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House In Half

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HOUSE IN HALF

Merrill Lee Girardeau

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of the Masters of Fine Arts Thesis at Sarah Lawrence College,

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To the writing community at Sarah Lawrence College,
with great thanks

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Our life is a camera obscura, said Isaiah, do you know what that is?

Never heard of it, said the nation.

Imagine yourself in a darkened room, Isaiah instructed.

Okay, said the nation.

The doors are closed, there is a pinhole in the back wall.

A pinhole, the nation repeated.

Light shoots through the pinhole and strikes the opposite wall.

The nation was watching Isaiah, bored and fascinated at once.

*You can hold up anything you like in front of that pinhole, said Isaiah,
and worship it on the opposite wall.*

Why worship an image? asked the nation.

Exactly, said Isaiah.

Anne Carson, 'Book of Isaiah'

JOE

JANE

I have sliced my last loaf of bread
I have turned the dish of M&Ms onto the floor

you only loved what I asked you to love my words
and the space between us

I sit against the bathroom door
Listen to him bathe the children

you wore my words on your hands I wore yours like rings
on the severed arm black velvet in the jeweler's window

I had never thrown a yard sale before
I learned to write receipts on notebook paper

so wide the space between us now that when the baby falls I
clutch her to me I rub her back I sing

The kids and I would snap in time while the dog
walked by, his claws like tap shoes on kitchen tile

her warmth reshapes the room in my mind
where I always thought your touch would go

I lay with my head on his lap
Let's give a round of applause, said the TV

I'm pleading with a different face yes less dazzling
than the one I remember

and love fell off like a pale cloth unveiling
a new and terrible power

THE SONG OF JOE BRIEFCASE

LATELY

I have read two books, one after the other,
with characters who share my beloved's name.
They die.
The writers show them dying.

My friends and I jog silent
around the steel reservoir.
We lie on the grass,
tired men. Kurt, sullen,
his cap over his eyes, and Ian,
beatific in sleep. From below
the leaves are lace and hunter-green.

To love my friends is to let them lie down. This
I can manage.
I can love while forgetting them,
while I think about the dead
and my small dreams of the beloved,
who is alive and away.

She'd roll her eyes to hear me say *beloved*.

It is good to be alive,
I tell the Lord. It is good to be alive.

I ask again what it is to forgive her for my dreams,
to forgive her for what she did
and didn't do in the dreams,

forgive myself for loving her,
and the deliberate sunlight
rolling over upon us.

RED WAGON

Red wagon of the heart,
where have you driven me, and what
do you hold? The pale lights have gone,
the room in clouds of red dark.
Watch my companions in silhouette
sifting among each other like paper dolls,
folding into each other's shadowed skins.
If there is a man playing the blues
in the corner,
if we are silent, listening,
why isn't the room blue? And where
is the music for the space between
blues and red?
Wash yourself in the song;
love your friends in shadow.
Pray for what they will choose and whom
when they leave this place. Pray—you know
you are in danger. Forget desire,
red wagon, what she will choose and whom.
Totter down the walk and spill your goods.

IGNORANCE

I know God like the handle of my front door.
He's a summer hit buzzing
on every radio station, in every store,
between the aisles of every thought.

I stand God like a long line. Bus, train, DMV.
Do I see
the flush of a woman's cheek
as she reads her romance from a paperback?

Do I flinch
at the man who sucks bits of food from his teeth?

My eyes dart. I shift my weight from one leg
to the other. I wait,
but the waiting writes my seeing.

I see nothing
beyond what I see,
and nothing stays.

I can't tell whether my prayers clang
from Speaker's Corner
or slip out under the door
of solitary confinement.

Is God the crowd or the guard?

What is grace but irritation?
Favor disguised as tasks and tones

at first wholly unrecognizable. A flutter
like clipped hair on the back of my neck.

Somehow it's easier to imagine Him small.
Battery, sock, teakettle, delivery man.

Easier, because I am small. Dust mote or mole.

Blind and deaf, no matter.
Tune me. Tune me.

CRANK CALL

She has to say her name a few times before I understand. Jasmine, she says.
Like the song.

What song? I say. She doesn't answer.

I'm on the office phone. Slow day. Cloudy with sun. When it rained, Tanya said, Devil's beating his wife.

The way the drops pelted the hoods—all the cars turned silver behind the veil of water.

Jasmine asks me if I'm good at playing. Playing what, I say. Me, she says.

I roll my eyes. I wonder if it's one of my daughter's friends playing some kind of joke, but I can't hear any giggling behind her deep breaths.

Don't you think you'd be better off going to church? I say, sounding more like my grandmother than I meant to.

Jasmine says she goes to church every Sunday. I'm a bad girl, she says, rasping.

But you don't sound bad, she says. Sound scared. Probably scared of your wife more'n me.

A pause. I picture Jasmine taking a long drag from a cigarette. That right, honey? You scared of us?

I feel a lump in my throat. I gasp out some benediction, hang up, and bow my head to the desk, shaking with sobs. I don't bother to close the blinds.

GOD IS THIS MORNING

God is this morning.

This morning is candle, sun, reprieve of cold.

Cold is cantering light
across the splinter of river.

Did I ask myself what was yesterday?
Did I choose the morning I wanted,

or the one that would leave me writing trainside,
twirling the black cap of a pen on my tongue?

Understand. I need no answer. Tremor
of branches, robins out of season. Release.

JOE DRIFTS OFF, READING GENESIS 28

Rung 1: The blood is bleached from my hands

Rung 2: I grow chest hair

Rung 3: Talking sense for once

Rung 4: I smell like my brother

Rung 5: Am I worthy?

Rung 6: Hear the answer

Rung 7: The language of wings

Rung 8: I can wait out forever

Rung 9: I eat a cloud

Rung 10: Stare at the sun

HEARTS IN NATURE

I.

And there are other islands

lush garlands of *lamprocapnos*
spectabilis in Tibet

Portuguese lake, hairy with grass

neon mangrove forest
in the South Pacific

thin silphium seed

a German meadow
leaning far, as if to listen

II.

lee ufan/ modernists believe art object
becomes symptom of environment
[note from visit to Guggenheim, June 2011]

becomes—not is?

Mildew grows in the accordion folds
of a striped shower curtain

Mosquitoes mate with twinkle lights

*Take Sanskrit and spraypaint
your new language on subway doors,
says the yogi*

Is there dust on the canvas

a woman exhaling her Xanax
on a park bench

a tableau of chalk airplanes
on the sidewalk?

III.

Hearts in Aristotle's dream
butterflied filet mignon
(symptoms of environment)

Does love lie in a prostrate steak?

A gracious wind blew off the soot
on Jane's right atrium

Underneath the black dust
a hot-pink skin, redder than life

WHO'S HOTTER,

she called from couch to kitchen last July,
Madonna in Desperately Seeking Susan,
or Ginger Rogers in Top Hat?

Madonna: for cheekbones

Ginger: for the layer cake of feathers

Madonna: for mesh

Ginger: for lips, for the lipstick on the lips

Madonna: for Rosanna Arquette

Ginger: for riding crop and smart cap

Gaudy ghosts, the central argument of our marriage.

Her qualities darker, but not too.

She is Liesl, *sixteen going on—*

Hard surfaces: I trace the path of Madonna's hand

along the pink wall. Like Ginger

she sweeps her foot from floor to pearl air.

Were we doomed when she said she'd like

a pretty skeleton? When I said

I like the discipline of beauty

and the beauty of discipline?

LOVE LETTER FROM ADULTHOOD

It's time to donate

It's time to dust

to drop off your dry-cleaning

whiten your teeth

buy stamps

It's time to print your boarding pass

to RSVP

take your shoes to the shop

learn the directions

light the grill

send a gift

clean out your inbox

replace the roof

It's time to call the movers

change your PIN

refill your prescription

It's time to make arrangements

It's time to answer the door

JOE ATTENDS A SATURDAY SEMINAR

Left early for the church, cake box in tow.
Nine of us peppered the room. *How
to be a Godly Man*, large and slanted
on the whiteboard.

We didn't pray. We exchanged no names.

I studied the men's heads,
how they tensed, bowing slightly
under the weight of the pastor's instruction.

Make plans. Practice listening. Serve. Love.

Elegant, the erasure of a man in a white room.
How a slideshow can open the vacuum
still wider. I could've read a self-help book
and stayed home.

Sam's party: drunk and bad cake.
The fist gripping my gut
tattooed with *MAKE PRACTICE SERVE LOVE*
Directives for weak men, I mumbled.

I haven't learned love at church
but at play,
throwing a ball to the son who can't catch.

TELEVISION

God of All Comfort, I am thriving on static
and string cheese, Doritos downed with nary
a thought to my Maker, You. I have a wife who
scorns all I have, this La-Z-Boy in which

I make my grave. She'd never say
she'd like to pour her Boeuf Bourguignon
onto the seat, but she eyed my hand stroking
the remote during dinner. What have I done?

Dreamt softly of living inside a seed,
wrapped up, green, safe for a little while
inside a new mother. Grant me this one
request: if not a seed, then a sound like

saxophone, steel guitar, and manic laughter.
If not a sound, a thought. I am a rock, curious
to know the mind of the foot that steps on it.
She tells me I'm Your beloved son,

that I've dragged my heft across five deserts
for nothing, that I have pain that is not the stone
lodged in my palm. Indeed I say I am pain-FREE!
When I am wrapped inside a cage-blanket

with only warmth on my mind, I need no map
for my wanderings, none of Your laughter,
my Maker. My vision is eternally obstinate,
the TV fuzzing black and sizzling.

COVER LETTER

To whom it may concern:

Inside the loaf a quaintquiet. Or natal squeak.
Of bread my mound blushes, and lace takes a turn
for the corp. of dearest darling. Steal
a canape for me, a crepuscule, grapefruit's stain.
The honcho's cheek meek, fastened with a squeal.

College lawn a legion of shorts. Occasion: Squeal
Day, heir I guess of Artemis, the concern
of pearlish mothers, their mouths a stain.
Society of scholars, future governors. Doors squeak
at the coming king, who bought fame for a steal.
We who nibbled the hem of his slacks did turn

coats boats and drowned gentlemen (one). Turn
my page for triumph, for miles of cornish squeal—
compete. Win against wind on the ridge; steal
a list of the holy ones, the wind's flower. No concern
for the weak wasp of moral certitude. I squeak—
sneak into the cabinet of your employ, stained

brushbrown. What now is clean? Your stain,
CornCorp, slicks around your own revolving door, turns
a gin gin gin, mail-carrier squeak.

Unrighteousness rolls like an everflowing squeal:
wheel of a ship, lit-up lottery. Concern
me with fricative music, my self. I will steal

silence from the gray felt. You: *whom*: steal
license, lemmings. Quench the stain

of loose corp., my wicked. Stairs your concern
at red exits and ears. Stealthy, turn
the sheets into those damned. Prized, your wives squeal
as the mask of Demerol lifts. Let email demons squeak

into the corridors of virtue, where priests too squeak,
animate bobble-heads. I'll steal
honest answers and sugar. Sugar squeals
across some version of heaven, which stain
I can name (reference 2) the other corp.'s turn
at puddingly lies. He is my, not your, concern.

Runtish squeal of conscience burned. My concern:
CornCorp lifts off, steals the air and honor. Turn
me flaring, no favor. Clean squeak of lambent stain.

THE SONG OF JANE BRIEFCASE

THE FAIR

Let's meet the judges

I.

I now open the floor for discussion re: the Prettiest Girl of All Time

this
is the oldest contest in the world

Eve (a ringer) Helen and Esther

Mona Lisa, *men have named you*
Dora Maar, beloved, striped, and all eyes

the mirror has chosen the wicked queen as victor
no less than eight times in eighty years

Snow White deposes her stepmother
each time

Venus Cleopatra Gweneviere the Four Beauties (anarchists!) Liz Marilyn
Angelina the Jessicas the Jennifers the Universes mesmerists the mist
the miss

wielding perfume bottles shaped like apples
—the juice stinks like a bad dream

II.

walking past that window
my reflection reeks of diamonds

between them I find not
Audrey but the best thought
of my mother

III.

static title, mobile public fantasy
so the winner wilts
when we change our pretty minds—erased or glorified?

year by year
symmetry works us into madness

the long space between blinks is a vote

IV.

the unaskable question, I spoke into the dark
do you think you're pretty?

there were four of us, silent for a moment
well, said Rachel, I sort of *know* I'm pretty

V.

what about Mama? in her
are we erased or glorified?

consider also aunt sister granny grocer stripper lawyer teacher meter maid
ranger agent waitress pharmacist analyst physicist cosmetologist miss mist
MIST!!!

VI.

I watched the whole of *Mad Men* in a fit
one ugly fall, gritting
my teeth at January Jones' performance

She's bad at her job! I said once, in tears
But she gets to be
because she looks like that!

VII.

let's crown her already! tiara's handy
P G O A T spelled out in rhinestones on a white sash

there! the one in the yellow cloak
eating corn chips from a blue bowl

VIII.

she erases me? am I the alien, cock-eyed, or is she?

IX.

come on up, dear

let us see your pretty face

MISSION

The wicked queen in *Snow White* sends a huntsman
to kill the girl who is prettier than her

and demands he bring back her heart as proof.

SW sings in the forest,
a multitude of animals behind and around her

and the huntsman approaches.

His green eyes shine
as he lifts the dagger
as Snow White cowers

and he drops it, unable to perform his service.

He is in tears—

for her fairness? Her innocence, high-pitched and rhyming?

Both?

Instead he brings the queen back the heart of a wild pig.

She places it in a golden box
and, laughing softly, holds the box up
to the camera.

She holds the box at chest-level. We cannot see the heart.

TELEVISION

Forget I am a good woman.
Imagine me hilarious, resolved every half hour.
I am watched, my house cut in half.

Render me all eyes: lined, marblish, rude.
Talk to me about my hair; I am your
Pantene show horse.

Teach me how to talk about you—
how to brush my teeth, spin salads, call now.
How to lie like a child. How to be president.

If my brain is a sponge, squeeze it out
and bathe it in your brine (your Pepsi, your OxiClean,
afternoon, midnight, afternoon, noon).

Show me the Barefoot Contessa. At her name,
I will gather my face into my hands and sigh.
I will make a cassoulet.

I've gone so long eating with you, drinking
with you, doing laundry with you,
I can't remember how it was before.

Show me Planet Earth in flower, our fleshy
bleeding hearts—I am I am I am I—
strung along the branch of your love.

ON A FAMILY TRIP TO DISNEY WORLD, JANE KEEPS A DREAM JOURNAL

Stranger on a yellow Vespa chasing me down the high-school hallway, which turned into the digestive passageways of the Leviathan, which turned into a circus tent.

* * *

Holding my hand, my father led me down a white and shadowy hallway to a door, ajar and holding back brilliant light. He opened the door and we stood in a cafeteria line behind elderly people crooning for jello and steamed spinach.

* * *

In the barn with a broom, trying to swat down cobwebs. Swarms of bats flew down, and I ducked for cover. Scrubbed the kitchen floor with a nice wooden brush, which turned into a dead squirrel. A woman came in and asked where my father was. I told her I didn't know, but I lied.

* * *

Mariah Carey and I sang a duet at a nursing home. Played poker with residents. A woman with no teeth and lipless, slanted mouth attempted to grin at me after I played a straight flush in spades.

* * *

I was lying in a cradle, and a small crowd of people demanded that I cook dinner. I made stew with carrots, onions, and yellow squash. It turned an awful green in the pot. Then I was in a fabric store, wrapping myself around and around with a bolt of sky-blue cotton. I spun around so many times that

my entire body was swaddled. I heard a woman's voice speaking harshly, but it was muffled by the fabric, and I couldn't make out the words. In blackness, no longer wrapped, I looked at my left hand. My pointer finger was gone; there was only knuckle.

*

*

*

Beggar held out his hand to me. He was covered in soot-stained rags. I rifled through my pockets, but I had no money. In my vision somewhere I could see cartoonish gold coins, but there was no way to grab hold of them. A panther nudged me in the small of my back, and I fell into a small, lush patch of grass.

BETWEEN US

a dragon dies

 vines fall down the garden wall

a bench materializes

 a drift wipes the sea clean

the sun becomes a plaything

 jewelry is cheap

bedclothes are angelic

 movement impermanent

kisses have no smell

 edges dull

JANE DRIFTS OFF DURING THE MOVIE

In a dream, I hear a woman's voice call my name
—which is not my name.

I drift through a garden brightly lit,
and a flamingo hovers
above the pond. Though I float close
to clouds the color of hand cream,

a manacle might snatch me at any moment.

A red menace rises
above three strange domes
in which my children lie now, dead.

Now I roll in snow.

Now snowflakes pelt me
as I speed through the air on a biplane.

Now a red room golds me in sand.

VOICE OVER TO AURORA

Something in the wood
screeches back with our wildness.

Our truest dream. That other,
his song... Not your savior.

His savor is not his kiss.
Silly princess.

You are pseudonym.
Blonde ghost. The king's dream.

The king, the fairies, me—
we want you to be

what perfection IS to us.
Sounds like to us.

My staff is your thorn.
Soon you'll sing like you were never born.

Like you were never blessed.
Birdsong ailing in your breast.

Bright evil, my lightning, you'll be queen
of the underworld in the blink

of an eye.

AND I PITY ANY GIRL WHO ISN'T ME TODAY

Natalie Wood moves her mouth. She hears her own voice wobbling over
the soundstage. Buttercup
blouse, orange smock. She sings along with herself, exuberant and sharp.
Consuelo and I mimic her at first,
singing her lines after her: *Such a pretty me Such a pretty me Such a pretty
me*. By the end, we sing in unison
and in earnest. I feel pretty by proxy, prancing behind Maria as Tony's spell
pulls her under its jubilant current.
Marni Nixon stands in the recording studio, watching Natalie's bulging eyes,
her turned-up nose.
She looks just like love. Marni is a pretty blonde, but a ghost. She moves
her mouth along with Natalie's.
She rolls her r's gently. Only when the film is released does Natalie hear
Marni's voice on her tracks, mocking her,
ripping every high note from her throat. Natalie storms out of the premiere,
pulling her false eyelashes off as she hails
a cab. The film continues. Boys dance and fight, fight and dance, and in
their movements there is murder.
That last burst of joy: Tony shouts *Maria!!* across the pavement, the word
a red waltz.
Before this moment, she was every girl. *All the beautiful sounds of the world
in a single word*.
Now she is fully Maria (fully Natalie?). Violent, she bears reconciliation
as a black scarf on her pretty head.

FRIDAY NIGHT AT THE MOVIES

A half hour in and she's at the door not a lick of fat blue
bikini bottoms shirt off—thought it'd be

a good time at the Carmike just the three of us—
she walks in naked so skinny breathe in she's

skinny breathe out she's pretty she's skinny she's pretty
breathe in—look down breathe out—eat something breathe in

eat something—the popcorn look down chant chant
your mantra is—Joe's got the popcorn now one fistful

two—she's too pretty breathe out I'll never be so pretty
breathe in—it's me it's my fault she's pretty it's my bones

they're too wide; look at Margaret shoving it in her face
like she's blind she doesn't blink—you can't ignore a naked girl

honey or else you'll never quit growing growing out; God she's
not putting clothes on—God he's not doing anything there's

a naked woman there for you—I need to go to the bathroom
not now I'd eat a park bench starve to look like that to look like that

I'd cheat Joe and Margaret both; it's her body not mine her body—
her naked lithe smooth tan—it's not fair we are not mermaids

we are whales she's better at starving than me—arty picture—
someone needs to write her a letter someone

—she should swallow her naked pride learn cellulite it is
a language I tried to cut mine off now I have a mantra;

we put Margaret on three diets and still she broke
the scale—I gotta pee Margaret give me that

tub give me your drink your pigfat skin

TO THE MIRROR IN THE DRESSING ROOM, CENTURY 21

Shade my ugly

Highlight my bright wrath

my brass bangs your breadbasket your kitehips

I wear me as a white wet suit

Each warp each ding it is a heretic and so are you

trading my eyes one for the other

Reversing me you swap my scars

I crunch you taste aluminum and sand

You said I am not naive about my looks

You said I would rather have cancer than be a size 12

PRAYER

In case of crushed lung
 splintered bone

don't sue my false idol

beyond me this accident

Don't hold me accountable

What have I left out

A hole in the head

I can't afford rhinoplasty I need your kiss

don't sue

my imago my

friend we are bound

With every movement

like a disease

I see my body

on trial

LETTER TO E.

Dear girl, you have the heart of a short man
haggling over a hurricane lamp.
He wears thick dark glasses, a square suit.

You can't afford the old ballpark seats,
the stained glass, the crude painting
of Robert Johnson.
You can't afford your indecision,
thoughts tossed like dull swords.

I condescend to you. I can't seem to help it.
It is difficult discovering before you do
that you can't trust me, my friend.

Try on the silk dress and floppy hat.
The thin gold chain, the Coach purse.

How do we love our men?
How do we love each other?

You call your love imperfect
but never unfinished. Your best heart
languishes on the white racks
of a seafoam refrigerator.

THE YEAR OF THE HORSE

I had an MRI but didn't tell anyone. The reading showed blobs of light, my body riddled with tumors of want. Desire, once pure, now made mutant by disappointment.

They said the cure, though a sure fix, would take years. Some lavender pills. Weekly massages for the tumors, repaying them for my neglect. Guided meditation: *Imagine the object of your desire. Imagine yourself holding it. Is your life different now that you have it?*

I think I'd like Gatsby's green light. A direct and specific yearning, even if it kills me as it killed him. Instead, a lavender haze of good thoughts. They've given me hope now, but what of it? I hope for what I do not believe will happen.

I lie in bed on my stomach, empty bowl on the pillow beside me. Morning is the sickness of sleep, the pearl in my throat: radiant, calcified, hidden.

I find a fleck of glitter in my hair. Dregs of Chinese New Year, a month ago and miles away. The kids bought us handheld confetti cannons from a man on the sidewalk. When I pulled the string, a terrible *POP* and a gaudy shower, slower and more luxurious than rain.

I flick off the glitter, a fallen angel shedding the remnant of cheap glory. Still we will find fugitive confetti in the tub, on the counter, in shoes.

Gatsby had *an extraordinary gift for hope*. I thought I had it too, until I said *Happy New Year* to the strangers in the parade, and each time it felt more like a lie.

JANE AS AMY WINEHOUSE WATCHING YOUTUBE, 07/23/2011, 1:30 A.M.

listen

to me that's a gift i like

my dress that one

like gauze like a mummy hard to breathe so tight

There's a somebody

Jules called me today and she said

she said Blake just forget 'im

he's baby i can't live without him

she said i'm ha! i'm fucked

what i am is all elbows need to shave down the bone

here see?

could take somebody's eye out

listen to that you listen

i sound fucking great

Valerie Valerie

There's a somebody

do you know that one Andrew?

somebody I'm longing to see

I hope that he

no there look at that i'm doubled over laughing

what's so funny, d'you think?

Stop makin a fool outta me

Valerie little maracas that's me

all rattling round in the head
i'll shake my head for you listen

There's a somebody

Jules said Blake he's my villain
no Jules i said it's not
him it's me my own villain

INCARNATION

I left him on Second Ave., in magnolia shadowlace, clicking his purpose in and out of place like a broken parking meter, fed the change it can't digest. Because he is in my past, he is regressing, becoming ancient. But not Cro-Magnon. Not yet.

Time slides against itself like a belt: one piece goes forward, the other backward.

He wears a cloak now and boots of crude leather. The wind loses his language as in visions he weaves snowmelt with narcissus and the songs of Solomon. Stumbling up the Way of St. James with stumbling prayers.

In a year or so he will wear sandals, a breastplate spattered with the blood ripped out with lion teeth. His eyes will be trained in blindness, ears hidden behind the clobber of his helmet.

In time he will shed these costumes for his truest skin: Gideon reclining against an oak tree. An angel will ask him to make victory for God. Though I am powerless, you call? says Gideon.

The angel knows the centuries of wives begging for their husbands—for second chances.

MEN: A SIEVE

lemonjuice blood

hair: raven feathers

I kiss his head, and the sweat of his scalp speaks

blood: blackhot with his mother's dark

glockenspiel song

guilt

film: scrim for his fear

hair: long with the memory of soap blood:
twined with longing

voice: coca-cola

filmy clothing of psychedelic light

hair: mine

blood: mine

COAT

I hang it on his trailer hitch first.

It takes several tries, though. There are many Chevy trucks of the same model, color, and year in this town. I must remember certain stickers and scratches, the plastic beads in a swag on the rearview mirror, brake light dead on the right side.

The truck drags its tattered hem through the streets. Pills of tan cling to the wool, mute.

I hang it on the pews of invisible churches, the bedposts of honeymoon cottages, the arms of ashen linen sofas.

Within minutes (sometimes), I'll be buttoning it up his chest. The collar whispers, and his mouth moves along with it. *You look like that, and you could make me do anything. You're beautiful enough to hate.*

*

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Weeks ago, I hung it on the eaves of that cafe where he gushed over Wallace Stevens once. That was when I was least sure of what I nodded for, that *there is no spring in Florida*, that I could, in fact, *let be be finale of seem*.

Before rising, he looked at me. *I could stretch two tiny clotheslines between us, from your pupils to mine*, he said without laughing.

I made him see it, I thought. If only in miniature.

The next day I saw him in the cafe again. He was with someone, and he was wearing it. We joked about concrete icing on cinnamon rolls. I sat in my chair

and realized he couldn't feel the weight. He couldn't see the caramel snags on his shoulders.

One night we danced, fingers trickling, pivoting about each other as he spun me around and around the parquet floor of a home we didn't know. He wouldn't let go of my right hand (would he?). He sang every song with me (to me?). Even I couldn't see it.

You were enjoyable, he said as I rose from the car and into the static sunrise.

I wriggled in my sheets, thought I saw it hanging from the knob of my dresser, just below my three Bibles.

Yesterday he plodded into the cafe, wearing the glasses he saves for headaches. I asked him to read my newest. *This has potential*, he said.

I left minutes after he did, not crying. Waiting is its own weeping—weeks of chill pink mornings, lacing my fingers around a paper cup, watching the man with furtive eyes take pictures with his mouth, tac-tac his keyboard; watching the square-faced man stare gray through the window at sweated women; watching the skinny man stand at the counter, all toboggan and brown broken teeth—I threw it upon each in his turn.

I see it hanging on each O of this young century. On the boy with the ball cap and clean eyes. On the curly-headed runner those fifteen years. On men in trains. On sidewalk men. Grocery men. Pub men. Church men.

*

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Its owner stood naked before me once. I offered it to him. He slipped it on, the tan bleaching to a shine. Moments later, I was dragging it along by the sleeve, returning from the altar to my father. I don't remember how it left its owner's body, or how it changed color again.

* * *

This is easier: to pass the thing around, to scream at it skull-bound, suck the tears back into their river caves.

By now, though, the screaming has peeled the paint off the ghost churches, the bedrooms, the cafe.

And more than ever, I understand rash love letters and untoward embraces. I understand that my contribution to insanity is a garment, that the garment is mere perforated hope.

* * *

He—or he—or he—cannot wear it. Each is a symptom of its dark must.

I cannot wear it. I am small with thin shoulders. My nails grow sharp, and I need something else to cut them with.

Soon (I think) I will press my nose to the white tile—smell pine, vanilla, bread—wear nothing but light. I will feel a rough sleeve and a strong hand, forever cool, resting on the back of my neck.

OH! YOU PRETTY THINGS

I won the lottery for *Saturday Night Live*, asked my friend Marianna to go with me, and, after properly having a cow, she said, ‘We have to look hot.’ She said we’d earn better seats with better looks. Marianna is armed with expressive brown eyes, full lips, and gobs of hair. She would have no problem with the hot-ness. It was up to me.

We took a couple of hours to get ready together at my apartment. She tried on three different outfits from the selections of clothing she’d brought. I straightened my hair (something I never do because it makes me look sort of like an Afghan hound). From my bathroom mirror I asked Marianna how she used to do her makeup in junior high and high school. ‘It’s funny, I actually wore more makeup in high school than I do now,’ she said. ‘And nicer brands. I used to have all Estee Lauder—Mom would buy it for me—just because she was dealing with so much else.’

‘What do you mean?’ I said. ‘Oh, you know, my hair, braces, glasses and contacts,’ she said. ‘I was just a project. It was like makeup was the one thing we could count on to look good.’

I watched as musical guest Demi Lovato was prepped during commercial breaks, how a costumer adjusted her black jumpsuit, how her face was nearly plane-less with so much makeup. The singer is petite and pear-shaped, the flesh on her arms a bit more robust than that of your average female celebrity. Yep, that's probably about how I look, I thought.

An older gentleman lay his car keys on the bar between Marianna and me, left for several minutes, came back, and had a pizza delivered to us on his tab. He was watching the Mets game on the screen that hung over the bar at this place called Pasta Lovers and asking us about the South. Marianna, who is, like me, an Ole Miss alum, chatted with the man at length about SEC football. He asked me which team I root for. I shrugged. 'I... don't.' He said, 'Fuck 'em, right?'

He bought us a second round of drinks. Beyond the small lobby area with its small bar lay stairs that belonged in a split-level house. On the upper level was a beige dining room, sparsely populated with patrons, wine glasses sitting top-down on their white tablecloths. On the lower level was a large room in which a couple was celebrating their rehearsal dinner.

When we told the man what we were doing later that night, he shook our hands, congratulating us on our good fortune. Marianna struck up a conversation with a family who stood behind us. Meanwhile the key man, whom we later guessed was at least an investor in this restaurant, if not *The Pasta Lover* himself, asked me about winning lottery tickets to *Saturday Night Live*. 'So what do you tell yourself on a night like this? Like, something beautiful and wonderful happens to you. Everything's perfect. Stars align. How do you explain something like that?'

Demi Lovato lies somewhere on a wide spectrum of former Disney kids. In 2011 she left a musical tour with the Jonas Brothers for a stint in rehab. She was 18 years old. Once she emerged, she shared that she'd been admitted for substance abuse, eating disorders, and self-harm, and that in rehab she was diagnosed with bipolar disorder.

In October 2015, two weeks prior to the release of her new album and her *SNL* appearance, Lovato appeared in a story for *Vanity Fair*. Her interview accompanied a photo shoot for which Lovato insisted on 'no makeup, no clothes, no retouching.'

Considering his question for a moment, I looked out of the pane of glass to 49th Street. ‘Well, I believe in God, so—’

‘Yeah? *Me too*. I’m a Christian,’ the key man said, nudging my arm. ‘Really? Me too, that’s great,’ I said. ‘I think it’s God blessing us—’

‘Yeah, but I mean apart from that,’ he said. ‘How do you explain it?’

Before I could answer, he turned his head to Marianna and the small crowd beyond. I’m not sure what I would’ve said, had the conversation continued. A lottery’s a lottery. Blessing is blessing. What other explanation is there?

Soon we were paying for our first round and saying goodbye to Pasta Lover, who kissed each of us on the cheek while telling the lady in the brown fleece hat and the guy in the suit beside her where we were headed. We walked out the door with congratulations following us.

Lovato is not the first person (and by *person*, I mean *woman*) to appear ‘raw’ for the public on purpose. Kim Kardashian, Marion Cotillard, Jessica Simpson, and others have opted out of the Photoshop game, allowing their untouched visages and varicose veins to appear on newsstands.

In most of the *Vanity Fair* images, Demi utilizes strategically placed sheets, a t-shirt, and the rim of a bathtub to conceal herself. The conceit was of a piece with her existing brand, which promotes health, inner strength, and natural beauty. Not only does Lovato have her own beauty and skin care lines, but she’s been known to post a variety of bare-faced selfies on Instagram. Perhaps unsurprisingly, in these pictures she sports uber-groomed eyebrows and not a pimple to speak of.

Marianna and I walked up a wide staircase into a round room with a white ceiling that glowed with lavender light. A ribbon of flat screens ran around the circular walls, and on them glided photographs of Steve Martin in a bee costume, Lady Gaga in a lightning hat sitting at a white piano, Dan Aykroyd and John Belushi in Ray-Bans and porkpies.

We walked through security and received our tickets, deep purple and tucked inside a tiny white envelope with *Lee Girardeau, Merrill* written on the blank beside *Name*. On the top right corner of the envelope someone had written a *2* in ballpoint pen.

From the metal detector, the Peacock Lounge was a brief walk away. A smiling brunette page looked on the envelope of our ticket and asked us to sit in the center section of the lounge. I didn't know what she was talking about at first; the lounge was just a giant room full of white pleather couches. Then I saw the two gauzy, floor-to-ceiling curtains the color of sun-bleached seaweed, separating the room into thirds. Marianna and I sat on the couch closest to the page, facing the line of future audience members being directed to various sections of The Peacock Lounge. I watched idly, content to wait. Marianna's look was sharper, a little panicked. Her head flicked back and forth with each couple or family placed in their respective sections.

Miley Cyrus' newest single is called 'BB Talk.' In the video Cyrus cavorts in a variety of pastel infant getups: a onesie, a diaper, a passie, a baby-style inflatable Sumo suit. The lyrics to the verses are talky—not rap exactly, just casual soliloquies about a relationship with a guy who's just too nice. The chorus is simple: *Fuck me so you stop baby talkin'*.

The Disney machine is all about baby talk: infantilizing its young stars into and past puberty to the point of creepy nonsense (Exhibit A: On Cyrus' Disney Channel show 'Hannah Montana,' the actor playing her teenage brother was 35 years old if he was a day). The way out, consistently, has been sex.

By now, Miley Cyrus has all but burned Hannah Montana in effigy. The cute, wholesome pop star has metamorphosed into a semi-nude, synth-happy, tongue-wagging toke-master.

Disney obscures sexuality because its primary audience is presexual, i.e. they are children. The Disney Princesses, for example, are beautiful cartoons and to some degree sexy, but they aren't inherently sexual. Demi, Miley, and Selena—like Britney, Justin, and Christina before them—are not cartoons. They grow into adults, something no contract can curtail.

Marianna and I moved to New York within two weeks of each other in August of 2013. We'd known each other a little in college, but desperation made us fast friends. She's an actress, funny and totally watchable whether playing an old man, a hippie, or a Jedi.

The longer we know each other, the more I see myself in Marianna. Not in a sisterly way exactly—more like I'm her evil doppelganger and she's the plucky heroine who must befriend me to get to the next level in a feminist video game.

We love to laugh together, but on this night the mood was rather tense as we sat in the Peacock Lounge, waiting for something to happen.

After a while, Marianna explained her theory about the Lounge. The two girls standing in front of us in line downstairs had a nepotistic connection to the show, and they were laughing and talking past the gauzy curtain to our right. Marianna speculated that the section to our right would sit in the floor seats in front of the main stage. Our section, she said, and the one to our left would be sitting in the bleachers of 8H. 'I mean, I could be wrong,' said Marianna.

'Bummer,' I said blankly.

Happy as I was to see the show, I found Demi Lovato's new singles loud and unmemorable, if sung by an impressive instrument. I wonder if she would do better to hire a more skilled song-writing team than to post self-helpery on the internet. She's using her fame generously, but I wonder how effective it is. If she wants to combat the misogynistic culture that contributed to her eating disorder, what if the best revenge is good art?

The *SNL* kingmaker, apparently, was Jen, an elflike redhead with a clipboard. I watched her scoping the section to our right and rearranging where certain guests were sitting, even in what was ostensibly a holding area (the Peacock Lounge, I mean). Marianna said, 'That's the woman who pulled me and Katy for the front.' When they came for the dress rehearsal 2 years prior, Marianna and our friend Katy, a wide-eyed blonde, were plucked from their original section and placed on the front row of the floor, right in front of the main stage.

The Peacock Lounge transformed. I noticed who was directed to which section. I noticed gender and group size. I noticed which person in a given couple was more attractive and how wide was the looks disparity. I noticed what they were wearing and whether their hair looked dyed and where they kept their fat.

During her *Vanity Fair* interview, Lovato said, 'I'm about to launch an album that finally represents who I truly am.' This is the kicker. She's making her music with Interscope records for millions of dollars and millions of fans. The claim is preposterous. Demi Lovato, like all famous people to one degree or another, is a product. Tested, adjusted, calculated, scheduled. The 'totally raw' photographs? A nice statement about curvy bodies and a carefully coordinated gimmick.

As someone who's been to treatment, Lovato has most likely gotten closer to the germ of her identity than most of us ever will. She of all people should know that the real Demi can't be sold. And if we are to believe that her album *Confident* really is *who she is*, why does it sound like everyone else?

I had noticed the long couch catty-cornered to us, the one in the righthand section Marianna suspected was special. On this couch sat a line of handsome young people. They looked like a DKNY ad with their black leather blazers and/or pants, their shining teeth. There was the model-esque couple, both male and female showing off their long long legs and poreless skin. And the pairs of women, all of whom probably smelled like Flowerbomb and vodka tonic. One in particular, a girl about my age, had the sharp, square jaw, blue eyes, and wavy hair of a young Carmen Electra. Her lips were slicked red.

I seethed.

I'm growing and changing. I was in a relationship, and I was being managed by my parents, and I was still under Hollywood and Disney, and I was being held to this expectation of being the good girl... I had to have moments where I was crying and I was like, 'Why am I not in love with what I do?' I was forced to get very uncomfortable for a while in order to make the decisions I made.

- Selena Gomez

I scanned the long bench again and again, trying to conjure the image of my face next to that of each woman seated there. I lost every time. I had a higher BMI, a crookeder nose, thinner hair, smaller eyes. I distracted my unhot, horse-faced self with Tracy Morgan's Wikipedia page.

'When I walk into a place and people look at me, they don't see an artist,' Selena Gomez told the *New York Times*. The attention, she seems to think, comes from her erstwhile romance with Justin Bieber.

Gomez was voted the third hottest woman on the '2015 Hot 100 Reader's Choice' poll for *Maxim* magazine. She's not much of a singer or actress, and presumably the Bieber mess will fade, but the fact of her 'hotness' will probably secure Gomez many more ad campaigns, acting jobs, and albums. That's no guarantee that she will be any more in love with what she does, and in fact, she'll probably have less control over her career if the public so covets her image.

I don't see an artist either. I wish I did, or could.

Marianna said something I barely registered. 'You okay?' she said.

'I just—I just *really* don't like it when I know an attractive person is judging me,' I hissed. But the truth about Jen is I didn't see her as attractive; I saw her as a woman trying her damndest to be attractive. Red hair straightened (who wore it best?), five-inch heels, and I'm pretty sure I could see the outlines of each hamstring through those skinny jeans. Given that Jen's job probably commandeered the majority of her waking hours, I marveled that she had time for working out at all. I imagined that she was one of those people who goes to Equinox at 11 p.m. with the insomniacs and exercise addicts.

I reasoned that they wrote those numbers on the envelopes before we arrived at 30 Rock. Unless they trolled the Internet in an attempt to match name with face, it would be impossible for them to sort the audience by attractiveness. Right?

I was with a group of friends recently who asked me how I was. Suddenly, without knowing how, I was talking about Selena Gomez. ‘Miley and Demi both made their breakdowns part of their personas. Selena hasn’t had anything like that—she’s stayed completely together. I’m worried that she’s headed for a breakdown, but the thing is, I don’t think anyone’s going to know about it when it happens. She’s going to implode from the inside, and no one will know.’

Aloud, I tried to talk myself down. 'We're lucky to sit anywhere. We're getting to see this show for free. It's going to be fun no matter what.' *Something beautiful and wonderful happens to you. How do you explain something like that?*

I looked at everyone seated around us. I remembered that everyone tried her best to look good tonight. That the human species is uniformly extraordinary—beautiful, even. That beauty's scope can expand, and it is my responsibility to expand it. I scanned our section. *She has nice eyes, He has great eyebrows, I like her ear-rings, He has pretty hair.*

You are worth more than your body or your sexual appeal. The world of showbiz doesn't see things that way, they like things to be seen the other way, whether they are magazines who want you on their cover, or whatever... Don't be under any illusions.. ALL of them want you because they're making money off your youth and your beauty... which they could not do except for the fact that your youth makes you blind to the evils of show business. If you have an innocent heart you can't recognize those who do not[...] The sooner a young lady gets to know that, the sooner she can be REALLY in control.

- Sinéad O'Connor's open letter to Miley Cyrus

And for a moment I lost my mind. The line in front of the Peacock Lounge became the line coming off the trains at Auschwitz. I thought about how people were judged by their race and how race is appearance and how appearances were sent one direction to die and the other to live.

Tina Fey and Paula Pell, made up as rough-looking men with bad haircuts and staring into the camera, drifted past me on a screen.

Amidst my storm of conscience, Jen summoned the audience-models from their long bench and ushered them out into the hallway. She turned and looked at our lowly center section, meeting Marianna's and my cool gazes. She walked over.

'Let me see your envelope really quick?' she said. I showed it to her. 'Okay,' she said and wrote an 8 beside *Lee Girardeau, Merrill*. 'I'm actually gonna send you with these guys.' I don't remember what we said to her in response, but as we trotted down the hallway and away from the Peacock Lounge I do remember saying 'Yes!' through clenched teeth and starting to babble *everyoneisbeautifulbutweshowedthatbitch*. Marianna looked bright-eyed and ready.

What does it mean to be confident? It means letting go, being authentic, saying I don't give a fuck and this is who I am. I want to show the side of me that's real, that's liberated, that's free. What if we do a photoshoot where it's totally raw?... Let's do it here, let's do it now.

- Demi Lovato

During the show, host Tracy Morgan revived his 'Brian Fellow's Safari Planet' sketch, in which Morgan's Fellow interviews wild animals. His second guest was a camel named Elizabeth. The beast stepped right in front of our chairs before her appearance on air. Aidy Bryant held onto Elizabeth's rope as she stood feet from me, gigantic, marble-eyed. The show instantly became a circus, big top or no.

When Fellows invited the guests onstage, Elizabeth cooperated with Bryant's tamer character for a few moments. Then Elizabeth turned her ass directly in front of the camera, obscuring the set and the stars from view and sending the audience into gales of laughter.

GREEN GIRL

ODE TO YOUTH

The parade glitters down Fifth Avenue. Chance and dancing, breast-bearing
and sweat. My roommate is leaving the city today. She's too young for a breakup

so bitter,

too young for a merciless panic on the downtown 5. But there she is,
Band-Aid on her temple, Bloody Mary in her hand. I sit meekly,
sipping iced coffee in a slick furniture showroom

with a few friends and strangers, looking over

the brass bands and roller-skating drag queens and the man, probably seventy,
wearing a ball sling and a bandanna. I—we—are stained

by small, nice places. The personality quizzes on Elizabeth Johnson's old Dell
told me I embody individuality, crave uniqueness, like a peacock

or Luna Lovegood. In another life, I couldn't afford

an obsession with selfhood. Elizabeth, the child of older parents,

had the basement all to herself. Her dad Bruce painted it lime green. Natives

call us fresh,

as if we've been plucked from comely orchards. Pure rubes.

I wrote a poem about the prettiness that spills off the L. My teacher said

the simple fact of youth is beautiful, and the fact was a comfort.

Later I was troubled by the vision of every green girl in the city aged,

terrified of windows. Mistakes unmade, bad eggs unsung. I don't have to worry

about an errant child. So I invent one: my friend, the one the city scolded

and shattered. I pray over her room when she's away like a mother, begging.

CHILD'S POEM

The train stopped, hours and hours. Or maybe twenty minutes.

For a second, all the lights left too.

That day Myra told me she ate a Pokemon.

A man's voice crackled over the quiet.

Excuse me, ladies and gentlemen, due to a fatality near the Botanical Gardens

we will be running express from Wakefield to Harlem - 125th Street.

I sat next to Julia in math. A parrot's shadow played on the wall.

There were sheets. One white, one neon yellow, taped to the bottom of a train, over
the wheels.

That train was still. Ours, two tracks away, moved slowly.

People in orange vests beside the sheets, standing on the tracks.

A woman asked me something. It might've been another language.

The conductor clopped down the aisle with his chin straight.

I was afraid. I had seen the blue lights too at the BG.

Dark apartment. Mom will be home in an hour.

Did the wheels sound different today?

THE WEDDING WAITS ON ME

I take a cab from the tip of the Queensboro Bridge and watch the tram skim back from Roosevelt Island overhead.

Rachel with her bleached hair wears a white top that might be a bra, lacy hot pants, and a short white kimono with fringe.

Gary must be four inches shorter than his bride. Skyping his family, his fellow Irishmen stand in a row, holding their phones out with straight arms as Lisa officiates.

All thirteen of us have to climb out a window and down a ladder to the garden out back. Sherif films the proceedings. He's a former coworker of ours, recently dumped after a five-year relationship, carrying a vaporizer with him everywhere to maintain a constant high. He tells me he read about an Australian biologist who kills cane toads by 'moving them to the freezer beside the ice cream.'

Rachel loves the ladder bit, but to me it is the least strange part of the day. Stranger: the lovely grapes on the jungle vines behind us; not one family member in attendance; Rachel and I have never spent time together outside of work; she is marrying a man she hardly knows; no one here is over the age of thirty-five; we have Thai food after.

They say the placebo effect persists even when patients know they are taking placebos. So we tell ourselves, 'If not now, when? If not in New York, where?'

Rachel says, 'I'm probably making a mistake.' I ask her about Sunnyside, her favorite places, her routine. I can picture her day now: rolling out of a blue bed at noon for her two o'clock shift. I know her block, her street, the bar around the corner where they drank free shots after signing the license.

I thought I was writing about marriage, but I can't press down on something that now seems at once fragile and incorruptible, like one of those grapes.

RACCOONS

Blue light drifts through, the shining weather
dimmer here. Between tidy yew and crabapple rows, visitors
dot the Conservatory Garden like figurines in some model of the place,
their mobility predictable, faces scrubbed clean of distinguishing features.
On the end of a leash, a golden retriever. A family squints
for a picture before the tall fountain below. I sit on a stone bench
reading about the sad man, wondering if this
is the best use of a summer afternoon.

NORTH CAROLINA, its shape and name, etched on the slate
at my feet. Raccoons come then, using the trellis as ladder,
though they remain aloft. One hops to the rim
of the trash can beyond. He considers. He jumps inside
and emerges with what looks like a diaper
but is only a white paper bag. What if death were like that?
Dip in, hop out, no shit to speak of. I count three
raccoons, who half-lounge, half-gambol on the trellis now.
They're not so wild, hanging out in the primmest acre of the park.
A woman jumps and scurries away when she realizes their nearness.
They must not see me. In this garden, all humans are spirits: alien,
disguised, always watching. To raccoons we must be unimaginable,
though we built their playground. Later I will spot them at the Delacorte
during *The Tempest*. They'll pay no mind to the wizard, the girl, the storm.
They will walk across the wings to their next score,
retreating into the dark.

GOD BOUGHT ME ORANGES

A friend once taught me how to peel an orange without a knife: roll it around on a table, pick the skin off, and proceed.

Yesterday a wrong number asked me about Jesus. What about him? I said. And he talked about Ayn Rand for twenty minutes.

Then he said, Jesus' heaviest teaching—this is in Matthew—is that we should give up father brother sister mother house hat coat for the kingdom of God.

You want to know something else? he said. Jesus told us not to resist the man who is evil. Like if a man breaks into your house and robs you blind and tries to rape your wife, you should let him. Matthew 5:39. Look it up.

He kept talking as the pages of my Bible skittered to the first gospel. It is right, he said, to protect your country. It is right to protect your property. It is right to protect your wife's body.

I looked through the window. Men had worked on East 90th that day: jackhammers and a treble of shouts. Dusk now, the traffic cones waiting for further instructions.

He told me I believed in God for my own survival. When you were formed, he said, you were surrounded by a certain type of provision that depended upon belief in a creator. You did not know the provision was conditional. You assumed that belief in God bought you clothes, kept food in the pantry, paid your dad's mortgage.

You were too young to separate necessity from convenience, survival from desire.

Desire does elude me. The produce aisle, for instance, is a quilt of quenchable hunger, and I am paralyzed by it. Last winter, I bought oranges because someone told me they were in season. I continued to buy them through peach season, until eating an orange slice was like biting into the husk of a caterpillar three days dead.

You believe in God, the man said, because you think you will die without him. The circle comes back to you.

I told him about growing up in the church, how pastors and teachers would turn gospel into pedantry. Do you think I've been pedantic tonight? he said.

After hanging up, I waited for the orange streetlight to glow. Later, in bed, I thought about loving someone from afar. You tell yourself you will survive, that this desire is temporary, impotent. Imagine a boy throwing rocks at your window, tour the throne room of your heart, break the window yourself. (I'll note that in every respect, this process is highly inconvenient.)

Yes the man would say. You let desire burn in your throat until another one snuffed it out. You saw the boy's Dreamsicle shirt in a church far from your hometown, prepared to smile, remind him who you are, and discovered that the profile was not his. Your fear in service of a stranger.

MATTER OF HEALTH

I have no appetite, but I love buying food. The Thai lady with fuchsia lipstick asks me if I have a rewards card.

This is the first time I've spoken today. Even when I talked to God, I spoke in silence. First with my eyes closed. Second, eyes open. Third in black ink. Because I hated every prayer, I came here.

I hold out my house keys, mailbox key, key to the store where I work, the keychain Marion got me in Morocco, my New York Public Library card, and a surfeit of metal loops.

I pass them across the conveyor belt and imagine the woman fleeing the store with them, running breathlessly north. She does not wonder which doors will open if she stops to try them out. She runs until there's no more island.

Across the river at CubeMart Self-Storage, my small key—the one with the red cap—will open a kingdom of unsullied darkness, canned beans, and stacks and stacks of clean white paper.

She will have a belly full of water and a lit bulb in her mouth. She will draw a mother and child, her iterative psalm.

IDEATIONS

Romans 1:20: *Since the creation of the world, God's invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived... in the things that have been made.*

Creation mirrors creator. Art mirrors artist. Made things don't come out of nowhere.

I didn't see the problem with thinking like this until I read David Foster Wallace's review of a Borges biography:

The majority of readers who will be interested in a writer's bio... will therefore usually be idealizers of that writer and perpetrators (consciously or not) of the intentional fallacy. Part of the appeal of the writer's work for these fans will be the distinctive stamp of that writer's personality, predilections, style, particular tics and obsessions—the sense that these stories were written by this author and could have been done by no other.

Infinite Jest, Wallace's masterwork, is nearly as long as the King James Bible. On an eight-hour flight I read only forty pages. Two weeks later, the book was devouring my days.

It is the 1,079-page iteration of what reformed pastors preach week after week and what Wallace said in his Kenyon College address, 'This is Water': unless you're at the service of some higher power, he said, 'pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive.'

Wallace writes about losing to a little girl in chess in the extended version of 'Shipping Out,' his essay about taking a Caribbean cruise. He later admitted that this game didn't happen. I wonder if the girl even existed, or if he made her up too.

He walked his petite cabin in Keds, measuring the length and width of it, lazing on top of the bedclothes as he watched *Jurassic Park* for the eighth time that week. He dined with the same cruisers at every meal. His favorite tablemate, he writes, 'looked... like Jackie Gleason in drag.' He kept up with said tablemate post-cruise until the piece came out in *Harper's*, after which she offered only silence for her hurt.

Wallace told a journalist about it later and seemed less concerned with the lady's feelings than the authority of his own observational powers. '[S]aying that somebody looks like Jackie Gleason in drag, it might not be very nice,' he said, 'but if you just, if you could have seen her, it was true. It was just absolutely true.'

Re: mini chess prodigy and other fabrications, Wallace explained, That's what you get when you hire a fiction writer. I give him a pass here, but I'm not sure why. I can't stand the lies of people I love, but a writerly lie makes a well-told story (the conditions of my trust).

My friend Miriam can't eat a thing. She's allergic. She used to come into the juice place where I worked and pick up two glass bottles of our greenest juice, and always the freshest batch. She couldn't have fruit, but she could drink the spinach, celery, cucumber, and parsley. Until she couldn't.

Miriam stopped coming to the store when she developed a reaction to cucumber. I can't remember if it was a rash, a closed throat, indigestion, or another unspeakable symptom.

The season our paths crossed was winter, and she wore a deep black parka with a tight-fitting hood, her face a pink suture down the middle, gray ringlets poking out of the sides. Every day she had red eyes and tears trailing down her face—from the wind, I guessed.

David Foster Wallace might describe Miriam's sensitivities in the way he described his own, which, like mine, are more psychological: with the phrase *nerve endings*. As in, a particular stimulus was hard on his nerve endings, or pleasurable to same.

Wallace's brief flame, writer Mary Karr, inspired both *Jest's* Joelle van Dyne (a.k.a. Madame Psychosis, a.k.a. Madame P, a.k.a. Joelle v D, a.k.a. Prettiest Girl of All Time, a.k.a. PGOAT) and a woman from his essay about the Illinois State Fair.

Wallace calls this woman Native Companion and alleges she was his date to junior prom two decades prior, when in fact he wrote the shell of NC as she is but embellished her dialogue so that it sounded like Karr ('Buy me some pork skins, you dipshit').

When you are someone like David Foster Wallace, passionate to the point of near-madness, you hold a beauty contest in your mind and crown Karr your queen with PGOAT spelled out in rhinestones on a white sash. When it's over, perhaps, you punish her, cramming the impossibly beautiful mouth of Joelle v D with Karr's voice.

Like Wallace, I have at various times hosted an addiction to television. During college, I didn't have a TV. I thought the addiction was over until the summer after I graduated, when I streamed the whole of *Twin Peaks* in three days.

Later I read Wallace's 75-page take on David Lynch, in which he describes the chair where Lynch sits in his editing suite, plus the large impression of the *heroic auteur's* bottom in said chair. I love imagining Wallace alone in that room, giddy, haunting his hero's office.

I see the scrubbed field where Lynch and co. shot the scene in *Lost Highway* that Wallace observed: the grass and the light are yellow. Patricia Arquette sits red-lipped in her maroon Porsche murmuring into her cell phone.

MARCH 27, 1997: Charlie Rose asks David Foster Wallace about his prodigious use of footnotes.

DFW: I'm just gonna look pretentious, talking about this.

CR: Quit worrying about how you're gonna look, and just be.

DFW: I have got news for you. Coming on a television show stimulates your what-am-I-gonna-look-like gland like no other experience. You may now be such a veteran that you're like, you don't notice it anymore. You confront your own vanity when you think about going on TV. So, no apologies, but that just—that's an explanation.

In Wallace's over-the-shoulder shots, Rose looks truly elated as he laughs.

I never visited Miriam's apartment, but she spoke of it so often that I can see it. Particularly a room of old junk: discarded art, paintbrushes, paints, easels, palette knives, mold, and dust. 'It's very demoralizing,' she said.

The burden of sorting through this room intruded into every conversation we had. She was obsessed with the mess, as if it were punishing her for something. She would mention, too, that many of the paints with which she once worked are triggers for her rashes now. She feared the flurid patches would arise even if she touched the paint tubes, or breathed near them.

In terms of color, Miriam possessed flurid sensitivities. David's were a graying lavender.

Five hours Kristen napped on the couch. In the bedroom I read the paper and watched 'Parks.'

By eight she was awake, and I was snarling inside. We ran across a Woody Allen documentary on YouTube I'd already seen. Across the timeline at the bottom of the screen were eight thin yellow bars to show where the commercial breaks would come. We watched the first ten minutes. Allen's Brooklyn childhood, his rather girlish baby pictures, and photographs of his mother Nettie Konigsberg, who is more or less his double. 'I could watch this whole thing,' said Kristen, who, like Allen and his mother, has fluffy red hair.

Eight-thirty: time for fireworks. I hadn't cared much to see them, but my apartment had become a holiday prison.

We walked down the middle of East 81st. Why not? No cars around, no people even. Kristen ran, side-shuffled, skipped. I walked fast, facing forward, keeping quiet.

At 79th and East End, the houses and pavement drop off like a haze. Bits of plaster and brick and dust seem to float off like sand over the river. Beyond and above, the troubling, combustible stars and distant music.

Maybe thirty of us stood there. Clusters of people looked to the south, content, while back and forth I batted thoughts of death. I might have asked Kristen to please leave. I might have walked west, up the brief ridge without explanation. Instead, I stood with her as the light dinged our faces.

(From the foundational text re: the intentional fallacy:)

The meaning of a poem may certainly be a personal one, in the sense that a poem expresses a personality or state of soul rather than a physical object like an apple... We ought to impute the thoughts and attitudes of the poem immediately to the dramatic *speaker*, and if to the author at all, only by a biographical act of inference.

As far as I can tell, W.K. Wimsatt and M.C. Beardsley, the fathers of the IF, don't have anything to say about the distinctive oddities and obsessions of any given author. Certainly intentions can to a degree mandate those quirks, but the reader's interest in the writer's individuality need not (and might never) trespass into a questioning of intention.

Which is to say, I don't know *why* David Foster Wallace wrote *Infinite Jest* merely from reading it, though I can find out quite a bit about him from it. I must go outside the oceanic consciousness of the novel to find the answer.

Though I don't care as much *why* as I care *how*. In writing the book, as in all writing and all work, Wallace's challenge was in and against time.

I simply don't understand how a writer can produce 1,100 coherent pages in five or six years. 'You have to, like, go to the bathroom,' I wrote to Kristen, a fellow fanatic.

Jonathan Franzen wrote that by killing himself young, David Foster Wallace chose ‘the adulation of strangers over the love of the people closest to him.’ He complained that his friend had and has become ‘a very public legend.’

I am part of this mystery. Do I adulate DFW? Of course. But there’s a shade of intimacy coupled with the adulation. A friend asked me why I was calling Wallace ‘Dave’ and ‘David’ conversationally, and I couldn’t answer her. From afar he gave me his life’s work. From afar I gave him attention that became a kind of devotion. He’s a demigod at best.

Although when I read somewhere, ‘the essential Wallace is unknowable,’ I burst into tears.

He has thousands of devotees, groups who meet regularly to digest and discuss single scenes from *IJ* at a time. In life, Wallace admitted how he craved attention, how he winced at that desire, its existence and insistence. ‘Part of you is the biggest ham ever,’ he said to Charlie Rose, perhaps speaking obliquely of himself.

I disagree with Franzen. Maybe because I am just what he said: a stranger. Or because my adulation feels hollow. There’s no way I can explain Wallace better than his best friend could, but I can think myself nearer to his pain.

I can imagine how each of his cells felt distinct from the other, how each tensed in pain inside its own tiny lightning storm. Imagine Wallace swimming in rooms of people, all holding giant blue books with his name on the cover, signing with his signature smiley-face as their faces hover over him, one by one, glowing.

Imagine trying to rest in the attendant despair, fright, and afterglow of this kind of fame. Imagine telling a writer from *Rolling Stone* you feel so lonely when he calls you a genius.

Rolling Stone's David Lipsky watches David Foster Wallace:

[And on the airplane, he buckles in, then instantly goes down. A heavy sleep. He's gotten his book out. Softly pouty, butterfly mouth slightly open. Handsome. A little silver in his hair, falling over the ears. A pink smear of sun behind his profile.]

The last time I saw Miriam was my last day of work. I was at the dry cleaner's. I walked in, said hello to the man who received my money and retrieved my things, and took a deep breath before I noticed her standing next to me, green eyes boring into my face like an awestruck child.

She kissed me on the cheek and said, 'I've started cleaning out my room. It's tough work. Slow, but it's getting there. Anyway, I feel your—you know, spirit—encouraging me, urging me on. *Keep going, Miriam!*' She cocked her head to the side sweetly. 'I just wanted to tell you that.'

I prayed for her, for the room. Intermittently, fleetingly.

Sunday, July 5

3:26ish p.m.

Carl Schurtz Park.

2nd extended time on a park bench today.

Yesterday got pretty dark during the afternoon, and I'm not at all sure why [inverted syntax/arch]. Kristen stayed over again b/c there was no Shakespeare in the Park for the 4th and we had to [wanted to?] get up early for tickets again today. I felt grateful for her company but also sort of used [not 'sort of'—*very*]. Yesterday afternoon we came back from hanging out with Cassie in the park, in lieu of hanging out in line [still haven't picked up the Northern 'on line'] together, and Kristen [so many consonants in that name!!] took a 5.5-hour nap while I was confined to my room. Not that I probably would've done anything different that afternoon [would I?], but I just felt trapped [dreams of spider webs, mazes, bad parties]. Then she ate a couple of my eggs that night and encouraged us to watch a Woody Allen doc on YouTube when she had a job app to get done [I am judging here! See me judging!].

Then we walked to 79th and East End Ave to watch fireworks. As the beautiful glittering light fell over the East River [literary analog to Thomas Kincaid—really trying to distract from the following] I was having some of the darker ruminations of my young life [what I wouldn't admit: *I don't want to know anyone I know/I want to start over/I want Kristen out of my apartment/But when she's gone I know I'll want her back/I don't care about The fucking Tempest/I can't beg out now—we have a plan/If I died, only my family would care/What would my friends think/What would they say/Could I pull it off tonight if I timed it well/Would I leave my phone at home or take it with me/How long would it take them to realize I was missing/Would they find my body/What would my body look like after 24 hours in the river/36 hours/70/140/What if my parents didn't have a body for the funeral/My mother would never forgive me/Her life would be over tomorrow/She would do nothing for the rest of her life/It would all be my fault/I would do this*

knowing her life would be over/It's my fault her life is over/Her life is over and mine had barely started/So selfish/I'm being selfish/I'm so miserable I'm fuming/I am angry/I am angry/I am angry], and I was getting a little scared.

Once I got into bed and started imagining the aftermath of my own failed attempt at suicide [bridge method], I felt better immediately. Is it because I was being creative? Is it because in the story [story], I was attempting agency, if ultimately failing to meet the goal? [Including this is my least-favorite part. I am writhing.]

You are Wonderful Counselor [Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. -Isaiah 9:6].

I say [write] what I said months ago and say [write] now: I need some way of accepting myself, dealing with Merrill Lee, or I am going to go fucking insane [only after I worked in NY retail for awhile did the word *fuck* settle comfortably into my vocabulary].

I've been entertaining fantasies again of sleek, defatted Merrilflesh which is dangerous in many ways. But exercising more frequently will absolutely help my mood [it did—and didn't].

Last night I was asking what even keeps me alive, and I wasn't able to come up with an answer (=darker ruminations). I wasn't looking forward to anything; I wasn't excited about any of my relationships, including Yours and mine; no one has been reading my work and even I don't want to read it/work on it/who would care what I said even if it was published [this is what I thought at first. The body in the river stuff came later]. A lot of this 'darkness' sounds like a 14-year-old pretending to be depressed [does it? I can't decide. And why 14?], but it doesn't feel like that. I feel sick again.

I don't know. Maybe this is hypochondria from reading DFW's bio[graphy].

On *Fresh Air*, Mary Karr says she prays for every face she sees on the train.

'My instinct, Terry, is to kill everybody on the subway... I'm not a nice person.
I'm not such a nice person.'

In the same interview, she uses the term *horse dookey* twice.

Jonathan Franzen on David Foster Wallace: *He was more lovable... than the benignant and morally clairvoyant artist/saint that had been made of him...*

Merrill Lee on Merrill Lee: *Instead of flowering into the self-sacrificing artist/saint of my fantasies, I hit a full stop when I came here.*

In other fantasies David Foster Wallace is Jesus, suffering long and submitting to death so I don't have to.

I am a fool. Not every teacher with long hair is Christ. Besides, there is no debt. He was persecuted by a particular evil.

And any man who could write the final story in *Brief Interviews*, in which a young man beds a so-called 'Granola Cruncher' by feigning self-effacement, humility, and attentiveness—any writer who can parse that man's approach first-person, with the kind of detail—'her prototypical Cruncher morphology was evident right at first sight... and dictated... the tactics of the pickup itself and made the whole thing almost criminally easy'—that opens wide the writer's psyche, even if it is a persona. He can't embody divinity, can merely hold it, borrowed.

Whatever its name, David's imago admitted his intention to himself behind the veil of a thousand small white feathers, as if in his anger he'd bludgeoned a pillow to bursting.

I can't pray to him. I can't lose him in a garden.

My best thought is that David's in heaven—the Lord and I have had conversations about this; He has yet to give me a straight answer—where he belongs.

My worst: wraith-language spun backwards and repeated in a foreverdark loop.

D.T. Max, in his final and highly unsatisfying sentence of the DFW biography, writes, 'This was not an ending anyone would have wanted for him, but it was the one he had chosen.'

I can't get past the idea that Wallace was murdered. That, perhaps, as a hostage of his mind's disease, he had very little choice in the matter of his death. Free will v. influence or coercion or torture or or or.

I'm not disputing the evidence. I'm not saying someone else did it. I'm asking about flesh and spirit, the guardian angel, the face of the demon.

'Just keep coming back,' say the Crocodiles of Boston AA.

So too the call of *Infinite Jest*: keep coming back: don't leave me: tell me my mind can be sorted, that I sorted it well.

ELLIPTICAL W/ *EVERY LOVE STORY IS A GHOST STORY*

Could I find a lens as large as this mirrored wall
where a pregnant woman watches herself walking

As if my feet tread on clouds
Head bobs words jump out of order

A book: tent for a small stolen child

The thin young man at the Bowflex
exercises like Jesus pulling the weight of all anguish

The child: he was gifted

In a dream I slide down a chute at sea
like the birth canal from hell: bright yellow
winding set atop a boat in the middle of the ocean
Forty other children are waiting

The child grew up passed me Tuesdays and Thursdays
leaving ENGL 318
Shabby jeans occasional eye contact

I delight in reading and the delight fills me
but it is narrow

A pair of twelve-year-old boys walk so close
their hands almost touch

Below me on the metal base between the pedals
the head of a single screw
God's one odd eye

WALLACE AS FRIDAY / 1 SAMUEL 20:3B

I cry every time I read Franzen's 'Farther Away' *but truly*
I am distant The distance is the pain *as the Lord*
moves me I can't name where the compassion *lives*
I see myself in the green light of idol worship *and as*
willing participant in someone else's tragedy *your soul*
Mr. Franzen doesn't need my compassion My attention *lives*
in a peculiar room where *there is*
a bed white carpet two black labs *but*
no people and no sunlight *a step*
on the stairwell is David's boot *between me and*
that sound lies the fact and fantasy of *death*

I said it to Kristen in bright sunlight with an orange cooler sitting next to my right hip, with poodles and pit bulls trotting past us. *Every Love Story is a Ghost Story* sat in my lap.

I said, 'I'm going to solve the mystery of David Foster Wallace's life.'

Now let's just bask in the presumptiveness of that statement for a moment.

Let's take a step further. Let's pretend the sun glorifying Central Park that day was not sun but pride. Pride baking us, helping plants photosynthesize, evaporating puddles, anchoring the earth. It's lucky for us to have a star managing these tasks. Pride is only like a sun in that it is bombastic; you'd be unwise to task it with any kind of upkeep. Pride will kill your plants. It will try to drown you in any puddle it can find.

Pride had attempted to drown me many times before I knew who David Foster Wallace was. This was merely the latest drill I'd devised to test myself against the cosmos. When I said what I said, I didn't mean *David Foster Wallace's life*. Obviously I meant *Merrill Lee Girardeau's life*.

What a terrible, terrifying mystery! What a task: to solve the self!

He is not me, and I am not he. DFW was a genius. A mathematician, philosopher, amateur linguist, major-league novelist. An expert on any topic he touched, from the porn industry to cruise ships to lobsters to pharmacology to infinity. He was charming, sweaty, duplicitous. Tender. Hilarious. Ill.

I am something else. Describing myself in this moment seems strange and false, so I'll just be a dick and refer you to all the words preceding this one. They will tell you what I am.

The similarities: we are white; we are writers; we are readers; we come from two-parent, upper-middle-class homes. We are the younger of two children, and both of our siblings are of the opposite sex as we are. Both of us were born sometime between Eisenhower and Bush the Sequel.

And then we are—were—sad.

Sadness is a force like light. It can reveal, bleach, grow, kill, darken, even obscure. It is part of us, and it is through us. I can call David Foster Wallace the ‘sad man’ and call myself the sad girl, but that quality is not our substance any more than rage or lust or thirst is. DFW’s sadness came to him chemically, lethally. He needed a heavy antidepressant to keep him alive. I, praise be, have no such dependence and never have. I had, however, reached a crippling level of sadness by the night of July 4. I wanted to tinker at the soul in a new way. I’d been doing it for years, the spiritual excavation of a born-and- raised Protestant.

Spiritual work can look a lot like lab work: cataloging the parts of the self, observing and analyzing them, making a chart if you have to, troubleshooting over and over and over and over. It’s only somewhat effective. Like how you can chart solar flares for months or years but never explain why they happen in the first place.

I set out to solve Wallace so that I could track his loud, lasting pain backward to my own quiet interludes of sorrow. Jonathan Franzen writes about the same scoping process in reverse: *extrapolating* from his own minor addictions the experience of his best friend David Wallace, who lived for many years as an alcoholic and drug addict. And for me DFW himself became an addiction and a distraction. That sentence is the only one I’ve written that I wish he could read now. The irony overwhelms.

Did I really believe that if I read everything David Foster Wallace ever wrote, that if I read what others wrote about him, I would be able to uncover the cure to my own sadness? Did I believe that if a genius couldn't devise the solution, I could?

Can I blame the sadness itself for this batshit delusion?

Jonathan Franzen posits that Wallace's sadness was laced with an insidious and lethal brand of self-hatred.

Even after he got clean, even decades after his late-adolescent suicide attempt, even after his slow and heroic construction of a life for himself, he felt undeserving. And this feeling was intertwined, ultimately to the point of indistinguishability, with the thought of suicide, which was the one sure way out of his imprisonment; surer than addiction, surer than fiction, and surer, finally, than love.

Let's step into Wallace's mind by way of Franzen's: how sure is love? I say I believe in it (love, I mean). I say I believe in God. But even in my construction of those sentences you see the true slant of my faith. *I*: subject. *believe*: verb. *God* and *love*: objects. I am responsible for keeping the believing going (this, I'll note, is not theologically correct. The church knows it too. And yet it is our disease). I can stop believing, and the objects—the force and the deity—will still be there. I'll just miss out.

It's easy to give up believing. It's the easiest thing you can do. But then—and Wallace knew this—Franzen too with his use of the word *imprisonment*—you belong to a new belief, a new cause, a new star. Religion/Addiction.

Franzen writes that Wallace couldn't stand his own hideousness. Maybe this fixation and repulsion was the one addiction he couldn't shake. Then again, maybe not. Maybe this wasn't his deepest disease. But still, how wonderful it

would have been to see DFW in the throes of self-love! To have believed that he was worthy of love, as worthy as anyone else!

Easy to throw this fantasy onto him. Easy to imagine myself into his story, and into Franzen's and Karen Green's and Mark Costello's stories by proxy.

Harder to imagine myself in the throes of self-love. To imagine how I would be better off if I divorced myself from the belief that I am more hideous than lovely or lovable. That I am a mystery to be solved.

But I must confess, reader: that is how I see you too. You are a mystery to me, whether I know you or not (and in fact you're a greater mystery to me if I *do* know you). Is that alright with you? Can you bear it if I promise not to try and solve you?

And love lurks, waiting for you. It wheezes out your hatreds, smooths your hackles with tender fingers. How do I know this, I who accept love so pitifully? Because you are like David and Jonathan. You have—think of them now—people who love you so much that they will forget the sun if you leave them. He or she or they will close their blue shutters over that brutal, brittle star and descend into a sadness that no amount of dizzy language will ever remove.

NOTES

Joe Briefcase is the name David Foster Wallace gives to the archetypal American television viewer in his essay, 'E Unibus Pluram,' collected in *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again*. Jane I made up.

Lamprocapnos spectabilis is the species name of the flower commonly called the 'bleeding heart.' This flower appears in Joe's 'hearts in nature' and Jane's 'Television.'

'hearts in nature' also represents a cursory Internet search on the origin of the heart shape and its iterations on planet Earth. The seed of the silphium plant—the juice of which was once commonly used as female contraception—is shaped roughly like a heart. Aristotle's theories about the human heart's shape might have also inspired the now-common 'heart' symbol. (Keelin McDonell, 'The Shape of My Heart,' *Slate*, 13 Feb 2007.)

'The Fair' excerpts the Nat King Cole tune 'Mona Lisa.' Lyrics by Ray Evans and Jay Livingston.

Many poems in the Jane section refer to Disney Princess movies and the myths behind them. I drew primarily from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *The Little Mermaid*, and *Beauty and the Beast*.

'And I Pity Any Girl Who Isn't Me Today' owes a debt to *West Side Story* and the Museum of the Moving Image in Astoria, NY, on whose lovely screen I saw the film in 70mm the summer of 2015. The title is a lyric excerpted from 'I Feel Pretty.' On YouTube you can also find video in which Natalie Wood's excised recordings of songs like 'I Feel Pretty' are played over the original footage from the film.

'Jane as Amy Winehouse watching YouTube, 07/23/2011, 1:30 a.m.' derives its time stamp from the singer's death date. The poem wouldn't exist without Asif Kapadia's extraordinary documentary *Amy*.

'Incarnation' references a story about the biblical character Gideon, found in Judges 6:11-26.

'Coat' excerpts Wallace Stevens' 'Indian River' and 'The Emperor of Ice Cream.'

'Oh! You Pretty Things' (stole the title from David Bowie) excerpts text from the following:

Coscarelli, Joe. 'Selena Gomez Tilts the Disney Halo with "Revival."' *New York Times*. 24 Sept 2015.

Ecclesine, Patrick. 'Demi Lovato's Spontaneous, Nude, Makeup-Free Photo Shoot.' *Vanity Fair*. 2 Oct 2015.

Strang, Fay. "'Don't let the music business make a prostitute of you": Sinead O'Connor's open letter to Miley Cyrus after she's inspired by her Nothing Compares 2 U video.' *dailymail.com*. 3 Oct 2013.

'Ideations' represents a deep plunge into the work and life of David Foster Wallace, and its sources are too many to name here. Below are the works from which I took direct quotes:

'Charlie Rose interviews David Foster Wallace' Parts 1-4. YouTube.

Franzen, Jonathan. 'Farther Away.' *The New Yorker*.

Jenkins, Mark. "'The End of the Tour" is A Film For David Foster Wallace Buffs.' *NPR*. 31 July 2015.

Lipsky, David. *Although Of Course You End Up Becoming Yourself*. New York: Broadway, 2010.

- ‘Mary Karr On Writing Memoirs: “No Doubt I’ve Gotten a Million things Wrong.”’ *Fresh Air*. 15 Sept 2015. Accessed via iTunes.
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David Foster Wallace on Nonfiction, 1998, Part 3.’ *Slate*. 26 Nov 2010.
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- . *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*. New York: Back Bay, 2007.
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- . *This is Water: some thoughts, delivered on a significant occasion about living a compassionate life*. New York: Hachette, 2010. Read by Amy Wallace Havens. Audiobook accessed online through the New York Public Library.
- Wimsatt, Jr., W.K., and Monroe C. Beardsley. Excerpt from *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry*. Lexington University of Kentucky Press, 1954. <http://faculty.smu.edu/nschwartz/seminar/Fallacy.htm>

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