

## FOLD KEY

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## PAPER BALL FOR GAMES

Play ball. Ball play. This is a play about a ball. A paper ball for games. What kind of games? Your ball leaves up to you. I cannot spare you the ambidextrous hermaphroditic multifold versatility of the paper ball. You must play yourself. Our universe is devoid of perfect circles. We pause and consider. We fold this, a paper ball. A 26-sided ball. As it is, in this world, the more sided, the more seemingly sideless and round. Certainly, in life, circles and spheres eat at us, inside and out. Look there! our very pupils stare back from mirror not quite round. Gravity helps. It longs to ball stuff. But then there's spin. Stuff longs to ball, but can't help but spin—out of control, out of place, planets bulging for miles at the belt-line. Once as a desert guide I sat with a very dirty kid, after two months of rehabilitative desert life, as he rode away in the back-to-your-life van, and every other dirty kid was stoked about the Butterfingers stashed in the seat pockets and the vroom-vroom of 4-wheel drive, but this dirty kid, he fingered the air-control dial, and said, all awe-struck, "Perfect circle, what the fuck are you doing here." And that opened my eyes. Our sun, which boasts superb mathematical roundness, bulges 10 kilometers at its equator. Who wouldn't? we say, hanging our damp lives from lines missing the mark, missing this and that too long and too much to measure. Thank God for black holes! The event horizon round those could be the one perfect circle in our universe. Or a self-erasing boundary, depending on your math. So thank YOU, thank yourself for this self-folded ball. We mean it. We who are part of the imperfect sphere galactic collective as far as we can call it it's all imperfectly spherical internal and external planets. We recommend you make your ball. Really make it. Blow breath into it: folded paper, full of swallowed up words, provides a perfect air hole. Then, hit it with your palm. Hope to hit it back with some other palm, yours or other. The paper ball will fall to the ground sometime. That's gravity longing. Let the ball stay down. Now, take your head, like an imperfect sphere between your two palms. Begin to sway head side to side, slight pressure in pads of fingers. Now, press hard into temples. Again and again. They are imperfect basins collecting weird and electric rainwater from your imperfect head. If you are also a migraineur, you know this already. How the temples are also our telltale mortal potholes crying out to be filled with a smoothness we don't have. Yet how the pressure of a finger tip says something, something *else*, something *not this*. How the relief isn't in the pressure itself, but in the volley between fingertips, your head the thing passed back and forth. Your head! Have you ever felt a more ridiculous ball? So knobby! So unweighable! So grooved and clunky and holed and inimitably folded and unfolded, so not round and so unwieldy and so full of protest at being a ball! Never! Never have you felt such a ridiculous, imperfect ball for games. The relief.

## THE RETURNED TOP SPINNER

YOU:

I know astringently manipulating the diameter of the pores on my nose to better and longer balance a spinning top thereon is absurd.

*[Deep breath.]*

I know there is no grace to stretching and starving and crossing my body to serve the angular momentum of a spinning top. Adjusting my environment, in all places at all times, and often below the level of my awareness, to invite the spinning of a top is, I know, pointlessly distressing. Not only for me, but for the rocks I stack and unstack, the chairs I sand-blast and rebuild, the birds I call to and the people I converse with in order to lure them into various configurations conducive to top-spinning.

SPECIALIST:

Mhmm. And you. Are you a person poorly dressed as a bird, or a bird poorly dressed as a person?

YOU:

That. That. Whatever you just did. Makes me want to turn away and keep a top spinning. Away from you. And just for me.

SPECIALIST:

Which is to say....

YOU:

What we both can't touch or it stops.

SPECIALIST:

Or everyone—

YOU:

Everyone thinks touch is the beginning. But—

SPECIALIST:

Go on—

YOU:

But it's the stop.

SPECIALIST:

Or everyone—

YOU:

Anyone who has seriously spun a top knows. Get the hell outta the way of your own speed.

*[Pause.]*

So yes, I went to Siberia. Old, twisted cradle of top spinners. They have their own way, own curve knife, own against the grain, own dead-on twist-axis. I went to be part of that. I went like a toy grenade. I went like a toy grenade and found I wasn't. Much more unreal than that: a real one.

SPECIALIST:

So, a real grenade?

Screw you—

YOU:

Ok, you mean real explosive—

SPECIALIST:

YOU:

You don't know what means. What it was to see their bloodied tops spinning, in some lopsided village, the way they kept them going. Like calling on a different force of nature. Not the one that spun my need to spin. But like a—

SPECIALIST:

Like a—

YOU:

Like a drunk sky woman? With lightening fingernails? Every top on fire, whirling nameless smoke?

*[Pause.]*

I was repulsed.

*[Long pause.]*

My tops lost their taut circles. Then the circles stopped.

*[Silence of undetermined length.]*

And I haven't really spun since then. Like the tension just went out of my body. Slack. Like there's nothing in me to turn.

SPECIALIST:

And now—

YOU:

Before, by now, I would've ripped out the two pages of this transcript, drawn a spiral on the back of each one, then folded them into spinning tops. I see the spinning top in them. But I feel no movement. And so this conversation will never amount to a spinning top.

SPECIALIST:

So what is the shape of our conversation?

YOU:

Your 2-dimensional asshole?

SPECIALIST:

Now now—

YOU:

And now I'm like the people I always wanted to be like. People who don't think about spinning stupid tops. But there's something else, a nothing. Like my arm's for nothing.

*[Pause. A few jerks and facial tics attempting speech. Then, stillness.]*

Like I don't even have a right arm.

SPECIALIST:

You don't have a right arm. You stopped using it. Stopped noticing it. It got infected. It was removed.

YOU:

Yes, like I don't even have a right arm.

**THE CLOWN STANDS ON A BOX AND MIMES THIS SERMON BEFORE SHOVING  
IT DOWN THE PANTS SHE ABRUPTLY REALIZES SHE IS NOT WEARING**

So it seriously  
looks to be a stupid day, good people. But I am a clown, if that helps. As a girl, when I asked  
my Mother for ballet lessons, she sent me to 4-H clown school. It's like she knew. It's like  
her gift to me was a sharp chill squirt in the face when expecting to smell a serious  
lapel-pinned flower.

I've had three serious-serious loves. Two of those, the 1st and the 3rd, make fun to no end.  
One's laughableness is sacred, as is to no end. The 2nd was a magic mirror. I'm going to say to  
you, and please, do not take this as doctrine, and please, take this in no way as something to be  
swallowed, no, just a messy mousse pie in the face, so here, I'm going to say to you: never live  
with a magic mirror.

Naturally it depends. How much does surgery mean to you? It means a lot to me, I've found  
out, but it doesn't mean who I am. I'm a gnarly migraineur. I had brain surgery, at 21, for a  
brain tumor. I lost hearing on my right side, like the surgeon warned, but was able to "kiss boys"  
after the surgery, like he weirdly worded I might not, ever, again. I live now with my 3rd  
serious-serious love.

He reminds me very much of my 1st serious-serious love. I was young then, yet old enough  
to be deaf on one side and know that kissing boys was an eerie luxury. I get so many  
migraines that my current doctor will not give me refills on my migraine medication, because  
it's too often to be "normal," so I always have to come back and check in with the doctor,  
but I don't like checking in with the doctor, so I run out of medication, and my forehead  
is splitting open, skullghost milkweeds floating in the light-axed air over our bed,  
where my love says, can I bring you a bag of frozen peas? He can. He places them  
on my forehead.

Usually the migraine comes to me, but sometimes I come to it. Sometimes I am my skull-  
crusher. I straddle the scythe and throw back the schnapps, stripping my insides like whirlwind.  
Clean-licked bones for the headache to rattle. When I go witch, when I howl moon, when I  
squish evil red berries against my forehead, my love stirs awake, murmurs, You have medicine  
left? He knows the slayer is summoned. He knows how my self-raves end. When I had  
migraines with my soul mate

—oops, I mean, my magic mirror... this is the circus, dammit!—back in our little hut in Maine, my magic mirror would spread wide as midnight snow, winking smithereens of moon. When that didn't do it, my magic mirror would levitate above the bathroom sink, open on a cabinet of countless bottles and peppermint ointments and lubes for 5-dimensional sex—but nothing could help. I thank my magic mirror now, now that I have the right prescription, and know what relief feels like.

It does not feel like a magic mirror.

It does not refract you into a fish-scaled goddess the color of metals melted by occult fires. And it does not act the funhouse mirror in crazytown, dizzying you with the huge pimpled ass of your soul. It does not double your pleasure, double your fun and not-fun, double your uvula-flamed laugh, double your shit-steaming tears, double your chip-toothed fears, it does not double, no it does not double, not your something, not your nothing. It does not dare double your body into one body twin-sunned, twice-shadowed.

No. Relief doesn't breed spells like mirrors. Relief expels. I say this with some sadness, but also relief. Relief: the loss of being stricken. And boy, in the magic mirror you were struck: eye to eye unblinking beings being seen seeing. What to do with that you? Your highest and lowest magically and disastrously reflected? What do you do with you and the mirror and the you in the mirror and the mirror in you, so assassinator-precise, what could you do, to make all the yous and mirrors more blurrily light-filled? More fluid?

Well. Maybe a slather  
of the clown's face paint.

Maybe you smearing your face in the mirror. And you smearing the mirror with your face! The smeared mirror now smearing your smeared face! Maybe that. My 3rd serious-serious love asked me tonight, when he saw my green-glitter eyebrows and Bowie-lightning face: Do you have medicine left? I do not.

After this party on paper, I will have a migraine. I can feel it. But I also feel this: magic mirrors exist. They work like snow, soft and hard and reflectively in the noon sun and elementally under the new moon, to give you what you'll find yourself, later. So now, later, against my surgeon's prognosis, and as no one's soul mate no more, merely a clown, but I mean it, I kiss you, I kiss you, I kiss you, here, as YOU and not my mirror.

# Lattice Through Which I Glimpsed My Twilights<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Every piece of paper is a Have You Ever game. I think trees along with other plants, and rocks, and deer leaps, and dog eyes, and bright lichen kiss stains on black basalt, and spiral shells in sand dunes, and brain-wrinkled storm clouds, are all asking us this all the time: Have you ever. And trees give us reams of paper to write down our little answers. It's hard to know what one has and has not done, ever. The question is only complicated by the bits of plant and rock and leaps and stains and shed shells, star rot, and atmospheric wrinkles that have converged and accreted into this body. Have I ever ridden a meteorite? Parts of me have. Have I ever coiled around a life and sucked it lifeless? Parts of me have. How relevant are those parts? I am no one to answer that.





# Said Glimpsed Twilight In Different Font: The Parting of Said Sea<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> You might find that without changing a word, a mark, a breath, everything has changed. And then you might find, if you so much as change the size of the suddenly-essential formerly-arbitrary font, the Parting Of The Sea doesn't happen. Damn! Have you ever found a detail was behind the whole picture? Have you ever lost something unweighable in the world, unseeable, untellable, and yet its loss changed every part of you? Have you ever seen the realization of that staring you in the face, finally, through kaleidoscopes of blank space?