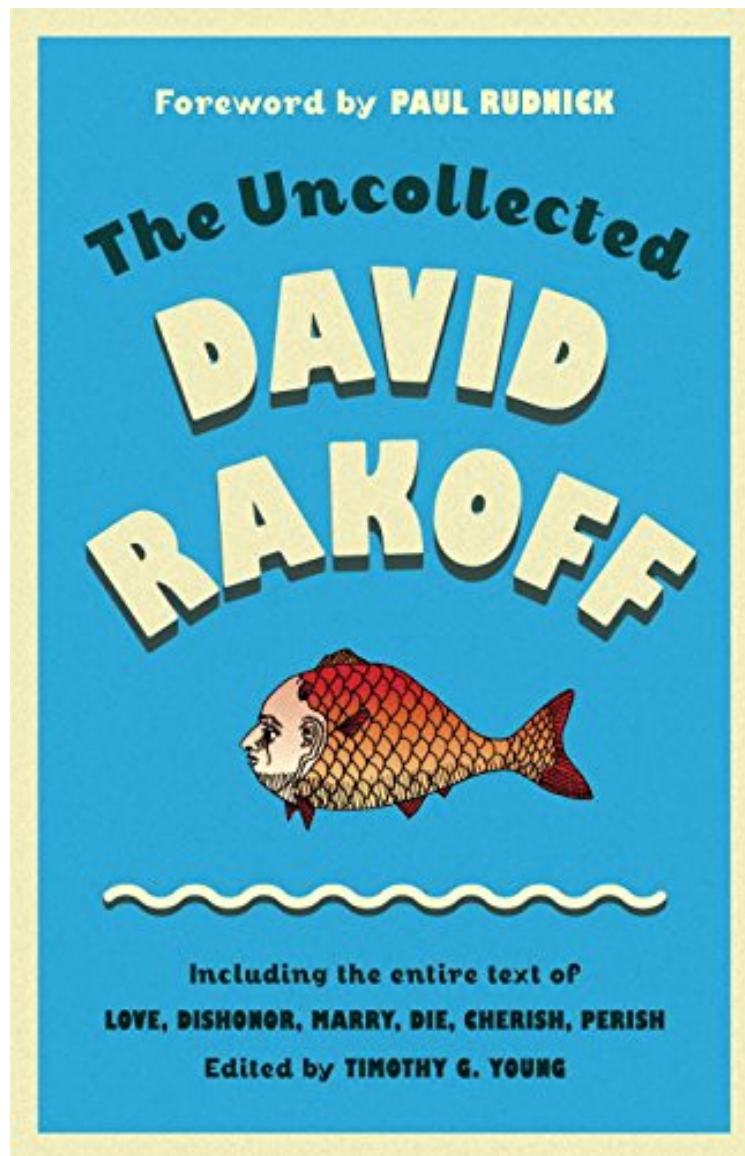


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Bestselling and Thurber Prizewinning humorist David Rakoff was one of the most original, delightfully acerbic voices of his generation. Here, in one place, is the best of his previously uncollected materialmost never before published in book form. David Rakoffs singular personality spills from every page of this witty and entertaining volume, which includes travel features, early fiction works, pop culture criticism, and transcripts of his most memorable appearances on public radios Fresh Air and This American Life. These writings chart his transformation from fish out of water, meekly arriving for college in 1982, to a proud New Yorker bluntly opining on how to walk properly in the city. They show his unparalleled ability to capture the pleasures of solitary pursuits like cooking and crafting, especially in times of trouble; as well as the ups and downs in the life-span of a friendship, whether it is a real relationship or an imaginary correspondence between Gregor Samsa and Dr. Seuss (co-authored with Jonathan Goldstein). Also included is his novel-in-verseLove, Dishonor, Marry, Die, Cherish, Perish. By turns hilarious, incisive and deeply moving, this collection highlights the many facets of Rakoffs huge talent and shows the arc of his remarkable career.With a foreword by Paul Rudnick.

The dizzying work of the late, preposterously talented Rakoff has finally been corralled in an anthology of profound entertainment. --O, The Oprah Magazine, "10 Titles to Pick Up Now" A candid, hilarious, self-effacing grab bag of writings on subjectsthe art of the wedding toast, tween angst, Frank Sinatra, friendship, New York tourists, and Rakoffs many adventures abroad and on public radiothat tickled the prize-winning humorist. Elle A must-read for Rakoff enthusiasts. It includes all manner of LOL material. . . .Some of the wit on display here reminds [us] of vintageFran Lebowitz. . . . But Rakoff's best stuff emanates from his big gay self. . . . All in all, a veritable Rakoff cornucopia. Bay Area ReporterAn eclectic anthology of ephemera . . . and personal insights. . . . A haunting epitaph to a talented writer. . . . Any Rakoff completist won't want to overlook this essential collection. Out.com, 10 Books Were Excited for This Fall "The shorter worksfiction and essays of prize-winning author Rakoff needed to be collected. Here, in prose touching and thoughtful, detailed and just hinted at, he limns what it has meant to become a New Yorker; to come out as a gay man; to suffer the heartbreak of friendships when AIDS was new and, perhaps, scarierin other words, a life well lived, with fleeting moments carefully observed. This wide-ranging collection encompasses all that brought Rakoff renown. . . . [And] will suit readers who seek thoughtful essays and the grace and the humor, in top form, of a top writer. Booklist [An] enjoyable anthology. . . . Rakoff writes with eloquence and grace. His voice is a sui generis mix of humor and misery. . . . Fans of David Sedaris and Jon Ronson will find the book a fine addition to Rakoffs hilarious body of work; its publication further highlights the loss of his truly original outlook. Library Journal One of our funniest writers. People Rakoff can issue withering snark with the best of them. But once his rapier wit has sliced the buttons off his targets clothing, revealing the quivering, vulnerable mass within, his fundamental sense of decency gets the best of him. SalonAbout the AuthorDavid Rakoffis the author of fourNew York Timesbestsellers: the essay collectionsFraud,Dont Get Too Comfortable,andHalf Empty,and the novel in verseLove, Dishonor, Marry, Die, Cherish, Perish. A two-time recipient of the Lambda Literary Award and winner of the Thurber Prize for American Humor, he was a regular contributor to Public Radio InternationalsThis American Life.His writing frequently appeared inthe New York Times,Newsweek,Wired,Salon, GQ,Outside,Gourmet,Vogue, andSlate, among other publications. An accomplished stage and screen actor, playwright, and screenwriter, he adapted the screenplay for and starred in Joachim Backs filmThe New Tenants, which won the 2010 Academy Award for Best Live Action Short. He died in 2012.Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved."Goodbye to All of You" There is an unwritten social code that I learned at university. It is uniquely suited to the architecture of a campus, with its walkways and quadrangles, but it has proven to have universal application. The law is the following: If, when you returned after the summer break, you ran into someone on the footpath whom you knewanyone from casual-nod-hello acquaintance all the way up to and including actual-yet-temporary friendand you did not speak the first time you saw each other that semester, you never had to speak to that person again. Ever. You could nod, you could suck in the necessary breath for the possibility of expelling it in greeting, you could even chuckle at each other in recognition, but if you actually didnt say anything, you were rid of that person. Thereafter, for the rest of your lives, you could engage in the most wonderful, revisionist estrangement; you had never known each other. You could allow yourselves to be introduced to each other at parties and affect a disingenuous, doe-eyed, first-meeting Hi.This capacity and desire to slough people off is no less a paradigm for real life than it was for college. Admittedly, in ones student days, it happened far more frequently, casting about furiously for identities as we all were. How embarrassing it was to have come back to school affecting

an Urban Marxist Peoples Poet demeanor only to be confronted with ones old friends from the Gilbert Sullivan Society. Life is like a flight. Sometimes you sit beside someone and tell them too much about yourself. Unlike a flight, however, life goes on and on and you cant change planes in Grand Rapids so sometimes you just have to change seats. There is no one more worthy of our contempt than somebody who reminds us of who we used to be. Conversely, a true friend is someone who knew you when and doesnt hold it against you. There is also a less Stalinist reason for these passive purges: You run out of time as you get older. I have been accused by many friends, as well as by my therapist, of being suspiciously social. This doesnt mean that they think Im a climber, or an Eve Harrington manqué. They know Im not that. What suspiciously social means is that I am perceived to know and maintain too many relationships with people. If one is friendly to everyone, one is friendly to no one. Of course, this is not actually true. I have a very significant core group of friends who, despite transoceanic migrations, etc., remain the most cohesive social network of my adult life. In fact, the bonds get stronger as my social world shrinks. There are, however, many people whom I consider friends who, due to their being single and miserable like myself, spin at high velocity and bump together about once every three months. There are laws that apply here, as well. If, for instance, you have a cold and reschedule once, add three months, and then if the other person gets food poisoning, add three more. There is a quantifiably infinitesimal chance that a third rescheduling will actually bear fruit. This is true for most grown-ups I know. Like all good theories, though, there is a seemingly contradictory and simultaneous aspect to the rule. If you really want to get rid of someone, a friend who has revealed an unfortunate penchant for psychotic episodes, say, or someone who responds to Its such a beautiful day with Thanks, Ive been feeling really attractive, you cannot. It is said that tragedy is sympathetic but chronic problems are alienating. Late-night, ear-bending, soul-baring conversations with friends who tell you that nobody understands me as you do get hard to take as they move into their second decade. It is nice to be needed, but like shelter in a storm, not like dental floss or a really good vegetable peeler. And so, you call less. You reschedule and cancel. You try to create distance. You are a fool, playing a losing game. A game governed by the you-forgot-to-tell-me-that-you-switched-jobs-and-your-home-phone-number-but-Im-glad-I-finally-managed-to-track-you-down principle. I can hear the voice of Jane Darwell as Ma Joad here, wondering when I got so hard and mean. Its not meanness that makes me or anyone terminate relationships; Ive been gotten rid of, too. Countless times. When I first moved to New York, I maintained my contacts in Canada steadfastly, but its not true what they say: Absence doesnt make the heart grow anything. Absence makes you forget. I had a new life that was admittedly more exciting than my old one. I came out, which distanced me yet further, and my friends back home responded in kind, having lives of their own. I did have one friend, however, who used to call me, her voice fairly sawtoothed with umbrage. The very existence of my new life constituted a betrayal. I superegotistically backslid and apologized for years, terrified that I was in fact guilty of her silent accusation that I now felt myself to be superior. I, in turn, would roll my eyes on the other end of the phone at her anecdotes about the same old people, her inertia, the smallness of her dreams, the Narrowness of her Worldview (I really did use these terms Im not proud, Im trying to be honest). But one day, I just stopped. I took the note of contrition out of my voice. I talked about my life without trying to mollify her by disqualifying its importance to me. It is only years later that I see that at the same time I stopped apologizing, she stopped trying to exact those assurances from me that our relationship had not changed. We both knew it had and we both were finally comfortable about it. Recently, on a trip home, I called her. Not to make plans to see her I didnt have time, nor did she but simply to say hello. After years of avoiding walking by her house when I visited my parents, I got over my narcissistic fantasy that she was inside, sobbing, lying in wait so she could heap upon me recriminations of neglect and heartlessness. For the first time, I did not feel like I had wounded her when I put the phone down. A boyfriend once explained to me his leaving New York for Los Angeles this way: You know when Joan Didion has that man say in Goodbye to All That that there comes a time in New York City when youve slept with all the women in the room and borrowed money from all the men? Well, thats why I have to leave, but Ive borrowed money from all the women and slept with all the men. When he told me this, I could only focus on the part about him having slept with all the men, but I know now what he means. It doesnt necessarily make one a bad person to lose touch with someone or leave them behind, no matter what the emotional or carnal bonds once were between you. People get used up. It sounds horribly callous, but its true. The term is tossed aside like an old shoe not a bad shoe, just an old one. Theres a false moral component operating here. Its hard enough to simply grow up; dont confuse the issue by not allowing yourself to lose contact with people who have now become strangers to you. The movies lie: sometimes you wont always have Paris, and whats more, youll neither of you particularly care. Although there is an occasional attendant sorrow, its evident the art of losings not too hard to master. I was recently walking one Saturday morning and passed a store I had been inside a few hours previously. I looked through the plate glass and there, like a flimsy plot device in a bad movie, I saw an ex-friend looking around. I dont mean an old friend, which is how I refer to people in Toronto. He is my only true ex-friend, and there he was in the housewares section of Barneys. When we first became close, several years ago, he issued me a warning: I get tired of people after two years or so. I get really intimate, and then I get tired of them. Ill probably get rid of you, too. He laughed and covered his mouth, mock-shocked at his own cynicism. I issued the counter-warning that he wouldnt be able to dismiss me so easily. I liked this banter. It had a Hepburn-Tracy antagonism that I enjoyed and it felt like he was laying down a romantic gauntlet to me, which may well have been the

root of my problem. His lover was sick, and I felt needed and up to the challenge of proving him wrong and sticking around for the long haul. We became good friends. We filled niches in each others lives that seemed dangerously close to the role of soul mates or lovers. In very little time, our discourse consisted almost entirely of inside jokes, catchphrases, and partial aphorisms. I would pick up the phone at work, and he would be saying in his best Ruth Draper, My dear, this is not for the childrens ears. Meet me at the Royalton. We cared for his dying boyfriend. I sat with him in the church at the memorial service, when his in-laws would not acknowledge him. And then something soured. It was precipitous, this disaffection. Maybe it had been developing all along but, if so, it had been concealed, occupied as we were with caring for his lover. But suddenly, there it was: biting into a perfect-skinned apple to find it full of rot. Both of us felt unacknowledged, censored, unrespected, and unloved by the other. Perhaps, in the absence of a shared crisis, we battled each other. But I actually think I had reached a point of saturation with my role as the subordinate caring one. Or maybe I was just angry he hadnt fallen in love with me. We spoke about it one night and agreed we would have to work harder at the friendship. We came away from that evening unconvinced and dissatisfied. I then went away for a weekend. I didnt call before I left and didnt call when I got back. We havent contacted each other since. I dont feel gotten rid of in this case. It is both our faults. His two-year prediction of expiry was merely an unfortunate coincidence. I watched him looking around the store, unaware of me. I had no discernible feelings watching him, none of the nausea of seeing an old boyfriend, for example. I was Stella Dallas minus the rain and the handkerchief between my teeth. And then, as if he had seen me through the glass earlier that morning when I had done the very same thing, he stopped in front of a bowlful of red-and-yellow parrot tulips. Among shelves of overdecorated vases, trays, crystal, and other articles of household pornography, he leaned in to them, closing his eyes, concentrating on the one real thing that was there. [Out, May 1994. This is a longer, unedited version of the published piece.]