

## Family Pictures Texts

### Text #1

*After the shock treatments he didn't recognize her. Her mother said it was because her skirt was too short. He was hospitalized for three weeks. She left school every day after lunch. She told her teachers she was having ultra-violet treatments for an acne condition on her back and shoulders. She changed out of her school uniform in the ladies-room at the bus station. She always took the number forty-two bus. She considered it to be her lucky number. It was the year her grandparents were gassed at Auschwitz. She always went to the same place, the cafeteria in the basement of the Eye Hospital. She'd been in the children's ward for ten days when she was six. Her parents had been fighting. Her mother had slammed a glass cupboard door shut. The glass shattered and fell into her right eye. Blood was everywhere. She always drank one cup of milky tea and ate a package of custard cream biscuits before going home. Two days after he returned home, he cut her skirts and dresses into triangles. She found them stuffed under her bed. She stopped going to the Eye Hospital. She stopped going to school. She rode the number forty-two bus for five hours every day. He waited for her to come home. He hated comings and goings. She could see his face pressed up against the window. It looked gray and distorted. He always assumed she'd had an accident. He always assumed they'd all had accidents. He was never specific. They were forbidden to take trains. Two weeks after he returned home, he poured her perfumes down the toilet and smashed the bottles. She found her lipsticks and mascara in the kitchen trash. Her allowance stopped. He stopped shaving. He cut his pin-striped trousers off at the knees. He forbade her to go out at night. One night she defied him. He chased her down the street. He was sobbing. The next day he was hospitalized. He didn't recognize her after the shock treatments.*

## **Text #2**

*He was choking on tears and cigarette smoke. She was afraid to say anything. Everything seemed to fill him with anxiety. She ran into the bathroom and vomited. She heard a bird warbling. Escaping into the bedroom she closed the door quietly. All of a sudden, she felt cold. She opened his drawer. In-between his stained underwear she found a small photograph. It must have been him in his late teens. He might have been smiling. She couldn't tell. On the back it was marked 1938. Underneath the date it said I am a Jew I am not a Jew I am a Jew I am not a Jew I am a Jew I am not a Jew I am a Jew.*

### **Text #3**

*He wears a dirty, blue, polyester jacket given to him by his eldest daughter. Grey hairs appear embedded in the weave. Every afternoon he watches soap operas and game shows. He lost his job during a corporate take-over. He's sixty-one and feels useless. On one of his worst days, he had a nosebleed that bloodied three handkerchiefs. It was New Year's Eve. The family was together. She ran into the bathroom to escape. A chipped enameled bowl was resting on the toilet seat. The handkerchiefs were soaking in bloody water.*

*He's proud of his illnesses; his high blood pressure, his weak heart, his varicose veins. When she mentions that he could help himself he smiles and says "why should I care about my body, what's it ever done for me?" When she mentions alternative forms of medicine, he says it's all a hoax. She's afraid of his illnesses. She's afraid of decay. She has lines at the corners of her eyes. There are crumbs left unwiped on the kitchen counters. He blames all messes on her. He says it's because she needs to wear glasses. She's tired of cleaning up after him.*

*She collected herself and opened the bathroom door. He was shuffling his feet on the orange wall-to-wall carpet. He does this to build up static electricity in his body. He reached out and touched her. She shuddered as a slight shock ran through her body.*

#### **Text #4**

*I feel ill. My nerves are raw and I have pains in my groin. I sit with my head down. The shadows in the room are creating faces, intestines and petals. She is staring at me, an image on the wall. Her flesh is painted in yellows, greens and pink. I am aging. My body is changing shape. I crawl into myself, into my mother. If only I could sever the root. Starve the egg. Murder the connection.*

*I saw my newly born daughter encased in a tall, transparent body. She wandered out of her room, across the hallway and disappeared. I breathed a sigh of relief. My breasts filled with salt water. I expressed it into a watering can and fed it to a dying plant in the living room. My daughter re-appeared and asked me for some milk. I explained that I didn't have any and suggested she ask her father to produce some.*

*We visited my parents last week. As I unpacked the children's clothing, I suddenly remembered a remark the doctor made to my husband after the birth of our daughter. "Congratulations" he said "and oh, by the way, I put in an extra stitch for you."*

## **Text #5**

*It came on the youngest one's thirteenth birthday. They were eating cake. The chocolate-icing was burnt. There was a paraffin aftertaste from the dripping candles. The blood trickled down her thighs onto the green vinyl seat. He said he would clean it up. He said he was used to it. They didn't know what he meant. They were afraid to ask. She said the cramping wouldn't last long. She offered her aspirin. Her doctor prescribed valium. She went to get a sanitary-napkin for her daughter. She kept them in an old toy box in the bathroom. She went to get a cigarette for herself. Those she stored in a biscuit tin on top of the refrigerator.*

*They were born exactly five years apart. There were three of them. Girls. He had never wanted sons. He felt daughters were easier to control. When it was time for the first one to start school she thought about getting a job. They needed the money. He refused to let her work. He was uneasy when she left the house. He felt abandoned. He felt ashamed. She felt bereft. She became pregnant and a part of her shriveled. She became agoraphobic. When it was time for the second one to start school she looked in the newspaper for a job. He told her she had no skills. He told her she was inefficient. She believed him. She became pregnant. She started to smoke. His words began to sound foreign. Her voice began to sound thin. The children learned to be suspicious of one another.*

*She explained to the child how to attach a napkin to the belt. The child said it felt like a harness. She didn't know what to say. They went back to the table. Nobody wanted any more cake. The middle child said she had homework to do. Simultaneous equations. Once she'd asked her father to help her with a geometry assignment. She didn't understand his explanations. He said she was stupid. She was afraid of her math teacher. She cleaned off the table. She washed the dishes. She watched her mother creep upstairs and enter the*

*linen closet. A string-bag hung on the inside of the closet door. It contained her daily chocolate supplies. She felt nauseous. She ate a walnut twist. She squeezed her body in-between the bottom shelf and the floor. She pulled the door shut. It was her space. The youngest child started to cry. The aspirin wasn't helping. She needed somebody. The belt was rubbing against her swollen abdomen. It needed adjusting.*

## **Text #6**

*She used to hear her parents making love at night. She imagined her father thrusting the memory of death into her mother. They were all born with a taste of torture. Once a teacher instructed her to wash her mouth out with soap. Once her mother told her that Jews were processed into soap. Last weekend was Passover. The five of them spent two days together. Her parents fought constantly. She nibbled away at a walnut cake her mother had baked and burned. By Sunday she had consumed the whole cake. Her father often mentioned that he had starved during the war. The only thing he had to eat was stale rye bread. He believed in the family. He always talked about his grandchildren at the dinner table. She suspected she'd never provide him with any. She suspected her older sister preferred women. The youngest was too young. She noticed a gold ring on her older sister's finger. She asked her if it was a present from someone. The response came hesitantly.*

*"My friend Sonia paid for half of it and ..."*

*"Does Sonia have one?" he interrupted before she had time to finish the sentence.*

*That night when they were all in bed, she heard her sister crying. She entered her room. She entered her bed. She held her in her arms, close to her body.*

## **Text #7**

*When she told her she was taking birth control pills she called her a whore. When she told her she was recovering from an abortion she told her not to mention it to her father. When she told her the man she was marrying wasn't Jewish she said she wasn't coming to the wedding. When she told her not to tell anybody she did. When she told her she was a feminist she said she was one too. One night she dreamt they were identical twins. One night she dreamt they were identical twins. They dressed up like Mediaeval Madonnas. They dressed up like Mediaeval Madonnas. Like Joans of Arc. Like Joans of Arc. Like Ingrid Bergmans. Like Ingrid Bergmans. Like Lizzy Bordens. Like Lizzie Bordens. They sought their reflections in mirrors and didn't recognize themselves. Only the other. Her father became confused. He asked them to identify themselves. They couldn't. He became frightened. He decapitated them. He interrogated their bodies. He took them to a hospital where an attempt was made to put them together.*

*When she had the feeling she wasn't herself her mother reassured her that she was.*