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**To The Man In Isolation  
Slapping Baloney On His  
Head, Nassau County  
Correctional Facility,  
East Meadow, NY 5/18/94  
Frank Van Zant**

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## Frank Van Zant

TO THE MAN IN ISOLATION SLAPPING BALONEY ON HIS HEAD, NASSAU COUNTY CORRECTIONAL FACILITY, EAST MEADOW, NY 5/18/94

The kids with me on the student tour, near drop-outs doing the *Scared Straight* thing, didn't notice at first, no one did, all of us agreeing later that we thought it was a skull cap. No, there it was, after whispers bubbling under nerve-lids: baloney, two pieces crowning your bald head, your fingers peeling them on and off, the moist meat sound going with a soft suction rip s-s-s like a roller rolling paint, wet on dry bobbing head, chin tucked, neck rolls and jowls all rubbery, your eyes down, averted or unaware, no one could tell.

What were you thinking about by slapping and peeling baloney? Was it a protest about the cell, the guards, the quality of the baloney itself? Was it some kind of shocking symbol? An entertainment? Were you coming off a numb night of DWI? The kids, all polite enough to gawk furtively so the guard didn't yell at us, preferred the drugs explanation, that you were *one buggin' fucked up dude*, meaning it as a kind of compliment to your craziness, how you went way up on what they've ever done, outscoring their shot-gunned beers & double bong hits & pot-stuffed stogey Blunts & all the acts and rites of passing muster to the honor of wastoids. You were King Wastoid to them.

I was in denial too, for I laughed you off, sad for the sight of you, but needing to write & write, in retrospect, to peel back your meaning to me, through layers of humor & nerves & contempt, to teach myself to me. In layer one, in humor, you were Baloney Art, letting me make my own associations to your performance coming in Live From New York, It's Baloney Slapping Man, and because I couldn't tell what you meant, you were "Ars Poetica," not meaning but being, seeing you as Klinger from M\*A\*S\*H bucking for a Section 8, becoming George "The Animal" Steel prowrestling yourself in that private ring, becoming the mystic lawyer/prisoner from Chekhov's "The Bet" who was the wisest man in the world in his Jungian Gold Cell, becoming an Incan palace with fat-steps running from your shoulders to the high priest baloney on

your temple head, becoming a pornographic vision, you there in some kind of private foreplay, with the phallus of your neck in a fetish-heat of squishy skin & meat.

In layer two, in nerves, you reminded me of my own school daze, class of '79, of Dave Fullerton whose dad was a shot cop and who once guzzled three bottles of salad dressing on a bet, collecting twenty bucks (a lot then) even though the chunky blue cheese clogged his swallowing, made him run to the front porch rail to ralph up 6 beers 6 shots 1 bag of fat Snyder's pretzels 1 honey mustard vinaigrette 1 creamy Italian and the best part of his chunky blue guts. That was art too, flowing forth as our cheers and testosterone ranting celebrated his earned celebrity, well worth the two bucks apiece, back-slaps all around.

In layer three, in contempt, I realize my connection to you, no longer denying how close I've come to sitting in there myself. I admit to myself I have cheated and stolen and driven drunk, and hate those pisspoor choices of mine and yours. So then, sir, can I tell the kids all this? Can I tack it on the board, sir, next to this desk, so they smell the stink in me, so they bug out one clear true collective eye? Would my confession improve our chance at reaching them (if you admit that's what you were trying)? And if I do tell them, will they say *That shit is wack. That ain't me 'cause I'll get away with it just like you*, or will one single one of them try to wake up a 2 a.m. hearing the s-s-s of my voice & dreaming himself in the meatwater shine of your face?