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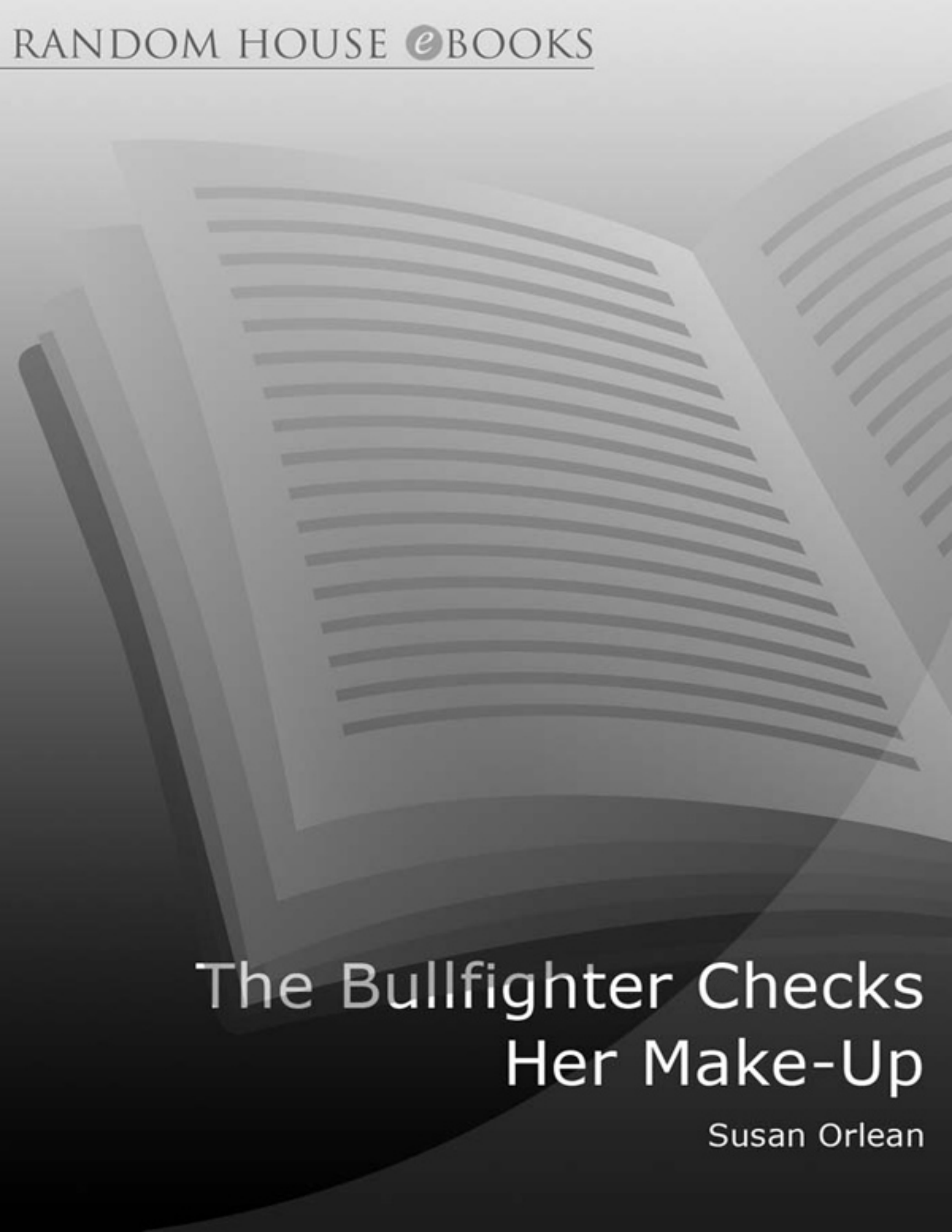

The Bullfighter Checks Her Make-Up

Susan Orlean

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THE BULLFIGHTER CHECKS HER MAKEUP

Encounters with Clowns, Kings, Singers and Surfers – Not to Mention a Dog

WILLIAM HEINEMANN LONDON

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For John Gillespie

who makes me so happy

THE BULLFIGHTER CHECKS HER MAKE-UP

Susan Orlean is the bestselling author of *The Orchid Thief* and *Saturday Night*. She has been a staff writer at *The New Yorker* since 1992. Her articles have also appeared in *Rolling Stone, Vogue* and *Esquire*. She lives in New York City.

‘Arresting … [the reader] reads on, transfixed by the casual grace and beauty of these miniatures … The profiles have a timeless quality’
San Francisco Chronicle

‘Orlean … has enthusiastically, humorously and quite honestly portrayed these characters in all their glory and with all their warts, and the level of devotion to doing so comes through in every sentence … What marks her work … is her ability to enter a given person’s life and stay in it long enough to make readers feel they’ve known the character all their lives’
Boston Globe

‘Engrossing … compelling. Reading *Bullfighter* will leave you convinced that the world is much wider and stranger than you had thought and that the most ordinary-seeming people are often the most remarkable’
US Weekly

ALSO BY SUSAN ORLEAN

The Orchid Thief

Saturday Night

Introduction

ENCOUNTERS WITH CLOWNS, KINGS, SINGERS, AND SURFERS

I always wanted to be a writer. In fact, as far as I can recall, I have never wanted to be anything other than a writer. In junior high school I took a career guidance test that suggested I would do well as either an army officer or a forest ranger but I didn't care: I wanted only to be a writer, even though I didn't know how you went about becoming one, especially the kind of writer I wanted to be. I didn't want to be a newspaper reporter, because I have never cared about knowing something first, and I didn't want to write only about things that were considered "important" and newsworthy; I wanted to write about things that intrigued me, and to write about them in a way that would surprise readers who might not have expected to find these things intriguing. During college I kept a journal with a section called "Items Under Consideration," which was a meditation on what I was going to do once I graduated. It was filled with entries like this:

What to Do/Future Plans

Why I Should Go into Journalism

PRO:

Fun!
Interesting!
Writing!
Activity and excitement!
Good people (maybe)
Social value

CON:

No jobs available
Have to live in NYC for serious work on a magazine
Talent is questionable

Except for some interstitial waitressing, my first job out of college was writing for a tiny magazine in Oregon, and I made it clear at the interview that I would absolutely, positively die if I didn't get hired. After all, I knew being a writer would be "Fun! Interesting!" and full of "Activity and excitement!" I had no experience to speak of, except that I had been the editor of my high school yearbook. When I went to the job interview in Oregon, I brought a copy of the yearbook and a kind of wild, exuberant determination, which was the only thing that could account for my having gotten the job.

What I wanted to write about were the people and places around me. I didn't want to write about famous people simply because they were famous, and I didn't want to write about charming little things that were self-consciously charming and little; I wasn't interested in documenting or predicting trends, and I didn't have polemics to air or sociological theories to spin out. I just wanted to write what are usually called "features"—a term that I hate because it sounds so fluffy and lightweight, like

pillow stuffing, but that is used to describe stories that move at their own pace, rather than the news stories that race to keep time with events. The subjects I was drawn to were often completely ordinary, but I was confident that I could find something extraordinary in their ordinariness. I really believed that anything at all was worth writing about if you cared about it enough, and that the best and only necessary justification for writing any particular story was that I cared about it. The challenge was to write these stories in a way that got other people as interested in them as I was. The piece that convinced me this was possible was Mark Singer's profile of three building superintendents that ran in *The New Yorker* when I was in college. The piece was eloquent and funny and full of wonder even though the subject was unabashedly mundane. After I read it, I had that rare, heady feeling that I now knew something about life I hadn't known before I read it. At the same time, the story was so natural that I couldn't believe it had never been written until then. Like the very best examples of literary nonfiction, it was at once familiar and original, like a folk melody—as good an example as you could ever find of the poetry of facts and the art in ordinary life.

My first feature for *The New Yorker* was a profile of Nana Kwabena Oppong, a cabdriver in New York City. Nana's life as a cabbie was the embodiment of ordinariness, but he also happened to have the extraordinary honor of being the king of his tribe, the Ashantis, in the United States. His life seesawed between its two extremes, between the humdrum concerns of daily life, like doing maintenance on his cab and prodding his kids to do their homework and looking for a new apartment, and his royal concerns, like resolving property disputes and officiating at Ashanti ceremonies and overseeing the transportation of deceased members of the tribe back to Ghana so they could be buried in their

motherland. I spent months on the story. When I would get together with him, I never knew whether I was meeting with Nana the cabdriver or Nana the king. By the end of our time together, of course, I realized that there was no real difference, and that the marvel was watching him weave together these strands of his life.

Just before I profiled Nana, I had been asked by *Esquire* to write a piece about the child actor Macaulay Culkin, who was ten years old at the time. I don't rule out doing celebrity profiles, but I wasn't in the mood to do one right then and I wasn't very interested in Macaulay Culkin. Then my editor told me that he was planning to use the headline THE AMERICAN MAN, AGE TEN. On a whim, I told my editor that I would do the piece if I could find a typical American ten-year-old man to profile instead—someone who I thought was more deserving of that headline. It was an improbable idea since they had already photographed Macaulay for the cover of the magazine, but my editor decided to take me up on it. I was completely dismayed. First of all, I had to figure out what I'd had in mind when I made the suggestion. Obviously, there is no such thing as a "typical" boy or girl, and even if I could establish some very generous guidelines for what constitutes typicalness—say, a suburban kid from a middle-class family who went to public school and didn't have an agent, a manager, or a chauffeur— there was the problem of choosing one such kid. I considered going to a shopping mall and just snatching the first ten-year-old I found, but instead I asked my friends to ask *their* friends if they knew anyone with a ten-year-old, and eventually I got the name of a boy who lived in the New Jersey suburbs. I liked Colin Duffy right away because he seemed unfazed by the prospect of my observing him for a couple of weeks. He was a wonderful kid, and I still marvel at how lucky I was to have stumbled on someone so endearing, but the truth is that if you set out to write about a ten-year-old boy, any boy

would do. The particulars of the story would have been entirely different with a different boy, but the fundamentals would have been the same: An ordinary life examined closely reveals itself to be exquisite and complicated and exceptional, somehow managing to be both heroic and plain.

THERE ARE SO MANY THINGS I'm interested in writing about that settling on one drives me crazy. Usually it happens accidentally: Some bit of news will stick in my mind, or a friend will mention something, and suddenly a story presents itself or a subject engages me. For instance, I decided to profile Felipe Lopez, a star high school basketball player, because I had stumbled across a headline in the paper one day that said CHRIST THE KING AIMS FOR REVENGE. It was one of those headlines that stops you dead in your tracks, and even after you figure it out, you can't quite get it out of your mind. Christ the King turned out to be a Catholic school in New York, and its basketball team was bent on avenging an embarrassing loss to another school. Before reading the story I hadn't realized that there was a Catholic basketball league in the city, and that alone got me interested. But what really hooked me was remembering how ardent people are about high school sports—I guess it was the fierceness of that headline—and that led me to thinking about how a kid who was really good at some sport must lead a very unusual sort of life, and then I started wondering who was the best high school basketball player in the country. I could only hope and pray that he went to a school as evocatively named as Christ the King. As it turned out, Felipe didn't—he went to a school with the very homely name of Rice—but he did live in New York, not far from my apartment, and, like Colin, was happy to have me follow him around.

Some of these stories are about people who are well known, such as the designer Bill Blass and the Olympic figure skater Tonya Harding, and almost all of these were suggested to me rather than having been my own ideas, which tend to be about people who are not yet well known nor ever will be. Bill Blass was suggested to me by Tina Brown, who was editor of *The New Yorker* at the time, and I accepted the assignment when I found out that he still made personal trunk show appearances in small cities around the country, even though most people at his level in the fashion world had long since given it up. I loved the idea of profiling a world-class designer not in New York or Paris or Milan but in Nashville, at a ladies' luncheon in the middle of the week. Writing about Tonya Harding was a different kind of challenge. She had been in the news constantly after the attack on Nancy Kerrigan, and it was hard to imagine that there was a story left about her that hadn't already been told and retold. But I had noticed that all the newspaper stories mentioned she was from Portland, Oregon, which wasn't true: She was from the exurbs twenty miles or so outside of Portland. Because I used to live in Oregon, I knew the two places were entirely different, even antithetical, and I was convinced that Tonya Harding made a lot more sense if you understood something about where she was raised. I assumed that I wouldn't get to interview her when I went out to Oregon, so I interviewed people who cared about her and who lived in her town. It was a little like studying animal tracks and concluding something about a creature from the impression it has left behind. I still wish I could have talked to her, but maybe that will be another story another time.

I LOVE WRITING about places and things almost as much as I like writing about people, and I probably spend half of my time on stories that are primarily about a particular landscape or environment or event. For this book, though, I

decided to gather together only pieces that center on people, to present an assembly of the various characters I've profiled so far in my career. There is nothing harder or more interesting than trying to say something eloquent about another person and no process is more challenging. It's much easier to, say, climb Mount Fuji and write about the experience (which I've done) than it is to hang around with a ten-year-old boy or an unemployed Hollywood agent or a famous fashion designer trying to be both unobtrusive and penetrating, and then try to make some sense out of what I've seen. It's just that people are so *interesting*. Writing about them, in tight focus, is irresistible. I am sure that I will continue doing profiles as long as I'm still writing, stepping in and out—lightly, I hope—of other people's lives.

Readers often ask me if I stay in touch with anyone I've written about. It's an understandable question; after all, when you profile people, you spend a lot of time with them, and you do come to know them very well—sometimes even better than people you think of as your friends. But writing a profile is a process that has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Usually when it has ended, the writer and the subject have very little in common except for the fact that they were for a while a writer and a subject. There are some notable exceptions. Robert Stuart, the hairdresser I wrote about in a piece called "Short Cuts," still cuts my hair, so I see him every six to eight weeks. Bill Blass ("King of the Road") invited me to his runway shows for years after my piece ran, so I would see him—from a distance—every fall and spring, when he would come out to take his runway bow. He recently retired, so I won't be seeing him in spotlights anymore. Jill Meilus, the real estate broker ("I Want This Apartment") became a friend, and I have lunch with her now and again; if I sell my apartment, I will probably ask her to handle it. I'm certainly not in touch

with Tonya Harding, but I always pay attention when I hear about her in the news; I think she was arrested recently for hitting her boyfriend on the head with a hubcap. As far as I can tell from the coverage of the tennis circuit, the Maleeva sisters (“The Three Sisters”) have retired from the professional circuit. Felipe Lopez, after an erratic four years on the St. John’s University basketball team, achieved the almost impossible dream of becoming an NBA player. The Jackson Southernaires (“Devotion Road”) are still singing gospel and have performed in New York several times since I wrote about them. I’ve gone to hear them a couple of times. Right after my piece was published, a French movie company made a documentary about them that was shown on European TV. I still read the Millerton *News*, where Heather Heaton was an ace reporter (“Her Town”), but I no longer see her byline, so I assume she’s moved on to a bigger paper in a bigger town. The Shaggs (“Meet the Shaggs”) played together for the first time in seventeen years after my story came out. I went to the sold-out show and couldn’t believe I was seeing it, and I think they couldn’t believe it was happening, either. When a young man came up to Dot and showed her his Shaggs tattoo, it was as if time had not just stopped but had doubled back on itself, and the Wiggin sisters were teenagers again in New Hampshire, trying their best to play “Philosophy of the World.”

Inevitably, though, I lose track of many of the people I’ve written about, people like Colin Duffy, Nana Kwabena Oppong, Big Lee, Tiffany, Biff, Silly Billy, Leo Herschman, and on and on and on. It’s the one part of the job—this “Fun! Interesting! Active! Exciting!” job—that makes me melancholy. I know it is unrealistic and impractical to think I could stay close to everyone I’ve profiled, and even if I could, we would never be as close as we were when I was writing about them; still, it’s hard not to feel attached to

people once you've been allowed into their lives. So what I have of them, and always will have, is just that moment we spent together—now preserved on paper, bound between covers, cast out into the world—and they will never get any older, their faces will never fade, their dreams will still be within reach, and I will forever still be listening as hard as I can.

April 10, 2000

THE AMERICAN MAN, AGE TEN

IF COLIN DUFFY AND I WERE TO GET MARRIED, we would have matching superhero notebooks. We would wear shorts, big sneakers, and long, baggy T-shirts depicting famous athletes every single day, even in the winter. We would sleep in our clothes. We would both be good at Nintendo Street Fighter II, but Colin would be better than me. We would have some homework, but it would never be too hard and we would always have just finished it. We would eat pizza and candy for all of our meals. We wouldn't have sex, but we would have crushes on each other and, magically, babies would appear in our home. We would win the lottery and then buy land in Wyoming, where we would have one of every kind of cute animal. All the while, Colin would be working in law enforcement— probably the FBI. Our favorite movie star, Morgan Freeman, would visit us occasionally. We would listen to the same Eurythmics song ("Here Comes the Rain Again") over and over again and watch two hours of television every Friday night. We would both be good at football, have best friends, and know how to drive; we would cure AIDS and the garbage problem and everything that hurts animals. We would hang out a lot with Colin's dad. For fun, we would load a slingshot with dog

food and shoot it at my butt. We would have a very good life.

HERE ARE THE PARTICULARS about Colin Duffy: He is ten years old, on the nose. He is four feet eight inches high, weighs seventy-five pounds, and appears to be mostly leg and shoulder blade. He is a handsome kid. He has a broad forehead, dark eyes with dense lashes, and a sharp, dimply smile. I have rarely seen him without a baseball cap. He owns several, but favors a University of Michigan Wolverines model, on account of its pleasing colors. The hat styles his hair into wild disarray. If you ever managed to get the hat off his head, you would see a boy with a nimbus of golden-brown hair, dented in the back, where the hat hits him.

Colin lives with his mother, Elaine; his father, Jim; his older sister, Megan; and his little brother, Chris, in a pretty pale blue Victorian house on a bosky street in Glen Ridge, New Jersey. Glen Ridge is a serene and civilized old town twenty miles west of New York City. It does not have much of a commercial district, but it is a town of amazing lawns. Most of the houses were built around the turn of the century and are set back a gracious, green distance from the street. The rest of the town seems to consist of parks and playing fields and sidewalks and backyards—in other words, it is a far cry from South-Central Los Angeles and from Bedford Stuyvesant and other, grimmer parts of the country where a very different ten-year-old American man is growing up today.

There is a fine school system in Glen Ridge, but Elaine and Jim, who are both schoolteachers, choose to send their children to a parents' cooperative elementary school in Montclair, a neighboring suburb. Currently, Colin is in fifth grade. He is a good student. He plans to go to college, to a place he says is called Oklahoma City State College

University. OCSCU satisfies his desire to live out west, to attend a small college, and to study law enforcement, which OCSCU apparently offers as a major. After four years at Oklahoma City State College University, he plans to work for the FBI. He says that getting to be a police officer involves tons of hard work, but working for the FBI will be a cinch, because all you have to do is fill out one form, which he has already gotten from the head FBI office. Colin is quiet in class but loud on the playground. He has a great throwing arm, significant foot speed, and a lot of physical confidence. He is also brave. Huge wild cats with rabies and gross stuff dripping from their teeth, which he says run rampant throughout his neighborhood, do not scare him. Otherwise, he is slightly bashful. This combination of athletic grace and valor and personal reserve accounts for considerable popularity. He has a fluid relationship to many social groups, including the superbright nerds, the ultra-jocks, the flashy kids who will someday become extremely popular and socially successful juvenile delinquents, and the kids who will be elected president of the student body. In his opinion, the most popular boy in his class is Christian, who happens to be black, and Colin's favorite television character is Steve Urkel on *Family Matters*, who is black, too, but otherwise he seems uninterested in or oblivious to race. Until this year, he was a Boy Scout. Now he is planning to begin karate lessons. His favorite schoolyard game is football, followed closely by prison dodgeball, blob tag, and bombardo. He's crazy about athletes, although sometimes it isn't clear if he is absolutely sure of the difference between human athletes and Marvel Comics action figures. His current athletic hero is Dave Meggett. His current best friend is named Japeth. He used to have another best friend named Ozzie. According to Colin, Ozzie was found on a doorstep, then changed his name to Michael and moved to Massachusetts, and then Colin never saw him or heard from him again.

He has had other losses in his life. He is old enough to know people who have died and to know things about the world that are worrisome. When he dreams, he dreams about moving to Wyoming, which he has visited with his family. His plan is to buy land there and have some sort of ranch that would definitely include horses. Sometimes when he talks about this, it sounds as ordinary and hard-boiled as a real estate appraisal; other times it can sound fantastical and wifty and achingly naive, informed by the last inklings of childhood—the musings of a balmy real estate appraiser assaying a wonderful and magical landscape that erodes from memory a little bit every day. The collision in his mind of what he understands, what he hears, what he figures out, what popular culture pours into him, what he knows, what he pretends to know, and what he imagines makes an interesting mess. The mess often has the form of what he will probably think like when he is a grown man, but the content of what he is like as a little boy.

He is old enough to begin imagining that he will someday get married, but at ten he is still convinced that the best thing about being married will be that he will be allowed to sleep in his clothes. His father once observed that living with Colin was like living with a Martian who had done some reading on American culture. As it happens, Colin is not especially sad or worried about the prospect of growing up, although he sometimes frets over whether he should be called a kid or a grown-up; he has settled on the word *kid-up*. Once, I asked him what the biggest advantage to adulthood will be, and he said, “The best thing is that grown-ups can go wherever they want.” I asked him what he meant, exactly, and he said, “Well, if you’re grown up, you’d have a car, and whenever you felt like it, you could get into your car and drive somewhere and get candy.”

COLIN LOVES RECYCLING. He loves it even more than, say, playing with little birds. That ten-year-olds feel the weight of the world and consider it their mission to shoulder it came as a surprise to me. I had gone with Colin one Monday to his classroom at Montclair Cooperative School. The Co-op is in a steep, old, sharp-angled brick building that had served for many years as a public school until a group of parents in the area took it over and made it into a private, progressive elementary school. The fifth-grade classroom is on the top floor, under the dormers, which gives the room the eccentric shape and closeness of an attic. It is a rather informal environment. There are computers lined up in an adjoining room and instructions spelled out on the chalkboard—BRING IN: (1) A CUBBY WITH YOUR NAME ON IT, (2) A TRAPPER WITH A 5- POCKET ENVELOPE LABELED SCIENCE, SOCIAL STUDIES, READING/LANGUAGE ARTS, MATH, MATH LAB/COMPUTER; WHITE LINED PAPER; A PLASTIC PENCIL BAG; A SMALL HOMEWORK PAD, (3) LARGE BROWN GROCERY BAGS— but there is also a couch in the center of the classroom, which the kids take turns occupying, a rocking chair, and three canaries in cages near the door.

It happened to be Colin's first day in fifth grade. Before class began, there was a lot of horsing around, but there were also a lot of conversations about whether Magic Johnson had AIDS or just HIV and whether someone falling in a pool of blood from a cut of his would get the disease. These jolts of sobriety in the midst of rank goofiness are a ten-year-old's specialty. Each one comes as a fresh, hard surprise, like finding a razor blade in a candy apple. One day, Colin and I had been discussing horses or dogs or something, and out of the blue he said, "What do you think is better, to dump garbage in the ocean, to dump it on land, or to burn it?" Another time, he asked me if I planned to have children. I had just spent an evening with him and his friend Japeth, during which they put every small, movable

object in the house into Japeth's slingshot and fired it at me, so I told him that I wanted children but that I hoped they would all be girls, and he said, "Will you have an abortion if you find out you have a boy?"

At school, after discussing summer vacation, the kids began choosing the jobs they would do to help out around the classroom. Most of the jobs are humdrum—putting the chairs up on the tables, washing the chalkboard, turning the computers off or on. Five of the most humdrum tasks are recycling chores—for example, taking bottles or stacks of paper down to the basement, where they would be sorted and prepared for pickup. Two children would be assigned to feed the birds and cover their cages at the end of the day.

I expected the bird jobs to be the first to go. Everyone loved the birds; they'd spent an hour that morning voting on names for them (Tweetie, Montgomery, and Rose narrowly beating out Axl Rose, Bugs, Ol' Yeller, Fido, Slim, Lucy, and Chirpie). Instead, they all wanted to recycle. The recycling jobs were claimed by the first five kids called by Suzanne Nakamura, the fifth-grade teacher; each kid called after that responded by groaning, "Suzanne, aren't there any more recycling jobs?" Colin ended up with the job of taking down the chairs each morning. He accepted the task with a sort of resignation—this was going to be just a job rather than a mission.

On the way home that day, I was quizzing Colin about his worldviews.

"Who's the coolest person in the world?"

"Morgan Freeman."

"What's the best sport?"

"Football."

"Who's the coolest woman?"

"None. I don't know."

“What’s the most important thing in the world?”

“Game Boy.” Pause. “No, the world. The world is the most important thing in the world.”

DANNY’S PIZZERIA is a dark little shop next door to the Montclair Cooperative School. It is not much to look at. Outside, the brick facing is painted muddy brown. Inside, there are some saggy counters, a splintered bench, and enough room for either six teenagers or about a dozen ten-year-olds who happen to be getting along well. The light is low. The air is oily. At Danny’s, you will find pizza, candy, Nintendo, and very few girls. To a ten-year-old boy, it is the most beautiful place in the world.

One afternoon, after class was dismissed, we went to Danny’s with Colin’s friend Japeth to play Nintendo. Danny’s has only one game, Street Fighter II Champion Edition. Some teenage boys from a nearby middle school had gotten there first and were standing in a tall, impenetrable thicket around the machine.

“Next game,” Colin said. The teenagers ignored him.

“Hey, we get next game,” Japeth said. He is smaller than Colin, scrappy, and, as he explained to me once, famous for wearing his hat backward all the time and having a huge wristwatch and a huge bedroom. He stamped his foot and announced again, “Hey, we get next game.”

One of the teenagers turned around and said, “Fuck you, *next game*,” and then turned back to the machine.

“Whoa,” Japeth said.

He and Colin went outside, where they felt bigger.

“Which street fighter are you going to be?” Colin asked Japeth. “Blanka,” Japeth said. “I know how to do his head-butt.”

“I hate that! I hate the head-butt,” Colin said. He dropped his voice a little and growled, “I’m going to be

Ken, and I will kill you with my dragon punch."

"Yeah, right, and monkeys will fly out of my butt," Japeth said.

Street Fighter II is a video game in which two characters have an explosive brawl in a scenic international setting. It is currently the most popular video arcade game in America. This is not an insignificant amount of popularity. Most arcade versions of video games, which end up in pizza parlors, malls, and arcades, sell about two thousand units. So far, some fifty thousand Street Fighter II and Street Fighter II Championship Edition arcade games have been sold. Not since Pac-Man, which was released the year before Colin was born, has there been a video game as popular as Street Fighter. The home version of Street Fighter is the most popular home video game in the country, and that, too, is not an insignificant thing. Thirty-two million Nintendo home systems have been sold since 1986, when it was introduced in this country. There is a Nintendo system in seven of every ten homes in America in which a child between the ages of eight and twelve resides. By the time a boy in America turns ten, he will almost certainly have been exposed to Nintendo home games, Nintendo arcade games, and Game Boy, the handheld version. He will probably own a system and dozens of games. By ten, according to Nintendo studies, teachers, and psychologists, game prowess becomes a fundamental, essential male social marker and a schoolyard boast.

The Street Fighter characters are Dhalsim, Ken, Guile, Blanka, E. Honda, Ryu, Zangief, and Chun Li. Each represents a different country, and they each have their own special weapon. Chun Li, for instance, is from China and possesses a devastating whirlwind kick that is triggered if you push the control pad down for two seconds and then up for two seconds, and then you hit the kick button. Chun Li's kick is money in the bank, because most

of the other fighters do not have a good defense against it. By the way, Chun Li happens to be a girl—the only female Street Fighter character.

I asked Colin if he was interested in being Chun Li. There was a long pause. “I would rather be Ken,” he said.

The girls in Colin’s class at school are named Cortnerd, Terror, Spacey, Lizard, Maggot, and Diarrhea. “They do have other names, but that’s what we call them,” Colin told me. “The girls aren’t very popular.”

“They are about as popular as a piece of dirt,” Japeth said. “Or, you know that couch in the classroom? That couch is more popular than any girl. A thousand times more.” They talked for a minute about one of the girls in their class, a tall blonde with cheerleader genetic material, who they allowed was not quite as gross as some of the other girls. Japeth said that a chubby, awkward boy in their class was boasting that this girl liked him.

“No way,” Colin said. “She would never like him. I mean, not that he’s so … I don’t know. I don’t hate him because he’s fat, anyway. I hate him because he’s nasty.”

“Well, she doesn’t like him,” Japeth said. “She’s been really mean to me lately, so I’m pretty sure she likes me.”

“Girls are different,” Colin said. He hopped up and down on the balls of his feet, wrinkling his nose. “Girls are stupid and weird.”

“I have a lot of girlfriends, about six or so,” Japeth said, turning contemplative. “I don’t exactly remember their names, though.”

The teenagers came crashing out of Danny’s and jostled past us, so we went inside. The man who runs Danny’s, whose name is Tom, was leaning across the counter on his elbows, looking exhausted. Two little boys, holding Slush Puppies, shuffled toward the Nintendo, but Colin and Japeth elbowed them aside and slammed their quarters

down on the machine. The little boys shuffled back toward the counter and stood gawking at them, sucking on their drinks.

“You want to know how to tell if a girl likes you?” Japeth said. “She’ll act really mean to you. That’s a sure sign. I don’t know why they do it, but it’s always a sure sign. It gets your attention. You know how I show a girl I like her? I steal something from her and then run away. I do it to get their attention, and it works.”

They played four quarters’ worth of games. During the last one, a teenager with a quilted leather jacket and a fade haircut came in, pushed his arm between them, and put a quarter down on the deck of the machine.

Japeth said, “Hey, what’s that?”

The teenager said, “I get next game. I’ve marked it now. Everyone knows this secret sign for next game. It’s a universal thing.”

“So now we know,” Japeth said. “Colin, let’s get out of here and go bother Maggie. I mean Maggot. Okay?” They picked up their backpacks and headed out the door.

PSYCHOLOGISTS IDENTIFY ten as roughly the age at which many boys experience the gender-linked normative developmental trauma that leaves them, as adult men, at risk for specific psychological sequelae often manifest as deficits in the arenas of intimacy, empathy, and struggles with commitment in relationships. In other words, this is around the age when guys get screwed up about girls. Elaine and Jim Duffy, and probably most of the parents who send their kids to Montclair Cooperative School, have done a lot of stuff to try to avoid this. They gave Colin dolls as well as guns. (He preferred guns.) Japeth’s father has three motorcycles and two dirt bikes but does most of the cooking and cleaning in their home. Suzanne, Colin’s teacher, is careful to avoid sexist references in her

presentations. After school, the yard at Montclair Cooperative is filled with as many fathers as mothers—fathers who hug their kids when they come prancing out of the building and are dismayed when their sons clamor for Supersoaker water guns and war toys or take pleasure in beating up girls.

In a study of adolescents conducted by the Gesell Institute of Human Development, nearly half the ten-year-old boys questioned said they thought they had adequate information about sex. Nevertheless, most ten-year-old boys across the country are subjected to a few months of sex education in school. Colin and his class will get their dose next spring. It is yet another installment in a plan to make them into new, improved men with reconstructed notions of sex and male-female relationships. One afternoon I asked Philip, a schoolmate of Colin's, whether he was looking forward to sex education, and he said, "No, because I think it'll probably make me really, really hyper. I have a feeling it's going to be just like what it was like when some television reporters came to school last year and filmed us in class and I got really hyper. They stood around with all these cameras and asked us questions. I think that's what sex education is probably like."

At a class meeting earlier in the day:

Colin's teacher, Suzanne: Today was our first day of swimming class, and I have one observation to make. The girls went into their locker room, got dressed without a lot of fuss, and came into the pool area. The boys, on the other hand, the *boys* had some sort of problem doing that rather simple task. Can someone tell me what exactly went on in the locker room?

KEITH: There was a lot of shouting.

SUZANNE: Okay, I hear you saying that people were being noisy and shouting. Anything else?