

Me & Sylvia Plath

by Con Chapman



Plath, me: If you close your eyes, you can't tell us apart.

Readers of a certain age will remember how, in the wake of President Kennedy's assassination, a list of eerie parallels between his life and death and that of Abraham Lincoln began to circulate. Kennedy's secretary was named Lincoln, Lincoln's secretary was

named Kennedy; both were succeeded by a Southern Vice President named “Johnson”; Lincoln's assassin ran from a theatre to a warehouse, Kennedy's from a warehouse to a theatre, and so on.

I was fascinated by the list at the time, in part because Kennedy's assassination was the death knell for my pitch-perfect impersonation of our first Roman Catholic president. I, like comedian Vaughn Meader, suddenly had to come up with some new shtick, dealing a permanent setback to the progress of my artistic development, from which our nation has yet to recover.



Vaughn Meader

I hadn't thought much about that period of intense speculation in my life until the 150th anniversary of the Gettysburg Address and the 50th anniversary of Kennedy's assassination occurred within three days of each other this fall (ANOTHER simultaneity!). And the most recent in a improbable series of events that has been haunting me for some time; the remarkable parallels between my life and that of Sylvia Plath.

Consider: Plath lived in Wellesley, Massachusetts—I lived in Wellesley, Massachusetts.

Plath was a published poet—I'm a published poet.

Plath won a guest editor position at *Mademoiselle* magazine. I used to read *Mademoiselle* in my dad's women's clothing store as I

waited for him after basketball practice. (Check out the fashion “Do's and Don'ts”).

Plath's work appeared in *The Boston Herald*. My work appears in *The Boston Herald*.



Plath wrote a thinly-disguised *roman a clef*, *The Bell Jar*. I've written a thinly-disguised *roman a clef*, *Making Partner*.

A character in *The Bell Jar* picks a piece of lettuce from a salad and eats it with his fingers. I've done the same thing!

Plath was married and had two children. *I'm* married and have two children.

Getting spooky, isn't it?

Plath worked at Lookout Farm in South Natick, Mass. *I* represented the owner of Lookout Farm when he went into bankruptcy, an episode that I've chronicled in *The Sylvia Plath Foreclosure Sale*.

But now it gets even weirder.

Recently, just as I was about to write the whole thing off as mere coincidence, a poem of mine—"Feline Impediments to a Sunday Nap"—was accepted by *The Christian Science Monitor*. It's the first time I've ever sold a poem, so after many years of trying I can finally say I'm a member of the highly-lucrative guild of professional versifiers. I might have to join Poetic Arts Local 292, Somerville, Mass., and watch some of my hard-earned money go to keep fat-cat, do-nothing union bosses in pinky rings—but it'll be worth it.

But that's not the creepiest part. You want to know who Plath sold *her* first poem to?

I'll give you three guesses—first two don't count.

(cue spooky music) The . . . Christian . . . Science . . . Monitor.

"Bitter Strawberries," which you can access at neuroticpoets.com, was about the strawberries at Lookout Farm. *The same strawberries I tried to save from foreclosure!*



Lookout Farm: Spooky!

If the hairs on the back of your neck aren't standing up now, you should probably see a doctor—you may already be dead.

I don't want to over-emphasize the similarities between me and Plath, because in some respects we are very different. For instance, she wrote gloomy, depressing poetry that makes you think life isn't worth living.

I, on the other hand, write family-friendly light verse that makes you think life isn't worth living.

Still, to the skeptics reading this, I have one question:

Have you ever seen me and Sylvia Plath in the same room?

I didn't think so.

