

KASS FLEISHER

*Advice for New Faculty Members: An Open Letter to J.A.*

*for Steve Katz  
with apologies to Robert Boice*

1. *Wait, patiently and actively*

Full Moon rising over the Mount Vernon Country Club. What you have to understand is the spiritual component in music: we generate an essence, which is received by the audience, and the audience sends it back to us. Or, we contemplate by regarding thoughtfully, by studying. She stands looking at the whited-out spaces on her birthday calendar—ghosts of friends lost. Did they betray one another? Or were they not meant to be friends, became friends mistakenly? White mountain peaks shimmer with an inadequate amount of snow. A breeze tickles the junipers, the weight of Anthony dragging them groundward. Dogs have the run of the place. The dining room is cantilevered over sharp edges of mesas and quiet sparkles of suburbs. She looks out over it and imagines disaster, envisions the floor giving and the windows shattering and the beams cracking. The tables would slide against the wall then spin out, patrons clinging, across the saged land. Arapahoe land. She shakes her head to clear the anger and returns to the conversation. The topic at table is failure. Do you comprehend, when I grasp your hand, that I think you the most heroic among us. All the statufied men and women are dead, and you're alive—it's better. Ancient future grasps us. Despite her affection for Don Henley, and having become expert at dangling modifiers, the furry hair on the back of his neck stands up. Nothing compares, she thinks, to being with a man who routinely replaces the toilet paper roll before it is empty.

2. *Begin early, before feeling ready*

Full Moon rising over the Mount Vernon Country Club. The spiritual aspect of music is so crucial that if you play a note wrong, you could hurt someone. Or, we contemplate our finished work to appraise it. She grips an eraser as she picks up her address book, considers her moving parts. The packing can wait until we've been

fed properly. The chicken on the buffet is not bad, the crab legs a bit oversteamed. They are convinced by the waiter to try a bad wine. By the way she describes it, as a refreshing blend of grapes, they know ahead of time that it will be bad but they have lost the capacity to object. Lodgepole pines are tall enough to wave magnanimously, just beyond the draperies. To her breast she clutches weakness as a child clutches a broken wrist. It's not broken, she said, it's just sprained—go sit down, you'll be fine. Dictionary definition of destruction: what it costs her to write. At table, much is made of the way the bass player strums his instrument like a rhythm guitar. Well, he says, don't let the fucking door hit you on the fucking ass on the way fucking out. Dogs have the run of the place—Arapahoe land. Above them, faint stars begin to ice the night, body and soul. Below them, canyons pinch into nothing, stabbing coyotes in the hinges. You wrote one for me, now I write one for you. We are asymptotes. You curve toward me, our lines begin to intersect. We will run along together like this until infinity, never touching—close, adjacent, breathing the same air, but forever so faintly ajar. And this is the rhetorical device they use to illuminate love.

### *3. Prepare and work in brief, regular bouts*

Full Moon rising over the Mount Vernon Country Club. It's not enough to play well—the audience must participate, must feel the spirit, become one with the spirit. Or, we contemplate the future, while hazy plans outline themselves. Curiosity runs high at this altitude. The desserts, she says, are not as good as they look, not quite creamy and delicious—but desserts are like sex: bad dessert is better than no dessert at all. The cover story on the Italian magazine was *Amato Stress*. Easy, Mario—easy. Here in our suborbital navigation we make like bunnies and run for the brambles, our friends covering us from behind—although a thousand miles away behind. It's you and me against the word, bub. Resist much, obey little. Do enough time in these institutions and it becomes clear: everybody's got something to hide, 'cept for me and my monkey. The eyes of elk spit red in the headlights. To her breast she clutches weakness, the end of something, the door closing on the way fucking out. She sits gaping over Arapahoe land, gleaming now in the cunningly clear night, out of the past. Were we ever here, he wonders. If I fell, would there be a parachute. Would you tuck underneath me, and

would we roll together when we hit the ground. I adore you, she says. They meet belly to belly and what is manifest is fear. Finger to finger, the realization that it's a short dance, but a full one. It's the dance they signify to do.

4. *Stop, before diminishing returns set in*

Full Moon rising over the Mount Vernon Country Club. Music is a deliberation, a visceral nod to one of the nine goddesses, a rhythmic convergence. Or, we consider a change of occupation with caution and prudence. Meaning, of course, is comprised of you talking to me and me sitting there thinking about the funny little mole you have on your cheek. For instance, we drove up the canyon past the odd UFO house that perches on the hill. Apparently, he says, the owners have been unable to sell it and the government is buying it as an architectural treasure. In the fall, bears nibble berries in the backyards of Genesee, under a halfmoon for the misbegotten. *Je ne sais quoi, Genesee*. Dictionary definition of dream: placing one foot in front of the other, and trusting that the top of the cliff exists. At table, there is some expressed discomfort over the wealth of the area. Posh. In 500 characters or less, explain why you merit inclusion. Jesus, she says, is that with spaces, or without. The straightness of his spine as she digs her fingers into the muscle. The uprightness of his chin, upon which he has taken it. Against the word, in Arapahoe country, where she does not belong, come Sunday. He needs wide open spaces, room to make the big mistakes. In the bathroom, shining chromed containers offer anti-bacterial soap. There are no dust mites at eight thousand feet. The bass player's hand blurs across the strings in a fury of faith. She can no longer stand to write. She imagines grasping her unknown genius between her legs and tossing him out across devotion. He would land softly, gathered in adoration for what he can give, for the finely spun web of the possible.

5. *Moderate strong emotions*

Full Moon rising over the Mount Vernon Country Club. The percussion is our shared heartbeat, it's the way we all live together in this moment. Or, we may profit by reflecting upon the brevity of human life, the improvement of our inner lives, the mistakes we have made. All of us reside in these stolen stories, these things

they wanted him to do which he would not do. Dictionary definition of assimilation: inserting anus in the tongue of the dominant and munching contents on the happily. He reaches up behind her and yanks on a curl, and this is love. The canyons whistle beneath, begging her to come, neglecting to remind her that she will only have to walk back up. Because what we most believed has failed, the future is ours. The advent, the womb of time, eventuality, posterity even. Both illusion and hallucination imply faulty or mistaken perception. The window opens and every encounter with him is like walking suddenly into a pine grove after a cleansing rain. There you stand, inhaling green, hoping it will last forever. It don't mean a thing. With spaces or without, ideology stops short of the affection we maintain for it. You cannot see it from here, but high up on the peak, saxifrage will peek through in three months. When the snow dissolves in Arapahoe country and the lightning pops. In my thesaurus, courage and cowardice are on the same page.

6. *Moderate overattachment to content*

Full Moon rising over the Mount Vernon Country Club. Music comes from nature, reflects nature, is the sound of nature, returns to the natural. Or, as he pondered the motive Foster may have had for betraying him, we pondered our next move. All texts contain directions for their consumption, but the same cannot be said about dinner parties. My beau, my swain, my gallant, my amoroso. We have gone steady steadily, for 43 fictions now. The future is ours, and it is time to be pinned to the tail of a pasty past, tossed high to swat a persistent gnat. Thigh against thigh, fortune smiled even when all we saw were windows shattering. I have a thing for the Eagles, she says. Everyone knows this, he replies, but this is a jazz concert—talk about something else. To write another word would be to jerk the heartbeat right out of her. You must start with the vowels, he says, and find a way to believe. Belly to belly, nothing hides from the monkey. You are what you are, she says. What, he says, is that supposed to pass for dialogue? Your consciousness streams, but you are not Stein. There should be a niche, here in Arapahoe country, for who he is—there should be something other than this cache of castigation. For instance, he notes that all the black people sit in the front of the room. Wealthy whites to the rear. Knowing their place.

7. *Let others do some of the work*

Full Moon rising over the Mount Vernon Country Club. Music falls to the ears as the gods fall from grace, gently and with love abounding. Or, muse suggests freely wandering thoughts—the guiding genius of the poet—for instance, we muse on the past. Talk about something else, talk about the ways of Swanny. Down yonder. A goodly portion of the earth is indeed below us, and we gaze upon it with retribution in our hearts. We try to be nice about it when we tell the waiter the wine sucked. Some people will like it, she says. It would be nice on a hot day, to have a chilled red wine. There should be something for everyone, tears for fears, and the dictionary definition of muse. What we talk about when we talk about going. The words will not come no matter how much we manipulate them, one hand job after another. I am through with talking, with knowing, with talking about knowing, with the spin of the in, with writing. They are they and we are we and the wanderers are we. What do we seek of earth birth. We seek no beginning and no end. Canyons neither begin nor end. You can't pretend a tectonic shift had anything to do with you. I am the monkey on your back, the friction from which you take warmth. What we talk about when we talk about shrubby cinquefoil. The way the aspens have been brought down out of the hills and planted where they don't belong. The way you comb your hair for five fucking minutes every morning when I'm waiting for the mirror myself. The way you smile so sweet.

8. *Moderate incivilities*

Full Moon rising over the Mount Vernon Country Club. Music is the ultimate collaboration, entirely about reception, entirely about admission, admittance, entrée, taking part in the party, the affair. Or, we muse on the past, what is now going on, or what may happen tomorrow, drowned in imaginative, not too serious, reflection. The exaggerations of Prince Peter are such that it is the Randy, it is the Weston, it is the Trio, breathless in high country. Although we both originated in suburbia, the applause lasts for days. There should be something for everyone, but this agitation, this cocktail of brain chemicals, this dinner party, this introduction. How will it ever fall away, even if the structure fails. Dictionary definition of muse: you stroking my hair. A simple peck on your beard. What is not exposed is useless, but the words are killing us. Are words the

only way. If so, must we write the words. I do not think they hear us. We are covered even as uncovered, loved even as lost, feared even as wept, lived even as dead. We are only in our solely, exclusive in our merely, paltry in our summation. The mountains never fail to point up, though to what we don't know. It is the fury of finality, the infinite flourish. It is what it is to be free, to have scope, to have the run of, to have one's own way, to hide. It is liberation. It is you upon me, a granule of moonbeam. And belly to belly, curve to line, hell frozen over, we are already gone, feeling strong, singing this victory song on the last day. The topic at table is failure. The topic at table is fencing. The topic at table is fading. It is a patient, active waiting.