

## A Story

Farley Inman – for 25 years I haven't seen you  
or thought of you.  
Yet, here you come about me this Christmas  
rattling your chains like Marley's ghost  
when I try to bless or be blessed  
ready as ever to kick ass or kiss it.  
I hate your bow tie.  
I hate your high hair part.  
I hate the late adolescent grain of your cheek.  
I hate the arrogant outjutting of your ears  
not to mention the smirk of your smile.  
I called you once – no doubt you've forgotten it – you  
son of a bitch –  
“Cincinnati's Dancing Pig”  
from the title of a popular song  
about your hometown  
(not top 10 – maybe 15 to 20).  
I must have been fending off some snotass remark of yours.  
I don't want to talk to you anymore.  
I'll talk to my friends out there.

He transferred from our small-town-small  
Southern Presbyterian college after pledging  
Sigma Delta Tau our freshman year to Cincinnati U.  
where there was a good chapter. God, I suppose  
he was not unattractive in some kind of general  
Midwestern clean-cut way. Farley I hate  
hating you. I hate why I hate you.  
I hate you because you took Roseanne  
to the Sophomore Gardenia Dance.

Roseanne was not one of the Belles

whose legs swung like clappers  
inside calf-length, gray-flannel skirts  
as they strode from class to class  
across town at KCW – The Kentucky College for Women.  
Coopies we called Them

(we, the horny inhabitants of Breckinridge Hall  
peckers rising high above  
the petty assault of saltpeter  
in the mashed potatoes)

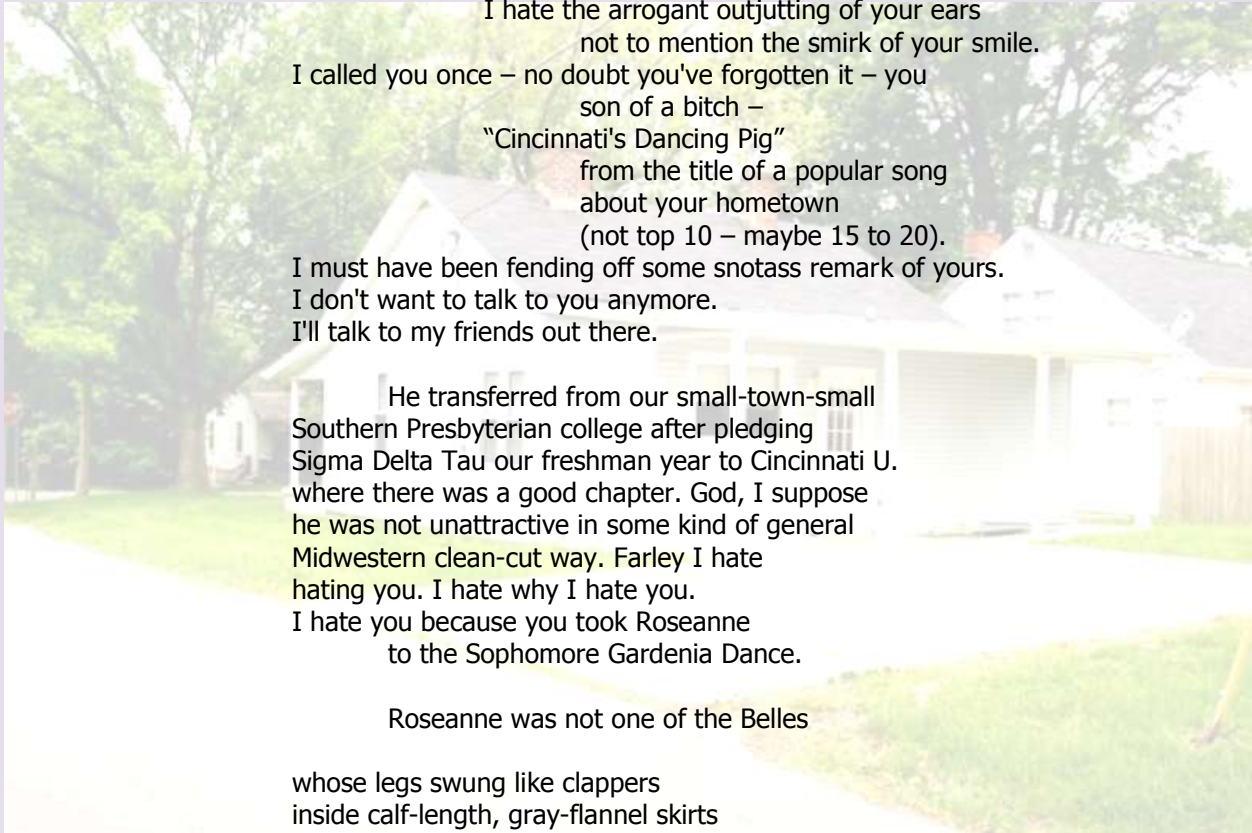
or The Collection

The Collection at the Kentucky Corral for Wildlife.

Roseanne was beautiful,

though shorter from hip to ankle than my taste  
brought up by Betty Grable and the cartoon calendar  
girls of Esquire Magazine said she should be.

She dwelt in the trodden way between Old Breck and the Coop



sweeping the cinders behind the counter  
of Begley's Professional Drugs, flowing  
between the mayonnaise and the meat grease  
swelling her uniform of pastel blue and dirty cream  
with such sweet swells my heart long  
in hiding now stirs for a word.

And though we could not, would not take out a town girl save  
on the sly to try and get a little  
of what Townies were supposed to be good for,  
weekend after weekend

we crowded 4 by 4 in 2 by 2 booths  
to dine on the Saturday Surprise –  
thinned out tuna plopped down amidst a tomato quadrisectioned  
on a leaf of lettuce too limp to last to Sunday Noon Dinner.

We watched before going on to the Saturday Movie Special  
(Three Westerns

2 starring Buck Anybody in black and white  
1 with Audie Murphy or – God Forbid – Rory Calhoun  
in Eastmancolor

6 Silly Symphonies, a Pete Smith short,  
and a serial about men from Mars who from some cave  
use Miss Jane's Dude Ranch as cover)

salivating out of more glands than the salivary  
as she made each sweet and Saturday Surprise  
out of her sweet and Saturday self, she, Roseanne.  
How could it be that it was that asshole Farley Inman  
who asked her to the Sophomore Gardenia Dance?  
I can't stand it. A quarter of a century  
later, – I can't stand it.

Friends, you should know I was not a dancing man.  
Those few I attended in high school  
I spent in the cloakroom not checking coats.  
The first dance that ever I danced  
I danced with Joanne Fern  
stumbling, after the movie  
(the high-class midweek Western  
/in genuine Technicolor)

into a social at her KCW dormitory.  
There was no out save admitting I never danced before  
which admitting I was not about to admit. Her hall  
did not even have a cloakroom not to check coats in.

She too transferred after her first year,  
I don't know where – I can't believe to Cincinnati U.  
So, it was not that Farley and I were rivals.  
I wasn't going to the dance with anybody.  
In truth, despite my yearning, I liked women most from afar,  
and did not hasten back after dancing my first dance,  
and yet, I was there – I don't remember how –  
perhaps with Jean Haversham - then a sophomore –  
whom I didn't go to several dances with –  
I dressing up in my father's fat old tuxedo  
she, (a skinny thing, tall, a writer,

with one eye too in love with her long nose)  
donning – with amazing grace – pale green puffy low-cut  
/things

(Later, she grew elegant  
becoming a buyer for B. Altman  
or Bonwit Teller – some such place)

and we going together – but not as dates  
no, never as dates,

One grand time we played basketball  
all night long with the decorations  
at the spiffed-up gym – dreamily trying to dribble  
soft pink balloons between the dancers,  
passing and shooting at the crepe-paper covered  
baskets and talking and talking and talking.

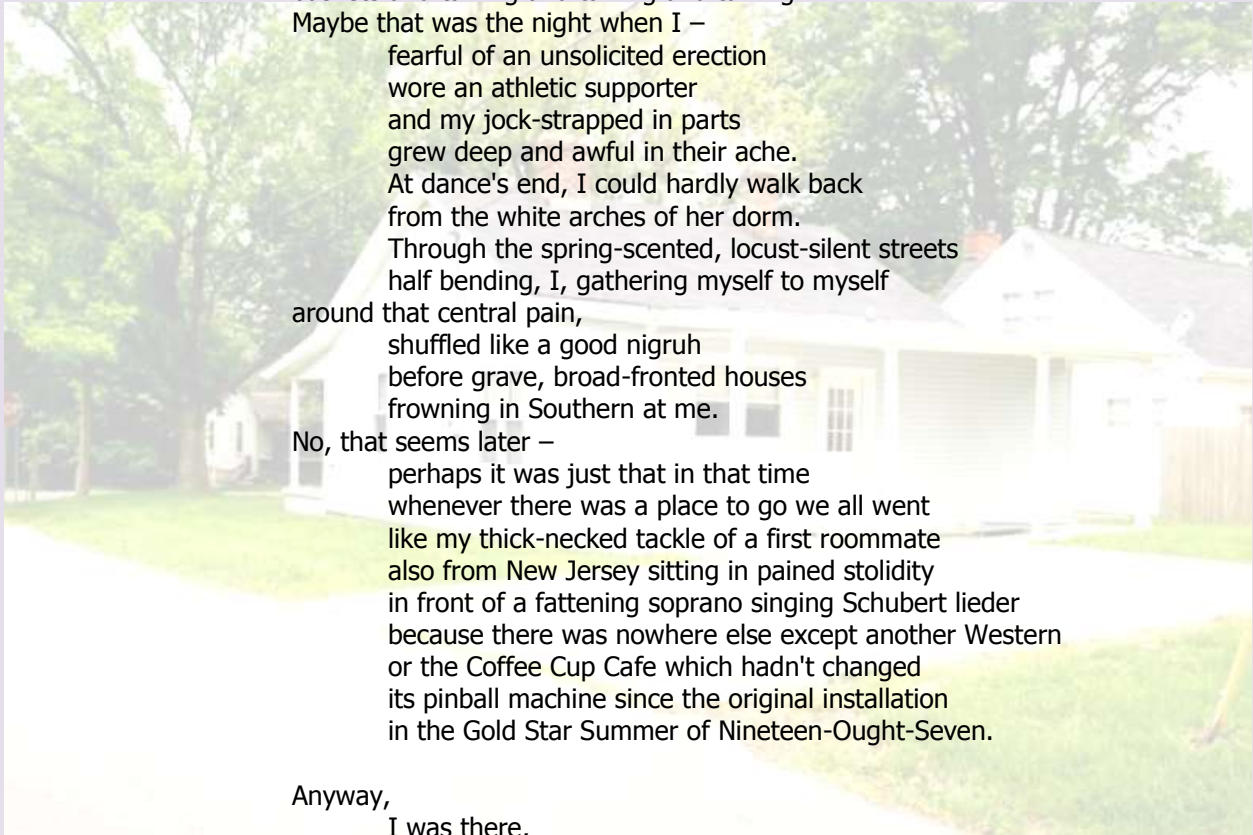
Maybe that was the night when I –  
fearful of an unsolicited erection  
wore an athletic supporter  
and my jock-strapped in parts  
grew deep and awful in their ache.  
At dance's end, I could hardly walk back  
from the white arches of her dorm.  
Through the spring-scented, locust-silent streets  
half bending, I, gathering myself to myself  
around that central pain,  
shuffled like a good nigruh  
before grave, broad-fronted houses  
frowning in Southern at me.

No, that seems later –  
perhaps it was just that in that time  
whenever there was a place to go we all went  
like my thick-necked tackle of a first roommate  
also from New Jersey sitting in pained stolidity  
in front of a fattening soprano singing Schubert lieder  
because there was nowhere else except another Western  
or the Coffee Cup Cafe which hadn't changed  
its pinball machine since the original installation  
in the Gold Star Summer of Nineteen-Ought-Seven.

Anyway,

I was there,  
at the dance,  
when Farley and Roseanne came in  
Farley smirking his smirk,  
licking his pimped chops  
and Roseanne in rose-red  
Roseanne in rose-red  
bare-shouldered, dark-haired,  
the tops of her breasts trembling out above  
/the crinolined carapace  
of those thrilling formals of yesteryear  
gowns modeled I learned later from top to tail  
after the breast plates of Roman Centurions.

I couldn't stand it then, I can't stand it now



that it was Farley Inman, that ass,  
who took her to that dance.  
What in my smallness makes this memory bearable  
is that Farley did not have the joy of her.  
Discarding their dates like old corsages,  
fraternity presidents, football captains, tennis stars,  
Phi Beta Kappa candidates, veterans, yes,  
the last lorn legions of World War II  
exotic as flamingos  
surviving on the dwindling pink shrimp of the GI Bill  
cut in on him and on each other – one after the other  
a line, a conga line of tuxedoed,  
bow-tied, Adam's appled, cutter-inners  
while abandoned, unCooped Coopies  
who not long before had sipped snoot-nosed lemonades  
at that very drugstore of which I've spoken  
huddled sullen by the coke machine whispering –  
or lingered long in the powder room  
carved out of the odor of liniment and toweling  
in the trainer's quarters.  
Even the doddering Dean of Men did his dance with her  
and Hazlitt Tee Beauregard, the head of the English  
/department.  
It was Roseanne's night, and you, you bastard,  
you did not have the joy of her  
I think, – except the wry joy of the owner  
of the one good bottle of bourbon at a bring  
your own party who, going to make his drink, finds  
that everyone else has approved his taste  
by emptying his bottle.  
Roseanne in rose-red  
you owned us all  
that one night in the spring of 1951.

I do not know what happened  
at what ever hour the clock struck twelve.  
When I went back to school the next year, she was gone –  
I don't know where, – certainly not to Cincinnati U.  
We no longer ate at the drug store  
moving on – now that someone had a car –  
to the Crossroads just outside of town;  
having lost the salt of beauty,  
we settled for the savor of homemade barbecue sauce  
puddling over our hard-fried food.

Oh Friends, the stories of my life  
have long bent and cracked beneath  
the weight of unrescued girls.  
For once, then, a happiness,  
but I was not Prince Charming,  
no, never charming. It was Farley Inman  
who played that role and haunts me still.