

The Witch in the Canyon

by Joey Delgado

There's a witch in Laurel Canyon.

She made Wes a promise.

Her bungalow smelled like Parliaments. Parliaments, garlic frying in olive oil. Parliaments, garlic frying in olive, and a freshly opened pack of Red Vines. Wes could have curled up into a ball and fallen asleep on her shag carpet, right after telling her all his secrets—some of which he did—and weeping for a non-specific feeling of joy.

“You are heartsick,” she said.

“Yes.”

For those wanting a description of the Laurel Canyon witch, ask yourself this: What does comfort look like? Answer that and have a clear picture of her hands, her skin. What does safety look like? There, that's her voice. What does danger look like? Now you're looking in her eyes.

“You want the pain to go away.”

“Yes.”

She lit a candle. It smelled of lavender.

No. It smelled like longing. Wes crossed his legs to hide an erection and covered his eyes with his hands to hide fresh, falling tears. Emotions were not felt from within in the Witch's house. They were all around him, antibodies attacking a foreign invader; dancing,

swirling, shimmering; they were dust and light and smoke. There was no escape. So he felt. Everything.

“You want to forget.”

“No. Yes.”

She handed Wes a card, a business card, ecru with plain lettering: Lilith Flair on Sunset.

“Tattoo his name over your heart and you will forget. Your heart will mend.”

“Tattoo? That's...a little permanent.”

“It's a lot permanent. But his memory won't be.”

Holding up the business card he said, “I go here.”

The Witch nodded.

Wes did what the Witch told him to do and by the end of the day he had the name ‘Jeff’ tattooed on his chest.

It all began shortly after. He lost his job and apartment. He moved in with a cousin. His brother lost his left leg in a motorcycle accident. His dad was diagnosed with prostate cancer. Suddenly, Wes couldn't get enough cocaine. All the cocaine in Columbia couldn't satiate him, and there wasn't enough Franzia in the world to bring him down. He stole to finance his cravings. He stole from his cousin, who kicked him out. He stole from his brother, who gave no chase.

Wes all but disappeared.

A begger panhandles on Sunset.

A handsome man drops change into his cup. The man leans in, squinting. He knows the beggar.

“Wes? Is that you? What happened?”

“Who the fuck are you? Get away from me!” The beggar's voice startles him. The man backs away. He runs down the street.

An old tattoo starts to itch. The beggar scratches the itch away.

“Spare change,” he says, holding out his cup.

