

Sitcom

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Wicked

She had stomach problems. It made peeking into her medicine cabinet less fun than it should be. Her thick beige syrups and chevron-shaped pills would scare anyone. The intricate dance of her real sickness – a cross-pollination of stress (she thought) and ‘trace glutamate,’ a wheat protein – was less impressive, coming across like the unnamed malady of a talented but troubled student who’d doodle pictures of genies’ lamps instead of answering exam questions. Her apartment was warm, well furnished and full of pristine, trendy accoutrements: vanilla soap, glazed tiles, plush Bloomingdale’s towels, imported rugs and a noiseless dehumidifier. Bookish, too, each room with maplewood shelves stocked heavily in trade non-fiction: *Fatal Chic: The Electronic Alley*; *Schenectady Dream: Inventing Edison*; *One Hand Clapping: Staging the Trouble Plays*; *Pared Apples and Corkscrew Tracheotomies*; *The True Story of the Swiss Army Knife*; *Advancing Through the Impartial Darkness*; *The Poetry of Rebecca Plover*; *Thomas Buford: The Majestic Beauty of Discount Higher Education*. Not a place where a man who was used to sleeping in his clothes could feel really free, but I was dead grateful for the invite. Since quitting a job I had at Kinko’s

I'd been singing in a local café
called Ludica for the generous bits
in a passed-around hat. Her kindness
was directed towards a homemade soup
which she stirred as she talked on and on.
A soup full of gourmet-grocer things:
fish and sausage, chick pea and okra –
smoky, spicy, nothing she'd ever eat.
I took spoonfuls of her soupy tonic,
which she took pleasure in serving to me
as if I were her boy. I was hungry,
I savoured and listened to her go on.
She said, 'When dumb people try to sound smart
is when they'll say the dumbest things.
The books dumb people always overpraise
are kind of like the fancy sitting rooms
of a new immigrant's house. I mean, like,
is there, you know, anything tackier
than the rooms they consider fanciest?
You know, the plastic-covered sofas?
The china figurines of boys peeing?'
Soup-bound, unsure what she was trying to say,
I did not defend my Aunt Katherine's
collection of tea cozies, boxed neatly
in a glass curio my Uncle Jim
spent six cheques on. I stayed with the soup.
Suddenly, she was putting on her coat,
saying, 'I know just what this soup needs!'
and she bounded off like a cheery elf,
the door banging shut before I was sure
she was serious. I stayed with the soup.
I waited for an hour and a half.
She didn't have tv, so I was reduced

to browsing through *Spectral Erotics:*
The Lover in the Late Romantic Age,
and fell asleep on her quilt-covered bed,
which smelled like applewood and cardamom.
When the phone rang I did not hesitate.
A girl's voice called me by name, saying,
'You don't know me, but I'm Adie.' Adie
was the best friend, and she was with her.
She'd fallen sick again – maybe wheat flour
residue on the soup's garbanzos.
'She's sitting on the curb now, chilling out,'
Adie said, but not to worry. 'This stuff
happens all the time.' I asked, 'Where are you
now?' and she said they were at Zabar's
which I said was 'wicked' because I like
the word, it was so summer-in-Boston
sounding. I invited Adie to my next
coffee shop show and I 'hoped to see her there.'
'Are you asking me out on some date?'
While your friend is puking on the West Side?'
I said, 'Not really,' but she still described
herself and her dislikes while her friend groaned
in the background. I was absurdly full.
The next time I played a Ludica show
I took to swearing in my onstage patter,
just to get attention. I imagined Adie
in the crowd, her hands ready to clap,
her vibrant spirit most noticeable
when she requested her favourite song.

Ginger

Did Elvis really love Ginger Alden?
The comely former Miss Traffic Safety
would sneak away from the out-of-it E
just to spend time with her normal boyfriend.
But, then, why speculate about Ginger?
She was just someone slow to get out of bed,
the first beauty queen to see Elvis dead;
who but God knows what her intentions were?
Elvis's love overwhelmed its object:
obdurateness must have seemed glorious
to a man determined to kill himself,
despite his gold-plated pistols and private jets.
E found a good high in his new love and all:
Placidyl, Valmids and Demerol.

Crosstown

'In the end,' you said, 'it was just too hard to remember your phone number.' Stingers like that don't come along every day, not even to a man who'd wear a beard of bees, not to a man who'd sport wasps in his corduroy pants after changing his name to Captain Stinger. On the bus out, I wrote down so-long poems in a spiral-bound, dollar-store notebook. Like any creative writing student would, I compared you first to an abandoned bird 'twittering grief,' and then, with a vengeance, to your mother, right down to the 'talon-like fingernails' and your magical ability to make men disappear. Then I got into it:

*Don't ask me to grow up and consider
the legion of lanky sperm donors
who'd queue up just for a shot with you.
You can Facebook with those dorks any day.*

Self-conscious about the poetry, suspicious all bus-riders like to peek, I gave up and just sketched a professional-looking bell-curve graph – a masterplot pitch for a steamy, shirts-off *roman à clef*:

A) Like Heathcliff and Cathy ice-skating,
I really should read that book one day;
B) Somewhere in the middle, the girl
accustoms herself to the hero's smile
and his arrogant sanctimonies;
C) the girl looks completely ridiculous
in Banana Republic jeans, probably

in love with some Warren at the workplace
and Warren's read some of *Wuthering Heights*
as well as *Marjorie Morningstar*.
Furthermore, when Warren's asked if he's read
Marjorie Morningstar or *Middlemarch*
Warren never says, 'Are you fucking nuts?'
Out of the neighbourhood, the bus stopped
for a long time outside St. Teresa's.
Worshippers needed assistance to board.
I gave up my seat, but two high-schoolers
jumped into it, one on the other's lap,
their faces pink with a druggy Wednesday.
I wondered if I would ever have to plead
to St. Teresa? Would she be on my side
or yours? Did you ever consider
'the mystical spear of divine love,'
or were you always pretty much satisfied
with oversize sweaters and the songs
of Sarah McLachlan? The bus rumbled past
my stop but, still feeling stung, I stayed on
and continued to a part of town
I'd never seen, an area where most
stores sold utility meats or secondhand
shoes. That's where I want to live one day.
In a local tavern called Companions
I bumped into your sister Meggie,
and Meggie's always good for a laugh or two,
good to drink grappa in the afternoon.
'What can I say about my dumb sister?'
Meggie said with a laugh and I told her
you didn't understand why I spent a weekend
at a seaside seminar on 'how to meet
people' and on 'the art of speed-dating.'

I told your sister the same ghost story
the married man tells Annabeth Gish
in *Mystic Pizza* and, satisfied with
how that went, her hand grazing my shoulder
as she excused herself, when she got back
I asked, 'Wanna just go and grab something?'
and Meggie said, 'Why stop there, Schlitzzy?'
I laughed and asked if she wouldn't call me
by the nickname you gave me last May.
She looked at me, both familiar and strange,
and said, 'I was just thinking of calling you
*some dumb, drunk, pasty hick I picked up
in a bar. That or Punkinhead McGee.*
Which one do you think has a better ring?'
She thought it would be more convenient
if we ordered something from her place;
she bragged about some sketch takeout place
which had 'jumbo tandoori po' boys,'
but we quickly forgot about the subs.
Later, I listened to some of her CDs:
the OST to *Dawson's Creek*, which was
the most beautiful thing I ever heard –
like the tender ache of first love itself.
I said her taste was both 'progressive
and classic.' In the morning, I scooped up
my things and, in *Companions* again,
set out to finish those poems started
the day before, not fixing on objects,
thinking about you, stung and complaining:
'I guess I just don't understand you.'

Li-Lo (Blazon)

The *Fully Loaded, Freaky Friday* smasher
holed up in rehab but still looking smart.
Taking tittering, blind, tabloid teasers
but smiling right into the camera's heart.
Li-Lo, each freckle a blushed diamond,
rampaging redheaded or raven-tressed,
or at the wheel, weaving, a Valley blond
and always some puss's Hollywood mess.
A look-at-me bandage around her wrist,
her voice a Marlboro-strafted gravel,
and sufficiently Roosevelt Hotel blessed
to say, 'I hate children! I hate them all!'
Humpdays will come and humpdays will go:
La bella vita forever, *bella* Li-Lo.

Summerland

In the future, Kraft Macaroni and Cheese will become so cheesy we will no longer know sadness. In a calculated move to get younger people more interested in poems, Browning's *Pippa Passes* will be retitled *Whatevs*. And quite soon, howevs, the one I'll just call 'She' will be in Myrtle Beach, avoiding the sun. Nearby the racks of wiffle balls, Speedos, NASCAR towels and quality fake vomit, nearby stands for funnel cakes and corn dogs, by seaside pavilions showcasing bands most people think broke up in eighties, she will be indoors (AC to eleven), working on her novel. There will be much less downloading Amy Winehouse songs than before and far much less buying new pants than most consider a normal pants-buying regimen. In the future, it will be determined that Lincoln greatly suffered from restless-leg syndrome. We will learn open-face sandwiches were discovered by Chopin. The future will be particularly bright for those who've invested in medicated socks. Cigarettes will make a spectacular post-cancer comeback and Philip Morris will produce a smoke that will last longer than it takes Neptune to circle the sun, or however long it takes Sting to have sex. O Bright! Maybe before she finishes

her novel, all the world will discover
the true evil behind Tom, the generic
MySpace friend (whose hero is Nietzsche).
The pure evil of Tom; the *pure evil*.
With longer lives and warmer sun, the future,
full of happy pectoral muscles,
will see more exciting new combinations
of the words 'Angelina' and 'online.'
In the future there'll be melon-coloured
tombstones and loose-tooth meds that taste
twenty-six per cent less medicine.
The future will feature some wise choices.
She wouldn't think of having a long novel start
'The idiot's drinking Schlitz Light again,'
because who would want to hear such things?
That doesn't sound like a killer first line –
aren't novels meant to have killer first lines?
The Carolina sun-moments, coming, going,
will, I think, be of little allure to her,
and if she does find some gamesome mood
she certainly packed enough swimwear.
The future will be full of shiny new books
and I promise to skim at least one of them.