

bus trip on acid

Nemah was peaking when the Greyhound crossed the border. Her mouth was dry as lemon, she sucked back Cokes as the miles cracked by. This bus trip on acid was her get-away. Escape.

Source always said he'd find her anywhere. "No matter where you go, I'll find you," he had promised. "I'll find you in hell if I have to."

She had thought hell was there with him. "You wouldn't have very far to go," she'd said, and laughed and ducked before his fist had smashed. She had been reckless then, with nothing more or less to lose.

The acid was a going-away-good-luck gift from Lana. "Do it after you get out of the city," Lana told her. "Out of this hell-hole. Away from that shit-heel. Promise me."

The bus wheels droned beneath the seat where she had found refuge and salvation colours. When they crossed the border between countries, Nemah ducked down but no one noticed her. She could be invisible. She pushed her shades higher up the bridge of her nose and sniffled.

She leaned her cheek against the cold window. Night had fallen, and stars dotted the sky like the candles of a billion birthdays. Her eyes felt full and glassy but not from tears. Not from crying. This was her victory ride, she would not cry. She would feel those acid-colours washing over her, she would be a drift of wood.

He'll find me in hell if he has to, she thought.

But then that fullness behind her eyes melted down into sudden tears. Tears that drummed down her cheeks in rhythm with the wheels beating on the asphalt below her little sanctuary.

"I am a one-note orchestra," she whispered.

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All the endless lonely night long the sign blinks neon onto Nemah's window.

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Under the winking neon, bones hang. Goat bones. With heads attached. Nemah stares at those dead goats dangling underneath the sign. Mouths agape and dead. She is sure of it. Dead. Bereft of fur, they seem naked, and in their nakedness and deadness, they are obscene. The roaches in her room obscene in their furtive aliveness, the goats under blinking neon are obscenely dead.

Being Night Keeper has no logic here, she is alone. No monsters emerge from any closet, only endless roaches and dead naked goats under flashing lights.

Nemah sits alone in her single creaky armchair all night watching through the window, because there is no life inside her one-room suite. Sucks back Valium like peppermint candy. Rewarding herself for every hour of her Keeper duty.

the mask slid back

Nemah ground her cigarette into the shell the doctor kept especially for her to use. Aside from her, there was no smoking in his office.

"He's dead," she said.

"Why do you think that?" the doctor asked.

He raised one quirky eyebrow briefly. When he dropped it, the mask slid back down to cover his real face.

Nemah blinked. "This Stelazine is making me feel weird," she said.

"Weird? How?"

"Strange. Not real," she said.

"Unreal in what way?" he persisted.

Nemah let her hand fall to her lap. Traces of it lingered behind, on the desk. She lifted it like a dead weight from her lap and let it drop again. The traces moved from the desktop to the blank space where she had lifted it, but she could sense it lying on her lap.

She blinked again. "My eyes feel sharp," she explained. "Like crystal. Sometimes I can't close them." She placed her dead hand against the nape of her neck. "My neck gets stiff. All of a sudden. And then I get paralyzed, and I can't move. Also I can't write," said Nemah. "I feel wasted all the time."

"Do you want to write?" he asked.

"Well yes," she said. "Sort of. At least a letter or something. At least in my diary. I want to stop taking them."

"And do what."

"Feel normal. Feel," she said.

"What makes you think he's dead?"

"Maybe I just wished it. Maybe that, do you think so?"

"Maybe."

twisting the night away

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Hanging under winking neon, neatly and obscenely dead, Source twists gently from a hook. Hanged by his feet with the other dead, blood draining from his open mouth into a stainless trough below.

Nemah curls up in the armchair by her window in that dark airless room while roaches scuttle all around. The radio that keeps her company at night crackles as she sits and sits, watching the dead naked Source gently twisting the night away.