

# *The Author, His Works*

Joseph Michaels

The author, his works. Emaciated grip, unpublished: his secret glare. Is a person. Is a peer. Is male, though some days feels the opposite. Here is the man with ample moustache and tan eyebrows, large round head screwed on like a helmet. Seeking with groans, difficult to love. Living, it seems, in a room entirely of corners. Smells like bubble gum and hot popcorn, has no memory of the home left unpossessed. Unaware of his true height, he crouches slightly at all thresholds. Is sincere. Is ironical. Is ironical to be sincere. Unaware of contradictions—there are usually contradictions. See him in the kitchen, burning the toast. See him with the baby, being needlessly cruel. Conditional love is still contingent: watch him as he chooses. Writes a novel called *Four Tomorrows*. Writes a book of short stories called *Buffalo Sauce*. Aged, generational, haunted by affection. Well-washed, well-maintained, this is the one that makes it. This is the one that makes it, he says, and then it doesn't. Feels a place like fear and smells it through to the roots of his gut. Is afraid. Is afraid of everything. Has a fantasy that Gertrude Stein didn't bathe, has a dream in the night where he washes her dark body. Meets her in

a restroom at the Albany bus station, leaves the water running to help her as she pees. Needs time. Feels time. Wind passes laterally, lifts up left buttock on the warm wooden chair. Wants to get better, wants to really try. Wants to write new rules for how to hurt fewer people. Wants to stick with it. Writes a noir called *What a Man*. Writes a children's story called *When He Gets Back*. He believes in the difficulty of faith and autobiography, he sees his own faith better in the moments of its leaving. See him in the back room at Carmine's Restaurant. See him in the driveway, idling the engine. Dreaming of his mother's house and Gertrude Stein. Mustard in glass bottles, play-acting house, baked nutmeg butter cookies hard and bright as the inauspicious piece of jade waiting to be tooled. He wishes chronology weren't so arrogant, sees a childhood reflected back at him through the eyes of his one daughter. Wants to be a father, wants to be a good one. Wants to be a mother, giving up his breast. Believes in a God by the vending machine light, seeks out new places for where a God might fit. The author, his works. His realization and testament. Art saves nothing, takes no one down from ledges. Preserves only its own creation. No idea but the idea of a visitor, no function but the function it contains. Writes out a memoir and calls it *Mistakes*. A short poem entitled *The Way I Should Be*. Wants to get better, wants to really try. Wants to stick with it, wants to think that he will. Something inside him capable of more. Puts his feet up on the desk, marvels at the floor plan. Knows a cousin of yours from west Bayonne, has a mother with that same name. Is a room. Is a friend. Is an institution and a feeling. The feeling of a sailboat, a feeling like survival, caught up and manic on the winds of the sun. Builds up a tool collection at the back of the garage, works there in the dark with his daughter nearby. Eats. Sleeps. Has been found wanting. Has been found warbling. Wants to establish a morality for being only decent. See him in the church on Sunday, mumbling a prayer. See him in the struggle as he tries to impart lessons. Worlds will not be changed—the author, his works. The author, his charm. His dedication. His witlessness and selflessness. Whose strangeness is not strangeness but instead a kind of sharing, limited alone by shortened reach. Our Author who art working, hallowed be thy productivity. Thy time will come, Thy name will be undone, in fallen leaves as it is in dust. Satisfy us this unknown future our welcome into want, and read to us our romances as we romance those we better know. Buy a house, build

a house, build a seven-year-old girl. The green and the golden, the dark and iron world. Creation, like compulsion—like reproduction, like singing in the shower, like orgasms in solitude—the conception of a joy or dread so intimately personal it must pretend a public face. The author, how he lives. His works. His secret glare. I met him on the hill one day some decades ago, just back of the grazing field and the old building's commons. I lured him out with cheddar cheese, and he shrunk considerably when I touched him. For years we would take journeys together: the size of a pine nut, barely, smuggled just that close in the outside pocket of my winter coat. I kept him in a ring box with air holes punched through to the velveteen top, took him to the best of parties, fed him lettuce when he asked, bought him new clothes and his daughter nice bracelets, and he lived like that until he died.

8