

9/13, 11:15 p.m.

Dear Callie,

According to the latest fortune cookie fortune:

WHEN YOU MAKE CHANGE, COME BACK A DOLLAR.

Very inscrutable, these fortune cookies. Although I think it's safe to assume that the message is not about money, but about life. So, you get it? (Change and become more, etc., etc.) These fortune cookie people sure know how to squeeze profound ideas onto a tiny slip of paper. And then, of course, they add a cookie for free. It just doesn't get any better than that.

And speaking of change (your big change, not money), I'm glad you're adjusting to farm life. You're a braver girl than me. Even the mention of the word "udders" would send me packing. So I'm beside myself with admiration for you actually having the nerve to touch them, much less pull on them. Are they slimy? I know, fresh milk is "just like cream." But they actually sell cream at the corner deli. It comes in a carton!

Now, I know it's not as much fun to reach into the dairy section and grab a carton as opposed to, you know, reaching under a cow and grabbing its udder, but what can I say? Life is dull here in New York City.

I'm also glad to hear that the school in Kansas doesn't bite. I was afraid it was gonna be very *Little House on the Prairie*, like, you'd keep getting your braids dunked in the inkwell by the boy who sits behind you, some big, blond hulk who's really twenty-four but is still in high school.

On the home front, my life remains unchanged, and the screaming continues. Kevin and my parents are fighting all the time now. They think he's a bum for dropping out of Tufts to move back home and become an actor, and I agree. He's dramatic all right, and every day he stars in the same little play, which I've affectionately titled:

**THIS IS HOW YOU REPAY US,
BY BECOMING A BUM?!**

(A play in one scene, by Amy Finawitz)

CHARACTERS: MARV, LILLIAN, and KEVIN FINAWITZ. Special cameo performance by AMY FINAWITZ, who plays herself.

THE SCENE: The FINAWITZ living room. The FINAWITZES are shouting so loudly, that LOU, the doorman, calls from downstairs to tell them that the chandelier in the lobby is starting to vibrate.

LILLIAN

(to KEVIN)

Why have you dropped out of school?!

What's the matter with you?!

KEVIN

There's nothing the matter with me.
I'm following my inner chi.

MARV

Can't you do that at college?
(to LILLIAN)
What's an inner chi?

KEVIN

I don't need college to become an actor.

LILLIAN

Couldn't you have figured that out four tuition payments ago?

MARV

Do you know how hard it is to make it as an actor?
You and your chi will end up a bum!

KEVIN

You're just urban pseudo-intellectuals with no feeling for the aesthetics.

MARV

I don't even know what that means! See how smart you are?!
You should finish college!

LILLIAN

Didn't one of the Jonas Brothers go to college?

KEVIN

What on earth does that have to do with anything?!

At this point, AMY passes through on her way to the kitchen.

AMY

Hi, 'scuse me. I'm running away to Italy to press grapes with my feet.

She is unceremoniously ignored. The fighting continues, until LOU the doorman calls and threatens to have them evicted.

THE END

According to some doctor guest on *Oprah*, it's often the unstable, emotionally needy child, a.k.a. pain in the butt, who demands all the attention in a family. Very insightful, these doctor guests, don't you think?

And by the way, do you like the picture I sent you? I'm finally wearing those contacts. They kind of show off my eyes, if I do say so myself. And how about the hair? Can you see how that lemon juice worked its magic?

I am a little concerned, however, that my boobs are getting too big for my torso. I told my mother that I wanted to get them reduced. She said I was crazy and that I should exercise. Exercise? I was like, "Mom, they're boobs. You can't exercise them away."

And speaking of boobs, please don't suggest that I hang out with Judy and Claire while you're away. I know that Judy is angling to be my replacement friend, but those girls are bigger dorks than we are and so BORING. The point

is, there is no point now that you've left. You know I'm not going to find a replacement friend to suit my discriminating taste.

I
remain
forsakenly
yours,
Amy

9/14, 9:15 p.m.

Dear Callie,

Well, it seems that God, in his infinite humor, has decided to intervene in my life by sending me an actual replacement friend after all. Unfortunately, she is older than He is.

Who, you might ask? Why, none other than little old Miss Sophia who lives up the hall in 4B. Remember I told you about her? She used to baby-sit for Kevin and me sometimes when we were little, and she'd tell us these super long stories about "when she was young during the depression," blah, blah, blah, and how her "bubbe" made borscht and how she put sour cream on it and it was better than any expensive, fancy restaurant because it was made by her bubbe's loving hands, blah, blah, blah.

She was always so happy talking about Bubbe's beet soup of love that Kevin and I didn't have the heart to tell her that all we wanted to do was watch cartoons. One time she even made us a couple of bowls which we tried to ditch (cat bowl, down the sink, etc.) when she wasn't looking, but that stuff is like some kind of red globby glue that stains everything in sight. We were finally forced to choke it down, and our teeth were red for two days.

My mother still invites Miss Sophia over every once in a while for one of her, thankfully infrequent, experimental vegetarian Friday night Shabbat dinners (tofu brisket anyone?), and Miss Sophia always insists on bringing another one of Bubbe's made-from-love recipes, many of which smell disturbingly like gym socks.

You know how my mom is. The week after some Jewish holiday, she gets into the Jewish version of the Christmas spirit and it's always the same thing: out comes the good china and the candles and a challah that she bought from the Italian deli (because it's crusty). And then she's like, "Isn't this nice? Taking a break from our whirlwind week. Surrounded by family and friends. Taking time to be grateful to God for what we have."

And then she gets all pious, throws a doily over her head, lights candles and reads the Shabbat prayer phonetically from *Judaism for Dummies*. She rambles on about the luminous glow from the candles, then immediately blows them out so she doesn't set her sleeve on fire like she did that one time.

Of course, by the next Friday, we're back to our "whirlwind lives" (a.k.a. ordering Chinese food) until the God mood strikes Mom next.

Remember when your family came over for Shabbat a few months ago and how, after dinner, we were gonna be religious and finish that Hebrew school project about Moses and the ten plagues (lice, frogs, etc.) but instead

watched *Night of the Living Dead* on cable? And your dad had his ear up against the den door and was like, “What’s all that weird groaning?” Which of course were the zombies eating people, but we said, “Oh, we’re praying and really feeling it.”

And he was, like, “Uh . . . okay.”

And we almost died laughing.

Sigh. Good times.

Now I’m feeling depressed. I’m going to channel surf for stupid, non-slasher horror movies.

But before I do that, I must finish my story about Miss Sophia.

So, you know how every morning I pass by Miss Sophia’s apartment on the way to the elevator, and how I hear her cats yowling and get that slightly disturbing whiff of cat pee mixed with air freshener which wafts out from under her door, and how I have to wait while she hobbles down the hallway in her cute Lord & Taylor ensemble, pulling her little metal shopping cart with the wheels?

Yes, I know I’m being mean. She’s always liked me. I’m just so popular with the geriatric set.

Well, anyway, on Tuesday morning, I am rushing to the elevator because I’m late, as usual, but I still tiptoe past Miss Sophia’s door in the wild hope that she won’t hear me.

At the elevator, I peck vigorously at the open door button. Then I scoot in and peck vigorously at the close door button, but am stopped by a familiar cry.

“Yoo-hoo, Amy, dear. Hold the elevator!”

Groan.

But, of course I do. She bolts her thousand locks and bumps her metal wagon across the rug, ducks into the elevator and is about to ask me when my little friend is coming home (that's you) which it seems like she does every morning, but I beat her to the punch.

"She's gone for the year, Miss Sophia," I sigh, with all the politeness I can muster.

"I see," she nods. "And my, you've gotten bigger since I last saw you!"

(Another one of her favorite remarks, which I don't appreciate even though I'm assuming she means height.)

"Thanks, Miss Sophia," I sigh.

At this point, the elevator opens and there's Mr. Klein from 8B who wants to get in, but he extends his hand to help Miss Sophia out first.

He spots me and says, "Good morning," in that tense, nasal voice of his, when I know he really wants to say, "Why do they let children live here?"

So there you have it. My two new best friends in the building, since your departure.

I am so never forgiving you for this.

Amy

PS: Mr. Lee, down at Lee's Chinese says, "Hi." He wants to know when you're coming back for our after-school egg rolls. I told him that might be a little hard since you're living in the heartland while your parents travel Europe.

9/14, 10:50 p.m.

What do you mean they're not lice; they're locusts? What the hell are you talking about?

9/14, 10:55 p.m.

Don't have a cow! How should I know you're still thinking about the ten plagues. Mrs. Goldstein would be so proud! That is, of course, only when she's doing her side gig at Temple Beth Shalom. When she's teaching history at PS 126, I don't think she thinks about Moses at all. Except maybe when the cafeteria is serving Middle Eastern-inspired falafel.

9/14, 11:10 p.m.

You're so right! Lice are grosser than locusts. At least locusts don't lay eggs in your hair. Besides, don't locusts make that crickets noise by rubbing their little sticky legs together? What was that supposed to do? Annoy the Egyptians to death? Was the Pharaoh like, "Nefertiti, for Golden Idol's sake, close that damn window. Those crickets are driving me crazy. I can't think straight. My hieroglyphics are turning into a jumble."

And then was Nefertiti like, "Then free the slaves already so we can get some peace. And forget about those hieroglyphics. No one can make heads or tails of them anyway. And BTW, they're not crickets; they're locusts." Get it straight.

9/14, 11:15 p.m.

What about this? What if, maybe, the frogs and the locusts were, like, fake-out plagues. Maybe God was like, okay, now you've got your guard down and you think I'm just some bogus idol . . . when Bam! Here come the boils! . . . Who's sorry now?

9/14, 11:20 p.m.

Yes, I am totally losing it. Thank you for pointing that out. Going to sleep now. First though: have to perform our ritual check the closet for zombies. Hope you're doing it too. I hear they've got some nasty zombies out there in the heartland, where the undead are, like, super bored.