

Girls

by Emily Smith-Miller

They were white ships sailing on gray waves, on concrete folds of a cotton dress she pulled over her pert breasts. She had that lovely Irish complexion of pure ivory and strawberry, kisses and cream, eyes that changed colors, the highland gift to girls of Eire parentage. Late for the carnival, she looked at herself: cap sleeves, fitted bust, casual bell of a summer dress, sticking in the right places around her legs. The townhouse was humming with floor fans and open windows to the blistering asphalt, New Jersey solstice eve. Not so pretty as those girls down at the boardwalk, with their ebony curls, their exotic flesh, the mature movements nurtured by older siblings and dresses that peeked skin all over. But she wasn't a Spanish dancer, she wasn't a queen of Santeria and spelling words with the letter 'y'. She was old hill moors on green rolls of crag. The gray sea hitting white caps, splashing the decks of ship sailing across her patterned dress, across her Mick heritage.

Lolita smiled when Gale walked past her, Gale was a shining anomaly in the heat and bright, her skin never tanned and the boys rarely looked at her pretty eyes, but Lolita saw something beautiful in her friend. She hated her own dark skin, it was the color of creamy coffee, her deep chocolate gaze and petite features made her lovely. Her sister Rosa dressed her in fashionable clothes that their friends envied, Rosa wanted her blood to look as good as she did, Lola was a reflection of her. Every boy on the boardwalk stared when she and Rosa walked by, everyone of them had their sweet wet dream about the Dominguez sisters. But Lola was more interested in pasty Gale, her white smile and pink budding lips, the cotton frocks she wore were more exciting to her than the skin tight tube tops and mini skirts Rosa put her in. Lola knew though, that the only reason Gale wasn't picked on by the older girls was because she had chosen her as her as a best friend when they could scarce crawl away from each other.

The storm settled on the wooden pier, bird shit and old men with

fishing caps, Gale glanced around hurriedly, she hated being alone out here. Then the soft hands clamped themselves over her eyes, and something jumped on her back. She almost collapsed under the weight of Lola, and the surprise attack, but she kept steady and bucked her off. The two girls heaped on the splintered saltwater worn planks of the boardwalk sucked in laughter and screamed greetings at each other; Gale cursing Lola, Lola teasing Gale. They picked the other up and embraced, sisters of choice.

Gale wished when she was younger that she was so pretty as Lola, so fine and thin, so elegant and beautiful. That only lasted their immediate friendship though, within weeks of complaining about her ugliness, Lola had set her straight. She smacked Gale across the face and told her they were women, they were beautiful like night and day, they were the feminine extremes, different but the same, and incomparable. Lola was the only person that made her feel truly exceptional, she would look into her, match skin with her and laugh at her when she tried to tan and just turned lobster. Rosa was never so happy to see Gale with her sister, she always made a point to compliment the other girls Lola brought to their house, she let them wear her clothes, but never Gale, she said Gale would look ridiculous in anything that she owned, and Lola would rebuff her sister.

Waltzing together the girls were odd companions, everyone said so, but neither of them cared anymore. This was carnival, released school hordes roving like lice on an infected scalp, Lola and Gale above them all.

"Who you want?" Lola piqued at her Irish mistress.

"Who you want?" Gale answered back, knowing better than to answer straight away for fear of Lola pulling her own matchmaking stunts, the kind that almost always ended in severe embarrassment for Gale. Lola tried her best to hide the response of the boys she pushed at her friend. She would say they were knobby faggots, not worth Gale's second look, but she knew better. She heard them laugh when Lola tried to tell them her friend was just the sort of woman a boy could hope to kiss on a ferris wheel, how they would

guffaw and sing slurs of her pale skin and limp red hair. Usually Lola would end the scene by back handing them as they tried to grope her breasts, she would push them off and say they weren't no men, no boys neither, just little pussy bitches wearing their brother's wife beaters, pretending at masculinity. Gale heard it so many times she'd stopped answering the question.

"I want Mr. Coolidge." Lola said confidently, referring to their elderly English teacher with his pinched face and sunken eyes, coke bottle glasses and wisps of balding hair.

"Shut it Lols!" Gale laughed.

"We gotta find you a boy to ride with tonight. Rosa said tonight all the girls get their first love picks, tonight is some kind of magic, abuela said so."

"Well if abuela said so . . ." Gale smiled. "I want that new boy."

Lola blanched, her mouth half open, gaping like a fish, "HIM!"

"He might like me," she said sheepishly.

"Psh, that boy ain't worth no ride on the big wheel with you!"

"You asked!" she spat back offended.

"Why not Jeremy? He's got them nice muscles and fine eyes, so handsome I think Rosa even likes him."

"Then Rosa can have him." Gale turned away sadly. "She gets most everything she wants."

"Rosa's dumb, why do you want that new toad?"

"He's not a toad! He's . . . nice. He helped me when I dropped the groceries on the way out of the bodega, picked em up and helped me carry them two blocks home."

"Ahh so it's payback for being a gentleman, eh?"

"Lola," Gale looked at her sternly. "I know they don't like me, they don't ever look at me the way they look at you or any of the other girls, I know, I'm not pretty like that, so I don't mind a nice boy, and he has green eyes."

Lola smiled, she didn't know he had green eyes, she loved those different color lens, anything other than brown.

"Well that changes things!" She shouted triumphantly.

"You're so weird Lolita," Gale giggled. "Now who you want?"

"Well if you don't want him, I'm gonna take Jeremy, not gonna let Rosa get something she's been eying all summer so easy." The girls looped arms and skipped to the carnival shaking with glee.

Theo stood with his back to the lights of screamer rides, girls in their scanty dresses, the big boys shoving at each other, and the smell of funnel cakes. He stared out at that ocean, at that place with diamond stars gleaming off crisp blackness. He moved from North Carolina, he had blackish brown hair and olive skin, he had green eyes. This was no place for him. The boys tried to beat on him and the girls laughed, he was not one of them. He saw one girl, she was as out of place as a junebug in Iceland, her misty pale skin and modest smile. She was about as lost looking as he felt, but then he saw her with Queen Bee, the most beautiful and baddest of all those screeching harpies trying to be women. He wouldn't go near her again.

Lola saw the boy Gale picked for her first love, he was shifting in the wind off the rock jetty, looking adrift, just as Gale often did when she wasn't around. She sat in the dirt, her new mini getting dusty, to watch him. She liked to watch. Gale was in line for cotton candy, and Lola sent some of the girls to distract her while she went and found this waif of a man. Lola smiled at the way he moved in the breeze, trying to fall into the air and disappear like a dandelion bloom.

Jeremy said he'd ride with her at midnight, in a rocking bucket, she knew he'd kiss her, she knew he'd feel her through her clothes, she didn't mind, but this was more important, seeing Gale smile. So she crept behind him, she scurried the jagged rocks and metal netting, then, she sprang!

"You!" Lola shouted, and Theo nearly went tumble into the sea. She reached out and grabbed his arm, pulled him back into the land.

"Don't go fallin' off the edge now."

"What do you want," he glared at her.

"You."

"Me?"

"My friend thinks you're alright, I want you to ride the wheel with her tonight at midnight."

"What?"

"At midnight, solstice eve, you ride the ferris wheel with my friend Gale. You speak English, right?" Lola hated dumb boys, so slow, so annoying.

"Gale?"

"She's my friend," Lola said defensively, ready to pounce on any insult this cretin might throw her way.

"Does she have that pretty red hair?"

Lola couldn't help but beam, "Yeah, she's got that hair and that skin."

"Why are you asking me?"

"Cause she's shy."

"Why are you friends with her?"

"She's my best friend," Lola nearly shouted in correction. "You don't need to worry why I'm friends with her, you just need to know that you say one thing to make that girl sad I'll beat you black myself!" Theo was surprised, Queen Bee was different than he'd expected, she was pretty and protective, she was something else. "You don't want to ride with me?" he asked.

Lola's hand shot out so quick, Theo didn't have a seconds time to catch himself before he had been slapped off his feet and hit the rocks with his knees.

"NO!" she yelled at him.

Theo looked up at her with anger and betrayal in his eyes. "You're all fucking crazy!" he rumbled at her. "No, I don't want to ride on the stupid ferris wheel with your dumb friend you stupid bitch!" He pushed himself up and ran the other direction, leaving Lola waving in the salt mist.

Gale, was under a street light, licking the cotton candy from her teeth, she saw Lola approaching with that same hard look she always had after a bad talk with a boy.

"You don't want none of that pussy mother fucker," she answered, before Gale had a chance to open her sticky lips. Jeremy rounded the corner at that moment and grabbed Lola around the waist, burying his face in her soft black hair. She spun at him and kicked

him in the knee, he went down fast, then looked up at her with hurt eyes. Embarrassed in front of his crew, he backed off without a word and tore into the darkness.

"What happened Lola?" Gale asked concerned.

"Nothing," she responded, then she looked into her friends warming gray eyes, stormy Irish seas, faery lands and moss covered cliffs.

"Will you ride the big wheel with me tonight Gale?" she asked in a small, almost frightened voice. Gale never got the chance to be brave for Lola, she never got to defend her against taunts and teases, or pick her up from a well placed shove. Gale grabbed Lola around the shoulders and pulled her close. "Always, Lolita," she whispered in her friends mocha ear. "Always."

