

Mathilda Is Not My Girlfriend

by Cheryl Anne Gardner

Some idiot was gonna let a snake eat him. I know, but I saw it on the internets. That's some dumb-assed stuff right there. Everyone knows about snakes. The Jesus book tells us all about them, inside us, slithering through ruby-red and eating our guilt from inside out. It wasn't that Mathilda didn't want that thing she'd never admit to wanting. We don't talk about it. Shame really. That acid cocktail of flat black. I want it too. Ain't afraid to jack the tracks blind for it either. I have no fear of perfection. My apartment smells of crotch, rancid fat, and an act of contrition. It's my signature scent. Mathilda doesn't care. She frequents dark places. Buys stuff at organic markets and talks about Morocco like she'd just unpacked her suitcase yesterday. I'm just ordinary. Non-specific. Never been to Morocco or to Mathilda's place. It's ok though. The snakes give me the strength to endure in spite of my total lack of self-control. Mathilda plays the cello. Lives in a crack-shack near the Jade Fountain take-out. They use snakes and stray cats in their *lo mein*. That fact isn't in the Jesus book, but everyone around here knows those people eat snakes and stray cats. Mathilda says she feels interfered with. Spoiled. From the snakes and the cello and the smell come from the kitchen at that Jade Fountain shithole. She says she wishes that she could just peel her skin off and put it in a scrapbook as a souvenir -- for me. I'd like to taste her skin . . . and maybe some whiskey. Mathilda says she'd like some whiskey too. I don't have any though. I don't have a kitchen or a cupboard or whiskey glasses. All I have is apologies . . . and rats and cockroaches and those Jesus snakes in my veins. Mathilda says she has them too. She picks at hers till they bleed.

