

Frankie and Alice, 2013. Brooklyn, New York

by Lillian Ann Slugoeki

1.)

At the corner deli, sweat dripping down my face, I ask for black, but Frankie adds milk. Just to spite me. Because I won't sleep with him. As if. Wonder what his wife would say? Punch me in the jaw, right? Like maybe the rules about holy wedlock vary from Staten Island to Brooklyn.

But it's too hot to complain-- already 85 @ 8:00 a.m. in the shadow of silver lindens. The leaves rustle like crepe paper in the hot sun. Alice, soon to be dead in 24 hours, from the heat, says, *Hey kid*. I sit with her under the blue awning. Alice eats her other meals in the hospital cafeteria. Because it's across the street, and she likes the meat loaf on Tuesday, *So sue me*.

We bonded because we both hate to cook, and because she remembers the corner bar, fifty years ago, when prostitutes consorted with sailors in the back room. And that maybe she was one of them. This was way before the Expressway changed everything, cutting off access to the harbor.

Alice also tended bar, says, *I was a mean drunk. Sooner punch ya than look at ya*. Her stockings are rolled down to her knees. Her coffee is black with a side of ice. Her bra strap slides down her slack flesh. @ 83, I can almost see the pretty girl she used to be. She calls Frankie, a stupid bastard, and I suppose he is.

And my back, she says, is killing me.

Jimmy, a traveler of Black Irish persuasion, sits at the next table, passes around his phone, *Lookit the new filly I got at the track.* And to Alice, a faux leer, *Hot today?*

She says, *Matter of fact, fuck you,* then eats an ice cube. Frankie steps out to smoke, his belly spilling out of his wife-beater.

Frankie, I say, I'd like to ask you a question. He smirks, looks away, as if he's being mysterious.

You in love with me?

Alice says, *Frankie? You gonna answer her? Or what? Cause you ain't in love with your wife.*

Everyone laughs, including Frankie. I can't sit out here much longer, but before I leave I say,

Alice, don't forget to turn on your AC when you get home.

Kid, she says, don't worry about me.

They found her body a week later. It wasn't pretty. She didn't turn on the AC.

2.)

There are birds in the silver lindens. And there are birds everywhere. In October, I see Alice's ghost, once, under the blue awning, and Frankie is still in love with me, still fucking with my coffee.

