



Burnt Bridge  
February 2011



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# Matthew Hamilton

## The Dancing Lady

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I landed in Manila a poor man. I carried a water bottle and a few clothes stuffed in a backpack. I did this purposely. I knew that most Filipinos believed Americans to be rich. I wanted to prove differently. I slept on the streets. Abandoned park benches and cardboard boxes were my five star hotels. I moved to a different place every night. Filipinos called me Joe and the tourists looked at me as if I were a lunatic.

It was difficult to sleep because of the stench and the noise. The air smelled of urine and sweat. The rumble of cars and motorbikes were constant. Their exhaust powdered everything black. I took bathes at a hostel. I paid a squatter to do my laundry. I ate my meals from street vendors.

I usually slept in the day and walked around in the evening. I didn't feel so out of place at night in my rugged clothes. Besides, the evenings were more interesting. Prostitutes waved to me from balconies and street corners. Old men offered me Viagra and shabu. Gay men wanted to give me a massage. I turned them all down. I'm not gay, so it was easy enough to turn down the masseuse, but the women were all of them stunning. There's just something about olive black eyes and tan skin. But I wanted to do my part to dispel the myth that all Americans come to the Philippines to fuck a Filipino virgin or marry one or traffic one to the Middle East. And walking around Manila I could understand why Filipinos thought this. Almost everywhere I turned I saw Americans, westerners at any rate, patting the butts of women half their age and slipping them into a taxi cab. It took all the will power I had not to drag these old greasy men into a dark alley and beat the living shit out of them.

After two weeks I had all the city life I wanted and decided to head to the provinces.

I walked into the tourist office.

The woman behind the desk looked at me, hesitated. "May I help you, sir?" she finally said.

"Yes," I said. "May I see a map of the Philippines?"

She handed me a map. "Where do you want to go, sir? Boracay and Palawan are very beautiful."

"Somewhere with few tourists, so not those places. I want to stay in Luzon, too." I pointed to Cagayan Valley. What about here? I bet there's some great camping and hiking up through here. And I read that the American and Filipino Guerilla forces were all over this area during World War Two. Has anybody ever found anything? Sounds like a fascinating place."

"Sorry, sir, I don't know what it's all about there. Maybe."

"Where do I go to get on the bus?"

"San Polluck, sir."

“May I take the map?”

“Yes, sir.”

On the way to the bus station I scanned the map. I decided to ride as far as the bus would go. It was fifteen long hours. I arrived in the town of Gonzaga hot, tired, and smelling like a cross between a rotten mango and stale beer.

Everyone was staring at me when I got off. The men looked suspicious, girls shy and goo goo eyed.

I flagged down a tricycle driver. “Take me to the nearest resort,” I said, and we sped away.

A resort in the Philippines can mean anything. It can be a five star hotel with all the amenities or a loan nipa hut tucked away on the beach. The tricycle driver took me to a place somewhere in between, named Virgie’s Beach Resort.

A young girl was sweeping dog turds off the parking lot. The main building was one level, yellow in color, with a bar off to the side. In bold letters, a sign read: **Open 24 hrs.**

I walked into the reception area, stood there a minute watching the girl behind the desk watching me. She was like the girl at the tourist office, but more inhibited.

I smiled at her, tried to make her comfortable. I studied the room rates, asked for the cheapest one. "I don't need a TV, aircon, hot water, anything special," I said.

"500 pesos a night, sir," she said. That was about 10 US dollars.

"I can handle that," I said.

"Yes, sir," she said. She handed me the key.

A boy appeared, grabbed my bags, escorted me to my room. I flipped him 5 pesos. "You speak English?" I asked.

"Yes, sir," the boy said. "We speak very good English in the Philippines."

I smiled. "Is there a market nearby?"

"Yes, sir."

“Well, where is it?”

“What, sir? You want a girl?”

*Jesus, I thought. Sex tourism is big business.* “No, just the market, I said.

“Filipinas are very beautiful, sir.”

“Yes, I know. The market, please.”

He pointed with his lips. “Der, sir.”

“So, go to the main road and turn left, then straight,” I said.

“Yes, sir.”

“Thank you.”

“Welcome, sir.”

I headed to the market after a quick nap. A group of women were playing Mahjong in one of the kubo huts near the main road. They stared at me and smiled. I smiled and waved.

The market was bustling. People were hopping about in all directions and searching for the perfect crab and jumbo shrimp. Some settled on a few pieces of squid and a kilo or two of talapia. Most of the talapia were still alive, having recently been deposited on the wet tables, flopping their last minutes of life away and spraying stink water on prospective customers. An old woman with missing teeth held a string of crabs in front of me.

“Hello, sir. You want?”

“No thank you,” I said.

Hundreds of eyes were watching every move I made.

“Hello, sir,” a young girl behind a fruit and vegetable table said. “You like this one?”

I was instantly pulled to her. She looked to be in her mid twenties. She had a strong, yet delicate face, and the yellow T-shirt she wore suggested that if she were a flower, she would be a dancing lady, bright and yellow, delicately

strong, having command of nature's music, the wind and the rain her orchestra, thunder her tempo and lightning her clairvoyant baton.

"Hello," I said.

"You like something, sir?"

I didn't want anything, but pretended to look around.

I pointed to a bunch of bananas. "How much are these?"

"30 pesos a kilo."

I couldn't resist. She was so beautiful that I would have bought anything from her. "Give me half a kilo," I said.

"Yes, sir."

She put them in a bag and handed it to me. I lightly grazed her hand as I took my change. Her skin was something milk would feel like if it were solid. I smiled at her as I walked away. She smiled, too, her olive skin whirling into a bright

shade of pink, like cotton candy. I studied her face and swore to remember it. I wanted to see her again, but thought of sleazy white guy horrors from Manila. I didn't want to be labeled as the sex tourist of Cagayan.

The next morning I helped some locals repair a banka. There was a large hole near its stern. A large wave slammed the boat into a wall of coral the day before. Somehow he and his crew were able to tug the boat to shore before it became victim to the wrathful sea and home to a school of fish and ghost crabs. I thought of the girl the whole day. No matter how hard I tried, I just couldn't get her out of my head.

The banka repaired, me, Clifford, and Clifford's crew settled in a nipa hut. There were 8 cases of Red Horse Beer packed in ice under the bamboo table. On the table were a variety of special Filipino delicacies: Pinapaitan, Kilawen, and Sinanglaw. I wasn't much of a drinker, but it would have been rude for me to decline the invitation.

Clifford popped a beer open and handed to me.

“Thank you,” I said. I took a sip, then set the bottle down.

As the sun dipped into the sea, the last of the light swallowed up by dark clouds, I watched the fishing boat lights move mysteriously across the water like a fluorescent snake until they were overpowered by the atmosphere, the sky turning from white to orange to yellow to blue. I gazed at the ocean. The sun would be up in a few hours. As a child, I always enjoyed watching the sun rise. It always reminded me of a yellow-orange blister growing out of the sea.

Seeing the party winding down, I excused myself and walked closer to the water. I settled into the sand. I allowed the spirit of the waves to relax my mind. I imaged the dancing lady running towards me. I hoped to see her again tomorrow. This time I would ask her name. Why should I care what people thought? I knew my intentions. And they were good.

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Matthew Hamilton is an MFA candidate at Fairfield University. His most recent work can be found at *LitSnack*. He has forthcoming work at Black Lantern Publishing.

# Thomas Mundt

## Broke-Ass James Taylor

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Broke-Ass James Taylor has Mouths to feed.

There's an Ex-Wife Mouth, for starters.

Alimony Mouth. A Mouth with lips caked in shades like Midnight Rampage and Talk to the One-Night Stand and other varieties unbecoming of a woman in her mid-forties. A Mouth that flirts openly with even the most acne-scarred, scoliosis-ridden servers among us. (Broke-Ass James Taylor witnessed this painful act firsthand at The Macaroni Grill, where the two hashed out the key terms of their Separation Agreement over Calamari Fritti.) A Mouth with a seemingly-endless supply of daggers with which to fracture Broke-Ass James Taylor's breastbone and puncture his occasionally-beating heart.

There's also the Mouth belonging to Tiny Roger. Son Mouth. The six-year old Mouth that's turning Tiny Roger into Not-So-Tiny Roger at an alarming rate. The Mouth that never met a Teddy Graham it didn't like. The Mouth Tiny Roger uses to breathe because all the excess Tiny Roger keeps bearhugging his lungs, rendering his nasal passages useless, ornamental.

And, of course, there's Broke-Ass James Taylor's Mouth to consider. The mouth trained to tolerate Five-Dollar Footlongs and sour, been-in-the-bottom-of-the-break-room-drawer-since-the-Clinton-Administration coffee. The Mouth that lip-syncs along to the same ESPN Radio Extra Points, the impassioned pleas for instant replay in baseball and righteous demands for LeBron James' head on a gold-plated charger, every hour on the hour. The Mouth that hasn't made contact with a Lady Mouth in sixteen months, two weeks, and four days.

Misery Mouth.

And so, given the existence of these Disparate, Needy Mouths, Broke-Ass James Taylor is presently in the conference room-cum-office suite of his current quasi-employer, SILVERMAN HIRSCH COOLEY & MCKENZIE, LLC, on a Saturday morning, booting up a Dell desktop that sounds less computer and more flight simulator. As the relic's fans sputter and whinny, he ponders the percentage of Earthlings for whom work is associated with the scent of hot dust.

\*\*\*

Broke-Ass James Taylor isn't finding what he's looking for.

He's been assigned the task of locating documents supporting SILVERMAN HIRSCH's contention that the defendant, Danny Ries, broke his fiduciary duty to Brightstar Financial's shareholders by failing to disclose the potential conflict of interest in contracting with MT Partners, an entity whose Board of Directors overlaps Brightstar's by nearly three-fourths.

Instead, he keeps finding Nigerian scam spam and email threads between Danny and his wife, Mary Fran, wherein they recount the time they fucked on that houseboat on Lake Ontario.

While a rather-large part of Broke-Ass James Taylor is fascinated by the latter communications, the fearlessness with which Danny committed his boatfucks to company record, the remaining part of him that incurred six-figure debt for the privilege of practicing law wonders how it all came to *this*. (*This being shorthand for sifting through the fecal matter that is one ethically-challenged entrepreneur's life in exchange for a pittance of an hourly wage.*)

He wonders aloud if it's too late to get into dentistry. (He could see himself in those colorful scrubs, the ones that let his patients know that he's not super-uptight, that he probably likes to wakeboard in his free time.) The room's empty file cabinets remain silent on the issue, although Broke-Ass James Taylor has a pretty good idea they'd answer *Yes, It's*

*absolutely too late. You made your bed... if they could.*

So, he keeps looking.

\*\*\*

John Ostling used to exist. He signed up for one of those websites, the ones that help like-minded people find one another. It wasn't even one of those seedy sites that get you Rest-Stop Head or secure your spot in an Argentine Five-Way. It matched you with others based upon approximately six-thousand levels of compatibility. It was supposed to work.

John drummed up some initial interest in his profile, mainly from fellow divorcées searching for dates for upcoming Rascal Flatts concerts. He did so without the assistance of a picture, not out of insecurity about his looks or a desire to be evaluated strictly upon his marginally-impressive bio but simply because he couldn't figure out the Browse and Upload functions. When his technological breakthrough finally,

mercifully, occurred (with the assistance of a much-younger colleague), he chose a picture Alimony Mouth had taken of him a few Christmases ago. It depicted him in a forest-green henley, an acoustic guitar perched upon his crossed, corduroyed legs. There were three red-felt stockings in the background, heavy with candy and replacement razors and Target gift cards.

The response to John's picture was swift. He returned home from a late night of middle-aged male camaraderie to discover he'd received an Introductory Message from a zaftig, twenty-eight-year old Kate from Crown Point, Indiana. (It didn't escape John that the Message had been sent at 2:47 a.m. CST. He could envision Crown Point Kate sitting at her laptop with a half-glass of pinot, the *Should I, or shouldn't I?* debate having raged between her legs for hours before her body simply *demand*ed that she contact him.) Pleased with himself, he smiled and clicked:

**u look like a brokeass james talor :(**

There were no other Messages, Introductory or otherwise, in his Inbox. Just assorted great deals at JCrew.com and a cornucopia of pills with which he could become two-to-three inches larger.

He wondered if there was a pill that could instantly make him two-to-three times less likely to microwave and devour a Ham 'n Cheddar Hot Pocket in defeat.

\*\*\*

Broke-Ass James Taylor's cell is having a seizure on the desk. It's Tiny Roger, as denoted by the luminescent **TR** in the Caller ID window. As he reaches to answer, he wonders if he'll ever stop thinking of him as Tiny Roger, if it'll take decades before he ever sees him as anything but the jaundiced, bug-eyed infant that spent the first two months of his life outside the womb inside an incubator.

"Hey, Bud. Whatcha up to?"

(Heavy breathing.)

“Bud? You there?”

“Yeah. It’s. Me. Dad.”

“What’s going on? You okay?”

“I’m. Fine. I’ve. Been. Invited. To. A. Party.  
I’m. Calling. To. Ask...”

Broke-Ass James Taylor pauses to appreciate his son’s social calendar. It takes only a second before *his* lack thereof sinks in.

“Of course you can go! That’s great.”

“Mom. Says. I. Have. To. Tell. You. That.  
It’s. A...”

(Heavy breathing.)

“Pizza. Party.”

Broke-Ass James Taylor pulls his cell away from his face, so his dramatic sigh won't register on Tiny Roger's end.

"Bud. We talked about this. Remember?"

"I. Know. Dad. I've. Been..."

"I know you've been exercising more, Bud, and that's great. I'm very, *very* proud of you for that. But your diet's important too, and you can't just..."

Tiny Roger's smothered lungs suddenly discover a Celine Dion-like inner strength and expel a wail Broke-Ass James Taylor would expect to come out of a wolf, possibly a dingo. But never his son.

"Bud. Bud. Come on."

(Sustained wolf cry.)

"Bud. Okay. Bud. Listen to me."

(Heavy breathing.)

“Yeah. Dad.”

“You can go to the pizza party. Okay? But let’s not overdo it. Remember the “M” word we talked about?”

“Yes. Dad. Mod. Er. A. Shun.”

“Exactly. Moderation. Just a few slices. Okay? And don’t drink a ton of Coke.”

“Oh. Kay. Dad.”

(Silence.)

Having never been through a Ten-Step Program of any kind, Broke-Ass James Taylor doesn’t feel like an Enabler at all. He just feels like an Exasperated Dad who lacks the energy to continually lie to his son about there being more to life than gorging himself on Deep-Dish Pepperoni every chance he gets.

It strikes Broke-Ass James Taylor as infinitely less cruel than perpetuating the myth of The Future, where foresight and hard work get rewarded and dreams play out in real time.

\*\*\*

When Broke-Ass James Taylor returns from Subway, there's a note waiting for him on his ergonomically-incorrect swivel chair:

*To All Contractors:*

*The espresso machine in the Break Room is for Authorized Users only. There are NO exceptions!*

*--Claire Kuypers*

*Administrative Assistant, Litigation*

The note is unsettling not because of its content but its mere existence, as Broke-Ass James Taylor was convinced his was the only human presence on Floor Thirty-Two. (He's unfortunately aware of the thriving gnat

community in the men's room.) Saturdays at SILVERMAN HIRSCH are about escape. They're about inhabiting the Isle of Broke-Ass James Taylor, free of mainland concerns like ComEd meter readings and weddings for which he still hasn't bought anything off the registry.

He wasn't prepared for the existence of other Isles, imagined cartographers had long abandoned the prospect of their location.

In the Break Room, Broke-Ass James Taylor finds neither a list of Authorized Users nor any guidelines for determining one's status as such. But he's knows he's not an Authorized User, has no chance of becoming one.

He *is* an Espresso Man, however. At least today.

Broke-Ass James Taylor selects a tiny ceramic mug, better suited for a four-year old girl's backyard tea party, and places it on the black plastic grate. He pushes a button and expects the espresso maker to gurgle, to pop and fizz like the Mr. Coffee back at his efficiency. But it

simply hums, as if to Handel. The only objectionable sound comes in the form of the slow drip, a *plop plop plop* calling to mind his swollen prostate and recent complications at the urinal.

His cup running over, Broke-Ass James Taylor adds vanilla from a glass bottle he was certain contained olive oil prior to his Unauthorized Usage. He sips and Roman Candles go off in his brain, every synapse firing in delight.

He thinks, *This is how you treat a Mouth.*

\*\*\*

Thomas Mundt lives in Chicago. His new(ish) stories can be read now or soon in places like *The Cleveland Review*, *Kugelmass*, *Bartleby Snopes*, and *Dark Sky Magazine*, all less-than-meticulously collected for your convenience at [www.dontdissthewizard.blogspot.com](http://www.dontdissthewizard.blogspot.com). He is currently completing his first short story collection, *You Have Until Noon to Unlock the Secrets of the Universe*

# Maude Lark

## From the Wings

---

thousands know  
the gratifying dazzle  
of the panorama  
and the intimate tremor  
of the solo and the pas de deux  
from the comfort  
of the darkened house

but few can view  
the rapid pleasures  
that I can see  
from the darkened wings

I stand back stage  
through the performance  
and, while I work,

I watch  
And have only  
some inches of vertical light  
a pillar of color  
between black curtains  
by which to catch  
my instances  
to cherish;

two disembodied hands  
flicking into sight  
for a caress,  
then ascending,  
dovelike;

the sudden escape  
of a profile head  
from the barricade  
of cloth  
to pose,  
listening;

the flash  
of the danseur's foot  
passing through  
his à la seconde;

and last and best,  
that instant  
when the ballerina runs  
to prepare  
for her next onslaught –  
runs to the back  
with a sweep  
of her arms  
and a head  
refusing to lose hold  
of her audience;  
so she draws  
them with her;  
so she draws  
me with her

and then, to the  
surging accompaniment  
of applause  
she leaps,  
bursting  
into the wings  
where I stand

some say  
they pity me;  
they say,  
“ah! but you miss  
the total beauty,  
the line,  
the tour de force,  
the lift,  
the height  
of the grand jeté!”

ah! but what I keep  
is more  
than what they  
ever will;  
my instances,  
though few,  
will stay,  
better than  
an entire variation  
will,  
in my mind's eye

I get to see  
the choicest instances,  
the most beautiful nuance

I get to see her  
finish that endless  
closing leap  
and feel the force of it  
as I catch her  
to stop her  
before she reaches  
the wall

and I get to see her  
pant like a human  
and smile  
a real smile  
when things  
have gone well

-

Maude Larke has come back to her own writing after working in the American, English and French university systems, analyzing others' texts and films. She has also returned to the classical music world as an ardent amateur, after fifteen years of piano and voice in her youth.

Publications include *Bird's Eye reView*, *Naugatuck River Review*, *Cyclamens and Swords*, *riverbabble*, *Doorknobs and BodyPaint*, *Sketchbook*, *Cliterature*, *Short, Fast, and Deadly*, and *The Centrifugal Eye*.

# Joby Griffin

## Venus Flytrap

---

I am the fly in the Venus

Struggling hard, but to no avail

Cannot seem to get out of this jail

I am the fly in the Venus flytrap

You enticed me with your sweet taste

But your kiss was poison

Now I'm dying slowly in your grasp

The ever constricting grip

Which will inevitably become my tomb.

-

Joby Griffin grew up in the countryside outside of Batesville, MS. Joby plans to transfer to Full Sail University for videogame design. Joby grew up with three brothers and one sister, who tragically drowned in the Tallahatchie River, when he was six. He currently lives south of Batesville with his brother and mother, where he spends time writing short books and poems when not doing schoolwork