

March 4, 2008

Dear P,

Hey.

I'm finally writing you back. I've been carrying your letter around in my pocket so it's pretty wrinkled but you have good penmanship or cursive or whatever they call it so it's still totally readable. It actually looks like Mom's writing and I never knew that about you.

I've been meaning to write back for like weeks I swear P but every time I started to do it I would get distracted like I'd have some shit to do or I couldn't find a pen or something. I've never been much of a writer anyway even though this one time in seventh grade I was in detention for skipping class and I had to do this five hundred word essay on politeness and after she read my essay the woman who was running detention this substitute teacher everyone called Mrs. Boobjob told me I had an unusual gift. She wound up giving my essay to this English teacher Mr. Douglas-Roberts and he invited me into a special composition class but I got kicked out right away for chirping like a bird during this thing called an automatic writing

exercise. I haven't really written anything for a while so I hope this letter doesn't suck too bad.

So I'm on a Greyhound bus and the driver's wearing a hockey mask. It's clear instead of white and you can see his skin all slimy and pressed up against the mask. When I got on he said hello and his voice was clogged and small. I think he has some sort of infection on his face and I can't tell if he's black or Mexican.

I'm wearing this hoodie I found the other day and I wish I had something a little warmer. Man I feel like shit. I have the chills and I should've eaten something but I'll have to wait for the next refueling point which the driver said would be somewhere in Idaho.

P I've been living in Portland for five months and I'm not sure how I feel about it. I probably won't really know for years because that's how it works right? You don't really develop feelings about a place till you've left it. It's like a girl or a dog like that black Lab E brought home after his pony league game that dog Sarge. Remember how Mom accidentally backed over him with the Olds and how you said he made that squealing sound? I miss that dog even though he only lived with us for a summer. Remember how

you used to do that trick where you would put extra-crunchy peanut butter on the sprinkler in the front yard and he would start licking the peanut butter off and then you would turn on the sprinkler and he wouldn't stop even though the water was shooting everywhere and he would flip his weird spotted tongue around all crazy and then you would do the fake Fifty Cent voice and it would be like Sarge was really busting rhymes or something.

To be honest I've never really had a girlfriend to miss. I've gotten off here and there but I'm basically talking about hand jobs. I don't mean to be weird P but in your letter you said how you wanted the truth about stuff even if it's ugly and trust me it's going to get a little ugly. Uglier than my skittery penmanship if skittery is even a word.

I can still feel the effects of the meth that me and this kid Branson did last night. It was my first time trying it and it made everything taste aluminum so I didn't feel like eating anything and now I'm totally fucking starving but I already said that right? To be honest P I'm so nervous I can practically feel my bones rattling around under my skin.

The bus smells pretty bad like mold and breath and piss from the bathroom and disinfectant they

used to try to cover it up and the back of the seat in front of me has a sticker on it that says jobops.com which is somehow making the smells worse. Out my window the sky is so dark it's almost brown like a bunch of German shepherds got stuck up there. I imagine them snarling and baring their yellow teeth at this shit world and all of its disappointments. That's pretty much all I can see the sickly sky and rain streaking slantways across the glass and the Rose Garden shrinking in the distance like a lost toy.

There are only about eight people on board and six of them look like they're sleeping with their eyes open. This man three seats in front of me is snoring so loud it sounds like he's drowning in a bird-bath and this old black woman keeps crying into an Easter basket. I don't even know when Easter is. Maybe she just likes carrying around Easter baskets. She probably had something in it that she lost like some money or a picture of her dead pet. She's wearing a pink shower cap with little yellow daisies on it and she's sitting about four rows in front of me and her crying almost sounds like Santa Claus laughter. Even though it's March I keep thinking she's going to turn around and scream "Merry Christmas foolish-

ass bitches!” like she’s been saving up all her sorrow and hatred and this skanky bus is the only place she can let it out.

Man I wish I had that iPod Fat Larkin gave me. I wound up giving it to Branson. He’s the guy I did meth with last night. He was my best friend in Portland and the one I will miss the most.

I stole about fifty iPods for Fat Larkin. Me and this kid Bobby Job were Fat Larkin’s iPod thieves. Bobby Job has emotional problems and likes to stick mechanical pencils in cats’ anuses especially this one cat called Acrocat who sounded like a dental drill when it meowed. The emaciated thing followed Bobby Job around with pure loyalty because he would feed it Popeye’s. Bobby Job wound up getting his face bit up by a Doberman pinscher and got sent to the Yakima juvy home up in Washington.

Fat Larkin had iPod thieves and cell phone thieves and there was this girl who would stop by the Roxy Diner and deliver his daily blueberry smoothie. Oh man P you would LOVE the Roxy Diner! They got all these movie posters up like from Quentin Tarantino films and the ones Robert De Niro starred in when he was skinny like Taxi Driver and Mean Streets and the place is infested with drag queens and

drug addicts and no one really gives a shit. It's your kind of place I swear.

I apologize if my writing is hard to read but writing on a Greyhound isn't too easy and by the way I just reread some of what I wrote and I realize I'm not following the rules like I should you know like grammar and punctuation and commas. I hope that's cool.

Fat Larkin kicking me back an iPod probably made him feel less guilty about Bobby Job getting his face bit up. You would like Fat Larkin P. He speaks his mind and maybe killed a few people and one of them was probably his ex-wife Norca but nobody really knows for sure. He's sort of scary-looking because he has some gold teeth and his one eye gets stuck but he has this other side like he's into Star Wars action figures and he's nonabusive to little kids and he doesn't eat pork.

He would give me twenty bucks for every iPod. I would jump joggers in Forest Park which is this big woodland preserve with all these trails and tons of trees. I mostly went for mom types or fat people because they were the easiest to knock unconscious. I'm still small for my age. I haven't grown much since the last time you saw me which was four years ago at

Christmas I think. That's when you came out of the closet and the Major made you stay at the Holiday Inn. I'm a little taller but barely five four and really skinny like you could maybe stick a pin through me or throw me off the roof of a building pretty easy. I think something's wrong with my hormones P. I wouldn't be surprised if I'm missing a gland. Maybe all that homegrown I smoked back in Cincinnati has permanently damaged me? That's what I get for smoking weed right? The point is that when I was thieving I had to target the extra weak or the super slow.

It's weird I don't feel so ashamed about confessing all this stuff to you P. Does that make me a sociopath? I heard once how if you have no shame for your bad deeds that it means you're insane. Maybe my heart has an infection in it or something or maybe when I was a baby I had some weird fever that killed part of my conscience?

After a few weeks I had to stop hitting Forest Park because these cops started riding around the trails on mountain bikes.

My iPod victims never even saw me because I would sneak up behind them and hit them in the back of the head with this heavy alarm clock that I took

when I ran away from Buckner. It was my roommate Torris's clock and he got it from the cadet store. It's metal with the Buckner Military Academy seal on it and had sharp edges so a good thump would put down even the most obese person pretty easy.

Once I knocked out this tall woman with huge veiny hands and when I was disconnecting her iPod I saw she was wearing a medical chain around her neck that said she was a diabetic. I felt bad but I don't think she died or anything because they would have put it in the paper. I have the clock in my duffel bag on the rack above me. It doesn't actually work anymore because I ruined it thieving for Fat Larkin but it makes me feel safe.

You never know what's out there P like all the murderers and the rapists and the kidnapers and the freaks who have sex with animals or children or both or the weirdos who ride around naked on farm equipment. There's just so much you have to be careful of. Fat Larkin said he was going to give me this French Taser gun that he got off the Internet but he never did. Fat Larkin has a wooden broadsword on the wall above his sofa and he can imitate fighting sequences from this kung fu movie called The Five Deadly Venoms. Once he let me hold the sword and

it was way heavier than it looked. Even though he's never studied martial arts Fat Larkin says he has "world class equivalence." You would have definitely liked him P. He doesn't believe Jesus was white and he says he was Egyptian or Russian or that he was from Honduras or something.

I got another wave of iPods off these skinny girls who'd hang out at the Hollywood Bowl on Halsey Street. Most of them were like thirteen and trying to look older with their rap video makeup and tight jeans. Basically all they do is run back and forth across the lanes and text-message each other and take cell phone pictures of the local black dudes and they try talking like they know about C-Rayz Walz and Madlib and lowriders and oxycotton. The truth is they're mostly just little rich skeezers from Lake Oswego and Orenco Station and most of them haven't even had their first period yet and they get so drunk on vodka and Gatorades that they wind up puking in the ashtrays and they'd forget about their purses which I would take into the bathroom and help myself to their iPods or nanos or iPhones and leave through the custodial exit like I was never there.

I hit the Hollywood Bowl every Saturday night

for a while but then the management started posting signs warning bowlers to keep an eye on their personal shit so someone obviously complained. On average I'd usually get three or four iPods per visit and I got seven that third week plus an iPhone.

Fat Larkin cleans them with furniture polish and clears the hard drive and then sells them for a hundred cash in the back booth of the Roxy. He keeps the iPhones for himself but gives you an extra five bucks if you bring him one. The iPod he gave me has eighty gigs and a color video screen and here's the good part. There was a ton of mad slamming punk rock loaded on that iPod like Dropkick Murphys and the Dead Kennedys and the Clash and Minor Threat. P I know a lot of that scene happened way before I was born but I still relate to it thanks to your rock-n-roll teachings. Somehow Fat Larkin knew about my musical taste probably because I was always talking about punk rock. He even started calling me Punkzilla which everyone in Portland called me too.

Speaking of Portland the weather sucked there P. It was never sunny for more than two days in a row. Recently it's been nothing but heavy rain and this ugly brown sky so it was probably as good a time as any to leave. "Break north during a nefarious rain

kid” Branson kept saying. “Break north and don’t look back.” North would’ve meant Washington State and there’s nothing up there but wild animals and rivers and naked people fucking in the woods but I know north means anywhere to Branson. He could be on his way to Mexico and if you asked him where he was going he would say he was breaking north.

Branson was my roommate at Washington House and I don’t think he had any idea what nefarious meant but what he would do was he would see a big vocabulary word in a magazine or a newspaper and try it out on me like I was his illiterate guinea pig or something. One time he told me that my hair looked Byzantine. This happened when we were sitting in front of Our Lady of Fatima on Garden Home Road displaying our April Yon Collection sign and trying to look legit. My Buckner hair had just started to grow out and it was getting wavy so I thought Byzantine meant curly or something.

Later that night I looked up Byzantine in the Washington House Commons Room dictionary and it said something about the Byzantine Empire so then I looked up Byzantine Empire and it said something about the Roman Empire and all I could imagine was a bunch of people walking around in togas and

feeding grapes to each other and having ancient-style orgasms.

Me and Branson made most of our money from the April Yon Collection. April Yon was this little girl who got kidnapped in a bookstore and her picture was on the front page of the Oregonian and it was seriously big news because her father owns like half of downtown Portland. That guy's name is Caldwell Yon and he looks all grave and bloodless like he sleeps in a coffin and a lot of people thought maybe he kidnapped his own daughter or like sold her to this motorcycle gang who made kiddie porn but there was no evidence. He went on TV all the time and cried and looked like a vampire.

April Yon was only like six years old and the newspaper said someone kidnapped her while her mom was buying a cookbook. In the newspaper picture April has big blue eyes and pink barrettes in her hair. She's the kind of kid who you can never imagine dirty. Her skin probably cleans itself like one of those ovens.

Me and Branson made a sign with that Oregonian photo and sat in front of Our Lady of Fatima for like eight Sundays in a row and I'd ring this little brass bell and Branson would shout "APRIL YON COLLECTION! GIVE WHAT YOU CAN!"

HELP FIND APRIL YON!” and we’d fake cry and all these Catholics would give us mad quarters. I’m sure Mom would have been one of the generous ones but the Major would have probably walked right by us the stingy ass.

Once this man in an electric wheelchair donated twelve bucks and patted Branson on the shoulder and told him the Lord would be proud of us. He was like “The Lord Our God would be proud of you boys” and wheeled away with his skinny dead legs.

Shit I’m suddenly realizing at this very moment how upset Mom would be if she knew about this stuff. I can just see that sad face she makes when she’s about to cry. I’m sure she’s really messed up about me just disappearing. I guess I would be too if I had a fuckup kid like me P. I mean I know I have ADD and I know I smoke maybe too much pot and I know I got busted stealing that DVD player in the back of the Service Merchandise and I know the Major hates me and I know all of this makes me like public enemy number one and that I totally deserved to get sent to Buckner. I know that and I can live with that but it hurts deep to think that Mom might be suffering over me it really does P. It makes me want to smash one of my fingers with that alarm clock.

Anyway back to the April Yon Collection. Me

and Branson made around thirty bucks every Sunday. Once we made fifty-seven and after we paid our Washington House rent which was twenty-four fifty we went and got hand jobs from Buck Tooth Jenny. Buck Tooth Jenny's real name is Jennifer Norris but everyone calls her Buck Tooth Jenny because she has the buckest teeth I have ever seen. But she has curly black hair and big brown eyes and nice creamy skin and she doesn't have no sores on her mouth or nothing and she looks right at you when she does you.

One time she made me come so hard I shouted "I'M A CRIME THRILLA AND A DIRTY COP KILLA!" I swear I shouted that P and even though when I come nothing shoots out I still get all those feelings in my body like I'm getting electrocuted and tickled with a feather and I'm falling backwards all at the same time.

Buck Tooth Jenny has a nice body too which makes up for her teeth and she'll sometimes take her shirt off so you can stare at her titties while she does you and shit listen to this she told us she was going to pose naked for this website lostgirlslovelosers.com but Branson freaked out on her because he's obviously in love. She was going to make like three hundred bucks posing for that website too and it's pretty

funny because Branson doesn't mind if she gives me or someone else a hand job but he goes ballistic if she starts talking about posing for a website or if you call her Buck Tooth Jenny. He's like "Her name is Jenny!" and I'll say "But her teeth are so fucking buck B!" and he'll go "Don't say that shit Punkzilla!"

Once she showed us this scar on the side of her leg where she got cut going down a slide. She let me touch it for free and when I ran my finger across it she made a faraway face and it felt like a melted crayon. If she got her teeth fixed she'd be slamming but she doesn't have the money. She barely pays her Washington House rent with this disability check she gets every month for falling into a big pool of spinach where she was working at this frozen vegetable plant. She lives on the third floor and everything is mad purple in her room like for instance the walls and the carpet and even the shower curtain in her bathroom and she has all these weird baby doll heads on this shelf sort of lined up next to each other and there aren't any books just baby doll heads and some of them don't have hair and look like spooky old men.

Once after she did me I asked her what they were supposed to be and she said they were her special friends and when she started telling me their names

and the little stories about each of them I knew there was something seriously off in her brain like she didn't get the right vitamins as a kid or maybe she got dropped on her head. She calls this black baby doll head Chocolate Bill. She'll go "Chocolate Bill's from the African continent" and she'll say it like she's talking to a four-year-old. She told me he liked to run through the tall grass and talk to the elephants and that his favorite thing was Oreo cookies and chocolate milk and then when I looked closer I could see that there was an Oreo cookie next to his head.

Sometimes Buck Tooth Jenny does this thing where she pretends like she's talking to someone on her cell phone. She'll hold it to her ear and say "This is Jenny . . . Uh-huh . . . Uh-huh . . . But I didn't order any cranberry plush carpeting" and then she'll hang up and shake her head like the carpet company is crazy. She's twenty-four and she doesn't have any parents and even though she's a little slow or fucked in the head or whatever she's been one of the nicest people I've met.

In your letter you asked about what I did for Christmas and what I did was me and Branson went to early Christmas Eve service at the same church where we did our April Yon thing. We basically sat in

a pew way in the back and Branson pretended like he knew what he was doing like when everyone kneels and says “Amen” and all of that he was really trying to do it right. He even took communion and for some reason that made me take communion too but I didn’t have to try so much because of all those times Mom made us go to St. Rose’s and sing the hymns and recite all the prayers and give change when they pass those baskets around. Yeah all that church stuff is deep in my bones P. That kind of thing makes me wonder if we get hypnotized more than we know like when we’re at the grocery store or at the mall or at other places where people put on nice clothes and spend money.

At Christmas Eve mass the priest was this guy with a short black beard and an oily forehead and he seemed like he was subbing for the regular priest like he had a real job selling knives or something. I’m not sure why I thought that. Maybe it was because he wasn’t in a very good mood like he wasn’t in the Christmas spirit. The weird thing was that when he sang his nostrils got really huge and he sounded like he was kind of whimpering with pleasure almost like something sexual was going on. I didn’t like him and I hated being there and I kept trying to not stare

at Jesus up on the cross because his face was really starting to freak me out and toward the end I almost left but I didn't because Branson was so mesmerized with the Catholic rituals and the sermon which I didn't even hear. Maybe he thought Jesus or Santa Claus or one of those Christian heroes with the wavy hair would grant him a wish or something?

At the end of the service this choir of little kids performed "Joy to the World" and Branson was really singing the shit out of it. It was weird how his whole personality changed like all his toughness evaporated and he was six again or something. I thought he was going to stay after and ask about trying out for the altar boys.

After church we were walking back downtown and Branson was mad silent and I asked him why he was being so quiet and he said he wasn't being quiet and I asked him if church freaked him out and he was like "Did it freak YOU out?" and I said no and he said "Stop sweatin' me Zilla" and he looked at me with animal hatred in his eyes like he was a wolf in a forest and I went "I ain't sweatin' shit" and then he said "You must wanna get blasted" and after that we didn't say anything for the rest of the walk home and it didn't snow which sucked especially after our

weird conversation or argument or whatever it was. Like I told you earlier it mostly rained in Portland so there was no white Christmas but people still put up Christmas trees and you could see them all lit up in the living-room windows we were walking by. Christmas trees and angels and big cardboard snowflakes on front doors and different colored lights blinking.

When we went past this lamppost with a wreath on it Branson said “Faggit-ass Christmas” and climbed the lamppost and pulled the wreath down.

Later we went over to Buck Tooth Jenny’s and Branson gave her the wreath and she hung it on the wall next to her fake tree which was only about three feet tall and smelled like a carpet store but it was okay to look at. Me and Branson decorated it with microwave popcorn and shredded newspaper and Buck Tooth Jenny arranged her baby doll heads in the branches. She put Chocolate Bill on the top like he was the Jesus angel.

Then we cooked a Tombstone pizza and got drunk on a bottle of Two-buck Chuck and sat on the purple sofa and smoked clove cigarettes and then Buck Tooth Jenny gave us hand jobs. She did me left-handed which was like someone else was doing

it and I closed my eyes and imagined that girl back home who lived down the street from us Cornelia Zenkich. Remember how she would ride her skateboard by the house? I swear I could smell her sometimes P like a wild nature bush or some raspberries. I get confused by how the smell of a girl can totally haunt you. Do you ever get that way about Jorge like you can smell his cologne or his body odor even when he isn't there or like maybe when it's scientifically impossible to smell him like when he's halfway down the street or something? You probably don't even remember Cornelia Zenkich because she was like a fourth-grader when you left home. She's got blond hair and dark blue space-alien eyes. Once I caught her staring at me when I was mowing the lawn. I was mowing it with hatred for all things and I was probably making the nastiest face I could. I think you were already living in Memphis and the Major had chewed me a new one for saying fuck in front of Mom and Cornelia Zenkich was on the street in front of our house and she just stood there holding her skateboard which had all this Japanese graffiti art on the bottom of it and I stopped mowing the lawn and sort of froze and we stared at each other. She was wearing cutoff jeans and a sleeveless black T-shirt

and I could feel her wanting to wave at me or tell me some secret but nothing happened.

When I was at Buckner I wrote her and asked her to come to the Midwinter Ball with me but she couldn't for a reason that makes me sick to my stomach P. So sick that I can't even go into it. Anyway sometimes I'll just think about Cornelia Zenkich riding her skateboard like her legs and her perky little ass and her titties sort of pushing up against the inside of that sleeveless black T-shirt and her soft pink nipples tasting like peppermint and then that Cornelia Zenkich smell starts making a pleasure cloud in my mind. Anyway that's what I was thinking about when Buck Tooth Jenny was giving me my left-handed Christmas hand job.

She gave Branson a hoodie with a lion on it. It said "King" on the back and Branson wore it almost every day. He even wore it to bed and to the bathroom. The hoodie started to smell and it had about nine different stains on it but Branson kept wearing it no matter what. Eventually Fat Larkin bought him a vin' Diesel T-shirt and made him give him the hoodie with the lion on it. He was like "Let it go kid. You ain't no king anyways. You ain't even a DUKE."

Buck Tooth Jenny didn't give me nothing extra for Christmas but I was satisfied with the hand job. I gave her a tin of Lake Champlain chocolates that I stole from the CVS and we ate them in about ten minutes.

I gave Branson a silver-plated cigarette lighter that this old gay guy left on a table at the Roxy. When you pushed this button it made a blue rocket flame that hissed.

“Good lookin’ out dog” Branson said about the lighter. “Good lookin’ Zilla.”

Branson gave me a Swiss Army Knife that had scissors and all these other tools like a miniature saw and this poker thing for leather which was cool for survival but he took it back when I was sleeping and gave it to Fat Larkin who I saw using it to clean his nails a few days later.

Branson gave Buck Tooth Jenny a washcloth with her name embroidered on it and she cried. She loved it so much. You should have seen it P. Her top teeth got so extra buck I thought they were going to pop out and attack me. The washcloth was light blue with purple embroidery and I'm almost positive Branson had it made special at a department store. Now Buck Tooth Jenny uses it to dust off her baby

doll heads and she sings this little spooky song to herself when she does it too. The song goes “My friends are blue my friends are green my friends are bigger than they seem” and there are other words but I can never understand what they are because her teeth get in the way.

Even though I puked from eating all that chocolate Christmas Eve didn't really suck as much as I expected it to. It was way better than the ones back in Cincinnati where everything was tense and Mom was so confused about whether or not we were going to midnight mass and before you left she was always sweating you about where you had been the night before and whether or not you were going to agitate the Major about him being a Republican war-lover and did E have one of his stress headaches and did she buy enough food and why wasn't anyone helping her in the kitchen.

The last Christmas in Cincinnati I went down to the basement and sat up against the cement wall and took like three Actifed and listened to the Dead Kennedys on your old iPod while Mom did the dishes and the Major paced around the living room preaching to E about personal excellence and achieving goals and staying physically fit. Man when I think

about it I used to do a lot of Actifed. Thank god for Actifed and your iPod P. I don't think I would have made it without those two support systems.

The weird thing about Christmas Eve with Buck Tooth Jenny and Branson is that the following morning meaning Christmas morning this woman from the fifth floor burned to death and we had to evacuate the building at like nine a.m. We hung out near the lobby and saw the paramedics bring her body down on a stretcher and it was pretty eerie because the lobby was playing "Silent Night" and "Little Town of Bethlehem" and there were paramedics and firemen and this dead woman on a stretcher who had just burned to death and her face was charred like grilled chicken and they hadn't even put her in a body bag yet. I had never experienced that particular smell before P. The scent of a burnt human is unlike anything else.

She was this woman they called Black Betty even though she wasn't black. One of the firemen said she fell asleep smoking and that her hair caught on fire.

After the firemen kicked us out of the lobby me and Branson and Buck Tooth Jenny walked over to the Roxy and ate free scrambled eggs and hamburgers which was cool. I think the management at the

Roxy felt bad for everyone at Washington House. We didn't talk much but Buck Tooth Jenny kept saying she was going to quit smoking those clove cigarettes. She was obviously freaked out about Black Betty and I have to admit I was too. In fact every time I closed my eyes I could see her charred face and sometimes I still can.

P the bus is shaking too much so I'm going to stop writing now.

Love,
Your Bro