

# MANNING UP

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The Slut keeps its tattoos private. It nests in the bedroom sound system. It glitters externally but spills coarse black curls when cut. Upon waking, the Slut is lazy. It will finger its cerise finial. Turn a diamond post in the stretched-out puncture of its left ear lobe. It will extend through its toes without moving thorax or anterior.

(We're in the new unit (high ceilings, wood floors, capers in corridors) with toast and coffee; the sun is a big star. Our Heroine can't get enough of the mountains. Were you ever on the beach? The walk is something in sneakers, five minutes in heels. After you tell me her birthmarks, I promise to believe.)

That's an afternoon! The Slut opens on a twirling chair; its hair curlier and curlier, curling long, voluminous, tugged out to the waves; its wet with yes.

Our Heroine's favorite form of masochism? Freeze-frame. To examine her fingers. Yes, and the charms of gapped teeth. Polish? *Prosze*. Pinky rings? Pretty, pretty. Please or thank you? Pick, please. Heels or sandals? The latter. Will her breasts stop teasing already? *Prosze*. The time has come for your ex. Her new puppy is so small and holy!

The Slut will nurse behind a teal curtain. When kin and ken come crawling, it will offer a gold leash. Lay feast the fatty milk: the new pup sups at its feet. On the shores of ten thousand lakes, under an overpass, in a tree, against the borders of Dinkytown. Here, directions to put on a pinch-tip. Don't you love the lime? I tell them my girlfriend's so bad—! Oh, postcard blue, blue of sky flat against balloon, blue of statue or mustache in the Louvre.



How to discuss its carnal preferences? The Slut is a vegetarian.  
Vernally, it prefers a meatless meal meted by a meaty man.  
Internal combustion versus external eruption. But here. And then  
there. That. And them.

Jealousy lives on negatives. A vintage software voiced by *la petite salope*? Choose no. Please? The X sneezes and wheezes. Deal me a please-bargain, hook me a floppy? Somewhere, in a wheeled plastic cart or an underwear drawer, a collection of sleazy diskettes.

In short, the Slut has a healthy appetite and a strong sense of family. It may dance in rainstorms until soaked through or eat frosting straight from the can, but it still lives at home in a historic brownstone and, when the maid retires, it hosts a grand affair with red cake.

The dream is five extra seasons, a commemorative cup, the hung  
note (laugh attack, Frau G.B., napkin pink, the Renoir-nude  
obscenity). Give the X some credit. A pastime for chanteusing?  
A stomach for noodles?

Twelve-day cruises in six sick cities—the Slut's in Montenegro with a sister, Paris with a punchy cousin, Naples with that infant it insists on hefting into all the snapshots. A little \_\_\_\_\_. Expert \_\_\_\_\_. When the Slut puts pen to paper, who can control what postcard prose it'll produce?

If you took her on a vacation, I'll shut up. As it stands, I'm lying down. A noisy overhead with a reckless pull above, fat cats a floor below. Do you remember? From my bedroom, there are only trees, stopped and started by sills. No beginning, no end, when I'm summing February to August. I keep coming up Easter and the right light. A flirty overnight. Ten thousand ways I never heard you say I love you.

In one shot, a silver pendant dangles between its breasts.

Another: the contortionist at play, skin ironed and tan, teeth  
and pursed lips, that hair against sunny wallpaper.

Our Heroine favors beginnings, and sweetest is the X's stumbling from a heart-stilled, mid-blizzard, Café Exposé encounter when the Slut unzipped her black down, let her long jet hair tumble-tender over one shoulder, and asked, *Do you want to see me sing?* (Our Heroine gathers herself, gulps a seltzer.) Jealousy flenses my spine. The pretty, pretty Slut: asked for your number, phoned from across the table.



Drill it in a cathedral or take it to temple. Leave it out in the rain. Feed it food in foil wrappers until it develops a mouth for mussels and frites.

The Slut's profile hangs greenly outside my bedroom window. I find nothing from the new metrics. See the X in a bone-milk blouse that bares her backbend belly. All morning tracking its transformation with a string of zeros, five or seven centimeters tall. At night, Our Heroine tiptoes past trees and snips tags from necks and waists, elastic bands and side-seamed flags. A man walks into a street sign and wears a bandage like a bow. Our Heroine finds an envelope, follows a red string, unfastens gussets.

Its countenance, post-mitzvah. Its performance, très tov. In concert, the Slut mouths words I can't make out. It sways before an orbed microphone. Its calves are stumped by the knee-grazing hem of a dreary red dress.

Our Heroine longs to drool blood, but (*dot, dot, dot*) and (*sound of church bells*) the flag flies, and the X still sounds polyorgasmic after midnight. A Casablanca whips the ceiling and strobes the mirror like a sliced moon. Herein she starts to say please. Jealousy is a needy beast. *Prosze*. If only she could quit her thank yous.

How could it be anything else? The Slut is a student of grammar;  
versed in the mysteries of pre-history: sure with the tongue.  
Neither slovenly nor slatternly, its eyes lit-low are tidy  
folders.

Up close, could you see her pores? The wondering never wanes.  
The X was a twenty-year-old female. The sample was 5.5 months.  
What was her waist-to-hip ratio? Her European shoe? Tell me of  
her history with the dentist. O, Anti-Princess, sometimes the  
line of bone running through the broad of your arm is a slice,  
and other times you're moire.

Let's take a trip to Altamira and go as nineteenth-century scholars. High collars and beige starchings: This is just because Our Heroine wants pantaloons, a square-necked chemise. Can we invite the counselor who looks like a benign cat? You say, sure, she was always a sport. Our Heroine gets set with kid gloves and her ivory lorgnette. "Sight seeing..." we sigh as animals blur anew every time we kiss.

First there were no dates and then there were yes dates. Or maybe you just started showing up, leaning over her desk, really taking advantage of your gym membership, walking her home, saying hi to her blonde roommate, using her toilet, bringing your health kit on Tuesdays, carrying a toothbrush, keeping your shoulders open for bites. Is this why you liked hanging upside down so much, that day in the park? I think we were talking about karma. We'd just eaten small portions of potato curry. My cousin was up from the city and wearing a sealskin coat.



And yet, it will tango twins with limber and brio. The Slut dances: it is agile, despite the pervasive smell.

In Altamira the bison looks like moleskin or something painted then blot. Karstic via dolomite or bedrock? Wasn't the point to point to something particular? Okay, okay, polychrome human hands! We're happy! We talk chestnuts, we eat Zamarano on olive oil crisps, we drink sweet white wine, totally spread out along the Bay of Biscay, hematite and ochre, one large doe, we're supine and studying the sky as though it were the ceiling.

Maybe this is just a trip to Spain. A merger of dominos and jacks. When the music swells, the bodies smack. Come winter, find the Slut dehydrated, indoors: still lapping up Spanish, still choking on hair.

Our Heroine—oh dear! All she arrived at was elastics and plastics. Our Heroine looks down the road. She licks the salt off the X's new tires. We both know how it goes, the blow before the cross. So much for projection, adieu to the reel. I'm waiting for you to tell me how she snuck to the outskirts of Crystal. Whether the magnet was attached or not. From across the cave, the opening is a window. It is bisected and yellow like an organ.

My jealousy flies me to a wide, freshwater lake, an arabesque from the Slut's cabin. My jealousy cuffs my wrists and drives, faster, faster, until we bumper-kiss a deer. Polychromal blood and guts. Polychromal life of longing for longing and many fancy regrets.

Good morning, December. One day Our Heroine does her holiday shop. She paints her nails POLANDRY. Menage: a little lipstick on her collar, a wrinkle at her cheek. In cosmetics, smiling at blushes is the Slut. The Slut is a person, someone with a pulse and a paper cup of coffee with a leaky cap. She is broad-hipped and impressively bosomed. Thick shouldered, Lover, no one you could have loved, nothing like me. On purpose, I bumped into her, and she—she said, excuse me. A nice girl. Really, she was fine.

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