

It's End of the World Karaoke

by Ashley Inguanta

It's End of the World Karaoke at Big Daddy's and Lara takes a photo of herself for Facebook before she goes on stage. She's holding a basket of nachos in one hand and her phone in the other. After she takes the photo, she says, to Javier, "Hold these," and hands him the nachos. He holds the nachos and stands there, beside Lara, admiring her long, brown hair and floppy hat. She sings "Heaven Can Wait" by Meatloaf and gets the whole crowd to sing. They even hold up their lighters. Javier holds his lighter with one hand and Lara's nachos in his other. He wants to kiss her before the world burns down, and he knows it's coming.

"Don't put those nachos down!" Lara says to Javier as she hops off stage. She takes a chip and dips it in the cheese and bites down, hard. "I'm getting us more drinks," Lara says, and before Javier knows it she's back with two White Russians. Usually he drinks 7 and 7's here, in Big Daddy's, because that's what his father drank. And usually this guy who looks exactly like Santa Claus sings, and they drink 7 and 7's together, but he's not here tonight. None of the regulars are here tonight. Not Santa Claus or Cat Woman or Mary Ann from that island. Javier misses them for a while, then puts his lighter away and takes a gulp of his drink, which tastes a lot less milky than he expects.

When he and Lara sit down at a table, finally, she gives him permission to place the nachos in the table's center, so they can both reach. Javier does what she tells him then says, "You know this is it, right?"

Lara says, "Yeah," and scratches her nose.

He wants to kiss her. He just met her ten minutes ago, and he has only kissed one other girl in his life. Her name was Jonah and she had a small breathing problem and *Dirty Dancing* was always

playing in her living room. They worked together, doing advertising for Frito Lay.

"This is IT," Javier says. "No more of anything." And then the MC calls Javier's name, but Javier didn't submit a slip of paper; he doesn't want to sing.

"Your turn!" Lara says, and the moment Javier opens his mouth to say *No*, she takes his photo with her phone with one hand, has a sip of her White Russian with the other.

Javier knows he won't make it through one song without the heat coming in. It's almost here. The world's all smoke outside. Everyone can see it, through the windows. And they're all just sitting here, in Big Daddy's, knowing.

The MC calls Javier's name again. He's walking up to the stage now, thinking *Why not?*

"Your turn, Javier!" Lara says. She eats a nacho, offers some to the men at the table beside them. She tugs the rim of her floppy hat as she offers. And of course, all those men take handfuls of nachos, nod as if to say *Thank you*. Javier wishes he could be anyone but himself as he stands on stage, waiting for the music. He doesn't even have a song. He knows this and of course he doesn't care. They're all watching him, those men. And Lara. She's watching him, too. He wonders if she is everything he will ever need. He wonders if their world will stay like this, a mass of energy, of relationships and music, even after everything else burns down. This place is heating up. The smoke is coming in. Javier will never get a chance to sing, to move the crowd. He never wanted a chance. It's when Lara finishes her basket of nachos the MC looses the next track, deadening all sound, transforming their world into a silent, disappointed, flimsy thing. And it's when Javier turns around, walks offstage and steps outside, their world turns into something else, something certain.

