

June 2009

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Recommended Citation

Nazos, Maria (2009) "Advice To Joe's New Girlfriend from the Ghosts of Lovers Past," *Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal*: Vol. 9: Iss. 1, Article 41.

Available at: <https://orb.binghamton.edu/harpurpalate/vol9/iss1/41>

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ADVICE TO JOE'S NEW GIRLFRIEND FROM THE
GHOSTS OF LOVERS PAST

Maria Nazos

1.

Let's get this straight—if his heart were any further on his sleeve, it would be a wrist watch; he tells time with that instead of the tired old concept that doesn't exist.

2.

Thing is, he isn't great at articulating things. I don't mean in that way that women stereotype men to be—he believes you

cannot say *this sunset is beautiful*, because how could it ever encompass the ejaculate gold and russet streaks? How can you see the flowers just now,

poised on the sill—I believe they're called posies—but he believes that when you gaze at upon them, the yellow is not a symbol for friendship, that they are what they are. You have no choice but to breathe them in and in—

3.

You need to train him to lie resourcefully. He cannot, repeat, *cannot* tell you that you've gained weight. If he ever does, stare into his eyes as if you can see his unborn children. He'll get the message.

4.

Ask him about those years, playing with the Jug Band, about the top hats and vests he wore, ask him about his former loves, about his lover-of-three-women

in a day past, ask him about the infidelities, the monogamy, his ex-wife Martha, who is still convinced there are cameras

hidden in the squirrel's nests. Make him dance on the frying pan, as he calls it. He doesn't think he loves it. Rest assured; *he does.*

5.
He'll never love you as much as he loves me.

6.
Then again, he's a die-hard romantic who resurrects from infertile soil; so he might.

7.
Okay, let me be real with you for a second. If I'm going to tell you anything, anything resonant, or applicable anything that you wield, it's this:

you've got to be more stable than me. Hopefully you'll be able to not feel like monogamy is a defunct invention, that you have cellular memory

as an emotional escape artist, even though your blood whispers his name. Listen: this is the man with salt grit stubble, who coughs and rises to stumble

barefoot onto the whale watch boat he captains from the rowboat docked beside it. He stayed there whenever his second ex-wife kicked him out—

Her name's Louise. She is short in height and temper. She has a soft frizz of gray hair pinned up in a messy bun to show off her soft jaw line,

like a tragically beautiful ballerina. The boutique she works at is called Dulcinea, it's right on the main drag. I'm telling you this so you can cross over to the other side of the street when you see her.

She's 90 days sober, I hear, and that's a pretty crucial period. I'd stay away from her if I were you.

8.

Okay, let me be really honest: when you've drunk too much, because you drink only in excess, when your voice breaks and breaks down (and it will),

Do me a favor, and punch the couch instead of him. I know it's tempting. You'll feel better in the long haul.

9.

But it's all because you love him, because he has this thing where when you yell at him, he shuts down like a computer chip in an unknowable machine.

10.

The blue glass bottles under the lamp need to stay there. They're called Blue Solar Water. He's been drinking them and intoning the mantra, "I love you. I'm sorry.

Please forgive me. Thank you." It's derived from this book he's reading, it's about delving into the place of zero limits in your heart. Read it, I urge you.

It's gorgeous. Plus. You'll know we aren't crazy enough to be licking the grapes off wallpaper.

11.

Things can't always be perfect. When gravity kicks in and makes him descent lightly off the wagon, don't be too worried. He'll get back on soon.

12.

Admire him. Admire him to the point of envy.

13.

Tell that Colleen to stay the hell away from her. She's the one with reddish cropped hair, who hangs out at the Old Colony Tap.

14.

He'll always forgive you, to the point of his detriment. Learn the humility part, the self-blame, the ability to be wrong.

15.

Love him, I urge you, or else I'm coming back to haunt you in the ass.

16.

He's always been pretty virile, but with you, he might need some Cialis. You can get it online.

17.

Don't do that! That thing I just did, don't *ever* cop out, using blatant humor to deflect raw emotion. "I love you. I'm sorry. Please forgive me. Thank you."

Sing it, sing it, again and again, when you go on a whalewatch, bend over the stern, it's the best place to watch the humpbacks. Plus, while he's captaining,

he likes to watch you lean over; he's wondering what the ocean smells like to you.