

I Am Really Bad at Titles

by Tiffany R. White

The hair on my arms have greyed, or so that's how it looks to me. It's been 12 years since we last spoke. I think I haven't aged too well. I bought a rocking chair.

I am 37 years old. I admire those plastic claws on long metal arms. I think I may need one soon. When you and I were a pair of teen girls this was never an option. I was a full breasted, wide hipped 14 year old, my sidekick, you were white, flat chested and old, old hippie. The 90's weren't kind to either of us, me more so than you.

You remember our conversations? Something like this:

"Thin Lizzy there?"

"Sleepy," you'd say, wisps out of your waif-like mouth. I'd go on.

"I fucking hate life. I'd kill myself tomorrow if it wasn't for Honors History. Twelve pages on the KKK. I'm an idiot."

"You're beautiful," you'd say, not paying attention but meaning it.

"Who the fuck have you been looking at?"

"Sleepy," you'd say, the end of the receiver next to your mouth not adjacent so I could barely hear and I knew I'd lost you to Star Trek: The Next Generation.

Times I'd show up at your house, slowly morphing into a football player, a dude, baggy pants, jerseys and backwards baseball caps, you'd call me a puella pulchra, pretty girl in Latin. You took Latin. Contrarian. Bold. Opposite.

I'd arrive and pull out a 100 cigarette and kick back smoking with your mother. She used to like me. When I got sick she told me about how you guys hid all your medicine so I wouldn't be tempted to swallow them all. The time I spent the night and, not really thinking

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but thinking about slitting my wrists your mom and I had a heart to heart. It went:

"Stephanie."

I didn't say anything.

"That girl up there loves you. This is something I won't let you do. I cannot watch you break her again. I won't let it happen."

"She will leave. Just like everyone else."

"It's a self-fulfilling prophecy. You know what that is?"

"No."

"You think it and do just enough so that what you are thinking is going to happen, happens. She loves you. Remember that."

I hadn't. The fact that you loved me said more about you than me. Fortitude. Honesty. Temperance. Everything you espoused I was too cowardly to admit I lacked and I sucked it from you, big like the baby elephant in the room only less cute and prone to forget.

When you left the day they hauled me away, I had no way of knowing. I didn't get your letter till I arrived at Red River Group Home. All I could do was shout, the fire in my veins paling to the rock gut of sadness in my chest. I screamed, "She left. She left! She left! That bitch! I knew it!" The girls in my villa told me, "fuck that ho. Move on." And so I did. I met women who couldn't be my friend and a girl who could but ultimately used me up, dominated the little dignity I had, and left too. I saw you when I got out of lockdown at the state hospital. You told me you didn't hate me and you'd call. Remember? That was 12 years ago. And all I have of you are dreams.

Dreams that I am 37 and you are 15. That you live across the street and I tell everyone I meet, "I can go to Chris's house. She's home. She's my best-friend." I go. There you are, your Apple II computer, your sister, everything like I left it. You entered my life

when it was fraying at the edges. And now I am old and sitting down at my iPad writing, the rhythm of the keys a kind of forgetting.

I remind myself I am 37 and so are you every time I ride the bus. I cannot get that smooth face and silken hair out of my mind, I cannot replace them with age spots, crow's feet and frizz. Porcelain remembrances.

I think about Metamucil. I think about the last time you talked to me. I am still waiting for that call, nights blowing by like cigarette ashes under the heater by my window.

