

Alternate Universe

by Elisa Hall

I'm waiting to enter an alternate universe. The queue is long and my drugs are coming on. This is not the first time. There are multitudes of ordinary taxis and stairwells and turnstiles which have taken on new vistas, become sparkly.

The ground disappears and I become weightless. I lift my feet, first one then the other, my legs are jelly the inside of my mouth feels really big.

'Shit.' I say to my friend.

She laughs at me. 'You're so cheap.'

I'm wearing my suede mini dress. I'd been trying to date vegan girl, younger than me. I can't remember her real name but I called her 'little deer.' Just as I thought I was getting somewhere she saw me in the dress at a nightclub.

'You're wearing an animal,' she said, and that was the end of it.

My boots were leather too. Baxter lace ups with leather soles, great for dancing in but I did fall over. I looked down at her feet. Converse sneakers. It wasn't enough that I was vegetarian.

There's a girl at the party I like to play with. I only see her in this world.

Tonight she's wearing a leather harness, hot pants and boots. She's very sexy, a secret sea anemone. I sidle up behind her, put my hands over her eyes. She backs into me. In the crowd and the dark I undo her shorts and push myself down into her. We kiss and then I'm gone, the scent of her a faint imprint on my fingers.

It's later in the night. The music is deep and dirty the smell is sex and amyl. I'm surrounded by sweat shining men gliding over each other. I see a girl. Naturally she has a spotlight on her and a runway heading towards her for me to shimmy along. There is no backing away from this. I jettison myself there. She has dark almond eyes and black hair, an Egyptian queen. Her lips are full, delectable.

I stand in front of her and we regard each other for an unfathomable age. Without words we embrace and eternities surround us. Coloured sparks are pouring out of us and joining into the lights pulsing around the room. I know we have met in other lives even though I don't believe in reincarnation.

In the ordinary world I ask her out. It's the worst beginning to a relationship I've ever had. I don't understand how love and frustration can go together

but she's a nightmare, childish and unreasonable. Inextricably I am compelled, driven by certainty that this is unstoppable. I persist. 'Your friends are boring,' she says to me. She doesn't rate being reliable.

Over time I wear her down with gentleness. She submits to being loved, a feral entity partially tamed. I know not to tether her to me. She loves me back with fierceness, she is a hot fire. I am steady, stoic. The tricky parts of me untangle, I am pulled away from my known path and onto a highway massive and unknown. We wander, seekers, travellers, she yearns to experience as much as she can fit in, and fast. We traverse the world, wired for wonder. I surrender, home being wherever she is. We exist together for years entwined two beings and there is no other, the richness and treasure described in fairy stories are ours for the taking.

On a bus winding up a mountainside she becomes ill. I understand it's something stronger than us, a black seam snaking through her body. Through the ages over and over I have been the one like Atlas elevating the world to hold her against me until her last breath. This is my binding truth and my best mission and I am indefatigable.

Still, I'm not ready.

It comes fast. Her heart falters. Stops. I'm left beyond imagining grief for it is here and real. My life continues, hard with anguish and expressed as an elegy. I am becoming old and she is endlessly young. For now I bide my time.

This is what I know.

She will be there when I am dying.

No-one else will see her but I will be smiling.

My heaven will be the most magnificent dance party in the realm.

She will lay her hands upon me, usher me in, and kiss me with her jewel lips.

'Hurry up honey,' she will say. 'I've been waiting for you. You're missing all the fun.'