

# Tim Kinsella

An excerpt from  
THE KARAOKE SINGER'S  
GUIDE  
TO SELF-DEFENSE

## Will



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Administratively, the scene was structured kind of like the anonymous blowjobs in men's rooms triggered by a coded foot tap. A couple men meet up at a predetermined place, an isolated place, used to be a barn just outside of town. Then it moved to behind the factory-church.

A flat powder blue square, two stories tall and equally as wide, painted on the front of the abandoned factory on the West side of town, a church had salvaged exactly that much of the building. Ornate bulbs popped from the double-belted centers of the two new pillars at the big front doors. The rest of the building, the majority of its front, remained untouched. Granite shades of grit and gray, the depths of its seams in shadows and dirt behind the powder blue box, the rest of the building, a frame frozen in continuous expansion, fading into the background of the dull sky, day or night.

In the open yard behind the factory-church, late at night, early morning, men met anonymously, the meetings coordinated through scribbled code in men's room stalls, near payphones. The keys whispered in passing in the fury of battles in bar parking lots. Will was offered the key many times before recognizing it as such, slow to realize a code to break even existed.

In the parking lots, only once a night exploded into scattered chatter and threats, tears and heat, did Will ever feel peace, hunger satiated, his mind still.

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Tim Kinsella (born 1974) Libra / Chicago / Music

Maybe he had imagined the whole thing. The feeling of being watched was very similar to the feeling of suspecting you were being watched. The entire dark flatness of the factory's backside, the empty stands of a stadium. Breath quickened. He hopped a few steps

“Hello?”  
darting rodent, he sauntered, hands in pockets.  
big moon. Walked through the open gates, dragging his feet loudly through the gravel. The yard empty, a  
Finally got out. Stood next to his car under the window and smoked, heard silence.

Skipped through the whole dial again. Cracked the weak the scan function skipped over all his presets. Static on the radio, the reception so with his sleeve. Chest to steering wheel to wipe the windshield and rattle for a while. The windows began to fog. He as far as he could, up to the fence, sat in the warm purr car, nothing to see, but this must be the place. Pulled up around the back of the factory-church, waited in his Giving in to his curiosity one night, Will pulled dream's command.

Repeated, the message took on the power of a and Thursday.”  
message slipped. “The factory-church, 3 AM, Tuesday close up in his ear. A small man he never caught sight of, bumping up against him, moved on as soon as his sides retelling a single event all at once. Commands and shouting men with chests puffed out pointing, many appears cancelled each other out, became a single roar. And in these moments, Will would hear the whisper close up in his ear. A small man he never caught sight of, bumping up against him, moved on as soon as his message slipped. “The factory-church, 3 AM, Tuesday and Thursday.”

up to the tracks to better survey the yard, still empty.

Suspense doubled back on itself became boredom. Scraping metal to gravel, he peeked in the drawer of a file cabinet on its side. Nothing, turned to return to his car. From above, the plunk of metal down on his skull, a deep grunt of muscles collapsed him. Flattened in a blur, he raised his hand over his head to stop the next blow. But no more crashes followed the first. Opening his eyes, nothing, no one anywhere. Lay on his side in the gravel under the big moon, pulled his knees up fetal. Far off, a rodent scampered eye level.

He stood, dusted himself off, dust stuck to blood clumps. Stood up straight and called out, cleared his throat and called out, “Well, come on then! You come out now!”

Whir of silence from every direction, he spun, no one. He shuffled back to his car, kicking up dust, scanned the gravel for a long pipe, a heavy car part, anything he might be able to swing. Looked back over his shoulder every few steps. Wheezing, he opened the door to his car. Turned back to the yard, threw his head back and howled to the factory's backside, black against the night sky, howled.

Grabbing the car door, he bent at the waist, slammed the door shut on his head and bolted upright as the door bounced back. Turning, he expected applause from the dark flatness of the factory's backside, the empty stands of a stadium, but nothing. Howled again, his nose filled with blood. Eyes burned and the scream of

*The Karaoke Singer's Guide to Self-Defense*, By Tim Kinsella  
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the late night life of Stone Claw Grove.  
Midwest, Classic Rock, and compulsive brows hum a requiem for perspectives. Long bus rides through a post-industrial Gothic  
*Singer's Guide to Self-Defense* drifts between story lines and An irreducible collage, as intuitive as it is formal, *The Karaoke*

options and murky desires.  
Jesse has never known how old he is. They each cope with limited wig a haircut. Norman is not prepared to take over his father's club. splintered memories. Will bathes his grandmother. Mel gives her Reunited for a funeral and leery of one another, a family compares



“For all this novel's depth of story, and that story's grip and wealthy undercurrents, Tim Kinsella's rushing, trippily meticulous prose is so exciting to follow that the story seems as much the novel's soundtrack and topography as it is the point. A thorough and wildly distinctive read.” -Dennis Cooper, Author of *The Marbled Swarm*

the blood-beat under each tip's husk, two small smiles and a soft frown under each finger, his hands made her sick. Their smell made her sick.

It's a long walk in the cold. Rush hour's line of lights. All these each had a place to be? Pinch me awake or just point, lost in an endless parking-garage maze, lost in the corn outside of town, just point. It's a long walk out here in the cold.

What loving evolutionary impulse sprouted opposable thumbs if not the need to pinch one's self awake? As many dreams as there could ever be, there must be exactly that many ways to wake up.

His fingers never asked anything of him but to be kept out of dark places, down drains, between rocks. They needed only to see where they were going. In return, they should point or pinch, not only clench.

Tammy ate pickles with her frozen pizzas. He'd help her do the dishes in the bathtub. She had a proper way to crack an egg, a recipe for ice cubes.

He was five, six years old. Nana's backdoor slowly faded closed. He was just steps behind his sister running, running, hopped the couple stairs from the garage, turned the hall and through the kitchen. But the door clicked shut as he hit it. He shot his little claw through the pane, each digit, up past his wrist, hit with thousands of blistering hot pins.

Yeah, put through a glass door, manual sex, broke a glass—Will would no longer take this history of his American signature for granted.

more analogous to that of an opiate abuser, eventually though not measurable in such terms, came to be the drink to feel the same drunk. Will's tolerance, after a while, might come to need three or four times amounts of pain to yield the same rush. A drinker, learned resistance, he needed greater and greater dependence. His tolerance, like anything, the body's compared to satiating the needs of his ever deepening But the vanity of the parking lots meant nothing computer time he'd signed up for at the library.

but sometimes didn't know what else to do with the "Awesome power," "Relentless," He tried not to look, on street fight message boards, "Astonishing grace," unique according to the specific challenge he faced, argued his technique, his intuitive strategy and passion People recorded every fight. Posted them online and montage sequence.

actually in battle, to truly experience time pass as in a scene near the beginning of *Conan*, equally pleased to identify himself as a barbarian of pre-history and while him. He thought of himself as living out the montage arrived. Challengers traveled from nearby towns to find lots of the various bars, people applauding when he days. Will had become a local celebrity in the parking The high of the mysterious single blow lingered for heading home.

He sat down in his car, sat a long while stunned before bent, held the pose, stood and looked around smiling. his balance. He opened the car door again, held it open, wind rushing in his ears forced him to concentrate on

requiring twenty-five or as much as a hundred times the original amount.

And this single blow at the factory-church, the shock, dropping from the sky and then nothing, maybe it was a trap. He tried to shake the thrill, distracted for days, but couldn't. He had to return to the factory-church, try to figure out what had happened.

Sunday morning, children scampering off during the post-Mass mingle climbed a short stack of railroad-ties, found a tooth among the gravel.

Will once thought himself solved, briefly. Tammy. Didn't she solve him, couldn't she? She'd easily, without effort it seemed, explained him to himself. Cornered him, daring vulnerability. But the ultimate lack, the self-absorption pulling inward toward the hollow like a drain, not possibly language enough to fill it, promises made smiling, grotesque. No codes, no destinies, empty, Will left with his silly fists.

It was a good name for him. He always liked it, free will. If he had to turn his head, if there must be a sound he couldn't help but turn his head toward will, it was good, free will. Funny, the only sound he had no choice but to respond to, a muscle decision, will was a funny word.

It embarrassed him about Tammy, about how he thought he felt. Must've been some misunderstanding,

a case of mistaken identity, projection, imagined ease, a simulation. He understood "will," but how he had thought he felt, too abstract, stupid. He preferred hunger, the uprising to the revolution.

He had learned to allow her to touch him, but then the stakeouts, ringing a strange doorbell at four in the morning, the shame. He had only one photo of Tammy, a photo booth. On his lap, she was too far foregrounded to remain in focus, and his big, dumb smile.

In seeking to repeat their perfect harmonious ambiguity he'd mistaken dull satisfaction, manic desire, flattery, total pussy, perfect technique, the acceptance of others, drama, spit, content habit, specific conditions, awkward cohabitation, and even pity. But it was a state, passing, a passage. No possible outcome but feeling made a fool of, not good enough for his own hunches.

He could no longer accept the intuitive hunt. He needed new intuitions. Self-consciousness of the hunt insured the hunt's failure. Commit to quiet, commit to quiet or accept the shame vulnerability inevitably opens up into.

So he got quiet, five years above The Saigon Restaurant in southeast Ohio, worth it just to say it every morning, "Saigon, shit. I'm still only in Saigon." Especially funny those first days enduring the strange withdrawal symptoms of compulsive fighting, hardly able to crawl out of bed, but never able to stretch enough. Worked nights at the in-patient home until the temptation to fight back against the patients got

down. The thick mustard colored skin around his nails, from a pay phone at the self-storage. Tell her to come always smelled like a deep fryer. He would call her Tammy lived in an apartment by the highway that to learn there was no mayo on hand.

getting a hot dog each for dinner was so disappointed to ask for an application. A Native American family grabbed a bag of "traditional fruit snacks," too ashamed the association followed him. In the bright store, he shame from back home, the olive-skinned blond kid, figured he could work at a convenience store. But the down spread eagle on a hot grill got to be too distracting. After quitting hood cleaning, the temptation to flop turkey spider-soldiers he commanded intuitively.

hands, granite symmetrical turkeys, symmetrical across his palms, are handprints symmetrical? His crisscrossed in cuts and slashes. The shallow canyons of his, banners nicotine yellow and dry as salt flats, Tammy hated his hands, those disgusting hands back at the bus station.

through morning rush hour by then, slept sitting up and got turned around and walked past Tammy's, Carroll Motel but couldn't face it. Walked and walked got lost. They sent him away. Thought about The from the bus station to the strip club to find his sister. Got to town, home for one long day, walked directly grill and sizzles, the constant balancing act.

water up into the hood, it drips back down on to the balancing on a step ladder above hot grills, spraying to be too distracting. Found work as a hood cleaner,