

Shouts & Murmurs
Animal Tales by Simon Rich

June 30, 2008

FROGS

“Hey, can I ask you something? Why do human children dissect us?”

“It’s part of their education. They cut open our bodies in school and write reports about their findings.”

“Huh. Well, I guess it could be worse, right? I mean, at least we’re not dying in vain.”

“How do you figure?”

“Well, our deaths are furthering the spread of knowledge. It’s a huge sacrifice we’re making, but at least some good comes out of it.”

“Let me show you something.”

“What’s this?”

“It’s a frog-dissection report.”

“Who wrote it?”

“A fourteen-year-old human from New York City. Some kid named Simon.”

(Flipping through it.) “This is it? This is the whole thing?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Geez. It doesn’t look like he put a lot of time into this.”

“Look at the diagram on the last page.”

“Oh, my God . . . it’s so crude. It’s almost as if he wasn’t even looking down at the paper while he was drawing it. Like he was watching TV or something.”

“Read the conclusion.”

“ ‘In conclusion, frogs are a scientific wonder of biology.’ What does that even mean?”

“It doesn’t mean anything.”

“Why are the margins so big?”

“He was trying to make it look as if he had written five pages, even though he had only written four.”

“He couldn’t come up with one more page of observations about our dead bodies?”

“I guess not.”

“This paragraph looks like it was copied straight out of an encyclopedia. I’d be shocked if he retained any of this information.”

“Did you see that he spelled ‘science’ wrong in the heading?”

“Whoa . . . I missed that. That’s incredible.”

“He didn’t even bother to run it through spell-check.”

“Who did he dissect?”

“Harold.”

“Betsy’s husband? Jesus. So this is why Harold was killed. To produce this . . . ‘report.’ ”

(Nods.) “This is why his life was taken from him.”

(Long pause.)

“Well, at least it has a cover sheet.”

“Yeah. The plastic’s a nice touch.”

DALMATIANS

“Hey, look, the truck’s stopping.”

“Did they take us to the park this time?”

“No—it’s a fire. Another horrible fire.”

“What the hell is wrong with these people?”

FREE-RANGE CHICKENS

“Well, it’s another beautiful day in paradise.”

“How’d we get so lucky?”

“I don’t know and I don’t care.”

“I think I’ll go walk over there for a while. Then I’ll walk back over here.”

“That sounds like a good time. Maybe I’ll do the same.”

“Hey, someone refilled the grain bucket!”

“Is it the same stuff as yesterday?”

“I hope so.”

“Oh, man, it’s the same stuff, all right.”

“It’s so good.”

“I can’t stop eating it.”

“Hey, you know what would go perfectly with this grain? Water.”

“Dude. Look inside the other bucket.”

“This . . . is the greatest day of my life.”

“Drink up, pal.”

“Cheers!”

(Laughs.)

(Laughs.)

“Hey, look, the farmer’s coming.”

“Huh. Guess it’s my turn to go into the thing.”

“Cool. See you later, buddy.”

“See ya.” ♦

Hey, Look by Simon Rich

July 23, 2007

What I imagined the people around me were saying when I was . . .

Eleven:

“Oh, man, I can’t believe that kid Simon missed that ground ball! How pathetic!”

“Wait. He’s staring at his baseball glove with a confused expression on his face. Maybe there’s something wrong with his glove and that’s why he messed up.”

“Yeah, that’s probably what happened.”

Twelve:

“Did that kid sitting behind us on the bus just get an erection?”

“I don’t know. For a while, I thought that was the case, but now that he’s holding a book on his lap it’s impossible to tell.”

“I guess we’ll never know what the situation was.”

Thirteen:

“Hey, look, that thirteen-year-old is walking around with his mom!”

“Where?”

“There—in front of the supermarket!”

“Oh, my God! That kid is way too old to be hanging out with his mom. Even though I’ve never met him, I can tell he’s a complete loser.”

“Wait a minute. He’s scowling at her and rolling his eyes.”

“Oh, yeah . . . and I think I just heard him curse at her, for no reason.”

“I guess he’s cool after all.”

Fourteen:

“Why does that kid have a black ‘X’ on the back of his right hand?”

“I bet it’s because he went to some kind of cool rock concert last night.”

“Wow. He must’ve stayed out pretty late if he didn’t have time to scrub it off.”

“Yeah, and that’s probably why his hair is so messy and dirty—because he cares more about rocking out than conforming to society.”

“Even though he isn’t popular in the traditional sense, I respect him from afar.”

Fifteen:

“Hey, look, that kid is reading ‘Howl,’ by Allen Ginsberg.”

“Wow. He must be some kind of rebel genius.”

“I’m impressed by the fact that he isn’t trying to call attention to himself.”

“Yeah, he’s just sitting silently in the corner, flipping the pages and nodding, with total comprehension.”

“It’s amazing. He’s so absorbed in his book that he isn’t even aware that a party is going on around him, with dancing and fun.”

“Why aren’t any girls going over and talking to him?”

“I guess they’re probably a little intimidated by his brilliance.”

“Well, who wouldn’t be?”

“I’m sure the girls will talk to him soon.”

“It’s only a matter of time.”

Sixteen:

“Hey, look, it’s that kid Simon, who wrote that scathing poem for the literary magazine.”

“You mean the one about how people are phonies? Wow—I loved that poem!”

“Me, too. Reading it made me realize for the first time that everyone is a phony, including me.”

“The only person at this school who isn’t a phony is Simon.”

“Yeah. He sees right through us.” ♦