

**Lyrics for**  
**DONT LOOK BACK**  
Jenny Olivia Johnson  
Innova 925

**DOLLAR BEERS (REDONDO BEACH '96)**  
*text by Jenny Olivia Johnson*

Dollar beers  
Come on down  
To Redondo  
I'll be waiting for you  
Don't look up  
Don't look back  
How far can you go  
Til I can't see you  
Dollar beers  
And half-off shots  
Young girls will go missing  
The DJ is spinning  
I'm spinning  
You're missing it all  
You're missing it all

**PILOT**  
*text by Jenny Olivia Johnson, including quotations from interviews with the Andes survivors, and fragments of Alfred Lord Tennyson's "Crossing the Bar"*

INTERVIEWER / GHOST WIFE (soprano 1)  
We are going to talk  
Not about what happened at the mountains  
Not about external facts  
We are going to talk about the things that happened inside of you  
About the person you were, and the person you are  
About the things that changed in your relationship with the world  
And life  
And the things that remained as they were, before the accident.  
Is this okay?

SURVIVOR (soprano 2)  
Why?  
Don't ask why  
I am still breathing  
I am still alive  
Don't ask why...

INTERVIEWER

Where?

SURVIVOR

On the mountain

INTERVIEWER

How?

SURVIVOR

We were starving

And God, we were delirious

What we did will stay with us

When we die

INTERVIEWER (becomes GHOST WIFE)

I hope to see my pilot

Face to face

GHOST WIFE+SURVIVOR

When I cross

The bar

No sadness, no farewell

No sadness

When I cross the bar

When I cross the bar

GHOST WIFE

I'll be with God

I'll be with God

I'll leave a beautiful body

My body, don't love this body

Don't love me

You'll lose too much

I'll leave you

I'll leave you here

SURVIVOR

No farewell...

GHOST WIFE

I'll leave you here all alone

I'll leave you

I'll leave you here

I'll leave you here, no farewell  
I'll leave you my body...  
Use me  
Use me  
Use me

SURVIVOR

To stay alive  
To stay alive

GHOST WIFE

Use me  
My body  
Given for you

GHOST WIFE+SURVIVOR

Remissionem  
Peccatorum  
Peccatorum...

**CUTTER**

*text by Jenny Olivia Johnson*

Five  
Seven  
Nine  
Seven  
Five  
Seven  
Five  
Seven  
Nine  
Seven  
Five  
Seven  
Five  
Seven  
Nine million  
Nine trillion  
Nine million  
Nine million  
Five trillion  
Seven billion  
How many?  
How many?

How many scars?  
None to speak of  
Please  
It doesn't hurt  
Don't make me stop

### **STARLING**

*text by Jenny Olivia Johnson, including quotations by Jonathan Sterne and Edgar Allan Poe, and fragments (de minimis) from "Lolita" by Vladimir Nabokov*

There are two kinds of memory  
One with your eyes open  
The other when you evoke  
A ghost  
A face  
I'm free again  
in your eyes, my love,  
I am free, I am free

(I talk in a daze  
I walk in a maze  
I'm trapped in a cage  
I can't get out)

Was it then, was it then?  
That the rift in my life began?  
A fatal summer  
A sunny blur  
A face that froze my mind  
That froze all time  
Was it then, was it then?  
That the rift in my life began?

*[I was interrupted in the heyday of this soliloquy, with a voice which I took to be of a child, which complained "it could not get out."—I look'd up and down the passage, and seeing neither man, woman, nor child, I went out without further attention. In my return back through the passage, I heard the same words repeated twice over; and looking up, I saw it was a starling hung in a little cage—"I can't get out—I can't get out," said the starling. I stood looking at the bird: and to every person who came through the passage it ran fluttering to the side towards which they approach'd it, with the same lamentation of its captivity—"I can't get out," said the starling—God help thee! said I—but I'll let thee out, cost what it will; so I turned about the cage to get to the door; it was twisted and double twisted so fast with wire, there was no getting it open without pulling the cage to pieces—I took both hands to it. The bird flew to the place where I was attempting his deliverance, and thrusting his head through the trellis, pressed his*

*breast against it, as if impatient—I fear, poor creature! said I, I cannot set thee at liberty— "No," said the starling—"I can't get out—I can't get out," said the starling. I vow, I never had my affections more tenderly awakened; nor do I remember an incident in my life, where the dissipated spirits to which my reason had been a bubble were so suddenly called home. Mechanical as the notes were, yet so true in tune to nature were they chanted, that in one moment they overthrew all my systematic reasonings....and I heavily walked up-stairs unsaying every word I had said in going down them.]*

Wanted:

Wanted:

I was a child  
The angels envied us  
And so I lie  
Wanting

I lie  
by her side  
I lie  
I fly...

[wanted]

[wanted]

[wanted]

[and the rest is]

[and the rest is]

[and the rest is]

## **THE AFTER TIME**

an opera in progress; text by Jenny Olivia Johnson

### 1. DANCING

*A college ballet class, women only. ERICA FEIGN, prompt, neat, professional, and clearly somewhat depressed, watches as LUCY SPELLMAN, a gorgeous and edgy-looking classmate, enters the class late (but not in a hurry) and takes her time joining the others in warm-ups, looking generally spaced out (perhaps hung over, and about half a joint's worth of high). ERICA has been watching*

*LUCY for weeks; she has become bitterly obsessed with the girl. There's just something about her.*

ERICA

I can't decide  
Are you high?  
Or just dumb?  
I've never seen a pretty girl  
Look so undone  
Your eyes are dead  
Your body moves like in a dream  
A jagged ghost-trail Inhabiting this mirrored scene  
Why do I care  
That when you look away from me I feel destroyed?  
Your gorgeous haste  
Your fucked-up face  
I can't abide  
Your sidelong glance  
Your sullen stance  
Your hazy eyes  
Your fucked-up hair  
Why do I care?

*(ERICA accidentally bumps into LUCY)*

ERICA (awkwardly)

Hi....

*(ERICA enters a dream state, watching LUCY dance. The studio darkens, and they appear to be the only two people in the room.)*

ERICA

But when  
You move  
When  
You move  
When  
You move  
Something  
Happens to me  
I don't know...  
I've never felt these things  
I don't know...  
I don't know  
What's  
Happened to me...

To me  
I've never felt these things.

*(ERICA's dreamstate gradually fades, and the original studio lighting and population returns, as does ERICA's melancholy.)*

ERICA

I can't decide  
Why it is  
I think of you  
When you're not even in the room  
Where do you go?  
When you leave here  
I feel my life  
Stops in time  
When I leave here  
I'll follow you... I'll follow you...  
Look at me  
Don't look at me, my fucked-up face, your gorgeous face  
What do I want?  
What do I need from – you?  
What do I need from you?  
What do I need?

*(Silently, the ballet instructor pulls LUCY aside and asks her to demonstrate a delicate solo. As ERICA watches, she admits to herself what she has been feeling at last.)*

ERICA

You are the most beautiful thing I've ever seen.

## 2. DRINKING

*Some unspecified time later, ERICA FEIGN is joined by police officers on the roof of the college dormitory in grey early morning. They are investigating the mysterious death of LUCY SPELLMAN, who fell to her death. ERICA was apparently there at the time, but she was too drunk to remember how or why it happened. The police don't seem to believe her.*

ERICA (ashen, traumatized)

Yes,  
I've been up here before  
On this roof  
Yes, I was up here  
I was up here

That night, with her  
With her--yes, yes, I was--  
You won't understand this, but--  
What I remember is just this:  
I was drunk, drunk on something, I don't know--  
She was touching, touching my face--  
Yes, she was talking, talking about something from her past,  
but all I know is she was touching, touching me--  
My mind became a body--  
A body--  
No words, just touch, just taste, just scent, just touch, taste, scent, no words--  
No words--  
Just a body  
A body  
No words, just touch, just taste—  
I fell asleep  
In her hands  
And woke up here alone  
Alone...  
She was gone....

### 3. FALLING

*ERICA imagines LUCY—once a beautiful dancer with a clearly tragic past—falling to her death. In a way it feels like her own death. Her meditation on this tragedy becomes first a confession of love, and then mutual recognition and understanding. We leave ERICA and this fragmented story with many unanswered questions about what really happened that night on the roof.*

#### ERICA AND LUCY

You are the most beautiful thing I've ever seen  
You are the most beautiful thing I've ever seen  
You are the most beautiful thing I've ever seen  
You--you--you--you are  
You, you are happening to me  
The most beautiful thing  
I've ever seen  
I can't unsee  
You--you--you--you--  
You happened to me  
I can't unsee  
You happened, happened, happened, happened to me  
You happened to me  
Happened to me  
I can't, I can't unsee



See

Your body--body--fallen

Fallen at--my feet

I've fallen--fallen down--at your—

At your feet

I've fallen

I've fallen at your feet

I can't-- I can't--

I can't--unsee—

I can't be Free...

Free...

Free...

Free.