

Eidetic (from OPEN CITY Magazine Number 16)

by Rick Rofihe

DEAR HANK,

I know this is unceremonious, writing on my daughter's "Care Bear" stationery but, nonetheless, you haven't written to me and I feel like our dialogue has ended abruptly. Writing to you without getting a reply is like jerking off.

Not much is happening here in Wainscott. Adrian is penis-obsessed. Fortunately next week his father is joining me so I'll let *him* deal with it. (Another reason I'm glad I'm not a single mother.)

And if you want to know what penis-obsession *means* in a four-year-old, it means him clipping little Spider-Man weapons around his penis and shooting them. And threatening his sister by holding his penis like a hose and chasing her around pretending to pee on her. (On the other hand, I did catch Emma just as she was about to tie a little doll apron and bonnet around Adrian's penis to make, "a penis woman," she told me.)

All this is too much for me. But I can relate all the way around. I mean, if *I* had a penis, I would find all *kinds* of fun things to do with it too.

Now, Hank, what is this note about what I just received from my mother? What is she talking about when she says "us"? YOU AND ME? And she says she *approves*—OF WHAT?? *RÉPONDEZ S'IL VOUS PLAÎT!*

In any case, her sensationalism knows no shame. Yesterday she called and told me in a quavering, tear-filled voice that my grandmother had fallen down the stairs. I thought it had just happened. She filled me in, blow by blow, slo-o-owly, in that teary voice with lots of sighs: how grandma landed on the concrete basement floor, that she may have been lying there for "who knows

how long," that the doctors wouldn't tell the family for sure if she was ever going to walk again. Finally I asked if my grandmother was going *to die* and she responded in a perfectly normal voice that this all happened *days* ago and that grandma is now sitting up in her hospital bed, eating, speaking and drinking. (My mother is truly a product of the tabloid age.)

Of course, the whole thing is horrible, because even though I don't really care about most of them, I do have a vague fondness for my grandmother. Furthermore, I know a huge confrontation will happen when I don't attend either or both my grandmother's logically imminent funeral or my sister's remotely possible wedding. But what can they do? Put a familial curse on me? Cut me out of a will that I'm not in anyway?

Hank, have you ever read any interesting fiction or drama about mailmen? Not postal workers, only the people who schlep it to your door. I recently imagined a scene in which a mailman throws bunches of letters into the ocean. Can you imagine how appalled and upset certain people would be if they found out a mailman might have *done something* to their mail? There could be a public lynching. (What I'm trying to say, Hank, is, *Please* write.)

I'm going to bed now. It's very late for me (a quarter to midnight) and I've obviously missed the last letter pickup.

OK, now it is 5 A.M. and although I'm sipping a cup of coffee while the kids are still sleeping, I'm not *really* awake because I jumped out of bed when the alarm went off, thinking I was late or maybe reacting to a dream or something. (Ignore me if I'm babbling.)

I think that all night I dreamt about people I knew when I was in high school. I woke at 2 A.M. composing in my head the meaningful letter I would write to Shirley, my high school drug pal and sex partner who, twelve years ago, when I ran into her out in Missoula, was a telephone repair person and looked like a cowboy with breasts. Then I slept and woke again, sure that I would call and

visit Ellis, my flamboyant and brilliant boyfriend but *not* sex partner (he was always gay) and show him the photo of us running naked through the campus of the college I would soon attend. I rediscovered Ellis when I taught a term in Santa Cruz and then re-discovered him a couple of years later on a trip (before I met you) to New York. He writes essays that often wind up in good places under different names. The last one was about his having AIDS. I'm frightened to contact him again because I think he's quite sick and even though I've never really been around one, I have a feeling I would be a lousy bedside companion for a terminally ill person.

Did I ever tell you that I have an eidetic brain? I never really thought of it as a virtue because nobody else cares if a person has this ability or not since it doesn't really translate outside one's head, but anyway I can see the wildest things clearly. I'm really at my best when I can visualize the pine floor of your house up there, and the newspaper beneath the maple table with benches at either side and something on your stove that was pretty, probably an enamel teapot. And a beige shirt that you wore. And how I got you hard with my hair.

Now it's 8:30 and the kids here have had breakfast. I'm watching them through the patio door but, let's face it, you can't raise your children through glass, so this will be short.

What I wanted to tell you was my favorite passage in that insert you sent me from *Sassy* (an appallingly racy post-toddler magazine that I often did look at—and I know you did too) is the one where the foxy guy buys a “hardbound, coffee-table-size book” (and I thought Madonna's *Sex* was oversized) and then tells the cashier that she has “a good bod but no brain cells” because she short-changed him.

Who do you think are the true intellectuals? I'm a fan of both Gore Vidal and Harold Bloom although most people can't stand either of them. George Plimpton is interesting. (I wish you were here with me so you could say Yes-No-Yes or something.)

I'm seeing Adrian getting his penis out. Gotta go.

The mailman's not here yet, but now I have a little girl with a toothache in my lap. Poor Emmikins. I'll have her write her greetings to you—she's a very smart little girl.

Now it is 1 P.M. I am most definitely awake. Got your two hilarious postcards just now, along with an envelope full of annotated clippings. The cards killed me. You are so funny Hank Hillon.

But I'm trying to respond to your real letter. The older letter about love and sex and relationships. You're right about the getting close and pulling back thing and how I did that and you too. But why when I was pregnant with Adrian? Just timing? I don't know why I did that with you. I can only make things up because I can't remember why, and my eidetic mind can't seem to see anything either. Maybe it had to do with the sex. You're right, sex can really screw things up. (You said "make you sad" but I don't feel that way although I see how you can because you are a romantic person and I'm not, although I wish I was. I'm too pragmatic.)

Sex used to define me in a sense. Especially when I was a teenager and it was one of the only ways I knew how to communicate, since I was raised in a family where sexual abuse and innuendo privileged academia and sincerity. Seduction and sex was a hard habit to break. Some time after I started college I found out that I had another way to relate to people, and after all isn't that what life is about—always looking for other people to relate to? So I changed my appearance—short hair, no makeup, and found that sexual energy towards me changed and I wasn't flirting with every dick-head on the street. Though I do tend to flirt with men and women after I know them and trust there is something about me they like that doesn't include sex. Because sexual energy between friends is inevitable especially when it's one of the biggest things you really don't know about each other. So what if I can't help but wonder about other people's sexual responses—does that make me a kind of voyeur? Anyway, I'm a *would-be* fly on the wall.

I'm glad (I hate that word) ... I'm happy ... I'm pleased? ... It's nice (awful) ...It is *simpatico* that you now have in your life a woman who something's going on with ... (no, no, no) whom you're interested in (worse). HEY DUDE, GOOD LUCK WITH THE BABE! Now for your question: How would *I* feel if *you* were married? ... hmm ... I guess it would be just another thing. I had a very close friend in Santa Fe who worked at a place called The Borrowed Money Café. His name was Eugene. We tried the sex thing about ten years ago and it wasn't right, but we were (and still are in a remote sort of way) close friends. For a while, way back when neither of us had a partner. Then he met a wild Texas chanteuse, but my never-ending presence led to their demise. Years later, after I was married, he met a woman who he'd eventually marry and he said to me, "Dee," (that's what he always called me—Dee DiLorenzo), "BACK OFF!" I've always backed off but she's never been entirely comfortable with me.

And so it goes ...

I'm going to stop writing this letter now.

