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# The Appetizer and Other Poems

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Claremont McKenna College

**THE APPETIZER and other poems**  
**(with After Words)**

Submitted to Professor James Morrison

by

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for

Senior Thesis

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## **Negotiations**

Negotiations are like gunfights:

Never have your safety on,

Don't take your eyes off your target—

For one second, always count the shots fired

From *both* guns. Know the exits and escape routes

And the most important rule,

Never let him know it's a gun fight!

**Denied Insertion**

A tattered scroll, you by temptation read

Stability will tremor, after shock

Has set in, and settled down the clock.

Pallid murky waters you must tread,

Take all the times he leaned to make amends,

And pressed forgiveness on whom he desired.

The hamster's wheel will, nevermore grow tired

Though constantly, your cage's bars he bends.

But here; you pray, think, grow and become

Satisfied in your unrippling reflection.

Waiting calmly for the resurrection

Of your heart, which will protect your kingdom.

### **Pudding**

The proof is in the pudding.

So, make your proof sweet

If your guests like to get fattened up,

And feel good. Make it tart

If your guests are mean,

And like to bicker and argue.

Make it plain if your guests are vanilla

And will only accept the basic.

And, if you don't know what it is

your guests want...

Don't fucking serve pudding

**The appetizer**

Oh, how you thought this was so brilliant,

You ordered an appetizer, without

Even mentioning anything to her.

She thinks you're spontaneous and cool now—

She'll expect you to order an aged bottle.

But—WAIT, taste it first of course. Don't act

Like you know what you're doing all

Pretentious-like. Act like you're doing this

To be witty, and for shits and giggle—

Wow, you're really overthinking everything now.

Interesting strategy: Shoving your

Fork with that overpriced, underflavoured,

Skewered fried seafood in her mouth to get

Some early, half-assed body contact going;

Somebody jumped gun before the wine uncorked.

You need to act calm, take a bathroom break,

Breathe—Ah, the men's room; or the scared shit-less

Baby boy's room where so-called, manly men

Try to deal with a selection of problems;

None new, but none familiar or calming.

There's always the too-drunk-guy, staring at  
The mirror giving himself a prolonged  
Thumbs up, while the sink is still running,  
Repeating "you're under control, you're a  
Smooth astronaut," up, up, and away, man.

Then, there's the rugged, hardcore, goatee-and-all  
Lumberjack-of-a-behemoth, shredding  
His asshole apart in the handicapped stall—  
Angrily screaming and grunting, on tear's verge,  
Scolding truckloads of baby back ribs and bacon out.

Meanwhile, the all-American, real man's,  
Family man is coping with his  
Debilitating fear of women with  
Four powdery snorts that each cost more than  
The bill sitting in his nose; and for what—

To construct the courage to throttle his  
Under-worked, over-paid sexy blonde hire  
That he's already signed a pre-nupless-

Marriage-worth of bonuses to defile.

My one eye feels blind still in this valley.

Why does every walk back to the table

Turn into a unique staring contest

Called: how long we can avoid eye contact, so that

When we see each other, we're up close, at

The table and surprised to see each other.

Who were you expecting? A guy that has

Something to say when he comes back from a

Brief bathroom break?...Now stirred is silence,

Thanks to that asshole waiter; he damn-well knows

(I was going to fill her glass after)

I wiped that sauce smudge off the glass table.

And great, now you have to piss. Stay calm, this

Nervousness can only help, though 'cause at least

You'll avoid embarrassment on your toes' tips

Wow! this glass table is horrible, it's

Enticing us both to stare at the ground...

At least, her boots are fancy; point to them,

Say something complimentary, you can't possibly  
Fuck this up. Wrong, again! Of course, these dates  
Where you're the 'cool guy' always end when she  
Finds out you're not actually cool at all  
When you spill wine on her elegant (red) dress...

Whoa, she's right, it is the same shade of red.  
Well that was an unexpected delight  
Maybe you aren't cool. No, you're just lucky.  
You're the lucky penguin that wanted so  
Badly to be a shark with a deadly smile.

OR, Maybe it's not as much about me  
As I thought. I've essentially acted  
Wrongly and foolishly according to  
My patented playbook. And yet, we are  
Drinking, laughing, enjoying a peculiar—

Assortment of arranged, ticklish, flavors,  
Comparing our bland sets of hobbies to  
Our unfulfilled dreams and boring passions.  
Small talk grows and turns into bigger talk,  
Not only focusing on pillow talk.

Or that last conversation at the porch,  
Or doorstep or driveway or...or...what if  
She has an apartment? No, knock it off...  
Overthinking has only caused you to  
Stop by another lame cheese and wine bar,  
(An expensive dark chocolate place, and a  
Grossly disappointing adult toy store.)

Things are decent, the vibe is nice, just try  
To focus on how good tonight has been,  
How many fantastic things you have done...  
It's been a nice walk back and you're a block  
From your place...Holy fuck, you're steps away

From the streetlamp of no return, her heels  
Could start hurting at any moment, and  
She could decide to walk right back to the  
Sea of cabs just a few curb stumbles and  
Deep breaths away. And yet, she came this far,

She now wants you to ask her a question.  
Open your mouth, you coward. Good, that's it,

Now unhinge your jaw, and say something real—  
Confidently and proudly. Give her  
One of those go-to, Hell-yes, I rule, works-  
Like-a-charm lines and mention the ‘nightcap.’

Be smooth, operate on this fine Penny  
Money with the style of James Bond...OH no,  
You have nothing to say, you’ve opened and  
Closed your mouth 4 straight times now...  
You look Like you’re chomping the damn air...  
May day, may day.

This is a tailspin, you’re freezing up on  
This ice princess. She’s got a chill up your  
Spine, so cold...wait, that’s not your spine, that’s  
your...Pinky...my God, that’s another pinky  
Wrapped around your pinky...I don’t under-  
Stand it. I’ve embarrassed myself and made  
An asshole of myself all night and here  
She is, holding my hand. Grabbing my whole  
Arm, moving in closer like her body  
magnetically fits into my grooves.

And it does, of course it fits, it always  
Fits before it gets dirty. Yet, it's not  
The dirt that makes it shrink and constrict. No,  
It's the washing process. But look at her.

I'm just impressed. She's done so many things  
I don't have the balls to initiate...and  
I'm just smiling at her warm face. This is  
One of those moments. She has no idea  
I'm looking at her right now, and I know

She thinks when I smile out of the corner  
Of my mouth like this...Just like...yeah, like this,  
Just when this sideways, crooked, drunken  
Grin cracks my face into an apparent  
Collage of lust and confusion, she thinks—

I must be thinking about her naked  
Well...it's true, when I grin from the side of  
My face, I have a nude vision of her,  
But not the nudity of the flesh that  
Exposes her shape, textures, and tastes.

Instead, I'm picturing the unclothed, unmasked  
Bravery that she possesses and I respect.  
The courage I wish I had myself.  
The strength to venture into uncharted  
Territories with a nervous loser  
Who has been trying to impress her  
All night long with fakeness and clichés.

The curiosity to try me on  
For size even though I've tried to make my  
Tag misleading. The very same foolish  
Instinct that caused her to cling onto me  
Like she is now. No words have to be spoken,

But I still ask, maybe out of habit,  
Maybe because I know it's one of the  
Realest, and most intimate things I can  
Actually verbalize to her...Can I  
Take your panties off with my mouth?

Girls never like the word "panties," but I  
Toss it around like a stir crazy puppy  
That hasn't been taken on a proper

Walk in weeks throws around a rag doll.

The response to my question is always

A facial cringe, not a verbal “ew.”

The term Panties is not socially unacceptable

Or offensive, but she doesn’t like to hear it,

Especially if she’s topless and thrilled.

The discomfort is what makes the question

So deep and real. It’s an uncensored,

Candid decision question that never

Gets more than a second of thought.

Such a familiar story to me: it’s always

The same instantaneous cringe followed

By a brief, momentary stare in which

She very quickly assesses that yes...I am

Fucking serious, that truly is my intention right now.

And oh, how reality-grounding and

Perfect is the typical response:

Either a so obviously fake moment

Of excitement with a high-pitched “yes,

Pull them right off” or a reluctant sigh

Of acceptance...“sure.” But this one—she was

Different. She pushed my hair right down into

The Bermuda triangle. I must have

Been lost deep undersea in Atlantis

For a long time because I was breathing

With newfound gills, ignoring all knots,

Stiches, and pains in my lungs, flapping my fins

Fluidly, and holding my trident steady.

No jokes cause simultaneous laughs, in fact,

No slapstick humor does either. We could

All be in the same room and watch the same

Hilarious pranking go down, or hear the

Same punchline, but no two pick up the

Feeling together or at the same time.

That’s all in your own head and up to you

When you decide it’s humorous.

But this primal, rhythmic dance of love, and

Lust, human hormones, and vanity

Connects minds. Something unspoken about

The drive to reach a peak of emotion,

The serene feeling of nirvana and ever-  
Lasting peace, ties lifeless and scattered  
Brains together into one complete feeling.

Only when this utterly complete feeling,  
This connection of exhaustion, comfort,  
And pleasure is reached, can one know  
The incredible joy and uplifting sensation  
That is the rare simultaneous laugh.

At the exact same time, all of the worries  
In the world were solved, all of the conflict  
Was at peace, and every part of your body  
And mind felt happy. So you laughed,  
Let out an invigorating and freeing snort,  
Barked like a hyena, felt like a drunk clown,  
And cracked up almost hysterically. And right  
When you thought your sweating, shaking,  
Fulfilled body was laugh-relieving,  
You discover her laugh-attack is slowing  
At the exact pace yours is, and the  
Uproar continues in a beautiful cycle.

There's a messy resolution to the story,

But it's best to end at the climax.

Always order an appetizer.

### **Sunset of Love**

The festering urge to stare and gaze  
At a glorious, fleeting spectacle  
Is combatted by a sting-  
A need to wince, blink, and turn the head.

I'll engage my full being into this gliding orange  
...Not out of obligation, the beauty alone is worth  
watching.

After all, what's a few temporary purple blotches in  
my view,  
Relative to the masterful peace of this masterpiece.

All is pure and clean in the quiet coastal scenery,  
Until the rays and reflections onto the ocean  
Begin to shrink in length. The emotional giant  
Begins to nestle under the trees. For shelter?  
To hide? To protect fellow horizon lovers' eyes?

So many, Too many thoughts entertained by such  
A sunset. By the time this spherical slice of my heart  
Is completely covered, a new moon can venture  
And creep its way into our sky. But of course, even

The lunar miracle is just a reflection of the sun we  
truly loved.

**Heartburn**

Got that heartburn,  
Bit off more than  
Teeth could gnash  
Into manageable pieces.

Got that headache,  
Splitting, piercing ringing  
Sound that makes  
You dread being awake.

Got that chest pain,  
Got those asthma lungs.  
Got the ailments  
That make laughing not so fun.

But shake the cobwebs from  
The dusty skeleton. Medicine  
Causes dependence. The  
Body only feels sicker,  
When the soul has regulated relief.

When the fever runs high,

And fingers can't control the  
Contours of the awaiting thigh,  
Fight through, do not fall to sleep.

Yes, it's contagious.  
But we all want to  
Be sick together, don't we?  
No permanent heal.  
But, heat will be felt.

Two opposing land masses  
Collide and tectonic shoulder  
Plates form mountains, body  
Quakes, Tremors. The after-  
Shock is the best part.

Is it not? After the volcano  
Erupts, a moment kicks  
Itself into your sinus.  
You cannot physically  
Stop yourself from shaking,  
Smiling. That is when the  
Heartburn goes away.

It will come back, though.

**If I**

If I hold your hand, will you feel wanted?

If I always cuddle and am honest,

If I do all these things will you notice?

If I was witty with these words,

If I could hatch this scheming bird,

Out of the egg of if I, if I tried.

But is and ors

Are bitches and whores.

And this is more

Than you expected, neglecting me.

And ifs ands and buts,

I'm going nucking futs,

Oh, if only I was a little more impress-if.

If I looked like chiseled stone,

Or If I had a golden throne,

If I had a mighty and proud steed.

If I tried to be a prince charming,

If I wasn't off-putting and alarming,

But If I wasn't these things, I wouldn't be me.

Cause ifs and ors

Are bitches and whores

And this is more  
than you expected, inspecting me.  
Ifs and ands,  
I'll try with my hands  
And you'll wanna dance,  
If you take a chance on an if.

**Wannabe**

I want to be the flip to your flop.

I want to be the skip to your hop.

I want to be the crust on the bread

Of your sandwich that you just don't want to cut off.

I want to be the zz to your top,

But if I was the lolly to your pop,

I'd ask how many licks it takes to get to the center:

one, two, three.

I want to be the something to your something.

I want to be the nothing to your nothing.

I want to be the anything to your abundant

everything.

I want to be the hip to your hop.

I want to be the ship to your battle.

I want to be the prince in your castle.

If you'll be my princess, then you should saddle

Up on my horse, straddle up on the porch,

No hassle, skedaddle before we explore—

These new lands with true romance.

I want to be the zipper to your pants. And,

I want to be the dragon to your fly  
I want to be the who, what, when, where to your why  
I want to be the fruit to your fly,  
The frown to your smile, the cloud to your sky.

I want to be the something to your something.  
I want to be the nothing to your nothing.  
I want to be the anything to your abundant  
everything.

If you applaud and cheer and clap,  
Then I'll just snap and tip my cap,  
Down to the ground for you to drop  
Your lost and my new found.  
I want to be the Jackson to your Five.  
I want to be the pulse that tells you, you're alive.  
I want to be the beef to your jerky,  
The lock to your turnkey, the turkey to your jive.

I want to be the something to your something  
I want to be the nothing to your nothing  
I want to be your everything,  
But for now, I'll settle for being anything.

### **Your Meadow**

IS it greener there?

Sometimes I think the grass is greener over there

In the meadow you lounge in. Perhaps you'll invite  
me

But considering I walk under ladders, break mirrors,  
and open umbrellas indoors...

I know luck isn't my lady

But maybe, I'm not the only one that's crazy, and  
shaking, and looking for a nice pasture for grazing.

Hopes and fears interchange like train tracks  
conducted by a dice roll. I don't know if I'm a steam  
engine, but I think I can...I think I can...

I haven't decided my expectations, but if cacti  
certainly root in the sand, I can be the oasis to quench  
your thirst...

But of course, there's nothing green about this  
desert...

Maybe it's the fireflies in your face that spark in the  
night, but something is much livelier and greener is  
over there.

### **Blonde Dream**

I wrote a stupid song that expressed my  
Feelings, but I know you don't want to hear  
My voice; even this is a naïve whim.  
I'm not saying that I need you,  
I'm certainly not saying that you need me;  
I just believe deep down that we  
Owe each other civil conversation.

I fully understand that your friends will  
Forever hate me (justifiably so), and I  
Have come to that harsh realization that  
You won't ever again, intend on enjoying  
Anything about me (excluding laughing  
At my dispense). But I want you to know  
That I believe that people never change,  
And if you'd just let yourself talk to me again,  
We could have a little blast from the past.

I taught you a little about life and reality too.  
As we grew up (and fucked up) together,  
All that we cared about was having each other.  
I'm sorry we lost that feeling with time and conflict.

Should that dictate the rest of our interactions?

Perhaps this seems overdramatized to you,  
But you were the only thing I ever loved  
With all of my heart and soul. The one  
And only person that I do whatever it takes  
To start smiles. I bend over backwards to make  
You feel beautiful. And you are, always—

The only person for whom I constantly curb  
Mistakes. Worst of all, you are the only person  
I abandoned.

I'm sure your friends and family agree  
That I'm just some crumpled trash,  
Skipping around the dark alleys of your past.  
But from your watering can of compassion,  
And kindness, my petals opened and faced the sun.

You know it would be instantly magnifying,  
To get high and watch horror  
Movies. Have food fights and tie each  
Other up with zip ties and handcuffs.

All that fleeting fun. And more, we could  
Shower together with my dog. I could  
Fix the hole in the dry wall from when  
We tried contemporary dance lifts  
To Tears for Fears.

I know that we have an unclassifiable,  
Chemistry. A bond from which Beryllium  
And Phosphorous does not parallel.

Perhaps you'll never want to be my friend,  
But I'd really like to get along with you.  
The very last thing that I want is for you  
To hate me, but you know that's your call.

Don't go back to those exciting nights when  
We first met where I'd try to impress you.  
(Sorry I prompted that earlier in this note.  
I suppose I am still overly manipulative.)  
Go back to the nights where we struggled  
Together over bullshit and hurt each other.  
We were able to cling upon sharp,  
Yet docile cliffs and know that

The fright of the cavern in which we found  
Ourselves was an eerie belonging.

I know you don't want that back; I don't either,  
But there was something special between us  
And to just stubbornly throw away a friendship/  
Relationship/whatever-you-wanna-call what we  
Had would be a huge mistake.  
For the both of us. So I'm going to try  
My damndest to avoid that outcome.

Erin, I really think it's time we talked.  
If you disagree, I don't blame you because  
I know you've matured into a lioness.  
And here, I feel like a mouse offering to  
Pull a thorn from your clammy paw.  
Your gaze shows strong will,  
But I know that you're still the same  
Compassionate, sweet genuine person  
That just wants contentment and peace.  
As big of an insensitive asshole as I am,  
I know that my heart is in the right place.  
I just want good terms and a chance to talk.

If you honestly think that the break-up  
Was unforgivable, I understand and I'm sorry  
That I wasn't a patient or kind partner.  
My side of the see-saw rarely grazed  
The mulch. You must know that you don't  
Belong with a punk like me and you're  
Way too beautiful and pure to slum  
Around with basket cases like myself.

But I was proud of who I was when  
We were together, and I was proud of us,  
And the woman you were growing into.  
It's awful to think that such a fond  
Part of my life is completely missing,  
Or hates me, or wants nothing to do with me.

I have these two tickets to a La Sera concert,  
Friday night, the Echoplex. If you're busy or don't  
Want to go that's fine, but I think it could be  
A good experience that we could positively  
Move forward with. It'd mean a lot to me  
To get a chance to have a discussion;  
Because it is still easy to say,

You are the most significant thing  
That's ever happened in my life.  
I just won't go down without you.  
You are my story, and I want a resolution,  
Not a conflict.

The most important moments have  
Already passed, but I know that there  
Is some future for us. Maybe it's you  
Hating me forever, maybe it's civil  
Disagreement, but I hope with all of my heart  
That we'll be friends, or at least friendly.

Please Erin, consider all things said in this note.

Hopefully and Humbly,

Sam

**Keith Stone**

The new Keystone Ice can bears the emblem of a  
fish.

The first can in the 30-rack holds the tail-fin.

The next can, the thick of the tail and start of the  
abdomen.

The following can, gills. The fish is long, two  
complete

Dorsal-fin Sections. By the sixth can, the fish's head  
Can be seen. Stack the cans and you've got a full-  
Grown aluminum trout.

Who am I to say the new design encourages binge  
Drinking? I discovered the insignia when I was  
cleaning

Up the wounded soldiers and torn up shotgun shells.

Such a wise wizard am I with my fish staff.

Look, everybody! I've found Nemo!

## **Hey Ho**

Hey Ho, whaddya say and know,  
I think I'd rather sleep in the sleet and snow  
Than listen to your mouth,  
Go on and on about,  
How you just might, just never let him go.

And now, I flounder and flop about,  
Just trying to get my nose above the surface.  
But an anchor drags me down.  
I guess at least I'm grounded,  
But my rewards card is valued at worthless.

So swipe, re-swipe, and know to your delight,  
That no matter how much you take this serious,  
That I feel hysteria,  
Think about my cheeriness,  
I cherish that big picture we're bacterias.

So dance till you drop,  
I'm sure you'll shake it off,  
He doesn't notice that you're feeling desperate.  
Be all that you can be,

Cross your eyes and dot your tees

And pray to God that it'll happen,

And He might let it.

And I'd rather trip, on your ex-boyfriend's lacrosse

stick

Than face the mad hatter facts about this.

And I'd sooner laugh,

About my grandma drowning in a bath,

Than stumble in the dark without a glow-stick.

Let's make a bet, so that the winner gets

All the wish I didn't do that shit regrets.

And to the victor goes the spoils of the winter,

You spring forward, I'll fallback

When we meet up and commence.

So dance till you die, get ceiling fucking high,

He still don't notice that you're feeling desperate

Do all that you can due, pay your fees and ask your

cues

And swear to God this will happen,

And She might let it.

### **Trashy**

I'm that trashy kind of throw-me-away in the paper  
basket.

Waste me, I'm nasty. Might go moldy in this casket  
Worms crawl inside of me, delightfully. I always  
scheme.

I'm that trashy kind of throw-me-away in the paper  
basket.

What's growing on my face? Is that my face?

What is my face? Throw-it-away in the paper basket,  
Before I face my own buried hatchet.

No regrets, but I'm all out of bets, so disposed,

I go, I suppose, it's just next. Like a dandelion  
spreading

Its seed even after you fail to blow them away in one  
breath.

I'm that trashy kind of throw-me-away in the paper  
basket.

I'm not recyclable, I'm landfill bound, compacted.

Don't litter me, or belittle me, I am not made of  
plastic.

No, I'm that trashy kind so throw me away in the  
paper basket.

**Oz**

Tap, tap, tap, tappity tap, tap your ruby, ruby red  
slippers.

There's no place like my domain, my dojo is dead  
chipper.

You could be lying in the grass, like a lion in the  
grass, how krass.

Got no courage, cowardly like Eugene's Ooga Booga  
Booga Mask.

Cause I need you—

Like Mario-Italiano kneads the pizza dough,

'Cause he needs the dough, or his legs both will be  
broken-

His shroom guy's already beating Luigi.

And I want you—

Like a cat, without a post wants a little more scratch.

And, I think you get the point

I want you like I want cash—or road dome.

Please follow, follow, follow my golden, golden  
path-road.

Got some dumb lyrics, moronic, more brainless than  
scarecrow.

I'm mean, meaner than Mr. Clean, meaner than the  
man behind the screen.

The one that puffs that emerald green, I want to light  
you up like White OG.

Until that witch, that bitch, that wicked western  
hitch-hikers

Worst nightmare if they get picked up,  
Hope they like a bumpy broomstick ride up their butt,  
What's up, I think you're my buttercup.

'Cause I love butterscotch, and nutterbutters rock,  
And your nutty and mother fucking hot-to-trot.

I want you—

Like George Washington really wanted weed and  
hemp to catch on.

I want weed and hemp to catch on. But mostly,  
I just want you to wear a hemp thong. Wait,  
What was my point?—oh, I don't need to bother.

But I fucking want you

Like them hoes on Maury want Jerome to be the  
father—

But he's not the father.

I want you to suck me

Like the lolly, lollipop guild.

I'll make sure you and Toto are not killed—

She won't get you my pretty, she won't get you my  
pretties.

**Sugar Fix**

Ah, the ritualistic joy of parking in front  
Of the closed-down Iron Works Gym,  
Only to waltz right into the Fruizen  
Next door, to order a gelato in a waffle-cone!

It's the only non-frozen yogurt ice-cream shop  
Open 'till 11:00 pm. Its clientele mostly hangout  
With boba iced-tea, speaking in Korean,  
With textbooks sprawled across all tables and  
seating.

I feel at home in these sweet, Asian sanctuaries.  
I cruise by Pixie Donuts in approach of my  
Consumerist treasure. Pixie used to be my fix.  
Jelly donuts—my jam. Jerry Quo's father owned  
The place: it was similarly inviting to Asians.

I speak of the powdery bakery in past tense  
Because it has been shut down, years before.  
An article was printed in the local courier.  
It exposed Pixie's magical dust as fueled by  
Means other than maple logs and cinnamon buns.

Apparently, the shop was a front for massive  
Ivory shipments. As sugar-hungry kids, we all  
Had our theories about back-door Bear-Claw  
Deals. We never suspected whale-bones and  
Elephant tusks.

Now, Mr. Quo has been forced to open a new shop:  
Texas Donuts. I don't feel so welcome there.  
It's much like Yogurt Land or 21 Choices—  
(No free wifi).

### **I won't Mind Sinking**

May Day, May day, I'm sharply losing altitude  
Tailspinning, shipwrecked stuck with a mutinous  
crew.

Batten down the hatches, anchors away let's shove  
off

Hoist the sails, we're on the trail, I'm no Kirk and far  
from a Spock.

Illogical! My navigation system's confangled,  
Danger danger, Will Robinson: our course is all  
mangled.

Marooned on a maroon island, both eyes color  
blinded

Directionally challenged, no balance, stranded on this  
island.

We're caught in a downward spiral,

My panic and paranoia is viral.

And if this ship goes down too deep,

And there's no more oxygen in our submarine

... I won't mind sinking.

Full speed ahead if it's still in ye', warp pace in this  
spaceship

Rocket off to the moon and back, it's all about  
displacement.

Cape Canaveral is quite the average travel route,  
But my GPS is pointing me to the Koopa King's  
castle.

No hope, no note, just abandoned in this lava moat.  
And even though I'm begging to sink, I wind up  
afloat.

Driftwood ashore, no more time to explore,  
My first mate has stabbed me in the back. Et tu  
brutus, you whore?

We're caught in a downward spiral,  
My panic and paranoia is viral.  
And if this ship goes down too deep,  
And there's no more oxygen in our submarine,  
I won't mind sinking.

**Hit the Gas, Ski Mask Fast**

Put the money in the fucking bag,

And nobody else will get hurt.

Put the money in the fucking bag,

You saw the hero die first.

This is a stickup, everybody freeze!

Or else. This trigger might get squeezed.

Nobody make a fucking move,

NO-body make a fucking move.

Everybody remain calm,

Or I'm setting off this bomb.

I've come to automatically grand theft a grand.

Unmarked rolls and rubber bands.

If you've got a watch or swatch,

I'll swap it for your safety.

Don't you try to test a testy

Motherfucker named me.

Me I says, me's the name,

Robbing blindly is my game

So before you try to moan or brag

Put your money in the fucking bag.

### Graphic Novel

I want to be your superman,  
But I smoke too much kryptonite.  
I could be over there in a flash,  
Yet, I don't have the power of flight.  
If I was Peter Parker,  
I'd get tangled in my own web.  
Because I get green, no manners,  
Bruce Banner, and I Hulk-smash myself.

Maybe if I had a batmobile, or shiny utility belt.  
It seems I'm Iceman, and you're the human torch,  
So when we touch I melt—  
Under pressure, but not underwater,  
I don't resemble Aquaman.  
Other sea-fishes are just bitches  
Isolated like doc Manhattan:  
Blue alone and naked, so Magneto angered.  
But my villainous ways won't force  
Me into a choke-hold Darth Vader.

No I must be a hero, like Tron and fend off Sark.

Or pull a Tony Stark, and wear a blue thing on my  
heart.

To protect you in such choppy waters from the  
circling Hammerhead sharks.

Thunder thunder thundercats! you know that ain't my  
call.

Not at all, I'm no Buzz Lightyear.

Infinity and less-than-beyond.

I'm far from a James Bond, more like scary Barry  
Bonds.

Big Headed, super unimpressive,

No spidey-senses, sensitivity or incentive.

I can't guide the way, I lost my green lantern.

Damn sure, that I'm not Mr. Fantastic, Dr. Galactus,

Destroyer of the planets. Just a hopeless romantic.

But I can promise you for sure that when it boils

Down to the thick of it, I won't save the day.

## **Public Transport**

I want to publically transport you, and take you on a  
ride.

Just subside, smile, hold the rails, and keep your arms

Inside—

The vehicle, hop on the trolley. It's foreseeable that  
you and

Me would get caught in-between a bus and a taxi.

I wanna take you underground, and eat you fresh like  
Subway.

Can we take the bus today? I think it's too much  
dismay.

But it's only a couple quarters for a round-trip  
trolley.

Holly, hollers at pills of molly, cause I folly over  
pocket's,

Call her Polly. Along she came, on the tram, on the  
train,

All the way, one way. Let's just say it wasn't okay—

For both parties involved, I'm so Hardy boys to  
solve.

You are not one with the sun: the earth don't revolve  
Around you.

I want to publically transport you, take you on a ride  
Just subside, smile and hold the rails, keep your arms  
inside—

The vehicle, keep them safely in. Unless you want to  
lose your limbs.

But you need those, to feed the meter,

Keep the train on tracks, and either

Take the ferry over to the island,

Where double decker buses only cost two limes, and

Diamonds are awarded to the team that wins the food  
fight,

And afterwards there are public hot balloon rides!

### **The Bird and the Bee**

My mind drifts out of control and lands on your  
shore.

I know you're winning, but it's the beginning so let's  
not keep score.

You keep your cold shoulder turned and it's freezing  
me up,

But my mind keeps buzzing with that bird's and the  
bee's buzz.

And I'll be your singing bird, if you'll be my busy  
bee.

Honey we both got wings and live in a tree.

And yes, I'm alive in a hive, and you're nestled up in  
a nest—

But when the pieces don't fit, the puzzle looks the  
best.

I could bring you some pollen, and you could chirp  
for me.

Migrate over to my land and kill the Queen Bee.

I don't need her orders, directions, discretion or  
mandates.

Just flap around a field of flowers—I'll butter you up,  
pancake.

And, I'll be your singing bird if you'll be my busy  
bee.

Honey we've both got wings and live in the same  
tree.

And yes, you're alive in a hive and I'm nestled up in  
my nest.

But when the jigsaw doesn't fit, the puzzle looks its  
best.

**W's**

Who the hell are you, to tell me

What I'm really all about?

When did this become a showdown,

Where I got a gun in your mouth?

Why are you talking down like

You're horse is stories above mine?

Who, what, when, where, why,

What, when, where?

Who, what, when, where, why?

Who, what, when, where, why?

What, when, where? I question

Your motives, but I'm confused about my life.

Who does this kid think he really is with that

What-ever attitude? And

When did he get off acting like home is

Wherever he feels in the mood?

Why is he such an inconsiderate jerkoff at any given  
time?

Who, what, when, where, why,

What, when, where?

Who, what, when, where why?

Who, what, when, where, why, what, when, where?

I question your motives, but I'm confused about my  
life.

### **Carnivale**

The Coney Island Cyclone is the world's

Oldest functioning roller coaster.

It was invented on a pier in Brooklyn in

1927. To give you an idea of how

Old that really is, Sliced bread wasn't

Invented until 1928.

The expression 'the best thing since sliced

Bread' is used to denote the sheer age of

A thing. It was the most practical invention

In ages. Centuries and epochs have passed

Since such a simple yet well-needed design

Was pitched and erected. The very fact

That this expression cannot be used to

Describe The Coney Island Cyclone

Speaks lengths and loop de loops.

The line to get on the coaster is not-so-

Surprisingly, short. It is comprised mostly

Of wood and rusted iron. It creaks like a

Neglected front porch rocking chair

In the Everglades.

I have no desire to get on this ride  
Other than to prove to my girlfriend  
That I am brave. She doesn't care.  
She just thinks I am stupid. I am.  
Instead of spending my time with pink  
Admit one tickets and sitting on rides,  
Leaving her alone on the piers,  
I should be tenderly applying Calamine  
Lotion to her Shingled back.

I nervously and improperly laugh  
At her shingles. Not at the misfortune  
And pain she goes through, just the very  
Word itself. This disease is a synonym  
For roof tiles. You're not supposed to walk on  
Them, for they are dangerous.  
But I like to climb on top of things, even  
If it means getting a firm megaphone talking-to.

I joke, 'do you want me to remove your  
Spackle, my dear?' She doesn't find it funny.  
It isn't.

**Untitled (for now)**

A fish will just feel like a fool

In the deepest most beautiful pool

If I is told to find the top of a tree

A bird can't feel at peace

And can never calmly sleep

If it is told to dive deep

A horse is nothing but an ass

Can never stride fast

If it is told to move backwards

A chicken will never take flight

Has no brain soul or might

If it is put into buckets and nuggets

## **Drugs**

Drugs, drugs? Drugs

What do we love as much as? Drugs

Drugs, Spontaneous euphoric

It's drugs, drugs, drugs, drugs

You know I gotta have it

Drugs drugs drugs

Relapse is not a habbit

My brain is fried, completely destroyed

Is that a narc? Getting paranoid

I guess I've just entered the void with all these

Drugs

You like your caffeine, alcohol, and nicotine.

Sometimes, you do blow and smoke that

methamphetamine.

I'm getting green with reefer, leaving it to beaver,

Not a devout believer, so I'm golden, as a retriever.

And receiver of drugs and hugs and love, because I

always share irresponsibly.

Consume drugs, drugs, drugs.

My favorite girls are mary, lucy, and molly.

Gosh, goddamn golly, I'm feeling really gnarly.

Charlie-horse your whores if they're horsing around  
dolly.

Llama and Parton but I don't pardon for all these  
Needles and injections, and people with their  
infections.

It's not a worthwhile lesson to just check in  
To any motel with a herrojuin addiction.

It's just in, that I'm more oxycontent than your  
ambitions.

Picture me,

I played so hard the other day my knuckles bled on  
my guitar.

The lifestyle I lead is wild and uncomfortable.

When I touch you touching me I feel so untouchable.

**Transmonia**

I'm stuck living in the past,  
The present is a gift too hard to unwrap.  
Pruny hands in a bubble bath,  
Old notes in raincoats still make me laugh.

I scanned the pages of your diary,  
Looking for the very best version of me.  
Somewhere between all the lines of hate,  
I'm sure there's something okay.

And I need help.  
Almost as much as I hate myself.  
I knew you like the back of palm,  
When I used to park in the front of your lawn.  
I'm a stubborn asshole,  
Even when I try to change.  
Pack my bags for Australia,  
I'm sure I could take a train.  
Drink away my troubles,  
Because tomorrow will be great,  
Waking up with a fucking headache.

It's awful funny how talking sucks,  
When you've come so far,  
And always get drunk.  
Well, it wasn't only sunshine and sex,  
But it was better than denial and loneliness.

And I hate myself.  
Almost as much as I need help.  
I knew you in the back of my car,  
When I used to park in the front of your lawn.

I'll learn my lesson, when there's nobody left  
Who wants to hear my bullshit, excuses,  
And I confess!  
That I was the lowest point in your happiness.  
I'm sure I won't be too hard to miss.  
At least, I won't get caught lying to myself.

### **Shiny Red Dumpster**

Looking outside the window of  
A religious studies class, its common  
To see a cute girl jaunting from somewhere  
That must be interesting, to some place  
That must be daring.

This time, a brand new dumpster catches  
The eye. They replaced the dining hall  
Parking-lot dumpster. The upgrade is  
A crimson red Front Loader waste-container.  
The metal shines above a waxed Ferrari.

Why does a scum receptacle have to be  
So clean and new? What was wrong  
With the old one? Did it not have tenure?

The dumpsters teach one thing. It is easy  
To lie about recycling.

### **Hot Pink Plaster Cast**

Where do you go when no one wants to hear your  
shit?

Where are you off to, where the hell have you been?

I saw you under the Rosemead Freeway underpass  
Selling your ass for claps, cheap drinks, and laughs.

I miss you like I miss your hot pink, plaster cast

I was wearing an orange vest, picking up trash.

I never saw some-one with a limp, run so damn fast.

How can you get away from your own past?

I signed your cast, with a drawing of a dick.

The best detox is retox there's still some in the clip.

And in the chamber of secrets, but the safety was  
latched

You never pull the trigger anyways.

How can I be so lost when I've found God?

How can I be so vain when I'm such a sloth?

Where do you go when there's nowhere left to turn?

I look as mighty as an oak, but I'm as soft as a fern

And you turned my gulley—into a wooly, wooly  
mammoth farm

All my tusks were transformed into your bracelet and  
your anklet charms!

I signed your cast with a drawing of a dick.

The bet detox is retox there's still some in the clip.

And in the chamber of secrets, but the safety was  
latched.

You'd never pull the trigger anyways...anyways.

### **Influencing Influences**

Moving through a thickening high,  
Unable to clasp hands together.  
When the knees wobble, and the lips  
Are too numb to feel the saliva bridge  
From its tongue to your chin,  
Look for explanation. Try to  
Recall cause-and-effect to understand  
Your drug-induced side effects.

There was the kid down the street  
That sold indoor hydroponic weed.  
It was a good thing to introduce him  
To the runners, he knew the farmers.  
He was always in a pleasant mood.  
Even when lost in Joshua Tree  
His focus was rolling a blunt and  
Team morale.

Before that, close friends prescribed  
Of all pastel colors of medication.  
Terracotta Pink for the scattering times,  
Powder blue for mind-numbing,

Tapioca Yellow when the goof wanted  
To be brought out. White just for the  
Hell of it.

Then, the guy on the DarkNet preferred  
Mailed-envelopes of cash to BitCoin.

Always left town to see Cocaine Kyle.  
Usually surrounded by buildings and  
Large crowds of clueless masses. Only  
A few were in on the big joke. What a  
Laughing riot it was between us.

Now who's laughing? If there was a  
Stupor police, hands would be cuffed.  
No, there is only a fuck-up police.

**A Sonnet to Hangovers**

Blast awake from a static whirlpool dream,

Beside the mummy only stirs a grumble.

Dawning tangles of perspiring bedsheets mean

Impossibility to recall night's folly and fumble.

The howl from the moon erupts a temptation;

One only lethal without acceptance of pain—

For all skin cracks and sheds reconciliation.

But beneath the surface of the molting vain

Is a spirit that can be rejuvenated with hopes

Of praise for being so bold as to jeopardize

Spirit, mind, body, heart, reputation and scope.

The blur makes every urge pleasant in hindsight,

Even recurring debilitation is a token of might.

The dripping faucet can never be repaired

When whiskey triumphs fears and dares.

**Ballad for Lost**

Magic carpet could use some shampoo.

The pixie dust ran out in the dumpling-house booth.

Chipped my tooth on a guitar

Trying to write you a song.

Ankles click (clack, clickidy click).

When we cuddle them up.

Stop watching day-dreams

Projected on your windows.

It feels nice to wallow...in my regret.

Broken lights dance on wet pavement.

You told me twice to knock-it-off,

I know I haven't spent—

Enough attention to make my eyes cross,

When I look at your ugly dolls.

And I feel like a wasp, all I do is sting

And nothing sweet.

Milkshakes of malt, always spill

Turn my lips numb, make my brain pump,

You call them puns, you still can't drive,

I know I won't die, if I can just lie.

I presented you with an acorn.

It was drained of all its poison, pretty quick.

You've never had to say more,

To express that you feel alone and sick.

But I'm not here. Though if I was

I'd probably tell you that I'm still enough...

And if I was, I'd hold your bones so tight,

They'd go from smooth to rough.

Candles drip, when you don't blow them out.

I'd share with you my paper Mache,

If that was allowed.

Got your period front row at Tiesto's show,

Apology flowers never grow.

And I feel like a wasp, all I do is sting

And nothing sweet.

Milkshakes of malt, always spill

Turn my lips numb, make my brain pump

You call them puns, you still can't drive,  
I know I won't die, if I just lie.

**No Reason**

I wanted to see you perform at the  
Vagina Monologues. I've never been,  
I've heard it's quite interesting.

(You wouldn't have wanted to see  
Me there, anyways.)

Instead of witnessing that Earth  
Shattering moment of symbolic  
Catharsis, I took too much LSD  
And would up in the Pomona  
Valley Emergency Room.

Captured in the rainbow tunnel of my stupor,  
I thought I was the leader of a new world.  
Travelling through unseen dimensions  
Of vibrant Hourglass sand. Orbits of  
Humanoid creatures with suction cup  
Eyes hold me as their genderless pariah.

I sort of came-to in an ambulance.  
A cycle of thought galloped recurrently

In my mind. None of this before me in this  
Ambulance was real. I was under the impression  
That I was being detained by the  
Inter-dimensional travel police.

Carlos and Colin later informed me that I was  
Sprinting around in the rain, until security  
Finally caught up to me. Unable to answer  
Their questions, I tried to climb fences and  
Break free from their cuffs.

I didn't notice the gashes on my hands  
Until the surly nurse with the crew cut  
Hooked me up to an IV.

I wanted to see you at the Vagina Monologues.  
You wouldn't have wanted to see me there, anyways.

**Oh, Savior**

Oh, savior can you bring me ease?

I've ripped self apart like Heracles,

By mine own hand, and with full-knowing.

I call upon your wishful glowing.

Brightness float me away from the swamp—

In which I dwell, and gnash, and chomp,

And sludge, and sting, and pain, and fuck,

Where falseness in their brains abrupt.

Yet my rebut still feels corrupt.

As only eyes that cannot judge

Dance toward the marshy undergrowth,

Of which I beg you to approach.

So dawn me life-siver, dispel me drink.

Perhaps I've misread your printed ink.

But you claim to forgive all—that let you

Into their hearts. Mine may be dark,

But you're welcome to decompartment-

Mentalize, and understand,

You will be splitting room.

For another, too resides

In my estately tomb.

I've heard you two have a past.

Damn-near shared a womb,

Yet out your land you cast

His sorrows and his gloom.

So I have accepted him thus,

As only your teachings find fit.

Be careful of the webs you weave

For evil is the wit.

The time so idle for Satan-play,

But also for scripture read.

Oh, Savior, if you hear me

Alleviate my head.

Like Zachariah trapped on the rood,

I have not space for all.

So join me, Hosannah in the Highest

Pray that we don't fall.

**Scavenged**

Vulture of low-hanging fruit.

Talons never closing,

Neck fully-wound.

Eyes fixed on vulnerable prospects.

Perches on short, sharp cliffs

That hang above cavernous valleys.

Wings can bring the carrion

A higher comfort, but they

Are only spread to keep from

Splattering on the ground below.

All prey so young,

But none so fresh.

**Notes for the Misguided**

Let the spiked hair of the 'degenerates'

You walk over be your pumice.

Exfoliate your brow, bury your head

Deep into the pit of the sand dune valley.

Polish your Rolex with the tears

Of child sex-slaves and lowjacked fillings.

Don't you know how

Methylenedioxymethamphetamine

Is manufactured?

The clipboard toting scientist has no hand.

It was Meth Cook Daniel's first-born son.

A seasoned synthesist can point out all

Three degrees of burn marks on his

Crackly skin.

Skin that cries not for your smooth shine.

But continue to cover your surface with

Sun-screen, then, tanning-lotion, both

Hooves of horses and cows.

### **Writing for Others**

I used to write for others...

But I wasn't any good at that

And as I've gotten better at making words sound nice  
to people,

I've realized, that the only thing that you want to hear

Is exactly what I want to say.

And only sounds good to you if I don't give a damn

Whether or not you like it.

So it isn't that practice has made me better

It's that rejection made me sadder

Rejection made me angrier

And write selfishly

For me.

Which, inadvertently, made it better for you.

(Maybe I still do write for others).

### After Words

Thrust into a world of poetry, I've grown to embrace the poetic lens. Each topos, each trope, each rhyme, each cliché, each morning morning's minion, each reduction to a state of almost savage torpor, each nightingale, each ode to an obscure, inanimate object, and every single Stella of the skies holds special significance hidden to the naked eye. Not insasmuch as something undiscoverable upon ponderance. Rather, a way to contemplate the physical. The *Ah, Sunflower!* reaction. That is not to say that poets have a supernatural eyesight to certain beautiful images. My eyes do not see any more dandelion puffs whirl-winding in the sky than others.' Take the image a step further. The puff of dandelion seeds becomes a floating scoop of ice cream. Dripping sweet nutrients to the field, fostering the growth of new dandelions. So, now we have the permission to kick the field of dandelions and birth more scoops.

These words come after my project as they are a reflection of my poetry. There is a step after expressing one's thoughts into a poem. That is to say, it is important to re-read your poetry once your mind has settled. You can begin to reflect more objectively on your actions that put you into the poetic mindset. In the following pages, I have organized a few stories with deeper philosophical insight than my poems. Like my poems, they are about loss, love, life. But they contain moments of meditation and reflection. Moments in which I engage the reader with what is swimming around my head now that I've tried to understand the situation more objectively. But does reflection bring us closer to objectivity? It is common to believe that memory alters and bends the truth. By expressing my emotions 'in the moment,' I am lying. My written emotions are more driven by how I'm feeling with the pen in my hand than how I felt before I jumped off a

wall and broke my ankle. Yet, this prose sort of writing provides us with a different effect than poetry. Much of my poetry has been a series of images or emotions. Very little self-reflection on cause-and-effect or position in society is explicit. For the most part, I urge the reader to find my thoughts afterwards within my diction, syntax, or rhythm. During this prose section, I will outright express my emotions as they are. Rather than convoluting a failed relationship and describing it as a metaphorical moat, I will say that I feel as if there is a boundary between us now. I will address how frantically I behave when I see her in my peripherals, just dying to get her attention. I will conclude with the reflection that I only set myself up for more disappointment by expecting any kind of positive reaction.

The result of these 'after words' is more insight on the reader's end, hopefully. When writing poetry I try to apply sensory images that put the reader in the present moment I am trying to convey. My goal is to give the reader a first-hand view at the experience. My prose attempt to provide the reader with insight to a more reflective mode of expression. While my poems create a comprehensive view on the inner workings of my mind, I expect that this additional prose section will bring the project full circle.

## Negotiations

Everything in life is a negotiation. As a collectible salesman, I've begun to pick up on this. I had a collectible an interested party wanted desperately, but I had no idea how he conducted business. When I was younger, I used the internet to sell and procure old Nintendo video games and action figures. It wasn't until college that I had my first face-to-face sales interaction. I had to create a game plan and persona.

The interested buyer was the one to initiate the negotiation. He was looking for valuables, and I happened to have them. We agreed to make a transaction. Before I told him the value of the package, he made me a less-than-desirable offer. My response was to pin him against an imaginary bidder. In no way did I want him to know that the parcel in question was for sale. I even vacuum sealed the purple Gamecube disc-container and packaged it in a USPS priority mail box so he thought I was paying a shipping cost to the second merchant. I explained to him that I really wanted to give the game to him.

"You seem like a really great guy and I know you're interested. But you'd have to make me a higher offer than my friend across the country. He's not a friend, really. But he did ask for this game first."

The truth of the matter of my example negotiation with the collectible buyer is that I didn't care for wallet fodder. I wanted to establish an honest relationship in which both the second party and I were willing to put all of our physical and emotional capital into a business about which we felt passionate: collectibles. The trick with vintage video games, comic books, and dolls is to keep them in mint condition. It is so easy to avoid the desire to open a package when your pay-off is contingent on patience. Especially with a

highly desired good, the sales pitch and consequent negotiation is crucial to making money.

I do not mean to say I aspire to be some Machiavellian sociopath. Simple favors and interactions can be viewed as negotiations of sorts. It is important in such interactions to have a sleight of hand and an honest heart. You must know that eventually, your intentions will be sniffed out. A truly powerful negotiator expects the second party to catch on to his end-goal. The trick is to have a clever guise up your sleeve. A red-herring can be good. An escape route is also recommended. If some level of honesty and sincerity exists underneath your guise, the scale will always tilt in your favor.

## The Duel

How the fuck did I end up here? I've never even shot a gun with live ammunition in it before. I just got the stupid glock a week ago. I guess if I had to trace my trajectory back, I would find myself flirting with the wrong girl. God, everything is so easy in hindsight. So, this guy really thinks he has what it takes to kill another man? And over something so petty. Maybe, if I best his wit, he'll submit.

"Listen, I didn't know that was your girl—" I said.

"Yes you did, you approached her when I left to the bathroom!" He interrupted.

I wanted to tell him that a true gentleman would have waited for her to go to the bathroom first. I looked out of the corner of my eye. His girlfriend was staring blankly at me. I got this feeling that her man had been in this kind of scenario before. "So, you're going to shoot a man for buying a perfect stranger a Long Island Iced Tea?" I asked.

"Where do you get off calling my girlfriend 'perfect?'" I could hear her cringe. At this point he was firing verbal blanks.

I've never pointed my gun at anybody before. I imagine his safety must be on as well. This is beginning to feel like a customary type of engagement. "Cold steel chills the soul. If you want to have a 'chill night,' I air-quote with my index and middle fingers, "I suggest you keep your 9 mm Ruger pointed at me."

"Oh yeah, and what if I do?" He said proudly. What a simple response to my over-winded grandeur.

I tried to cock the gun smoothly, but again, this is all new to me. I didn't even have the holster on forwards. I mean, Sonny Crockett from Miami Vice did it that way. That was stylish. What I had going on was clueless. Lucky this baboon put his gun away.

When a person decides to point a gun at you and realizes you have a gun of your own, they're likely to submit. Everybody practices their right to bear arms in one way or another. In my Mexican stand-off example, the true ammunition was wordsmithery, not bullets. The gun is the mouth, the trigger is the wit, and the bullet is the desired 'compromise' that will have to be met.

## **Falling Out of Love**

I will be the first to admit that I am naïve. Each passing day, I learn more about how foolish I truly am. It always comes with a great surprise to me, but every day, I learn more about how clueless I am with relationships. I've always been the type of person that learns through experimentation and risk-taking. Quick to climb fences, prone to jump off walls. But, when the risks I take hurt others, the lesson learned is burned deeply into my mind and soul. I have the tendency to become an unstoppable force of pathetic will. Whatever cheap ends I can manipulate myself into motivates the lowly needs. Even if just to receive a harsh 'fuck you,' I've crossed boundaries figuratively and immediately. I have exploited others' attention and patience. I am the hero, the fool, god, and the street urchin all at once.

I think my ex-girlfriend is doing the right thing by trying to seriously move on from our relationship. I acted so selfishly in the relationship that I must remove my ego from my conception of our past in order to understand the crux of the problem. If I look back at our relationship objectively, as a man and a woman that I do not personally know, I can begin to appreciate why she hates me now. My inability to consider how my decisions affect the people around me has made me a careless man. I cheated and I wasn't there for her when she got shingles. We were on-and-off together for two years. I missed one of her birthdays and forgot one of our anniversaries.

The relationship ended as most do: a product of bad decisions and carelessness. I dismissed her feelings as trivial and wronged her countless times. I do not focus on my neglect or abuse, however. Obviously I have some growing to do, but I believe the cheating wasn't what damaged her so badly. Rather, it was the time we spent apart. Or

perhaps the lack of which. I constantly demanded her forgiveness and friendship in a deplorable fashion. I took away the time she needed to spend healing and thinking about herself. What I did with her time was also unhealthy, exploiting her emotions and vulnerability. Unsure about the breakup, I coerced her back into the relationship, time and time again. I never gave myself the chance to be alone and learn from mistakes in the relationship. We repeated this cycle of stupidity, all thanks to my sick passion for control. I was, as she put it, “inserting myself where I didn’t belong.”

When I said I’ve literally crossed boundaries, I mean, literally. Like a Venetian gondolier in the Pacific Ocean, I paddled into deadly waters. Two months after our most recent, and most painful separation, I broke into her house. Not with a crowbar or anything. Worse, I betrayed the trust that I never deserved in the first place. I went to open the front door with the Hello Kitty print key that Tam gave me at the start of our relationship, but the door was already open. I drunkenly staggered into the dimly lit house and beelined for Tam’s room. As I stared at the Cedar door so many memories came to mind of pointing out how the wood-stain design looked like an evil lady. Before I could knock, I was angrily greeted by one of her roommates Esme.

“What are you doing, Sam?” She asked sounding more concerned than angered.

I told her I honestly didn’t know. She suggested I leave and I agreed. When I got home, my Mom told me that she had received several calls in the last 10 minutes coming from panicked girls. My Mom relayed to me that the girls that lived in that house will not hesitate to call the cops next time I do something so stupid. Justly, so. I brought lilies, roses, and apology note the next day. They mocked me for such a weak gesture. But I feel like in doing so they wanted to verbally communicate that I felt sorry. That’s just the

problem. I feel like it's okay for me to do anything because I'm charming enough. I'm not. Nobody is. Anybody looking for genuine human relationships will tell you that there is no excuse to put yourself above others.

Respect is paramount in relationships. If I do not respect Tam's space, I will continue to cause her the harm. She will feel as if my aim is to control her and prevent her growth. However, if I behave in a respectful manner, she may grow and see that I am attempting to better myself as well. There is no 'meant to be,' 'perfect fit, or 'happily ever after.' Relationships require work, love, and mutual respect. If I ever want to be a part of a healthy relationship, these ideals must stay in the forefront of my mind. Personal autonomy must take a backseat. Part of me feels as though I've lost the urge to continue to pursue. I don't like losing urges. It is a healthy thing to be in pursuit of difficult outcomes. But if the outcome causes harm to others, it is best to let things go. I've fallen out of love.

### **Lizette**

My name is Tonie Flor Nguyen. I used to go by Toni. Then, I started to tell people to call me Flor. Now, I tell them its spelled Tonie. None of my friends seem to bother my minor identity shifts, but it is important to me. Just like moving around the furniture in my bedroom. Change is good. God, I want to get out of Claremont.

Lizette was my first childhood friend. My first best friend. I asked her if she wanted to be my friend and she called me an angel. I later learned that almost everything Lizette did was ironic. But the memory is still fond.

My whole life was a mission to shelter my friends. Wherever I went, I would amass a group of likeminded individuals and hold on dearly to each of them. When they left, I cried. I learned to hold on deeper to other friends. I didn't have Lizette's back. Well, at least not to her face. Now I am the only one with deep-seeded memories of her. I remember when we used to braid each others' hair and put way too much make-up on.

Every girl in our class called us sluts because we were the first 'sluts.' Joke's on them, they lost their virginites way before us. Well, I guess that's not a joke. None of this is. I can't imagine myself ever laughing about our memories ever again. Even the times we pretended to be Cholas and shoplifted from Gas Stations and Liquor stores. Why they ever let us into these establishments, I'll never know. Maybe they were just distracted by our hot pink hair and the asymmetrical piercings on our faces.

Both of us lived on the 'other side of the train tracks.' We took the train all the time, but rarely went North of the tracks, except for school. Then, when we had to go to the continuation school for a semester, we stopped going North of the tracks altogether.

Well, I was only there for a semester. Lizette graduated from that cursed continuation school.

We spoke less when she thought I had sold her out. Without me around, she would get bullied. Even with me around she had adversaries. She was never the type to call ‘uncle.’ I loved that about her. Probably for the same reasons the bullies did. People always tell you that bullies are just jealous of you. But in Lizette’s case, they really hated her. They thought she was weak and hated that. They thought she was a slut and a man-stealer and they hated that. They thought she was a drug mooch and they hated that the most. I’m not sure from whom they got their information. But they were dead wrong about all of the above.

Lizette thought I sold her out. I remember our close friend Kennedy told me that she had been cutting.

“So, what? We all cut.”

“Not like this.” Kennedy took a few slow breaths through her beautifully crooked nose. I tried to read her expression, whether she was sad for Lizette or happy to get something off her chest. I bit my pen trying to think of a way to change the subject.

“What music does she listen to when she does it?”

“That’s the thing. She hasn’t been doing it to relieve stress, she’s been trying to—like...”

I’m not sure what interrupted Kennedy, but I knew where she was going. So, I went to see Lizette. I hadn’t talked to her face-to-face in two months. We would occasionally check up on each other on AOL Instant Messenger. Even back then it was super outdated. Facebook and MySpace were in and we just liked to IM because it was

funny to us. Like listening to cassette tapes or watching movies from a VHS player. I brought her some rice in case she was hungry. She told me she hadn't been hungry in a while. She looked pale and her eyes were red.

“Have you been taking drugs?”

“You know they scare the shit out of me.”

“Then, what's the deal?” I knew my words were stupid as soon as they left my mouth. That queered the conversation from that point on. I tried to talk to her about my close friend. This stupid boy she despised. I'm not sure why she hated him so much. He was friendly, just super horny. I liked that about him, but I never let him get in my pants.

“So, you're no longer with Derek?”

I laughed. “Of course, I'm still with Derek.” She knew I liked to talk about boys. But I remembered that she didn't. She told me it made her jealous, but I always knew that wasn't true. I've seen her get jealous. She just didn't like to talk about boys. At this point, I felt like I couldn't really do anything to help. There was something on her mind, but she didn't want to share. But I could see her constantly adjusting the loose sleeves on her Madonna sweater and making sure her skirt didn't rise above her knees.

A few years passed and we graduated high school. Lizette turned a corner and she would laugh with me about fashion trends on the phone. I even got to see her more. We would hangout in my garage or her dusty living room and she would smile. We would make fun of how we spent our middle school days, smoking cigarettes on the roof of the frozen yogurt shop.

During my second year at Chaffey Community College, I heard she was having a hard time again. I felt so guilty, we hadn't talked in a year. Not even via phone or computer. I didn't even bother calling, I just went to her house, uninvited.

"You can't come in, I'm on my period."

"We've taken baths together when one of us was on the rag," I knocked on her door softer this time. "I miss you, can we please talk?" I nervously bit my plump lips. I could hear her hip cock, it always made this cute clicking sound.

"I just want to be left alone right now."

"No, you don't," my vision got a little blurry and my lips began to quiver. "It's cold out, please let me in."

She didn't let me in. She just walked back to her couch. I assumed she was just in a bad mood and didn't want to talk. It was okay. I convinced myself that I would talk to her later. But, I got too busy. I heard she turned the corner again, and I had so many other commitments. A new boyfriend, two jobs, and Community College really took a toll on my free time.

By my senior year of Community College, I had been so attentive to my close friends. I felt like I was building a complicated nest for pollinating honey bees. But I was really just a bear-trap next to a ceramic bowl of honey. I had met new friends who weren't so likeminded. But they would listen and try to understand. Some of them were annoyed by my motherly impulses and need to stay in close contact. But I knew that they appreciated it when they needed my help. But, I lost track of Lizette. Until, I read in the news that she had passed away. I went to talk to her mother, who never liked me.

"So, what happened?"

“She died.” What a numb response.

“I mean,” I could tell that she didn’t want to give details, but I had to know. “How did it happen?”

“She hanged herself, in the closet. First she tried the ceiling fan in the living room.” She opened the door and pointed at the ceiling. “See? It’s broken.”

I cried for a full day. Then, for the next few weeks, I was upset and considered myself a failure as a friend. How could somebody so attached to friendship completely lose track of her first friend? I blamed myself. I called the suicide hotline to ask if they had gotten any calls from a lost soul named Lizette. They told me that even if they had, that information was confidential.

When I got the invitation to her funeral, I felt the need to express myself artistically. I painted a self-deprecating portrait of my trembling hand holding the funeral invitation on an expensive canvas. It wasn’t a very good painting. I’m not great with realism.

At the funeral, I brought a rose. Not one of those cheap-o ones either. Lizette’s Mom brought her dog out. A beautiful dalmation named Wheetus. Like, after the shitty band. I got this vibe from the dog like it wanted some attention. So, during the commencement I approached it slowly. Nobody saw me because the dog had run behind all of the chairs. Its ears perked and its head shifted from side-to-side like a street-corner dealer. Still, I felt like I needed to pet it. It was an urge to stick the fork in the electrical outlet just to see if your parents were full of shit. Wheetus didn’t react to my fingers, but when my face got near, he snapped. He bit me so hard on my upper lip that I jumped backwards. I held my hand to my face, shaking. I didn’t want anybody to see the blood. I

returned to my seat and sat next to my sister. She could see the blood soaking my p-coat. She leaned in to whisper to me, probably to tell me that everything's alright. But she seemed to be in shock from the blood, too.

I looked over at the other people sitting in the front row. Lizette's mother was sprawled across four family members. Her body language was lethargic, but her face seemed happy. Maybe the closure process was taking a much more serious toll on her than I first imagined. I looked down at the rose, it was dripping wet. The blood perfectly matched the shade of the petals. The thorns and stem were also covered. I took my hand off my face momentarily to see the damage. My hand was completely red with no signs of clotting. My sister's eyebrows screamed. I told her I had to leave and handed her the rose. At the end of the funeral, she put the rose on the coffin for me.

After I got eight stitches in my face, I came home. I iced my lips constantly, but they were already numb. I'm not sure I'll ever get out of Claremont. At least Lizette did.