much this pissed her off. At the time it seemed natural. Amanda was musical and Jack loved to draw. If I had to do it over again I would have asked Amanda if she wanted to practice her cello in my studio.

I cut up small plywood panels for Jack and gave him a set of sable brushes, and his own paints, not acrylics, but the oils I used, thirty-dollar-a-tube pigments. Sarah asked why. She thought at four Jack should have been using something less toxic, but I told her that future curators would be thanking me for steering the young Jack Rutherford Ogden to materials almost as permanent as granite.

One of the family snapshots was of the three of us standing outside the Metropolitan Museum of Art. I asked some stranger to snap it as if we were tourists. I'm sure it was taken before we went in. Afterward I was too annoyed with Amanda to have bothered with a picture.

Every January a group of volunteers—mostly middle aged and elderly ladies working under the direction of the museum's conservancy department—pack away the Neapolitan eighteenth and nineteenth century terracotta and wood silk-clad figures that decorate the Met's "Angel Tree." Thirty feet high and lavished with over one hundred and fifty, fifteen-to-twenty inch figures: beautifully painted faces gentle and innocent; swirling robes of silk, rich as thick smoke curling heavenward—a nativity scene to break even my pagan heart, angels, the holy family, wise men, shepherds and travelers. The volunteers put up the tree in November, then pack the figures away after cleaning each with sable brushes and special vacuum cleaners. The figures are kept in a temperature-controlled environment, held by supports, stored in heavy crates. Their creators would be pleased.

I watched the dismantling of the tree with Jack and Amanda. They were five and twelve. (Sarah was supervising the packing up. We were about to move to Salisbury.)

"Art survives because each generation protects it, loves it, values it, tries to make time stand still, or at least slow down," I said. "These ladies are my heroes, guardian angels protecting art made by men who are now dust."

"Will they take care of your paintings when you're dead?" asked Jack.

"I sure hope so," I answered. "You make sure someone does if I'm not around okay?"

"I will," said Jack.

"If you want them to take care of your work you should paint something nice," said Amanda with a laugh. "Why don't you ever paint things that are beautiful, Dad?"

"Don't be such a smart ass."

"Dad's pictures are nice!" said Jack.

My defender shot Amanda a furious glance.

How can my defender defy me? Who is he? I thought I knew.

Tall, tender, tough, smart, funny, kind, polite. Jack hated school. I would always imagine him moored to a desk, longing to sail away. And yet when he painted with me he never moved concentrating with a white hot intensity. By the time he was fifteen Jack was reading books about eastern religions and could quote the sayings of Lao-tse.

2

The article in the New Yorker wasn't even about Dad. It was mostly about Lucian Freud, Wayne Thiebaud, and Steven Hawley. Dad got just a few paragraphs. He framed them.

Todd Ogden's work represents an outstanding late addition to the Modern Movement which is in the process of being reassessed. When we look at American painting in the 19th century, we see that there were already overlapping attitudes toward the notion of the real. Its greatest exponent was Eakins in a painting like *The Champion Single Scull* 1871, which provides a reflection of reality that would seem perfect but for the fact that it is so consciously disciplined. But Todd Ogden gives us something else as well -- he conveys surprise at what he sees, as opposed to what we expect to see.

Some of his smaller paintings such as *Virgin and Frozen Peas In Front of Old Painting* 1983/4 produce this feeling of astonishment not just in the viewer, but one senses in the artist himself. For the majority of spectators the most familiar picture in this exhibition is probably the *Female Nude in the K-Mart Parking Lot* 1989/90. Did the normally outspoken Ogden actually intend the nude female facing the viewer to be a "blasphemous" Christ icon?...

Was that the bullshit they'd carve on Dad's headstone? I wanted mine to say: "Jack Ogden, Marine." We look for meaning because whatever peers out from our eyes isn't happy to be bound up with a mortal body. We want to live forever. If life means something then maybe our hope that we're more than a sack of blood and bones is evidence of an immortal soul rather than insanity.

I needed to cut out smoking weed, even on the weekends—didn't want to pop the piss test. I heard the recruiters sometimes sprang a surprise.

When Dad lost his mind I'd play along. "Just smile and nod." But then I was just tense enough to fight back, not just pretend to listen and then do my own thing. I was angry enough to fight him.

When he started in about how "dumb" the Marines were, I told him that William Manchester was a Marine. End of discussion. At least for me.

My seventeenth birthday party—Dad, Mom, Jessica and guests were on the new dock. Amanda called from New York.

Everyone was overdressed for the hot day so there were jackets hanging off the cast iron lawn furniture. People always dressed up for Mom's parties. And of course Mom looked cool and collected in her pale yellow linen dress, and one of her big floppy hats.

The lawn was just cut so the garden smelled good. There were lots of boats on the river. Dad's boat was one of the biggest so people slowed down and stared at it and the lawn stretching up from the riverbank to the sprawling house. Plus, Mom hired a band. So there was some pretty good jazz floating out over the water.

Anyway, there were about fifty people milling around. It was my party but they were mostly Mom's friends. And because I left St. Martin's early and blew off their track team mid-season, there was only Jessica and three fairly decent guys from Chandler.

Mom's "friends" were people she always used this sort of occasion to get close to for her "causes." That day she invited four Salisbury selectmen and their wives because she was working on getting an easement to build a gazebo too near marsh, and the mayor from Newburyport was there, because Mom was raising money for some courthouse restoration. Dad and I were arguing, or as close to it as Dad would get, being it was my birthday and he really was trying hard to be nice. I pointed out that lots of artists, writers, political leaders--the sorts of people he respected, had served.

"They were drafted," said Dad, and that that was a "different time."

"No they weren't. Okay, some were but lots volunteered too."

The only other thing he could come up with was that I was meant to do "great things" and that the president was an asshole.

Then he started messing with Jessica, like somehow he disapproved of her now! I'll bet if I had been headed to Harvard I could have been out all day, night and weekends with any girl and he would have loved her. And he had been busting my chops because I was smoking. I know I could have smoked three packs a day and he never would have said a word if I wasn't saying I was headed to Parris Island. He called it "low class," but never said that about his agent, let alone the guy who came up from the Met to see his stuff and smoked the whole time. And he knew Alice and me were going at it like crazed rodents when I was fourteen and she was seventeen and he didn't give a shit! Back then I was winning track meets. I was sailing his boat. I was in a school he thought was great.

"Why would you want to only be a soldier when you could be so much more?" he asked.

I answered him like it was sort of a joke. But he knew, I knew, he knew, we really were fighting. So I was laughing and so was he, but we were staring at each other.

"First off, I'm not going to be a soldier but a Marine! Second, just because your generation screwed up Vietnam doesn't mean history stopped. Third, even a paranoid can have real enemies."

"To succeed in life you need to finish what you start," Dad said in a phony relaxed voice.

"Track just seemed stupid," I answered.

" 'Stupid?' What's stupid is the way you're hanging around with that girl. Is she the reason you quit track? Did she get you to start smoking?"

Now the gloves were off but he hadn't got the balls to go after me on the Marine thing, not on my birthday anyway, so he settled for picking on Jessica.

"I didn't even meet her till after I left St. Martin's."

"Why would you go for some mousy little girl?"

"And you are a controlling bastard," I said more and more mightily pissed off. "If I find her interesting, what's your problem?"

" 'Interesting?' Where's your passion?"

Before I could stop him, Dad turned to Jessica. She was standing on the dock about fifty feet away talking to Mom where they were setting up the table for my birthday cake the caterers were fooling with. Dad and I were on the boat.

"Jessica!" he yelled.

"Yes, Mr. Ogden?"

"Come over here."

Jessica boarded. She didn't know you take off your shoes on a boat so right off he snapped at her and she seemed a little embarrassed as she kicked off her shoes.

She looked so beautiful in that long gray skirt and white blouse even if it was way too hot. Her black hair fell down her back almost to her waist. She reminded me of a Filippo Lippi Madonna, only with no pearls braided into her hair and she wasn't blond. Jessica's blue eyes look directly at you, and were never cast down demurely Madonna-style, but she seemed to know the same secret those Lippi Madonna's knew. That's what reminded me of the Lippi's, Jessica's inner peace, as if she was from someplace less noisy.

The way Jessica kept smiling even though Dad was being so rude was brave. She sparkled and was about as far from "mousy" as you can get. She was different from the other girls at Chandler, not afraid to love ordinary things. Everyone else was into being extraordinary. Jessica was extraordinary but didn't know it. She talked about Sandy Point, and the way when the tide is out it looked as if you could walk across the bay to Crane's Beach, and how she had always wanted to do that. And when I told her about the Marines, she didn't look shocked or disappointed, just scared. And she liked Anne Bradstreet.

As Jessica stepped into the cockpit Dad started in.

"Let me tell you both about how I met Jack's mother," said Dad.

"C'mon Dad!"

No use.

“There was nothing rational about the experience. She seemed to have a shimmering outline around her as she walked through the gallery door. It was autumn and her cheeks were flushed. She wore one of those ratty Afghan coats everyone had in the seventies. It looked good on her! Her wool slacks were so tight you could’ve counted the change in her back pocket. And she was so beautiful! Her face is what got to me--those high cheekbones that pale Victorian coloring.”

“That’s it Dad! Okay, Jessica, lets go!” I said.

He grabbed her arm.

“Jessica wants to hear the end of the story, don’t you?”

“Why not?” said Jessica and smiled.

She was cool as a cucumber and looking right at him. Dad turned away first. Then he talked even louder.

I grabbed Sarah and kissed her before I even knew her name. Hell! I had her on the desk before I knew her name!”

He looked at us and smiled his shark grin.

I dragged Jessica away. She laughed.

I spent the rest of the afternoon trying to explain Dad to her. I don’t think she got his, I’m-a-genius-so-I-can-say-anything routine.

“I’ll work him into a story sometime,” she said.

Jessica was wonderful. People find hope in beauty. If there’s no meaning, if there’s no soul, just eyes reporting to a brain, then our desire for there to be more is our madness.

3

We were at the start of the last summer before the Marine Corps. And I was preparing for the worst though still hoping he wouldn’t go. I needed Jack more than ever. He had defied me and time was running out. And not being from a military family I had no sense of proportion. All I knew was that Marines got killed in Korea, killed Vietnam, and killed in Beirut.

Jack was a poet, a philosopher, and a real artist! After we moved to Salisbury, I set him up to paint in my studio—a barn by the house, both built in the 1830s. Jack painted muddy little landscapes of our marsh and river views in a wobbly eight-year-old hand, and several good pictures of me at my easel.

Then there was the Duccio craze, when he copied a Duccio Madonna and even used gold leaf. He was eleven. I never enjoyed anything more than watching Jack paint.

Jack wanted to know all about the Duccio panels in Siena. After I showed him my slides he painted crucifixions. And he made me tell him the whole story of Jesus’ life and death and resurrection because of those slides.

Jesus was a subject I had steadfastly resisted. It—"He"—gave me the screaming willies. But after explaining Jesus to Jack I began to incorporate Christ figures into my own work again. And those were the pictures that finally got me into the Met.

Cimabue, Duccio, Giotto, Uccello, Ghiberti, Masaccio, Brunelleschi, Donatello, Fra Angelico, Fra Filippo Lippi, and Botticelli, we looked at them all, in books and/or at the Met. And Jack must have had cadmium yellow on his fingers. I was furious and screamed at him. There are still little yellow fingerprints on my Illustrated Vasari.

After Duccio came Sister Gertrude. Jack loved her self-taught "primitive" art, painted on just any old board or piece of cardboard with childish daubings of color--happy angels, bible verses, and of course those famous self portraits as the bride of Christ riding to heaven with Jesus in his airplane. Sister Gertrude painted herself dressed in white, her wedding veil flying in the wind behind her, her dark brown face set with big eyes, as she headed to paradise with her white Jesus.

We listened to a recording of her chanting her apocalyptic gospel messages accompanied by her tambourine. She'd given up playing the guitar after the Lord told her not to play any more. Later she gave up painting when he told her to stop painting.

"Why was the Lord so crazy?" asked Jack. "Did he hate art?"

I didn't know what to say. I don't believe in God so that meant I'd have to say Sister Gertrude was nuts. So I changed the subject and talked about how ironic it was that the only reason we knew about Sister Gertrude was because a Jewish art dealer took her Christ-promoting art seriously and made it—and Gertrude Morgan—into an American icon. I'd talk about all sorts of bullshit while we painted.

When Jack was thirteen he finally came face-to-face with Duccio's paintings in the little museum inside the unfinished wing of the Siena Duomo, the cathedral's vast expansion that was never completed after half the population died of plague. By some miracle the Duccio room had no other visitors that day. Jack and I were alone with the figures of Christ and his disciples, the throngs of Jews, the Romans, the high priest, all painted in slightly green flesh tones and surrounded by the languid Tuscan landscapes, gold, strong faces and exquisite pastel coloring. Jack stood, staring at the panels.

"So somebody made something perfect!" Jack practically shouted.

After we got back from Italy we spent three months working at the marina—nights and weekends. By late October we were working under a tarp warming our hands over the butane heater every few minutes. Jack spent hours on his back reinforcing the connections between the hull and the deck. We added layers of fiberglass and strengthened the deck-attachments for the cables to support the mast. The two of us were planning to sail to Bermuda in the summer.

I carry pictures in my brain:

We were off Cape Hatteras with a lot of wind—the starboard rail was underwater then came up, foam gushing back into the ocean. The self-steering mechanism kept us on course. We were racing straight downwind and Jack's long sandy hair whipped around his smiling face in the breeze.

I had growing confidence in Jack's seamanship and he had absolute trust in me. We alternated three-hour watches.

I had no worries when Jack took watch. I even slept. Jack and I worked on radio fixes, dead

reckoning, current effect, we looked at Jupiter—I taught him what I remembered about coastal navigation.

Bright blue sky, clouds mirrored in Jack's lovely wide-set eyes, a dusting of freckles over his nose was growing more pronounced every day—sun burnt shoulders—Jack's seriousness about doing every job I gave him and doing it well—my absolute satisfaction that for once something was going as well as I hoped for.

We sat in the cockpit, heads back watching the sky and ocean slide past. Jack's back was warm from the sun as he leaned against me.

After Amanda graduated high school and left for New York, first for a child care job then NYU, Jack was like an only child. I almost never heard from Amanda. When she called she mostly talked to Sarah. I'd get snippets; assurance from Sarah that school was going well. It wasn't that I didn't love Amanda; just that I could only concentrate on what was in front of me—my work and Jack.

He draped his long arms over my shoulders when we walked off soccer fields. And that was when he was fifteen and tall as me, a time so many sons seemed embarrassed to even acknowledge the existence of fathers.

The Jack-and-the-Marines debacle started on September 11, 2001 when Jack was just sixteen. Thirty-seven of my works on paper were destroyed. As I watched the endless replays of the Twin Towers crumbling I imagined my art burning. Certainly this was insanely petty. Who gives a shit about art when a man and woman hold hands as they leap to their deaths? But who can visualize "thousands killed?" Who can grasp the end of the world?

I was mentally prepared to accept my fate: over time my art will forgotten. "Over time"--comforting words denoting centuries of gentle corruption, paper yellowing through eons, paint cracking, colors fading, not the entire Sarah Pregnant series soaked in jet fuel going up in flames as the gallery at the top of Tower Two was destroyed!

Amanda called from New York and told us she was fine. She was a senior at NYU. There was dust in the dorms. Jack's reaction was odd. He said he wanted to enlist. At first I humored him.

One afternoon, a few months after the disastrous visit by the recruiter, Jack came into the studio and sat down. I paid no attention. That was our way while I was working. And he was back to keeping the old rules, at least that day. He sat still for a good twenty minutes till I was done and turned.

Looking at Jack made my heart feel pinched. I was so damn angry and sad too. But I didn't know how to express the sorrow. I just knew that I had failed.

"Dad," said Jack in a quiet serious voice.

"Yes, Jack?"

"Dad, I'm really going to go through with it."

"There's still plenty of time to work this through."

"I've done my thinking."

"What if I said, if you join the Marines we will not speak again?" I said.

"I'd say, okay if that's how you want it," he answered calmly.

I took this as a challenge, one that had to be answered.

"Maybe I will," I said.

"Okay."

Jack regarded me steadily. His voice was quiet. I was trying to use my most reasonable tone. I smiled again. He still didn't smile back so I stopped. I felt as if an icicle was being rammed up my spine.

"Why are you so ready to shit all over me?" I asked.

"You're the one that sees it that way. Not me. But I'm going down there."

"You're just going to sit there and defy me to my face?"

"Call it whatever you want."

"Then fuck you!" I bellowed.

Jack just gave me a hard look.

"If you go down there I'll never speak to you again!" I shouted.

"Fine," Jack said, in an infuriatingly calm voice.

"I mean it!" I screamed.

"Fine," said Jack. "We'll never speak again."

I knew he was bullshitting, at least I hoped so. Jesus, I knew I was bullshitting! It was gamesmanship. I wasn't man enough to call it off right then and there.

We left it at that. I hoped he'd forgotten the threat as the days passed. But nobody backed down, nobody unsaid anything. And then we stopped arguing about the Marines—for a while.

I was hoping that if I didn't bring it up again the whole idiotic topic might just fade away, that maybe he'd just not go. And I'd pretend to not notice and let him back down gracefully.

Sarah was filling in college applications and leaving them in Jack's room regardless of his rebelliousness. She was still begging him to go for early decision at Harvard.

And I was left wondering just why Jack was able to get to me so thoroughly and painfully. I'd climbed out of a crappy background to a good place. And somehow I guess, I'd always assumed my kids would follow.

I hoped he knew that after he got back from boot camp we'd speak again even if I couldn't back down before he left. I figured he'd know it was like the times when he was little and I sent him to his room and said he had to stay there all day. After about a half an hour I'd come upstairs, shout at him some more for a few minutes then relent and release him from house arrest. I was counting on him knowing I was full of shit.

4

I was sick of always having the easy way handed to me, the ambitious Ogden/Rutherford nonsense where every step's just a petty calculation. I was going "open-contract." I didn't sign up for a specific MOS (military occupational specialty) but would do whatever the Corps needed.

My recruiter said I'd probably be in admin or motor-transport; a glorified truck driver or some poor jerk with a clipboard loading supplies. But like they said: every Marine a rifleman. We all have to qualify at five hundred yards, almost twice the distance to the target that the Army makes soldiers shoot. And the point was becoming a Marine, any Marine.

I didn't want a job that summer since I'd be working solidly for the next four years. I wanted a last vacation without a care in the world. As a graduation present my parents gave me \$1000 and told me I didn't have to get a job, to take a break and enjoy myself. It was Dad who said this. He also said he wasn't going to speak to me again if I went to PI. But the \$1000 told me his threat was bullshit, as usual.

I was driving Dad nuts by refusing to back down. On the other hand he'd lose control whether I pushed or not, flipping-out had always been his way of dealing with stress. I was tired of backing down and giving in to his whims.

Dad was pissed when I reminded him he hadn't exactly followed in his dad's footsteps.

He dropped in on me just before I went to bed a few days after he threatened to never speak to me again. I think he was sort of trying to make up. But he wouldn't come clean. I decided to see if I could push him over the edge. A good way was to needle him about his wacky religious childhood, something "we never talk about."

"You don't love Jesus any more, do you, Dad?"

"What?!"

"Well I think I'm going to be a born-again Christian like your dad."

"Don't go there."

"I want to call up your mom and ask her if she'll teach me how to love the Lord. How soon is Jesus coming back?"

"Cut it out!"

"But Dad, I'm feeling this call from God to preach about Jesus. Is he going to come and take us away? Are we going to be left behind?"

"Shut up!"

"I thought you always said that everything should be on the table."

I could tell he was about to explode but he contained himself and walked out.

Eventually he did sign the papers though. He had to. I'd been bugging him endlessly. He got so sick of me interrupting his painting he signed them and literally threw them at me after I'd asked about a hundred times. Anyway he knew a few months later I'd turn eighteen and this way it was still something like his decision before he'd lose all control.

And once it was settled he even put up a pull-up bar by the barn and got in my face about training for boot camp! He wanted to control everything, even what he was against!

Dad and Mom acted as if they were foreigners. They never talked about America except when they complained about the president, what an idiot he was. But who were Mom and Dad going to call when the shit hit the fan? What was wrong with wanting to serve my country?

5

Jack is angry with Todd. Now he's furious with me too it seems. I'm not anti-military, just anti-Jack joining. Several members of our family served in World War II. And there was at least one Rutherford in Korea. So Jack is quite wrong. We have done our bit.

I even admitted to him that perhaps there is something valuable about military discipline, something like the Native American right of passage, alone in the woods for two weeks to become a man. But I think all-male societies are one-dimensional. I know they tolerate women in the military now but Jack is joining the Marines and they train the women separately. What does that imply? I'll try to get Jack to reread *On the Beach* and *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Why on earth did Chandler School include that trite William Manchester muck in humanities? Education is such a mess these days. If they wanted to study war they should do something systematic, do the Romans before the Second World War for God's sake. Jack read Marcus Aurelius and missed the point! I had no idea that a certain type of male might be so vulnerable. About half way through this dreadful post-graduation summer I asked Jack to go for a walk. We went down to Graff Road and strolled along the edge of the woods. The marsh looked lovely along the Parker River. The smell of the woods, especially the woodchips from a freshly cut hickory, was sweet. People were canoeing. Everything seemed normal, cheerful, just like any other summer in New England. And yet Jack was in some obdurate delayed adolescence stalking along, not his normal easy-going self. I don't think he was noticing our surroundings. I was very much hoping the walk would somehow remind him of just why he should stay.

"Don't misunderstand me." I told Jack, "I do know people for whom the military could be a constructive experience. There was a former Marine at Harvard Law and I believe he's a judge now. However, who wants to actually kill or be killed? I don't understand your logic."

I took his hand and we walked along. He had nothing to say, though he did hold my hand very sweetly.

"What are your needs?" I asked him. "What needs are propelling you into the military?" He had no answers. I was at my wits end. What does one do with stony silence?

"You should aim to work at the cabinet level if you want to emulate your grandfather," I told Jack, "if you want to serve, work to develop real leadership, to make a real difference. Why don't you try politics? I'll call Robin and I'm sure she could fit you in as an intern on Kennedy's next campaign."

No interest whatsoever! Silence!

“Jack,” I said, “I’ve always been uncomfortable near people who are dogmatic about their truth.” No answer. We walked back to the car. I wonder if Todd is right about this Jessica person. Perhaps she is the new ingredient that’s driving a wedge between us all. Is she making my child happy? I know nothing about her people.

“Stay out of it as much as possible Mother,” Amanda said, after I called to talk about the situation. “You always end up lecturing.”

“You’re wrong,” I told Amanda stung, “I never ‘lecture’ Jack. The kiss of death is to become a schoolteacher parent. Look where it’s getting Todd!”

For whatever reason Amanda just wouldn’t talk, she seemed angry with me. Now I have two angry children.

What’s been the source of Amanda’s bitterness? At Wellesley I majored in fine arts and philosophy. It was not a “jumped-up finishing school,” as Amanda sometimes claims. It was a top college about excellence and doing things well, pursuing reason, thinking things out for oneself.

What is wrong with Amanda? I’ll make allowances for her being distressed because of Jack’s wild talk. But I think it is something deeper. My sister and I were lucky there was no son. My father treated us as “sons.” Maybe it’s better for a woman if there is no brother in the home. That’s always been one of Amanda’s problems. Jack got all Todd’s attention.

And Todd is being so damn inconsistent! One minute he tells Jack he’ll never speak to him again if he joins and then he goes out and puts up a pull-up bar! He told Jack he needs to get in shape for boot camp. For God’s sake!

Office: 10th Floor—Editorial—Letters Department, rooms 1055 and 1056. Title: “News Assistant.” Job description: One of the six persons responsible for producing the letters to the editor section of the New York Times.

The place radiates history but in a quiet way. The offices and most of the people I see in the elevators have an unmade bed quality. Everything is a little worn out and shabby. Since I was a little girl I’ve read the letters section of the Times. Well, they all came out of these offices on the 10th floor where I work!

Every angry letter Dad ever wrote that has not been printed—in other words all of them—came to these hallowed rooms. I thought the offices would be rather grand and imposing, marble columns, and high ceilings or maybe a modern version, high-tech chrome and glass everywhere. The newsroom on the third floor is more like that, big, with lots of cubicles, but up here on the tenth it’s like the main building upstairs halls and principal’s office at Chandler. We even have a dowdy little library in a big open area I walk around to get to the Letters office. It has a wood partition and the hall runs around the partition so when I walk from the elevators to our office I’m skirting what looks like the dowdier section of the Newburyport library.

Jason, our letters editor, is in one room and his desk is across from his second in command, Susan. She’s been here twenty-three years and is the Letters department. Jason has been here four years and before that was in the news department. They are all nice people, very academic and tweedy—very dedicated.

My fellow peons: Picture the younger faculty at the Chandler School, men in khaki pants, blue and white shirts with ties every which way and women who look as if they would be a lot more comfortable with a book sitting on the porch of some house in Kittery—lots of nondescript wool slacks, skirts and mauve blouses, the sort of women who wear shawls. The word “sexy” does not describe anything or anyone here.

The office I'm working in is about the size of the living room in Salisbury. I sit looking out at a yellow/rust brick wall and some big air ducts. Our windows are large and the room has plenty of light. Next to us peons is the door that leads into Jason's room. The door is always open. Next to the door is a two-foot tall pile of past Times letters pages. The papers are held down by a brick somebody sent to us with the words "Convict Criminal Clinton" stenciled on it—but as Jason commented dryly: "This doesn't reflect my political philosophy, it's just one of the stranger objects we've been sent." As for the letters, these days they're mostly sent by email.

The papers under the brick are turning yellow from the bottom of the stack up. A chemist could illustrate a lecture on the acidity of paper from this slowly yellowing stack. The top pages are white and on the very bottom, about two feet down, the pages have turned pumpkin color. Actually the way the white gradually fades all the way to pumpkin is sort of pretty. It's a good illustration of why daddy always insists on using acid-free paper even for his most casual sketches.

I come to work at about nine—stay till six. The way we keep ourselves from going crazy is to download all the letters then we sort by topic. We can use a key word, say, "Iraq," and then everything on the war goes into one pile. We print up hard copy and arrange all the piles on a little table next to the door leading to Jason's office. Then we do what we call the first sweep of the day by around ten. We do a second sweep by one and a last sweep by five or six, after that is the cutoff for the day, though we'll consider a letter for the next day or up to a week later.

Most of our mail is in response to something by our columnists so I told Dad he has a much better shot of getting a letter in about a news story than a column. And we don't print rants so if he is serious about something he should cool his jets.

We're here to reflect the views of our readers fairly. And since most of our readers are smart enough to be of the left that's how the page comes off. In fact it's the conservatives who get the break because say we get one hundred negative letters about a Brooks column backing the president, and we get seventeen conservatives writing who liked it and say we publish four letters, two negative and two positive, it would appear to our readers that a half of the letters were positive but they weren't. So Jason is right, "You can't read the letters as a sort of opinion poll." We don't see ourselves as performing a watchdog function. That isn't our job. As Jason says, "The letters are another voice representing the news from another angle."

My position is the most junior. Everybody here is Ivy League. (Everyone but me, that is, unless they count the fact that I got accepted at Harvard.) Most everyone got their job because somebody in the paper recommended them. That's how I got in. You have to have good computer skills—and a good grasp of the language—but above all you have to know somebody. I was at NYU when Jack quit track and left St. Martins. Dad called me and I was shocked. He'd been the star player on his junior high basketball team, and then at St. Martins he was drafted to run on the senior track team after just one tryout. He started winning right away and kept winning all the way up to the state championships where he won the 400-meters. We all got used to seeing Jack win. Then suddenly he just didn't want to run any more. But Dad didn't get it. I think it was Jack's way of telling Dad to get lost. I did the same thing by taking the au pair job in New York for the summer before college. I got to move out ahead of schedule.

The irony was that the people I worked for that summer were even more self-involved than Mom and Dad. They made them seem positively laid-back. I mean there's lax then there's indulgent. She-who-eats-her-young is a freelance contributor to the style section at the Times. He-who-is-terrified-of-his-wife is a plastic surgeon. After the little boy repeatedly socked me in the shins with a bat, "she-who-eats-her-young" said that I was to never say "no" to one of her children, but to find "creative and positive ways to redirect their creativity."

I lived in at the au pair job at 86th Street and 5th Avenue across from the Met. Très chic! (Though I felt I had somehow betrayed my roots on the Upper West Side by moving to the other side of the park.) Then I moved into the NYU dorm, then, after I graduated, moved to my place on

the Upper West Side and started my job at the Times. After I graduated from NYU she-who-eats-her-young got me my job at the paper, she's related to the publisher—God's third cousin, whatever.

Mom drove me down to the au pair job. Dad was furious because he hadn't wanted me to take the job. And then she came back at the end of that summer and helped me settle into the dorm. Then, four years later, Mom stayed after graduation. (Dad headed straight home.) She stayed because I needed help moving into my studio apartment on West 102nd Street.

I picked a place not too far from where I grew up. It was nice to be "home." I never did feel like I belonged on the North Shore—too white and the East Side is well, the East Side. The Korean lady at the store across from the 103rd Street subway station still remembered me from when I bought fresh orange juice there on the way home from school as a kid.

I still get that sense of relief every time Mom calls me with an update. The relief is that I'm here and not there. Dad seems to really be coming apart over the Marine thing. And now Mom says he's pissed off about Jessica—the new girlfriend. The sooner Jack's out the better for us all!

Jessica is not good enough for Dad. Just like my au pair job wasn't good enough. He doesn't say so but I think (I KNOW) it's because of Dad's weird sense of self. I called to ask him why he is being so hard on Jack.

"Some social experiments are not a good idea," Dad said.

"Are you saying Jessica isn't 'worthy' of Jack?"

"Will you be happy seeing your brother pumping gas?"

"Don't change the subject."

"Answer my question!" Dad bellowed.

"What's wrong with pumping gas?" I asked.

"Nothing if you don't have potential."

"Maybe he'll be a general or something," I said trying to laugh.

"The second raters go into politics and the third raters are in the military."

"And the artists are the only 'first raters?'"

I was still trying to jolly him along.

"First raters are people who don't settle for less, who finish what they start!" Dad yelled.

"So we're back to Jack quitting track? Jesus Dad!"

"No. But that's a good example of a character flaw."

"Dad?"

"Yes?"

"In the sixties, you weren't talking about winning track meets, were you?"

"I know you're being sarcastic but in fact the sixties were all about achieving our potential."

"While stoned?"

"It was about new beginnings, about moving beyond the cycle of violence based on the illusion of economic growth."

"From what I hear it was mostly about fucking."

"What's wrong with fucking?"

"And that is why you don't want Jack to be a Marine—not enough fucking?" I said and laughed.

"Your brother is throwing away his life." Dad paused. "He is also destroying my peace of mind, my ability to work!"

He is SO transparent! Poor Daddy!

"Daddy, not everything revolves around you."

"It only takes one generation to destroy everything. Think about the first family member of some German family who decided to join the Nazi Party."

"Jack isn't joining the Nazi Party!"

"I created a space where you all might thrive free of everything I grew up with, the prejudice, the narrow outlook, the stifling mentality. Jack's throwing it away."

What could I say? I told Dad I had to get back to work from my lunch break, which I actually did.

After I got back to the apartment I called Jack and told him that I honestly think his joining the Marines is absolutely insane and he shouldn't do it just to spite Dad. He could find less drastic ways to stick it to Dad. But Jack says he really does want to join, although he won't get into why. "I just do," is all he says.

So I called Mom.

"I think Jack is just sick of all the selfishness," I say.

"Whose selfishness?" asked Mom.

"Yours, Dad's, aren't you sick of it?"

"He's just a young man trying to distinguish himself from the crowd," said Mom.

I don't know how Mom sticks with Dad. I just get it over the phone and can't take Dad for more than two minutes. I can take Mom for maybe three.

7

I was at Chandler for the last two years of high school. That's why Jack and I were first drawn together. We were both the new kids in a class that had had its own cliques already. He had been

going to St. Martin's Prep but left after he quit their track team. I won a scholarship and transferred from public school the same year.

Even at Chandler, where people don't dress up or flirt in the usual overt teen manner—they're into being "natural" in a sort of granola-laid-back-but-pretty-intense way—Jack stood out as especially hot. The girls, even the nerdiest ones who were "above" ordinary teen stuff, didn't pretend they weren't looking at him. And the guys liked Jack too because as Dad said,

"Jack's a regular sort of guy."

After we'd been in school together about a month he started to ask me what movies I liked, if I ever read PG Wodehouse, how I liked school, what I was writing in my journal. I'd never read Wodehouse so Jack brought over some books. And Jack also brought over videotapes of old movies like *Being There*, *All That Jazz*, and *Full Metal Jacket*, his favorites. And then Jack started wearing a Marines T-shirt. People freaked out. The teachers told Jack they didn't think it was "appropriate." Some parents complained.

The T-shirt became a topic at a school meeting called to discuss this "free speech issue." We met in the school theater where the weekly meeting was always held. Three girls read an open letter about needing a new dress code that respected the sensitivities of other students. They said the T-shirt made them feel "uncomfortable."

Someone called it a "diversity issue" because of the "don't ask, don't tell" gays-in-the-military policy. Jack answered that if kids could wear "Nuclear Free Zone" T-shirts he could wear a Marines T-shirt. And, he said, that since Congress passed the law about gays in the military people who had a problem should petition Congress not blame the military. Then he looked around at everyone and asked them if they were saying that because the military isn't perfect did that mean we no longer need a national defense.

Then one teacher said that the military was homophobic. Jack answered that maybe it was but that; "On July 26, 1948 President Truman ordered the military to desegregate signing Executive Order 9981, which states," Jack pulled a note out of his pocket and read, "It is hereby declared to be the policy of the President that there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion, or national origin." Jack put the note away and smiled at the assembly then said, "The military followed that order even though there were plenty of racists in the military just like there were in the rest of the society. So do you think it's fair to blame the military for gutless civilian leadership related to the gay rights issue today? In a democracy civilians set policy."

Then Jack asked the teacher if the law was changed and gays could serve like anybody else would that teacher personally start encouraging Chandler students to volunteer, maybe sponsor a junior ROTC on campus. Lots of students, especially the guys, laughed and you could see the faculty was getting really annoyed.

The meeting kind of petered out with the headmaster making some lame remarks about Jack being "well prepared" and having the "right to be wrong," but that nevertheless Jack should think about "balancing his free speech perquisites with sensitivity toward our diverse community."

It seemed a little over the top for a T-shirt.

The T-shirt said:

"USMC—When It Absolutely Positively Has To Be Destroyed Overnight!"

Jack wore it every day after that. A lot of the guys thought it was cool.

Chandler was started in 1967 by a rich couple for their kids. They say that the first classroom was an old yellow school bus that was gutted then filled with desks. It was parked back of Rose Chandler's house in Salem. She kept goats and wrote a book about Rimbaud. The Chandlers were hippies but they were rich. They let the kids at school smoke weed back then. Now you get kicked out. Chandler is still progressive and alternative but they have ordinary rules these days. And the Chandlers are gone. Regular people run it now.

The campus is very swanky. The new Rutherford Theater cost millions. (Jack's grandparents paid for it while Jack's sister Amanda was there.) The new science building just won some kind of architecture prize.

Triton Regional High School where I went before transferring, was all about cinder blocks and metal lockers and bells every forty-five minutes and kids dragging their reluctant behinds from class to class and graffiti in the toilet stalls. At Chandler there were no bells. If a discussion ran long we just kept talking. Sometimes classes took two hours, depending on how interested everyone was. And everyone seemed to actually like studying. I loved Chandler.

And if the parents of two lucky students didn't have the \$32,000 tuition there was the Rose Chandler Opportunity Scholarship. That's how I got in, along with an African-American, a nice guy who had to commute an hour and a half each way from Roxbury. He was one of the only three non-white students in the school. The other two were some diplomat's kids from India.

I wrote a thirty-one page essay: Mistress Anne Bradstreet--First Poet of the American Colonies, for my scholarship application. The essay began: "Seventeenth-century Puritan life was the most self-conscious ever lived. Nothing was so trivial that it couldn't 'speak' a divine message, no disappointment so terrible that it couldn't be a 'correction' from God..."

They liked it. I got accepted.

Triton Regional had been driving me crazy. It was Mom's idea that I try for the scholarship. To put it mildly, we're not the usual Chandler types. Dad works at the sewage treatment plant and Mom's at Anna Jacques Hospital as an executive assistant in administration, in other words a secretary. Chandler parents are rich and we're "barely middle class" as Mom says. Some Chandler parents drive rusty old Volvos that seem to be held together by faded "Arms Are For Hugging" and "Imagine Peace" bumper stickers. That doesn't fool anyone. Like Dad said, "You have to be wicked rich to be able to afford to look that bad."

Jack lived in Salisbury, Massachusetts. I live in Newburyport. That's ironic because Newburyport is "yuppie-scummed," as Mom says, but Salisbury isn't. Mom says it's one of the "only real towns left around here." Most of Salisbury is pretty ordinary. The people who live there have regular jobs. On the edges of town there are some big historic houses. Jack lived in one of those.

We lived in a saltbox-style two-bedroom Mom says we couldn't buy these days. Her great, great, great grandfather built it. Mom's dad was a carpenter. Mom went to community college in Haverhill and studied business administration. Dad never went to college.

Jack's great, great, great grandfather, on his mother's side (more greats than that, I don't know how many), more or less founded Boston and actually knew Anne Bradstreet.

I love her poems, especially the ones about loss. None of Bradstreet's children died in childhood which was lucky back in the 1600s. From Anne's point of view "luck" is the wrong word though.

She believed in God's will controlling every last thing, not only controlling everything but even making it happen, what they called predestination. That's why the death of her grandchild came as a terrible shock. She seemed to be wondering why God quit blessing her family after he'd taken such good care of her kids. What was God trying to teach her by killing her grandchild? I think Anne discovered that if you think God's in charge of every little thing it's hard not to hate him.

With troubled heart and trembling hand to write,
The heavens have changed to sorrow my delight.
How oft with disappointment I have met,
When I on fading things my hopes have set.
Experience might 'fore this had made me wise,
To value things according to their price.
Was ever stable joy yet found below?
Or perfect bliss without mixture of woe?
I knew she was but as a withering flower,
That's here today perhaps gone in an hour;
Like as a bubble, or the brittle glass,
Or like a shadow turning as it was...

I think she's saying that life should have made her wise enough to know bad things would happen to her. And now she's learned that "stable joy" can't be found "below" on earth. She still trusts God to make things right in heaven but for now figures God is sort of mean, or at least can't be counted on because "perfect bliss" is always mixed with "woe."

Jack's parents bought their brick federal-style four-story when Jack was about six. It sits on a twenty-two acre waterfront estate three miles from Salisbury's non-descript town center and four miles from Salisbury Beach, most famous for the big strip club where all those choppers are parked Friday nights.

Jack's house has twelve bedrooms, fourteen fireplaces and a huge barn behind it that they converted into Mr. Ogden's studio. I only peeked through the door but it's really incredible. The studio was filled with hundreds of paintings, and three huge easels holding canvases at least twelve feet high. I didn't get a good look at the art but it seemed really good and also really unsettling.

Jack's house is only a twenty-five minute walk from mine. We're separated by the Merrimack River where it opens up into Joppa Flats. After we started to go out Jack always walked across the Route 1 Bridge, cut along the Newburyport promenade to Water Street and crossed several back yards to get to my house.

Jack asked my parents if he could drive me to school. Chandler has a rule that students can't drive each other unless they get written permission. My Dad agreed, since Jack had to pass our house every morning anyway and it saved contributing for car pool.

Every time Jack pulled up I felt a fluttery zap in my stomach. And he always arrived on time. Mornings suddenly became sweet.

One day Jack said: "How about instead of coming over at seven-thirty we meet at six forty-five?"

"How come?" I asked.

"So we can have breakfast together."

I've never been a morning person and could hardly wake up for school let alone breakfast. But the next day I got up so early I saw Dad going work.

It was after our third breakfast that Jack kissed me. I kissed back. We had just eaten pancakes so our first kiss tasted maple syrupy.

After that, sometimes he'd throw pebbles at my bedroom window till I woke up. He'd drag the picnic table across our back lawn and, by standing on it, was able to reach the sill of my window and climb in. He usually did this at about two in the morning. He'd be gone by about four and always put the picnic table back. We never woke my parents.

8

How exactly was Dad connected to our country? What had he done for anyone? Fuck his pull-up bar! Let the grapevines take it! That's what I was thinking. He was right about me needing to work on my upper body though. I wanted to kick ass on Parris Island. On the way to Jessica's at night I'd stop at the Nock Middle School and use the swing sets to do pull-ups. Dad thought the USMC was invented to spite him.

Mom thought anyone who joined who had "better options" must have had psychological problems.

Amanda wasn't home. She had the sense to get the hell out. I was about to follow her.

Jessica was the only person who kept her opinion to herself.

I counted down the days, kept repeating that I'd be on the bus in six short weeks, three weeks, two...

I knew the only person I was really going to miss was Jessica.

Dad was a hypocrite. All my life he told me he wanted me to be free to "follow my passion." All my life he told me he was glad he took the "unconventional road," how "self-expression is the central fact that gives life meaning." All my life he told me that he had to get away from his parents—"the ethos of the small man"—to save his soul. Then I chose to join the Marines and he went ballistic. He stood there seething with anger at me for making the "wrong" choice and painting pictures of clapboard churches with naked people hovering over them—demonic Chagall meets Duccio on acid!

A few years ago the Met bought two of Dad's works for their permanent collection. We drank champagne.

So that was the highpoint of a selfish life? Where were those two paintings? Stored out of sight! Where were Dad's other paintings? In private collections owned by the sort of people he called: "Hollywood assholes," "Japanese fascists," and "Pompous idiots like your Mom's parents."

He was a hypocrite! Dad argued for tradition but then always subverted his subjects, as if painting realistically had to be justified. It was as if he was groveling. "Please Mr. Critic, look how weird and ironic my paintings are! See! I'm modern too even if I do paint figuratively when no one else--besides that overrated shithead Hockney--does! Please, oh pretty please! Let me in the club!"

He said we're deluding ourselves if we think we can "simply walk away from ten thousand years of figurative expression" and that "traditions evolve for a reason."

Traditions?! A great thing till it came to the traditions of the USMC!
Dad should've had the courage of his convictions. If he wanted to defend realism, why didn't he do it the way Wayne Thiebaud does: without blinking? How can you be "contemporary" anyway? Contemporary is always thirty seconds ago. There's a past and there's a future. There's no present. It can't even be measured.

9

Jack will be in boot camp by the end of the summer, if he really goes through with it. Two scenes stand out. I should have taken each as a warning.

Scene One: Todd was not amused when Jack put the Marines bumper sticker the recruiter gave him on the Mercedes. Todd scraped it off so furiously that he scratched the paint down to the bare metal. While he scraped he yelled: "Why the fuck won't this come off?! He must have worked hard; I mean really sat down and thought about what he can do that will hurt us most! Can't you see that the only reason he's joining is to get at me?"

"I don't think it's always about you," I said.

"It's the way he can aim the lowest! 'See, Dad, I'm aiming low! See, Dad, I'm returning to everything you spent a lifetime trying to grow beyond!'"

"He's not saying that."

"I can't take it from you too! Why are you taking his side?"

Todd tossed the screwdriver away and stormed back to the studio.

Scene Two: The obsession grew. Even so I was shocked when Todd tried to open Jack's files on the computer in Jack's bedroom. Jack was at the girlfriend's place. I thought Todd was in the studio. He was in Jack's bedroom snooping! After fiddling about for a few minutes Todd charged into my office and ordered me to open the computer files so we could read Jack's essays and whatever else he had written, to "find out whose been influencing him."

I refused. Todd literally dragged me by the arm up to Jack's room.

"Why don't you enroll in Merrimack Community College? They teach computer literacy," I said, as he pulled me along.

"Don't fuck with me! Show me his files, Sarah!"

"Does the word 'privacy' ring a bell?"

"God damn it Sarah! Do what I say!"

He dragged me into Jack's room. Jack's sports trophies looked forlorn. And his posters of Siena, Miles Davis, and all the rest made me just want to somehow roll the clock back, say to when he was twelve or thirteen.

"Spying on your son is not—"

"Who put him in Chandler?" Todd snapped interrupting me.

“And what is that supposed to mean?”

“It means he’s been infected by all your bullshit!”

“Oh shut up, Todd.”

“Try explaining this to anyone!”

Todd kept fooling with the keyboard. Of course he hadn’t a clue. And I was so angry I walked out. I was furious at him for grabbing my arm. He didn’t actually hurt me but there was a lot of rage in that grip.

“Sarah! You get back in here and open his files!” Todd screamed.
That’s when I snapped.

“Fine!” I screamed, running back and picking up the monitor. “I’ll open them!”

I heaved the monitor into the hall where it crashed against the wall, knocked down a painting, then smashed on the stairs.

It yanked all the wires out of the computer which crashed off Jack’s desk.

Todd backed down fast enough after that! He didn’t say much but retreated to the studio.

I’ve had it!

Jack’s done so few things that represent a definite choice. Every other thing Jack did we asked him to do. He played town soccer from the time he was six because Todd wanted him to. He went to St. Martins though his best friends were in the public school because Todd told him to. He joined the track team when they asked him. Jack has always been quiet about his own interests. And he has always gone along. He only put his foot down about not wanting to do track and now this terrible choice. Ironic: Amanda was the “difficult one” and Jack the “easy one.” Now this!

What is it about males and their need to prove themselves physically? I was proud of Jack when he quit the track team and transferred to Chandler. I was proud that he rejected all the nonsense about competition, about “winning.” I wonder if Jack brought the Marines up as a joke then decided to join because of Todd’s overreaction.

Todd has made such a huge mistake in being so confrontational. What has happened to us? Why should I put up with this? There were other possibilities once. In 1975 HLS received seven thousand applications for our class of five hundred and fifty. It was the era of Vietnam and Watergate. Most of us just seemed intent on getting a top job at a top law firm. All my classmates were from places like Yale, Michigan, Columbia, Chicago and Stanford. We were hot stuff! Except for me, everyone who graduated from the class of 78 has been wildly successful, at least judged by the 25th Anniversary Report.

Women at HLS were still enough of a rarity that some professors hardly spoke to us and almost never called on us. Nevertheless the best advice was to be prepared; if your study was incomplete it was better not to show up; it was a long time before you forgot the humiliation of being exposed as unready in front of your classmates.

The professors used the Socratic method of give-and-take. One student would be selected without warning by the professor and grilled. Learning to survive that “method” of questioning was about the only thing I took with me from HLS that prepared me for life with Todd.

Todd seemed to open a larger world. He was my “rebellion.” I dropped out, began living with him, moved to New York, trotted along to his openings, watched people look from me to his canvases and back as the light of recognition dawned: Yes, I am the spread eagled naked girl, that’s me over there too, and there, and there; Todd’s model, Todd’s lover. Aren’t you glad he’s a neo-realist and that every pubic hair of mine is as lovingly rendered as the follicles of some prophet’s beard in an exquisitely executed Dürer?

How have I come to this gloomy place where my life’s work is babysitting a fifty-three-year-old child? I got into HLS for God’s sake when women didn’t do that! It’s as if Jack’s Marine escapade has just woken Todd up from a dream, and he’s woken up angrier than ever.

Everything has revolved around Todd’s “struggle,” his refusal to be distracted from his “path.” Todd’s frame of mind has been defended as if it is a country with borders. Distractions have been eliminated, detractors ignored. In an interview he once said we are a “two-man army,” yes one general and one private.

We moved out of our obscenely lovely and affordable rent-controlled New York apartment on Riverside at 110th Street so he could have the “spiritual space” he needed. He had plenty of space in his studio and we spent my money on the house!

We stopped talking to his parents forever, and to mine for almost ten years, so Todd could transcend the bitterness of trying to live down too common a childhood in the first instance and being intimidated by my mother and all “the Rutherfords” in the second. He indulged Amanda and Jack for the same reason we ended each day with a bottle of wine, as a reward, a distraction, a way to relax, a means to refresh him for the next day’s assault on the work.

I have followed him. But I will not follow Todd as he alienates Jack! Todd hectored Jack about Jessica, the Marines, smoking, Jack’s nighttime rambles, just everything, in the same way Todd says his father used to hector him. Todd has become a scold! He is the fundamentalist preacher now!

I’m the fool who thought that studying law was “square,” that being Todd’s model was “cool.” I was the fool who got on her back, the late-blooming flower girl who gave up the “bourgeois pigs” of the Myopia Hunt Club for Woodstock. Only my “Woodstock” was the Venice Biennale, retrospectives at the Whitney, hanging around Todd’s studio.

Even at the office I’m just “Todd Ogden’s wife.” I used to be pleased that my new identity at least eclipsed the Rutherford nonsense. Then I realized that it had eclipsed me.

Mao had it right: Death to geniuses!

I even have to remind him to lift his weights in winter so he stays strong for his summer passion—that sailboat! And he is strong! When I first saw his tall frame he was wearing a thick home-spun beige sweater. His sand-blond hair was long then, tied back in a ponytail that fell to his lower back. His leather jeans were like some sort of greasy second skin. He wore cowboy boots! He was tan from sailing, tan and sweating. The cable-knit sweater was far too warm. No doubt he thought it made him look Hemingwayesque. It did. His dark brown eyes seemed black and mysterious; his waist was narrow, his hips slender, his shoulders wide, and his powerful forearms tan below rolled up sleeves. He talked about sailing because I told him I was crewing for the Kennedy cousins that year. He told me that if he sold a major work he planned to get a bigger boat. Bla-bla-bla!

We did it while the guests were milling around the show munching wedges of Brie. He had handed me a glass of champagne, “the good stuff,” he called it, kept in a back office, not “the plonk being served to those assholes.” After sex in that cramped little office we went back into the gallery and talked about Todd, a conversation that’s been our main topic for thirty years.

My parents hated Todd. I was dropping out of a law school graced by a building named for my grandfather. I was “throwing everything away” on a “this man from Maine,” the son of some wacky minister, a “terribly obscure” painter, “some hippie” who had gone to the University of Maine for a year or two, then to art school.

I dropped out of HLS to coddle Todd, to keep Todd’s parents away from him, to change the rotation of the solar system for Todd, to say red is blue and green is gray for Todd. But I will not destroy my relationship with Jack for Todd! I will not climb into Todd’s tower and pull up the ladder!

I tried to remind Todd that this is not the end of the world.

“My grandfather served. And so did about half the men in our family, before the Second World War. Before the war we Rutherfords used to even vote Republican for Christ’s sake!”

I accompanied Jack to one “poolee parent’s night.” Of course Todd wouldn’t come. The place was littered with soggy paper plates and casseroles and a cast straight out of southern New Hampshire, women jammed into sweat pants, faces pasty under the neon, white, lower middle-America; splendid and inarticulate rubeness. Then there was the kitsch speech—“America’s 911... first to fight... two hundred and twenty years of proud service... your Marine Corps...” bla, bla, bla—by some handsome Marine in dress blues. Jack had the grace to not catch my eye as this man rambled on. The room was awash in flags. On the way home I said, “Darling, you know I’ll support your decision but how do you abide these people?”

10

“How can you do this?” I asked Jack.

I’d gotten up to paint. As I made coffee Jack crept in. I heard the latch of the back door close with a gentle betraying click. I was waiting.

As he walked in he brought a gust of the cool dawn dampness with him, an earthy four a.m. scent of the marsh at low tide. I was already regretting snapping at him as he walked in, yet feeling incapable of getting on top of the situation.

“I just went for a walk Dad,” Jack said, yawning.

“You’ve been smoking, I can smell it. You said you wouldn’t smoke. If you go to the Marines a smoker you’ll smoke for life, a short life with a cancer finish! Why do you smoke?”

“Smoking relaxes me so I can sleep.”

“Use the pull up bar. You need more exercise. You need to be strong for boot camp!”

“I could kick your ass any day.”

Jesus, I thought. Has it come to this?

“Okay, forget the bar. Take two Benadryl and two Tylenol. Then you’ll sleep.”

“I’d pop the piss test.”

“The Marines don’t care if you take an antihistamine.”

"I'm not supposed to take anything."

Jack was standing in the kitchen door watching me. I was clutching my mug of coffee. Usually he would've used my silence as cover to just slide on past and up to bed. Now he seemed to be waiting for me to make my next move. The expression on his face was blank, passive, and impossible to read. I wanted to get him to react, to argue, to fight with me, to get this game over and move on.

"She could come over here you know."

"Jessica would rather I go there."

"It could be anyone, just any girl, and you pick the one girl that doesn't like me."

"I never said she doesn't like you, Dad."

Was he gloating? He sure as hell had me by the balls. Was he sad? His face was so closed it was driving me nuts. Where was my Jack?

Jack: sitting in the back of our rowboat fishing, skin pale, almost transparent, covering the lanky frame shooting up from within. He was so beautiful sitting in that row boat, alone on the river in front of our house.

Jack: releasing the stripers we caught. He wouldn't use barbed hooks.

Jack: hair ruffled in the tropical wind.

Jack: diving into clear water as the huge cumulous clouds rose in towering white banks over Bermuda.

Jack: watching fish, lost in the turquoise vastness while he swims over the ocean floor.

"Do you think in the Marines they'll let you wander around like this, all hours?" I asked.

"I'm not in the Marines—yet."

"Your bad habits will follow you. You'll mess up being a Marine up like you're messing up this summer!"

"Thanks, Dad. I'm glad you have such confidence in me."

"You wrecked your graduation and now you're wrecking your last days at home!"

"I didn't 'wreck' graduation."

"Yes you did. You went out with Jessica instead of staying home for our family party. It may well be the last chance you had to see Great Grandmother Rutherford."

"You hate her."

"And do you know how embarrassed I was?"

"What?"

"People were shocked. One parent wanted to call a meeting to ask how the school had failed you."

"A bunch of true Americans, huh?"

"Why you?"

"Why not me? Goodnight, Dad."

Jack turned his back and walked out.

"You talk to me!" I screamed.

I ran up the stairs and jumped in front of Jack to block his path.

"You hear me out! Don't you dare walk out on me!"

Jack sighed and sat down on the top stair. He was looking bored, looking that way on purpose. He had to be feeling something. If I could find an excuse to grab his hands I'd know. His hands always were clammy and cold before track meets. It was the way I knew he was nervous, even though he always was able to look so calm.

How had the tables gotten turned? I was the one cowering. Couldn't we somehow just say what was really in our hearts? But I was spouting shit, shit I didn't even feel. What I wanted to scream was, "Help me Jack!" What I said was:

"For a start will you or will you not promise me you'll stop smoking?"

"We see death around us but deny it and speak of resurrection," Jack said with a grin.

I couldn't read the smile. What kind of smile was it? Was he trying to make peace? Was he sticking it to me? Was he quoting someone?

"Enough of your bullshit!" I yelled, "You know what this proves?"

"What?" Jack yawned.

"It proves you're weak! You just can't quit, can you?"

"Quit what? I smoked two cigarettes walking over the bridge. Goodnight Dad."

Jack walked away. I started to follow him. I planned to grab and hug my boy. I didn't. I stood rooted to the lower stairs feeling like I was being drowned.

Once I was sure he was asleep I came back in from the studio and peered through Jack's door. I had been sitting alone for almost an hour stewing with the lights off. He lay with a long finely-boned foot sticking out from under the cover. Jack's high cheekbones looked as if they were carved from ivory in the early light. I tiptoed forward and knelt, touched his hand, the one lying outside the cover. It was warm. Was he in good enough shape for boot camp?

Sarah said it was a bad idea me trying to get Jack into shape; let his preparation be his own affair she said. I knew she was right, that Jack had to sink or swim on his own but I wanted to help him develop more upper-body strength, a secret weapon to face the test of mind and body that lay ahead. It was my way of telling him that I'd just been full of my usual shit when I threatened to never speak to him again. Then Jessica wrecked the whole summer by more or less kidnapping

him. He was always over there! They never once “hung out” at our place. Now there were grapes ripening on the pull-up bar and the big leaves had turned from translucent pale green to a darker shade and were dusty.

As I knelt next to Jack he opened his eyes. He looked wide awake. It hit me that he’d been faking sleep.

“I’m trying to sleep,” he said.

“You never use the pull-up bar.”

“Sure I do.”

“The grape leaves would be disturbed. I check them. The tendrils are firmly wrapped around the bar.”

“You ‘check’ the grape leaves to see if I’m getting ready for the Marines?” Jack asked and stared at me in disbelief.

“Yes.”

“Do you know that you’ve become the world’s biggest asshole?”

“I want to send you down there prepared!”

“Now you’re ‘sending me’?!” Jack stared at me angrily. “This is why I quit track!”

I felt as if the ground was swallowing me.

“I forbid you!”

“I thought you were ‘sending’ me?”

“Fuck you!”

“How about I go live with Jessica till I go to Parris Island?”

“You’re only here a few hours every couple of days as it is! Now you want to move out to her place for your last weeks at home?!”

“Yes.”

“No you won’t!” I yelled.

Jack sat up and leaned back against a shelf stuffed with Calvin and Hobbes books and Far Side calendars along with his dusty sports trophies. He glared at me then spoke slowly.

“Are you saying I can’t move in with Jessica?”

“Say I am saying that?”

"I'll move out anyway." Jack said quietly.

"Get out!" I screamed.

"Fine! I'll pack right now!" yelled Jack.

He swung his legs over the side of the bed so fast his legs clipped me. I sprawled onto his floor.

"Just what is going on?!" Sarah shouted, from our bedroom.

"Ask Dad!" shouted Jack.

Moments later Sarah was standing in Jack's doorway.

"What have you done?" asked Sarah.

I said nothing. Jack started violently yanking open drawers so hard they fell out of the chest and hit the floor with a smash. He was grabbing handfuls of T-shirts and underwear.

Sarah stormed upstairs. I followed for a few steps then turned and charged back into Jack's room. He was shoving everything into his old back pack, the one he'd used on our sailing trip.

Sarah yelled after me: "Don't you dare start in at him again!"

"I'm asking Jack not to go!" I called back.

I hoped Jack heard that my voice was breaking. I didn't give a shit if he saw me cry.

"I'm leaving," shouted Jack.

"Don't you dare go teenage melodramatic on me!" I screamed.

11

Dad let Jack move in because Dad had served in the Navy and remembered the Marines who were on his ship. Dad said that they were good guys and lots of them didn't come home from Vietnam. If Jack was getting kicked out because he wanted to be a Marine, Dad said that it was okay for him to move in for the few weeks he had left before boot camp. And the fact that Jack and his dad were arguing about me helped, too. If Mr. Ogden didn't like me, then he could go to hell as far as Dad was concerned.

All Dad said to Jack was, "You be careful or I'll cut off your balls. I don't want a grandchild yet!" He laughed, reached up and tousled Jack's hair. Dad hardly ever touched anybody. He liked Jack a lot.

When Jack left for boot camp it broke my heart. I knew it was coming and the fact that he wanted to become a Marine was one of the reasons I loved him. I admired his determination, the fact he could look at everything being given to him and decide to make a sacrifice and do something completely unselfish. But till the end part of me hoped he wouldn't go.

Sometimes he said he wanted to do something "different." Other times he said he was tired of "all the crap." I think he meant the hanging around and waiting for something, anything to happen.

And Jack said: "The Marines tell everyone: 'You're important because we can use you.' I like the Corps for coming right out and saying it."

I didn't want him getting sick of me so I only cried in front of him once and did my other crying alone, not counting the day he left. I couldn't hide my tears when his recruiter finally came to our house after dinner and picked Jack up to take him to the recruiting station in Andover and from there to Logan airport with the other poolees.

Jack held me. He looked nervous and sad and his hands felt clammy. He was pale. And I sobbed. I think that was the only moment he really had doubts about going.

He said he'd write. The recruiter told him they allow recruits to bring family pictures and a Bible. Jack didn't have a Bible but he had put together a pocket-sized album of pictures of me and his family.

A week before he left Jack asked me to go into his house and pick up some photographs. We drove over in my mom's car when Jack was sure his parents were out. Jack stayed in the car as I went in through the screen porch back door.

Jack asked me to look for one specific shot. He said he figured it might be in album number fourteen. It was. In the picture Jack and Mr. Ogden were standing by a pink wall and they were both holding snorkels and masks and had their arms around each other. Their hair was wet and they were smiling and happy. I have a copy because I asked Jack to go to CVS and make me one.

Three days before he left Jack said: "Married people see each other naked, even when they're not having sex, just walking to the shower, whatever, and I want to just see you like that."

"But we're not married," I said laughing.

"I want it to be as if there hasn't ever been a time when we weren't together. I want it to be as if we were kids together and nobody was ever here except us."

"You mean like Tom Hanks in 'Castaway?'"

"Yeah, but we get fed, maybe by the gods or something."

"Why would the gods bother to do that?" I asked.

"Because nobody loves each other like I love you and you love me."

And Jack stripped off and started to run around my house naked. And even though Dad was at the plant, and wasn't going to be home for hours and Mom was at work, I still got nervous.

"Put on your clothes!" I yelled.

"Not till you take off yours, and we walk around naked like we've been married for thirty years," he said.

So I did. And it felt so weird!

I had been naked in his arms, but just stripping off was strange. It wasn't like getting undressed up close, like when we made love. Then he was already touching me, not across the room just staring.

I didn't feel sexy, just like a somewhat pudgy girl getting undressed. And Jack knew exactly what I was thinking, because he said: "You have the most beautiful body in the world."

"No I don't."

"Yes, you do. Do you know why?"

"Why?"

"Because it's where you live."

Then I felt better. He was always answering my thoughts.

"You're the only reason I'm sad about going to Parris Island. You are the biggest reason I want to go too, because I think it will make me a better person."

And then we both laughed, because Jack said all that serious stuff and there we were standing across the living room from each other naked and shivering the whole time.

When he said that about married people seeing each other naked I never even thought for one second I didn't want to marry him. It was as if it was planned years ago, and was just waiting to happen.

So was that a proposal? Did I say "yes" by stripping?

We got dressed, and it really did change the way I looked at Jack for those last few days. And Jack's beautiful naked body is fixed in my brain.

I didn't understand how busy they get at boot camp or about how they can't make any phone calls and how slow the mail is. So for the first few weeks I was depressed. I didn't get any letters. And since Jack had left without speaking to his dad I couldn't call the Ogdens to see if they had heard from him. They hadn't spoken to me since Jack's seventeenth birthday party. I knew his Dad resented me. Anyway I was checking our mailbox every afternoon.

Jack had been gone two weeks before I got a letter. It was in a small smudged envelope and had been written fast and messy in pencil on stationary with fuzzy black and white photographs the size of stamps of Marines doing training printed up one side. I figured that this must be some sort of standard issue stationary they gave the recruits. And I could tell right away Jack was freaked out. I certainly was. It was as if I opened a door and looked into some strange country.

Dear Jessica,

This recruit had two DIs in his face screaming till there was spit on this recruit's face because this recruit didn't sound off loud enough on the day we were formed—they weren't interested in hearing this recruit's excuse that was he had a sore throat. "You are the weakest nastiest piece of shit they ever sent here!" "Yes, sir!" "Say something YOU!" "YES, SIR!" This recruit knows what they do and why but it's hard to take. And this recruit hadn't slept in 72 hours and those "haircuts" sting. This recruit can't do anything right, even get dressed fast enough for them. Did you know there is a right way to put socks on? This recruit hates the DIs but our SDI—Master Sgt. Isaac Jackson—is awesome. DI = Drill Instructor, SDI = Senior Drill Instructor. This recruit loves you. Send paper, envelopes and stamps. This recruit lost most of his the first time the DI dumped our footlockers and piled all our trash in the middle of the squadbay.

Love,

Rec. Ogden

Part II

12

Charleston Airport 0200: not supposed to be keeping journal—hide pages between pictures in little family album they let you bring—waiting for bus—writing on scraps—

Half recruits haven't slept or were drinking last night—ragged—ass! OK--but nervous--

Speech by Marine in waiting area: "You are now an official United States Marine Corps recruit—as such you are punishable under the uniform code of military Justice—UCMJ—set of rules and regulations that all military personnel must abide by—you will be punished—do you understand recruits?"

"Yes, Sir!"

"From now on when you speak to a Marine, civilian or sailor the last word out of your mouth will be sir--like this: yes sir, no sir, yes ma'am, no ma'am. Do you understand, recruits?"

"Yes, Sir!"

"You will be at the position of attention--position of attention is--your heels are together, feet at a 45° angle, legs are straight--not stiff at the knees, fingers curled, thumb along trousers seems, head and eyes straight to the front, and your mouth is shut!"

On bus from the airport to PI--told to keep our heads down--black night—water on both sides of causeway dark as oil—hot damp air—low tide muddy smell, just like Merrimack--arrive darkest night. Only my heart beat--then there's screaming --if you love you will suffer loss--

In-processing—stood on the yellow footprints in the dark packed ass-to-crotch with new arrivals—form up by standing on them--famous yellow footprints stenciled on dusty pavement--step gingerly onto footprints in front of the in-processing building--dark, low, three-story red brick--taking next breath--gritty hardtop--empty road fading away under overhead steam pipes--deprived of all personal space--fearful boys, DIs strutting around--

--Made regulation call home--no answer--left message--to admit vulnerability is to bow to mortality—

...To be continued October 1 2006 when BABY JACK will be in bookstores everywhere!