

**The Song Between  
Her Legs  
Lance Manion**

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“Starting a book with a good quote is important.”

-Lance Manion

ALSO BY LANCE MANION

**Merciful Flush**  
**Results May Vary**  
**The Ball Washer**  
**Homo sayswhaticus**  
**The Trembling Fist**

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## Introduction

The first thing you must be wondering is why the cover of this book is so crappy. Well, I'll tell you. I threw this together quickly to give the general idea of what I wanted as the cover but the more I thought about it the more I wanted the cover to look crappy. I wanted it to scream SELF PUBLISHED. I didn't want to pretend that this book is something that aspired to be read by the masses.

I know what you're probably asking yourself ... "Doesn't he know that most people judge a book by its cover?"

Believe me, I do. But most people won't enjoy this book. It's definitely a book geared more for the people that don't judge a book by its cover. Over the years I've had publishers and agents contact me with helpful advice and tips on how to improve my writing and be more accessible to the general public and they always seem at a complete loss when I tell them to piss off. They just can't process that someone doesn't want to be a best seller.

Just because there isn't a demand for obscure writers doesn't mean there isn't a need.

I know my limitations. I am incapable of writing some epic, transcendent story about fabulous people doing fabulous things, meticulously researched and rich in detail. I'm literally struggling to get through this introduction.

How long do these stupid things have to be anyway?

And yes, I know that you probably figured out that not judging a book by its cover is also a form of judging a book by its cover.

Life is funny. And dumb. And sad. And scary and absurd and rude and weird. That's pretty much all I'm trying to capture. The human experience is wildly erratic and I won't pretend otherwise.

Here's the thing ... if I could sing I'd have much rather been a songwriter. If I could draw I'd have much rather been a cartoonist. I can't do either so here you sit reading an introduction to a book that is one corn dog away from being an odd little carnival tucked away where you least expect it.

I hope you enjoy some of the rides.

## **a stinging bug by any other name**

The other day it was partly cloudy, which doesn't make a great opening line but it does go a long way in explaining why when a bug landed on my nose it couldn't be said to have been "out of the blue." It was partly cloudy ... as I just mentioned. Rarely does a bug land on someone's nose "out of the partly cloudy."

I like to believe that I've evolved as a human being because I reacted very differently than I did the last time a bug landed on that particular spot. The last time I acted under the false premise that my nose was constructed with indestructible titanium and not the very structible bundle of nerve endings that it actually comprised.

I slugged myself right in the nose and left it all red and swollen and was forced to walk around the rest of the day sporting this testament to my poor decision-making.

The problem then, as it was the other partly cloudy day, is that while the bug did not wear the distinctive yellow and black colors of the notorious villains of the insect world, it sat on the end of my nose and, while my eyes are outstanding at gathering information from a variety of distances, the close proximity made the bug blurry.

Try as I might I could not make heads nor tails of what exactly was perched on the end of my snout.

This is where being a writer makes one susceptible to unfortunate flights of fancy. While most people would stop at a small number of insect suspects, the writer, given his or her training, can come up with a cornucopia of winged menaces that could have hypothetically plopped down and made themselves at home.

I guess this is a cautionary tale of sorts.

Everybody thinks they can write and most people aspire on some level to put the ol' pen to paper and take it for a spin on behalf of their fellow man. What they don't appreciate is the terrible toll it takes on your imagination. Scientifically speaking, I believe every time you think of a new odd idea you build a new neural pathway. You make a new connection which in turn allows you to make a similar odd connection more easily the next time the desire for weirdness takes hold. The odder you start to think the easier it is to continue to think of odder and odder things until such a time as you are sitting at a dinner party making small talk when all of a sudden you look up to find everyone else at the table staring at you with their mouths wide open in shock and bewilderment at what you thought was a pretty innocuous observation.

Some people don't think this part through, the dangers that lurk in thinking oddly. Once you slip to the odd side, it's a long road back. Book signings might be tedious but they are nothing compared to the horror show of lying awake at night staring at the ceiling with a writer's mind.

So instead of lashing out in fear I took a composed breath and tried to imagine all the whimsical circumstances that could have brought this noble creature to my nose. All of a sudden I was one with the universe. Connected with all living things. How two separate but equal beings such as me and this blurry little fellow could have found our paths entwined began to play out my head in great detail. Each scenario getting progressively more poignant.

I slowly pointed my head towards where the sun would have been, had it not been partly cloudy, as if showing the universe that I was a much better person than the last

time I punched myself in the face. I was beaming and imagining my friend doing a little basking itself.

Perhaps I'd truly found some deeper appreciation of the beauty of life in all its many forms.

That's when the insect stung me and left my nose all red and swollen.

Well played, universe. Well played.

## lost in transmutation

If people hibernated then I'm sure there would be a medical term for what Greg had but as Greg was a frog and people don't hibernate I'll just have to describe it as best I can.

Disappointed in the name Greg for a frog? Expecting him to be called something whimsical like Gribbit?

Be reasonable. First of all, there are literally millions and millions of frogs and they can't have all names that are whimsical. Second, if you take a moment to examine the existence of a frog you'll find a decided lack of whimsy in their lives. Granted they start off as tadpoles and it's tough to top that if you're looking for whimsy, what with the tail and the swimming around and all, but eventually the tail departs, to be replaced by legs, as they move from an aquatic lifestyle to a more half and half land approach, and after that they are strictly business.

So, the condition Greg was afflicted with ...

Although perhaps the word afflicted is a bit harsh. While it did drive him a bit mad, it could be argued that the thoughts that run through the heads of both people and frogs are really the only proof that we exist at all and thus this so-called "affliction" added at least thirty five to forty percent to Greg's existence.

His condition was this: while all of his amphibious comrades slipped deep into the mud and went to sleep for the winter months, Greg slipped into the mud and was awake the entire time.

A bit of a mixed blessing.

It made him a very odd frog when he eventually popped out of the mud and rejoined his brethren but nobody could argue that he wasn't a pretty bright frog. He'd had plenty of time to think through some issues that in the course of a typical frog year most frogs didn't have time to mull over. Frogs seem to be on the menu for almost every animal out and about in the warmer months so much of their time is spent hopping for their lives and trying to squeeze in a few worms and flies when the opportunities present themselves. Buried safely in the mud allowed Greg some peace and quiet his slimy pals didn't have available to them.

I realize at this juncture that you might be guilty of anthropomorphizing Greg to such a degree that you have him inventing things and walking erect and such but let me slow your roll a bit and remind you that he was still a frog. A really smart frog is still not as smart as really dumb raccoon and I've yet to be walking through a wooded area and see a small raccoon factory belching out black smoke and producing tiny wheelbarrows or raccoon footwear.

You're still probably dizzy with the earlier whimsy of tadpole imagery and thinking this story is destined to end up a Disney flick.

Let's try to collect ourselves and get back to Greg shall we?

For although nothing about his condition indicated that he would end up the beloved star of an animated movie, Greg had seen some things that no other frog, that he was aware of, had seen.

Snow for starters.

Every few years the ground would warm up noticeably and he would slither up topside while the rest of his frog compatriots slept blissfully unaware that there was a

break in the cold action. Greg would emerge and see the grey skies and naked trees of winter but the temperature made it safe to sluggishly move around.

And while sluggishly moving around, he would occasionally see lumps of this white stuff he'd never seen before. When he got closer he could feel the chill radiating off it. Being a very wise frog he knew not to get too close because there were still hawks flying around and they could, whether it would make sense to them at the time or not, see a green frog against a white background from miles away.

The first time he'd seen it he couldn't wait to report back to all the other frogs but the following spring, when he told them of his discovery, they laughed and croaked derisive things about him so he never said another word about it.

So seasons came and went and Greg spent his winter months deep in mud and thought while simultaneously trying not to go out of his mind.

Then one December the temperatures suddenly shot up and he emerged to find the air temperature similar to a typical spring day. His blood started to flow more quickly and he made short work of exploring the frog-less world around him.

Or so he thought anyway.

For there, sitting on a section of pond still covered in ice, was another frog.

A young lady frog.

And quite a looker. Legs that went on for days. He thought he remembered her name was Amy and she had just lost her tail the previous spring.

Almost on queue he saw a hawk high above them take notice of her and he leapt into action. Please note that the fact that Greg was a frog and he happened to be leaping into action was entirely accidental and one of the more pleasant side-effects of not knowing what the next word in the story might be until it's typed.

He let out a well-timed croak and Amy was able to slip safely into the chilly water and make her escape. Moments later she slowly crawled up to Greg to croak back her thanks. Greg could think of no better way to get introduced to a female and felt his confidence grow with each suave observation he made about their winter environment. She took it all in like an eager student. They spent two solid days above ground before the temperatures started to sink again and signaled it was time to once again slide deep into the earth and wait things out.

Two magical days.

Amy was just happy to know that she wasn't the only frog who couldn't get to sleep.

Greg found himself appreciating probability and circumstances more than he could ever remember.

It was the first time he could remember burrowing where he was already anticipating the trip back topside. His heart was fluttering away, remembering sliding up to Amy just before they went their separate ways. If ever a frog felt debonair it was then. Their enormous eyes almost touching. Whispering to her and hoping that she understood.

"I have to be leaving ... but I won't let that come between us, okay?"

## the pep talk

I was never a natural athlete. Whatever gifts of hand-to-eye coordination, strength or speed that were ladled out to my peers via DNA somehow gave me a miss. Nowhere was this more on display than when I participated in youth baseball.

I don't want to get all *Wonder Years* on you but somehow it seems unavoidable. That little wave of nostalgia that washes over me when I think about grabbing the ol' bat and ball and heading out to the ballpark has me longing for a simpler time when all I wanted was a root beer and a corn dog.

And a girl to touch my penis.

Sorry. No need for that. Penis-touching aside, there was nothing about my baseball experience that would help me convince any girl that my penis was something to aspire to touching. That last sentence proving once again that try as you might to put penis-touching aside, you simply cannot. Truth is, at the age I was during this story, penis-touching probably wasn't even on the menu but that's yet another example of how I have a nasty habit of working penis-touching into stories even when it's not relevant. With a hyphen no less. The hyphen is where I feel I really crossed the line.

Back to the story with the usual apologies.

I was the complete package ... I could neither pitch, hit nor catch. I couldn't even figure out the point of the brim on my hat. Sure it kept the sun out of your eyes when you were looking forwards but as soon as you lifted your head to try and see a fly ball the sun immediately overwhelmed your retina and had you covering up your head and backpedaling away from the site where the small leather meteor was plummeting to Earth with ill intent.

It wasn't as if my father hadn't done his best to prepare me for baseball. Just before my first practice, he dragged me to a local pizza place that had a few batting cages out back to work on my swing. He quickly bypassed the 30 mph and the 50 mph options and threw a few coins into the 70 mph machine. Having done that, he grabbed a bat and a helmet- safety first in the ol' Manion household- and strode confidently to the plate.

He looked me right in the eye. "You can't have fear in your heart when you approach the plate so let's get this over with right now." I heard the pitching machine growling away in the background as he leaned forward into danger zone and I knew at once he meant to get intentionally hit by the ball to drive home whatever lesson he was cooking up in his head. "There are worse things than pain. For instance ... a restless heart." Before I could ask him what he meant by that, the ball came hurtling forward and fractured his humerus. Despite the name of this bone, there is nothing funny about damaging it. I concluded this as I, and all the families gathered at the pizza place, listened to a smorgasbord of profanity that would have had a longshoreman covering his ears.

My dad was in a cast for the first six weeks of my season. A grim reminder of the suffering that can be inflicted by even the smallest of objects.

During the first practice it became clear that the coach would be assigning positions based on the size of the truck each child arrived in. Until that time I was completely unaware of the thriving lumberjack community our town must have been harboring. A few of them appeared to have paid extra just to have the vehicle unnecessarily belch black fumes into the air upon command. By the time our station wagon roared down the

dirt road there was barely room enough for my mom to park between the collection of phallic-mobiles.

Being keenly aware of the subtleties of language, I quickly noticed that while my coached instructed the other players to “play” second base or “play” centerfield, I was always asked to “go out” to left field. I quickly vowed that I would “go out” there to the best of my ability so as not to disappoint him.

The wooden bat that I had purchased with my own money was sneered at by my peers so I scooped up one of the aluminum ones, or whatever space-age material it was made of, to take batting practice only to find that this space-age material was scientifically designed to transfer the energy from the pitch to your hands, should you be unlucky enough to make even the slightest contact with a pitched ball. The results would have your hands burning with the white-hot intensity of a thousand suns.

For the record, listening to some of the parents doing their best Tom Hanks “There’s no crying in baseball” impersonations every time I fouled one off did little by way of making me appreciate the movie *A League of Their Own*.

I remember the events leading up to my little pep talk like they happened yesterday. It was during a practice when I was having particular difficulties doing anything right. Any ball headed in my general direction did so with the complete certitude that it was in no danger of being caught. Each grounder and pop up had an almost palpable arrogance to them, as if they knew that they were going to reach their intended destination with no meddling from my glove.

It was after a tenth ball in a row had seemed to defy physics and make its way through my glove and into the vast expanses behind me when the coach seemed to feel the need to pull everybody together and address the team.

“I want everyone to take a look at Lance. Here is a kid that can’t catch a ball to save his life. His fielding skill seems to defy all laws of probability; a bystander would assume that if enough balls came his way that at least one would make its way into his glove ... and yet none do. In fact, the only thing worse than his fielding is his hitting.

“Why do I point this out? Because he still makes every practice and he still shows up to every game. He doesn’t let the fact that every one of his teammates and every one of their parents and every coach, including myself, secretly hopes he’ll miss one deter him. Just one.”

He paused and got a far-away look in his eyes before continuing.

“But he never does. Ever. Every friggin’ game I’m forced to find a spot for him on the field and every game we can look forward to him striking out three or four times. Sometimes during critical at-bats. But does he quit? Nope.

“Why do I point this out? I’m not sure. It’s just watching him play the game of baseball makes me so angry at the universe that I simply couldn’t stand by and not say something.”

Practice then resumed.

The next game, fueled by this inspirational pep talk, I decided to take one for the team and get hit by a pitch. Years later I would understand more fully what my dad meant about a restless heart but, as I lay there in a pool of my own blood with two of my teeth knocked clean out of my head, I would briefly question his conclusion vis-à-vis getting hit with a pitch.

## killing a bird

While I would love to regale you with a charming coming-of-age story, I'm afraid the facts surrounding this particular one preclude that. Had I been ten or eleven when the events I'm about to chronicle occurred, there might have been a chance but, given I was nineteen at the time, chances are you're not going to find it endearing.

The lessons learned from the forthcoming narrative should have been learned long beforehand but taking into consideration they weren't might allow a little sympathy towards me to creep in.

When my college roommate suggested we buy a BB gun you would think that all my "nothing good can come of this" bells would be ringing up a storm but you have to understand that while my "gathering" skills were unmatched, I had yet to explore the "hunting" side of my psyche. While it was true that it wasn't the first time I had held a weapon, it was also true that the previous weapon had been nun chucks and after hours of practice the only thing that was in any possible danger of getting harmed were my elbows and the occasional lamp.

As is inevitable when dealing with all thing male, shooting at bottles and cans soon became tedious for reasons that might escape the typical female. I am careful to say "aiming" as opposed to "shooting" because "shooting" infers that the aforementioned were hit from time to time. Try as we might, as close as we crept, we were unable to hit a single bottle or can. We put them up as targets and then twenty minutes later we took them down unscathed.

We had bigger fish to fry.

It was time to hunt.

While we didn't apply war paint to our faces before departing we did pretend to. The village needed food and it was up to us to oblige.

My friend took a couple unsuccessful shots at a squirrel and cursed the breeze and the faulty manufacturing facility where his BB gun was made. Moments later a blue jay landed on a branch about thirty feet above my head. I aimed and pulled the trigger and was about to curse the breeze and the faulty manufacturing facility where my BB gun was made when I saw the blue jay fall from the tree like a plastic thing.

No final chirp, no twitching. It fell like the dead thing it was. The dead thing I'd made it.

To this day I remember watching it fall. Remember walking up to it as my roommate congratulated me. The sincere admiration in his voice. I remember, as if it just happened, looking down at the corpse.

When I hear about these new 3-D printers I know in my heart that when they have the ability to take images directly from my head that I will be able to recreate every feather on that blue jay.

I couldn't tell you the name of my high school prom date or my first drink or even where I lived at the time of this hunting expedition but I can picture that bird laying there with complete clarity.

So I talked early on about the lessons that come from such an experience. I can spin it however I want but the truth that was revealed was that I am a pussy. I am a gatherer.

I should be back at the village with the rest of the women grinding corn and whatever the hell else Indians eat.

I tried using my intellect to rationalize the killing. I told myself that I had no doubt saved the lives of hundreds of worms. Each of them free to go on and procreate and have little worms. When I thought about it, I was the Oskar Schindler of the *Amyntas alexandri* crowd. Somehow being the hero of all things slimy and spineless seemed appropriate.

This fucking bird now lives in my head. He visits me when I get too happy or too full of myself. A ghost that lives in my stomach and his fluttering is felt as an ache.

The funny thing is- if you find irony funny- is that, although I've never held a weapon since, I don't think I'd have much trouble shooting a person. Maybe irony isn't the word for it.

Maybe I didn't learn dick. About having a dick. Or being a dick.

## the hanging bit

Sometimes I get so frustrated with this little thing hanging between my legs. The grief and drama it causes.

Then I laugh at the absurdity of it all. Not just the fact that that it's hanging there in the first place but the whole body. The appendages jutting out all over the place, the anus sitting right next to the little hanging thing, the nose, hair, the whole package.

How absurd we are.

We think we are so special in the universe but I'm pretty sure there is a lot of other sentient life put together a lot better than we are.

And this damn hanging bit.

Half the people on the planet have a hole in them that seems to be a perfect fit for my little hanging bit but it's never that simple. Sure, they all feel the same but somehow I want to stick my hanging bit in a particular hole. Even "want" is a poor way to describe it at times.

Need.

And why? They all feel the same.

Don't give me the evolutionary imperative line. I know we are born with the drive of spreading our seed but that is simply the engine that moves the metaphorical vehicle. Procreation doesn't explain everything. Our minds, our ego, play a huge and senseless part. A cute woman could be wearing an "I'm infertile" t-shirt and there would still be lines around the block to have a shot at her rig.

So evolution gave us a motor but no steering wheel.

And why does it feel so good to play with if it is just a means to an end? If you stretched the nerve endings on the tip of my hanging bit endings-to-end I'm pretty sure they would travel the moon and back at least a half dozen times. Funny we would call them "endings" in the first place, they are usually just the beginning.

All of this sensory overload would seem to scream "Any hole will do!" but it doesn't work that way.

Don't get me started on the hole either. What a mess that thing is. How could evolution come up with something as beautiful and complicated as the human eye and then produce the hole? The hanging bit might not be a treat for the eyes but the hole looks like evolution was just exhausted from working on the eye and decided to turn in early. You can almost see it throwing up its just-recently-completed hands and saying "Good enough. We'll come back to that in a few hundred thousand years when we're done growing the head a bit more. The downstairs plumbing will have to suffice. They'll just have to live with the bouquet."

But my hanging bit desires it just the same.

I sometimes sit back and wonder what great advances humanity would have made if we didn't have such voracious sex drives. So many brilliant minds (I'm obviously not including mine amongst those) spending so much of their day worried about their hanging bits. I'll wager every known disease would be a thing of the past if men could spend just a few clear-headed days without the shadow of their penis hanging over them. We'd be flying around in environmentally-friendly solar cars, our life spans would be doubled and college and professional athletes wouldn't have to continually spend big bucks getting themselves found not guilty of rape charges.

What a wonderful world it would be.

But instead we all wallow in the bleak reality of the hanging bit. Chasing the momentary release of shooting a batch of DNA into the depths of some hole that is usually lying there seeking completely different objectives, collapsing back dazed like the guy who suddenly wakes up with a start and realizes he's been a werewolf all night. Except instead of mauling people to death he's been crashing around making poor decisions, promises and mistakes.

“What have I done? What have I done?! That wasn't me. That was my hanging bit!”

All these lamentations falling on deaf-and-expecting-to-be-taken-out-to-an-expensive-dinner ears as the poor creature tries to drift off to sleep figuring out why hole and whole and hold and holy all sound the same but are so damned different.

Sometimes I get so frustrated with this little thing hanging between my legs. I can't help feel that putting the anus right next to it was poetic justice.

## Mr. Peanut

(first appeared at [potluckmag.com](http://potluckmag.com) 6/3/14)

It took a minute to clear my head. The last thing I remembered was a long fall and then suddenly I was sitting in the dust in the middle of what appeared to be a movie set based loosely on the Old West. Damned if there weren't tumbleweeds rolling past and all.

I stood up and found I was parched. My lips felt like little pieces of cracked leather and my throat was raw. As much as I wanted to cough and get rid of the dust that had found its way to my mouth I didn't dare.

"Go on, check the well."

I heard a voice behind me. I turned to see a man leaning against what appeared to be an old saloon. His face had too many lines on it and although he was wearing chaps I could see that his legs seemed to bend in the wrong direction. Like the kind of insect that comes to mind when you talk about legs bending the wrong way.

Usually I would immediately come up with the kind of insect but I was just too damned thirsty.

From inside the saloon I could hear raised voices. Eager to take my mind off my need for refreshments I walked up to the little swinging doors you always see in westerns and took a look inside.

There were two men, both who seemed to have legs that bent the right way, sitting across a wooden table across from each other and seemingly in a heated argument.

"Obviously the peanut is the preferred nut of the poor!" one of them bellowed.

Not to be outdone the other bellowed his choice of the almond with equal fervor.

"How can you say that?" the first one thundered. "The almond is clearly the nut of the middle class."

"You're batshit crazy I tell you!" the second man countered, "The almond is the nut of the common folk."

The first man fell back in shock.

"The almond? The almond the nut of the common man? Are you mad?"

Neither had bothered to mention if the nuts in question were salted or unsalted but the question ran through my mind just the same and reminded me how much I needed a drink.

"Go on then, check the well," the cricket-man chimed in.

My attention was brought back to the two men at the table as the second man began to make his case.

"Was there or was there not an entire advertising campaign based solely around the image of a peanut dressed up in a top hat and cane? Is this the preferred wardrobe of the masses? Was there a fashion memo I missed?"

A satisfied grin began to crawl across his weathered mug.

"You're seriously going to base your argument on a giant peanut wearing a monocle?" The first man sat back with a look that was equal parts disbelief and disgust.

Feeling the argument turn in his favor the second man made his closing argument "Why would a peanut company lie?"

"Why do all commercials lie? Everybody knows that the cashew is the rich man's nut. Just because one doesn't waltz around in a TV ad with a monocle doesn't mean that it's not the favorite nut of the upper class. It goes cashew for the rich, almond for the middle

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