

Lost Splendors

by Ulrica Hume

"I have a theory," she said on their first date, which was at an Indian restaurant where the music was a lovely singsong but the chef seemed enraged as he clapped a ball of dough between his hands, then threw it into the flames. And her date, whom she would never see again, who would deactivate himself from all social media — Facebook, OkCupid, and Twitter — therefore slipping into invisibility, this thirty-six-year-old male who had taken sequential photographs of his shoes as he hiked on some trail in Colorado, smiled his long-toothed smile and said, "So what is it, your theory?"

They did not know each other well, if at all. She tore off a piece of garlic naan, and when he was leaning in, eager to hear, thinking perhaps that her theory was about him, she said:

"It is that someday there will be no men and women, but instead gender-neutral beings, shaved and reconfigured, whose only use will be the tending of artificial orifices, and the contents of those orifices will be like the starter for sourdough bread."

They walked out of the restaurant, where they had shared plates of spinach and dal, and drunk white wine, feeding the greasy naan into each other's mouths in a way that seemed sexually provocative. Then, after he had pulled open the car door for her with the roughness of someone who is embarrassed by his own chivalry, after he had checked the GPS, as if he was unclear where they were or where they were going, she added to her theory:

"Polar bears on slips of ice.

"Landfills overflowing with plastic straws.

"Fire and fury!"

But this was happening now, she realized. So she looked out the window at the darkness there. This solar knowledge of end times.

