

AA For the Suicidal - alt.punk extract

by Lavinia Ludlow

--An excerpt from my novel alt.punk

The drive back to Sac does nothing to sober me up, either, and although Avaline and I are ready to hurl, she takes me to her afternoon support group, "Lean On Me: A Place for Manic-Depressive and Bipolar Sufferers to Come Together," or in other words, AA for the suicidal. It's hosted in a middle-school classroom, and there are people of all ages sitting in a circle, fidgeting, bored, inattentive. The moderator seems to mean well. He goes around the room and asks each of us how we're holding up, subsequently offering us gum, but if any of these people are anything like Avaline, manners and gum aren't going to do shit.

"This is Hazel," Avaline says with a slur. "She gets butt-hurt easily, so be nice."

"Hello, Hazel. Why don't you tell us about a recent low point in your life that's really tested you," he says.

"I can't really think of anything," I say, distracted by the sight of the ceiling fan circulating in the reflection of his polished head.

"Last week, we discussed our biggest fears. Most of us fear we'll pass our disease onto our children," he says. "What's your biggest fear?" All eyes are plastered on me and it's making me tense up even more.

"That the only sex I'll be able to get is fat-fold sex," I say.

"Don't take her seriously. Hazel's an angry nineties chick and she just broke up with her boyfriend," Avaline says, revealing to the public truths I've taken considerable care in hiding from myself. Bitch.

"I didn't break up with him. He dumped me for the third element of the periodic table."

"Now, now," she says. "Marilyn Manson cheated on Dita Von Teese, the Queen of Burlesque and Bondage, with that little girl from the Green Day video. And that skuzzy Billy Bob cheated on Angelina. And Ethan on Uma. Those disgusting guys don't appreciate the beautiful women they have. It happens to the best of us." For a second, it really makes me feel good. "Although Ethan's a beefcake and I'd have his babies any day."

"You're ridiculous," I say.

"It's been way over a month. You need a good fuck buddy to help you get over him." It dawns on me that we're not too different: she has an address book of fuck buddies; I have a grocery list of carbohydrates. "If you really want to get back with him, invite him over to talk," she says, and the moderator's mouth is gaped open as if searching for the right words to end this. "Mix him a sweet drink and dissolve in two Viagra. You could throw in a hit of E if you want to warm things up. After he drinks it, come out of the bathroom in your skivvies and push play on your DVD player that just so happens to have lesbian porn in it."

"That's your advice to me?" I ask.

"Wait a minute," some guy says. "Straight chicks watch lesbian porn? Can I watch you two—"

"I think, um, we're getting off track here," the moderator finally says.

"Say the Viagra and porn don't work," Avaline says. "Slip him a mickey, drag him into bed, and fool around with him while he's out cold. You'll wake up together naked and he'll have to take you back." The room goes mute aside from a fly buzzing overhead and a few clearing throats.

"That's motherfucking rape," I say. (For the record, she's the type that would give her kids cough syrup at night to shut them up.)

"You can't rape a guy," she says. "Really, you can't. It's our double standard as girls. It's considered rape for them but not for us. And I've never had to roffie any guys because they always fold after the Viagra. Rohypnol just got a bad rap 'cause everybody called it 'the date-rape drug,' but it's really just another benzo." I wonder if

anyone would notice if I slid under the table and crawled toward the door. "Unless you're some fat-ass heifer, no straight guy is going to turn down punani with two Viagra in his cock," she says.

"Can we not use the term 'fat-ass'?" I ask.

"Hazel," the moderator says. "Um, are you suffering from a mental illness or grief from your breakup? You know, there's a difference." He hurls out a bunch of inquisitive questions about my "clinical diagnosis" and my "combination of medications," so finally I tell him I have none because I'm undoubtedly not batshit insane. He asks me to leave. I could put up a fight but I decide against it.

On the way home, Avaline tells me that I should have faked it so we could have at least stayed for the hot chocolate and cookies break, but listening to her about something like that would be like going to Liza Minnelli for marital advice. Maybe I should join a cult. At least they do everything in their power to prevent their pledges from leaving. But after being rejected by the punks *and* the crazies, I doubt I'll fit in anywhere.

