

AUTHOR'S NOTE

If we are related, please, for the love of God, do not read this book.



JOANE CREAMER

My mom had a friend named Joane. She was a few years younger than my mom and had two children with super dumb names, Calamity and Nirvanta. They acted like kids who have dumb names like that act. Joane was pretty and used to come over a lot, wearing a bikini around our house and pool. Once, she, my mom, and all related kids went to the beach a couple days after Joane got a nose job. A Frisbee hit her bandaged-up face and she went unconscious from the pain. The guy who knocked her out was staring at her possibly-dead-but-hot body while my mother screamed “King Pervert!” at him.

When I was around twelve, sometimes I would babysit Joane’s children. On the days she drove me home, she would bunch her skirt up to her hips so the beginning of her panties were visible. Any time I looked over, she ran her hands all over her thighs, but she always looked straight ahead at the road.

It didn’t bother me, but I wasn’t really into it either. Later, when I was in high school, I thought about fucking her—but I also put my dick into a vacuum cleaner hose, so being on **THEE FUCK LIST** didn’t mean much. I know Joane’s behavior was something that only a deep-end nutjob would have indulged in, and not that I condone it in any way, but it didn’t

occur to me then to feel one way or the other about it. To be honest, it doesn't really occur to me to feel anything about it now either. I never thought, *An adult is sort of exposing themselves to me!* I remember having a forever-expanding tolerance for people disregarding my feelings when I was a kid; it seemed to happen so often. Today when my feelings are disregarded, I overreact to an avalanchian degree. Energy cannot be created, nor can it disappear, etc.

I'd been checking out porn magazines forever but couldn't figure out how jacking off worked. There would be cartoons with motion lines around someone's cartoon hand and cartoon dick, but I couldn't grasp that you had to keep on doing it for anything to happen. I would jerk it for one or two jerks and be unimpressed. Willing to try anything, I wrapped my cock behind my leg to bend it and squeezed it as hard as I could with two hands (or rubbed Icy Hot into it), but with no results.

With the theoretical understanding that anal sex existed, I took a butter knife with an oblong bulb at the end of the handle and squatted over my grandmother's antique hand mirror. My sister now has this mirror in her living room. I inserted the knife handle into my butthole and watched it disappear up me in the reflection. It felt like I wanted it to. Suddenly, a spot of cum the size of a dime dripped down onto the mirror.

I went bananas—yanked the knife out and threw it into the bushes. That was the first time my dick did anything other than pee, and it freaked me out. I did not look at porn or touch myself for a couple of months. After I got over it, my mom kept asking everyone why the butter knives kept disappearing and, for some insane reason, I told her.

Faking being at home sick one day and with nothing to do, I went into my parents' room. Under the bed was all the porn I had been fruitlessly investigating. I opened one magazine and put it on the quilted bedspread. It showed a fully aroused penis in a fully aroused vagina. My godmother is a famous quilter and has her work displayed in the Smithsonian. This quilt was one she made.

The coveralls I was wearing—this was during an experimental fashion phase—had open pockets, so you could put your hands all the way inside without unzipping the front. Finally, of its own instinctual, wanting accord, my hand, as if it were The Hand itself, as if it were the Beast with Five Fingers, spider crawled inside of my coveralls and began jerking and jerking without stopping. I turned the pages with my other free hand and kept working, totally focused on the pictures and not totally conscious of what else was happening

Violently, confusedly, and opulently, I ejaculated. It felt yellowy and thick. Looking up, I saw Joane standing well inside the doorway of my parents' room. She had watched me cum for my first time. I noticed her hair had been dyed from blond to black. She'd showed up to borrow something from my mom, I guessed. We stared at each other.

My hand was still inside the open pocket, and the porn magazine was still on the bed. She walked out of the room and started looking around the house for whatever it was she needed. It took her a very long time to find it. I stayed frozen and could feel the cum on my underpants clogging up. Lamely, I have maintained a grinding preference for black hair my entire life. Also, if you haven't caught this already, Joane's last name was Creamer.

GAVIN ENGELBERG

My mom and dad had a lot of emotional and psychological problems, and they were very young when they had me. There probably wasn't as much supervision as there should have been. When I was eight or nine, I played with twin brothers named Gavin and Reuben. They were Guatemalan and had been adopted by our white, Jewish neighbors. The husband was a nephrologist and the wife was a well-known autism specialist. Later, the husband was accidentally electrocuted and died, and after his death, the wife used to talk to my mom about jerking herself off with gradually larger and larger vegetables.

On good days, the lack of supervision was a marvel in that it led to free, long-form adventures I can't imagine any kids I know having now. But on bad days, it was only debilitating and led to a feeling of being permanently unsafe, day or night.

Gavin and Reuben were bonkers, and they wanted to do every dangerous and upsetting thing they could think of. They played with firecrackers, motor oil, a real bow and arrow, and BB guns; lit a palm tree on fire; smoked dead bees wrapped in dried leaves; buried each other up to the neck in rocks and dirt; and climbed to the tops of telephone poles. I was shy and frightened of everything and would only stand

by, half sobbing, as they rode further and further into the Children's Chaos.

When they were older, they once purposely crashed their grandmother's Cadillac into an Andy Gump port-a-potty that was in a park on the edge of a baseball diamond. It flew into the air and landed on the roof of the car, which shattered the windshield. Sixty gallons of hot, rotting Little League sewage dumped all over them, filling the car. They were drenched and screaming through the endless dark curtain.

Even though they were eternally bent on killing themselves, Gavin saved my life once. My parents tied a hangman's noose in our avocado tree for a Halloween party. It stayed in the tree for months. When I was outside playing with Gavin, I stood on a bucket with my hands under my chin and threaded my head into the noose. I kicked the bucket away, thinking I could just pull my head out. It became immediately clear I had no air and could not get free. Gavin was on the other side of the yard with his back to me, playing on the ground with bugs. By chance, he turned and rushed over to put the bucket back under my feet. We knew I had almost died and he held both my hands like a vicar until I calmed down.

Gavin, Reuben, and I were obsessed with fantasy and sword worlds and role-playing games like Dungeons & Dragons. We played every day, and the dice and paper games morphed into the clunkily dubbed "D&D: We Are the Characters," meaning, we ran all around the neighborhood with hatchets, long screwdrivers, PVC pipes, and trash can-lid shields. We spent weeks creating the details of our fantastical selves within the games. To be cruel to one

another, we would sometimes throw the pieces of paper that our characters were recorded onto into Gavin and Reuben's pool. It always made someone cry.

As an offshoot of D&D, we were also into Greek mythology, unicorns, and Pegasus. Gavin had a collection of unicorn plush toys; Reuben had a collection of Pegasus plush toys. Although both boys were physically intense, they were also very sensitive, and in exasperated submission to these sensitivities, their parents basically let them do whatever they wanted. The combination of no rules, no adults around, big imaginations, and big emotions led to Gavin falling in love with one of his unicorn dolls. Its name was Merganzer. Reuben and I were merciless when we found out and pinched and slapped Merganzer in the face. Gavin wailed with such genuine sadness that it shocked us into stopping. He didn't talk to us for days. To try and cheer him up, we would dig little holes, fill them with dry pine needles, tie plastic Smurf figures to sticks we shoved into the dirt, and light them on fire as melting sacrifices to Hera, Zeus, and Poseidon.

One night, I was sleeping over, Reuben was at a friend's house, and their mom and dad were out for the evening. There was no babysitter. Gavin said, "I need you to do something for me. I need you to take photos of me making love to my unicorn."

"Which one?" I asked, though of course I knew.

"Merganzer," he whispered. He handed me a Polaroid camera and took off his clothes. I stood in the corner, watching and holding the camera like it was a cake I had dropped and then picked up off the floor.

The previous winter, I had stolen a small, two-blade Swiss Army knife from my dad's bureau. I dropped it in a gutter during a rainstorm and pretended I found it there. Gavin saw me drop it in. He shook his head in trifling disgust and grabbed it away from me. Using this knife now, he poked a tiny hole in the seam along the doll's rump. He had a little boy's erection and got behind the unicorn, inserting himself into the hole. He began to pump.

On his raw, dark pink butthole, which would flash open each time he reared back for a thrust, there was a perfectly round, heavy, chocolate donut of his shit. Gavin explained to me months before that he could not wipe his ass anymore because witches lived up in there. He was afraid they would grab his fingers and pull him inside himself. I pictured one inside him, standing on a little raft and pushing herself along with an enchanted staff.

"Merganzer, Merganzer . . ." he moaned.

I took nine photos quickly. The Polaroids fell from the camera onto the carpet as their images came to life. Gavin gathered them to his breast like novenas and peered down into the stack as if for some holy response. He no longer seemed to be aware of me. I told him I was scared and was going to go home. I only lived a couple of houses away but usually got anxious during sleepovers, so he was used to me leaving suddenly. I ran across the street and across the lawn of our quietly mean, uptight Canadian neighbors and saw that someone had left a dead rat on the hood of their Mercedes.

LAMONTE

When I was a child, my dad would deposit me into a network of children's corrals with the other offspring of the musicians he worked with. It made sense: stoned dads dropping their underdeveloped hippie-funk mistakes off at someone's backyard or big house to run around and police themselves while they made records, hung out, and took drugs elsewhere.

Two of the kids in this network I knew were a girl named Nala and her brother Lamonte. Once, those two; my sister; our next-door neighbor, Kevin Jeong; and I were sitting in a car in a parking lot with no grown-ups around. My dad left us in there to go do something. We were getting tired of waiting, so I suggested that when we got back to my house, all the boys should put each other's dicks into each other's butts and make a circle. In the middle of the circle, there would be a bonfire. We could triple howl and dance around its flickering hobbit flame. Bending my arms at an unnatural angle, I started to demonstrate what the vibe of this dance might be. My sister and Nala started screaming in amused horror, which then inspired Lamonte, Kevin, and I to start screaming in amused delight. So then, locked alone in a car in a parking lot, were five screaming children. A security guard or some other reasonable citizen must have eventually

found my dad because he came running over with a terrified-and-then-relieved look on his face. He tried to explain to us how frightening our behavior might seem to strangers and exhorted us not to do it, but we just kept screaming and grinning while he tried to get us to cool it.

The next day, I was at Nala and Lamonte's. We were very little. Nala was maybe four, Lamonte six, and I was maybe five? At that time, it was popular to make rubber erasers in the shapes of animals, buses, people, or fruit. Nala had a collection of presidential bust erasers. They were all gray, about the size of a prune, and must have come in a set. We were seeing what it was like to stuff as many as we could into our mouths. They were very detailed and crevice-y, so our spit collected in them and would pour out all over us when we pulled them out again.

Lamonte imperiously told Nala to get out of her own room, which made her cry. She stomped away. He told me we should climb into his tree house and do what we'd talked about the day before in the car. The tree house was not really in a tree but more a part of a jungle gym that had a little Lincoln Log shack on top. Next to it was a picnic table where we (or Lamonte's mother) had made us SpaghettiOs for breakfast. The ones we'd spilled were now hardened in yellow and red on the table, a constellation of smaller Os baked by the sun inside a constellation of bigger O's.

We climbed up the ladder and it seemed very high but couldn't have been more than six or seven feet up, because I remember on another day someone's dad handing us up binoculars to play with. When we got up there, Lamonte very quickly took off his clothes and started a bouncing

syncopated chant, "I'm gonna strip . . . (cha cha cha), I'm gonna strip . . ."

His back was curved in and his belly button poked out like half a Superball. It looked like someone should probably draw some eyes and a frown around it and turn it into a depressing cartoon. His penis was bucking in time with his song, and he began to walk in a circle, smiling and laughing. I was all for it but nervous, so I just pulled my pants down. I was wearing a plaid collared shirt and a V-neck sweater. He approached me from behind, and I had to hold up my shirrtails to expose my hole.

When his dick went inside, I remember it being very easy, and the sensation was something I couldn't then describe. I neither liked it nor disliked it; I just didn't know. Lamonte was giggling, making funny duck sounds so it made everything seem silly, which it was. He didn't thrust in and out but just kept it in and kept his chant and springy rhythm going.

After a little bit, he pulled himself out. We got dressed and felt super wild and out of control but in a fun way. He and I started jumping out of the window of the tree house and onto the dirt and grass and climbing back in and doing it over and over again. I felt like we repeated the jump a hundred thousand times. Somehow, our unfinished skeletons remained indestructible inside us, but our clothes were filthy by the time we ran out of this rampaging, entangled energy.

Late that night, my mom picked me up. My dad stayed where he was to keep playing music. There was a clock from Las Vegas on the wall and its numbers were dice. One of my parents had cut out simple Arabic numerals and taped

them to the dice so I could learn to tell time. So I know it was around 11 p.m. when we got home.

I sat on the rug, and my mom sat on the couch. My sister was asleep in a child-sized, black-and-orange rocking chair that had chess piece-shaped decorations carved into it. When I sat down, I could still feel a clear ghost of pressure from Lamonte's dick in my butthole. When I stood, it was gone; when I sat, it returned. It was an interesting sensation. I kept standing and sitting.

My mom asked me what I was doing. I told her that I had done something that I wasn't sure I should have done. She put her face up to my face and asked what it was. A voice came into my head that told me that, for everyone's sake, I should not, under any circumstances, explain things. This voice has continued to rescue me from execution my entire life. I told her I didn't want to say. The sensation in my butt was pulsing. She glared at me for a moment and then went into her room and closed the door.

A few months later, my parents accidentally woke me up in the middle of the night while they were checking my butthole for worms with a flashlight. I wanted to keep my mouth shut about it, but in the morning, I was too worried and nervously asked my mom what was going on the night before. The answer was strange and gross, but it was a relief, as I had assumed she'd somehow figured out what I did with Lamonte and was looking for proof of all that I had been quietly feeling.