

that I would never really wear. Adam wore a red trucker's cap and his white tuxedo jacket. We weren't surrounded by family and friends, by teary moms and giddy grandmas, by loved ones who'd flown in from all over the country—unless by "loved ones from all over the country" you mean "drunken strangers vomiting into their own

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hats." It was swarms of sweatshirted ladies buckled into fanny packs, me, the man I love and a shrieking gaggle of Japanese girls crowned with sparkly antennae. And somehow, it felt really... right.

Around midnight it was time to get married, one more time. We'd decided to renew our still-fresh vows in the Little White Wedding Chapel as an Elvis crooned into an echoey karaoke machine. After we arrived in our tired-looking white limo, Adam inquired about a glass to be stomped on, in the Jewish tradition. "Oh, a mazel tov?" asked the girl at the counter. "Sure, we do those all the time!" We'd never heard *mazel tov* used as a noun, but we figured, hey, when in Vegas, and gladly accepted the paper-towel-swaddled lightbulb.

As we filled out our paperwork, a drunken groom lounged in the waiting area, mirrored sunglasses shimmering atop his head like the first-place tiara from an asshole pageant, as his new bride paid for their wedding. Adam and I held hands as we perused the souvenirs for sale—we decided on the world's least legible bumper sticker, which sported the name of the chapel in spidery, curlicued script. Finally, we were ushered into the chapel, a glorified walk-in closet festooned with fake flowers and various incarnations of molded white plastic.

And once again we were married, this time surrounded by all the generic crap that we'd tastefully edited out of our first wedding—plastic bells, clutches of fake roses—this time in a cookie-cutter ceremony we'd seen a million times before in movies, featuring rote vows and a strange minister in a cheap suit. Again my stomach registered flutters of excitement, tides of nervousness. Did I take this man? Forever?

Again? I looked into his eyes and through a throat of tears said the familiar words: "I do." And the stranger declared us husband and wife. ("By the powers vested in me by God and the state of Nevada!"—how great must it be to say those words every night?)

Our Elvis, wearing a golden tux that molted rhinestones in patches, sang

"One Night of Sin" and "Can't Help Falling in Love" into a microphone plagued by tinny feedback. He hiccuped a lot of "uh-huhs" and "oh yeahs" in between the lyrics and punctuated each line with a languid,

beckoning gesture. Adam and I danced in circles in the tiny chapel.

And you know what? We felt different. We felt married. I don't know if it was the power of Elvis, the sizzle of Vegas or maybe that this wedding hadn't been the culmination of months of careful planning, but suddenly Adam seemed less like my boyfriend and more like my husband. Now we were talking! Now we were married!

Afterward our Elvis slapped Adam on the back, saying to me, "This man is dangerous, man. Don't let this one go, man."

"I won't," I told him.

In fact, I was already planning our next wedding. ♦

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My soul mate barely knows my name. By Liza Monroy

I'm a memoir junkie. I've devoured every chronicle of difficult childhood: *Running With Scissors*, *The Glass Castle*, *Jesus Land*, even *A Million Little Pieces*, before it scooted over to fiction shelves. I love having a window into different lives and the traumatic events that made the authors who they became. I drooled all over the phone when James Frey read to me from a chapter he was working on (he'd called for my boss, who happened to be out at lunch). And don't get me started on the time Dave Eggers cut my hair at a reading-slash-happening at Bergamot Station in Santa Monica.

But from all of my literary flings, one true love emerged. He kept me occupied for an entire day on a European vacation, a day I ecstatically spent with his dysfunctional family rather than my own. After hours holed up with Nick Flynn's *Another Bullshit Night in Suck City*, a poetic account of his father's homelessness, I felt like I had entered into a very serious relationship—one that was entirely one-sided, of course.

Maybe it was the way Nick evoked my own memories. My father had been homeless and struggled with alcoholism, too. "If I went to the drowning man, the drowning man would pull me under," Nick wrote. I, too, had resisted trying to save a troubled parent. "You seem like a regular guy, how'd you end up here?" "Where?" my father asks. "My father didn't know either. I was aware of things about Nick that took years to come out in real relationships. And with every page I turned, there were more similarities: I'd spent many nights during college within the walls of the Boston bars where Nick drank. We'd both experimented with illicit substances and concealed a sense of loss beneath bravado. Did I mention that he grew up in Boston and lived in Rome, and I grew up in Rome and lived in Boston? As far as I was concerned, we were soul mates, kept apart only by the fact that we'd never met.

When I found out that Nick was teaching a one-night seminar at a university near my apartment in downtown Manhattan, I immediately signed **continued**

back stories

continued up. The black-and-white photo on his book jacket had hidden the intense blue of his eyes, the rich texture of his slightly wavy hair. It was instant-breakfast love; after all, I already knew everything about the guy.

"We have such a short time together," he addressed the class. "There's an urgency in the room, can you feel it?"

I could. I had bees in my stomach. Instead of concentrating on the lecture, I fantasized about the two of us overcoming our similarly dysfunctional backgrounds, moving into a country house with a white picket fence and producing 2.4 mini poet laureates. One of the few moments in society when you have complete license to stare is when someone is teaching. I'd gone Flynn-sane (sorry).

At the end of the night, after we had critiqued one another's work, I slid my paperback across the table for Nick to sign. He smiled and wrote, "Your words shine." He'd noticed the story I handed in!

The following Sunday I was waiting in line at a Greenwich Village copy shop with my mentor Susan, who has published two memoirs, with a third on the way. "What do you know about Nick Flynn?" I asked.

"I met him at a reading," she said. "He's cute, right?"

"It's ridiculous. I'm obsessed." Since the class, I had logged countless hours online, reading every interview, every review of *Another Bullshit Night* and his two poetry books before that. I'd even e-mailed Nick a casual note and spent days compulsively checking for a reply. (He got back to me three months later: "Thanks, and best of luck!")

"Watch out," Susan warned. "A memoir is like posing for the camera. You tell the story in a way that benefits you. It's a false sense of intimacy."

I started to wonder whether Nick's in-person lady-killer-poet persona was as much a creation as the memoir itself, something he'd edited to create the perfect flawed self whom the ladies would vie for. Had he done certain things—like living on a boat, working at a homeless shelter, smoking crack at a South End party—fully aware of their potential as material? He did say that writing should be distilled to its essence. Maybe

I wondered whether Nick's lady-killer-poet persona was as much a creation as the memoir itself. Maybe he'd condensed himself into Hot Memoirist Man.

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Still, I carried his book with me everywhere I went. In moments of self-doubt, I'd glance at his inscription and my confidence would reboot. *Your words shine.*

Then one day I got together with Anna, a girl from the seminar. She mentioned that she'd gotten him to sign her paperback, too. "What did he write?" I asked.

"'Your words shine' or something like that," she said.

"Oh, really?" I replied. I tried to sound casual, but my illusion of personal connection was quickly fading. I had entered Nick's mind, his family, his relationships. I remembered the details of his childhood. He didn't know anything about me—he was a dedication player.

I can vividly remember the main lesson Nick taught us in the seminar: The success of your work rides on exposing your humiliating secrets in all their ugly detail. I hope he doesn't mind that I took his advice. ♦

Liza Monroy is a researcher at Jane. Her stories have appeared in *The New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *Newsweek* and *The Village Voice*. Her first novel, *Mexican High*, will be out next year. And she's still Flynn's No. 1 fan.



Cutting made me forget my eating disorder. By Abby Sher

We were at Jilly's apartment for a dinner party, and everything was so clean. It was me and Jay, Sara and Drew, Jilly and Tom. Jilly chopped onions and told people to help themselves to beer, wine, whatever. She pushed a dark wisp of hair back to meet her shiny ponytail and giggled as Drew sniffed over her shoulder

and asked what she was cooking.

"You'll see," Jilly sang.

I searched feverishly for the wine opener. I'd brought a bottle of pinot grigio because I was nervous about eating in front of everyone. I liked eating only late at night with the lights off. It had been like this for two years now. Jay had been patient when we moved in together, trying to coax me into eating

dinner with him on the floor next to our coffee table, but eventually he stopped trying. My therapist said I had to challenge myself to new experiences. I knew it was only a matter of time before they both gave up on me and my eating disorder. I was planning on getting too drunk to care anymore about what I put in my body.

If only I could find the corkscrew.

"Sorry to interrupt, but where's the thingamajig?"

"I'm not sure," Jilly answered. "Somewhere around the butcher block."

Why didn't she know where she kept her own utensils? Everything else had its own place. Each pillow was perfectly plumped, each book was alphabetized and tucked into its prescribed space. The corkscrew was in the drawer next to the refrigerator.