



* Jonathan Ludwig * False Starts, Fragments and Falsehoods * THROWBACK BOOKS *

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Typeface used throughout this book is the font of an Oliver #5.

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False Starts,

Fragments

&

Other Falsehoods...

I have a handful of lies
and every drunken night...

Five years ago she sold her body. She needed the money for college. It seemed like the easiest thing to do. Wrote up contracts, sectioned off parts as the areas in most demand went to highest bidders. A lawyer w/ family in the area bought her legs. When in town visiting, he stops by and takes them for a walk. Her mouth was sold to a man who likes to watch. I only had the money for one side of her torso, from armpit to waist. When we would make out (her mouth was sold to a man who likes to watch) my hand couldn't stray from that side, couldn't move to her stomach or to the small of her back, couldn't slide over to that area beneath her breast.

After me she was hesitant about starting new relationships. I wasn't understanding and I owned part of her but now-- w/ her body sold out --even friendships are stressed. They haven't seen her in, God, has it really been two years? They want some physical contact to accompany their, "I've spent the last year working on an organic farm in Mexico. It was nice except for all the Americans who would come down and spoil the natural beauty and culture of the area."

She was able to get around it, for a while, by dating a fag. They would go shopping together: they bought the same lingerie. They would watch movies together: they had crushes on the same actors; celebrity crushes, like a relationship w/ a gay man, felt satisfying in a way. It didn't matter if they couldn't touch her. But crushes, like a relationship w/ a gay man, end.

And she is alone now.

Sometimes I break into her house, waiting outside until I can see through the window that she has gone to bed. I pull the covers off her body and kneel beside her on the bed, my fingers feeling what they can of her ribs.

"Jonathan," she says, "I don't want to see you anymore."

"I own you," I say, "At least a part of you. Give me evenings and weekends." She doesn't want to hear that I miss her.

Sometimes, when I break into her house, there will be a man asleep next to her. Her mouth was sold to a man who likes to watch.

Packing my life into boxes.
It's heavier than I am, and my
arms, legs, and back
can't take the whole; it's only
here, within possessions, where
my life takes on any weight,
any substance.

It's hard to tell what is sweat and what is
the humidity. They lie together: they are
naked together on the bed, unaccompanied by
blankets-- it is too hot for them here --and
they are in love.

I have never felt this close before.

Her skin feels like mine, grafted on so
I could have her beauty. Our muscles have
started to weave together, the nervous sys-
tems are beginning to connect, and her blood
is recycled into me. The space between us
is non-existent, the space between us is a
terrarium for bodily fungi. If we are to-
gether long enough a rainforest will grow.
We'll be found dead in this room, mined by
what started as a tribe living around the
rivers of our legs and the valleys her
breasts fill that later became business men
building their towers to connect our collar
bones.

We should go before this happens. But
it would be too painful to part now and soon
it'll be day; there is nothing we need to do
then. Let us leave our clothes on the
floor, please, and stay this way.

Tonight I listened to a man talk about his brother and the snow. About how his brother died in the snow, or, if you prefer, how the brother was killed by the snow. Outside it was snowing and it looked warm and soft. Or, if you prefer the truth: outside it was raining. He looked down, not at his drink, not at the table, a little to the right, maybe at the ground, maybe at someone's feet, and he thought about his brother. His car ran off the road, became stuck between the wall of a ditch and a tree. He had a bottle of wine for company but company leaves too soon.

(leave while I'm still wanting you)
Maybe he left the car to piss and decided to keep walking. The cold doesn't always stay cold and the snow felt warm and soft.

I forgot he was talking about snow.
"What was her name?" I asked.

Everything can be about women. Maybe because everything is.
I want all my nights over again, for the first time, like I want to make love to you, again, for the first time.

(I want pictures of you wearing only
a double breasted sports coat & a fedora
a cigarette & a glass of 12 y/o scotch)

"I know you."

The voice sounded prettier than the mouth it came from. The voice sounded prettier than most things in my life. Maybe it's not the voice, maybe it's the words. I can respect words when placed in a certain order. There is little great about the ordering of, "I know you" but it was simple and unexpected and I turned to talk to her.

How to describe her: she flirts like she read a how-to in Cosmo but has yet to become comfortable with it.

How to describe her: she has no ass and her face isn't particularly attractive though there is something endearing about it.

How to describe her: she has nice tits.

How to describe her: it has been a long time and I am feeling lonely.

I would tell you her name but that would be telling. If you knew her, you would know this is a lie; I want you to think she would let me touch her because I want to believe it too. By keeping her nameless she can be anyone. This fiction isn't finalized and I could still erase her description, could still make her anyone. I could make her any of those girls unwilling to let me touch them. I could describe her walking through the dark house to spit semen down the drain (how much semen has gone down that drain?) stepping on an Oliver #5. Maybe you would like this image but you'd know it's a lie. You know she would only touch me to slap me; that I don't have an Oliver #5.

But maybe you will let me lie. Maybe you will think, "Jonathan needs this. If he keeps telling his lies long enough maybe he'll start to believe them. If he keeps telling his lies long enough maybe he'll get over them. He needs this."

Or, maybe, you like the lies. I've tried to be honest but there's little in my life to be honest about and all I want to do is entertain you.

All I want is to be remembered; a hope that my words will remember me even if there is little of myself in them. The truth is I am unable to write, unable to paint, unable to grow a fucking beard but I am a man in that I have a cock-- small and unwilling as it is --I am a man in that there is nothing else for me to do, I am a man in that she's willing but I'm still needing a bottle of port wine to work up the courage to disappoint her.

Lie or Truth, I don't know which to give. Lie or Truth, she said, "I know you." and I'll let you write the rest.

I would like to tell you a lie:

I received my first handjob at fifteen from an attractive girl who took off her shirt but wouldn't take off her bra. It happened in her bedroom, on her bed, and I came halfway thru the second song of the CD we put on to hide our sounds. The following conversation took place only in my thoughts:
Her: Shouldn't it be bigger?

Me: No.

Her: It's smaller than I was expecting.

Me: It's slightly over 6" (it wasn't).

So I ignored her. I avoided her. I did all of that but I kept the messages she left on my answering machine. I deleted all other messages and kept hers. And when the tape was full of her, "Can you call me back?"s and her broken, gasping, "Did I do something wrong?"s, I took the tape out and replaced it w/ a new one. At night, after everyone had gone to sleep, I would listen to them. I still have them and I still listen to them. I would like to tell you that she could have loved me, that I could have loved her.

What does it mean that she's a lie? She has affected my life more than the truth.

The truth: I received my first handjob at 13 from a 14 y/o boy named James on a fieldtrip to the coast. We stayed the night in a school gymnasium. The girls slept in the small gym and the boys slept in the large gym and James and I were together as far away as we could be from the rest of the boys.

And I still see her. I have left her nameless to avoid any incongruities in the future. I still see her at parties, at bars, in supermarkets buying organic vegetables. I like to imagine she can cook better than me, that she's buying ingredients for our dinner. I especially still see her at bars. I'll finish my drink, order another then I'll walk over to her and I usually fall apart. Sometimes she humors me, sometimes she ignores me, but she never remembers me. But I like to imagine...

What does it mean she's alive? She's dead w/ the rest, a ghost making me imagine beautiful women.

I play her
like Cecil Taylor

If this is all there is-- and I think it is --then let's keep drinking.

Drain what bottles are left, we'll meet later after being cut off. Everything starts w/ a drink, w/ a bottle of wine. She is young and beautiful, though she doubts both of these things. She invites me in. In the morning I'll watch her shower, pull the shower curtain down from its rings to see her in full. I'll notice the cellulite that I won't notice tonight. All I wanted from her was a pair of lips or a pair of legs, whichever she'd part.

She invites you in because she feels old and you are young.

And the guys she has been w/, I should feel embarrassed to be in their company; thinking, "I am no better than those that have come before me."

I'll name her Chloe because her name is Chloe and not because she reminds me of Chloe Sevigny. Though, she reminds me of Chloe Sevigny in Trees Lounge (1996). When I am inside her I can only think about Harmony Korine and Vincent Gallo. What do my words mean if theirs were good enough?

I am no better than those who have come before me.

And if that's all there is-- and I think it is --then I'll keep drinking.

I am here, in this room, w/ no sound out of place. They are catalogued and ordered on my shelves by type and size.

When I was inside of her I could only feel awkward but now-- w/ her asleep on my bed wearing only breathing --I feel I could care about her. Earlier, she went through the sounds collected on my shelves. She brought them down two by two, too eager to see how they would fit: the moans, the exclamations, the laughter, the heavy breathing, an embarrassing little gasp... but they didn't suit her. She wore them w/ a frown. They were incongruous w/ her body and her movements. Instead, she was forced to rely on what sounds she could make.

And she sighed and went silent.

The Dawn is drunk but the Dawn is still
awhile away.

And I've got another Dawn here.

And she is currently more appealing.

And this Dawn is small and I like her
like I like 18 y/o boys who say, "I've never
done this before..." Like I like two drunk
16 y/o girls who invite me to their house to
watch them dance (that is not how it hap-
pened but I like it better this way) and she
is a drink away from being drunk enough.

She looks like Britney and Brooke and Whitney
and from a distance she looked like Adrienne
and if I knew any of those girls I would make
them all Dawn. As it is I'll keep Dawn as
Dawn and I like her because of the way she
looks at me.

The look says, "I'm a drink away from
being drunk enough."

And her voice says, "Jonathan" every-
thing, everything she says starts w/
"Jonathan" and I like that like I like to
watch the Dawn sleep drunk but the Dawn is
still awhile away.

And I've got another Dawn here.

And she is currently more appealing.

Imagine a beautiful woman.

It's not hard.

Imagine her standing nude before you.
There are typewriter keys under her breasts,
lining her ribs, and typewriter teeth in
place of her mouth. When she speaks the
keys depress and the teeth swing across
their arcs, beating their letters on the
paper white of her skin. There is no fear
that her voice will ruin the fantasy and
you can write her words.

Imagine a cunt sweeter than port wine
and more intoxicating than absinthe, cocaine
or opium. Imagine you are a great poet and
imagine a beautiful woman. See what kind of
creature she is.

Today in Revolution Class we made Molotov cocktails for our generation. They are Hostess Pink Snowballs on the end of a chopstick. We light them and throw them. There is no fire everywhere, just the hope they'll stick and burn; that the voting public won't want a disfigured government.

Today in Revolution Class we watched a slideshow of starving children. They wore little and picked through garbage dumps for scrap metal for ten cents a week. Their skin was cut, their bodies cancer ridden. Today in Revolution Class we loved our sweatshop clothing because it offers these children a job other than that-- other than prostitution --at better wages w/ better work conditions. Today in Revolution Class we loved our sweatshop clothing because it saves us money for our cocaine.

Today in Revolution Class we watched a video of the 1939 World's Fair so we could understand the world of tomorrow today. There was a mermaid. She had no fins, she had no top, just a sexy lingerie bottom. It only showed her for a few seconds as she swam by the camera but I fell in love. Today in Revolution Class I imagined being fifteen years old in 1939 and I wondered if her breasts would have been the first I had seen other than erotic photos my father had saved from World War I, other than close relatives. I imagine so. I imagine myself stalking the mermaid, wondering if she would ever remember me out of all the others that gawked at her. I would try to dress better than them. I would try to act as though I was interested in the art of the exhibit and not the auburn of her nipples, the slight curve of her breasts. She died less than ten years later like all the other women, from cancer, from the metals that poisoned the water of the 1939 World's Fair. The water of tomorrow is poisoned like it is today, like it was yesterday.

Today in Revolution Class we fought our revolution because the women we've loved are dead, or are left unimpressed by us, or never existed except in the silver flicker of an old movie projected onto a new screen-- because the world has ignored us --because someone ought to know who we are and tell that we were here.

I met Barcelona at a party.
I call her Barcelona because she has
been there and I have not.
Her real name is unimportant.

the architecture of her was once well known
but you know the things living does...

Now that I've quit drinking the bottles empty themselves. They stay up late smoking cigarettes and listening to old Billie Holliday records. And I, having nothing better to do, lean in close to my bedroom door, trying to listen in on their movements: a bottle of Chimay, a bottle of Bulleit Bourbon and perhaps too many bottles of port wine talking about an ex-could-have-been-girlfriend, saying, "The people we fall in love w/ aren't worth the words wasted on them."

Their words flit from bottle to bottle scattered around the room.

Their words are interrupted w/ Lester Young introducing, "Ladies and Gentlemen, Miss Billie Holliday!"

And I've decided I've wasted enough time. I sit down and try to write. If all I can make is a failed attempt at being a writer, at least I can do it as an anachronism: w/ a soundtrack of vinyl pops and typewriter keys, w/ cigars and bourbon...

The bottles try to drown out my free-jazz percussion of hesitant words-- God bless the child --louder and louder until, eventually, an unwanted company of Pabst Blue Ribbon, Busch and Budweiser wake up. How have they worked themselves into my life? Maybe someone left them here: an old roommate, a friend, maybe someone not worth the words wasted on them. And the music they play-- I can hear them say, "What is this?" to the Billie Holliday, hear it being taken off the record player, hear it thrown and crash against the wall --how has all this worked it's way into my life?

Oh my God, they're even getting the lamp drunk. That shade she favors tossed like nothing to the floor, picked up by an almost empty can who wears it like a bra on the head of Anthony Michael Hall in *Weird Science*, like a lampshade on an idiot, like a cliché I hope doesn't find its way to my page.

And I ruin the party. I return the shade to the lamp, I drain the cans down the sink-- it doesn't have a cast-iron stomach but it will hold --and I glue the Billie Holliday back together. Though I don't get it quite right. The needle skips across the surface giving us: "Ladies and Gentleman Miss God bless the bubbles in a glass of champagne" sounding as if William S. Burroughs came back as a glitch artist.

And, of course, I pour myself a drink. A drink for each piece of the record I glued back together: when I wake up in the morning, the bottles are little sips scattered across the floors.

I could list all the pretty girls:
they are variations on a theme
like the clothes you wear

though the styles might change
the colors might change
the fabric might change

it's still your body underneath

I've been drinking but tonight I think you
should stay here and fall in love w/ me; I'm
not a bad person to fall in love w/.

Others have. Only half regret it.

In Singapore I saw real ampitheatres;
large clamshell designs that would carry
your voice. From a hill my friends and I
watched a group of British students rehear-
sing a play. The clamshell carried their
voices as a pair of binoculars passed be-
tween us brought their bodies. They saw us
and smiled and waved.

And there was a pretty girl and she
smiled and waved.

In New York City I collected typewriters
and smoked and drank w/ real bohemians.
Lived w/ a girl who'd stub her toes on the
typers in the morning and played Ornette
Coleman in the evening.

Inbetween we mostly did nothing.

In Singapore I bought her Singapore
Slings because we were in Singapore and I
thought I was being clever. I miss the way
would cry when we fought.

I can only love a woman when she is
crying.

And I've never found NYC as interesting
as Singapore. Singapore knew I wasn't clever
when I wasn't clever.

Back here everyone's trying to be big
city New York City but the details get lost:
change typewriters to paintings (Oliver 5s
for mock Rothkos) and Ornette Coleman to
Talking Heads. In the evening we dance and
in the morning we sleep and inbetween we
mostly do nothing.

Though, often, I've been drinking.

There is something about watching someone undress. It feels intimate. More so than seeing the person naked. An Example: look at undressing for sex. Either casual sex or sex at the early parts of a relationship. Undressing becomes stylized. It's hurried, it's a mini striptease, it's done out of sight, each person undresses the other, et cetera. It is not the undressing after a long day to go to sleep, to take a hot shower, to change into different clothes. It's fully aware that sex will come, that it is part of the sex act, and it either becomes embarrassed or overstates the sexual aspect.

(Embarrassment and awkwardness are both intimate, too, but they are often too hurried and cannot be enjoyed. And if the embarrassed or awkward action is slowed down to be enjoyed, it eventually becomes aware that it needs not be embarrassed or awkward and it becomes something else.)

But it's the natural undressing-- the undressing we do when we are by ourselves --that feels the most intimate. We like to think it is entirely innocent. We are undressing because it has been a long day, and work was hard, and we have sweat, and our clothes stink, and we wish to shower. We are undressing because something has been spilled on us and our clothes are no longer comfortable to wear. We are undressing because it's three in the morning, the bars are closed and we found no one there to take home, and our friends are asleep, and nothing comes when we sit down to write so we might as well be asleep, too. These are not sexual sexual actions but still... the body twists, it arches, it becomes revealed ...and young boys hope a beautiful woman will move in next door, that her bedroom will be across from theirs and one night she will forget to draw the curtains when she undresses for bed. Is it really just for the hope of a curve and the auburn of a nipple truthfully too far away to ever really remember?

In college, in figure drawing classes, the model will go into her little undressing room and come out a minute later in a bathrobe. She will go to the middle of the room, maybe there is a chair for her, maybe she'll be doing standing poses, but the bathrobe is discarded and for three hours she lets us look at every part of her body.

But she won't let us watch her undress.

I saw her again, years later, as she was sitting down after the bus pulled away from the stop. Just the back of her head. I hadn't been paying attention when she boarded and just saw the back of her head. We rode past my stop but I didn't know how to walk past her. I watched her. When we came to her stop I watched her profile, watched as she walked down the street waiting until she could cross. Your children have left you w/ wide hips, w/ an ulcer growing in your stomach like, soon, the cancer will start growing in your breast. The left one. The one that I noticed was smaller than the other that day when we were sixteen and you let me watch you undress.

I remember her.

Her skeleton, too. I remember her for how her skeleton would support her body. The way her face was constructed. My fingers remember the way I would imagine the feel of her jaw line.

It was the first thing you noticed:
Her mouth.

Claire, if you could hear the things we've fantasized about you... If you could feel them hardening your skin.

How will you age?

I've been dreaming about you. Nothing romantic. You're just in the background.

I was at Barnes & Noble looking at where I would sit on the shelf.

My neighbors would be horror-authors, their books so generic that my eyes were unable to register the titles. I fingered a space there, between the two of them, and it was large enough only for one slim volume.

All of this is probably how it should be. My prose carries no stories or substance and while I sometimes choose to believe that it has its moments of beauty, they don't happen often enough. Some would argue they don't happen at all. And, if I am going to be honest tonight, know that all I have in me is one slim volume. One copy is all that a Barnes & Noble would need. It could sit there, rather hollow, next to hollow neighbors-- and I will fit right in.

But at night when the books gather to tell stories like we do-- around campfires, around barroom tables, in cars when it's dark and the destination is vague and there are still plenty of cigarettes left --my neighbors, though repeating things we've heard too often, will still be able to entertain. When it comes to me I'll stumble over the words until I hit patches of things I would be proud of if they weren't plagiarisms from lesser works of better writers.

I like to think that someday someone I used to know will find it. She'll be waiting for her kids to decide which book they want. She'll wonder why they like to read so much. She never did. And it's not that she discouraged their reading but she never encouraged it. And she'll think about me (this is a fantasy and I like to think she'll sometimes think of me). She'll wonder if I ever finished that novel that, for awhile, I kept telling her I was writing. And I'll be sitting there, between those two generic horror authors. Only the one copy she'll buy and read and see herself all through it.

It won't matter, but if I'm being honest w/ you tonight, you should know that she's nowhere in it.



Jonathan Ludwig recently earned a BFA from Oregon State University. He is soft spoken, even when inebriated, and covers his giggles with the back of his hand. A member of the '06 and '07 Bend Poetry Slam teams, he travelled - when forced - the N.W. performing with perfect awkwardness on slam stages.



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