

It is 1997, Karaoke bar, Des Moines

Matt Mason

Tonight's the night you choose to fistfight Tom Jones.
 You write his name on the piece of paper, above
 "It's Not Unusual," hand it
 to the DJ, KJ, whatever the word is;
 and you sit,
 you deal with the "Whip It" of it,
 you deal with the sight of Rick Astley
 delivered in unironic flaunt,
 you deal with "You Give Love A Bad Name" partially crooned,
 partially screeched
 like some Bon Jovi centaur has crashed through the room,

before they announce your name
 (which you have not aliased
 (which could be a mistake,
 you hope-filled son or daughter of hope-filled parents
 (you were somebody's dream))).

You give new truth
 to lines like:
It's not unusual
to see me cry.
I want
to die.

And it is glorious.
 Even better than your "How Deep Is Your Love"
 (Spoiler alert: not very)
 that you gave as a gift
 to a different karaoke bar last week.

Someone
 takes an obligatory ride in Little Red Corvette,
 someone human centipedes a different Bon Jovi beast together,
 someone disregards human decency and sings "We Built This City on
 Rock and Roll,"
 then,
 one of the regulars

dressed in a style
 you can't quite put a name to
 saunters up with attitude,
 stands in that spotlight
 like it is their main source of nourishment,
 stares you down
 as he takes that song back,
 he Not Unusuals the crap out of it,
 like some alternate incarnation of Mike Tyson,
 he bites the second verse's goddamn ear off, he—

oh, "Gilligan Chic,"
 that's the name
 for how he's dressed—he

takes this serious,
 he's there to lay hands on this song like Jesus Karaoke Christ
 as if Tom Jones once saved him from drowning
 or wolves
 or being shipwrecked on some uncharted desert isle.

Bully to you, my good man,
 you want to say,
you have bested me
in something almost as ridiculous
as competition poetry;

now sit your white-pants ass down,
the DJ, KJ, VJ, BJ hasn't even gotten to my slip for "Delilah"
or "She's A Lady,"

buckle up,
son,
this
was only ever
Round
One.