

Story of Mine

“Come on. It's hot.” Kevin Adlai motioned for his wife Stephanie to get in the car, a '96 Honda Accord that still had its shine intact. Stephanie, with arms and eyes crossed, walked away from the car. They had parked in front of Port LeChant's Aquarium & Maritime Experience, which to Kevin was two hours he'd never get back.

“Come on.” Kevin opened the passenger door. He looked up at the empty sky and felt the burn of the sun. The heat and humidity in Port LeChant was beyond oppressive and more like a vault used in graves.

“I'm going to walk down Merchant Blvd. like we planned,” Stephanie explained and then paused to stare at Kevin, but she knew what he was going to do. For two days now, Kevin had been pissy, so much that Stephanie wanted to slip him some Midol. For this vacation – and not unlike the other vacations – all he wanted to do was drive to Port LeChant, stay at the hotel, eat, and drive back home. Stephanie wanted to see the city and actually live in it for a bit before returning to their normal life.

“I'll meet you back at the hotel,” she said and walked away from Kevin. She didn't turn around to look until he had driven off.

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Stephanie heard him singing before she even saw him, and when she did, she was startled by the man. He lay against a wall outside of Junior Lamont's Crab and Catfish Shack. Dark skinned and sun burnt, he stood out against the white of the wall, but most passersby didn't notice him. He wore several layers of

clothes, all stained rags. An open guitar case sat before him with a few dollars in change inside, and the guitar rested in his arms and propped on his shaky leg. The man strummed it and hurried between chords.

“Let me tell you a story,” he sang to Stephanie. “Let me tell you the story of mine.”

Stephanie almost nodded “no.” She didn't want to speak to the man and wanted to be away from him. But walking away would have been something Kevin would have done. So she nodded “yes” and stayed and listened.

The man strummed louder and began to tell his story.

* * *

There was a woman who walked straight out the woods. I was at the train yard about to ride a train out of LeChant. I got into some gambling troubles and owed more than I wanted to lose. The woman had clear skin, hair like a sunset, and green eyes that I still see when I close my eyes. She wore a blue dress. The kind you wear at one of those dances. Thunder, high in the sky and deep in the earth, came with her. And even though it was muddy at the yard, she didn't get any on her.

She strutted right on up to me and asked me if I wanted some wine. I joked her about turning water to wine 'cause I didn't see no bottles. She smiled, and I got that itch down there. I told her I wanted her wine, and she pointed me toward a rusted-out rail car with cases of wine inside.

“Drink all you want,” she told me. I asked her what did she want for it because ain't nothing free. She said all I had to do was listen. I told her I had to be going soon because some folks were coming after me.

“They won't bother you anymore.” When she spoke, her eyes looked like fire. They was green so it looked like green fire. I believed her and never had no trouble from those folks again. In fact, from then on, I did okay with a deck of cards. I worried that if I won all the time, I would be hung from a tree. But my lady was always there to whisper in my ear that everything was okay, and it was. She said a lot of things to me in my ear. She told me that she loved me more than anybody, that she would give me everything I ever wanted in this world and the next, and that all I had to do was believe in her and not the lies people tell about my lady.

I never went hungry, and I have a mighty appetite and not just for food. I had wine, money, and women. Though every woman made me think of her. That itch, no matter how I scratched or how many times, never went away.

One day, I saw a house on a hill with many rooms. Lots of folks worked in that house and were happy. I said to my lady that I wanted that house. She smiled but said there was a woman who lived there that wouldn't let me in. The woman had all the food she could eat and give to those in need, but my lady said the woman wouldn't feed me. The woman had all the milk and honey one could want, but none for me. Nothing for the likes of me.

“All you have,” my lady said, “is me on your side.”

After too much wine one night and painted women, I went up to that house on the hill. The path was easy to follow, and they wasn't any guards on watch. The front door was left open and inside the house was cool and calm. It made me sick to walk in. I saw all the things that weren't for me. It wasn't all gold and silver. I saw plums and peaches that made my mouth water as much as seeing

my lady, figs and melons, apples and berries. Baskets stacked ceiling high.

I walked up these long stairs and into the woman's bedroom. She slept on a round bed with a window open above it. Bright moon light fell to her. Her skin was just as white and pure as my lady's, but the woman's hair was like the golden sun even in cold moon light.

"You hate her," my lady whispered to me. She was with me. She's always with me. "She won't let you have anything. Ever."

I shook my head and wrapped my hands around the woman's neck. I closed my eyes as she clawed at my hands. I choked her hard and good. She didn't squeal or nothing, and it didn't take long before she died. I made sure she was dead, too. Then I ate and drank until I fell asleep next to the woman on her death bed.

When I woke, there were all the hungry and needy folk from the town at the house. They wanted to know when the woman was going to wake up, and if I was going to help them like she did. They was crying for her. I turned to my lady because I wanted her to help them like she had helped me, but my lady wasn't there.

I ran from the house. Those folk tried to follow me, but I lost them. And then I was lost. I couldn't find my lady until dark. She came to me with wine, but I didn't want any. I could see the house on the hill from where I'd run off to. Many folk had come to the house, had many fires lit, and were singing songs to morn the woman. My lady brought more wine and promise of women and fortune. I didn't want to want those things anymore. I wanted to go back up to that house and wake up that woman. I even asked my lady to do that. She

laughed at me and told me that she pitied me and mine.

I choked like I had hands around my neck and threw up snakes, thin and dangly black ones. I then told my lady goodbye and that I didn't need her anymore.

"When you are hungry," she told me, "you'll call for me. And when I have you back, you'll spend the rest of forever telling people about me and what you have done." She laughed and hot rain fell from the sky.

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The man never stopped strumming his guitar, and passersby never stopped for him. Stephanie stood in front of him clutching her hands at her chest. Even in the heat of the city, she was shivered and numbed.

The man grinned with his cracked lips and showed his black teeth. He strummed his guitar and laughed with tears in his eyes. Stephanie stepped away from him. She didn't want to turn her back on the man, but she had to get away from him. She hurried from him and hailed a cab. As she got in, she noticed The Seekers Cafe across the street. A red headed woman in a blue tank top sat with everybody staring at her. The lady, with a glass of wine in her hand, waved at Stephanie. Stephanie told the cabbie the address of the hotel she and Kevin were staying at. Stephanie Adlai cried all the way to the hotel.

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