**Notes: Bonk on the Head**

“Gertie wouldn’t apologize because she was upset with Dad over what he said after I failed my test the second time: ”Hey Gomer! That’ll be your new name, since only a goddamn gomer could fail a driver’s test, eh?” “Gomer’d be a better goddamn name than goddamn Herbert!” Gertie said. “Or goddamn Gertrude, for that goddamn matter. Why would you do something like that to your own goddamn children?” Dad cuffed her a good one on the ear for that.” (Page 7)

“One thing having a father in the army taught me is that there is Intelligence, and there is Counter-Intelligence. I speculated in black ops. Time now: 3:47. Time of arrival at home: 4:16. Assets: in the fridge, the breadbox, the freezer. The Colonel’s ETA from National Defence Headquarters: 4:32. Situation: perpetual hunger. Mission: clandestine snack. Execution: microwave. Support: Ailish, possibly Mom. Communications: subtlety, nuance, stolen glances. Enemy forces: one Colonel, grumpy.” (Page 15)

““I’m a celebrated – celebrated – fucking comb at soldier,” he said to me once when he was drunk.” (Page 18)

“”My rifle is a flaccid cock!” he said. His gin breath wafted all over my face. “I want to go to war!” he whined. “I’m destined to die in war.”” (Page 19)

““Any reason you have to drink like a horse?” the Colonel said.” (Page 19)

““That’s not the bloody point, you! When are you going to start thinking of others? How much [milk] is left? Enough for coffee in the morning? Enough for Ailish’s cereal?” “You’ve had two glasses so far, and Christ knows how many after school. Do I need to start buying milk every bloody day on my way home from the office?” “THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NO REASON YOU NEED TO USE SO MUCH MILK ON A DAILY BASIS. PERIOD.” Then his voice got real quiet: “I’m always at the ready, but you just don’t get that do you? I can see through the bullcrap, my son. I can see right through, to the cut and dried.”” (Page 19)

“I closed the journal in disgust and stuffed it in my knapsack. Poet, my arse. I’d be better off as a soldier.” (Page 24)

“”In today’s world, life skills are as important as professional qualifications. The Royal Military College of Canada lays the foundation for personal and professional skills necessary to meet the unique challenges of a career as a Canadian Forces Officer. If you are a good student, if you enjoy physical activity and if you are not afraid of hard work, perhaps RMC is for you.”” (Page 24)

“We heard the Datsun gear down to make the turn into our driveway. We were silent. The slam of the car door indicated what kind of a mood the Colonel was in, and when I heard it, I snatched three cookies from the cooling rack, kissed Ailish on the forehead, and booked.” (Page 26)

“”You, YOU! This is *not* your bloody car, you! You know you are expressly forbidden to sit in this car, let alone drive it.”” (Page 28)

“”Up to your fucking room you insolent little bitch!” he screamed. “I’ll deal with you *later.* And you don’t come down until I’ve come up to let you out!”” (Page 29)

“The two or three chickens that the Colonel had killed with the FN had all but disappeared in a puff of feathers and a mist of blood. At his feet writhed a chicken, clucking in mad circles, spinning around in its own innards. The Colonel looked up, recognized Gertie, and smiled. “Dinner’s ready,” he said, a little woozy on his feet. “You fuck!” Gertie said. She was about to say something else but caught herself and stopped.” (Page 40)

“By the time I returned to school grounds, I sensed that I was different. The people around me could live their lives however they wished – they could hit the road and smoke all the pot in the world if they felt it was that important – it did not matter one whit to me. They were civilians, after all, and it is difficult for civilian mind to grasp the military sense of purpose and duty.” (Page 46)

“The Colonel gave me the cold look, the look that made him known, to both friends and enemies within the CF, as “Mad Dog” or “Snake Eater.” What a nickname!! I felt like a goddamn P.O.W. when he gave me that look.” (Page 53)

“”The fucking truck. Right. You won’t be driving that fucking truck, you, until you’ve earned the responsibility.” “It’s a fucking glass of milk, Dad.” I said, feeling the desperation of his own temper igniting into something unnatural, something unrecognizable. “And I don’t see why you have to get on my case over a few pieces of fucking *toast!* Fuck!” Now both of us couldn’t believe what I was saying. My heart raced, and I felt the blood pounding behind my own eyes, and my temple throbbed. “You want your toast?” Dad said. He reached to the counter and grabbed a blackened slice. “You want some fucking toast?” “Here, have some. Eat!” the Colonel said. He held me by the back of the head and rammed a piece of toast in to the general vicinity of my mouth. He crumpled the other piece and threw at my face. I spit out crumbs and wiped my mouth with my sleeve. “A glass of *milk*! A fucking glass of milk, Kernal, for fucksakes! Oh, what? What are you going to do – shoot me? I don’t have any chickens Kernel! Jesus fucking Christ. You could have apologized to her! She didn’t have to leave! She wouldn’t have – you could have apologized to her, you *fucking prick*!” A rush and a push, whirl and twirl. I didn’t realize what had happened until he had released my belt and the scruff of my neck. Then everything went still. Tick. Tock. I was sure the clock had slowed down. I understood that I was moving through the air and that I would hit the wall eventually, and that the impact would likely hurt – it might even knock me out cold. I understood that, but had plenty of time to mull it over. I heard the drywall crack, and then give, as it absorbed my skull. I crumpled in a heap on the kitchen tile. I felt giddy, and I laughed, thinking how the old man would have to explain the skin missing from my forehead and the bruises on my face. “How come there is blood on the wall?” Mom would say. I couldn’t feel the pain yet, but my jaw was already numb. I clenched my stomach in preparation for the kick I imagined was coming. I was also trying to remember where the rags were to clean up the milk. I opened my eyes. One was full of blood and through the other I saw the old man staring at me. His skin was like boiled sausage. From where I was lying he looked old, and I noticed he had a double chin. Then he staggered backwards and fell, sinking to his ass with a loud thud. He cracked his head against the kitchen cupboards and opened his mouth, but he didn’t say anything. He put his fists up to his eyes and shook his head. I shut my eyes because I couldn’t stand seeing him like that.” (Page 54-56)

“”Gertie…” Dad said, putting his arms around Ailish. I shut my eyes. A kick in the gut would have been more welcome than having to see the look on his face. He didn’t look like a man at all.” (Page 56)

“”If I see you bear-marching like you were when we came in here, I’m going to write your mother and tell her you’re a retarded fuckpot. RECRUITS! Ah, again! Too slow! Stand easy. KEMPT! Kempt, quit moving your head around! Looks like you got Parkinson’s, your head bobbing all over the fucking place. RECRUITS! Atten-SHUN!” (Page 68)

“I learned to swear like a true dirt-eating motherfucker.” (Page 73)

“”TDV! It’s good to me honest. RMC is an experience unlike any other, Kempt. The Regular Officer Training Program is just about the only way to become an officer in the CF these days. And I’m confident you have what it takes. No duff, Kempt.”” (Page 88)

“”Oh I know you’re good,” he said. You’ve got an impressive record with the militia. And word is you’re the son of the legendary Snake-Eater.” (Page 92)

“I turned my head in time to see the plasma, my plasma, separating in the neat line of vials. Then I passed out. Three nurses brought me back around, laughing. Their faces surrounded me from all sides. One of them stuck a donut in my mouth. “Little cutie!” she said. “And he’s joining the Infantry!” said the hot nurse. “But he can’t stand the sight of blood!” said another. They roared.” (Page 101)

“The day that I officially joined the ranks of all Gentlemen Cadets, past and present, of the Royal Military College of Canada, I am aware that it is supposed to be a solemn moment, but it’s kind of hard to feel solemn when you’re sweating your balls off in thick wool pants.” (Page 108)

“I’m not insulted when it’s me getting cock, but to see a woman face-down and sputtering and being publicly humiliated and toe-tapped in the gut – all for training purposes – is horribly insulting for everyone involved.” (Page 115)

“My Flight, November Flight, was part of Five Squadron, or Brock Squadron, named after the British soldier Isaac Brock. He died fighting for Upper Canada in 1812.” (Page 126) (THIS WAS MY SQN)

“To pay tribute, our squadron traditions include wearing “crazy” pants at wing functions, sporting the colour purple, and painting lobsters on our faces. Why lobsters? Because of the B-52’s song “Rock Lobster.” Rock rhymes with Brock. What a tradition!” (Page 126) (MY SQN)

“…We were woken at 05:00 to the deafening noise of April Wine’s “Oowatanite.” The music was so loud that Mack and I had to scream at each other while making our beds. Then came The Sex Pistols’ “Anarchy in the UK,” accompanied by the furious shouts of all three CSCs as they paraded the hallway in clickers, banging the butts of their rifles against our doors.” (Page 128)

“At RMC, the C7 is nothing more than a prop for parade and a pain in the arse.” (Page 129)

“A bronco fuck is a popular pastime among the infantry types or those trying to get into the Ritz – RMC’s underground male-only club. Another rite of membership was the red badge of courage – eating a girl out when she was on the rag. The method of bronco fucking, as explained to me, is to screw a girl doggie-style, and right before you blow your wad you slap her in the ass and say something like, “You’re the ugliest fuckin’ bitch I’ve ever seen in my life” Then you hang on. There was a close-to-undisclosed statistic floating around that over half of the women of any year at RMC were at some point raped by either their fellow cadets or their senior officers.” (Page 129-130)

“Every night at 22:00 the mess put out kye, a crate containing loaves of bread, jams, jellies, peanut butter, milk, chocolate milk, orange juice, and, the odd time, sandwiches.” (Page 163) (WISH WE HAD IT)

“I’d make it. I’d hold the reins, eat snakes. I’d become the Colonel if that’s what it took.” (Page 180)

“It was late. I got up out of bed and snuck across the inner field and onto the parade square. In the middle of the parade square I squatted, staring up at the clock tower as it struck three. The commissionaire walked fifty feet away from me, but he didn’t see me. I was still as the night, a professional hidden in this wide open space. I emptied my bowels, leaving a long steamy coil of shit for the whole college. If they wanted me they’d have to take all of me.” (Page 180)

“I ran to the Arch. I had the feeling that I was on the verge of understanding something important. I took a shit directly beneath the Arch, and when I was done I jumped off the wall into Lake Ontario and swam towards the point.” (Page 183)

“”Okay. This is your last question, Kempt: what does NCT stand for?” I had no idea. “I have no idea, Mr. Hutch.” “You did a good job, Kempt. Well done.” I was about to dismiss myself when Hutch said: “No Cunt Tonight, Recruit. Bet you’ll never forget that.”” (Page 187)

“Winter was the best time for napping, not only because of the added comfort of long johns under wool pants, but for the cushy splendor of our winter headdress. In October or November we traded our blue wedge cap with chinstrap in for the black astrakhan with the red flap, which was like wearing a fluffy, portable pillow. If you couldn’t tell a first-year cadet by his shoulder flashes, then you could certainly spot him from the drool encrusted on his astrakhan.” (Page 192)

“I went for another swim after taking a shit on the Commandant’s lawn.” (Page 194)

“Nixon made us pick up the vomit with our hands and smear it on each other’s toques.” (Page 195)

“After picking up our barf we had to pass it around to each other. Then we were lined up against the stone wall of Fort Henry and pelted with eggs.” (Page 196)

“They pushed us all into the bathroom where we stood under the freezing showers fully clothed. When we were all shivering and blue-lipped, they had us shut the showers off. We all lay face-down and they turned the lights off. The floor tiles stank. My face was on fire. People were moaning and shivering up against each other. I think I might have been moaning too. I felt a warm trickle hit my raincoat, my neck, my toque, my face. “They’re fucking pissing on us, man,” Billy whispered to Josh. I was hoping he would laugh. But he didn’t. He didn’t make a fucking sound.” (Page 196-197)

“”Keep your mouth closed, Kempt!” Ms. Pfaff screamed. Later I found out why: the murky water of this stagnant obstacle had served as a receptacle for shit, piss and puke to drunken senior cadets for weeks. We were swimming through a sewer, and all these people, even our parents – especially our parents, were laughing and clapping and spectating.” (Page 199) (THE SHIT PIT OBSTACLE!)

“There were no long swimming obstacles over five feet deep, and there hasn’t been since a recruit drowned after being forced to swim around the Point, even though he was so petrified of water that he had only ever bathed by sitting on the edge of the tub and sponging himself… They apologized and sent their condolences the next day when they found his bloated body floating in Lake Ontario, and were nice enough to hang his picture on the memorial staircase in Mackenzie… The inscription read: “Drowned while attempting the obstacle course”” (Page 199)

“We pushed on relentlessly for hours. It was a feeling beyond exhaustion, and I stopped caring about what anyone thought – I didn’t care that I was dragging my ass. I wanted to give up. I wanted to stop running, stop moving and crawl into the earth with a fire blanket for warmth. I wanted to weep, or have someone punch my lights out. The last obstacles are a blur: my body could barely move, like when you’re being chased in a dream and you can’t run away, or you just can, but not nearly fast enough. It dragged on, hour after hour, until finally, soggy and stupid, we shuffled to the bell at the flagpole to signal that November Flight had finished.” (Page 199-200)

“I had it in mind to contribute the Polaroid to the time capsule. It looked like all the rest – even I would be hard pressed to tell the difference between this picture and a grainy black-and-white one taken over fifty years ago. And I thought about how, after the first obstacle, when we were already soaked with mud and grease and rain and sweat and mud, not one gentlemen or lady cadet of N Flight was distinguishable from another. Maybe this was really how it was done – to have us become one being – a being with the solitary purpose of growth through survival.” (Page 200)

“Somebody wondered what the girls were doing. They should have, I think, been showering with us. After working together the way we had, we had earned that much.” (Page 202)

“It wasn’t very difficult getting laid at RMC; you just couldn’t be too choosy.” (Page 204) (HAHAHAHA!)

“These guys [Americans] came to Canada, enlisted with and fought for Canada, and died for Canada before their own country had anything to do with the Great War. One had to wonder what the hell had motivated them. But I wasn’t thinking about those guys. I was thinking about Gramps lying on a beach, looking across at the remains of his fragged leg.” (Page 210)

“He hated the military, he hated Engineering. He loathed his squadron, and the thought of RMC made him want to puke.” (Page 221) (STORY OF MY LIFE)

“I think my roommate screws his mother.” (Page 223)

“In England, for instance, during an RMC rugby trip to Sandhurst, Bug Jilm got caught pissing on the Proctav’s calves in the shower. Proctav turned to piss on Big Jilm and hit the hooker, Haunch, with his stream. Haunch turned toward Proctav, put his hand under his own ass, and squeezed out a dark log... I bolted out of the shower just in time to avoid the shit-flinging.” (Page 238) (This is disgusting!)

“I’d even afforded myself a long gaze up the skirt of the Commandant’s wife, catching a breathless view of cream see-through silk over a Brazilian manicured and perfumed pussy. I’d had so much wine by that point, that I honestly considered diving in there to eat her out, convinced that she wouldn’t move, wouldn’t say anything, that she’d just let me go down on her in a gracious, heartfelt act of anonymous cunnilingus.” (Page 239) (WHAT THE HELL! HAHA IS HE INSANE? YES… THE PROTAGONIST IS INSANE!)

“My dad was unconscious in his bed. The cancer had forced them to scoop out part of his brain during surgery. Mom had been told that the tumour was so twisted and large that it was impossible to relieve any pressure in the Colonel’s skill with-out taking a chunk of his mind. The surgeon had explained that it had already taken over ninety percent of his left hemisphere. He’d been at my rugby game just ten days ago.” (Page 242-243)

“The doctors surmised that he’d had the tumour for eleven years.” (Page 243)

“Before he died, the Colonel was struggling to relearn the art of speech, retraining his brain after they’d hacked part of it out. He fought like a soldier, and eventually lost to an enemy without a face. The enemy had infiltrated his own cells, attacked him with his own blood, hit at him in guerrilla-sized pockets hiding in his brain, eating his thoughts, his emotions, swallowing his understanding. His face remained shattered, disfigured by the operation, bloated with drugs, water retention, insipid unconsciousness.” (Page 246) (THIS IS THE WORST PART OF THE NOVEL!)

“I wanted my Dad back. Some man. Sitting in the butts I wept like an old man, swaying to and fro to the music of live rounds and wishing for Daddy.” (Page 268)

“We sat for a while, then I said, “You leaving that here?” She looked at the package in her hands. “Oh, no. It’s for you,” she said. She handed it over. “What is it?” “Open it,” she said. I opened the wrapping. “I found it in the attic,” she said. “I thought you might be looking for it.” It was the journal – the journal Gertie had sent me eons ago. I’d forgotten all about it. It seemed surreal that I’d once had grand plans of writing a poem. “Thanks,” I said. (Page 272)

“”Hey dumbass!” The voice chills me; I run with goosebumps, cold sweat. “Nice moves, Brother!” Gertie screams from the sidelines. I see her off to my left, standing with Ailish and Mom. She’s tanned and lithe and she’s got a mischievous grin. She’s a woman now. One glance tells me she’s seen things, she’s got stories, there are new chapters for us to write.” (Page 275)

“”Gertie,” I say. “Gertie?” Then I see what it is she’s looking at. There he is, right in the centre of her iris, in the flush of her face. In looking at her I can see it’s the Colonel she sees. Suddenly she looks uncomfortable, and rolls off me. She doesn’t say anything and nor do I. We still have to catch our breath. But it comes.” (Page 276)