

DUCK DUCK DUCK

Ken Sparling

Something He Couldn't Articulate
Was Gnawing At His Privates

They were on the phone. She was far away somewhere on business. He was at home, alone in the kitchen.

“When I walk around now, I don’t so much walk around as I stump,” he said.

“What is stump?” she asked.
“You know, like plunking your feet down gracelessly. I stump around, like I’m old.”

She said nothing.

“I feel like some young buck impersonating an old person,” he elaborated.

“But you are an old person,” she told him.

“I know,” he said, “but when I notice myself stumping around the house, it seems like some kind of act, you know.”

“I’m not sure that I do.”

One Day He Told
His Son: Go Now

There was a street light at the corner two houses down from where they were sitting. The girl's eyes caught the light when she turned her head. Twice, the boy stole glances at the girl out the corner of his eye.

He Felt A Little Lucky
That Morning

Carlo got out of the bed and went downstairs, still naked. Gina came down in her underwear. Carlo was standing in the front hall by the coat rack. He put on a hat. Looked in the hall mirror. Shook his head. “I need a different hat,” he said.

What He Was Thinking Now
Was Something Unspeakable

She must have gone to
sleep, a place she liked to
go, because she seemed
to have just woken up
when he said to her:
“Well, I guess that’s it.”

I Have No Real Plan

She set her book down on the couch beside her, looked down at the cat in her lap, then across the room at me. “I don’t think stopping February will help,” she said. She stroked the cat behind the ears. The cat looked happy.

The Cockroach Climbed Down
To The Kitchen Counter Hoping
To Meet A Lady Cockroach

Rhonda Bellamy had been toasting
buns and squirting condiments
when the incident occurred.

There were no motels or anything
where she could stay overnight.

She wanted very badly to stay out
overnight.

Back then, in the spring of 1978, I
was ready to explain everything.

What Is Right Doesn't Matter,
Not At All, But We Don't
Understand That Anymore

About a week after Dad died, I had a dream. It's the only time I ever had a dream with Dad in it. In the dream, Dad was lying on the couch in the living room. We were getting ready to play some music together. I was setting up. We never ended up playing anything. Through the entire dream, I was setting up. When I finished, I looked up and Dad was sitting on the couch in his underwear.

He Kicked The Garbage Pail
Across The Room, Then Lay
Down In His Own Vomit

They could get food at any point during the meeting because the meeting was in the kitchen and either of them could get up in the middle of any sort of discussion or presentation without really interrupting the other.

The Boy Stood At The Edge
Of The Pond, Beside The Frog

It was late. The sun was going down. He had never heard a duck talk before. He had been coming to this pond to feed the ducks for years, but he had never heard one talk.

When The Eagle Burped,
He Tasted Mouse Liver

I worry a lot about using up all the gigs in my gmail account, but the truth is, I'll most likely be dead before I use up all the space.

It's probably time to stop worrying about this.

He Looked Down At
His Lap And Waited

“What’s your middle name?” the girl asked.

It was getting late, time for the girl to go in.

“James,” said the boy. “What’s yours?”

“Ellen,” said the girl.

“Nice,” said the boy.

There was a pause.

“Look at the moon,” said the girl.

The boy looked at the moon.

The Guy At The Corner
Asked Me For Fifty Cents

They slept in the same room
until Milo was fourteen and
Carter was ten, each
eventually finding his own
vaporous end in the blinding
blue of the sunlit sky.

Sometimes I Worry That What I'm
Saying Is Not Really What I'm Saying

The girl drives the car down off the mountain and suddenly they are in the United States. She stops the car in the middle of the road and sits there with it idling. She looks over at the boy in the passenger seat. She's got this weird look on her face, like her eyes have dark, empty rooms behind them.

I Decided I Should Try
To Drive All The Way

They both decided not
to let their eyes meet.

It was just too scary.

My Favourite Month Be September

The boy finished reading the letter. It was about some aunts and uncles that he'd never met. He kept his eyes down. It was a letter from his mom.

Because So Many Of
Them Had Pants On

When I say this is my life, I'm not trying to tell you that no one can tell me what to do; I'm saying that there are an infinite number of other lives I might have lived, and I can see these lives in the lives lived by everyone else around me, and the fact that I'm not living any of these other lives, no matter how much I might at times wish I were, is the reason I can say to you now that this is my life.

We Are Fond Of Sad Endings

“I know you’re awake,” said the boy.

“But I’m not,” said the girl.

A Sound That Couldn't Be

She went out to the car and sat in it. She watched the steam from her breath drift about in front of her face. She stuck the key into the ignition and started the car. She revved the engine twice, then backed out of the driveway and shot away into the night.

This Is Exactly Why We Should
All Be Communists, Said The Boy

When the boy's upstairs plans fell through – largely because he could not bring himself to get up out of bed – he made a series of small noises, like what you might hear from a tiny animal in a tree.

It Was Real Spooky, Man

She stood in the front hall. When she didn't hear any sounds from anywhere in the house, she went to the kitchen and put the kettle on. She was just sitting down at the kitchen table when the boy came in and sat down across from her. He looked like he'd just woken up. His hair was sticking out

sideways on one side, and his face looked crumpled. He didn't say anything, just stared down at the table while the girl sipped her tea. She wanted to ask him a question, but she couldn't think what to ask. And then, when she thought of something to ask, she was afraid to ask it. *The boy might have some rule,*

*she told herself, some edict
regarding questions I'm
allowed to ask when we're
sitting together in the kitchen.*

She pursed her lips. *Fuck
you*, she thought, but she
thought it very softly.

I Put My Lips To Her Neck
And Sucked

The laundry hangs in the yard. The yellow beach towel is next to the blue bath towel, which is next to the pink towel with black dots that are supposed to look like watermelon seeds. You can hear the wind in the trees when there are no planes flying overhead. A plane flies overhead. Listen.

The Boy Tastes Purple

We were on a bench in the cemetery. This was a few years back. Each of us had our reasons for being there, but those reasons remained incomprehensible, even to ourselves. The sun was out. The air was cool, but verging on warm. It was as though a pocket of warm air was hidden away inside a misty envelope of cooler air that was making its way up from the lake.

His Jello Fell

The sun dropped below the horizon and the clouds caught fire. The wind was blowing. Except for the burning bank of clouds at the far end of the lake, the sky was perfectly clear. There were just a couple of puffs of misty black cloud very close down, a bit north of where I was standing. These tiny dark monsters hung strangely above the lake, lurking like they wanted

to scare me into thinking they would drop, but I knew they would not. I was very cold, but I didn't want to go back up the hill till the fire went out of the clouds. I tried to control my trembling. I knew that I badly needed sleep. When the sunset came to an end, I trundled up the path from the beach to the cabin and climbed into bed, pulling the covers close up to my chin.

The Room Was Big
And Full of Lemons

The aim had always been to chop things off as directly behind my life as possible, so I had this great weight of future pushing back on me with no past to fall back into.

Everyone wants to be alone up to a certain point, but after that point, no one really wants to be alone.

After I got into bed, I remembered the little blue flowers I'd seen by the boardwalk that afternoon.

I Have To Go Now

She went into the living room. She was tired. The cat jumped onto the couch. It circled, then lay down beside her. She put her hand on its belly. For some reason, this felt good.

What A Lovely Dress

Get the carrots out of the fridge.

The carrots are in a bag.

Now, reach into the bag and
pluck out a moment and hand
it to me like it's a cup of
coffee, or a pancake.

What's An Ectomorph, She Asked

We couldn't afford to get the faucet centered properly on the wall. There was some kind of bylaw that required us to keep moving it around.

The Wife Laughed And Said She
Had To Hang Up The Phone Now

"We shouldn't have to
worry about this," I said.

"Eventually, you have to
worry about everything,"
she told me.

Dismissal Of The Offending
Employee Will Leave A Vacuum

The old man was scratching his beard. Garbage floated by in the river. Everything continued on the way it always did. The old man's eyes were like emeralds shining in the setting of his face.

They Call Us Sandpipers

The father was quiet, sitting on his bum on the brown straight-back chair, among the other guests. His daughter was performing, her voice rising up. Behind her, on the other side of the stained glass window, tall office towers pierced clouds. God spread his white coat over the land. He wandered alone in the fields beyond the city.

An Old Man's Glasses Were
Perched On The End Of His Nose

"Fuck you, dick," I said.

His name was Dick.

Dick McIsaac.

In The End, Desdemona Decided
To Join The Math Club

Cicely Moskovitch was chewing on a piece of celery when her mother came home with another club pack of sale-priced margarine.

People Were Pushing Past Me
With Their Baby Carriages

I got in the car. I started the motor. I drove for half an hour. I was looking for a donut shop. I wanted to stop someplace where I could get a coffee.

She Awoke Only To Find
She Was Asleep Again

I ride down to the lake. Lunch hour. A blond guy standing at the edge of the boardwalk eating a sandwich. Half a dozen gulls hovering five feet from his face. The guy tosses out a bit of bread and one of the gulls beaks it. Another gull moves in, lands on top of a four-foot post. The blonde man holds out a crumb,

moves his hand slowly toward the gull. At the last minute, the gull lifts off the post, circles away. The man finishes his sandwich, pulls out a pack of cigarettes. He looks out over the water. At the boats. The island. He slips a cigarette into his mouth. Lights up. *I better head back to work, I think.*

It Was One Of Those Gas Stations
That Sells Chocolate Bars

I wake up. My arm is asleep. I rub it. I go out into the hall. All the lights in the house are off. I'll probably have that cup of coffee now.

The Girl With The Blond Hair And
So White Legs Walked By Slowly

I'm lying in my reclining chair with it fully reclined, wondering if sitting up in a reclining chair would be termed *clining*. But that doesn't make sense because shouldn't *reclining* mean *clining again*, like, as if the first time you pushed the chair back you were *clining*, and every subsequent time was an instance of *reclining*.

Pretend You Are Someone
You Are Not

No matter what I do
right now, I'll eventually
die one day anyway, so
I really am at a loss as
to what specifically
I should do right now.

She Found Herself Floating
In Her Dream, Like Ice
Cream Floating In Coke

I got to thinking about my hand,
about where it had been last
night, about where it was now:
there, beside me in bed, little
residual bits of where it had
been yesterday still clinging to
it, and I thought I could taste
yesterday when I took my index
finger into my mouth, sucking
on it like yesterday was
something I could eat.

So There's This Paragraph
That Is Just A List Of Names

I knew about God, of course,
but at the same time, knowing
about God didn't feel all that
different from knowing about
Molly or Elise, or even Stanley.

The Girl Was Painting
The White Room Whiter

Bloomfield was a university professor I used to study with who stood up on his toes when he was making an emphatic point.

I Don't Know What You're Talking
About, But I Like Your Teeth

When we were away at
university and the weather
turned sunny, we always thought
we saw God running down out of
the sky, like some kind of
crazy-ass javelin thrower
competing at the Olympics.

The Laundry Hung Around Us Like
A Group Of Unwanted Guests

Sometimes, I'll hit the rim of the toilet when I'm peeing standing up, which is why I'll often sit down to pee, even though it feels a bit unmanly, but when you sit you don't have to worry about missing – or it would be weird, anyway, to have to worry about missing if you were sitting, which is why it might have been better to be a girl,

which I'm glad I'm not, really – but when I'm standing up peeing, I'll sometimes get a drop or two on the rim of the toilet, which is why I'll usually pull off a piece of toilet paper and give the rim a quick wipe when I'm done, but sometimes I don't want to have to bother doing this, so I'll just take a quick look, and if the rim looks

okay, I won't bother giving it a wipe, but then sometimes I'll come back for another pee later in the day and I'll see then that there is a drop or two on the rim from the last time I peed, and it makes me wonder if pee gets more yellow as it dries up on the rim of the toilet, because how come I can see it now but I couldn't before?

You Might Be Tempted To Skip
Over This Next Part, But Don't

He was sitting by the wall with the light coming up under his eyes and some men a ways off yelling at him to come on over. The wind was coming down from the place where wind always comes from, and the men kept yelling, but he stayed in his spot by the wall.

She Was Standing In The Shipping
Area Without Her Glasses Off

There was a large group at one end of the room, and smaller groups scattered about elsewhere, and still smaller groups here and there, and there were groups of females, and subgroups, grouped perhaps according to age, and there were even a couple of groups of one, and also, there was also a big window at the far end of the room with no one looking out of it.

The Girl Envisioned A Man
With A Metal Head

Deve came down from his room this morning still half asleep. I met him on the landing where the stairs turn. "I want some candy," he said. "You have to have your breakfast first," I told him. "Well then I'm going back to bed," he said, and he lay down on the carpet with his blanky bunched up to his face and his thumb in his mouth. Later, when I was shaving, and Deve was singing quietly on the landing, Parky came into the bathroom wanting to tell me

the funniest part of the book he was reading. As soon as he started reading it to me, Deve called down from the landing: "Be quiet down there, I'm trying to get some sleep." Parky stepped further into the bathroom and closed the door. He finished reading to me the funniest part of the book, then opened the bathroom door to go back out, and at that point Deve called out: "Hey stop with the racket up there."