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# THESE NOTES ARE PERSONAL BY MITCHELL GRABOIS

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## THANKS FOR THE MILKY WAY HANK

but you don't have to tell me how to eat it

Yes it might seem annoying how I pick off the chocolate crust to expose the candys soft flesh but you are picking at me the same way pulling off shards of my shell to expose my soft squirming pink innards

And also kindly shut up about grunge under my nails I've lost my life to the rapers and murderers and you think I should worry about dirty fingernails?

As if hygiene was a stairway to heaven-- not just grounds privileges

You better watch it Hank before you become one of them before you make a religion of the Activities of Daily Living

I have news for you Hank I will pace the day room like a caged animal with the foulest claws my last claim to respect

## WHY I NEED YOU

Hank you've seen the movie

The beautiful girl is hanging from a cliff The handsome hero rushes to save her

His muscles strain as he hangs by one hand from a protruding root and with the other reaches for her inch by inch across space until he grabs her and lifts her to safety You are my hero Hank my only hero my Zorro against the evildoers of the Mental Hell System

Slash your **Z** across the breasts of my Treatment Team members Make them relent

Make them give me my grounds privileges back

Slash an **H!**

Make them!

## MY TRAINING

My daddy tied a rough rope tight around my body and made me swim up and down the canal as if I were a dog on a leash and when I faltered he yanked me up There was no sink or swim there was only swim My body was rope burned There were rope burns

where my breasts should have been The rope had little bristles that dug into my body as I swam I did the breaststroke the butterfly Afterward I dripped blood and water onto the sidewalk running along the canal He stood ten feet away from me holding the rope and said I'm so proud of my little girl my future Olympian

Then he drove me home in his bright blue Rambler Daddy was wearing a white buttondown sport shirt black slacks shiny black shoes and was humming-- I've got a mule name is Sal fifteen years on the Erie Canal She's a good old mule a good old pal fifteen years on the Erie Canal

He turned to me and said This car meets my every specification

There was something fluttering in the back seat but I didn't turn around because I was still bound The Ramblers engine went taptap taptap taptap taptap

When we got home Daddy went inside for Oreo cookies but he made it clear that the cookies were for him not me and some person —yes it was you Hank—cut the ropes and I went running down the road naked my limbs bulging with swimming and swollen with hate

### **LIVING IN THE HOSPITAL**

They are rough when they come to wake me in the morning—they are mean They have taken everything and my body is my only possession and even that is not mine

These drugs these insistent drugs as if I were denying Jesus himself Everything is gone but they want me to get out of bed and brush my fucking teeth Can't you hold me? Can't you hold me close as if I were beautiful? I was beautiful before my father made me swim in Love Canal

Can't you see I was beautiful?

### **YOU LOVE ME BUT ARE AFRAID**

You take me to the Gate I've forgotten how to eat like a human being The other diners watch me— they are ready with hidden buzzers to call out the murderers and rapers If you leave me alone I will be meat for their Dobermans When you go to the bathroom I am frightened and throw all our food on the floor

Still you take me to Hightower Pharmacy and buy me a tube of lipstick I shake from medication and you guide my hand My lips have not been colored in two years The angels pour into my head and on the Texas highway I call out to you-- Hank!

I know you think I am full of disease You do not realize that the drugs have taken away all bodily ills because to have illness you must have life and the drugs have taken away all life So you are very safe with this zombie You can afford a tender moment with this zombie

If you don't love me I will hitchhike down the lonesome highway The roadway is not asphalt but the bodies of Dobermans laid side by side bodies of black men with huge blue muscles Sometimes all the Dobermans come back to life The black men have a stench of pesticide and unwashed flesh My babies are calling me forever

### **MY BABIES**

The whoosh of the eighteen-wheelers carries my babies cries I smell their sweet shit in the exhaust see them in watercolors beneath the road grime

My babies are calling and trapped behind these walls I can't go They are little bunnies in a submarine and I am Mama Bunny in anguish Up periscope babies Do you see this ugly face this pointy nose this horrible object that the murderers and rapers have made of me? Yes I am your mother Can you suck my breasts as if they could give you life and

happiness and freedom?

If I had my babies I would lay them in a crib and they would glitter like diamonds My legs would splash through surf sending sparkles of infants into the sun

But my sister helped them take my jewels She was always mad that I was my daddy's water doggie and not her

### **I WAS AS TOUGH AS A BRILLO PAD**

I swim into the loch The gates close behind me and I do the dead girl float for as long as I am able (my lungs are as big as accordions) but then I must come back to life

Next to me is a Panamanian freighter—we are two bodies afloat The water level starts to drop If it drops too far my daddy will have to let go of the rope and then I'll be free of him But the rope would still be around my body—I wouldn't be able to untie it—and the loose end would dangle down to the depths Who knows what monster would grab hold and drag me down?

I am swimming across oceans across continents This is wonderful exercise my daddy calls marvelous training And you'll probably make the Guinness Book of World Records!

### **HOW I DISAPPOINTED MY DADDY**

I was eighteen

My sister had a boyfriend but I didn't so I wanted hers We were on the beach I decided I didn't want to live on land anymore— I wanted to return to the sea

to be a dolphin I walked into the water and started swimming I thought I would swim forever I kept swimming until I couldn't swim anymore I felt myself sinking

I don't know how he got there—I thought I'd left him on the beach My sister's boyfriend threw a carry on me His hand massaged my breast as he towed me

He dragged me onto the sand It was very coarse and rough like sandpaper I wanted to scream Why are you torturing me? but couldn't get any words out He gave me mouth-to-mouth I thought that meant we were married without violence I sat up and vomited in the sand My sister came over with a child's shovel and covered it up The shovel was bright green

Later I realized it wasn't a shovel at all It was a mystical frog It squirmed in her hands and she shrieked and dropped it The mystical frog peed in the sand and froze everything for eternity

That was the end of my swimming career I was supposed to make the Olympics I was supposed to beat all the East German women their bodies swollen with steroids A thousand miles of water had lengthened my slim limbs

Instead I was left writhing and rolling in sand like a filet being rolled in crumbs spineless without will-- incapable of even the first and last human skill-- to protest

The water was my element and now I can never return I had to give up my marvelous swimming career Daddy's only dream

### **YOU ARE NOT A REAL SWIMMER**

Hank you tell me you're a swimmer too I drift away from you drift back drift in and out of focus You're afraid I will drift off forever and want to tie me down with similarity But Hank I know without seeing that you're a dilettante in the water splashing back and forth between walls as if your splashing was something significant and macho When you get out you want all the girls to admire your porpoise body slick and hairless You jump in and out of hotel pools but I am the Love Boat engines fouled tossed helplessly by the

merciless sea

You swim in shallow safe chlorinated waters but I swim among the great whites the moray eels the monster squid You swim in a predictable lane You say Brush teeth make bed brush teeth make bed comply comply comply But how can I comply when I have no shore no breath no friend?

Can't you just be my friend Hank kiss me even if my teeth are dirty even if they are grimy gritty not Close-Up teeth?

### **DON'T BE CRUEL**

Don't be cruel Hank You're my only Hank my only protection I'm Olive Oyl in the world of Bluto And you're Popeye snorting spinach hero of the locked ward

Out on the Oklahoma plain bats swooped around my head and I could hear your voice And I called out for you

I called out for your kindness

Look into my eyes Hank and tell me I'm sick

### **MAMA**

Mama became self-employed stealing my Social Security Disability checks She rented a trailer in Quincy Florida and a satellite dish and watched me on TV-- Americas Most Reviled

My swim lanes became dusty highways The rapers and murderers behind the steering wheels of their eighteen-wheelers raised bottles of tequila to their lips They clamped a mask to my face It was hammered copper and I gagged at the smell of used motor oil Then they opened the valve on their tank of Agent Orange and while I lay there in a coma they ripped my babies from my body

The angels came into my head and I could hear them calling ---Mama--- calling for me from their limbo land of lost souls

### **HANK YOU KNOW THE WATER**

You're my surfboard my skim board my boogie board my only only vehicle my Hank You're waxed my knees are knobby from the ride The red tide announces the fullness of love This half-eaten candy bar in my hand is a skeleton key When you share your swimming experience Hank I want to choke you You tell me-- The way you develop endurance is to endure.

### **FARE THEE WELL**

Listen you can hear them now The angels slice into my head like crystal I don't need to be in the Mental Hell System I can hitchhike to California At night I hear the waves calling Tiffany your babies are awaiting you Where are you Tiffany? Where are you? Where are you?

Farewell old Hank I see you from on high as if I were with Jesus You look around for me puzzled by my absence You are naked You are like me

I am by the roadway—the trucks are whooshing by like they always have There is no air — there is dust snowflakes every space is filled I am swimming through pure texture through plaster through a volcanic landscape of drying paint I am swimming to my babies

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**Mitch Grabois'** fiction has appeared widely in literary and commercial magazines throughout the U.S. and Canada since 1988. His story "These Notes Are Personal" is based on experience at Florida State Hospital, Chattahoochee, Florida. During this millennium, Grabois has completed four novels, *Princess of the Knives and Forks*, *The Brotherhood of the Sacred Armadillo*, *Two-Headed Dog*, and *Crackle*. His agent solicits your prayers for their publication. Grabois and his wife raised two sons, now adults. They celebrated their thirtieth anniversary last year, and live in the ancestral farmhouse in northwestern Michigan.