

But all he eventually saw was the flowering smile of acceptance.

He was standing outside, staring through the window at me for one last time.

He was looking at this story with affection.

I noticed my son had left a drawing behind: a landscape of the moon. It was so detailed that I had to linger over it, wondering about the patience required of my son to draw this particular moonscape. Where did this humming, ceaseless intention come from?

I also saw that one word was written on it, and I touched the word with a finger.

I didn't know what brought him here. I didn't know what called him away.

He was returning to the land where every boy forced into bravery and quickness retreats: a new life. Wherever he was going, he was not afraid.

The cream-colored 450 SL pulled out of the lot and turned right onto Ventura Boulevard, merging with the traffic until it was lost from sight and then the story ended.

The meeting lasted only minutes but when I limped back to my car it was twilight.

Across the street from the McDonald's was the Bank of America where my father's ashes were stored. What I hadn't told anyone was what happened on the eighth of November when I had gone to retrieve the ashes. When I opened the safe-deposit box that day, its interior was grayed with ash. The box containing what remained of my father had burst apart and the ashes now lined the sides of the oblong safe. And in the ash someone had written, perhaps with a finger, the same word my son had written on the moonscape he had left for me.

In a fishing boat that took us out beyond the wave line of the Pacific we finally put my father to rest. As the ashes rose up into the salted air they opened themselves to the wind and began moving backwards, falling into the past and coating the faces that lingered there, dusting everything, and then the ashes ignited into a prism and began forming patterns and started reflecting the men and women who had created him and me and Robby. They drifted over a mother's smile and shaded a sister's outstretched hand and shifted past all the things you wanted to share with everyone. *I want to show you something*, the ashes whispered. You watched as the ashes kept rising and danced across a multitude of images from the

past, dipping down and then flying back into the air, and the ashes rose over a young couple looking upward and then the woman was staring at the man and he was holding out a flower and their hearts were pounding as they slowly opened and the ashes fell across their first kiss and then over a young couple pushing a baby in a stroller at the Farmer's Market and finally the ashes wheeled across a yard and swept themselves toward the pink stucco of the first—and only—house they bought as a family, on a street called Valley Vista, and then the ashes swirled down a hallway and behind the doors were children, and the ashes flew across the balloons and gently extinguished the candles burning delicately on the store-bought cake on the kitchen table on your birthday, and they twirled around a Christmas tree that stood in the center of the living room and dimmed the colored lights stringing the tree, and the ashes followed the racing bike you pedaled along a sidewalk when you were five, and then drifted onto the wet yellow Slip 'n' Slide you and your sisters played on, and they floated in the air and landed in the palm fronds surrounding the house and a glass of milk you held as a child and your mother in a robe watching you swim in a clear, lit pool and a film of ash sprawled itself over the surface of the water, and your father was pitching you into the pool and you landed joyfully with a splash, and there was a song playing as a family drove out to the desert ("*Someone Saved My Life Tonight*," the writer says) and the ashes dotted the Polaroids of your mother and father as young parents and all the places we went as a family and the lit pool kept steaming behind them with the scent of gardenia flowers rising up into the night air, wavering in the heat, and there was a small golden retriever, a puppy, bounding around the sides of the pool, ecstatic, chasing a Frisbee, and the ashes dusted the Legos that were spilled in front of you and in the morning there was your mother waving goodbye and calling softly and the ashes kept spinning into space with children running after them, and they dusted the keys of the piano you played and the backgammon board your father and you battled over, and they landed on the shore in Hawaii in a photograph of mountains partially blocked by lens flare and darkened an orange sunset above the rippling dunes of Monterey and rained over the pink tents of a circus and a Ferris wheel in Topanga Canyon and blackened a white cross that stood on a hillside in Cabo San Lucas, and they hid themselves within the rooms of the house on Valley Vista and the row of family portraits, drifting over all the promises canceled and the connections missed, the desires left unfulfilled and the disappointments met and the fears confirmed and every slammed door and reconciliation never made, and soon they were covering all the mirrors in every room

sad/funny sort of way; there was a continuing wistfulness on her part and a high level of sexual interest on mine. But I needed my space. I needed to be alone. A woman wasn't going to interfere with my creativity (plus, Jayne didn't add anything to it). I had started a new novel that was beginning to demand most of my time.

What hasn't already been said? And I feel no need to go into great detail about it here. For those who weren't in the room at the time, here's the Cliff'sNotes version: I wrote a novel about a young, wealthy, alienated Wall Street yuppie named Patrick Bateman who also happened to be a serial killer filled with vast apathy during the height of the Reagan eighties. The novel was pornographic and extremely violent, so much so that my publishers, Simon & Schuster, refused the book on grounds of taste, forfeiting a mid-six-figure advance. Sonny Mehta, the head of Knopf, snapped up the rights, and even before its publication the controversy and scandal the novel achieved was enormous. I did no press because it was pointless—my voice would have been drowned out by all the indignant wailing. The book was accused of introducing serial killer chic to the nation. It was reviewed in the *New York Times*, three months before publication, under the headline "Don't Buy This Book." It was the subject of a 10,000-word essay by Norman Mailer in *Vanity Fair* ("the first novel in years to take on deep, dark, Dostoyevskian themes—how one wishes this writer was without talent"). It was the object of scornful editorials, there were debates on CNN, there was a feminist boycott by the National Organization of Women and the obligatory death threats (a tour was canceled because of them). PEN and the Authors Guild refused to come to my rescue. I was vilified even though the book sold millions of copies and raised the fame quotient so high that my name became as recognizable as most movie stars' or athletes'. I was taken seriously. I was a joke. I was avant-garde. I was a traditionalist. I was underrated. I was overrated. I was innocent. I was partly guilty. I had orchestrated the controversy. I was incapable of orchestrating anything. I was considered the most misogynist American writer in existence. I was a victim of the burgeoning culture of the politically correct. The debates raged on and on, and not even the Gulf War in the spring of 1991 could distract the public's fear and worry and fascination from Patrick Bateman and his twisted life. I made more money than I knew what to do with. It was the year of being hated.

What I didn't—and couldn't—tell anyone was that writing the book had been an extremely disturbing experience. That even though I had planned to base Patrick Bateman on my father, someone—*something*—else took over and caused this new character to be my only reference point during the three years it took to complete the novel. What I didn't tell anyone was that the book was written mostly at night when the spirit of this madman would visit, sometimes waking me from a deep, Xanax-induced sleep. When I realized, to my horror, what this character wanted from me, I kept resisting, but the novel forced itself to be written. I would often black out for hours at a time only to realize that another ten pages had been scrawled out. My point—and I'm not quite sure how else to put this—is that the book *wanted* to be written by someone else. It wrote itself, and didn't care how I felt about it. I would fearfully watch my hand as the pen swept across the yellow legal pads I did the first draft on. I was repulsed by this creation and wanted to take no credit for it—Patrick Bateman wanted the credit. And once the book was published, it almost seemed as if *he* was relieved and, more disgustingly, satisfied. He stopped appearing after midnight gleefully haunting my dreams, and I could finally relax and quit bracing myself for his nocturnal arrivals. But even years later I couldn't look at the book, let alone touch it or reread it—there was something, well, evil about it. My father never said anything to me about *American Psycho*. Though oddly enough, after reading half of it that spring, he sent my mother a copy of *Newsweek* with the cover that asked, over the angelic face of a baby, "Is Your Child Gay?" unaccompanied by any kind of note or explanation.

The death of my father occurred in August of 1992. At the time I was doing the Hamptons in a \$20,000-a-month cottage on the beach in Wainscott, where I was trying to work through my writer's block while preparing for weekend guests (Ron Galotti, Campion Platt, Susan Minot, my Italian publisher, and McInerney), ordering the forty-dollar plum tart from the specialty bakery in East Hampton and picking up the two cases of Domaines Ott. I was trying to stay sober but I'd started opening bottles of chardonnay at ten in the morning, and if I'd drunk everything the night before, I would sit in the Porsche I'd leased for the summer in a Bridgehampton parking lot waiting for the liquor store to open, usually sharing a cigarette with Peter Maas, who was waiting there too. I had just broken up with a model over a bizarre argument while we were barbecuing

we lived in, hiding our imperfections from ourselves even as the ashes flew through our blood, and they followed the brooding boy who ran away, the son who discovered what you are, and everyone was too young to grasp that our life was folding in on itself—it was so foolish and touching to think at one point that somehow we would all be spared, but the ashes pushed forward and covered an entire city with a departing cloud that was driven by the wind and kept ascending and the images began getting smaller and I could see the town where he was born as the ashes flew over the Nevada mountains mingling with the snow that fell there and crossed a river, and then I saw my father walking toward me—he was a child again and smiling and he was offering me an orange he held out with both hands as my grandfather's hunting dogs were chasing the ashes across the train tracks, dousing their coats, and the ashes began bleeding into the images and drifted over his mother as she slept and dusted the face of my son who was dreaming about the moon and in his dream they darkened its surface as they flew across it but once they passed by the moon was brighter than it had ever been, and the ashes rained down earthward and swirling, glittering now, were soon overtaken by a vision of light in which the images began to crumble. The ashes were collapsing into everything and following echoes. They sifted over the graves of his parents and finally entered the cold, lit world of the dead where they wept across the children standing in the cemetery and then somewhere out at the end of the Pacific—after they rustled across the pages of this book, scattering themselves over words and creating new ones—they began exiting the text, losing themselves somewhere beyond my reach, and then vanished, and the sun shifted its position and the world swayed and then moved on, and though it was all over, something new was conceived. The sea reached to the land's edge where a family, in silhouette, stood watching us until the fog concealed them. From those of us who are left behind, you will be remembered, you were the one I needed, I loved you in my dreams.

So, if you should see my son, tell him I say hello, be good, that I am thinking of him and that I know he's watching over me somewhere, and not to worry: that he can always find me here, whenever he wants, right here, my arms held out and waiting, in the pages, behind the covers, at the end of *Lunar Park*.