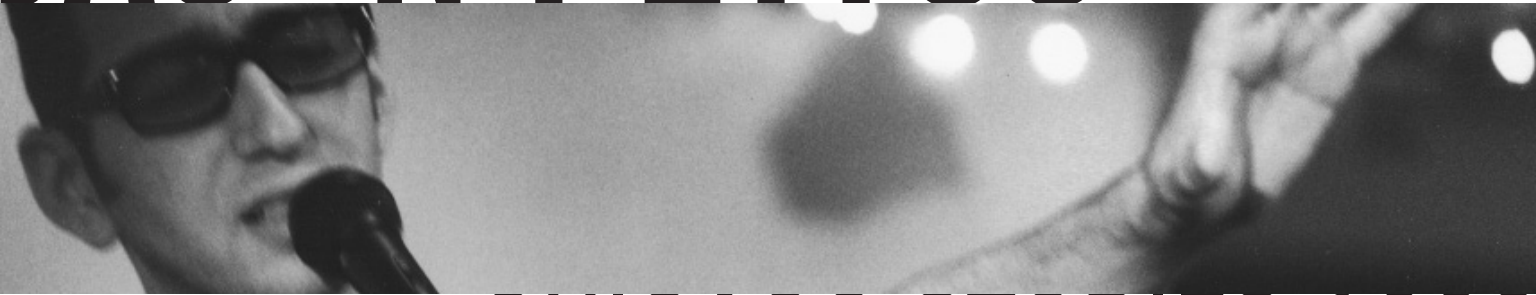


COMPLETE PERFORMANCE WORK 1996-2004

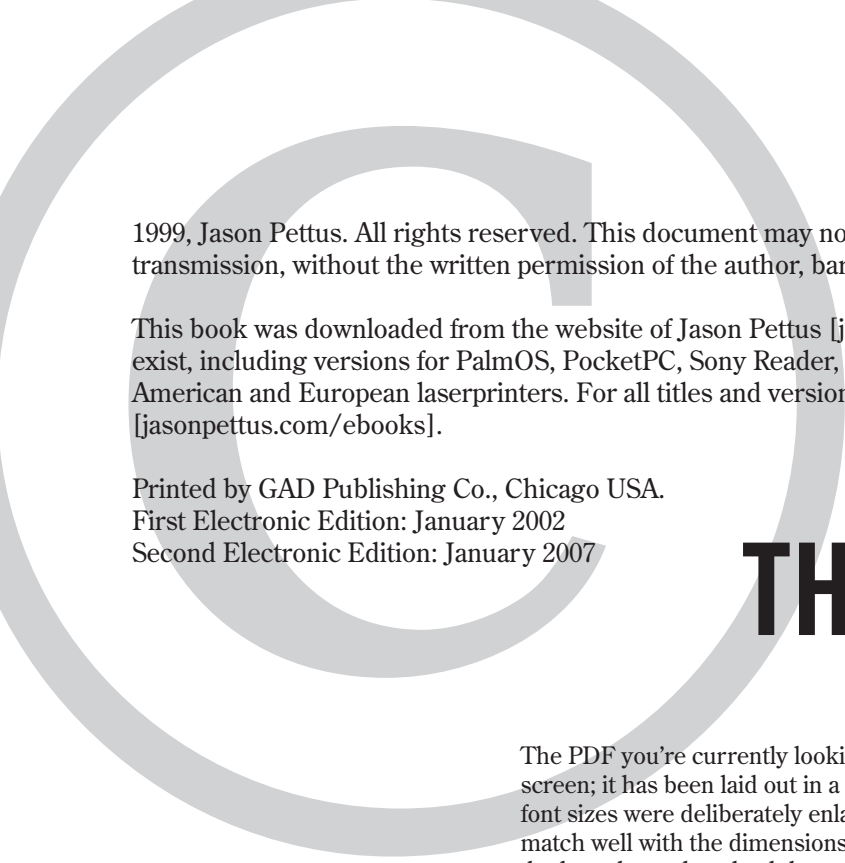
GAD Publishing Company Chicago USA

03 OF 13

JASON PETTUS



CHICAGO STORIES 1998



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Printed by GAD Publishing Co., Chicago USA.

First Electronic Edition: January 2002

Second Electronic Edition: January 2007

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CONTENTS.

- 04 Introduction to the 2007 Edition
- 07 12 ways that my ex-jobs and my ex-girlfriends are much alike
- 08 47 words spoken on an el
- 09 Bitch and moan
- 10 Brandon, king of the world
- 11 dynasty
- 12 Eight haikus concerning the last night of “Pow”
- 13 I wish I could start a poem by doing this
- 15 Jane the Geek
- 19 Jayne and Dana, Dana and Jayne
- 21 Jedi mind trick
- 22 A little story about my last temp job
- 24 Littleton
- 28 The love of Jacques
- 29 Maddie, the queen of internet pornography
- 31 me&thegirls&theporn&thedildos
- 34 Mean and hateful poems
- 36 The mod kids
- 39 An obscene poem for my new lover
- 42 One of those moments
- 44 She Number One and She Number Two
- 46 strangeplastikrobot
- 47 We are the sum of everything that has come before us
- 48 The world ends in 422 days
- 49 Yet another small poem for DG
- 50 You are all the Prozac I need.
- 53 Biographical notes
- 56 Notes about individual pieces

INTRODUCTION TO THE 2007 EDITION

Since 1996 I have owned and operated a basement press in Chicago called GAD, dedicated mostly to the self-publishing of my own work (and with a brief detour in 2001, publishing a dozen books by my friends, before giving up the pursuit again for lack of community interest). As of 2004 GAD had ended up publishing over forty books, both full-length and miniature in nature, dealing with everything from poetry to prose, essays, interviews, science-fiction, erotica and travel. Being the sole employee of GAD, of course, especially while continuing to write new material on a regular basis, unfortunately meant that many of these books ended up being published on a less-than-professional basis, with dozens of typos and grammatical errors found in each. It was something that always slightly bothered me about the GAD catalog; as long as I was an active writer, though, this worry was always trumped by the stronger desire to keep writing new material, and to devote the majority of my energy to these new projects instead of cleaning up the old ones.

In late 2004, however, I made the decision to put this literary career on indefinite hold, in order to open and operate an arts center here in Chicago instead. Given the chance for the first time to take a detailed look at the existing GAD

catalog, I decided at that point to dedicate the next few years of my life to going through these old books, giving each of them the thorough editing they deserved, and republishing them in electronic form, standardizing not only the look of each publication but also the options for downloading and viewing them. This was complicated enough when it came to the nonfiction and prose projects, but especially tricky in the case of my performance poetry and monologues, of which I had never attempted to publish a pervasive, chronological record. Since the 2007 edition of these poetry/monologue books makes certain older titles now obsolete, as well as introduces several new titles, I thought I'd take a moment and explain the entire process, for committed readers who wish to own the complete, definitive collection.

Prior to 2002, the vast majority of GAD poetry/monologue books available were of special projects, including: *Psycho Poets* (1997), a collection of poems about women I slept with in 1997, when I was a member of the Chicago poetry-slam team; *Jasonettes* (1998), *The Heatseeker* (1999), *Notes From My Grandmother's Funeral* (2000) and *Celibate* (2001), all of them written transcripts of special half-hour themed performances I gave over the years, all of them

for the old “Mental Graffiti” poetry show here in Chicago; [*Andi.*] (1999), a collection of poetry about a specific ex-girlfriend; and *The Tao of Now* (2000), a literary experiment of sorts, combining the length and structure of traditional short stories with the language and rhythm of slam poetry. The only exceptions were GAD’s oldest two books, *The Sweet Alice Sessions* and *Kathie Lee Gifford Likes to Fuck!*, both from 1996, both collecting not special themed work but merely the general pieces I was writing and performing for the open mics that year. In addition there was a “greatest hits” collection also available, called *The Jason Pettus Portable Reader* (2001) and consisting of around twenty of my audience’s absolute favorite pieces over the years, published exclusively to sell at live shows. These ten books reprinted approximately 100 of the poems and monologues I had written over the years; the vast majority of the 300 others I had written were simply unavailable in published form, save for those found on individual HTML pages at my website.

In 2002, the first year after “retiring” from the poetry community, I decided to make my first attempt at publishing a comprehensive series of these pieces; the result was the four-book series *Chicago Stories 1997-2000*, as well as a new “greatest hits” book, *More Poems about Blowjob*s, collecting my favorite sexually-explicit poems and monologues from over the years. These five new books went a long way towards getting more of my old performance work out to the public, but with still a number of inconsistencies: for example, technically the contents of both *Sweet Alice* and *Kathie Lee Gifford* should’ve been included in the “Chicago Stories” series, not as their own stand-alone books; the series was still missing the poems I wrote in 2001 and 2002, important for posterity’s sake but not a large enough collection to publish

as their own book; and of course even the current “Chicago Stories” series was missing several pieces that had become audience favorites over the years.

For this 2007 edition, therefore, I have declared both *Sweet Alice* and *Kathie Lee Gifford* as “out-of-print” titles, neither of which will ever be printed in their original forms again; instead, they have been consolidated and are now known collectively as *Chicago Stories 1996*, fitting better into the overall theme of the entire series. I’ve also compiled a short *Chicago Stories 2001-2004* book, including the smattering of poems I wrote after retiring from the literary community. The new six-book “Chicago Stories” collection (including expanded editions of the four volumes that had previously existed) now reprints all of the general work from my years as an active performer; the seven special themed books already mentioned have also been reedited and republished, meaning that owning this thirteen-book series now gives you access to nearly every poem and monologue I wrote between 1996 and 2004. The two “greatest hits” compilations have also been republished, along with two new ones; one’s called *Love Blender*, a collection of pieces about relationships, compiled originally as a feature for the electronic magazine *LoveBlender.com*, and the other’s simply entitled *Personal Favorites*, along with a new introduction concerning why they are. And finally, a new omnibus edition has been published for 2007 as well, called *Complete Performance Work 1996-2004*, collecting the content of all thirteen previously-mentioned books into one volume (and in fact, owning that volume makes owning the thirteen individual books unnecessary).

Those who enjoyed this book may also want to check out the following related volumes, all currently available

through GAD: *How to Win a Poetry Slam* (2000), a half-humorous, half-critical look at this unique literary genre; *Smells Like Sweat* (1997), a memoir of the 1997 National Poetry Slam, written entirely as a series of haikus (from an original concept by Jerry Quickley); and *The Tunnel Rat Sessions* (2002), a collection of long-form interviews with other slam poets that I originally conducted for the Chicago-based poetry newsletter *Tunnel Rat* in the mid-1990s. Of course, I also encourage you to check out the other books in the GAD catalog; as of this writing there are 55 books altogether, with more being added each year, covering almost every literary genre and style imaginable. As always, I urge you to drop me a line if you wish to discuss these pieces further; my latest contact information can always be found at my website, itself found at **jasonpettus.com**.

12 WAYS MY EX-JOBS AND MY EX-GIRLFRIENDS ARE MUCH ALIKE

1. I have a lot of them in my past and none of them have ever ended well.
2. They both average about two and a half months.
3. If it takes more than one interview I get bored and move on.
4. Neither of them will give me good recommendations.
5. Both are full of passion and intensity when it starts, then peter out at the end until they can't stand me anymore.
6. They are usually the ones who break it off.
7. Both think it's really cool at first to be hanging out so much with a writer...until they actually do start hanging out so much with a writer.
8. I lose a whole new set of friends every time one ends. I also end up usually losing a sweater and a couple of CDs.
9. I can look for both in the Chicago Reader.
10. Every time I get drunk all my friends want to know what it was like and which one was best and why it all ended, anyway.
11. I'm obsessed with having one until I actually do, at which point I'm obsessed with getting out of it.
12. They'll both dump you like a ton of bricks if you show up to their place drunk and yell "Blow me!"

47 WORDS SPOKEN ON AN EL

Belmont?
Yeah. You?
Same.
Good book.
You've read it?
Uh-huh.
Nice shoes.
Thanks.
Destination?
Dinner.
Ah. Boyfriend.
No. Alone.
Alone?
Lonely.
Ah. I understand.
You?
Nowhere.

Nowhere?
Roaming. Bored.
Restless?
Lonely. Afraid.
Don't be.
Easier said...
Dinner?
Now?
Yes.
Wow. Thanks.
My pleasure.
BELMONT.
Ready?
Sure.

BITCH AND MOAN

Bitch bitch bitch and moan moan moan. That's all I ever hear. "Jason, take your clothes off. Jason, let me put your cock in my mouth. Jason, make love to me, right now." I am sick of it. If I have to have sex one more time I don't know what I'm going to do. ON the bed, on the floor, in the bathroom. On the toilet, off the toilet, in front of the mirror, on top of our clothes, under the covers. Fingers, toes, tongues, rings, condoms, vibrating pagers, computer batteries, beer bottles and sock monkeys. In her mouth, around her fingers, between her breasts and up her ass. In my mouth, around my fist, between my legs and up my ass. What have I done to deserve such punishment?

If I have to have my cock grabbed under the table at a bar one more time I don't know what I'm gonna do. Drink drink drink, eat eat eat, smoke smoke smoke, fuck fuck fuck, bitch bitch bitch and moan moan moan. "Jason, I love you. Jason, let me buy you another beer. Jason, let's go hang out with all my sexy and interesting friends." Have I taken a

wrong turn? Did I accidentally piss off God? Am I the only one who sees this?

We do with without pornography, we do it with pornography, we do it with magazines and videos and computer images from the Internet. We do it for the Internet! We do it in front of a computer, we do it in front of a camera, we do it in the middle of a little dark room in the back hallway of a porn store at the corner of Chicago and Welles. Could my life get any worse?

She does it with women. I do it with men. We do it every twenty goddamn minutes! She can't walk right, I can't shit right, and my hand has been permanently cramped in this position for this last three days! Won't somebody kill me and put me out of my misery?

Bitch bitch bitch and moan moan moan. I am sick of it!

BRANDON, KING OF THE WORLD

Hi. My name's Brandon. I'm eleven years old. Can I sit here? What are you doing? Do you want to play cards? We could play poker. I know how to play poker. I have 23 dollars. We could play poker for money 'cause then I'd win. Five diamonds in a row is called a flush. I know this 'cause I know how to play poker.

My name is Brandon. I'm eleven years old. How old are you? Really? That's pretty old. My grandma is 51 and you're almost as old as she is. What are you doing on the train? Are you going to St. Louis? I'm going to St. Louis. My grandma and I are going to go visit my aunt and uncle and they live in St. Louis and it's pretty cool because they have a bike and they let me ride it in the street which I can't do at home 'cause I live in Detroit and my grandma says it's not safe to ride a bike in Detroit. Have you ever been to Detroit? Do you watch basketball? Who do you think's going to win? I think the Pistons are going to win, well, not really, I think the Utah Jazz is going to win but I really want the Pistons to win. I think Grant Hill's doing really good this year. Do you have Air Jordans? I have Air Jordans. What kind of shoes do you wear? Eww, those are funny-looking shoes.

My name is Brandon. I'm eleven years old. This is what grade I'm in. Your teeth are gross. What happened to your teeth? Why do your teeth have holes in them? That's really gross. Do you want to play cards? We could play Go Fish even though it's a kiddie game. We could play Go Fish if

you don't want to play poker. If I took a drink of this soda and spit, how far do you think it'd go? (spits) Sorry! That's pretty far.

Is that your Walkman? Can I listen to it? Eww, what is this? I've never heard of that band. Don't you listen to rap? What do you mean you don't listen to rap? I listen to rap. I listen to the Beastie Boys. My name is Brandon. I'm eleven years old. This music's stupid. I don't like it at all. Oh wait, is there any curse words on this? 'Cause I can't listen to it if it has curse words 'cause my grandma said I can't listen to music with curse words.

Do you watch wrestling? What do you mean you don't watch wrestling? How can you not watch wrestling?! It's the coolest! I watch wrestling every week. Stone Cold Steve Austin is the coolest wrestler ever! I have Wrestling Challenge 98 for my Playstation at home and I'm really good at it. Do you have a Playstation? Hey, look at that guy. He looks just like Dennis Rodman. Hey, you look just like Dennis Rodman! (pause, then shrug) I think he looks like Dennis Rodman. I'm going to buy another soda. Do you want a soda? I have 23 dollars. Did you ever see Michael Jordan when he was playing with the Bulls? Are you visiting your mom this weekend? Why are you...

(yelling from off-mike) BRANDON, GET YOUR BUTT BACK TO YOUR SEAT THIS SECOND!

Oops, I gotta go. See you later! Bye!

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EIGHT HAIKUS CONCERNING THE LAST NIGHT OF 'POW'

“Pow” was an open mic that ran in Chicago once a week during 1999, hosted by Noam Paco Gastor. These haikus were written on the last night of the show. (Written with Jude Baker and Lola Huston.)

Red lights on the stage
Freaky performers – is this
a practical joke?

How many exes
can be found in just one room?
Drink up. Never mind.

I would rather be
a sticky translator
for alien bees

The bees would feed you
precious royal jelly and
you'd be free from goo.

You'd communicate
like them, by shaking your ass;
talk in scent and touch.

Not by buzzing: it's
just a by-product of flight.
You beat wings to move.

Had you known what I'd
meant, you would have chased me down,
hand outstretched to beg.

When I step aside,
he can't help but be there.
He wants to do good.

I WISH I COULD START A POEM BY DOING THIS

All right all you stupid motherfuckers, now listen up!
I've always wanted to start a poem like that.

I have the beginnings of a thousand poems in my head
that I carry around with me, looking for the ends
"Last night I had a dream about you again"
"She asked herself one second too late, Why am I making
toast in the bathtub?"
"My computer set itself on fire when I typed your name"
I have the beginnings of a thousand poems in my head
and they are desperately seeking their ends to make them-
selves real.

I've always wanted to start a poem by singing
but I cannot sing.
I've always wanted to start a poem by taking off my clothes
but I'm ashamed of my body.
I've always wanted to start a poem with some phat hiphop...
thing
but...well, look at me.

YYYYEEEEEEE-HHHAAAAAAWWWWWWW!!!!!!!

I've always wanted to start a poem like that.
I have the beginnings of a thousand poems in my head
poems about my mom
and my dad
poems about love
and hate
and peace
and war
poems about my ex-girlfriend
and my other ex-girlfriend
and my other ex-girlfriend
and my other ex-girlfriend
poems about every single person
I've ever met
you and
you and
you and
you and
you and
you and
you and
you.
I have the beginnings of a thousand poems in my head

and I just cannot seem to find their ends.

“I was in Paris. It was a Thursday”

“I once bought a porn magazine and Beth was on the cover”

“THIS IS NOT A POEM ABOUT YOU”

I’ve always wanted to start a poem like that.

I wish I could write a poem that was just the first lines of a
bunch of other poems

That would be pretty cool.

The first line of a poem is the best part, anyway

It just goes downhill from there.

“I stole my daddy’s car on the fourth of July
and I drove it until it ran out of gas.”

I’ve always wanted to start a poem like that.

I have started a thousand poems about you in my head
and in a perfect world

I could string them all together

to make the one most kick-ass poem

in the history of the human race

and I could read this poem

on the pitchers mound in Wrigley Field

in front of 70,000 screaming fans

“She told me she loved me and I didn’t know what to say”

“Those anti-depressants were going to kill her and one day
they did”

“I would gladly hijack an airplane to come see you today”

and when I was done

everyone would understand exactly what I was talking about

and they’d all do the wave

and start cheering my name

over and over

“Ja-SON! Ja-SON! Ja-SON!”

But poems need endings.

And I cannot write the endings

to any of the thousand poems

I have written about you.

And so I sit in front of my computer,

run my fingers through my hair,

and think about you.

And so I will end

the first poem I have ever written about you

by saying,

JANE THE GEEK

ONLINE SESSION INITIATED BY USER
BEGIN

MAIN SUBJECT THREAD: MY WORST BREAKUP

Jane used to say that conversing with me was like participating in a threaded public bulletin board system on the internet. She claimed that after the conversation was over she would be able to envision it in front of her and see a perfect hierarchical structure, watching me jump from subject to subject in an intuitive way while still hopping from topic to topic almost randomly.

RE: WHO IS JANE?

Jane is. . . Jane. Is Jane. It's impossible to describe Jane in any other way than a self-referential one, because there's no proper metaphor that adequately explains her.

RE(2): JANE JANE JANE

Jane's a geek. Jane taught herself Linux one summer because it sounded interesting. Jane owns one of the original 1984 Macintoshes with all the developers' signatures etched into the inside casing. She named it "Sylvia"

and keeps her diary on it. In fact, Jane went to Macworld Expo in '91 just to sleep with one of the original developers, just so she could say that she had "insanely great" sex. Jane is a geek.

RE: HOW JANE AND I MET

At a lesbian strip club, of course. It's a long story so don't even ask.

RE(2): WHY WERE YOU AT A LESBIAN STRIP CLUB?

When I was younger I used to have a bunch of lesbian friends through the punk rock scene who used to love to drag me to this kind of shit to try to embarrass me. But really, that's not the point of my story.

RE: HOW JANE AND I MET

Jane walked up to me on the dance floor and said, "Did you know that when you multiply Pi with itself and add my birthday in hexadecimal form, you get the same number as the CD-ROM code for the album 'Burn Don't Freeze?'" Then she kissed me.

RE(2): DID I MENTION THAT JANE IS CRAZY?

Jane is manic-depressive. Jane has Attention Deficit Disorder. Jane's been on medication since she was four. Jane's been going to therapy since she was six.

RE(3): JANE'S OBSESSIONS

Jane is obsessed with two things – the mathematical equation Pi and the all-girl punk-rock band Sleater-Kinney. And believe me, when I say she's obsessed, I mean she's OBSESSED.

RE: HOW JANE AND I MET

So Jane kisses me and then says, "What did you get on your ACT?" And I say 29 and she says, "Perfect. I can sleep with you now."

RE(2): OH YEAH, ANOTHER OBSESSION

Jane will only sleep with people who got a 29 on their ACT. Not a point more, not a point less.

RE: WHO IS JANE?

Man, I don't know who Jane is. It's impossible for me to answer that question.

RE(2): WHY BI-POLAR PEOPLE ARE SEXY

Jane could be the most generous, unselfish, loving person I've ever known when she wanted to. There were times when she would easily give all of herself, every tiny little bit, to help another human being. Sometimes that was me, sometimes that was some homeless punk kid at Belmont and Clark who needed a meal and a pack of cigarettes.

RE(3): DID I MENTION THAT JANE IS KINKY?

Jane had this recurring sexual fantasy where she was trapped in a small enclosed space and forced to give oral sex. There was this crawlspace in the apartment I was living in at the time, between the oven and the refrigerator, maybe...oh, this wide. Jane used to have me undress her and put her in the crawlspace, then force her down on her knees and put my penis in her mouth.

RE(4): MORALITY ARGUMENTS

I'm not saying it's right. I'm just saying it was sexy.

RE: WHO IS JANE?

Jane's the only woman I know who can get sexually aroused over a new piece of FTP freeware. Jane's the only woman I know who's actually been institutionalized for mental imbalance. Jane's the only woman I know who enjoys pornography more than me. Jane's the only

TRANSFER INTERRUPTED BY USER

MAIN SUBJECT THREAD: MY WORST BREAKUP

Jane had a computer metaphor for every part of our relationship. We weren't a "couple," we were the sole two members of the newsgroup "alt.sex.digmeout." We didn't go out on dates, we had online sessions. Instead of asking me to spend the night, Jane would ask if I'd like to expand my internet connection from 56K to TCP/IP.

RE: JANE AND COMPUTER METAPHORS

When I first asked Jane how old she was, she told me

she was currently at version 26.2. A couple of weeks into our relationship Jane got a haircut, and she was suddenly upgraded to version 26.3. Jane's coding was really remarkable. It was completely degradable – if you browsed her with Netscape 5, she'd load up all the Java and CSS and Shockwave and all those other bells and whistles. But you could browse her with fuckin' Mosaic 1.0 and still get a clean, smart, interesting site.

RE(2): JANE AND COMPUTER METAPHORS AND DATING

Dating Jane was like logging on to her through Telnet. It was all content and no WYSIWIG bullshit whatsoever.

RE(3): JANE AND COMPUTER METAPHORS AND MENTAL ILLNESS

Jane never considered herself crazy. She just assumed that her hard drive had been infected with a virus and that one day she would eventually find the correct software to fix the problem. Sometimes when Jane was having one of her episodes, she'd hug me tightly and cry on my shoulder and tell me that I was her own personal beta version of Norton Utilities. It was nice. I felt like one of those cool defragmentizing programs that will put all the little pieces of your hard drive's code back together to keep it from crashing.

RE: WHO IS JANE?

Jane is a very, very disturbed little girl. Jane is the most complicated woman I've ever met. Jane is crazy. Jane is sane. Jane is Jane is Jane.

MAIN SUBJECT THREAD: MY WORST BREAKUP

One day I got a phone call from Jane and I said hi and she said hi and I said Should I come over and she said Yes, but not to my apartment and I said Where should I meet you? and she said Come over to Cook County Hospital, I've been institutionalized again.

RE: JANE AND HOSPITALS

Jane hated the new-age movement. To her therapy wasn't a solution but rather something to occupy her time while she kept looking for that perfect debugging software that would finally clean up her system. She refused to call mental hospitals anything other than "institutions," which is why she always referred to outpatient visits as "institutionalizations."

MAIN SUBJECT THREAD: MY WORST BREAKUP

So I got to the hospital and there was Jane. Jane had thick bandages wrapped around her wrists. I asked Jane how she was feeling. She said she felt like she had only 4 megs of RAM installed in her system and had been trying to run Photoshop 7.0 all day. I knew what she meant.

RE: GEEKS AND SUICIDE

My processor has frozen up before too. Hasn't everyone's? I zapped the PRAM, I rebuilt the Desktop, I ran a diagnostic – nothing helped. Sometimes all of us just reach the point in our lives where we have to say fuck it and simply archive all our files and completely reload the system software from scratch.

RE(2): THE PROBLEM WITH THIS

Sometimes your old software will become completely corrupted from the process and you have no choice but to just throw it away.

MAIN SUBJECT THREAD: MY WORST BREAKUP

Jane said We need to talk. Jane said that she's a Motorola 68020 processor and that I'm a G3. They're made by the same company but they just don't mix. Jane said that she's a SCSI port and that I'm a USB plug. I said, "Yes, but they make converters for that now." Jane just held her wrists in the air and said, "Yeah, but Microcenter closed early tonight."

RE: DO YOU MISS HER?

RE:(REPOST) DO YOU MISS HER?

UNSOLICITED MESSAGE DELETED BY SYSTEM ADMINISTRATOR

MAIN SUBJECT THREAD: MY WORST BREAKUP

Jane lives in San Francisco now. She works for Sega. Jane makes \$96,000 a year and owns almost half a million in stock options. I'm told she still drives her Saturn because she wants to stay in touch with the little people. Jane was on the development team for Sega Dreamcast 1.0. When you load in the game "Tomb Raider 3" and, right at the main screen, hit "B-A-A-B-C-B-A left arrow right arrow left arrow," a photo of Jane will appear on the screen. Jane's wearing a Sleater-Kinney t-shirt and flashing the gang symbol for Pi that she invented, which consists of three fingers down, one thumb sideways, and four fingers down. A message appears

below her photo. It says, "Many thanks to Norton Utilities. I couldn't've done it without you." In the computer industry, this is known as an Easter Egg.

END OF SUBJECT THREAD

ONLINE SESSION TERMINATED BY USER

JAYNE AND DANA, DANA AND JAYNE'

Every time a back is turned these days
 someone is sticking a camera into someone's face
Others take it for granted until
 the machine is put in their face
 and then we have a different opinion indeed.

Some of us love it and crave it
We suck on the lens like our mother's teat
We eat videotape and shit sound bites
We hold our babies in our trembling arms
 and name them Wolf and Stone and
 Katie and Connie and Star.
Others of us hate it and fear it
Throw up a Jackie O arm across our
 tear-streaked face
Squint at the strobe lights
 and wonder how the world went so wrong.

How odd that I should meet you the same

day she died.

One who I wish to hold to my chest
 and another one who I have held to my chest
 and is now gone.

You seek the camera and cannot find it
She fled the camera and found it lurking behind every bush
It's a waste. A shame. A pity. It really is.

I dreamt of her under soft polyester
A glossy childrens' magazine resting four inches from
 the outstretched fingers of the now-asleep twelve-
year-old hand

A dog snoring at toe level
I was stuck in a chimney with her
Our sweaty, dirty bodies pressed tight against one another
Not kissing not fucking but simply
 every inch of our flesh squeezed pore to matching

pore

I dreamt of her under soft white light

of a child's lamp left on past slumbertime
A dog licking my toes
and a small boy's hands clenched into fists

I dreamt of you last night.
We were running across the queen's lands
hand in hand
Laughing and looking each way
for the royal army to come and capture us
to throw us into a tall stained tower
the bricks black with grime and age
We were floating across the regal pastures
reciting verse at the top of our lungs
You in a flowing white dress
with a wreath of flowers in your hair
Me in a crimson robe
and a steel sword at my hip
We were running away from the world
and then I woke and realized
you had already done so

So strange that I should meet you the same
day she died.
One flying across the world in search of
a mental place called home
The other desperately trying to stay in one home
and being forced to become a rogue

I watched her
through the lenses
I watch you
through my own eyes

I watched her battle her demons
through the gauze of a
Photoshopped logo
I watch you displace your demons
through the muzzle of a
fake fur coat
I watched her for years as she
slowly crumbled and became
a cartoon character of herself
I watched you for one day as you
touch my elbow and whisper in my ear and
suddenly become real.

And now you're gone.
And now she's gone.
And I will miss you both.
Her, with whom I shared twenty years
side by side
You, with whom I shared one evening
One short evening.
You became alive to me the name night that
she died.
And I will miss you both.

JEDI MIND TRICK

When I was a kid adults were always asking me what I wanted to be when I grew up. Mike wants to be a fireman, Sally wants to be a princess, John wants to be an astronaut. What do you want to be, Jason? And I'd say the same thing each and every time. I want to be...a Jedi Knight. Protecting the universe from the forces of evil seemed like a pretty good career choice. The adults would chuckle in their patronizing way and say Well, Jason, you can't really be a Jedi when you grow up. And I'd say Bullshit! and then I'd remember that it's hate that leads to the Dark Side and then I'd shut my mouth.

When I was eight years old I wanted to be a holy man when I grew up, and I'm surprised that no one ever caught on to this and put me in a special class for behavioral misfits. After all, it would have saved me from being a poet. Some say being a Jedi is like being a priest. I say being a Jedi is like being in graduate school: years of excruciating study from teachers who are old and ugly and talk in cryptic languages; lots of sex with confused women who have issues with their family; and your roommate, Han Solo, who doesn't quite believe in what you're doing but will smuggle in pot for you anyway. There's one difference. At no point in the history of time have graduate students been allowed to walk around campus with giant swords, cutting off the arms of their enemies. Well, except maybe Vassar.

When I was eight years old I wanted to be a Jedi Knight. I used to practice on the neighborhood dogs: You will take me to your master. You are a good and loyal servant and

you will be rewarded. I used to practice at the convenience store: You do not need to see his identification. He is not the underage drinker you are looking for. I used to practice on dates in high school: Size matters not! Judge me by my size? Sex with me now you will! I have spent years on my living room couch trying to summon up the power to make the remote control suddenly fly from the other side of the room into my hand. Obviously I am too old to begin the training.

When I was eight years old I wanted to be a Jedi Knight. And believe me, I have seen the Dark Side and it's not a pretty thing. I have seen the women on the barstools laughing at me at two in the morning: Ho-ho-ho! Jabba duwaba Jedi Mind Trick! Ho-ho-ho! I have seen my bosses in Corporate America, brandishing their light sabre: (whoosh) Once I was the student. Now I am the master. Take this package to FedEx on your lunch break. I have seen the Dark Side and it is like a billion voices crying out in terror then suddenly falling silent. But I do not fear. I have pledged to be a guardian of peace in the galaxy. I have pledged to use my powers only in defense, never in anger. Not only can I shoot a torpedo down an exhaust shaft two meters wide, I can type 95 words a minute and am fully trained on both Windows and Macintosh. I am a Jedi Knight.

You will buy me a drink after the show tonight. You are a good and loyal audience and you will be rewarded. You can go about your business. Move along, move along.

A LITTLE STORY ABOUT MY LAST TEMP JOB

The supervisor at my last temp job took me aside my final day and slyly asked me if I would write a poem about their office. I politely declined but she kept insisting. “Oh, come on. It’ll be funny!” In deference to her, here is a little story about that office.

Your department is the most inefficient, backwards corporate environment I have ever seen. Documents that should take one edit take seven, and projects that could last a couple of days end up taking weeks. The people in charge of your department don’t know their asses from holes in the ground, and they have reached their middle-management authority not by virtue of their skills but rather the amount of years they could keep their tongue up the anus of the person above them without vomiting.

The daily mantra of your department is not “How do we make this office more productive?” but “This is how we’ve done it for the last twenty years and this is how we’ll do it until the end of time.” If computers were people your office would be filled with racists. You not only fear technology,

you loathe it. And anytime someone attempts in the least to show you how to use computers to eliminate repetitive tasks, you put your hands over your ears and scream, “I’M NOT LISTENING! I’M NOT LISTENING! I’M NOT LISTENING!”

You treat your employees like robots. When they unexpectedly finish the work they have been assigned to do, you give them soul-killing tedium that takes days and sometimes weeks to complete. When there is no work to be done at all, you expect them to complacently stare at a blank wall until they are needed, like C-3PO powering down during expository scenes in Star Wars. You are the people Kafka was talking about in his novels, and not only do you not understand that, you become hostile when an intellectual name such as “Kafka” is even brought up in conversation.

Does this feel like a personal attack? You’re damn right it is. I was attacked in your office daily from the moment I arrived to the moment I left. Your subordinates eyed me with suspicion and mistrust each time my back was turned. They are so incompetent at their own job they feel it

their duty to inspect all new employees for the same half-ass work ethic. When they found that my skills were higher than theirs, they sent secret emails to people more powerful than yourself, gossiping and outright lying about my poor performance. In typical fashion, your bosses never bothered to see if these reports were true but instead simply called my agency and terminated my assignment three hours before I was secretly about to quit in the first place.

Does this story sound righteous? You're damn right it is. Make no mistake about it: I AM BETTER THAN YOU. I am smarter, better educated, more intuitive, and possess both better crisis-management skills and computer skills than anyone in your department. I could do any of your jobs with one hand tied behind my back, and the only reason I don't is because I know that my job security would be determined by someone even more incompetent and back-biting than yourself. There are millions of people who could do your job better who choose not to for the same reasons, and it is people like you who are making America's once world-leading economic position slowly slip away into obscurity.

Are you offended by my story? You should ask if I give a shit. I was offended by you for a month and a half, and offended by people just like you for the last five years.

I resent the fact that I must rely on people like you so I can eat.

I resent the fact that my temp agency were a bunch of spineless weasels who wouldn't defend me.

I resent the fact that three of my paychecks were lost and that I was blamed for the problem.

I resent the fact that I was punished for producing the documents proving my innocence.

I resent the fact that I am forced to write such a para-

noia-laced, Bernard-Goetz-like justification of my actions.

I resent the fact that I still feel like I did something wrong.

I resent the fact that a million other artists have told this exact story a million other times and you still don't get it.

I resent the fact that I have to go find a new agency that will be just as bad, so they can send me on a new assignment that will be even worse.

I resent the fact that I cannot get away from you people.

You have offended me since the age of eight and you will continue to offend me until the age of 80. If you feel abused by this story, rest assured that it is only a small sampling of the constant 24-hour abuse I must take from people like you every day of my entire adult life. I am fucking sick of you people and I refuse anymore to mask my feelings of disgust and contempt for you.

There's your poem. Next time, think twice before insisting on hearing a temp's opinion of their job.

LITTLETON

I was in the library. I was doing research for this stupid Lit paper, T.S. Eliot. Whatever. The Wasteland, whatever. It was stupid. I was sitting at this table, I'll never forget this, I was sitting at this table and thinking how much I wished something would happen to get me out of doing this paper, like a, I don't know, like a snowstorm or getting sick or something. And then there was this really loud noise over by the doors and I look, and it was just. Blood. Everywhere. I couldn't even. You just couldn't even tell what was going on, there was just suddenly all this smoke and blood, just blood all over the walls and on the ceiling, and then there was screaming, there was just screaming and pandemonium and I go under my desk, I'm just sitting on the floor under the desk and I still haven't figured out what's going on, the fire alarm is going off. And then I start hearing these pops, these 'pop,' 'pop,' 'pop,' and I just start realizing what it was, it was like in the back of my brain I think, 'cause I couldn't even imagine something like that happening here. I mean, I couldn't even think that something like that could be happening, right here, right at my school, right here, right now.

Mark Platt is sitting under the table with me. We didn't know each other very well, he was on the soccer team,

I was on the student newspaper, we just. You know, it was just different circles we ran in, you know? We grew up in the same neighborhood, we'd see each other when we were kids, around the neighborhood, we'd all sled at this one really big hill together, I mean, every kid in the whole neighborhood did. You know, I'd see him around. We didn't really know each other but we'd say hi or whatever. He was a jock and everything but he was pretty cool. I mean, soccer, you know? Anyway, me and Mark are sitting under this table and I wonder if I have the same look on my face that Mark has on his, just this scared shitless look, you know? Just, like, you could just see it in his eyes, you know? And he's like, 'What should we do?' and I'm just like... (shrugs)

And then this guy comes walking up, and first all I can see is these black boots and black pants, but then the guy bends over and it's...Eric. I mean, it's Eric. Eric. He's got this rifle and before I even know what's going on he's pointed it and there's a deafening noise in my ears and I'm covered with blood and I think I've been shot, I mean I just don't know, I can't hear anything and I'm covered with blood and then I realize it's Mark, Mark's been shot right through the face. There's parts of his brain on my shirt and then, uh,

and then, um, Eric puts the rifle to my head, I close my eyes, the barrel is still hot against my skin, and Eric says “Do you feel like dying today?” and he laughs, uh... (pause) and I’m counting to myself in my head, I’m counting to 10. I figure if I can make it to 10 he’s not gonna kill me, you know, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5... (pause) and then he just walks off. Just like that.

So then I didn’t know what to do. These guys, they were a part of this group of like, ten, twelve guys, and you know, you don’t know what to think. I just wanted to get the hell out of there but I thought what if I get to the front door and there’s other guys there just waiting for all of us, just gunning us down as we run around the corner trying to get out? I don’t know. I mean this guy, Mark, he’s just gotten his face blown off two feet away from me. Mark’s brain is all over my shirt and I was just. Crazy. I couldn’t think right. So I ran out the back stairway of the library, ran up to the fourth floor, just ran away as far as I could and went and hid in Ms. Downing’s speech class, way back in a back corner, just shut the door and turned off the lights and just crawled under a desk.

I let Eric cheat off me once. On a test in Algebra, back in junior high. Is that why I’m still alive? I think about that a lot, I really do. Was it that I wasn’t a jock? Is it because I was the one who convinced Angie to run that photo of their group in the yearbook last year? I mean, it was a joke. That’s why we ran the photo. They were a bunch of dorks, playing Magik in the back of study hall every day. We gave ‘em a gang name for the yearbook photo ‘cause they were the guys least likely in the world to ever possibly join a gang. Irony! But they liked it, thought it made them badass or something. They started calling themselves by their gang name, all the time. It was ridiculous. They thought they were these big

rebel outcasts, like nobody could stand them except for each other, and that’s just not true. They had just as many friends as anybody else. I liked them. Yeah, they were dorks, whatever. Played Axis and Allies a whole lot. Whatever. I always thought they were pretty nice.

So I’m in the back in Mrs. Downing’s class, looking out the window, just...looking at the mountains, thinking about the ski trip we were going to take next weekend. You ever have one of those nightmares where you’re stuck in the house with a monster, like a killer or a Frankenstein or whatever, and you can’t get out of the house, you’ve made a wrong turn and ended up upstairs with the killer between you and the door? And you’re just crouched in the closet back in the back bedroom and you can hear the killer walking up and down all around the first floor? You remember how relieved you feel when you wake up? Every couple of minutes I keep seeing little pockets of students running away from the building, running across the football field. It’s just...deadly silent outside. You’d think there’d be cops there by now or something. I can hear guns going off somewhere in the building, another explosion, girls screaming again now, a big thump somewhere and I don’t even know what the hell that was.

I lost a lot of friends that day. Six. Six people I’d call friends of mine, lots more who I didn’t really know that well. Chris, made me chip this tooth in third grade, playing kickball. Brad. We were going to be folder partners in band next semester. Angie. There’s a plaque with all their names on it, right below the flagpole in the front plaza. I sit there sometimes, waiting for a ride after school. I think sometimes about what they’d be doing right now. But that’s a bad thing to do. It won’t get me anywhere and it won’t solve anything. So I get up and wait in the parking lot.

They brought in all these grief counselors the next day. They wanted us to all sit down and talk to them. What a joke. "Tell me how you're feeling about this tragedy." Whatever. So I walked around instead and watched about one million reporters all doing live shots from outside my school. You can always tell when a reporter's about to finish their report 'cause they have this little pause and this little droop on their last sentence. "We may never know the answer to what this community is asking...Why?" "People around the country are now asking themselves...Could it happen to them?" "For this small and quiet community, it will truly be... a day never forgotten. John Smith, NBC News...Littleton."

There's cops in our school now. Fully armed.

There's an entire section of the police force, specially trained, that do nothing, nothing else, but target high schoolers.

While I'm on school grounds, my locker, my backpack, my clothes, my wallet, my anal cavity. They can all be searched, without a warrant, without an explanation, at any time. We have a zero-tolerance drug policy now, which means I can automatically be suspended for bring Tylenol to school. My e-mail is randomly opened and read without my consent or my knowledge. Every issue of our school paper must be preapproved by the administration, and they have the power to veto anything they don't like. Again, without any explanation needed. Openly gay students at my school are put on a list now.

This list is put in a database at the police station. They are automatically suspected of crimes before others. Because they're gay. The doors of our school all lock now. There are bars on the windows. There is a barbed-wire fence all the way around our campus.

Huh. For the children. That's all they have to say

anymore. For the children. Think of the children. Do it for the sake of your children. 92 percent of my town voted for these things. I have less rights as an American high school student in 1999 than a Jew in Germany did in 1936. 92 percent! Our nation's high schools are being turned into police states, and not only do people not seem to care, they're all for it! It's to make me feel safer, they tell me. To prevent one of these horrible tragedies from happening again. Well, you know what? That's what you told me last year when you put the metal detectors in. And you know what those guys did? They blew up the metal detector and they shot the security guard nine times. Secretly reading my mail is not going to make me feel safer. You want to make me feel safer, try passing a decent gun control law in this country for once. Stop treating us like criminals before we've done anything and maybe we'll stop acting like criminals when we feel like we're out of options. The more you outlaw bands and clothes and haircuts, the more important those bands and clothes and haircuts will become to us. Treat us like 4/5th of a human being and we will respond to you in kind.

For the children? FUCK YOU! I miss Angie! We were going to go to Prom together and I was going to get lucky! I miss Angie and Chris and Brad and even Eric. I forgave him a long time ago. He was sick. He needed help. And instead he got metal detectors and random searches and a dad who happened to have a stockpile of automatic weapons in the basement. Nine kids in America died from school shootings last year. Meanwhile, two thousand of them died from beatings by their own parents, six thousand from gunshot wounds outside of the schools, four thousand from drunk driving, five thousand from hate crimes. 16,000 children committed suicide last year, and over two million

are forced to take Prozac. Is anything being done for those children? Do you ever see Tom Brokaw doing a live report from the side of a highway accident?

Angie was a virgin too. We were going to lose ours to each other on Prom night. We already had a secret hotel room and everything. Keep your grief counselors. Keep doing what you think is best 'for the children.' When I finally become an adult I'll tell you exactly what I think of what you're doing 'for the children' and believe me, I won't shut up until my vocal chords finally give out. I've been putting a rose on Angie's grave on the 20th of each month, ever since last April. That's all the grief counseling I need.

THE LOVE OF JACQUES

Oh! Pardon me, I did not see you there. Ooh, I am flustered. Pierre, some more wine, please. Let me introduce myself. My name is Jacques. I see you are in my bed which must make you my new lover. I am pleased to meet you. Pierre, the wine please!

So. What is it that brings you to my bed today, hmm? Have they been writing my name again in the bathroom of the Louvre? Ha-ha-ha-ha! PIERRE, WHERE IS THAT WINE! You will have to forgive Pierre. After all, he is only a dog. He has difficulty pouring the wine because HE HAS NO THUMBS!

Sooooo, where were we? Ah yes, my bed. I am pleased that you have heard of the soufflé which is the love of Jacques. For years they used to scream my name from the highest tower of Notre Dame. Jacques, Lover Extraordinaire! Jacques, King of the Bed! But the voices, they have fallen silent. They say I am a seducer. Nothing could be farther from the truth! Pierre, if you do not bring that wine right now, I am taking away your squeak-kay toy!

Seducer, hah! You are in my bed and I do not even know who you are! Is this the action of a seducer? But hush, my darling. Let us speak of it no more. The Americans, they had a saying in my country during the war. They told it to my grandpapa and my grandpapa told it to me. And now, I am telling you. The loose lips...they sink the ships.

Ah, but here is the wine! Pierre. Mon ami. You are truly...man's best friend. And now, a toast. To you...finding me. And another toast. To me...for being me. And now my darling, I hope you are prepared for the crepes suzette which is the love of Jacques. Darling, put down that pepper spray and we will begin.

MADDIE, THE QUEEN OF INTERNET PORNOGRAPHY

She's the queen of internet pornography

MADDIE-O DOT COM

The "O" stands for orgasm

The "M" stands for Madeline

You know, that little French girl

who was the hero of all those kiddie books

that the little girls get stuck in their heads

and carry them in the back of the brain

their entire lives

Laura Ingalls Wilder

Betsy Byers

Ramona

Madeline

Maddie

MADDIE-O DOT COM

She,s the queen of internet pornography

She does it this way

She does it that way

She does it every which way but loose, wink-wink

It's a postmodern porn website!

It's where you can not only look

at naked people on the internet,

you can laugh at the irony

of sitting on your computer

looking at naked people on the internet!

MADDIE-O DOT COM!

She's the queen of internet pornography!

She uses a Macintosh!

She has flaming tattoos up her arms!

Her email address is

BOSSHOG@DUKES.OF.HAZZARD.COM!

"I'm not doing this for the money –

I'm doing this for the lesson of empowerment

and to raise my inner awareness

of my self-image!"

Maddie!

MADDIE-O DOT COM!

She's the queen of internet pornography!

She takes it up the ass!

She gives it up the ass!

She ties people up

and whips them on their butt

with a cat-o-nine tails!
She pees on people!
People pee on her!
And why,
why oh why does she do it?

Because she's Maddie!
MADDIE-O DOT COM!
Queen of internet pornography!
She doesn't give a shit-
This pays twice as much as waiting tables
This pays three times as much as temping
and I was just getting screwed there too
I could save a little
I could take up cocaine
I could take that trip to Europe next year
It beats Starbucks
It beats Kinko's
It beats bike messenger
It beats massage therapy
It beats the Gap
and let me tell ya something,
fuckin' Marshall Fields wasn't about to
let me start my work day
at two every afternoon!
Maddie!
MADDIE-O DOT COM!

By entering this site, you are declaring that you are a person
18 years or older, and that it is legal to view adult material in
whatever part of the world you're in. Click below to bite into
the soft and creamy insides of MADDIE-O DOT COM.

ME & THE GIRLS & THE PORN & THE DILDOS

So, I'm going to the porn store. It's Thursday, it's 6 pm, and I'm going to the porn store. It's Thursday, it's 6 pm, I'm just finishing up work, downtown, in a suit, some woman from Canada keeps sending me incredibly dirty emails that I'm reading, at work, I'm writing back, at work, It's Thursday, it's 6 pm, I'm going to the fuckin' porn store!

It's a walk. It's downtown, but it's a walk. It's Chicago and State and I'm Madison and LaSalle, it's a bit of a walk. It's the best porn store I've found yet, and I've looked at a lot of them. It's big and varied and inexpensive. It's clean and well-lit and there aren't a bunch of creepy guys hanging out by the quarter booths. It's a good porn store. It's downtown. I'm downtown.

It's a bit of a walk. I think, hmm, how can I make this walk go a little faster? I know, I'll get stoned. I'm downtown. It's 6 pm. Where am I going to go to get stoned? Ah-ha, the Hilton hotel. I smoke a big ol' doobie in the men's bathroom of the Windy City Lounge and Cocktail Club. Not a soul comes in. I walk out in a THC haze the thickness of pea

soup. It's Thursday, it's 6 pm, it's 96 fuckin' degrees out, I'm stoned, where was I going? What am I doing? Oh yeah, I'm going to the fuckin' porn store!

Walk. Walk walk walk. Walk walk walk walk walk. Start realizing. Hey, this porn store is in River North. River North is a rich neighborhood. It's 6 pm. I've never been to a porn store at 6 pm. There's rich women everywhere. There's rich beautiful young women everywhere I turn, everywhere I look. How am I going to walk into the porn store without a hundred rich beautiful young women seeing me walk into the porn store?

I start slowing down. I start letting rich beautiful young women pass me by. I start looking over my shoulder to see if any rich beautiful young women are behind me. I create a 50-foot buffer zone so I can slip in hopefully unnoticed, well maybe noticed, but no one right behind me whispering, "Oh my God, look at that guy, he's going in that porn store."

The moment of truth. I have created my buffer zone.

It is smooth sailing ahead. I open the door with confidence. I walk in. I close the door. There are three rich, beautiful young women standing at the counter, paying the admission price. I turn around. They hear the door. They all look up.

At me.

Fuck!

I can't leave now, I'M ALREADY IN THE STORE.

The damage has been done. But wait

a minute. The beautiful women are in the porn store too. They're customers just like I am. I have nothing to feel guilty about, right? WRONG! THEY are three sorority sisters from U of I throwing a bachelorette party for their lifelong friend Jamie who's getting married in two weeks to Steve, an insurance adjuster for Peat Marwick who lives in a condo in north Lakeview. I am some creepy stoned tool of the patriarchal system here to spend my hard-earned money to keep the sisterhood in slavery and later joylessly masturbate to surgically-altered breasts which do not exist in the real world. Jesus Christ, I suck! But it's Thursday, it's 6 pm, I'm stoned, and hey, they've already caught me.

The employee asks if I want tokens or am I just browsing. I WAS going to get tokens but brother, believe you me, NOW I'm just browsing. I walk up to the magazine rack. The three beautiful rich young women stand directly behind me, their backs almost touching mine as they peruse the vast array of vibromatic choices in front of them. I brace myself for the inevitable conversation, delivered in high-pitched, cackling, drunk at Nick's at two in the morning voices:

"OH...MY...GOD, look at this one, it's two feet long! OH MY GOD, it's bright purple! Jamie's just going to scream when she sees this! OH MY GOD, we have to get this one, we just have to get this one right here!"

To my surprise, this is not what comes out of their mouths.

The beautiful women move with grace and elegance, soundlessly padding through the store like Japanese Sen-seis in paper shoes. They speak to each other in low, quiet, intimate voices:

"Well, what do you think of this one?"

"Hmm. Is that going to be big enough?"

"Well, I don't know about you but I think I'm going to need something larger."

"What about these bumps and ridges? Have you used something like this before?"

"Oh yeah, the last one I bought had those. They can REALLY come in handy."

I can scarcely believe my ears. Three beautiful young women inside a porn store, having a frank and earnest discussion about their favorite dildo choices. I start realizing, I'm a witness for a moment of empowerment! Three beautiful young women reclaiming the porn store for themselves! Three beautiful young women reclaiming their own sexuality and God-given right to orgasm! Three beautiful young women having a serious discussion about what may or may not aid them in their elusive quest for person ecstatic climax!

I start getting...turned on!

I start imagining the three women and I slipping into the back booths for a personally-led test drive of their new tools of empowerment, STOP, Jason, STOP! Stop thinking about sex! But I can't stop thinking about sex – I'M IN A PORN STORE! Every direction I turn I'm confronted with naked flesh, writhing, sweaty bodies caught under the harsh glare of Klieg lights in a southern California hotel room! I start imagining the three women changing their discussion

from the potential to the kinetic, not just talking about their personal jerk-off techniques but showing, sharing, leading the way with a swift hand and a sharp tongue, STOP IT, Jason, STOP IT! You must stop fantasizing about these three innocent women standing next to you...in the porn store... talking endlessly about the dildos they will be opening in a few short hours...

I am caught in a Kafka-esque nightmare! Row after row of the most beautiful, disgusting sex acts known to humankind, and my MOM handing them to me on a platter, inviting me to take them to the next room but to first finish my vegetables! I'm freaking out! I've gotta get out of here! I grab my things and start bolting for the door!

But wait. I stop. I think about it. It's Thursday. It's 6 pm. I'm STONED. I turn around and yell out to the store, "Ladies, it has indeed been a pleasure to be a fellow shopper with

you all today. If I may make a small suggestion in regards to your current purchasing dilemma. I believe it was said best by Vince Neil, lead singer of Motley Crue, in his haunting lyrics to the 1985 song: "Every night has its dawn. Every cowboy sings a sad, sad song. And every rose has its thorn." The women stare at me a moment then burst into applause, blowing kisses past the flavored condoms and towards my cheek. My work here is done. It's Thursday. It's 6 pm. I have been to the porn store.

MEAN AND HATEFUL POEMS

One night he finally asked her to have sex with him. She agreed. And everything was just fine.

He wrote a poem about having sex with her and he read it at the open mic. The audience giggled and the audience tittered and everyone had another drink and everything was just fine. She wrote a poem about he writing a poem about having sex with her and the audience giggled some more and whispered silly things in each others' ears and everyone had another drink and everything was fine.

He didn't like her poem about his poem about having sex with her. Or more to the point he didn't like a line in her poem about his poem about having sex with her, a line which he believed was a heavily-codified statement about his sexual performance. He wrote a poem about her writing a poem about he writing a poem about having sex with her and he read it at the open mic and the audience laughed and laughed and had another drink.

She clearly did not like his poem about her poem about his poem about her. It was a little mean and it was a

little hateful even if he wouldn't admit it was a little mean and a little hateful. She wrote a poem about his poem about her poem about his poem about her. Her poem was definitely mean and it was definitely hateful and she never hesitated to admit this to anyone who asked. She read her mean and hateful poem about his mean and hateful poem about her poem about his poem about her at the open mic and the audience shifted nervously in their seats and had another drink.

He did not like her poem. He especially did not like the way her friends squealed with delight when she read her poem like a group of 12-year-old girls at an ice skating competition. He wrote a poem about women writing poems about men writing poems about her. It was very mean and very hateful and it was about all of them. He read his poem at the open mic and the audience used the bathroom and a couple of people hissed and everyone had another drink.

Her friend did not like his poem about women writing poems about men writing poems about her. She found it insulting and demeaning and patriarchal. She wrote a poem

about men writing poems about women writing poems about men writing poems about women. It was a blanket indictment of all males in the poetry scene. It contained words like “goddess,” “Difranco,” and “oppression.” She read her indicting poem at the open mic and the men in the audience remained strongly silent and the women screamed like schoolgirls and everyone had another drink.

His friend did not like her friend’s poem. He found it insulting and demeaning and just like a woman. He wrote a poem about women writing poems about men writing poems about women writing poems about men writing poems about women. It was a blanket indictment of all females in the poetry scene. It contained words like “media whore,” “Henry Miller,” and “bitch.” He read his indicting poem at the open mic and the men in the audience hooted and hollered and made devil signs with their hands. The women got up and left. Everyone had another drink.

He and she both got publishing contracts. They both named their mean and hateful books after the mean and hateful poems about each others’ mean and hateful poems about each others’ mean and hateful poems. The mean and hateful books were both bestsellers and everyone read and read and had another drink.

The next week everybody wrote poetry about everybody writing poetry about everybody writing poetry about everybody writing poetry. Every poem was mean and every poem was hateful. They all read their poetry at the open mic but there was no audience left to listen. The audience had gotten sick of all the drama and were all getting drunk at a dance bar down the street.

A year later, he apologized to her for his mean and hateful poem about her mean and hateful poem about his

poem about her poem about his poem about her. She accepted. He asked her to have sex with him again. She agreed. And everything was...fine.

THE MOD KIDS

The mod kids are in front of the convenience store again
sitting and
pacing and
skating and
sitting some more.
They bite their nails
and run fingers through their
black
white
red
blue
green
purple hair.
They straighten their ties
and unruffle their skirts
and quietly tap their Doc Martens
against the side of the curb.

The mod kids are in front of the convenience store again
They're talking about bands
"Those guys used to suck but now they rock"
"Well, those guys used to rock but now they suck"

"Well, in my opinion, those guys' albums all suck
but if you see them live...
they fuckin' rock."
The mod kids are looking through
the latest issue of
Maximum Rock-N-Roll
freshly arrived
in their mailbox
that afternoon
'cause
none of the oppressive bookstores
in this bourgeoisie town
would dare carry something
that speaks the truth
like Maximum Rock-N-Roll!
Fuckin' Waldenbooks!

Yes, the mod kids are in front of the convenience store again
and a man in a Led Zeppelin
three-quarter-length jersey
asks them
if they're waiting

for someone to buy them beer.

“Beer?

We’re straightedge, man!

No liquor,

no drugs,

no cigarettes,

no meat,

no products that have been tested on animals,

no products that can harm animals,

no products that have accidentally killed other animals
while legitimately trying to kill the first animals!

Beer?

...No, we’re not waiting for someone to buy us fuckin’ beer!”

The mod kids are in front of the convenience store again
gathering material

for the next issue of their zine

The one they xerox in the school library

and send out like chemical warfare across the nation

The one that is the darling of Factsheet 5

The one that is loved by thousands of introverted teenagers

The one that is soon to be its own website

SMASH THE STATE!

The mod kids are gathering material

about what a shitty,

backward,

soul-crushing town it is

in which they live

and how they can’t wait to get out of here

and go somewhere cool

like London

or Manhattan

or Chicago

or San Francisco

San Francisco would be cool

or Berlin

or Prague

although I hear Prague’s a big sellout now

They even have Starbucks over there now, for God’s sake

The mod kids are

cutting and pasting

1950s clip art

and gluing them crookedly

on their 24 half-folded

pages of truth

and one day

16 years from now

they will wake up one morning

in their \$1000 bed

from Pier One

and wonder

where their childhood went

they will wake up one morning

and wonder

why they were so angry for so long

they will wake up one morning

and wish

desperately wish

they could go back to that convenience store

and start all over again

and do it right this time

The mod kids are in front of the convenience store again

They sneer at me
and ask me for a dollar
so they can go buy some Dunkin' Donuts.
In exchange,
they say,
they'll give me
the condoms
they received
at Safe Sex day
at school
last week

“Keep the condoms,”
I say,
handing them a buck
and walking away.

“Hey, man,”
they yell after me.
“Thanks.”

“No problem,”
I say.
And I keep walking.

AN OBSCENE POEM FOR MY NEW LOVER

Your tongue is amazing.

Your tongue is a wet
16-wheel big rig
barreling its way down
the highway

Your tongue is a
Mack truck
covered in gelatin
racing to meet
the convoy
downstate
Ten-four good buddy!
HONK-HONK!

When your tongue
attacks my mouth
it comes in not vertically

but horizontally
so flat and wide
it threatens to suffocate me

Your tongue in my mouth
is a website
saying
“CAUTION: Your browser must be this wide
to properly view contents”

Your tongue
is the obelisk
from 2001
and I am Dave Bowman
floating inside it
and whispering
“My God, look at all the beautiful stars”

Your tongue on my cock is amazing.

Each time you put my cock in your mouth
you manage to
wrap your entire tongue
around it
like a big slippery O

My cock in your mouth
is a pig in a blanket
at some shitty-ass diner
on Western Avenue

My cock in your mouth
is a B-movie actor
slowly getting squeezed to death
by a giant anaconda
in some low-budget
straight-to-video
summer blockbuster
destined for the 99 cent bin
at Tower Records
and I would have it no other way.

There's only one problem.

It's a small problem,
a teeny-tiny
itsy-bitsy
wee ol' little problem
but I feel I should mention it.

You don't leave my cock in your mouth long enough.

Oh, it's great when it's in there,
don't get me wrong,
my cock in your mouth is,
well, insert your own Hostess product metaphor here,
blah blah blah,
but every time I start to
climb that rickety wooden ladder
to ecstasy,
every time I get
two or three rungs from the top
and can just barely begin
to see the sexual Valhalla
just over the mountain ridge,
every time I'm just about to glimpse
the fabled Sight That No Man Can Recover From,
you unwrap your tongue from my cock
and you sit up
and shake my shoulders
and yell
FUCK ME JASON,
FUCK ME,
I CAN'T STAND IT ANYMORE,
I CANNOT SUCK THAT DICK ONE MORE SECOND,
YOU JUST HAVE TO FUCK ME,
RIGHT NOW, FUCK ME RIGHT THIS MINUTE!

And I think,
Fucking.
How pedestrian.

We should try an experiment, you and I,

to see if you could keep my cock
in your mouth a little longer.
I,m thinking, for example, three weeks.

We will attach a needle to your arm
and I will dutifully change your IV bag every 24 hours
so that you'll make sure to get your daily nourishment.
We will form a two-person ecosystem, you and I.
Every time you urinate
I will catch the golden liquid in my outstretched hands
and drink it down
and then when I piss
it will go straight down your throat
into your stomach
and the process will start all over again.

When you are tired and wish to sleep
I will gently thrust my cock in and out of your mouth
taking care not to wake you
and when I am tired
you can do the same.

Not a drop of our bodies will be wasted
nor a single second of our time.

And you and I, we will build our own ladder,
a gleaming, silver, 10,000 foot ladder
that will make all the other ladders jealous
and we will climb those heights of ecstasy
no one has ever climbed before.
We will find Atlantis,
not buried in a watery depth

but floating miles over our head the entire time.
We will climb that ladder
and climb that ladder
and finally three weeks later,
weak, exhausted,
track marks in our arms,
sick of the taste of piss,
we will finally finish
and lie down heavily
on the futon
and smoke a cigarette.

And when we're done,
I promise to you right now,
I will go down on you
for six months straight.

Because, you see,
my tongue?
It knows a couple of metaphors
of its own.

ONE OF THOSE MOMENTS

We had one of those moments, you know? I was at the bar and she came up to the bar and we glanced at each other for a moment, and in that moment, that split-second our eyes met, I mistook her for a former girlfriend, well, not a girlfriend really, a former lover, a good lover, a dirty lover, you know what I mean. She looked exactly like my lover, round eyes, square jaw, small breasts, big ass. A certain spark, you know, (pointing at eyes) right here, (pointing at stomach) right here, (pointing at hips) right here, a certain something that makes them just (stomps foot on stage) stand out in a crowd, you know? Like the one person in color among a black-and-white early 80s video, or an overmarketed cola commercial, or a maudlin Spielberg movie, like the woman with an angelic aura walking in a crowd of idiots in a heavy metal song, like, like, like, like the woman in red in that scene in *The Matrix*, you know? And I'm halfway out of my stool, walking over to her to put my hand over her eyes and kiss her, a good kiss, a dirty kiss, you know what I mean. And I'm halfway out of my stool when I realize, no, that's not

my former lover. Why, I don't know that woman at all. But it's too late by now. We've been staring at each other for three seconds now. And believe me, when you're staring at a beautiful random stranger, all traditional notions of spatial time go right out the window. A half-second of staring at a stranger is like every single final exam you ever took in college, added together, helplessly staring at that blank page, wondering where the fuck the professor came up with these fuckin' questions in the first place 'cause you sure don't remember them from the book, not like you actually read the book, you were too busy being 19 and thinking you're never gonna die and drinking Mad Dog 20/20 'cause it gets you fucked up real fast and hitting on girls with round eyes and square jaws, a certain something, a certain (stomps foot on stage) something. Yeah, that's how time becomes when you're staring at a beautiful stranger, and we've been staring at each other for three seconds, think about that. (staring at random stranger in the audience and counting very slowly)

One.

Two.

Three.

And I'm still halfway out of my stool, caught in an action pose, looking like the cover of a Beastie Boys 12 inch single, "I got the skills to pay the bills! BOOYAH!" And I know why I'm staring at her but I don't know why she's staring at ME, you know? We're having one of those moments, one of those "why are we staring at each other" moments. Why ARE we staring at each other? Do we know each other? We don't know each other. Why are we still looking at each other? Oh my God, do you think I'm hot? 'cause I think YOU'RE hot. Are you staring at me because you're attracted to me? Are you staring at me because I'm staring at you? Am I staring at you because you're staring at me? Are you going through the same thought process as me right now? Are you scared that I'm staring at you? Are you turned on that I'm staring at you? Should I say hello? Should I buy you a drink? Should I impetuously kiss you like something out of a 1940's screwball romantic comedy? WHY THE FUCK ARE WE STILL LOOKING AT EACH OTHER!!! It's amazing how many separate individual thoughts the human brain can have in the space of three seconds. And then she got her drink and I got my drink and she went back over and sat down with her friends. And that was that. But...we did have that moment.

SHE NUMBER ONE AND SHE NUMBER TWO

She Number One said Won't you write a story about us? and She Number two clapped her hands with excitement and said Oh Yes, Please Do, please carve our names in stone to be captured in immortality.

And I said to She Number One and She Number Two, Immortality is a tricky thing, little girls. An uncarved block cannot be restored once the whittling of stone begins, and even though it too will eventually be worn away into dust to be carried in the wind, it will take about a million years for that to happen. But She Number One and She Number Two shook their heads defiantly and said A writer's pen is a one-way street and we understand. Write what you will and we will have no complaints.

And so I wrote. I wrote about how She Number Two cried like a newborn baby the night she was arrested, the night I was a witness to the relacing of her shoes. I wrote about how She Number One almost made a porn film one night, the night I was a witness to a woman out of control of herself. I wrote of little girls flinging themselves out of windows, little girls slashing their wrists and letting the blood soak into the pages of blank notebooks to be licked and eaten by angry, hungry dogs roaming the countryside of Southport

Avenue.

And She Number One and She Number Two read the story and frowned and said This Isn't What We Meant. We're not so sure we like this story. And I said, sssshhhh, quiet, little girls, we've only just begun.

I placed She Number One and She Number Two on a flat and round stone in my hut and I grinded them into a fine powder with another flat and round stone and then baked them into taco shells and ate them. I took the little girls home and had sex with them at the same time, making them scream in ecstasy so loudly that the neighbors started complaining. We collected pennies to buy gas to drive to Evanston, and once we got there we stole credit cards so we could get drunk on Monday nights. A homeless man playing a flute gave us a videocamera and I taped the girls urinating into large silver bowls then pouring them into the neighbor's yard to kill all their plants.

And She Number One and She Number Two looked up from a dirty mattress at the corner of Fullerton and Western and said We Don't Like This Story. This story is scary and violent and it's not silly and fun like we thought it would be. Please, they said, we don't want to be immortal anymore.

You can take us out of the story now.

And I said sssshhhh, quiet, little girls. You have made your bed and now you will die by the sword. I told you immortality is a tricky thing. I am immortal several times over and I don't like it one damn bit. And She Number One and She Number Two cried and said Yes, You're Right, We Don't Want To Be Immortal Anymore but it was too late by then. I hypnotized the little girls and made them fight each other to the death for my amusement. The two clawed each other's eyes out and simultaneously choked each other to death with their bare hands. And I looked at the corpses on the ground and chuckled, then climbed to the top of the highest mountain in the land and I carved their names in the stone, "She Number One" and "She Number Two," in 500-foot-high letters and perpetually doused in gasoline so that the burning words traveled across the miles and all the people of the land knew of the two heroic martyrs. And She Number One and She Number two became immortal. Their ghostly spirits roamed the countryside for the rest of time and if you listen carefully, between the whispers of the wind through the trees you can hear them, the little girls, thanking me and cursing me for the gift I have bestowed upon them.

strangeplastikrobot

She touched my face and asked me why I was so sad. I said You're mistaken, I'm not sad at all, and she said Yes you are, I know because I'm a robot and I can read your mind. And sure enough I was sad and hadn't told anyone and sure enough, I reached up and touched her face and under the soft warmth of her skin I could feel the cold, unyielding metal underneath. And I said You are a robot and she said Yes, I was born from the dreams of a small lonely child whose only companions were a library full of Isaac Asimov books, this child who was so sad his whole life, and I sprung forth from his head like that one god I always forget, and this is why I can tell when people are sad.

And I said What is your name, robot? and she said You may call me...Entendre, and she laughed to herself as if this were some sort of joke. I touched her face again and said How did your skin get so soft? and Entendre said My positronic brain is covered by a protective layer of blue steel cut from the hood of a 1987 Yugo, which is itself then covered by a pliable form of plastic derived from the melted remains of a thousand discarded Barbie dolls. So why are you so sad? And I said Because I am lonely, robot. I am lonely and you are beautiful and will you come home and make love to me, robot? And Entendre said The First Law of Robotics states that I must never harm a human or through inaction allow a human to be harmed, so yes, I will come home and make love to you.

And we did. And I could feel her metallic hips underneath my calcium ones. I could see the internal glow of

her eyes behind her pupils. And she read my mind while we made love. She would reach up unexpectedly and say Thank you even though I hadn't said anything. And I realized after awhile that I could read her mind. I could feel the electronic synapses of her artificial brain turning on and off, on and off, 10110001110110000 which in her language means I love you and I said I love you too, robot. Won't you stay here with me and we will carve a happy life out for ourselves? People will look at you strangely and people will look at me strangely but I don't care because I've never been with someone who could read my mind before.

And Entendre said I love you but I cannot stay. I have to go find my Maker. And I said But your Maker is dead and she said Dead, alive, it matters not. I love him with all of my being and I will spend my existence trying to find him. And I sat in front of the robot and cried and the robot reached up and touched my tears and said with curiosity What is this hot, salty water coming out of your face? and I said Never mind, robot, that is the oil that humans produce to lubricate a sticky heart. Now go and start your quest.

And the robot left and it wandered the land for the next 120 years, trying in vain to find its Creator, and for the rest of my life, at times when I least expected it, I could feel tender, warm, hard fingers tickling my brain, and I knew that, wherever she was, Entendre was thinking of me. And for the briefest of moments, I would stop being sad and marvel at the modern age in which we live.

WE ARE THE SUM OF EVERYTHING THAT HAS COME BEFORE US

We are the sum of everything that has come before us, from the beginning of time to right now. Right now I have the blood of criminals in my veins. Right now I have the blood of nerds in my veins. Right now I have the blood of lead miners in my veins. Right now I have the blood of Klan members in my veins, right now, right now the blood of my forefathers run rampant over my heart and tap their rhythm against my ribs, tap, love, tap, hate, tap, time, tap, tap, tap a beer and quell the fire that's inside of me, douse the flames of my forefathers raging inside of me, love, hate, time, tap, tap, tap a message to you through the wall that separates us, tap tap tap (I'm not as bad as I seem) tap tap tap (I make plenty of mistakes) tap tap tap (they're always in public) tap tap tap (The world scares me)

We are the sum of everything that has come before us. We are a billion chromosomes strung in random order, a protoplasmic tapeworm coiled around and around and around a bend in the road I see dead Union soldiers, around a bend in the road I see burning crosses, right now, right now I round a round bend around the road, you on one side, me on the other, can you hear me?

HELLO?
CAN YOU HEAR ME?
I AM THE SUM OF EVERYTHING THAT HAS
COME BEFORE ME!

My heart beats a million years wide and three feet deep. The only space that exists is the space between you and between me. The only time that exists is the time between you and between me. We are the sum of everything that has come before us and we exist for this moment, right now, right now, right now I am you and you are me and time has compressed itself into a ball that hovers in the air, beating against our ribs, composing a silent tone poem between us, rattling our bodies until we become one, tap, tap, tap, tap tap tap tap tap

There.

Can you feel it?

Now
don't
move
an
inch.

THE WORLD ENDS IN 422 DAYS

If I asked you, would you have dinner with me on Friday?

If I asked you, would you go to the movies with me on Saturday?

If I asked you, would you run hand in hand with me to the edge of a cliff and then right off the cliff, yelling and screaming as loud as we can, kissing each other in the forty seconds of freefall before our bloody horrible deaths on the rocks below? because this is what I want to ask you to do. I want to ask you to lift your arms over your head and grow wings out of them and flap them and take us away to a land beyond the sun where nothing comes and nothing goes and all the troubles, these troubles of this everyday world are all away and can never ever come again. I want us to run screaming and yelling off the edge of a cliff, hand in hand, and the world's ending anyway in exactly 422 days, we all know it, and can't you see I'm lonely? Isn't it written all over my face in permanent black magic marker, 'cause it's all over your face, I think, I mean I may I think maybe, I look at your face and it looks like the day after Halloween, you can see there was face paint there that's been scrubbed

and scrubbed and scrubbed so hard the skin is red and raw but it's still there, the faint black of grease paint around the eyes, faint black around the eyes, and can't you see how horribly lonely and sad and afraid I am? Can't you see these black rings around my eyes, the world ends in exactly 422 days, my friend, and won't you spend those days laughing and running and holding and crying? Will you kick your foot through television screens with me? Will you make love to Sonic Youth albums with me? Will you mug old ladies on the train and run off with pink plastic purses screaming wild with all the reckless abandonment the end of the world affords us? because this is what I want to ask you to do. The fire is coming and we will all be burned up to a crisp so take today, take today right now, reach out and take my hand and tell me you'll love me until the world ends, wipe off the black rings from around my eyes, take my hand and kiss me softly on the lips and tell me you'll die for me and go running off at the edge of the cliff as fast and as loud as your legs will carry you.

YET ANOTHER SMALL POEM FOR DG

Today
I bought ten packs of playing cards
(59 cents, Osco)
and I taped
520 rectangles
on the white walls
of my apartment
and every time I think of you
I pull one of the cards down
and I take a magic marker
and write
I LOVE YOU
across it
to remind me
that it can be said
and then I burn it
to remind me
that I've never said it
and then I eat the ashes
because you are not here

YOU ARE ALL THE PROZAC I NEED.

Baby, it's a busy bzzzzzing beehive of a world we live in,
drones bzzzzzing about
our heads and necks and ears
bzzzzzzzy worker bees bzzzzzzzing around
a giant black haze
just about here
just about to connect with
their pointy little barbs
into our beautiful little necks
making us go OW and OOOH and flying in the night
to fetch our protective nets
OOH and OUCH and
I have considered subscribing to the fatalistic philosophy
of our blue-colored friend,
the answer that glides down the throat like a bitter pill
and does strange and fascinating things to our insides
that are strange and fascinating
to read about
their strange and fascinating effects

on those
strange and fascinating people,
who,
thank God,
are not us.

Yes.

I have considered Big Blue
as a suitable replacement for my Macintosh brain
I have bandied about
the concept of the Immaculate Perception
and perhaps idled away a quiet moment or two
perhaps thinking about
perhaps changing
perhaps
religion
perchance.
That is, until I met you.

Now I have a new pill to swallow,
a horse-sized sugar-coated
three-inch lump of buttery goodness
which slowly is eaten away
by the steel-corroding acids of my
inside metal-mouthed
fort knox of a bank of a vault of a base of a stomach.
And it is only after the internal digestion
of this sweet medication
you give the indication
of its eradication,
in short,
net sum,
WORD UP,
a placebo.
A libido placebo that quite wrongly
coursing through my acid veins
turns not into sugar water
but miraculously transforms
into the medication
I was seeking all along,
GOD I love fucking you.

And if I am to accept a prescription
to continue taking you
I will gladly do so.
If I am forced to have a suck job
doing suck work
for suck bosses
who blow,
just to have the precious health insurance

that will allow me to afford
your jacked-up prices,
at least I will be able to hold my head up high
and declare, "There's a lot worse reasons to accept a corpo-
rate job!"

Because baby, you're the sweetest spoon of sugar
to ever make the medicine go down.
You dissolve into my bloodstream
and put 20 gauge sandpaper
to my personality,
my bulbous bumpy lumpy
potato skin of a man,
and you file right over the ugly bumpy nodes
and make me smooth as Snoopy's behind.
You make me happy.
You make me smile at dogs.
You make me like vegetarian food
and Jane Campion films,
or is it Jane Champion films,
I still don't know 'cause I fell asleep before the movie started
but that's okay, I was taking you.
Your medicine not only combats depression and anxiety and
suicidal thoughts
it regulates my sleep patterns.
And it doesn't turn my skin blue,
and it doesn't cause cancer in laboratory rats,
and it's not addictive (well maybe a little)
and it doesn't get me high (well maybe just a little)
and it sure as hell
doesn't kill off sexual drive or performance.
No. Not by a long shot.

I put you under my tongue every 24 hours
and let you melt away
into a small hot salty stream of consciousness
soaking up into my taste buds.
You are all-day strong, all-day long.

And yes, I can't afford the prescription right now
but one day baby, you just wait and see
I'll be the hep-catteneest muthafucka ever to walk down the
street
with a smile on his face
and a tap in his toes
one smooth boss-hog
chomping a big ol' cigar and yelling "roscoe, you get me
those duke boys!"

And when I'm the belle of the ball
I will gladly flip a bird to
universal healthcare
and I will flip a bird to all those fucking Republicans
who won't let me get
universal healthcare
and I will flip a bird to all those fucking Democrats
who won't fight for
universal healthcare
and I will pay for your prescription
straight out of my own pocket
I will take pill after pill after pill after pill
and drown myself
on the love and the faith and the trust and the sex
you have granted on me
I will overdose on the sugary goodness

of your insides
I will close my eyes one final time
in preparation of the mortal coil
I will slippery slide down
I will make my final descent into
the little death
and I will say to myself
in a voice so small only I can hear,

"I sure am glad
I got addicted to you"

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

If any year could be called the high point of my career as a performer, 1999 would probably be it. I wrote a ton of new pieces, including the majority of my best-written and most popular ones; was being featured at out-of-state slams and poetry festivals on a regular basis; won my first government grant, for my work in hyperfiction on the web, and developed my first respect from the academic world; had written and published three novels, all of them well-received; wrote creative nonfiction for the zine world on a regular basis, and penned a new book of long-form essays regarding science-fiction; and even found time to write *The Tao of Now*, easily my best book of that entire time period. It was a highly prolific time for me, and also one that yielded a lot of success.

At the same time, though, it was also the year I turned thirty, and I had a classic mid-mid-life crisis over it that turned the year overall into a mixed blessing at best. With all the successes I had had with my career thus far, I still wasn't nearly to the point of turning a profit with it, much less having it pay my bills. And like many thirty-year-olds,

once I passed my twenties I started obsessively asking myself if I was doing the right thing with my life, and wondering if I should get involved at the bottom rungs of a new career instead, since I was about at the oldest age to do so and still be able to move up fairly quickly.

Ultimately I had to come to grips with the idea that I may never be a full-fledged success as a writer, and that cruel cosmic fate plays a much larger role in the professional career of an artist than any of us want to admit. We can write as good of pieces as possible, maybe some of the best work being produced in America, but if the right random person at the right random company doesn't see it, that work still may never get picked up and turned into a legitimate national commodity, one that generates enough regular revenue off which to live. I had to accept the fact that I was writing primarily for the personal pleasure that it affords me, and the fact that I was neither particularly qualified to do anything else nor particularly inclined to do so. I think all writers have to eventually shrug off a lot of this anxiety they carry around

with them in their twenties, if they ever want to get to a level where they're truly professional. It's not an easy process, for sure, but a necessary one. And believe me, it does get a lot better when you turn 31 and finally are no longer thirty.

This was the same year, by the way, when I first got much more involved with the organizational aspect of the poetry community. For years, in fact, I had been annually shooting my mouth off over what exactly had gone wrong at each year's national poetry slam, first for an electronic newsletter put together by my pal Juliette Torrez called "The Poetry Channel," then as a paid correspondent for About.com's slam page. (I also penned critical reviews and essays about slam issues for a variety of zines in those days, most notably for Kurt Heintz' popular e-poets.net website.) Well, the time had finally come to put up or shut up; the national tournament was to be held in Chicago that year, in fact, and also happened to be the tenth anniversary, and everyone was expecting it to be really big, big enough to have rented out the Chicago Theatre for the final round (capacity 5,000), big enough that the CBS newsmagazine 60 Minutes had decided to come out and do an entire story on it. So I thought to myself, it's now or never, and with my friend Greg Gillam volunteered to take on the daytime events of that year's tournament, which in the past had been this sorta ghetto of a schedule, a handful of sloppily-organized events scattered throughout four days, an afterthought as something maybe poets could do during the day while they were in a new city, on vacation, poor, and bored out of their minds.

Greg and I were envisioning something very different for our year of leadership; an entire alternative festival, in fact, an American slam version of the Edinburgh fringe festival, with at least 20 events spanning all the daytime hours

as well as a nightly late show, where local non-slammers and national competitors easily interact and learn new things from each other. We then decided to have each of these daytime and late-night events hosted by a different team of local poetry organizers; there were 80 local events being produced each month in Chicago, after all, so there were plenty of existing hosts to choose from. The idea, we thought, was to build an entire reason for writers, artists and audience members to come out to a national slam tournament besides the slam itself, for all of those literary people who are perhaps not the biggest fans of slam, or weren't good enough to make an official team. The goal was much like it is with the Olympics; to leave behind a revitalized, reinvigorated community after the tournament ends, to use this temporary event to transform a city's artistic community on a permanent basis.

I feel like we did that, and I also feel that the facts back me up; we held just under 25 events, did recruit 50 different local poetry organizers to host them all, and had an average of 20 audience members at each, including hundreds in attendance at such popular events as the open-signup hiphop and freestyle show, which combined popular recording artists from Los Angeles and New York with local kids and open-mic regulars, all of it DJed live by this really well-known guy named Jesse de la Peña. Various events from the daytime and late-night program got featured in publications as diverse as the Chicago Tribune, New York Times, Village Voice and Los Angeles Reader. And just about everyone involved came up to Greg and I afterwards and told us how much fun they had, from the locals to the hosts to the out-of-state guests. So, I had put my money where my mouth was and had won, thankfully. And it was this experience, plus my experiences running a student-owned art gallery back in

college, that was the genesis behind the arts center I'm now spending my time running as of the preparing of these notes.

Everything was to start changing by the next year, as I partly got a little more tired of the poetry scene and all the late weeknights and massive drinking that came with it, and partly as the scene itself started to change, based on this newfound popularity, especially among politically-correct young academic hiphop kids. But for now there are these pieces, most of which I'm still very happy with, and continue to perform on the occasional tour I still take to this day.

NOTES ABOUT INDIVIDUAL PIECES

47 words spoken on an el: In 1999 two of my poet friends, Aaron and Cassie, got married, an almost unknown event in the poetry scene. In lieu of gifts, they asked all their poet friends to instead read a poem about marriage at the reception. This is the one I wrote, and also printed along the side of a long CTA poster I had stolen from the el.

Bitch and moan: One of many poems in this book for DG, a woman I had a passionate and illicit affair with in 1999. Her situation is still complicated, so I have promised not to reveal her identity.

Brandon, king of the world: A real conversation I had on an excruciatingly long train ride from Chicago to St. Louis one weekend.

Jane the Geek: One of many stories I would write for shows organized by Greg Gillam, in a variety of venues and known by a variety of names. This was part of the monthly themed “Quimby’s Sessions,” held at Quimby’s Bookstore in Wicker Park; its theme was bad breakups.

Jayne and Dana, Dana and Jayne: Written for

Jayne Fenton Keane, an Australian poet on tour in Chicago the week I wrote this piece; and for Dana Plato, former child actress turned junkie, porn star, and eventually suicide victim, also the week I wrote this piece.

Jedi mind trick: Written for one of what would turn into an annual series of Star-Wars-themed poetry events in Chicago, all of them organized by my friend Shappy Seasholtz.

A little story about my last temp job: Like many Chicago artists, I have had what could be best described as a complicated relationship with Corporate America over the years. Most of my pieces about the subject came earlier in my career, when I was doing a lot more temp work and was a lot more unsure about my literary potential; this is a rare late-career one.

Mean and hateful poems: A little story and comment about all the crazy romantic/sexual/political stuff in the Chicago poetry scene of which I had participated the year previous. See the biographical notes for Chicago Stories

1998 for more.

The mod kids: One of my first performance pieces to make me really feel like I finally knew what I was doing. This was also one of the first pieces to become a long-term favorite of the audience. This poem also always sparks a number of emails each year, from people Googling the old zine guide “Factsheet 5.”

An obscene poem for my new lover: Written for the annual “Mental Graffiti” erotic open mic, held in 1999 at the Wicker Park danceclub Madbar. I was sick of hearing all the usual, cliched erotic poems that magically appear at each of these events, and wanted to do something that would sincerely shake up the audience. Man, I sure did manage to do that.

She Number One and She Number Two: Based on a true story, of two young female friends in the poetry scene who were always bugging me to write a poem about them. By this point in my career I was trying to cut back on the number of poems I wrote about real people, because the vast majority seemed to end up backfiring on me, making the person offended or pissed off instead of flattered. These women just kept bugging me and bugging me, though, so I ended up writing this piece, with the hope of deliberately offending them with it. Instead they were fascinated, and grew to really love the piece. Curiously, this piece has also become a long-term favorite among web readers as well.

Strangeplastikrobot: An uncomfortably autobiographical story, that for some reason most people think is made-up or even fantasy, because of the robot motif. Out of all the poems I wrote over the years, this is the only one that can still make me cry when I perform it out loud.

The world ends in 422 days: The title comes

from the fact that I wrote this piece exactly 422 days before January 1, 2000.

COMPLETE PERFORMANCE WORK 1996-2004

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- 06 CHICAGO STORIES 2001-2004
- 07 JASONETTES
- 08 THE HEATSEEKER
- 09 NOTES FROM MY GRANDMOTHER'S FUNERAL
- 10 CELIBATE
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- 12 [ANDI.]
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