

I Know This Girl Who Is Full of Stories

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I know this girl who is full of stories. The two of us are sitting on a bench, watching the traffic by the hospital on this dismal day, admiring how cold and industrial it all looks. We're smoking our lungs black, and I ask her to tell me one of her stories. I've heard it before, but I want to get it down.

"Tell me about Canada and the hermaphrodite."

"Well, where do you want me to start?"

"I don't know, where does the story start? Start from wherever you did last time."

"With the internet addiction?"

"Yeah, sure." She swears this story is completely true. She also swears by the England story and the Saudi Arabia story, I've only heard the latter in part. Some of these details may seem irrelevant, but she insists that you need to know everything to understand anything.

*So my mom has this internet addiction. And she's talking to this guy for about four months; I know about him, she talks about him and whatnot. Then one day she calls me into the kitchen because "we need to talk." Apparently this guy has had full-blown AIDS for eleven years. She tells me she has been called on a mission (which is alarming, cause she's not religious at all) to hold his hand when he dies. That's exactly how she puts it too.*

*This is all about two months before my fourteenth birthday, I'm dealing with eighth grade and all, and she leaves for Canada. She's gone for two weeks, then four weeks and I'm waiting for her to say she's coming back. Finally, a week after my birthday she calls and tells me that my brother and I are coming up there for a two week visit. It lines up with our spring break, so it's not a huge deal.*

*But when we arrive there, it's surreal. He lives in this really tiny place with his lesbian roommate and my mom, who has been living there for two months by this time. I slept on a loveseat in the dining room and my brother slept on the couch in the living room. Mom and Quinn (that's his name, although not his real one) are sharing a room, but I don't think much of it. Then there is the big surprise.*

*Quinn is a hermaphrodite. His birth certificate says female, he grew up female, and identified as a female until a few years before we went to live with him. He's about 5'5 standing up, and I met him on crutches. He is really skinny, with limp hair and these big glasses. Yeah, I would say he looked like a bird; he had really beady eyes. You know those graphic t-shirt like kids wear? Well he always wore those with jeans that were too big for him. But mostly he just wore boxers.*

*The two weeks pass, I'm not getting high and I'm not getting high... and the mom tells me I can't go back to America. Get this, she won't let me leave because she says I have a drug problem. Really I think she was just overwhelmed by what she had gotten herself into and didn't want to be alone. So we're up there indefinitely. A few months pass, my brother and I are just waiting for Quinn to kick the bucket because my mom made it sound like he was on the verge of death when she left. We don't have any friends up there; we're missing school by this point, so we just sit around this tiny-ass apartment. About the only place we went was to the riverfront. Wait, did I tell you he played sax?*

*Well he played saxophone and he performed at the riverfront on the weekends for money, the harbour we called it, and that was our little weekly outing. But after several months, he's degenerating. He upgrades to a wheelchair which I'm pretty sure came from a yard sale. I think it's obvious why he's degenerating: all he ever eats is toast; one slice would usually last him all day. Sometimes he would eat two slices, in the span of a day. We would try to get him to drink water, but he wouldn't drink anything but sweet tea.*

*We had been up there for a few months, me still waiting for him to die, when my mom tells me she is falling in love with him and that they want to get married. I'm fourteen, I don't feel like I can do anything about it, and I tell her that. So we go to Value Village and pick out thrift dress clothes. The ceremony- well it is almost a story unto itself.*

*First of all, it's not a legally binding wedding because Quinn is officially a "she." The minister's name is Roy and I'm almost a hundred percent certain he was gay. Also involved in the ceremony is Quinn's best friend, Gabe, who is super gay. He is some sort of Native American and works this traditional ceremony into the wedding. He burns some sort of herb, a sage called...*

She pulls out another cigarette from Jack's soft pack of GT Ones and asks me for a lighter again. She's racking her brain for the name of this herb, this sage.

*Well never mind what the herb was called. Anyways, you have to scoop the smoke to your face and then over your body, it's supposed to cleanse of bad energy or whatever. God, I can't stand not remembering what it's called.*

She calls her mom on her cell phone because she pays this much attention to detail. I tell her not to because I think this might be an awkward issue to talk to her mom about. Not to mention, a phone call about some Native American ceremony from a farcical wedding to a hermaphrodite is excessively random.

*Well, she's not there. That's going to kill me. Anyways, this herb definitely smells like marijuana. Quinn does it all the time for whatever reasons, so the apartment constantly reeks of pot and it makes it even harder not to smoke. They do this at the wedding, can you see the picture? My mom, her terminal hermaphrodite lover and a gay Native American cleansing themselves with what smells like pot; this is the wedding.*

*Even more time passes, we've been there for a little less than a year and a half. We're not Canadian citizens, so we're only supposed to be there for six months to begin with. It is summer now and I go to visit my aunt in Kentucky. On the way back we can't find my birth certificate, which is a huge hassle. I'm also carrying cigarettes in my backpack, so I have to fill out customs forms. I'm only fifteen and a little freaked out, and I think that if nothing else, I can tell them the truth.*

She emphasizes "truth" like it should be written in official capital letters.

*The TRUTH, I tell them, is that I have four packs of cigarettes, we're living at 14 Myrtle Street Dartmouth, Nova Scotia and I don't know how long we're going to be*

*there. This, as I find out, was not the best course of action, but then again I'm fifteen years old!*

*Meanwhile, my brother has been mouthing off to some neighborhood kid. And by "neighborhood kid" I mean the landlady's son. I arrive in Canada to find out she's been threatening to call immigration. We're not taking this too seriously, but combined with the customs form I filled out, it's a little much. Everyone is scared and the consensus is "we have to leave tonight." So we pack everything we own into trash bags- my mom will only allow us two each- and pile into Gabe's car.*

I ask her if she has to be smuggled out of Canada. She cracks a sly smile and says "Yes, hold on, because this is kind of funny. The story is not over yet."

*So we're trying to be real secretive, leaving under the guise of darkness and all. We leave at midnight and the border is several hours away from where we are in Nova Scotia. Gabe's driving, all hyped on pills, I don't even know what kind. The windows are down, music blaring, and the cold air is just hitting us in the face. Now he won't actually drive us over the border, so we have to get a taxi. He gives us money for the taxi, but we have absolutely no money besides that, understand me, none.*

*The first "establishment" we see in America is a Dunkin Doughnuts. It is a nice day so we sit outside, the three of us with our six trash bags and a guitar case. My mom manages to come up with some change for coffee. We're sitting outside of a Dunkin Doughnuts, somewhere in Maine, drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes for nine hours!*

*My mom keeps calling Cindy. You remember Cindy right?*

I nod yes, I do remember Cindy. She stops herself however. "I won't get into that, because Cindy would take up a whole book."

*Cindy works at a Salvation Army shelter and makes some calls to find us some help in Maine. She sends the Red Cross our way and they buy us dinner and put us up in a hotel for a night. Then we're in a Section 8 apartment for another day. Finally the Red Cross pays for our bus tickets home, to Florida. Right before we get on the bus though, we realize we have to condense our six bags into one. There we are, the three of us outside a Greyhound station, going through our shit, trying to make it fit in one bag. Then we ride for twenty-seven hours back to Florida.*

She adds some finality to that sentence. "Is that the end of that story?" I ask.

"Cindy picked us up from the bus station in Tallahassee." She offers to segue right into another story, but I tell her that this is more than enough for a single sitting and besides it's getting cold outside. She has made me promise to ask about anything, to get the details straight. She doesn't think anyone will believe it, but I tell her it doesn't matter because I believe her.