

AN ODE TO LOST LOVES

BY

LEAH KAMINSKY

At the Microsoft party, you meet a guy in the line for pizza.

"How is the food?" he asks, his syllables punched with sexy foreign stresses.

You nod over the music and swipe away a line of stringy spinach. "Mmmm... Wait what? It's very loud!"

He sets his plastic cup on the food table and you hover together over greasy paper napkins. The first and last meal of a fated love.

"I've met a boy," you scream to your friends while Kelis pounds out a milkshake. "His name," you sigh, "is Alfredo."

Your friends laugh like they've never heard a foreign name before. Throughout the night they tap you on the shoulder and ask, "How's Sauce doing?"

Secretly? You want to pour him into a pan and turn the dial to simmer. But all you can think to say is,

"Whatever, he's Venezuelan."

When the club closes, you follow Alfredo into his friend's Mercedes. The friend is Israeli, and when he discovers that you, too, are Jewish, he smacks his lips and throws bitter glances Sauce's way, as if to say, "You've got it all backwards, man. Shiksas are for practice."

You sit in the back, realizing fully the provocative nature of your dress as your skin sticks to the leather seats and refuses to peel free. The Mercedes' tires swirl around Fremont, dodging oncoming traffic like it's a video game and the reflective lights on the yellow lines are easy points for the taking.

You grip the door handle and, with the flair of a true romance novel prince, Alfredo whispers, "Do not be afraid. Hold on to me."

You think, "Sorry, Sauce, I'm not that drunk," but you say, "Cool!" and grip his sweaty arm tightly.

The boys stop at a posh apartment complex to bum weed off a friend. They leave you the Israeli, and he plies you with desperate questions through chattering teeth.

A lit cab idles at a red light, and you are overwhelmed with the urge to dash inside, not so much to leave Sauce and his buddies behind, but to drive fast on the freeway. Through the pass. Over the mountains. Across the country. Into the sea. Not so much to drive away- from the rain, from the work, from the drunk boys in Mercedes, with all the money and none of the brains- but to drive.

Daddy's credit card burns in your wallet and you wonder if you can change "Virgin Airlines" to "Safeway" on the bill bound for Binghamton.

Running, running, running, running, to the hum of an engine on idle.

The light turns green; the cab driver guns it over the hill. Alfredo stumbles onto the street, shooting suave glances towards the sparkly sequins on your halter-top dress. You climb back into the car and, voice ravaged in the way of undulating bodies, loud music, warm JD and coke, you close your eyes and say, "Drive me home."

AN INTERVIEW, PART II

BY

PATRICK MISHINA

You know, it wasn't the actual butcher shop that made me cry, but the overwhelming, condensed fright of everything around me. It all culminated in that bloody mess displayed proudly right in front of you in the display case, and, I mean, which girl wouldn't be frightened at the sight of that? Oh yeah, they had everything, whole ducks, pig's heads, chicken feet, so...it wasn't pleasant. But I knew what was going to be there every week, so it wasn't so much the body parts as it was the stench of everything mixing right before your eyes and clinging to your clothes, the posters of actresses you haven't seen before, and they're not particularly attractive, either, the dirty brick sidewalks - you can actually see a top layer of black grime collected over hundreds of years! - and the fact that everyone around you is speaking in indecipherable letters and strokes, it was all of this bearing down on you as soon as you cross the river and head down North King.

But it was really nice that I had a chance to spend those days with my Grandpa. It was funny, he would wear this dirty undershirt, just real dirty, to the point where you couldn't it was originally white, a real gross yellow, and over it would be this horrific aloha shirt, unbuttoned and untucked with the collar unfixd, and he would hold my hand and we would walk all the way down until Bishop, and then catch The Bus back home. Those were really nice times, yeah, yeah. And you know, when I think about, I don't remember what he had to buy from the butcher shop every week.

He would pick me up and take me to the candy store, right across the street. No, I don't the name of that store, too! But every time I would get something different, sometimes just li hing mui stuff, sometimes dried ika...yeah, those are my favorites. I also don't remember the

person behind the counter anymore, but he had the loudest laugh I ever heard, booming, like a mushroom cloud instantly filling the whole room, and every time he laughed he would slap the counter and make the large glass jars on the floor tremble. Sometimes I would jump up and drop all my candy, which made him laugh even louder. He and Grandpa would stand there and talk and talk and I wouldn't care 'cause I was too busy picking out my stash, but it's kind of strange when you talk about it, yeah? Why would he have had a friend at the candy store?

Sometimes he would go towards the back behind the noren and then would come back out with a small brown package. With that and whatever he bought from the butcher shop under one arm he would pick me up, set me on the counter, pay, and then leave. By this time the sun was already below the buildings.

You know, I feel like there is this guilt, a real small guilt that grows inside every person from Hawai'i who goes to school on the mainland. I guess many expect you to stay home and study there, be with family, continue the traditions, all that, but when you leave it is almost like leaving for the enemy. And when you study here, graduate, and then you find a job, it's hard to just pick up and leave, yeah?

You begin to grow your own life here. You're continuously moving and living and building up your own life that you don't have the time to look back, you can't ever do that...your past is like the smoke from a dying fire you're trying to run away from, and you can smell it from wherever you go, but once you stop to turn around you get swallowed up. I'm trying to make it on my own. So yeah, I don't see myself going back home, at least for now. I wouldn't feel good about myself if I did.

Oh, that's it? Ok, oh no, no, thank you. It has been great talking with you too. I hope my answers were at least of some help to you. Huh? A consent form? Oh yeah, sure, sure, sign right here? Ok.

She helped pack up and load the recording equipment into the trunk of a small sedan. Its door fought against the increasing pressure from her two hands, each palm pressed flat on the dirt and dust encasing the car whole - a gust had washed down from the mountain range to the east and slithered its way down through every street and into every vacant space - and finally, with not a slam but a tentative click did it close, an unsatisfying sensation that compelled her to pull up the lever to make sure it was completely shut.

She scanned the length of the horizon to gaze at the swelling ban of rouge, and for a moment she felt herself propelled upwards; she ends up afloat on the highest peak. She plays hopscotch on the mountaintops, eventually gets good enough to handicap herself by switching between balancing feet, covering her eyes, even hopping over gaps of one or two summits. She teasingly leans over the precipice, but each flake of snow, the abiding wind, the bowing trees beneath, all work together in reverent allegiance to keep her upright.

"Would you like a ride?" The interviewer's voice disrupted her meditation.

"Oh no, no, I'm fine, but thank y--"

"But your--", the interviewer barely had time to point to her belly.

"Oh, there's no need to worry, it's doing just fine."

By the time she had reached her apartment building it was already dark.

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THE QUEEN OF EX-HEROIN ADDICT INDIE GIRLS

BY
DEIRDRE COYLE

The Queen of Ex-Heroin Addict Indie Girls fluffs her scarves like feathers, digs reptilian boots into the dirt, returns to mammalia by unleashing auburn hair. Really she is a bird, swan-necked and sparrow-shy.

Really, though she and I have been roommates since college, we have nothing in common. Really, I want more than anything to absorb her uniqueness, take some of it for myself and keep it in a jar, or tucked inside my hair to clip up and expose when necessary.

The Queen of Ex-Heroin Addict Indie Girls is rubbing her boot into the sidewalk outside our apartment, grinding her heels into fresh cigarette ash. "I can't do this, Norah," she tells me. "We have to not do it."

"Okay."

Her smile is desperate and quick. She walks to the gas station to buy coffee. I trot after her boots, my own scarf long and trailing in the wind. Her scarves—there are two, I think—twist around her neck like intertwining snakes.

We are at the Circle K. I pick up a pack of ramen noodles, not sure if we're going back home. We are in line. "We don't have hot water," she tells me. "Or electricity for the stove."

I stare at the red and white packet, thinking of our apartment. "Where'd it go?"

She shrugs. "Guess the government took it." I put the ramen back.

Outside, she drinks the still-steaming black coffee as we walk. The place we might be going is not far, but it is very cold. "It is very cold," I tell her.

She grabs my arm, claws catching my moth-eaten coat. "It's okay," she says. "We're going."

"But I thought you didn't want to go?"

"Well, I didn't. But we are. We are going."

She offers me a sip of her coffee and I drink it even though it tastes burned and like burning.

Her arm still ensnares mine and she leans on me and I feel the weight of her, the true weight of her slight frame. Her need sinks into me and my organs realize they don't want this and turn to ice.

We are skimming the roads, walking between the snowy sidewalk and the salted street; the cars go by. Sometimes they honk, men in trucks, men on motorcycles, a man in a shitty Honda with two kids in car seats. Her elbow digs into my side, and I try to pat or rub her back but I can't even feel her beneath the heavy coat. Her hair is half stuck inside her scarves; the wind whips my scarf around her waist, tassels flinging meekly through the air.

Crossing Olympic Boulevard, I ask what can I do, isn't there anything I can do? She shakes her head, so quickly, clutches the coffee cup. I take it from her and it's empty and I throw it in the trash and she doesn't speak or seem to notice. We are almost there now; we are coming to the cross-street.

The school looms around the corner, a series of interlocked squares. Her breaths shorten. I can tell she is trying very hard. To breathe.

We approach the front entrance, flocked by Doric columns, gum-spotted sidewalks, a forgotten backpack. The double doors, green, push

open noisily and there are white tiles, a hall. "I know," she says. "I know where we are. I went to school here once."

The Queen of Ex-Heroin Addict Indie Girls leads me to an office the color of vomit where we fill out visitor stickers. Receptionists cluck at us quietly. A suited man flaps around the room, his paisley tie unclipped. He speaks in our direction and she releases her grip on me and her hands hang straight and she stands stock still at my side. He nods and smiles and smiles and leads us away down the halls. She speaks to him sometimes, in light words, and when he asks me something I say, "No, I'm just here with her."

When we go through a side door, the room is dark. We can see past red curtains and onto a stage, the backdrop of which is a large black sign with the letters D.A.R.E. in blood red writing. Her breathing trembles, longer, slower, I catch her arm again and wonder will she make it. Her eyes catch mine, latch there, hook, move away, tear a part of me off with them. Don't go, I want to tell her. You'll let them eat you like dogs. You'll let them ask you why.

She uncoils her scarves and pushes off her coat; the scarves slither down her arms. Drops the bundle on a chair. Her back to me, she walks straight, past the suited man and the red curtains. She is on stage now, not smiling, and staring at an audience full of children.

She breathes deeply, and begins.

ALONE AT LAST

BY
CHLOE HORNING

"Your parents will never know" he said as he drew the bottle from the liquor cabinet. She bit her lip. She had wanted this all school year: they were finally alone, perfectly alone. He took a long pull, grinned, and handed her the bottle. As she drank, the first zombie broke through the basement door.

IT'S A BIT CLICHÉ

BY
ERIN METTLING

It is a dark and stormy night. I know. My story starts with a cliché, but it could be worse. I could be at the end, telling my story from beyond the grave as my body lies face down in a gutter somewhere along an abandoned road. As far as clichés go, I prefer this one. All nights are dark, and most of them have the potential to be stormy. It begins something, even if that something is the end.

It was a dark and stormy night. That was the default in northern Scotland in early February. If it wasn't raining, it was misting. If the winds weren't howling, they slowly steeped into your bones. If the sun had set, it was dark. It's the way things worked. Most men wouldn't be caught outside on a night like this for any price. That's not true at all. Every man has his price. A poor man with little to eat might be willing to do anything to keep himself from starving. A rich man would be at home, cozy in front of the fire, with a snifter of brandy and a cigar claiming to "pity the buggers who have to be out on a night like this."

It was a dark and stormy night. A more superstitious man than I would hear the cry of the *bean-sidhe* in every howl of the wind. He would bar his door against the evils of the world, hoping to

protect himself from the fate that awaits us all. No one can outrun death. Not the fastest man on the planet, nor the richest, cleverest, or bravest. It is one of the world's inevitabilities that we all must face eventually, some sooner than others. It is not up to us who lives and who dies. It is the luck of the draw. Some make their own luck.

It was a dark and stormy night. I should have been at home. I should have been helping my wife clean up after dinner. She should have been nagging me to take out the garbage, blast the storm. She would have insisted that I piss on the doorstep to keep the spirits from following me back in. She was superstitious. She heard the *bean-sidhe*. She told me she heard her. My wife, who should have been waiting for me at home, to meet me at the door with a kiss and an order to take off my muddy boots before I entered her house. My wife, who sang like a meadowlark and had a gentle touch. My wife, who never harmed anyone in her life, who went to church every Sunday and Wednesday, who always had a kind word to say to anyone, even the foulest of the foul. My wife. She wasn't waiting at home. The smell of her still lingered in my memory. Flowers and fresh baked bread.

Cinnamon and honey. Her face haunts my dreams. She never leaves me, but she no longer waits.

It was a dark and stormy night, much like this one. She heard the call of the *bean-sidhe*, the woman who is a harbinger of death. The fairy who is used to frighten small children and gullible adults off of the moors after night fall. My wife heard her cry in the wind, calling for her. She left. She didn't hide. She didn't board up her windows and lock her doors. She walked into the arms of the fairy-woman who isn't there. Walked off a cliff to meet her. This cliff.

It is a dark and stormy night. A more superstitious man than I would not be caught dead out on a night like this. The howl of the wind holds the call of the *bean-sidhe*, but all I hear is my wife. She is waiting. She is telling me I forgot to piss on the doorstep. She is in the wind. Her voice, her scent, her touch. She is ever with me, and she is waiting for me to join her. I am not ready. She has gone somewhere I cannot follow. I make my own luck, but I cannot end something that is just beginning. She is my *bean-sidhe*, and she will haunt me until I join her. I am not in my gutter. It is just...
...a dark and stormy night