

## Who Do Mambo

*A sports writer complained to Joe Louis about another boxer who didn't like to take punches to the body. Louis replied, "Who do?"*

*Mon Dieu*, said the Hindoo, *I don't want to stop drinking*. Who do?

But sometimes you have to put down your glass so you can pick it up for another round. At the University Ladies' Tea with the pill-popping dean's wife and Marxist shrews, you don't want to talk to them or anyone else. Who do?

But like Audrey Hepburn in *My Fair Lady* you say *How do you do*, call on Andrew Marvell and George Herbert to rescue you, but you draw the short straw, and there's Julie Andrews in *The Sound of Music* with her igloo smile and Christmas sweater. You are the Sioux in this cavalry charge, and you need some firewater pronto, gin and lighter fluid or a gun, but that's so American, and who would you shoot but yourself, so you try to spin some voodoo around this vampire soirée. Where are the chicken bones and bat fangs when you need them, Miss Nancy Drew?

Face facts, you don't have a clue. Let me preview my upcoming bout of spinal meningitis for you, or shall I invoke Bob Dylan, mathematician and Hebrew troubadour, for I am tangled up in glue or something like it, goo or ooze. If I were a cow, I'd be bigger than I am, say moo and pray to Shiva, but as it is, I am a fourth-rate kangaroo praying for rescue in a bottle, my mind a zoo, a giraffe popping out my left ear, a zebra out my right. Whew, that hurt, but so much does these days. *Much Ado About Nothing*, that's my play, Beatrice and crew. Let's review.

Everything I adore is either forbidden to me or taboo,  
which is pretty much the same thing. O Alice, I grew  
an inch with that one, or was it my nose? Hey, Pinocchio, you  
want me to chop you for firewood? Who do? Wait, I have a few  
things to say about hue. I'm orange but, *carissimo*, you  
are as blue as you were the day Picasso, or was it Braque, drew  
you in Montmartre in the Bateau Lavoir, and now that my shoe  
is wedged in my mouth again and my underpants askew,  
I'll take this opportunity to bid you an affectionate adieu.  
Parting is such sweet sorrow that I would pitch some woo  
with you till next Wednesday; O Shiva, the queue  
to your divine brain is teeming with supplicants, so in lieu  
of the old one-two, I'll sign off. Something nasty just blew  
in from Kazakhstan, and my electric bill's twenty years overdue.  
Mirror, mirror on the wall—Oh, God, not you.

## Working at Pam-Pam's

Ava, darling, skin white as mayonnaise, eyes of cat-scratch topaz,  
zirconia smile, making *Mogambo* with Gable in Africa,  
Bwana Clark, to you, baby, Grace Kelly tumbling the substitute daddy,  
you rolling in Swamp Sinatra. What did you see in him—dumb  
crooner from Hoboken, a shrimp, and you in a gal's biggest fix,  
x- and y-chromosomes splitting in your deepest beauty, that toxic  
ditch of burping and feeding on the horizon. You think you know  
what the years ahead hold—you left with the baby, Sinatra a cad.  
Enemies or lovers—who's to say? Does anyone really change? Henry V,  
Vlad the Impaler, Saint Teresa of Avila—some do, but some  
feel sucking the blood from a maiden's neck is all they can manage. You  
understood how beauty could take you only so far. Of course, if  
God were in his heaven, we all might be film goddesses rather than fat  
timecard-punching factory workers with lacquered beehives, sewing  
halter tops for girls whose primary job will always be painting their nails.  
Such a world begs you to believe in the Hindu idea of *maya*, which  
is to say everything is illusion, kind of like the movies or theater or  
remember the time you found your boyfriend with your best friend? I  
jump at the idea of *maya*, because though I try to be good, right on cue  
quick as a bunny, the devil pulls me into his Buick, and the DJ  
keeps playing “Who Do You Love?” Ava, you started out as a bit player: carhop,  
pretty hatchcheck girl, ringsider, and then your gorgeous face was stuck  
like candy on magazines and marquees from Sacramento to Buffalo,  
Orlando to Natchez. When you lay dying in London, did you feel  
more alive than ever or was it like the story of Vishnu and the holy man  
Narada, who asks the god for the secret of *maya*? Vishnu says to him,  
“Narada, dive into that lake,” which he does and emerges a princess, slim,

married to a powerful king. Her life is golden. She has many children, owns palaces, her children have children, but her father and husband quarrel, lash out at each other until all her family lie dead on the battlefield. No person has known such grief. Her dear ones lie on the funeral pyre as daybreak kindles its fire in the east, and she lights the flame, dives in, and comes up queen no more, but Narada. “This,” says Vishnu, “is *maya*’s raj, jailer extraordinaire. For whom do you weep, Narada?” This is the “Q” really in Q&A. For whom do we weep? In dreams we are Richard III, ink-stained pen pushers, scullery maids, a hunched-over Laurence Olivier starring as the evil king on stage, Marilyn Monroe on Harry Cohn’s couch. Here’s to the movie queens with their nose jobs, snow jobs, blow jobs. “The beauty thing was fun,” Ava said later in Madrid walking along, gabbing with a friend, passing Pam-Pam’s, a local burger joint under the white sky. “But I’d work at Pam-Pam’s before I’d take off for Hollywood and star in another crappy movie.” O Vishnu, Vishnu, make me dive into that lake every minute of my misbegotten life, every time I forget I am Narada following the black *V* wild birds make in an autumn sky. Here’s to the mosquito, Lord, drinking our blood, be we factory worker, star, wife, widow, X-rated movie actress, saint, burger flipper, barfly, sporadic mechanic, clown, or crone. Empty me of everything I am—sphinx, minx, yogi, yeti, yenta, yodeling nun. Forgive me for being so dense, so numb. Break my back with the beauty of the world. Throw me in solitary, zip me into a shroud. Throw a match on the pyre, rend the veil of *maya*, annex me as the Nazis annexed Poland, help me pass your pop quiz.