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**celina  
baljeet  
basra**

melon

I am sitting on a narrow strip of grass next to a French supermarket parking lot with my sister, spooning out a watermelon, watching our parents' fight. It is over 40 degrees and we are in St. Malo, Brittany, summer holidays of 1994, the door to our caravan wide open, MC Solaar on the radio. I can smell the rice burning on the gas stove inside. We know we need to get up, but we are lazy, as the air is indicating high noon, getting denser and hotter.

I feel the pleasant coolness of the huge halved watermelon against my shins. Bits of juice trickle down onto my lap. I am wearing blue shorty shorts and a pink T-shirt that says Niki Freedom Now Eternity with a swoosh underneath, faded already. My father brought it from his hometown Jalandhar in India years ago. My sister Anna has small droplets of sweat on her upper lip, and dark curls stick to her forehead in ornamental shapes. Eyes firmly on the prize: getting the darker, sweeter bits of melon flesh before I do. We both have faint sheens of white sunscreen on our noses, generously rubbed on by our mother this morning. I felt fresh and lovely then, catching my tan reflection in a mirror above the fish displays in the supermarket, admiring a moray eel and her sharp incisor teeth;

**jacqueline  
dobranski**

piece meal

Dex Macon did not mind the stench of dog feces, nor the shrill of caged puppies. He sought to saturate his senses, to crowd out nightmarish childhood memories. His job as a veterinary technician both tempered and stoked his morbid preoccupations.

“Dex, you okay with sorting the freezer?” asked Dr. Wagman, nose wrinkled, tone apologetic. The freezer held unlabeled dog carcasses bound for cremation, the new assistant’s oversight. To return ashes to grieving owners, the carcasses needed identities.

“No problem. Fine. It’s cool.” Dex’s eyelids blinked to his heartbeat, a tic he’d had for twenty-two years. That long since he lost his family, the result of his uncle’s ongoing betrayal while his dad traveled on business.

A nasal whine escaped the freezer’s hinges, the deep chest releasing a faint sour odor chilling Dex’s sinuses. He scanned the lumpy three-ply trash bags with white bandage tape wrapped near the tops, forming green ponytails. Bending in deeply, he shoved the stiff carcasses to locate unknowns. Slicing through the bags with sharp shears, he matched descriptions to bodies.

The grim enveloped Dex. Beloved family members, now frozen biological waste. He resolved to spend quality time with his sole companion, Husky-mix Jed

# paul hendrikse



the smuggler



The morning light that came in through the window above his head illuminated the concrete walls of the space in soft colors. It had green and yellow tones close to the window and went to shades of blue grey in the farthest corner of the room. The changing light made the space radiant and gave it a soft playfulness. It was as if the walls would forget what they had been made for, to shield, to part from, keep.

He squeezed his eyelids to narrow stripes to create more contrast and intensify the subtle play of colors that was taking place around him. He saw patches of blue, yellow, grey and green in slow ever-changing constellations. The light projected blurry images inside of his head, as if his brain could not connect the things he saw with anything he had seen before and trigger some sort of an associative link. He enjoyed this abstraction, the flowing nothingness of the unclear, of not exactly knowing what he was seeing, with no images or meaning attached.

If he relaxed his eyelids and opened his eyes an inner lens did all the readjustments immediately. The image he saw and the image he remembered joined seamlessly. This image echoed the exact reality as he knew it. A room with grey walls, a window above his

**ana  
llurba**

black virgins



Let me be your eyes, a hand to your darkness  
The Velvet Underground, I'll Be Your Mirror

—When you're dead—Florence said—you don't have to clean your teeth.

—When you're dead—Felicitas added—you can eat all the candy you want.

—When you're dead, you don't have to wear pajamas—Faustina concluded.

—Now no one is dead. Clean your teeth and then go to bed!—Noemí ordered screaming at them.

It had only been one week since she arrived in Berlin. The first thing caught her attention was the omnipresent smell of fried chickpeas at the exit of the subway at the soulless Alexanderplatz. From the taxi window she saw how the light began to decline and the winter showed its claws of darkness and depression in the German capital. In the neighbourhood where her new employer lives there were many trees, no falafel smell in the air, nor crows digging in the garbage.

—When you're dead, you don't have to go to bed—the triplets muttered at the same time.

—When you're dead, it's cold and you have to cover yourself and sleep to save energy—Noemí said loudly

**karini**  
**viranna**

pinhole boyfriend

When Roos is 8 she asks me for stories. Always a story before bed. Roos is my niece. My sister's daughter. My sister who's now dead. My dead sister's daughter.

I tell Roos a different story every night. But half-way through she falls asleep, near the PG13 parts. The parts with sex and lust and how Noor, her mum, died. That's when I write. That's probably what you're reading now. I'm really young. Well, 26 to be exact. I'm motherly because I have to be. Because I love Roos. I like animals far more. But Roos is allergic to dogs and cats. So I take to petting Roos sometimes as if she were Van Gogh, my cat that now lives with my best friend. I'm a photographer. That's how I feed Roos and I double servings of vegan, gluten-free mac and cheese. I have a boyfriend. A pinhole boyfriend.

Finn was my first pinhole boyfriend. I suggest if you want that particular story, you should turn to page 22. But here's an introduction.

In 1987 I entered public school for the first time in my life. From an early age, Maman had homeschooled Noor and I. That was when we were back in Persia. Or Iran as it's now called. We had moved to Malmö when we first arrived and then eventually to Gothenburg. Malmö was supposed to be a melting pot, but to me,



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