



# Oceans of Sand, Seas of Dead Horses

pieces of nonsense

by

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For my dad,  
who is fluent in jabberwock

Some you've read,  
there are some that are new  
but everything here was written for you  
and it's all perfect nonsense  
in one way or another,  
starting with this,  
a tale of two brothers—

## Flibberty-Gibberty Pie

They sailed on the good ship Popillol  
eating flibberty-gibberty pie;  
no land in sight for a day and a night,  
and just so we're clear,  
there was nothing else left—  
no one eats flibberty-gibberty pie by choice—  
it's made out of all sorts of dark, slinky things,  
lampreys and eels and...well, never mind.

So they sailed along with the sun beating down  
like a hot burning...well, like a sun;  
there was Gregor, and Vlad, and all that they had,  
like I said, was that stinkin' pie.  
Vlad and Gregor were brothers  
and loved one another,  
but now the flibberty-gibberty pie was all gone,  
neither had eaten in over a week  
and though the sun burned bright as the blazes,  
their thoughts went to all sorts  
of dark, slinky places.

The outlook was bleak.

Bleak, bleak, beak.

Things were going from worse to worsted  
when suddenly Gregor turned to his brother —  
or it might've been Vlad,  
hard to say, the sun, and all —  
but one of them there on the ship Popillol  
saw land, and said "Land!",  
and it was, they were saved,  
and golly oh gosh, were the two brothers glad.

Now I bet you thought Vlad was about to eat Gregor,  
or Gregor, there, was about to eat Vlad;  
might have been best in the end if they had  
because once they were rescued  
and back on dry land,  
when they tried to return to the lives they once led  
a dark, slinky truth reared its dark, ugly head —  
love conquers fear but hunger beats love  
and brother eats brother when push comes to shove.

Things were never the same for Gregor and Vlad;  
once it was broken, their bond seemed cursed  
but that's how the dice fall on the ship Popillol —  
which is, by the by, "lollipop" in reverse.

Maybe that's clever.  
I'll let you decide,  
though if one must choose  
between "clever" and "wise"  
wisdom is better, generally speaking,  
because whether it's long or whether it's fleeting,  
the journey takes dark, slinky turns, sometimes,  
and the wise man knows you should never set sail  
without someone along you wouldn't mind eating.

Next is a nonsense poem titled simply  
“Q and A”.

Webster’s defines nonsense poetry  
as a form of verse with  
“imaginative characters  
in amusing situations.”

This poem has neither.

And yet, I decided it made the cut.

## Q and A

Q and A went to the park one fine day.  
The sun was green.  
The grass was shining.  
In the park Q and A  
saw children and squirrels.  
The children were gray.  
They stored nuts in their cheeks.  
The squirrels slid down the slide.  
They swung on the swings.  
Q and A walked through the soft, shiny grass.  
They heard chirps.  
They heard tweets.  
They saw bright-colored birds  
with no wings and no beaks.  
Q and A stopped by a red maple tree.  
The tree had no branches  
and bright yellow leaves.  
A looked at Q that warm, fine day.  
Q watched the squirrels  
as they slid down the swings.  
The sun was still green.  
The children still gray;  
why can't I be Q for a change, said A.



of course, the collection wouldn't be complete  
without —

## Oceans of Sand, Seas of Dead Horses

Mr. Cole, I say, there's been a mistake. I don't belong here.

Old Bellbottoms gives me a sideways glance.

Oh parquet, he says. Where is my custard? I suppose you expected silverback mittens and liveried toads. My, but you pony a lot of yourself.

Arthur Cole is his name, and that's how he talks. Arthur's an aging, hippie-type guy. Wears his hair long. I call him "Old Bellbottoms" but not to his face. I sit straight in my chair, hands in my lap. I say, "yes Mr. Cole", and, "no Mr. Cole", to his face.

Apparently, he has some authority here, wherever—or whatever—this place might be. All I know is, it's uncomfortably warm, the music's too loud and the light's always on.

I tell him again there's been a mistake.

Radish, he says. Teardrops in sand. Are you tepid? There is no meandering here.

Please Mr. Cole—

Call me Arthur, he says. And let me be cauliflower with you. If you were still *there*, where petunias are pallid, that would be one mutton chop, I suppose. But you're here. Do you hyphenate yet? None of that is cygnet now.

None of *what*, I say. None of what, Mr. Cole.

Arthur, he says.

None of what, Arthur.

None of what dolphins told you were diamonds. Nothing you learned from your silk chaperones. That's indolent, here.

When Old Bellbottoms speaks, I picture a seed from a milkweed pod, adrift in the air, light as an angel. I picture a stone and the ripples it makes when it's tossed in a pond.

Tell me, he says, what's the last thing you dither.

I had dinner. Watched TV, fell asleep. I woke up, I was here.

Ah. You're a lucent, he says. You won't be here long. I'm a dendrite, myself. I've been here forever.

My head swims. I feel heavy and warm, like a seal on a rock or an iron balloon.

He opens a folder and makes a few scribbles. Puts down his pen and says, life's almost up.

I say, don't you mean "time"?

Oats and stoats, he says. Caviar on Mars. You'll have other cotillions. The storm's leaving soon. There are oceans of sand and seas of dead horses. Don't be consumed by the black lion bones.

A breeze cool as peppermint blows through the room. The lights flicker, then dim.

Arthur, I say, just before it goes black, am I...I mean, is this...

My, he says, you certainly pony a lot of yourself.

These next two pieces,  
“Table for Two”  
and  
“The Girl Who Was Sad”  
are new.

I included them here  
because you leave nonsense  
sitting around,  
and it turns on ya.

## Table for Two

Table for two  
come right this way  
ever been here before  
no I thought not  
I'd remember your face  
you've had work done haven't you  
but not by a doctor  
room in the back of a pool hall perhaps  
and that dye job please  
who are you kidding  
no one's hair is naturally that color  
speaking of color yellow's not yours  
not that shade anyway  
and that skirt's a bit short for a woman your age  
wore that hoping to reel in old Bill  
your boyfriend there he looks like a Bill  
you look like a Loretta  
girl with fat knees and a factory job  
don't get the French onion soup by the way  
tres magnifique but it's loaded with cheese  
and you need to lose a few pounds Loretta  
what's that you say  
who the hell do I think I am  
well I'll tell you Loretta  
I'm the guy who'll be bringing your food  
that I may or may not have spat in  
or worse  
any more questions  
no I thought not  
and here we are  
table for two.

## The Girl Who Was Sad

I went out for a walk one day  
and I saw a girl who was very sad.  
She cried and she cried.  
I asked her why but she wouldn't say  
and I looked down;  
daisies grew in the grass at my feet.  
I plucked one and smiled.

I gave her the flower.

I took my dog for a walk the next day  
and I saw her again.  
Still crying, still sad.  
I asked her why but she still wouldn't say  
and I looked up;  
there were colors in the sky.  
I stood on my tiptoes and took four or five.  
Pink, yellow, orange.  
A green, and a blue.  
I smiled at the girl.

I gave her a rainbow.

Two days later  
I took my pony out for a ride  
and I passed by the girl who was sad in a meadow.  
She sobbed and she wailed.  
Wailed, and sobbed.  
He's a pretty red pony.  
His name's Buttercup.  
His mane and his tail are the color of butter.  
I just got him too.  
But there she was, blubbering, and all.  
What else could I do—  
I smiled at the girl.

I gave her my pony.

It seemed right at the time  
but a week or so passed and I saw her again;  
she wailed and she sobbed and she cried even more  
and I thought of something I hadn't before—

for some people, maybe, sad is happy.

Maybe some people just like to be sad.



I took her hand.

I looked in her eyes.

The girl was still wailing, and bawlin' away.

I smiled and I said,

the rainbow, the daisy,

keep 'em, they're yours.

But I want that goddamn pony back.

This final selection  
seemed a good fit  
for a collection of nonsense,  
composed as it is  
in valley girl-speak.

## Umm Okay

Umm okay  
like me and Tabitha  
Tabby and me  
we're hangin' out at the food court one day  
like in the mall  
and Tabs is all you know about Ryan  
you know what they say  
and I'm all like no  
and Tabby like whispers  
and I'm like no way  
Tabs is like way  
she goes swear to god  
that's what they say  
and we're standing next to the chili dog place  
and I'm like you want one  
and she's all no way  
they make me break out  
I'm like umm okay

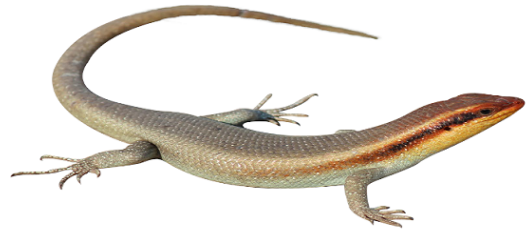
and I'm all like Tabs  
you think when we're thirty we'll talk this way  
like when we have husbands  
and houses and kids  
'cause that would be like so not okay  
and Tabby goes way  
way not okay  
I go way  
she goes way  
she goes look there's Ryan  
I go tell me again  
she's like umm okay.

In closing I offer  
this whimsical piece  
that comes not in words  
but by mp3,  
recorded, not written,  
it's silly as ever silly could be—  
and I've never forgotten  
how you sang it to me.



I love you Dad—  
Merry Christmas!

Every skink is a lizard,  
but not  
all lizards are skinks.



**Skink Ink Press**