Alice White Loves Me Because

by Kyle Hemmings

Alice White loves me because of my white-washed Sunday smile, my brown leather cap toe shoes, those wicker baskets of imported Gouda and maple bread, my mother's homemade potato pirogies. I tell her that the park is empty today. It's for us only. It can be as vast and as rich as my idea of Spain, my notion of Morocco. Or, I tell her, we can be like trees, falling trees, bending trees, hollow trees, grafted trees with arms about to snap. We'll stump each other with questions about love and its mysterious roots. Ambivalent roots. Unsightly roots. No roots.

Or I'll tell her of when I was a student traveling through Europe and a German girl with long silky legs left me by the ocean to contemplate the hook she stuck through my navel. She also stole my wallet.

I'll tell Alice that it was just a story I made up.

Alice's eyes will widen and roll.

Alice White loves me because I'm so on-the-fence. Should I touch her and risk destroying the magic of never knowing? Would everything disappear?

Whenever I explain my theory of the origin of the cosmos to Alice--she laughs. Nothing really begins, says Alice, correcting me. It only ends.

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Available online at *«http://fictionaut.com/stories/kyle-hemmings/alice-white-loves-me-because»*
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Alice White loves you because of the bad-boy way you take her down in hotel rooms of painted waterfalls, the scent of another woman's China Musk ghosting the air, the way you wrap around her squeezing her into a river of deep sky or the way you slam doors and leave her crying in gray marble-walled bathrooms. The way you ignore her while speaking to men with thin lips and in their fathers' cracked voices.

She loves you when your words leave her dirty, semi-transparent, at times, overexposed. She loves you best when she's feeling bottomed-out, post-suicidal. You have a beautiful cock, Alice will tell you again and again, her negligee slipping off, revealing the contours of her shape-shifting figure in the half-light, the small, uneven breasts.

You'll say You always sound like someone else.

After you leave, Alice will go to bed with another nothing-lover, no dimensions whatsoever, while you're in another part of town, sleepwalking, and your wife is tasting imaginary fruit.

And I have watched the two of you from a distance. What I can's see, I surmise. What I can't hear, I project. What I don't want to know--becomes the tongue I can no longer feel. My own thoughts become stranded at the inner ear.

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Someday Alice White will abandon you at a Metro station in France or lose me in a crowd in Saigon. She will drift from city to city until she finds another language she can't quite conjugate, a new exotic bird that cannot mimic her too-human love. She will tell potential

lovers that her gods are nothing but cheap tricks with empty hands and stolen identities. She'll take what she can get but its value will always depreciate towards the infinity of null happiness. Alice White will grow old and needy and spiteful in someone else's black and white movie.

I sometimes wonder that if Alice and I should ever meet again, perhaps on opposite sides of glass, a chance encounter in a thrift shop window, would I drown in her reflection?

I'll tell you this much. When Alice becomes nothing but the twitch in our morning faces, the exotic memory behind the false memory, you and I should meet for tea. You'll still be wearing her Sea Mist scent from God knows how long ago and I'll still be carrying a trace of her Bay Rum perfume. We'll have so much to talk about, so much air to inflate our words, and so little to do.

How many years did she, I, you, waste? Was it waste? Is that the proper word? How many years did we fall through our sleep? And I will tell you that neither your version of Alice White nor mine may ever have been true. And you might ask me just who I am. And I will tell you that I am nothing. I am the nothing that once entertained Alice White in my various guises: a tree, a suitor, a drowning victim returning to life. I am the nothing that once pretended to be something for a girl with sad mystic eyes. I tried again and again to connect and transform. I am the nothing that pervades everything that Alice White ever touched.