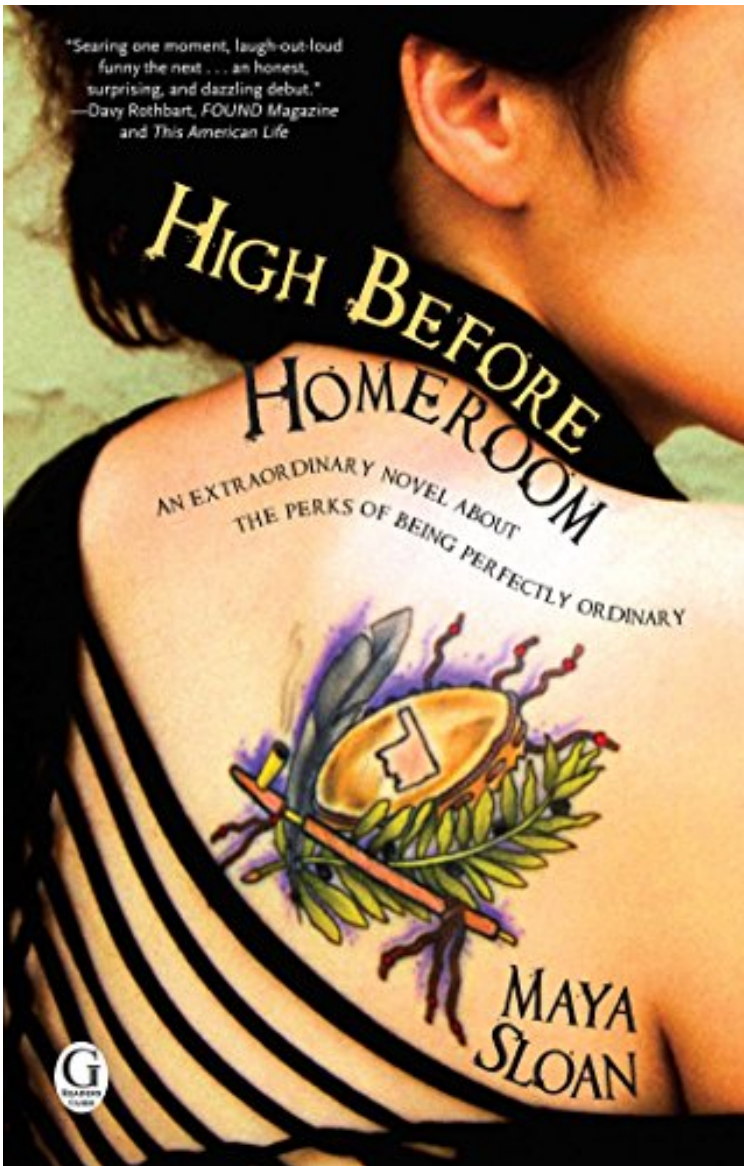


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# High Before Homeroom (English Edition)



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(English Edition)

**Par Maya Sloan : High Before Homeroom (English Edition)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised High Before Homeroom (English Edition):

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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurLosers, now you can get the bad-boy rep the girls find positively irresistible! Unleash your dark side with the Doug Schaffer plan for drug addiction and rehabilitation! (Kids, don't try this at home.) At sixteen years old, Doug Schaffer knows two things forsure: 1. He is doomed to live in the shadow of his older brother, Trevor, a former high school football star who is stationed in Iraq. 2. Free-spirited Laurilee, the hot ear-piercing girl at the mall, only dates bad boys.Cue Doug's foolproof plan to tarnish his own unremarkable reputation. The first step is to develop a drug addiction. His mom's too preoccupied with organizing care packages for Mothers Support Our Troops Northwest Oklahoma City Chapter to stop him. Besides, he just needs to get hooked on meth long enough to come back from rehab a totally different

person. Someone people notice. With the help of Trevors strung-out former high-school buddy, drug addict Doug has the confidence that loser Doug never mustered. He stays out all night, scores girls, and stands up for himself. Then Trevor unexpectedly returns home with a dark secret of his own, and everything Doug thought was true is shattered. Soon the brothers find a common ground they never knew they shared as they discover the price of pleasing others is the freedom to be yourself.

Extrait CHAPTER ONE Laurilees legs are bare and faintly bluish beneath the pleats of her plaid jumper. She once told me that it is the same one she wore in Catholic grade school. A lot of guys would get a stiffy if a girl told them that. Im one of those guys. Laurilee and I crouch behind the Dumpster at the back entrance of Penn Square Mall. We lean against the concrete wall and smoke unfiltered Camels. I used to smoke Parliaments until I met Laurilee. I like the Camels. I like how the shreds of tobacco get stuck to the end of my tongue. I cock my head to the left and spit them out and it makes me feel like a man. We keep an eye out for Terrance, the six-foot-four, pockmarked, probably undiagnosed-schizophrenic mall-security Nazi. By regulation, all employees are required to leave mall grounds when smoking, but we only have fifteen minutes and its cold. Laurilee has a scab across her knee. I want to run my fingertips around the jagged edges. I want to touch each of her flaws the slightly stick-out ears, the bitten-down nails with chipped silver polish. I want to bury my face in her unwashed hair, the turquoise streaks fading at the temples. Instead, I pick at a zit on my cheek. Its one of those you cant see. Right under the skin. Those hurt the worst. Yesterday he was harassing these poor baby wanksters, says Laurilee. I can hear her teeth chattering as she wraps her chapped lips around the end of her Camel. They werent messing with anyone, just killing time by the fountain. They were probably twelve or something. He took them outside, made them take off their bandannas. Gang wear, he told them. Ha. Twelve-year-old Okie Crips. Please. Terrance must have been a crack baby, I tell her. Hey, you want my coat? Nothing would make me happier. Laurilee wearing my coat, her smell seeping into the lining, wearing Laurilee for the rest of the day. Being inside Laurilee. I feel my dick stiffen. I cock my head, spit, and think about my grandmother naked. My grandmother has been dead for fifteen years, which makes this an even more effective mental exercise. Almost immediately, my boner goes away. Laurilee has pulled her legs to her chest and rests her cheek on one plaid knee. I like the cold. It wakes me up, she says. I suck on my cigarette, imagining my lungs blackening and shriveling up with each inhalation. It makes me feel like Im doing something that matters. I figure its the same reason some people cut themselves or puke up their food. At least you have control over something, even if it is your own annihilation. Besides, you never hear of sixteen-year-olds getting lung cancer. Cancer is for old people. Sixteen-year-olds get some rare, undiagnosable neurological disorder or leukemia. They lose all their hair and the whole football team shaves their heads in solidarity and then People magazine writes an article about it. I wonder, if I got an incurable disease, if the Make-A-Wish Foundation would get me a high-class whore so I wont die a virgin. I look at Laurilee. Her turquoise streak matches the faded blue of the Dumpster. If you were about to die, and you could meet one famous person before you did, who would you pick? I ask. Laurilee wrinkles her nose in concentration. Most girls would just roll their eyes and go, Ew, stop being so weird. Laurilee isnt most girls. Living or dead? she asks. Either. Mythological or real? Whatever you want. Its a theoretical question. Jesus, she says with a big grin. Jesus? Black Jesus for sure. Young, sexy black Jesus. Is that racist? Nah, but you cant pick Jesus. Too easy, I tell her. I didnt know theoretical questions had rules. How about Satan, then? Your final answer? I say, in my best Who Wants to Be a Millionaire voice. Wait! she says, sitting up straight. David Bowie. Thats who Id pick. Circa Ziggy Stardust. When he was all pretty and, like, sexually ambiguous. David Bowie is Laurilees new obsession. Before that, it was Kurt Cobain. Then everyone else at school discovered him, so she had to move on. Old-school tormented musicians are making a comeback. Even better if they died from a suicide or drug overdose. Laurilee figures, since Bowie is still alive, shes got him to herself for at least another couple of months unless he pulls a Michael Jackson. Youd pick David Bowie? Out of anyone? Sure, she says. Itd be a nice way to go. He could sing me a lullaby as I drifted away. He could do my makeup. Id be kickin it in my casket, all glammed out with glitter and false eyelashes. What about you, kid? I dont know. Laurilee has always called me kid, even though we are both sixteen. Youre not dying, are you? she asks. Not yet. Good. I dont want you to die. Whod I smoke with on break? Id have to smoke with one of the makeup-counter girls. Or those assholes from Hot Dog on a Stick. They dont even give mall-employee discounts, those Stick dicks. Dont die, okay, kid? Id miss you. She attempts, then fails, to blow a smoke ring. I dont hear anything after Id miss you. Laurilee would miss me. That means she thinks about me when we arent together. I do some quick calculations in my head. During the average mall shift, we usually spend our two fifteen-minute breaks smoking by the Dumpster.

Sometimes, if she isnt too busy stocking headbands, shell clock out at the same time as I do for dinner break. If there are around 168 hours in a week, and Im spending at least two of those hours with Laurilee out here smoking cigarettes by the Dumpster, and she says shed miss me, then at some point during the other 166 hours of the week she must be thinking about me. You have to think about someone to miss them. And, at some point during those 158 hours, she must be naked. So at some point in the week there is an off-off-chance that Laurilee is naked and thinking about me at the same time. The thought makes my dick hard again. I can see her white body slick with soap, her hair wet, running one of those pink bath puffs down her body, missing me. Then again, girls like Laurilee dont spend their free time thinking about guys like me. Id miss you is just a figure of speech. Id miss you, it fucked me up good, I almost died, pass the salt. As if she can read my mind, she sighs. Im spent. I went out last night. Whered you go? I ask, my jaw tightening. Laurilee goes out every night. My jaw tightens every time she tells me about it. Infinity, down near Twenty-third. It used to be a church. You know the one? They gutted it, put in some strobe lights, wah-la. They still have those stained-glass windows, I mean, I think they do. I was pretty fucked-up, kid. Ill have to ask Daniel. The guy from El Reno? I say, knowing perfectly well the guy from El Reno is named Marcus, drives an Oldsmobile he calls the pimpmobile, and spent two years in juvie for check forgery. Laurilee blows a raspberry. Please. Marcus is a douche. Im over him. Now, Daniel. Daniel is on a whole other plane. Hes a Buddhist. And hes got a tat on his neck. Of a dragon. Blowing fire and everything. God, I want a tat so bad. Someday Im gonna get a tat. Somewhere you cant even hide it. Daniel doesnt give a fuck what anyone thinks. Hes opened my eyes to a lot of shit. Buddhism is pretty cool. Does he eat meat? Fuck, yeah. She gives a fresh shiver, even though the wind has died down. Her pale, goose-pimpled collarbone juts out like a coat hanger from the ragged top of her sweatshirt where she has unevenly cut out the collar. It kind of defeats the purpose of a sweatshirt, but it looks good on her. When I tell her I like it, she tells me she was inspired by a late-night rerun of Flashdance on TNT. It was two in the morning and I cut the neck out of every T-shirt in my closet, she tells me. I cant explain it. I just felt like those collars were holding me back. My Mom was superpissed when she found out, half of them were these cashmere J. Crew sweaters she ordered out of a catalog, which made her twice as pissed. It doesnt matter, I like pissing her off. Besides, they look better my way. I should be on one of those reality shows where you, like, make a dress out of banana peels and they give you a hundred thou and tell you what a damn genius you are. The eighties are back, anyway. When I remind her she wasnt even born in the eighties, she grins at me. Past life, she says. Silly boy. According to Laurilee, in her past life she was an Egyptian queen, a beggar girl on the streets of London with only her wits and pickpocketing prowess as a means of survival, and the descendant of a plantation owner and his slave mistress. When I mention that these revelations seem to coincide with cable reruns of Cleopatra, Oliver!, and Roots, she punches me in the arm. Stop being so literal, she tells me. When Laurilee grins at me, nothing else matters. There could be an earthquake, a tornado, the release of a fatal viral strain extracted from Asian monkeys that will eventually kill off the human race as we know it, and I wouldnt notice. Id just grin right back at her. Now shes cold, and if I had any balls, Id put my arm around her shoulder. Hes a modern Buddhist. Its all in how you define it. He believes in the four noble truths and all that, but hell still eat a steak. I couldnt date a vegan, you know that. They have the stankiest breath. Besides, theres nothing better than a big-ass juicy steak, dontcha think? Like down in the stockyards? My mom took me once when I was a kid. You can get beer in a boot, how quality is that? I mean, I got a Shirley Temple, of course, because I was just a kid. But they still let me keep the boot. Then we went to that cowboy store across the street and my mom got me this kiddie-pink cowboy hat with a pink ribbon that tied under the chin. I thought I was cowgirl Barbie for the rest of the day, thats how pretty I felt. I dont know where that hat is now. I think we sold it in a yard sale. I wish I still had it. She laughs. I want to tell her that we can go back to the stockyards. Ill buy her another pink hat. Ill buy her the biggest steak shes ever seen, one of those seventy-two ounces. Ill even cut it into bite-size pieces and feed it to her. And she can be naked while I do it. Hey, she says, sitting up straight, what time is it? Four ten. Uh-oh, she says, running her hands through her hair as she stands. You should have told me. Cant leave Denise in charge for too long. Shell probably pierce some third graders septum or something. If I lean my body across the Aunt Bettys Cookie counter and look to the left of the food court, I can see Laurilee through the window of Trinkets. Ive watched her pierce hundreds of ears. She rests her hand under each tiny chin and whispers as she lifts the piercing gun. The little girls rarely cry. I wonder what she says to them. I wish shed whisper to me. Anything. A grocery list. The table of elements. After she pierces them, she holds up a mirror and they smile at themselves with baby teeth and rotate their heads from side to side, the tiny gold balls flashing in their earlobes. Her mouth moves. Sometimes I can

make out words. Pretty, she tells them. Beautiful thing. Laurilee stubs out her cigarette on the side of the Dumpster and puts the butt back in the pack. You ever want to do something drastic? Sure. I imagine myself pushing her up against that blue Dumpster and shoving my hands under her skirt and between her cold thighs. I imagine her eyes fluttering, her low moan, the rhythmic clanging of metal against her back. Then I realize how retarded this fantasy is, not to mention unsanitary. Well, Im gonna do something drastic. Just wait, kid. Im gonna do something irreversible. Like what? Oh, youll see. It will be a surprise. She grins at me. Shes beautiful. Not the kind of beautiful those asstard guys at my school can see. Not prom-queen beautiful. Shes a classic beauty, like a chick in a silent film. Shes got those big, liquid eyes that talk even when her mouth isnt moving. Those dumbass farmboys at my school wouldnt take a second look at a girl like Laurilee. A butter face, theyd mutter to each other. Her body is okay, but-ter face aint all that. A six out of ten. If I had on beer goggles. They could have been manufactured in a lab, those clichd dicks at my school. Take a beaker and put in some reality television, whatever song is on MTV rotation that week, mix in some middle-class, white-boy poser slang Ya, nigga, me and my boys was chillin with some smoke and a forty in the Wal-Mart parkin lot shake it all up, and dump it in a petri dish. There you go: youve got every guy who ever went to Classen High. They are science experiments. They are Pavlovs dogs, salivating at big cheerleader boobs, blond hair, the smell of hair spray. Id almost feel sorry for guys like that. I mean, if they didnt make my life suck so bad. Ive got something for you, I say, trying to keep my voice calm. Youre cool, man. Youre fine. I reach nonchalantly into the front pocket of my Aunt Bettys apron, wishing to God I hadnt been so eager to see her that Id taken it off, wishing to God I didnt have to wear an apron in the first place, and pull out the copy of *Leaves of Grass* Ive been carrying around for two months. Here, I say, holding it out for her like it was a stick of chewing gum. I thought you might like it. He was this crazy, bearded hippie. Before there were hippies, I mean. Kerouac loved him. Remember that guy I told you about? Kerouac? The one who took those road trips? I hear the urgency in my voice. Shut up, fucktard. Just shut up. He was bisexual, too. Before it was, like, cool. I mean, he tried everything. That was his philosophy. Girls, guys, it didnt matter. He probably even did it with animals. Just kidding. He loved animals. As pets, I mean. I laugh. I am a fucking idiot and I want to die. She takes the book from my hand and looks down at it. She smiles, and then I do too, because shes like an infection. The kind you want to get. The kind you brag about. Laurilee is the kissing disease. In an alternate world, where I am not a pussy, this would be where Id step close to her, wrap my arm around her waist, pull her to my ripped chest, and say, my voice sounding like Daniel Craigs James Bond, my hot, nonvegan breath on her slightly stuck-out right ear: Little you know the subtle electric fire that for your sake is playing within me. But in this world, I have scrawny arms and no swagger. I look down at my high-tops, the sides of the soles scrawled with doodles. When I bought them, they seemed old-school, ironic. Now they look infantile. Thanks, kid, she says, and kisses my cheek. Youre sweet. Ill read it when the shop gets slow. I will feel the imprint of her frozen lips during the rest of my shift. I will think about her pussy and knobby knees and warm tongue in my mouth while I bag engorged cookies for mall-walking housewives in sweatpants. I will write Happy Birthday, Nancy! in pink icing on a cookie cake and think about Laurilee naked in Kama Sutra poses with Buddhist Daniel, his Adams apple bouncing like a pinball beneath his tattooed dragon with each sweaty grunt. The sound system will pipe in the Muzak version of *Light My Fire*, complete with eighties synthesizer and harps, like the sound track to my mediocrity. I will hum along as I cut heart shapes out of premade dough. Laurilee smiles at me, clutching the book to her chest with one arm, as though the pages will keep her warm. Her tiny incisors are sharper than most chicks. Im a vampire, she once told me, and snarled. Better watch out or Ill bite you! Now she laughs, and the tinkling echoes off the cement walls and metal Dumpster, like wind chimes in a Tijuana slum. Not that Ive seen Tijuana, except in documentaries. Its just that Laurilee would make a gutter beautiful. Youre a real sweetheart, yknow that, kid? Laurilee gets off work before I do, leaving Trinkets to Denise, knowing no little kids come in for piercing past bedtime. I watch her walk to the escalator, clutching her ripped backpack with the anarchy patch. She stops suddenly in front of the down escalator, as though she has forgotten something, and turns toward me. I am staring at her, like a stalker. She grins and waves. I wave back like an idiot. Like shes going off to war. Then she hops on the escalator and the last thing I see, before she disappears, is the faint blue of her temples. A timer goes off, and I jump. The Snickerdoodles are ready. Its dark when I walk from the bus stop to the split-level, ranch-style house that looks like every other split-level, ranch-style house in our neighborhood, except for the overgrown lawn. None of the neighbors has complained. They know Trevor isnt here to mow, and they probably figure I dont know how to do it myself, even though any douche can mow a lawn. Of course I wouldnt put on quite as good a show as Trevor does,

getting all sweaty and whipping his shirt off, taking breaks to pour water over his head like its halftime. And the truth is, I kind of like it like this, with the weeds growing up the side of the house and the neighbors pretending they dont see whats happening. Its like a yearlong excuse to have a brother fighting in Iraq. A get-out-of-jail-free card. I wonder what other stuff I could score if I really thought about it, like how they give you a free Grand Slam at Dennys on your birthday. It occurs to me that its a lot easier to like Trevor when hes in a desert eight thousand miles away. In the kitchen, my mother sits at the foldout table we used to use for backyard barbecues when the extended family came up from Little Rock. They dont come anymore, except for every third Thanksgiving, and the foldout has taken permanent residence in the kitchen. We had a real dining-room table once, when I was a kid. It was one of those extender ones that you open up for family holidays. Im not sure where it went, but I havent seen it in a long time. Now we eat on TV trays or standing at the kitchen counter, which is fine with me. Family dinners are overrated. The floor is covered with half-assembled cardboard boxes and bags of packing peanuts. My mom is wearing a flannel nightgown. She hums to herself. There are stacks of candy bars, boxes of fruit roll-ups, six-packs of Hanes boxers, Juicy Fruit gum, piles of Sports Illustrated and Maxim. She has a piece of Scotch tape stuck to her bottom lip. She curls a yellow ribbon with a pair of scissors. Yellow ribbons are for dead soldiers, I almost tell her, except I dont want to say the word dead when shes thinking about Trevor. In Canada, the yellow ribbons also symbolize teenage suicide prevention, which is kind of disturbing if you think about it too hard. I googled awareness ribbons, figuring I could suggest another color, but they are pretty much taken. I never knew there were so many causes out there. Blue is nice, might remind the troops of the good ole American sky, but almost every shade is accounted for already. Sex-trafficking awareness is navy. In Spain, the blue ribbon symbolizes opposing the terrorism of the ETA, and in Israel it indicates support for the Israel unilateral disengagement plan of 2008. Im not sure about the specifics of these events because they dont teach them in Oklahoma History, and we arent required to take World History until junior year. I like the idea of ribbon awareness, though. I thought about an appropriate ribbon color for other guys like me, so we could recognize each other in the hall. Then I tried to figure out exactly what kind of guy I am, but the whole enterprise was depressing as hell, so I googled Laurilee instead. I realized I didnt remember her last name, which surprised me, considering she is the only reason I wake up in the morning. My mom has a patch of gray hairs coming in on the front of her hairline. She used to take care of stuff like that. She used to wear pink lipstick and smear on this cream she got at the mall that smells like a vanilla sundae. She stopped doing that stuff when Trevor left. Still, shes prettier than I remember seeing her in a long time. Her face is practically glowing, or maybe its just the shreds of silver confetti stuck to the side of her face. She puts a fistful in every package because thats just what every soldier in Iraq wants, silver fucking confetti to go with their yellow ribbons. Honey, she says, without looking up, did you ask your manager about the cookies? I forgot. I open the fridge. I scan for something edible that is not dehydrated, prefrozen, or shrink-wrapped. I should have stopped at Chick-fil-A. The Chick-fil-A people honor the mall discount. Probably because they are a Christian organization, and Jesus doesnt believe in stiffing fellow mall employees, unlike those ghetto asswipes at Hot Dog on a Stick in their gay rainbow hats. I take a can of Dr Pepper. Oh, honey, we could really use the donation, says my Mom, sounding disappointed. Disappointed mother is the worst sound in the world. Ill ask him tomorrow, I lie. I avoid talking to Roger at all costs, unless it pertains to my paycheck or a shift that coincides with Laurilees. Theyre sending in more troops. Did you know that? She looks up at me, midcurl. She is beaming, her cheeks flushed like a teenage girl who just made Homecoming Court. She lives for this. This is her purpose. This is why she wakes up in the morning. We have more in common than Id like to admit. Yeah, I say, and chug half the can of Dr Pepper. I think I read that somewhere. I called an emergency meeting for Friday. Are they coming here? Of course. God, I hate those bitches. They cackle. I swear to God, Mom, I can hear them in my sleep. Like a bunch of hyenas. Watch it, Dougie, says my mom, holding up the scissors at me. She cant hide her smirk. She knows Im right. My mom is the unofficial leader of the Mothers Support Our Troops Northwest Oklahoma City Chapter, not that it pays in anything other than personal satisfaction. The other northwest Oklahoma City mothers who support our troops hang on her every word, fawn over her package arrangements, argue over who will get her tea. She tells them what to do, like a sergeant, and they jump at her every command. Since Trevor left, her days are full of lists and phone calls. Its like shes in college again, when she led a student protest against animal testing in the biology department. I can almost see that girl in her now, the art major in Birkenstocks and sarongs, with charcoal under her fingernails. At least thats how I like to picture her, as one of those arty chicks who went to poetry readings and talked about Kafka and baked stuff out of wheatgrass. Now she is an administrative assistant to

a bunch of good-old-boy lawyers. They wear cowboy hats and call her sweetie. On Secretaries Day they pitch in to get her a gift certificate to Dillards. Once I found a stack of her old canvases gathering dust in the corner of the basement. The splatters are obviously derivative of early Pollock, which I know because I saw a documentary about him on PBS and was pretty impressed by any guy whod literally piss on his own work. But there is something even better in my moms paintings, something dark and interesting, like they were done by someone I wouldnt mind meeting. Oh, Doug, she said, when I showed them to her. Put those hideous things back in the basement. I put one on the wall over my dresser. Every time I look at it, I think about how she ended up marrying my dickhead father, and it seems like something straight out of one of those chick movies she Netflixes and forces me to watch, usually starring Emma Thompson, where all the women are desperate to get married and in the end they fall in love with some asshole tool instead of the nice, available guy who isnt as good-looking but would give them security and unconditional love and wouldnt spend their dowry on prostitutes. Of course, in the end of the movie they are old maids living in some family cottage and it is a feminist statement. If you really think about it, my mom is a feminist statement, raising me and Trevor on her own. I dont remember my fathers face. For some reason, all I see in my head is a cross between Bill Paxton and the dad on Leave It to Beaver. I dont think there are any pictures, and I wouldnt want to see them anyway. Only an asshole would marry someone, knock her up twice, then take off to Mexico with some mentally unstable heiress he met at the Cock O The Walk. I dont want to know anything about him, even if we do share the same DNA. DNA is as overrated as family dinners. I watch my mom assemble packages and feel a rush of love for her. I grew in her belly. She used to bring me orange juice when I had a fever. Shes not so bad. Then I think about how there is nothing to eat in the fridge and she forgot to go grocery shopping again. Can I have money for a pizza? I ask. Just have a sandwich. Want me to heat you up a Hungry-Man? Never mind, I say, hearing the whine in my voice. She shoots me a sharp look. I open a bag of Cheetos and lean against the counter. I chew loudly. How was work? It sucked, I say, making sure she sees my mouthful of neon orange mush. You got homework? I guess. You guess or you know? she says. I did most of it at work. I hope your grades are better this term. Im getting an A in English. We just finished The Sun Also Rises. My mom smiles and takes a sip of her Sleepytime tea. Shell supplement it with a tranquilizer around midnight. Hemingway. The whole thing is about how Hemingway cant get a boner. I emphasize the word boner, just to see if I can get a reaction. I think I remember, says my mom, unmoved. Mrs. Wallace wont talk about that part. I dont think she knows what a boner is. Before Trevor left, my mother would have acted shocked at my lack of tact. Erection, she would have corrected me. The old Mom would have been even more pissed about Mrs. Wallace. She would have given a speech about the incompetence of the American educational system and how she wishes we had the money to send me to the white-flight private school across town where they have a pottery studio and how Ill have to make the best of a mediocre situation and why didnt I apply myself because with all my natural ability I could easily be the kind of kid who merits a school-issued bumper sticker on the back of her minivan? But now she doesnt care. Now she is only half listening. Its like when I was a kid, and Id read an essay Id written or act out my science-fair presentation for her. Shed worked all day and would be folding laundry or making dinner and would be this weird concoction of parent and ghost. A half-Mom phantom. When I complained, she told me she was watching out of the corner of her eye. I didnt believe her then, and I dont believe her now. It isnt humanly possible to watch someone out of the corner of your eye, unless youre some kind of animal with eyes on either side of its head, like a parrot or a fish. I cant think of any others. Ill have to google it later. Next were doing the poets. Sylvia Plath. She put her head in an oven over some guy. I think he was a poet too. Poets are freaks. My mom smiles to herself as she tapes a box closed. I loved her in college. She seems kind of whiny to me. I mean, its not like she really suffered that much. She had a trust fund. I want a trust fund, Mom. Sure, honey. Ill get on that. Then Anne Sexton. Total child molester. Why are the poets so fucked-up? I dont know, honey. I know shes stopped listening. I finish the bag of Cheetos. Chester Cheetah smiles up at me, and I scrunch up his ugly face. A long time ago, my mother liked to read. Shed talk to me about literature. She always liked the guy books, shed told me. Heart of Darkness. Moby-Dick. The stuff chicks werent supposed to dig. The adventure stories. But that was a long time ago, when we talked about stuff like that. Middle school. Its been years since we talked about anything that matters. Im going to bed, I tell her. You should go to bed, Mom. Its pretty late. Soon. Ive still got a lot to do. Especially now, with this thing getting worse. Poor Trevor. She roughly curls a ribbon with his name. She looks up at me. Have you written him? Sure, last week. She gives me a pointed look and goes back to the package with renewed energy. I imagine what Id write Trevor. Hey, Bro: Youd still hate me.

Wed still have nothing to talk about. Im still a virgin. Ill probably be one till I die, just like you said. Youre pretty insightful for an asshole. Kill any babies yet?Im going to my room, I tell her.Good.Lots to do.Uh-huh, she says, rifling through the crap on the table. Shes done with me now.Maybe contemplate hurting someone. Or myself.Uh-huh, she says, and I head for the door.Maybe just jack off to internet porn, I mutter under my breath.Sleep tight, honey, she calls from behind me.I lock the door to my room. It smells like unwashed clothes and sweat. Along with the cooking, my mom has stopped doing the laundry, and you have to go through the living room to get to the washer and dryer, which means Id have to pass the Wall of Trevor. Id rather wear dirty underwear than pass the Wall of Trevor. Trevor clutching his peewee football trophy. Trevor at Spring Formal. Trevor at junior prom with his hot cheerleader date. There is the occasional school picture of me thrown in. Third grade, before I got contacts. The lenses of my glasses are so thick my eyes bulge behind them. Sixth grade, my blue period, when I decided to stop washing my hair. Trevor and me at my tenth birthday, our only photo together, his arm thrown stiffly around me, his blond hair freshly buzzed for football season. Im scowling and wrinkling my nose. We arent even the same species. When good genes go bad.I once asked Mom why there werent more pictures of me. You wont let anyone take pictures of you, she said. Thats true. But, then again, no one really insisted that hard.I throw my backpack on the floor and turn my iPod to Cool Blues. I got the iPod for my fourteenth birthday. A week later they came out with one that is half the size. Pretty soon theyll just implant an iPod chip in your wrist, and you wont have to carry around anything at all.I shove a bunch of crap off the bed and stretch out across the crumpled-up sheets that havent been changed in a month and probably have bedbugs. Parker plays his saxophone and it drips husky sex sounds, and I imagine Jack Kerouac watching him at Miltons Playhouse in Harlem, drinking single-malt whiskey, his hand squeezing out the rhythm on the cushiony thigh of the chick next to him with torpedo-shaped tits and a tight sweater, knowing in a few hours her bare legs will be over his shoulders. I think about Laurilees legs over my shoulders and try to imagine her pussy, but since Ive never seen one live, all I can picture are the bald slits of chicks on the internet porn-site teasers, which does the job just fine. I open my fly and start to jerk off, then Buddhist Daniel pops into my head. I almost lose it, just like in Hemingway.

Then I just blur out Daniels face in my mind, like how they blur out those hillbillies getting arrested on Cops. I picture Laurilee getting fucked by a faceless man. Then I picture her with me. Doing things to me. I picture her doing things to herself for me. I finish the job and groan.Not bothering to put my dick away, I turn to my nightstand and pick up my copy of On the Road, the pages yellowed and dog-eared, full passages underlined. Every coffee shop in America has some asshole trying to score cooter with a yellowed, dog-eared copy of On the Road. Only mine is like this because I actually read the book. I did buy it secondhand, but I underlined all the passages myself. I know this book like most of the kids at my school know the MTV show lineup or the pet peeves of those half-retard bitches on The Hills. I know just how it looks, another sixteen-year-old, outcast teenage boy obsessed with Kerouac, but I dont care. There is something soothing about these pages Ive touched so many times before.I turn to the scene where Sal, stifled by the ordinariness of his conventional life, sets out with \$50 and a plan to follow Route 6 from Cape Cod to Los Angeles. Then hes on a deserted road in the black night, his huaraches drenched, unable to thumb a ride. I wonder what huaraches look like. I wonder where I could get some. I think about how much shit I already get at school without huaraches and change my mind. Sal, undeterred, heads back to New York and hops a bus to Chicago instead, because hes the kind of guy who has the guts to do that, just pick up and take off to start a new life. This is pages before he hitchhikes across America, fucking lots of small-town girls by campfires and sharing bottles of cheap vodka with transients to ward off the cold, ordering homemade pie from gaunt waitresses at highway diners before taking them out to cornfields and fucking them. Getting his dick wet in the American dream.There is a bus station in downtown Oklahoma City, and I have saved over \$800 in cookie-slave money. But I wont take a bus to Chicago, or anywhere else, because I am a pussy. Besides, Id never see Laurilee again, and she is the only thing that makes my redundant adolescent existence bearable.Most days I get the Gordita Supreme and two Double Deckers at Taco Bell, but during lunch hour the next day I opt for a bean burrito and the cheesy fiesta potatoes, which are pretty much Tater Tots covered in melted Cheez Whiz.

I wonder if a committee of stoners is on payroll to come up with new recipes.Risky, says Dingo, who considers himself a Taco Bell connoisseur and peruses the menu like we are at a five-star restaurant.I like to shake things up, I say.Can I take your order? says the voice for the second time. We are walking the drive-thru. We stand in front of the intercom.I would like a seven-layer burrito, two Enchiritos, a nacho supreme, and fourteen packets of hot saucefour mild, six fire, and four hot. No, make that four mild, six hot, and four fire. There is a silence on the intercom.Eff you guys.We could go inside, but we like to piss off the mildly

retarded, gasoline-huffing Taco Bell employee we call Anus. We stroll around the side of the building. This isn't allowed, guys! he says, sticking his head through the drive-up window as we turn the corner. Cmon, man, says Dingo. You gotta have a car, Anus slurs through jacked-up teeth. I told ya guys that already. From behind us, a yuppie in a bloated Hummer bleats at us. He thinks we are just assholes hanging out and bullshitting, not the respectable paying customers we really are. Cmon, man, says Dingo, I thought you were our buddy. Anus snorts and adjusts his intercom mike. This is the last time. I effing mean it. You gotta order inside like everyone else. This is the same conversation we've had with him every day of the semester. I think he looks forward to seeing us. Thanks, man, says Dingo. I like your hairnet. Eff you, says Anus and pushes our plastic bags through the window. We head to the park a few blocks from our school. It's usually empty during school hours, besides Homeless Fred, the guy who lives under a bench by the playground. He's wearing a purple windbreaker and his eyes are closed. Hey, Fred, says Dingo. He puts a wrapped Enchirito next his head. Without opening his eyes, Fred reaches for it. Dingo is all about community service. Dingo and I climb the ladder into the hollowed-out concrete rocket ship. The blue paint is faded and chipping. I remember it as being electric cobalt when I was a kid, but then again, you always remember things being brighter. I spent whole days inside, preparing for my liftoff into space, packing and repacking my pretend supplies, checking the air-supply monitors and fuel gauges. I could name several variations of lunar surface material. I knew the chemical composition of the planetary soils and differing crater densities. I could also recite 253 species of dinosaur. I had a lot of extra time after my mom gave up on peewee football. My mom made me join the peewee league. She was worried about me. I spent too much time reading. She loved books too, she told me, but I needed to be more socialized. When I did hang out, it was with Dingo, and everyone knew he was an odd boy. Or, as they say in Oklahoma-mom talk, Bless his little heart. I think he might be touched. I wanted to like peewee football. I wanted to make Mom proud. I tried to stick it out. I spit on the ground like the other boys, poured Dixie cups of cooler water over my face. Once I accidentally doused myself in a cup of fruit-punch Gatorade by mistake. I got hell for the rest of practice, not to mention being sticky, but refused to wash off on principle. I tried, I really did. Pretended I knew what the hell everyone was talking about when they described different pass patterns. But after a week of pummelings and Coach Blair telling us, Pain is just weakness leaving the body and that our puke was good for the grass, I refused to budge from the car even when Trevor, who had just got his license and had other, more important places to go, slammed the steering wheel with his hands and said I better get the hell outta the backseat. It isn't that hard. It was hard. Even when Trevor, at Mom's insistence, tried to teach me to throw and tackle in his painstakingly mowed backyard, I'd end up with bruises or scrapes and run to Mom in tears. I wasn't what Trevor had hoped for. I didn't spend weekends lifting weights in the garage. I scrawled in journals. He had a tutor who wrote term papers for him. He didn't even have to pay the dude. Trevor is the kind of guy you want to do nice things for. Everyone in the world loves Trevor. Even worse, you couldn't dismiss him as just another dumb jock. His grades were always good, even without people writing papers for him. He could solve algebra problems in his sleep. Trevor aced English, giving the teachers well-structured essays with precisely written answers. My essays, on the other hand, were always returned with comments like While I appreciate your creativity, this does not follow the guidelines. Trevor always followed the guidelines. On the rare occasion he slacked off, the teachers were perfectly willing to overlook his momentary lapse in studiousness, chalking it up to his being busy with practice. Everyone wanted another winning season. Even the teachers wanted to be state champions. Trevor gave them something to discuss over stale coffee in the faculty lounge besides district pay cuts and broken slide projectors and that Mr. Newton, who taught AP History, was rumored to be a pedophile. At my age, Trevor was already quarterback of the Classen High Knights. He was only a sophomore, so it was a big honor. In Oklahoma, high school football is a religion, and Trevor was practically the pigskin pope. Only, instead of bowing to kiss his ring, everyone just dropped to their knees and sucked his dick instead. Both figuratively and literally, since our cheerleaders were rumored to be the biggest skanks in the division. Trevor was man enough for both of us. He had trophies in his bedroom. He had more friends than he could count. I had Dingo, the only one who got picked after me in PE class. I still have Dingo, who, at this moment, has taco sauce dripping down his chin. Dingo says my need to read obscure writers and my obsession with travel memoirs stems from my inability to come to terms with the fact that I will never be anything like Trevor. I tell him to shut the hell up and if I wanted shitty psychoanalysis I'd go to the school counselor. I gave her a book, I say, and take a bite of my chalupa. What book? Leaves of Grass. Figures. And how'd that work out for you? he says sarcastically. Everything Dingo says sounds sarcastic, even when he is being supportive, which isn't often. She said I was a

sweetheart. And then she let you fuck her doggy-style in the mall bathroom? She kissed my cheek, I say. You didnt even ask her out? I look at him. Of course you didnt, he says, balling up his wrapper and tossing it off the platform toward the garbage can, which he misses. He leans back and stares up into the rocket funnel, his hands behind his head. Gotta let this one go, man. I cant. Yes, you can. A girl like that, Laurilee, shes not in your league. Dingo sees Laurilee when he shows up at my Aunt Betty shift trying to score day-old cookies. A girl like that is wild. A vixen. Shes the kind of chick whod do crazy shit. Shed be rough, yknow? Shed use her teeth, her nails. Probably try to put a finger up your ass. Shut up, fucker. Yeah, well, youre not her type, man. How do you know? Cause you arent. You gotta be realistic here, man. You arent even in her hemisphere. You should aim lower. A fat chick, maybe. They like to suck dick. Thats what I heard. He laughs, and the sound echoes around us. Dingo has a genius IQ and scored almost perfect on the PSATs, though you wouldnt know it. Even though we are only sophomores, hes already getting letters from Princeton and MIT. Fat chicks, he says, and cackles. I lean back and stare up into the funnel with him. My classmates come here at night to get wasted and hook up. The inside has been scrawled on with pens and markers, the backs of pennies and Swiss-army knives. Years worth of words dissolving into each other. Every day there is fresh writing. Everyone wants to leave a mark. It doesnt matter anyway, he says. Every belief is false. Dont start with that. When you finally accept the pointlessness, youll be a shitload happier. He turns and smiles at me. Can you stop with that nihilist bullshit? Its not as bad as that beatnik shit. Cmon, man, I expect more of you. Really. You and every other sixteen-year-old outcast in Shitsville, America, getting a hard-on for Kerouac and then going home to eat his mommys tuna casserole. He sighs. Fact is, Laurilee is not gonna fuck you. I hate hearing her name come out of his mouth. She dates badasses. Shes got low self-esteem. Its a form of self-punishment. Youre too nice, man. Youre, well, youre a loser. Yeah. He picks at a ripe zit on his chin. This one is so big it practically has an area code. Proactive is the greatest lie in America, he once told me. Proactive is a government conspiracy. Just wait it out, man. Wait till we graduate and get out of this futile city. Just look at those Google guys. Its all about money. Make a lot of money, you can fuck anyone you want. Anytime. Two at a time. After I make my first million Im going to ask her out. He looks at me, and for just a moment, I think I see something like tenderness in his eyes. Then, just like that, its gone. He shakes his head. I wouldnt. I got to do something. Why? Because Im in love with her. There is no such thing as the institution of love, he says with finality. I have to do something, I say again, more to myself than him. Shes gonna take hold of your guts, pull em out, and grind them on the floor with her cute little combat boot. Im only telling you this because youre my friend. I take out a cigarette and light it. I blow smoke into the funnel. We stare up in silence. Now, if you want a real woman, I should introduce you to some of Felicias friends. Theres this one chick, Destiny, shes Asian, thirty-six, stacked, leather, whip, really into all that shit. No. Shes a law student, man. Shes an avatar. Nah, man. She goes to UPenn. Shes probably some three-hundred-pound, bald dude who lives in a basement in, like, Bulgaria or something. Not to mention Felicia. I dont even want to think about her real identity. Felicia is getting her Ph.D. in microbiology. I dont date cartoons. They arent cartoons, he says, and pouts. In the virtual universe, Dingo is hot shit. He is a legend within the Second Life hemisphere. He owns property and his own theme park. He has a fully furnished virtual mansion and hosts a weekly rave and a nihilist meeting society. He looks like an attractive version of himself, with pecs and a swagger. He gets fucked regularly by hot avatar chicks, but Felicia is favorite. Felicia and I went to Amsterdam last night, hell tell me. We got really messed up on shrooms and I ate her out under a waterfall in Rio. When I ask him how a virtual person gets stoned on virtual hallucinogens, he rolls his eyes at me, as though the answer should be obvious. When I ask him how he can be having an affair with a woman whose real face he has never seen, he tells me I dont understand. Shes incredible. She really gets me. Its not about something as frivolous as a face. Its not even about the sex, though the sex is pretty fucking sick, man. I want to tell him that rubbing a quick one out while typing Oooh, baby with your other hand isnt exactly sex, but its not like Ive got any credibility. Laurilee may be flesh and blood, but Im too pussy to accidentally brush her when shes inches away. Dingo spends seven hours a night online. There are times I wonder if he has mild Aspergers. Still, hes my best friend. Hes the only one Ive got. Come over tonight, he says. My mom is making cheeseburger meat loaf. Ill show you the museum Im building. Theres some virtual art out there thatll blow your mind. You know I dont like that shit. You got something better to do? I sigh. He knows the answer. No virtual stuff, okay? he says. I mean, I really shouldnt take a night off, but itll be okay. Well play Halo. You sure? Dont want to interfere with your virtual monarchy. Yeah, I guess so. I can take a night off. It is the same conversation we have every Friday. I may not have virtual double Ds, but even Dingo gets lonely for someone with an actual heartbeat. And its

not like Ive got anything better to do. Okay, I say with resignation, as though it is a choice. Id rather clean Porta Pottis on a hot August day than be near the Mothers Support Our Troops Northwest Oklahoma City Chapter during their weekend gift-box extravaganza. Besides, Dingos Mom is a great cook. She takes white-trash gourmet to the next level. Frito pie, baked chicken smeared in Campbells mushroom soup. Im sick of Hungry-Man. Dingo starts to talk about Halo and his Spartan Bungle armor and the United Nations Space Command, and I lean back and stare into the rocket ship. In fresh ink, someone has written Doug Shafer got herpes from his mother. They spelled my last name wrong. After fifth period, Ronan Applegate slams me into my locker on his way to gym class. Hes so close I can see the tiny hairs growing in his chin and smell his Speed Stick. Faggot, he says, then lets go of me. Of course I stumble and have to catch my balance on the wall. I turn back to my locker as though nothing has happened. He laughs loudly to himself as he heads to study hall. Nobody pays any attention. This is as regular an occurrence as chicken-fried steak being served in the cafeteria. Ronan doesnt call me faggot because he thinks Im gay. In the high school lexicon, it is a universal phrase for worthless; a pure waste of human existence. The gay rights people would really get their panties in a wad over that, but it is just a fact. And faggit is a pretty accurate description of how Ronan sees me. If my last name wasnt Schaffer, hed probably ignore me. Im a loser, but there are far more obvious ones he could fuck with. Johnny Eckhart with his two gay dads. Dylan Driver and his chronic psoriasis. But Ive got it worse because my brother was one of the greatest quarterbacks in Classen High history, and I am nobody. During study hall, Ronan sits in the desk behind me. He aims for the back of my neck with spitballs and chewed gum. Sometimes hell poke me with sharp objects. Stop, Ill mutter, trying to dodge him. Fucking stop. Dude, did you forget your Adderall? Stop. We both know he wont stop. We have our routine. Coach Thompson, playing sudoku at his desk and picking his earwax with a pen, pretends not to notice. Or maybe he thinks I deserve it. Ronan is first-string defensive end for the Knights, and I wear black. Ronan is invaluable to the team. Ronan believes that my existence is a mockery to the Schaffer legacy, and Coach probably agrees. I never fight back because Ronan is over two hundred pounds and rumored to take steroids. Hes probably undiagnosed bipolar, too, but he helped lead us to a state trophy so the question of his mental stability is rarely questioned by the administration. His classes are handpicked by Coach. Even though he isnt book smart like Trevor was, he never gets below a B. When we are having a good season, he makes honor roll. Someday I will kick his ass. I will shoot pepper spray in his eyes and punch him with brass knuckles. I will kick him when hes down, like in a bad gangster movie, and say, Whos the faggit now, huh? in front of the whole school while he sobs and begs for mercy, snot dripping down his Neanderthal face. For now, though, its easier to take the long route to class and just skip study hall. I skip many of my classes and rarely do the homework, but always ace the tests and midterms. For this reason, I have no trouble maintaining a C average. Sometimes I go to class, take a bathroom pass after five minutes, and never return. I dont think my teachers notice. Im one of those kids nobody will remember at the ten-year reunion, except to ask vaguely, Is he related to Trevor Schaffer? Man, Trevor Schaffer is a legend. Or maybe Ill pull up in a limo with two Playboy bunnies like Hef and theyll say, Who is that guy? Why didnt hang out with him more often? Then Ill take home whoever was crowned homecoming queen and fuck her in a way her stockbroker husband is incapable of doing and make her fall in love with me. Where were you senior year? shell say, after I have masterfully eaten her out. I was there the whole time, baby, Ill tell her. You just werent looking hard enough. Shell smile. Its been so long since I was with a real man. My husband doesnt even look at me anymore, shell say. Pale pink, Ill tell her, lighting a cigarette. Pale pink? shell repeat, still flushed with the satisfaction of my having given her seven orgasms in a row. The color of your toenails, Ill say. The same shade as the inside of a seashell I once found outside my beach house in Tahiti. I elaborate on this fantasy as I head to the football field. Im not sure how you eat someone out, but I figure it cant be that hard. Dingos theory is that you just pretend it is your last meal on earth. Lick anything that sticks out. I tell him that his extensive background in computer-generated muff diving in no way makes him an authority on real, live pussy. I make sure to turn away when Im passing the glass case that contains our one state championship trophy and Trevors Most Valuable Player plaque. Trophies are plebeian. Unless they are Pulitzer Prizes or Academy Awards, and even then it is debatable. Big fucking deal. So you are the most valuable player on some stupid second-tier high school football team in some stupid second-tier state. Big fucking hoo-ha. I remind myself that the world is a big place. One day I will go to Europe like Fitzgerald and Zelda. I will sip espresso at a caf and write profound insights in my journal. I will fuck Parisian girls who think my American accent is adorable. I will write them poetry, and they will translate it to French and recite my own words back to me when we are fucking, and I wont know what they are saying, but it will sound amazing coming

out of their little French mouth. You are a genius, they will tell me. You must meet my friend Antoinetta. She will adore you as well. Schaffer, says a voice from behind me. Ronan, I think. I once googled bear attacks, thinking Ronan has about the same level of brain function. Tip one: remain calm and avoid sudden movements. But that doesnt work. The moment I am in the vicinity of Ronan, every muscle in my body tenses; I breathe faster and get dizzy. Move away slowly while avoiding eye contact and speak to the bear in a low voice. I start to walk down the hallway in slow, measured steps. Hey, Schaffer! he says. Running will trigger the bears chase response and you are incapable of outrunning a bear. I get ready to sprint. Doug, right? Doug Schaffer? Thats your name, isnt it? I turn around. Mr. Prescott, the new college guidance counselor, is looking at me. Hes got a bag of McDonalds in one hand, his briefcase in the other. Im surprised he knows who I am. Yeah, I say. Shouldnt you be in class? I was on my way. We stare at each other. When they introduced him at the first assembly of the year, he looked all eager beaver, straight out of teaching school, ready to enrich the life of Americas future leaders with his wisdom. Hes the kind of teacher who tries to speak our language. Hes down with our needs. His hair was combed down in a shiny helmet. Kinda sexy, I heard a girl next to me whisper to her friend. My door is always open to you, hed said into the microphone. Im so there, shed said, and theyd giggled. Now, only a month later, hes morphed into a completely different person. He looks pretty rough. Both his face and hair have gone gray, and hes grown a beer belly. Now he looks like a real public-school employee. Doug Schaffer, right? Yup. You havent been in for precollege counseling. I internally wince. With five hundred kids in my class, I didnt think anyone would notice. Yeah, well, Im only a sophomore. You need to get started. Youll be surprised how quickly the applications Yeah. Ive been meaning to get around to that. Well, I better get to You did very well on your PSATs. I looked you up after I got the results. The highest English score in your class. You could probably get advanced placement in college. Have you thought about colleges? Sure, I say, looking down at my Converse shoes. I was thinking, like, Ivy League. Princeton, maybe. Oh. Well. If I remember correctly, your grades arent quite up to I was kidding. I better get to class. If youre serious about that, we really need to talk about getting your GPA up to par. I pretend Prescott is the bear. I back up slowly, avoiding eye contact. His McDonalds bag swings from his hand. I wonder what he ordered. You better eat that or it will get cold. McDonalds sucks when its cold. Just come in and see me. Okay. He shakes his head. I guess I dont sound enthusiastic. Dont you want to go to college, Doug? Dont you want to do something with your life? His runs his hands through his messy hair. You need college to succeed. Its like hes reciting some sort of guidance-counselor pamphlet. Sure. Yeah. Dont you want to live up to your potential? he says, but his eyes have gone vacant. I could be anyone. Any kid who skipped his mandatory pre-pre-college counseling session and doesnt appreciate the gift of higher education. Yeah, of course. You dont sound very interested. I dont know, Mr. Prescott. Im still considering my options. I might not go to college. Options? What kind of job can you get without a college degree? Really, Doug. With scores like that, its obvious you are capable of more. I can practically hear the bad ABC family-programming instrumental rising behind him. It really pisses me off. Dont you agree? I wish hed shut the hell up. He knows nothing about the real world. College is a cesspool of academic elitism, I mutter. What was that? I look him in the eyes. College, I say firmly, is a cesspool of academic elitism. Its the fast track to a lifetime of mediocrity. Is that so? Yup. Sorry, Mr. Prescott. Not to dis your career choice, but thats how I see it. I really appreciate your interest, but I prefer to avoid the trappings of the bourgeois. Is that so? he says again, flustered. I nod. Two red spots have bloomed in the middle of his gray cheeks. Oh, really, Doug. I see. Well, obviously you have intelligence. And what do you expect to do with that when you graduate, if you dont mind me asking? Be a sandwich artist at Subway? The Aunt Betty Corporation, I mutter. Much more opportunity for advancement. Well, if you ever intend to do something with your life, my door is I might go somewhere. Europe or something. Well, some colleges have exchange programs. You dont get it, I say, frustrated. Im just not college material. I know Im right. I dont have the grades to go out of state, and I dont plan on trying for them. My only options are in-state colleges, which would just be an extension of high school. Something like 90 percent of OU students are in fraternities or sororities. And even if I did pledge one of the loser houses, and they actually wanted me, no fucking way Im gonna let them haze me. I wont fuck a sheep just for the opportunity to live in a glorified dorm with other outcasts for four more years. Prescott stares at me with pity. I wish his eyes would shut the fuck up. College is pointless, I say with finality. He shakes his head and sighs, defeated. He used to come to school early to work out in the football weight room. Id be there early to avoid Ronan, who often stakes out my locker before first period to get in his early-morning quota of harassment. Id smoke cigarettes in the alley by the athletics storage room. Id watch Prescott emerge from the gym into the deserted parking lot, Nike duffel

slung over his shoulder, his face glowing. Ready to change the public educational system one lost soul at a time. Poor fucking tool, Id think, blowing a mixture of smoke and my own frozen breath into the morning air. That was a long time ago. I havent seen him there in a long time. Well then. I suppose, if we were to follow your line of thinking, a job like mine serves no purpose, does it? We stare at each other. Maybe he sees the answer in my face. Well, if you change your mind, my door is open to you. Good to know. Guidance counselor. Door. Open to me. Got it. Prescott stares at me with distaste. He shakes his head, like I am just another example of the education system gone to shit, the future of America gone to hell, the government and economy and environment all imploding because of guys like me who dont care enough to go to pre-college counseling. Then he smirks. Hey, he says, his voice suddenly calm and collected, the red spots faded. You arent related to Trevor Schaffer, are you? The quarterback? Damn. That kid is a legend. He doesnt let me answer. He gives me a wry grin and turns on his scuffed loafers. He walks down the hallway toward the faculty lounge, whistling, his McDonalds bag swinging with each step. Enjoy your lunch, I want to yell after him. Cold Big Macs suck ass. I go to the grass beneath the bleachers. Its one of those weird days, sunny and cold, and Im glad I have my parka. The light comes through the slats in bright stripes on the grass, and I settle in one of the dark gaps. I like how the autumn air stings the insides of my nostrils. I take out my copy of Dharma Bums and skip to the last section. Ray Smith, having triumphantly reached the top of Desolation Peak, is euphoric. He will live in a humble cabin, with the mountain as his companion. He will relish the isolation. No one will be there to criticize him, call him a faggot, or flick sharp objects at the back of his neck. No one would do that because hes a real man, and things like football trophies and algebra quizzes are inconsequential here. He is a man, and this is his mountain. I close my eyes for a second and imagine my own cabin, only Laurilee is there too. I shoot a deer for fresh meat because in this fantasy Im the kind of guy who shoots things without wincing, and she makes us stew. I know how to use a gun, get maple from a tree, light a fire with two sticks. I wear a red flannel shirt, just like Kerouac, and Im ripped. Laurilee fucks me on a bearskin rug, straddling me, leaning forward, her small, silken breasts resting on each side of my face. She smells faintly of sugar cookies. She says, Oh, Doug, and moans, her eyes rolling back. I sit up because the moan is real. I crawl a few feet under the bleachers, wondering if Ive finally gone over the edge and am hearing things. Wondering if I can diagnose my own schizophrenia on WebMD, I duck under the lowest riser and look to my left. A way down, a dark shape is falling and rising beneath a coat. A streak of light slants across a scrunched eye, the tip of a nose, a scowl. I know who it is right away. Peter Wilkenson, his teeth clenched, jackhammers into some girl. She could be any girl because he is Peter Wilkenson, and since he got back from rehab, the girls love him like flies love shit. He swaggers down the hall with new muscles, his eyes heavy-lidded, glaring at something the rest of us cant make out. He knows something we dont. Hes seen the world, and its gross and messy, and the girls all line up for the opportunity to fuck his pain away. The girl squeaks like a hungry kitten as he pounds into her. She cant be enjoying it. She cant be wet. In Dharma Bums, Japhy Ryder teaches Ray Smith the Tibetan art of yab-yumhe sits in lotus position while a girl named Princess straddles his lap. They sit there for hours. They are seeking enlightenment. Peter Wilkenson is looking for a warm place to splooge. If I had Laurilee, I wouldnt fuck her under bleachers. Id spend months running my hand over her body, licking every part of her. Id climb inside her pussy and take up residence. But she is a fantasy, and Peter Wilkenson is getting his sword sharpened with a live, breathing girl. The world is a really twisted place. I check my watch. I pick up my backpack. I want to keep watching, but I only have a few minutes to make Chemistry and will have to take the long way to avoid Ronan. I have my priorities. 2010 MAYA SLOAN *Revue de presse* "Maya Sloan's characters could be deemed purely comic if they weren't so realistic, tender if they weren't so jaded, and heartwarming if their lives weren't so heart-wrenching. All of which makes this a darkly compelling -- possibly controversial -- coming-of-age novel. High Before Homeroom is a wild debut from a brilliant new novelist." -- Julianna Baggott, author of *The Miss America Family* and co-author of *Which Brings Me to You* "Here's a confession: I like Doug Schaffer more than I ever liked his idol Dean Moriarty, and I had much more fun reading Maya Sloan's *High Before Homeroom* than I ever had reading its literary progenitor, *On the Road*." -- Ayelet Waldman, author of *Red Hook Road* and *Bad Mother* "Funny and poignant, this energetic coming-of-age novel about a young outsider who takes a radical path to coolness marks Maya Sloan as an engaging new young novelist to watch." -- Rilla Askew, author of *Harp Song* "No matter how profane it may seem at times, *High Before Homeroom*, like *Youth in Revolt*, is ultimately a charming take on one nerd's coming of age. In this assured debut, Maya Sloan clears the gender barrier, giving us the hapless Doug Schaffer, sixteen and obsessed with sex, love and Kerouac." -- Stewart O'Nan, author of *Snow Angels* and *The Speed Queen* "I love this book. Doug Schaffer --

sixteen years old and in an almost-constant state of arousal, as only a sixteen-year-old boy can be -- is everything you'd hope for in a narrator: disarmingly honest and irreverent and affable and funny -- very funny. Maya Sloan is a mad scientist of a novelist, filling her Petri dish with the cells of J. D. Salinger, William Burroughs, and Mark Twain, but ultimately this novel is her own glorious creation: a smart and wholly original take on what it means to yearn, in all its manifestations, in the 21st century." -- John McNally, author of *After the Workshop* "Searing one moment, laugh-out-loud funny the next, Maya Sloan's *High Before Homeroom* is an honest, surprising, and dazzling debut." -- Davy Rothbart, *FOUND Magazine* and *This American Life*