

Yukon Mining Company

by Melissa Ann Chadburn

I can pinpoint when I went too far. It was before I gave her my cell phone number. She started coming in at the beginning of my shift. Peeking her slightly acne ridden long face into my office, asking me questions, trying to start a conversation. She had crooked teeth and short blonde hair and there was nothing really exceptional about her appearance. Actually I take that back she had neat hair it was thick and choppy and sometimes she bleached it. Maybe that she dressed well, or that she was tall and built like a boy but had little tiny breasts, and a little tiny ponch poking against her T-shirt. Really I think it was her laugh. Most days you would just feel sorry for her. She was one of those girls the only one left to walk around the program on Christmas.

I know what that's like. I've been left on the holidays before. Around that time of year the time I was left behind, I began having my nightmare about a little boy and dogs. There was a little boy that would show up lost sometimes on the side of the road other times he'd show up at a house I was at. I tried to ask him for his parents' name or contact information but he didn't speak. He appeared to be around five or so. He wore a naïve green and white horizontally striped T-shirt and little denim Osh Kosh overalls. His hair was messy, his face quiet and pallid, his eyes empty. I remember feeling a large sense of responsibility toward him. The house I took him to use the phone to call his parents was dark and perverse. Filled with people fucking and dogs. One mangled chow followed us around baring it's teeth growling. There was a room that was covered in blood on the walls, on the floors, wolf dog carcasses everywhere. I tried to shield this from the little boy. I was worried that this would scar him that my attempt at helping him was injuring his psyche forever.

Sometimes other elements of anxiety would enter this dream, the floor scattered with tiny multiplying kittens covering the whole space beneath our feet. The little kittens' juicy fetus' and if you

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stepped anywhere you stepped on them and if you stepped on them they died, their tiny unassuming bones crunching beneath the soles of your shoes. The thinner more worn out parts where you normally felt pebbles you felt their little hopeful membranes slouching. Every step piercing the first small breath of life.

Later I learned that in these dreams the little boy represented a younger me, and here I had been fixated on the dogs and the blood and the kittens. Just the other day I saw a young boy sitting waiting for a bus as I drove up to a stop light and he looked at me pleadingly like the boy in my dreams and I wanted to pop open my passenger seat door and tell him to hop in. I think he would have wanted that too.

I started having these dreams when I was left to roam my group home over Christmas. Nobody knew how hard I worked to earn a weekend away. The house was run on a point system. You earned points for doing chores, for ensuring your roommates did theirs, for attending groups, the more points you earned the more freedom you got. I was "housemother" by that time I had successfully pleased and deceived all the staff until I earned enough points to spend a week away for the holidays. I put in a request a week in advance. Submitted proof of liability insurance and the address of where I was going. I made my arrangements smugly but quietly afraid that if I didn't appear modest enough I would hurt the other housemates' feelings. I thought I was different and special but still I was alone for most Christmas'. They never came. She made up excuses for her parents when they didn't show up. I knew what that was like too. Anyways she came in the same time I did and then went AWOL the same time I left. You see I worked with the homeless then. I was a case manager. She was a client. She walked me to my car. I remember leaving and hearing shallow footsteps following close behind me. I turned my head and there she was smiling slyly.

"Hey!" she would say emphatically waving her hand.

"What are you doing here? You're not supposed to be out."

The streets were dark like rain, the street lamps twitched on and off. There was an elementary school across the street that always

appeared extra sad and deserted at night.

"I was worried about you."

"I'm fine."

She ran up closer.

"No you shouldn't walk to your car alone at night."

I was carrying my purse and a box of files at this point too tired to argue.

"Here let me take that for you." She'd scoop the box out of my hands and walk me to my car.

She pushed a little further every night. Some nights she asked me to drive her back to the program. It was a block away. She just wanted to ride in the car with me. I put up a fight. A weak one. I told her I shouldn't. Notice the use of the word shouldn't. This was the beginning. I didn't tell her no or I did not want to. One night I did. I knew it was wrong but she jumped at the chance. She jumped in the passenger seat slammed the door shut and snapped on her seat belt.

"Where are we going?"

She smiled at me like a happy puppy.

"We're going up the street to drop you off."

She fiddled with the radio. A rap song came blaring out.

Comin' up I was confused, my mama kissin' a girl

Confusin' occurs, comin' up in the cold world

"Ohhh I love this song" She crooned bobbing her head up and down, bent her elbow flattened her hand and dribbled the air in front of her.

"Great."

Daddy ain't around, prolly out committin' felonies My favorite rapper used to sing ch-check out my melody

"Can you just drive me around the block until it's over?" She leaned in close to me, made begging eyes, she put her gangster hands together in prayer position.

"Plleeeeeeeaaase."

"Fine but just this once."

Hate it or love it, the underdog's on top

And I'm gon' shine homie until my heart stops? Then it was like

that every night. At times she pushed the envelope further asking me to drive her around the block and then eventually one day it was through a Burger King drive thru. She was happy when I did this. The happiest I had ever seen her. She was full of stories and manipulation. She told me she would return to the program if I drove her around the block. When she was drunk or high I was the only staff that was able to talk her down. I liked that.

She would race up and down the halls screaming, or piled on the floor in fits of laughter.

"CJ, it's time for group."

She'd look up at me, smile her decayed toothy smile, "Hey sunshine!"

"Just go to your room and calm down."

She whispered with her finger poised over her lips, "Oooh am I too loud?"

"Yes, you're too loud."

She stood up and announced, "OKAY I'M GOING TO MY ROOM NOW EVERYBODY BUT ONLY BECAUSE SHE ASKED!" and then she pointed an accusatory finger at me.

She'd pause at her door.

"Hey Sunshine are you okay? You don't look too good."

"Yes, CJ, I'm fine."

"Do you need anything?"

"The only thing I need is for you to go to your room."

"Okay" she whispered, "Shhhhhh.." and then she would tiptoe into her room.

She got kicked out. One of the other case managers did it when I wasn't there. I went home that night and watched a movie on HBO. I was drinking wine and eating pizza when my phone rang.

"Hi, Marina, I'm sorry for calling, I didn't know who to call. I'm sorry forget it."

Her rambling pushed air through my bones. I softened.

"No it's okay what's going on?"

"There's a car following me, it keeps on coming around the corner and watching me."

"Where are you?"

"I'm on Santa Monica and Highland."

This was a corner where kids sold drugs and tranny teenagers prostituted themselves.

This is West Hollywood, California. Aside from the homeless, and the tuberculosis-esque hawking noises emanating from the apartment buildings, the smell of fried cabbage, and occasional human dump found in pockets of the park, some hypodermic needles, and mail fraud, this is a nice neighborhood. The street is lined with jacaranda trees that leave purple droppings everywhere, in the fall the flowers turn yellow and orange, they leave sap on the cars. I have an avocado tree in my front yard.

I guess to really understand the neighborhood you'd have to know that West Hollywood is home to two distinct communities, gay men and eastern Europeans. And when the Russians, because that's what we called them no matter where they were from, looked at us homosexuals maybe they saw Peter the Great who enacted a ban on queers in the armed forces, although he was known to have his own fair share of male lovers. Perhaps they thought of Ivan the Terrible who was accused of being gay himself in an attempt to discredit him. Perhaps even the sweetest Russians in an attempt to protect them but maybe even an attempt to protect me thought of Tsar Dmitry who when he was overthrown had his flesh scraped through the dusty streets, his blood mixing with dirt, little freckles splintering off, his hair caked and mangled, especially his pubic hair as he was being dragged with a sickle through his scrotum and penis, the flesh of his testicles tearing, leaving hollowed sacs like chicken skin flapping against the rusted metal then finally his mutilated broken body sat on display beside that of his boyfriend Peter Basmanov. And maybe while they were being dragged they reached for one another and tried to clasp hands, or maybe they could do nothing but scream out in sheer pain, I like to think of them both staring at the sky, tears streaming down their faces, making silent vows to one another, their heads bumping directly up and down on the road and yet they focused on the same little bit of sky,

but if there were any mercy at all, maybe their last moments were dulled because they were passed out in pain, but there was still vomit dragging along their cheeks, urine on the exposed flesh of their legs stinging the wound of their sex, dignity escaped them, their bodies vacant of anything besides the screaming memory of hatred and pain.

Then there's the homeless. There are two parks that mark the borders between Los Angeles and West Hollywood. One is Plummer park, a small park with tennis courts where the older Russian men sit around and play chess all day, a woman pushes a cart selling warm homemade perogies. The other park is Pointsettia park, which has a large field and a small area for dogs to run around off leash. Each park has its own little plot of grass where the homeless addicts, tranny prostitutes, and mentally ill congregate and listen to music, sleep, do drugs, and trace the air with beautiful crazed fluid movements. Between the two parks is Santa Monica Blvd. the new "boulevard" just like Hollywood Blvd. used to be "The Boulevard". The ho stroll. Then as a white flag between the two there's a small shopping area complete with Trader Joes and a 24-hour diner, The Yukon Mining company. When it rained the tranny prostitutes worked their way inside the diner to solicit the customers right there. They sat on the older men's laps and fed them their mashed potatoes or vanilla pudding then after some time they snuck off, coupled one glamorous bronze glittery prostitute and one senior citizen, to the bathroom.

I remember one night sitting in a booth and seeing one of the prostitutes walk in. She was what I called a "scruncii tranny" because it's as if some guy found a scruncii on the ground and poof! became a lady. So this dusty muscular tranny in a sequined dress walked over to the center booth where three men sat. The men looked older than sixty. If this restaurant were somewhere else I would not guess these men were gay. The one guy she approached was wearing a member's only jacket, khaki pants, oxfords, and had a crew cut. He had that curmudgeony look all older men at diners get. She quickly smiled and squeezed in the booth between the

table and his lap. He kept on spooning his soup, the beef broth dribbling out the corners of his mouth. Her legs ,more muscular than his, took up all the space. He looked down at the table. He looked nervous. I got a glimpse of him when he was younger. In the Marines. Sleeping with men in Okinawa. He looked almost shy. His cheeks a little rosy. It made me scared. These were the ones to watch out for. They look shy but they could have a lot of pent up desire. Sexually stifled and angry. She stroked his head, making his hair messy. She was talking. He was ignoring, eating his soup. I couldn't make out the words. I tried to look at my flashcards. I wanted to study but I wanted to know.

"C'mon." she took off his glasses.

He put down his spoon. Looked at her for the first time. With a shaky hand he grabbed his glasses and put them on. He looked at her again. He put his two shaky hands slowly up to the sides of her face. She was stiff and still. Now she looked scared. I saw her little boy in her. Standing waiting to get picked for baseball. Hands folded behind his back. Looking eager. Always last. He clasped each side of her head and stroked her wig downwards.

"Okay."

She scooched out of the booth and took his hand. They walked off to the bathroom. It had a lock on it that required quarters. No one would bother them.

I sat and wondered why they only did this when it rained. Business seemed good in there.

She was high on crystal. It was a crisis. I became alive. I told her to meet me at the Yukon Mining Company. I ordered a coffee and pie. I asked her if she wanted anything. She said no. She looked scared. Her pupils were dilated and her jaw was clacking. I knew she was high. I asked her what she was going to do. She said it wasn't her fault. That some lady pulled over and offered her a ride then gave her some drugs to sell and made her smoke some crystal. Now she had to sell the stuff and she didn't want to. She had some money but didn't want to wait outside for the lady because she was scared of the car that was following her. None of it made sense but of course

it never does. I told her she could stay on my couch for the night. I took her home. I let her watch the movie I was watching on HBO. It was about a kid that was homeless that stayed at his case manager's house one night. I thought it was fitting. I drank wine and slipped into something more comfortable. It was a silk slip. I think I was being a little bit ridiculous. She slept on the couch that night. These things happen slowly over time. They start with a general malaise that grows into a vacancy, then maybe a disagreement. She made me perk up inside like the vietnamese ladies when I walk into the local nail shop. Last time I was with a woman I was performing in disintegrating theaters in San Francisco, reading poetry, and wrapping my hair in colorful African cloths. I felt strong then, but the time before the girl I felt meek. Then suddenly came the day it was clear. She looked at me and said, "I lay in bed every night and wonder who is lucky enough to go home with you."

That was all it took. She was. You are. Let's face it: anyone that poses that question is.

I mean how long do we wait for someone to find the right combination of words to rock our world like that? I know it's a fairy tale that there are a right combination of words but I gotta believe in something.

I know where CJ is now. She is crouched over in her room smoking crystal. She wakes up sad. She can't shit. She spreads out the foil. no creases. folds it in half. She puts the stuff in the crease. holds a lighter under it. A zippo. then smokes it. Well smokes the smoke. It's like kissing god or the kiss of the spider woman or the kiss of death. whatever. a kiss.

The End.

