

Transcript for

The Game Ain't Over Til The Fatso Man Sings (Chapter 4)

Ira Glass

Act Two. The game ain't over till the fatso man sings.

When little kids talk about a crush or love, are they talking about more or less the same thing that adults mean by those words?

Well Howie Chackowicz remembers how he thought about love in grade school. He wanted girls to like him, but they never seemed to.

Howie Chackowicz

Looking back on it, I think part of the problem was how I thought about love as a kid. I had a few ideas about how you get someone to love you that, in retrospect, weren't particularly helpful to me.

First, I thought that if they could see me sleeping, they would immediately fall for me. When I went to sleep each night, I would consciously try to sleep in a cute way, just in case the girls I liked would peep on me. I'd roll into a fetal ball like a kitten, and scrunch my head into my pillow, hand under my head.

I imagined that all the popular girls, intent on cruelly pranking me, had a ladder and climbed up to my bedroom window. But instead of painting fatso, or whatever, on my window as planned, their collective hearts would melt as they saw me sleeping like a babe, an angel, buried snugly into my blankets. I guess it was some crossover of a kids' knowledge of what was endearing to adults, applied to romance.

My second theory was that they'd fall in love with me if they could see me reading aloud. This conclusion came out of my experience with nieces and nephews who'd fawn all over me when I'd read to them. By age 6 I was already an uncle and I felt this lent me a certain maturity.

Often, at recess time, I'd go to the back of the classroom and read from a selection of kids' books. All the kids would gather around in a circle, and I'd pore through books like *Percy the Rose-eating Donkey*, affecting the voices of the different characters and speaking with a preacher's sweaty charisma.

I'm not sure why, but everyone in my class seemed to love the way I hammed it up. The only problem with this was the girls in class ended up treating me like their uncle. They'd call me Uncle Howie and talk to me in baby talk. Wead me a stowwy, Uncle Howie, and so on. Don't get me wrong, I loved the attention. But I wanted love, not wuv.

So I had all these ideas about love. And of all the girls I knew, my theories were most intensely targeted at one girl-- the most popular girl in school, Karen.

She became my most serious crush. I carried a torch for Karen from grade one to grade six.

Though Karen didn't seem to like me much, one thing I'd learned about love on TV was that if one was sincere, love can break all boundaries. I believed that there would come a moment where I'd speak the words "I love you" to Karen. With such tenderness and tears that it would break her heart, and she would cry, too and confess her love. I would allow one, brave tear to travel down my cheek.

[UNINTELLIGIBLE]

Howie Checkowicz

Jonathan is very, very, adorable. Now years later, I'm friends with Karen. Actual friends with both her and her husband, Alan. I even worked for him for a while. Karen and I have talked before about our elementary school days, usually steering the conversation towards how mean she was to me. But I've never really spoken with her about puppy love. I wanted to know what she remembered, whether she knew I even had a crush on her at all.

Howie Chackowicz

Who are your interests? We'll go year by year.

Karen

Keith, definitely, love interest. Barry Seller, the big one.

Howie Chackowicz

Loren Wilter?

Karen

Yes. Yes, yes, yes.

Howie Chackowicz

Notice who she doesn't mention. Even though it was so far in the past, the crush is still such an awkward thing to talk about. When I finally did tell her about how I felt about her when we were kids, I sort of mumbled my way through it, backpedaling all over the place. I even forgot to actually point the mic at her.

Howie Chackowicz

When I was in elementary school you were a big crush. You see?

Karen

Aw, I didn't even know that, you know. I thought I was just responsible for tormenting you, I didn't realize that there was a crush involved. Maybe at the time I knew? But I had no clue, actually, that you liked me, when I think back on it now.

Howie Chackowicz

One time, in the field, Keith told me to tackle you. He said, if you tackle her, she'll like you, and then you'll be popular.

Karen

That is so funny. You know what, that's very good advice, I think.

Howie Chackowicz

It was very bad advice, because I almost broke your leg.

Basically what happened was, I was standing off to the sidelines. I wasn't often picked to play. This was like a co-ed game, and seemed very fun.

And Keith said, I'm going to throw Karen the ball. You know, he compounds his r's. He goes, you tackle her, Howie, tackle her-- tackle her hard. And you'll be popular and everyone will like you. I'm like, OK, I'm going to do it.

And I remember you were kind of running, and the sun is shining off and your hair is bouncing. And you caught the ball. And I don't know what came over me, I just remember thinking that's what I had to do, was I had to tackle you. And I tackled you really hard. And you're on the ground, you're holding your leg.

Now, any kind of logic would have dictated that's not the way to get the girl you like.

Karen

Yeah, but a lot of times, the way young kids react or show affection is through physical-- like I was telling you before, I wrestled with Barry. Because you just want to be close.

Howie Chackowicz

This is not how she felt about it at the time. Because I felt the harder I tackled her, the more popular I'd be. I took her down like it was prison football.

The game came to an immediate end, everyone circling Karen's writhing body, the football near her lay totally still. She was holding her leg, looking up at me saying, you tub of lard, you broke my leg.

Karen doesn't remember any of this. She doesn't remember how she then jumped up, got four or five of her girlfriends in a huddle, and miraculously choreographed an impromptu kicking chorus line of Fatso Man to the tune of the Village People's Macho Man. Fatso, fatso man, I would not like to be a fatso man. Fatso, fatso, man, I would not like to be a fatso. At that point, they all threw their hands up in the air in unison.

I remember it so perfectly. But then, after all, it was my crush. She had no recollection of the time the school photographer called her Daisy Duke and then turned around and called me Boss Hog.

Or the fitness day that I'd beat her in a *Chariots of Fire*-style race.

She didn't even remember the biggest story of them all-- our sixth grade graduation dance.

Howie Chackowicz

Now, the last dance was Stairway to Heaven. I went to the dance to dance with you. But I couldn't, because as I was walking, a line of people walked by and blocked me. And then, it was a split second, but then you were in the arms of a grade seven.

Karen

Really? What was a grade seven doing in our graduation--

Howie Chackowicz

They crashed our grade six graduation dance.

Karen

Who was it?

Karen

I don't know. He was and thin, he had longish hair, and he came through the back door of the gym.

You don't remember the last dance?

Karen

No.

Howie Chackowicz

You kissed this gentleman.

[LAUGHTER]

Karen

Did I? Like a peck or a make out kiss? I don't think I was making out in grade six.

Howie Chackowicz

No. By adult standards, it was a peck. I'd say by grade six standards, you got laid.

It turns out that Karen remembered exactly one story about me.

Karen

Well my most vivid memory of you is sitting in class and the teacher asking us to pull out our homework. And you opening up your desk, and the paper kind of overflowing out of that desk. And you rummaging frantically through the desk trying to find what homework we were asked

to take out and not being able to find it, and our teacher walking up your desk, everyone knowing what was coming because it probably happened two days before. And the teacher just lacing into you and dumping the contents of your desk on the floor.

Howie Chackowicz

Now, like when that happened, did I seem cool, like a bad boy?

[LAUGHTER]

Karen

No. Everyone felt very, very sad for you.

Howie Chackowicz

More than anything, I wanted Karen to notice me. But not in that way. I think the problem with my theories was that I expected her to fall for me the same way I fell for her. That she would see me from afar, reading to our classmates, sleeping like a little prince. I thought that's what it took for someone to fall in love. I wanted her to think that this was the real me. I wanted to think it was the real me.

And the truth of it was that the real, real me was getting screamed at and having his desk spilled out on the ground each day.

There's a way you can love a girl in grade six that you'll never have again. There's something about kids, or at least the way I was a kid, that is purely romantic, in the truest, love sonneting sense of the word.

Only a year or two later, my theories in the ways of love had changed drastically. By seventh grade, I had some spin the bottle sessions under my belt. And I had concluded that instead of dreaming about a true love I couldn't have, I should get a little bit more pragmatic about the whole thing.

One night, after deciding I wanted to have a real girlfriend, I called up identical twin sisters I liked, Darlene and Elizabeth.

Darlene answered. I told her that I liked her, and I asked her if she'd like to officially go out with me.

She kindly told me that she only liked me as a friend, but she was flattered.

No problem, I said. Is Elizabeth home?

She passed me over to her twin, who I made the same offer to. And Elizabeth said, sure. And that was it. They're identical twins, what was the difference, I figured.

We went out for two whole months. It was great.

Ira Glass

Howie Chackowicz is the creator, writer, and artist behind Howie Action Comics.

Coming up, kids talking kid talk, adults not understanding. But you will. As our special *Kids Say the Darndest Things* edition of our show continues in a minute. From Public Radio International, when our program continues.

It's *This American Life*, I'm Ira Glass. Each week on our program, of course, we choose some topic, bring you a variety of different kinds of stories on that topic.

Today's program, Kid Logic. We wanted an hour filled with stories in which kids employ kid thinking. Especially the kid thinking that is perfectly logical but completely wrongheaded. And we have arrived at Act Three of our show.