

f r o m

**s i t u
a t i o n
c o m e
d i e s**

BARBARA

COLE

f r o m

**s i t u
a t i o n
c o m e
d i e s**

H a n d w r i t t e n P r e s s

Buffalo, New York

2002

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This book was made possible by grants from the SUNY Buffalo Poetics Department,
Charles Bernstein, Gray Chair; Robert Creeley, Capen Chair; Dennis Tedlock, McNulty Chair.

The letterpress printing of the cover was set in Caslon on a Vandercook 4 by Kyle Schlesinger.

Handwritten Press
Kristen Gallagher
19 Hodge Avenue #1
Buffalo, NY 14222

<http://handwritten.org>

meanwhile

I can only read you

autobiographical

which is far too distressing so stack it all in neat piles
perfect corners

did you hear me?

assumption: implicit carelessness

this is the
farthest from
the truth

I mean, I don't want to have to like
I mean, I can't see how what you mean is like
it's just well, I mean it's, it's just really, well, like really hard

water, eggs, cheese, milk, butter

There is a difference
between saying
"she does not remember"
and "she claims
not to remember"

If all the world were water
And all the water were ink

at the heart of the problem
a need to overprepare

Hi! Just calling to see how you're doing. Gimme a call.

With rings on her fingers
And bells on her toes

Buy 1 get 1 equal or lesser value free.

It would be told: on her 4th birthday she opens every package with simultaneous enthusiasm and reserve, calmly disassembling each present of its wrapping, only to exclaim: "just what I always wanted" each time, regardless of the revealed contents

Is this thing on?

even then

the need to be maternal,
to surround myself with people I think I have the ability to make feel special

Did you see where I put my

Lock the door would you? so this too will go unwritten

Did you get my e-mail?

NEW! Improved Formula!

OBJECTS IN MIRROR ARE CLOSER THAN THEY APPEAR

no one seems
to get it. this
what I have

been trying to
tell you. this
is the absolute
most one can

Where'd you put that receipt?
Are you going to get ready ?

Sing a song
Of sixpence

Stay tuned for station identification.

Will that be cash or charge?

one can grow used to anything, even this
sound of water hitting shore

the sheer relentlessness—

this need to focus on other things

Did you close the door?

I know you're busy but
this will only take a minute
of your time

all I ever wanted was to feel a little less responsible.

The imprecision of these terms

Somehow I sensed I would be going away—and no one knew for how long.

It's a honey of an O

It's cool. I just think
it's cool. I mean, it's
really neat and like
what I get out of it is
just this really good feeling.

Charmin Bounty Tide

A r e
y o u
r e a d y
t o
g o ?

But shouldn't I be able to understand it?

What the world needs now is another supermarket book section.

enclosed please find the requested materials

Otherwise, why write it?

Please bow your heads
for a moment of silence

If for any reason you are not 100% satisfied with your purchase,
return it up to 10 days after receipt of order for an immediate refund.

So,
what
do
you
want
for dinner

Would you understand if I said: today I cried green tears
Could you speak up?

I'm not here—leave a message.

That'll be \$48.84

She shall have music wherever she goes
and so a day is not really this complicated
thing:

a little soup for lunch, fight drowsiness in the
afternoon,

money changes hands, toilet's clogged again

areyoufeelingokay

and to the nation for which it stands

The transition of silence from comfortable to disconcerting.

The sudden realization.

Now.

It is over.

Seven, eight, lay them straight

Certificate of authenticity included free of charge

But no that's not it
because actually it has been over for a long time, so long
that suddenly you cannot remember when it *wasn't* over.
all I ever wanted was to not have to say it.

It's the realization itself that is so baffling,
like a delayed post-script.

Save 35¢ when you buy 2—16 oz. size or larger

did you hear
what I just said?

This program has committed a fatal error and will shut down

Can you hold on?

Even as a child, inspired with a new project,
she would get so excited during preparation—
just the assembling of materials
proved overwhelming
before she ever got started.

pickles onions on a sesame seed bun

Inevitably my parents would give me a few
St. Joseph's chewables to calm the cogs
and make me go lie down.

did you turn off the lights?

this

isn't

what

I imagined

store Can I fax it to you? What the world needs now is another paint-your-own-pottery

Please stand.

must you always be this
d i s a p p o i n t e d ?

Forgive me for reminding you
Of naughty things you mustn't do

hard of hearing much of my life—itself an interesting characterization:
if hearing is hard, by definition, could listening be easy?

Ladies and Gentlemen, at this time the captain has turned on the seatbelt lights.

three, four, shut the door

it's the iodine in the water—
need more iron

Turn around bright eyed

Punished as a girl of seven for over-pronounced g's.
Resulting overcompensations: said "sin" instead of "sing"

What the world needs now is another Disney cartoon gone Broadway musical

said "saw" instead of
"song"

went upstairs to kiss a fella

At 3, my mother enrolled me in a YMCA
"Cooking with Kindergartners" class.
We weren't allowed, obviously, to use
the stove so our quote unquote cooking
entailed essentially an early version
of culinary presentation arts. For
instance, one of our classes was on Frank

the Frankfurter which basically involved taking a hot dog, cutting a slit half way through the length of the weiner to make legs (we also weren't permitted to use any knives, so the teacher did the cutting too). Our part was decorating the furter with condiments. The instructor demonstrated how to make "Frank" by forming a ketchup smile, mustard eyes, mustard bowtie and ketchup buttons. Improving on this design, I opted instead for a mustard pearl necklace and kicky A-line ketchup skirt.

Thank you for holding.

came tumbling after.

I am conscientiously careful as to how I say 'what'—a frequent peppering of my speech—a carefully pronounced 'what' the eyebrows raised to connote interest and curiosity as if to say, 'how's that?'

There is no cost to complete this form.

But, I mean, I don't understand.

Shut the door, would you?

And, like, if I can't understand it, shouldn't it be, like, not so hard?

Sometimes you need a little finesse, sometimes you need a

lot

the implicit politeness of ‘pardon’ without explicitly begging ‘excuse me’

We are gathered here today

But he says “wut” staccato and, she thinks to herself, this is one way that he is very much a

Stand with feet in alignment with your shoulders and breathe

Power automated door—

KEEP MOVING

When the teacher came around, inspecting our dogs, she told me that my Frank did not look “right.” I explained that mine was a Franny the Frankfurter—a *girl* frank. The teacher, frowning, told me next time to follow directions.

The tears welling up,
I struggled to wipe off
the disallowed necklace and
skirt but ended up just
leaving an orange stain on
the weenie and ripping my
bun.

Coming soon to a theatre near you.

plop plop

Did you remember

your mother’s birthday

fizz fizz

Hey, would you turn it down?

“ When you disagree with someone, do not feign agreement for the sake of ‘keeping the peace.’

Change the topic.

Look away.

If you are sure of your ground, **you may** disagree actively and **emotionally.**”

Did you feed the dog?

For customer service, press 1

For assistance with your account statement, bill, or billing dispute,
press 2

Wait, so what are you saying ?

Please wait in single-file line.

these mini dramas staged in grand scale

still trying to cut out carbs

Do you know

what you want ?

Ashes, ashes, we all fall down

You got the right one baby, un, huh

Federal Methodology: a formula, defined by statute; used to determine the expected family contribution (**EFC**) for federal

Oh, I meant to ask you

To hear these choices repeated, press the star button

Your handwriting: a ghost I will never grow accustomed to.

What the world needs now is another Hooters
When the wind blows

It's not so much a request as a desperate search for an answer :

Givemeacall ?

the cradle will rock. Don't touch that dial.

Why can't you stand up straighter

and an infallible memory is not the gift everyone seems to think it is

Say base-ball. Say play-ground. Say pic-nic. Say cup-cake.

Do you know where I put my

so turn to work because what else can silence

Can I make an appointment ?

I don't recall asking for
cooking lessons as much as
I remember wanting an
apron.

And just look at all these nooks and crannies

you

were

saying...?

all I ever wanted was a more efficient goodbye

it's the way you ask a question as if you already know the answer to this and

everything

So make a point of being neat

And mind your manners while you eat

hold on? Can you hold on?

That'll be \$29.52

Please remain seated until your row has been called.

In my earliest memories, I am pretending with my mother that we are neighbors—housewives in adjacent houses—imagining myself her equal in domestic prowess and back-fence friendship.

with every year, the checklist becomes more improbable. the timetable rendered impossible.

The scenario is the same each time:

ritual already a joy at 4

Listen up
please.

Say flip-flop. Say pow-wow. Say back-pack. Say french-fry.

get off my father's apple tree

Again, this issue of influence.

How does your garden grow?

The Story: my Indian Chief husband and I returned from our honeymoon in Hawaii to discover our home vanished, destroyed by an unspecified "storm"

"nothing," I would insist, "nothing left but a stump"

Did you remember to get gas?

no, no, that's not what I meant

Always
overanalytical, I try
to decipher the
little girl mind that
composes such
tragedy and seemingly
delights in the
telling

What the world needs now is another Barbie Dream House

W h a t p r o d u c e s t h e s e p r o p e n s i t i e s ?

Did you make it to the bank?

May I have your attention.

Seventeen, Eighteen, maids-a-waiting

I wish someone had told me

these secrets mounting up between us
and who's to count the betrayals?

Would it be bitter of me to say that I do not want anymore stories

of the homeless man, the quasi-idiot as hero, the child as sage,
the superintellectual as techno-savvy-genius, the blue-collar slash factory
worker as philosopher, no more stories of daughters about fathers where the 'she'
is not even a thinly veiled stand-in, no more fanatical preachers,
Bake me a cake as fast as you can
No more 'I wrote this on the train here'
Oh what a relief it is
Can you get it to me by 9 AM?

Let's hear it for the little lay-dee

Your call is important to us.

the words one could have said

the volume alone is distressing

When will you be back ?

Supplies are limited.

newspapers stacked by the door
collected, stored up, on display

Late again—why can't you be on time?
Always, this question of readership.

We love to see you smile

PARKING RESTRICTED
ALL OTHERS KEEP OUT

do you have a
minute

If I say Deleuze Wittgenstein
Stein stein stein
If I say vis-à-vis vis-à-vis vis
Could I, would I, be then
smart?

avoid disappointment by
placing your order
right
now or by calling toll free

W h a t ' s t h e p o i n t ?

We ask at this time that you remain in your seats with seatbelts securely fastened.

Did you eat
yet?

the insomniac's disdain for sleep this hard

but escape has many faces

The Surgeon General warns smoking may be hazardous to your health.

Just bring out the Hellmann's and bring out the best.

This little pig went to market.

Keep a food journal—don't worry about fat grams, just record every calorie ingested.

Your head feels warm—are you
okay?

and in the process of correcting so many other wrongs
how many more mistakes accumulate

Are you on the other line ?

My standard Crayola creation required a 1-inch border of royal blue sky running horizontally across the top of the page and a 1-inch border of kelly green grass running across the bottom of the page. Receiving a painter's easel and quote good watercolors for my 8th birthday, my uncle the novice artiste taught me to increase the amount of water I used to lighten the tones of blue, starting at the top of the page with a "sky blue" and gradually distilling it to an "eggshell blue" as I brought the skyline down to meet the grass. Confused, I questioned a sky that touched the grass.

“So we all walk around in the sky?”
I asked, incredulous. For weeks I
walked around, elbows jutting out,
trying to see the sky touching
my arms.

The days of calorie counting are over—watch every fat gram that goes past your lips.
Did you take out the trash?

Say pop-corn. Say hot-dog. Say pig-pen. Say uh-oh.

This is just a courtesy call.

No more introductions that summarize the poem.

or even worse, explications.

What’s she talking about?

what we claim as ours.

And so the poor dog had none.

No more readings of all single-page poems joined by the standard
segue
of “this next one is called” and “this next one” and “and this one”

I’m just fucking with you.

all I ever wanted was one less glance at the clock.

And while we’re at it:

No single word titles raised to quasi-importance by the brilliant
(not-to-mention unprecedented) addition of “The”

Incessant, this problem of audience

(i.e. “The Visit” “The Dream” “The Goodbye,” etcetera)

Silence is golden. Please respect your neighbors.

excuse me,

do you have

the time?

Hey, what's the big idea?

sometimes you feel like a nut

An inappropriate question: as if time might be a commodity for the possessing.

sometimes you don't

there are more and more theys

Or as if time were an object that gets
passed around and traded like “hot
potato.”

that summer when I could not stop stacking bricks.

Of course, this proves significant.

Or the sense of entitlement implicit
in being designated “it” in
tag.

Have you driven a Ford lately?

Some like it in the pot nine days old

Which brings me to the question at hand:

i s t h e r e a l i m i t t o w h a t c a n b e f r a m e d
?

One hour service limited to machine capacity.

Time flies and you are there

Time cries and Could you grab the door?

trying to understand what it means to feel the sky around me.

Coupon redemptions paid by manufacturer

Good to the last drop

Five, Six, pick up sticks

and then there is her “what” which is like her “why”—accusatory, scolding, annoyed, as
if to say “I’m pretending I don’t know what you just said when, actually, not only did I
hear you the first time but now I’m making myself even more pissed off by making you
repeat it”

Your answers on this form will be read by a machine

how now brown cow

accusation: OVER-COMMUNICATION

which I consider neither criminal nor a blessing

all I ever wanted was to be a bit surprised

I'd like to buy the world a Coke

“ Smile brightly at people. Look and sound pleased to see them ”

How much is *your* estimated net worth ?

Once it has happened,
you can't help missing your name.

Searching in vain for what could never appear.

If friends kept secrets and didn't tell you

Wouldn't you feel left out too?

with silver buttons buttons buttons all down her back back back

Feel the Difference! Softest Thickest Ever!

must you say it in that tone?

At times it reads like an impossible math problem : If person A is going in one direction while persons X, Y, and Z, are traveling in the opposite direction, and

forces L, M, and N are imposed, how long will it take for person A to reach the final destination?

Early to bed and early to rise

The key word is “problem”

Hurry in for best-of-season savings.

Did you get that fax?

because I have never been skilled with problems that have only one answer

You forgot the cheese, didn't you.

rooty tooty

fresh and fruity

convinced myself mathematics was for the feeble-minded because it excludes the possibility of possibilities.

The chances of resolution automatically confined

Sit UBU sit. Good dog.

Call me later?

there
there
my pretty

This little pig had roast beef.

Is it too confessional to relate this anecdote?
Until I was 11 the type of bread my family ate was called “King” before we changed to “Family.” Shortly after this revolutionary shift, on an errand to the corner store, I inadvertently bought a loaf of “King.” Annoyed by my forgetfulness, my mother insisted I return the “King” bread in exchange for “Family.” Always destroyed by any accident regardless of severity or degree, I returned ashamed, red-faced, and frustrated with myself, trading in my now-discarded “King” for my newly-desired “Family.”

does this story mark me as a woman ?

Riding home by bike, I gripped the top of the bread bag with my handle bar and let

the loaf dangle. Of course, with the momentum of the bike, the bread swung into the wheel, tethered and ripped all over the street, the shattered plastic bag and bread bits clinging to the aluminum spokes. I gathered the pieces of my “Family,” cradling it in my arms the rest of the way home. Swaddling the torn and disintegrated loaf—as if my wanting it to be whole again could make it so.

Fill out these forms and just take a seat.

did you remember to call the repairman?

kiss a little longer

Nine, ten, a good fat hen

hold hands a little longer

The embarrassment she feels when a student, for example, signs a letter “Love” or better yet, the open heart—followed by a comma no less—so hopeless not to mention

f o o l i s h l y
f e m i n i n e .

'I is always 'they'

well, will you be back soon?

retaining fluid Oversaturated, undernourished,

Hold all questions until the end.

Watch your salt intake

girls— What I mean is, there are certain types of women—

who make it harder for the rest of us.

A shirt that tight for instance.

It begins with a buzz and ends with a hum

display? Is it possible for you to feel beautiful without your tits on

this worrying over distribution

Did you get that attachment I sent you?

M is for the million things she gave me

Scratch my previous claim:

you can indeed know someone too

well

in order to change, one must acknowledge the
system is faulty

Are you almost ready yet?

Pay special attention to all mailings from our office and submit the documents by the stated due date to maintain your on-time status

the fairest of them all

I only need
a bit of
your time

Advil B-complex green tea

Once upon a time
there was an engineer.

She is rendered nervous over blueberries,
and I notice the way his hands tremble

ChooChoo Charlie was his name we hear.

We may not be able to honor orders received late so do not delay in ordering

why are your feet so cold?

The inevitable: at some point you too will say the way I look at you is a disappointment

Is that your other line? Call me back?

For when she awoke, she found it a joke

At 3 the teacher
asks the class "what
do you want to be
when you grow
up?" So fall for the
boy who answers "a
bird." I have
always been
interested in people

who speak in
impossibilities.

this dance of averted eyes and loaded words

When I say 'you' I mean 'we'

I've got the fever for the flavor

I would like to say "it's all in your imagination" but little point in lying at this juncture

Don't even start
on the inanity
of nursery school
fostering long-
term career
p l a n n i n g .

Watch your mouth.

Call now for the location of a 24-hour store near you.

this is not at all how I planned it

Dollar Day Savings in every aisle!

It isn't fun to mope or pout
While other children play about.

did you get a chance to read it yet?

One, two, buckle my shoe.

are you even listening to me ?

Please pardon our appearance

if only he had told me

It's too bad that birthdays always become tests that the people you most want to pass
seem destined to fail.

So what if the only philosophy I can handle right now comes in a fortune cookie

Can you
hold
a minute?

found pictures of you: enough to wreck the week

to better serve you
You're always hurrying here or rushing off there
Jumping in the shower running off to work dashing out the door
racing through traffic jumping out of bed flying up the stairs
Could you speak a little louder please?

The idiocy of watching the elevator numbers
pretending you have any control

You forgot the milk.

Understanding, quite suddenly, that what I had perceived all this time as
waiting

was the actual living

Place your order anytime anyday

Did you ever see such a thing in your life?

In the coatroom at the back of my third grade classroom, on the wood between two brass coat hooks, some anonymous person scrawled the letters “d-a-m” in pencil. Scandalized Catholic school girls with a strong sense of correcting what is not right, one of the more outspoken summoned the teacher to the rear of the classroom to witness this desecration. Much to our surprise, our teacher made light of this infraction, instructing us that whoever had taken it upon herself to deface school property on her own time, could likewise find the time to erase it at her convenience. Moreover, the teacher sneered, before one attempted to deface property, she should be confident in her spelling.

Limited offer. One per customer.

See store for details.

Are you taking those calcium supplements—and you need more vitamin C

Does that come with fries?

Confused, one of my fellow students explained over cookies at snack that “d-a-m” referred to a beaver’s dam whereas the curse word “damn” was spelled “d-a-m-n.” Unsure as to what exactly a beaver’s dam was, I found myself even more baffled by the fact that such a simple word had a silent ‘n’ which until that point I did not know could ever be a silent letter. Based on the nature of this new knowledge however I reasoned that perhaps the secret silent letter had been inserted to signal its existence as a curse word.

What’s that noise? Did you hear that?

Manufacturer’s coupon. Expires end of year.

Along these same lines, I began to wonder if perhaps all curse words had strange silent letters. After this incident, I spent much time trying

to determine when I
would finally be old
enough to reach the
much-anticipated
spelling lesson on curse
words—

the regret of leaving without looking back

And the dish ran away with the spoon
even though I had heard what I was sure
must be every combination,
juxtaposition and usage of all known
curse words on the schoolbus or at
recess, these words were clearly not
permitted as one's working
vocabulary.

Certain items may not be available in all stores.

What the world needs now is another boob job.

Not responsible for typographical errors.

When it rains, it pours.

I envisioned the day when the teacher
would command, "Class, turn your
spellers to Chapter 15" and there
before me on brightly-illustrated
pages would be all the forbidden

words. As if until one wrote the words in neat columns in a marble-covered notebook, there has been no formal introduction. I guessed that I would need to be quite old before given the permission to use such words in sentences and tried to imagine some unknown teacher standing at the front of the room, calling out the words “shit” “boob” “crap” as the class bent over their loose-leaf paper carefully forming two columns of the correctly spelled words in immaculate penmanship.

We are not responsible for lost, destroyed, stolen, mutilated, or expired certificates

Please wait to be seated.

That'll be \$12.56

Or myself, older and taller, in a spelling bee, standing in erect “ladylike” posture behind my desk and carefully pronouncing “prick” before

enunciating the letters p-r-i-c-k clearly and confidently before once again repeating “prick.”

Pardon me, are those bugle boy jeans you’re wearing?

We treat every customer call confidentially

dressed in yella went upstairs to kiss a fella.

Yet, noting the almost unilaterally monosyllabic nature of most curse words, (with the obvious exceptions of “motherfucker” “bastard” or “shitface,”) I was quite sure that these words were not that complex and thus high school would be far too late for such a spelling lesson. Weighing the

time to make the donuts

star of the American road

obvious simplicity of the words’ construction against my notions of how grown-up one needed to be to use such words and further taking into account the ages of those kids on the bus who seemed most comfortable and daring in both frequency and creative combinations, I reasoned that it must be

sixth grade that such a spelling lesson
would ensue. Yes, sixth grade sounded

about right.

did you turn off the oven?

Assets include real estate (other than your primary residence), trust funds, money market funds, mutual funds, certificates of deposit, stocks, bonds, other securities, Education IRAs, installment and land sale contracts, commodities, etc.

Please no more “flowering penises”
no women’s breasts as bread
for the kneading

the San Fran
cisco treat

And what is it about a man over 50 that breasts settle in as permanent fixtures in the writing?

In preparation for our descent, please stow all portable electronic
devices at this time until we have arrived at the gate.

that moment of returning to old work and suspecting
it is not even half as good as you remembered

cents asked her mother mother mother for 25 cents cents

what

do

you

think

?

Violators will be prosecuted.

Whereareyou

Whatareyoudoing

question

even hearing loss comes down to a

of form or function

Do not leave any questions blank

he says “you know what I mean” as if saying it makes it so

I searched you out in every room without knowing—you
were lost in the seaweed.
Somehow I had overlooked (denied?) the degree of my intrusion.

“ Do not depreciate yourself
or become flustered when someone compliments you with
sincerity. At the very least,
offer an equally sincere ‘thank you’. Or,
reward the compliment by
saying,
‘That’s an **awfully** nice thing to say.
I appreciate it’.”

I mean obstruction.

What is your approximate projected annual income five years from
now?

did you get the phone?

I meant destruction.

what did I tell you

that realizing—sudden and alarming. like blinking sirens in the rear view
mirror.

It was there all along, gradually approaching—part of the realization is the
knowledge,

embarrassment,

that you did not see it sooner.

You've come a long way, baby!

What the world needs now is another Toyotathon.

It goes unnoticed and then suddenly announces
itself.

We reserve the right to limit, modify, delete, or otherwise change any of the rules, terms and conditions, benefits, reward or reward levels pertaining to the program at our sole discretion, with or without notice.

a vitamin E deficiency

and ironically enough, I know the precise date
when all my calendars were destroyed

The pulse can't resist quickening.

When I say destroyed, I mean lost.

You wonder: Did I do something?

You move aside—it passes.

At some point, you must start again.

Book number _____ of 100.
May 2, 2002