

What I Told Jimmo

By Andy Madison

From my back porch to Jimmo's Patio: I don't know where this is coming from; I can't explain it or see beyond it. It's as if I'm trapped. In a rotating glass case, like a piece of cake, repeating a circle, looking outwards, feeling chilled. And it's difficult, you know, being secure in the fact that I have something to offer and at the same time being completely certain that I'm a non-starter who cannot bring himself to participate in the true things that would make his life. And instead I'm just - just obsessed by how I could be, by what potential I have. And I have to escape it, let's get out of here, I need to go someplace, I have such hopes for me and I'm nowhere, Jimmo. Not to aggrandize it, but still, it upsets me.

On his Answering Machine: Last Summer at my younger cousin Micha's graduation, this just after Cathleen... of course you know who I'm talking about - around June this party was - and it wasn't his graduation, he graduated in May. But his family had this shindig in June up at their country place. I met a girl there, a friend of Micha's: cute, pretty interesting, a damn-site better than being lonesome. And did she ever like the look of me. She asked me if I was staying the night; some of them were staying over in tents in a pasture off behind the house, I had to be home for work the next day. She asked me, touching my chest first and then my waste, if I was sure about that. And I'd even met her before then, at another party - this one for my bigshot cousin; Micha's brother, the one we all envy, who - I think I've mentioned him - he's a human interest reporter, usually for like The Brooklyn Eagle- he's also a typesetter and a dog walker and a piano tuner - but this was for when he got an article excerpted in Harper's, like in that part up front. Same hosts, their parents, but at their place over on Murray Hill this time, I met her there first. And when I took a sip of wine, she always did too. And when I'd brush a little hair out of my face she'd touch her hair. But I ducked her, and afterwards I thought how much she must have liked my cousins, really, if she was willing to take a flyer on me like that.

At The Salad Bar: I see myself there, reflected in the sneeze guard and my face is transparent, a little bit like a ghost and when I see my own image and wonder what's really in there and through myself I see baby carrots and mushrooms - and is that - is it possible that this is a window into myself - that at some profound level I'm no more meaningful than those little shards of bacon.

On the Airport Shuttle: I had a dream the other night, that Cathleen, my ex. You met her. Like August before last, we went for tapas. She was on a pier, a useless one that extended far out onto the water, but which was closed in on all sides by high walls. And then I was there too and she was up on top of the wall, sitting and looking down at me in the sunshine. I offered - extended my hands upward, then I plead with her to come down and she would not. I tried to jump up and reach her, but you know how it is in dreams, I was all mixed up and I started tripping over myself. But I could not stand the thought of her tumbling back over and out of sight and that water was probably so shallow.

At the Baggage Claim: I don't want to aggrandize it, or emphasize it - it's always in the emphasis, isn't it, what somebody really means. Or if not what it really means, (who knows what real is anyway), at least what can be perceived of it without living through like 45 minutes of flashbacks from somebody's life that would color in the fullness of where they're coming from and bore you stupid in the mean time.

At Continental Breakfast: Shit, Jim, I'm not sure I'm putting myself across here, really I'm never understood; never. Really, and that's what I want, to be understood. And people say to me, 'Don't worry so much, you can do it if you're more confident,' as if that had never occurred to me, to be different from how I am - I know that! They could at least give me some credit and recognize that I know how puny I am, I hate being patronized!

Browsing Kayaks: I think I'm a good person, but you know, you can never be sure. So yesterday I faxed my diary to the NSA.

Choosing a Canoe: You know when you've got your eyes wide open, like there's no way you're sleeping, it might even be bright out but you lose all focus and withdraw to like six feet within your own head and if somebody approaches you, 'Hey,' they might say. You're aware of them, it just takes a moment, a long moment, for you to make a start and say 'Well hey yourself.' Usually people laugh because you jumped awake when you had been to begin with. You must know what I mean, yes? You thought I called you Jamesy that time like your mom always - anyway.

Over Soup and Half Sandwiches: I've liked having you around, Jimmo - I could always count on you to tolerate me and with you around it's like I'm safer, it's been so nice, you're a big brother to me, kind of - a big neighbor. Without you to stand behind, what the shit would I do?

In the Van To The River: You ever wish you could squeeze your consciousness out of your body and just live inside somebody else's head while they're getting their jollies on something, like eating a big fuckin' sandwich or hang gliding or making a tiny cut parallel to a bunch of little scars they've already got, whatever you want - better outside than in, I've been fighting off this melancholy that just blind-sides me, knocks out my wind, leaves me to ask why. And why on such a lovely day?

At the edge of a thirteen foot rock face: How can you even tell what somebody else wants? They're disguising their own desires from themselves all the time, and if they can't admit it to themselves how could they express them to you so that you can act on it? And if I sit here and dwell forever, by the time I learn anything I'll be old with quavering hands and repulsive nose hairs, so nobody would give me enough credit to do for them as I'd finally be so sure they'd need done.

Over Trail Mix and Purified Water: How sure are you that you'll be a success? Are you even sure what that entails, does it mean to be generous of yourself, to make your best assessment of what somebody near you needs, how you can best provide that and then -

then to act, acting is never straight through, never as you envision it beforehand. It's confusing, miserable stuff, doing. And if that's true how do you make such a judgment, presume to know, 'Oh, you need this, I'll bring it for you.' Is this coming across? I'm not sure.

Gathering Kindling: I tried to make coffee the other night, but I did not know you had to follow the steps in a specific order, so first I put the water in. Then I took out the filter and dumped the grounds; fussed with it trying to put it back in soggy, since I could not find fresh ones to replace it - poured in the grounds. All this time water was coming fast through the mechanisms in the coffee - maker. Maybe I never turned it off, I'm not sure. So water is coming out of it while I'm sort of maneuvering the old filter back into that meshy basket part, but I do it and I shrug at the puddle and pour in like a quarter pot more. I brewed some - well it kind of resembled pond water, and I got it about a centimeter deep in the pot. What a fiasco - and I stayed up too late that night as it was, so how much worse that would have been if I'd succeeded I can't even say.

Fetching Our Panchos: My one cousin, Micha, you've met him; he's a couple years younger than us. Well, he's pretty into music on the radio, he gets off on that 1-4-5 and I can respect that, those can be catchy and I almost never comment on music he puts on. But one time in his car for once in my life I had my CD-wallet with me, I forget why. I had this collection of avant-garde stuff from the time; it's actually claptrap, I've come to realize that, but then I was into it; what can you do? I said, 'You want to listen to one of my compact discs?' He said, 'Sure.' I put it in, he made a face at first and then tried to cover it - and with each new movement, this was organ music mind you, with each new movement he'd make this same involuntary reaction, he cringed a little and the car veered very slightly towards the on coming lane. Disgust, I guess you call that. This was evil-sounding stuff, mind. And by like fifteen minutes it was climbing to the end; these kind of wild dissonant arpeggios. He spoke up: 'This music sucks dogshit, why have you been playing this god-damned racket for so long? What about this is even good, much less better than nice music?' He was red. I told him if he'd wanted to change back all he needed to do was say so.

Over beans cooked on a canned flame: My last girlfriend, Cathleen, you've met her - I whispered to her once - 'You should never feel unwanted. You should never feel you don't deserve the love of a feeling person' and she pushed me off her.

Floating on a Lazy Bend: You ever rollerskate? I mean, like not weaving or criss-cross between cones, or really fast, though those guys are cool too - I just mean in a big crowd, all making the same sweeping left over again, how you have to lift your right and cross it over, lift it, cross it to arc your path the same as the rink - and how your mind stops; there is only coasting, it's all fluidity, and everybody in the rink is civil today; no assholes to clip your heels. You ever do that Jimmo?

Treading water in the air pocket under our over-turned canoe: I can't anticipate how I'll be different in the future, that's a total blank to me.