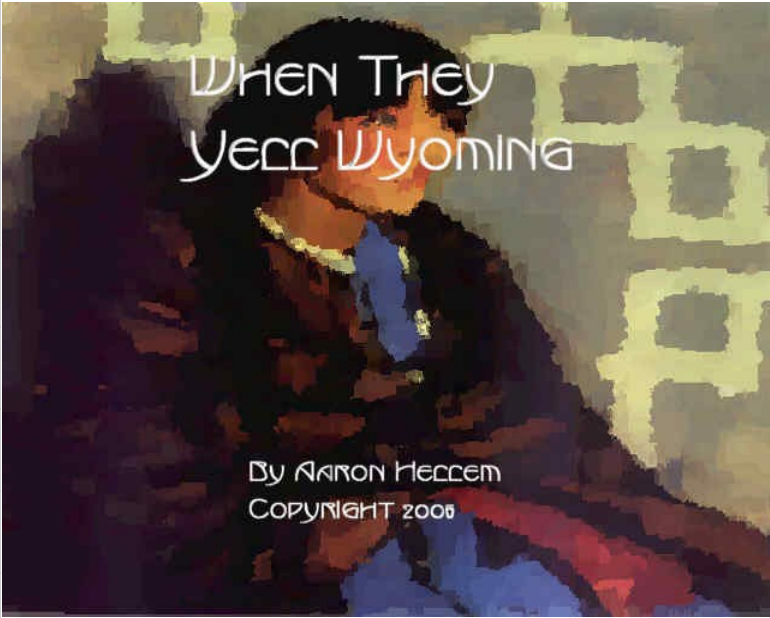


Home		
Winter 2006 Issue		
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Summer 2003 Issue		<p>Her boyfriend was a warrior, but he was in jail down in Cheyenne. I was the only one she knew who had a car and I told her I'd drive her down there to bail</p>
Editor's Note		<p>him out. It was right around that time that I decided I'd rob a bank for her if she asked me to. She said it was up to her to save him. She had three hundred of the bail money and I loaned her the rest. If we drove straight through, we could get there in a day.</p>
Guidelines	<p>There in a day.</p>	
SNR's Writers	<p>We didn't pack any clothes or anything. She got the call and got the money together. I picked her up in the early morning and we were on the highway when the sun came up. We had the windows down. It was the beginning of summer and was already hot. Her long black hair whipped around in the wind, but never got in her face. I thought it might have been because it was trained not to, all those years of her ancestors riding on the backs of horses. I wondered what she was thinking behind her sunglasses.</p>	
Mail	<p>He didn't even call me himself, she said. He had his brother do it. She lit up a cigarette and tossed the match out the window. His brother said he tried to fight three of them, and got two before the police got to him. He was born to conquer, you know. I asked her two of what.</p> <p>White men, she said. She blew her smoke out the window. She'd gotten his name tattooed across her belly as a way to show him she was his, that he had conquered her, too.</p> <p>They'd met in South Dakota one night when he beat up the white man she was going with. She said she fell in love with his dark skin and his quiet torment. His father was Sioux and his mother was Mexican. Across her belly, in delicate lettering, it proclaimed: Alejandro. I could see it when she leaned back in the seat. Her tank top too small and two sizes too tight, left her middle bare and her breasts scrunched up together. Her body was all curves and locomotion. I always imagined she rode a man like a horse, her thighs wrapped around him tight, her rump raised, her hips moving in a galloping motion, giving him little squeezes to let him know when to go faster.</p> <p>He never lets it out, she said, unless he's beating up on somebody. I told him a warrior fights the big battles, not the bar brawls, but he never listens.</p>	

Not to me, anyway. I told him not to go down there.

He could stay with me and find work. She stared out at the land drifting past us. It sounded like she might have been crying behind her sunglasses, but I didn't want to say anything. You know something, Billy, she said, you're all right for a white boy.

She reached over and squeezed my arm. I started to accelerate. She knew what it did to me every time she touched me. I slowed down. I wished she'd ask me to rob a bank for her, or move a mountain. If she wanted me to ride a horse and be a warrior, I could do that.

I'd burn in the sun out in the open prairie, but I didn't care. I'd do it for her.

We stopped in Sheridan for something to eat. In a little diner, I had a hamburger and she got a milkshake. Said ice cream helped her when she was worried. I glanced down at her stomach. His name arched over her belly button like a rainbow. A permanent rainbow of skeletal letters. She had to know deep inside her that having his name on her would leave her vulnerable. She ordered another milkshake for the road and I paid the bill. She said she wanted to pay her half, but we both knew she didn't have enough money and that she needed to save what she had in order to save him.

Back on the road, the sun was already down. I wanted to keep going for her, tried to keep going, but I was fading and needed some rest. She said she was tired, too. Said, We both could use the rest. I pulled over to the side of the highway, off the shoulder and into the gravel. Turned off the car. Shut off the lights. She slid over across the seat and laid her head on my shoulder. The engine ticked, but other than that it was quiet.

I said, Just for a few hours. We'll be there around noon tomorrow.

She snuggled herself into me. Put her arm around me.

It's all right, she said. He'll wait. She sighed. I settled into the seat. Tried not to smell her or feel excited about being so close to her. I can't tell you how much it means to me, your driving me down and the money, she said. Alejandro will appreciate it, too, even if he doesn't show it.

I didn't say anything. I was sure she knew I'd do anything for her and all she had to do was say the word. What are you, Alisha' I asked her.

What do you mean' she said.

Which tribe' I said.

Crow.

And he's Sioux'

Half Sioux.

And half Mexican.

His mix has always been his curse, she said.

How did that work between you' I said. For your families, I mean. I could feel her smiling into my chest. She got a real kick out of the white boy who was trying to figure it out, how she gave herself to a wandering warrior and tattooed his name on her belly and went down to bail him out in Cheyenne, how she opened herself up, how her exposed flesh was rubbed raw and codified.

Things like that don't matter anymore, she said. Not to us, anyway.

I stared out through the windshield, up at the star littered in the sky.

What about your family, white boy' she said. Would they let you bring home an Indian girl' If I loved her, I said.

We were quiet. I knew she wasn't sleeping. You're something, white boy, she said. You're really something. I felt her hand in my lap, unzipping my pants and reaching in. Pulling me out. Felt her mouth wrap around me and take me in. I didn't know if she felt that was something she had to do to pay me back, but I didn't want her to. Not like that. I said, Alisha, but she didn't stop. I ran my hands through her thick black hair. I closed my eyes and pretended I was inside her for real and she was treating me like a horse, squeezing me with her thighs to get me to go faster. I wanted to erase his name from her belly. Alisha, I said, but she didn't stop.

I never wanted it like that, as compensation, thought if I gave her enough time she would choose me, come to me, on her own. Alisha, I said, but she didn't stop. She didn't say anything. Neither did I. We laid in the dark, closed our eyes eventually, and fell asleep.

We woke up with the sun. Didn't speak. Rolled down the windows. She smoked cigarettes and I sped down the highway, speeding, trying to get us there soon.

It felt different between us and I didn't know why, but knew enough to blame her for it. I never asked for anything in return, would've robbed a bank with her and never demanded a cut. Would've got on a horse bare-chested and screamed across the prairie without ever asking her for sunscreen. I had never felt so white in my life. I glanced over at her and she looked back at me with a tired, deflated smile. She was eager to save her warrior.

We were in Cheyenne before noon. She knew exactly where to go and told me how to get there. It didn't look like a courthouse or a jail, except for the flag flapping in the breeze. This is it, she said. I parked, and we went inside. She did all the talking and I stood back, under the fluorescent lights with my hands in my pockets. She told the guy behind the desk that she was there to pick up Alejandro. The guy behind the desk didn't say anything to her, but just nodded and pushed some paperwork at her. She filled it out and I watched her, confident in a strange familiar way like she'd done it before. The guy behind the desk looked up at me. Can I help you' he said.

I'm with her, I told him.

She gave the guy the paperwork and the money for the bail. He stamped some of the papers, took the money, gave her a receipt. Have a seat, he told her.

We took a seat against the wall. It was bright in there, like a doctor's office. I could see all the lines in her face, the scars and the wrinkles and the wear from the

road. Her hair was greasy and looked damp. They're going to bring him out, she said.

I nodded.

She reached over and grabbed my hand. I squeezed it, held it tightly. I still didn't know what to say.

How to make it better.

They're going to bring him out, she said again.

They're going to get him.

I could tell she was nervous to see what kind of condition her warrior was in, if he was lost and defeated, or strong in the heart and legs with just a broken nose to show for. She'd said last time when she bailed him out in Rapid City his nose was broken, and the time before that in Billings his nose was broken, too. She'd said it was because he always left himself open, didn't keep his hands up, and led with his face and not his fists.

He'll be all right, I told her.

When they brought him out, his nose was broken, swollen to the size of a fist. One of his hands was wrapped up in gauze. There were bloodstains down the front of his shirt and all over his pants. She stood and went to him. She hugged him and he wrapped his one good arm around her and held her. He kissed the top of her head. She kissed him softly on the lips.

His whole face was puffed up and swollen. Under the lights, I could really see where he'd been worked over. One of the guards escorted him to the desk.

Alisha backed up across the floor, stood next to me. Alejandro loomed over the guard, tall and unmoving. He had at least six inches over the guard. And me.

Alisha was trying not to cry. Didn't I tell you about his nose' she said. I nodded. That damn nose has been broken more times than I can count, she said.

Alejandro signed papers and the guard handed him an envelope. Alejandro tore it open with his one good hand and his teeth, dumped everything inside it on top of the desk. His wallet, his watch, a box of wooden matches. He stuck his wallet in his back pocket, slipped his watch on his wrist, pulled out one of the matches and pinned it in his teeth. He nodded at the guard and walked over to us. Who's this' he said, and pointed at me. Stared me down like he was considering using his one good hand to beat the hell out of me. This is Billy, she said. He drove me down here to get you. You should thank him.

He stared at me, but didn't say anything.

You're coming with me, she said to him. You can stay with me for a while.

He nodded.

Do you need to stop anywhere and pick up your things'

I asked him.

Let's get going, she said. He doesn't have any things.

Alejandro sat in the back, and Alisha sat up front. Both of them stared out the window with sad eyes, like someone young had just died. I watched the road, knowing we wouldn't stop anywhere on the way back. Straight through all the way up to Billings. She smoked a cigarette. He unwrapped his broken hand. After a while, she said, He helped me with your bail, too. You should know that.

He looked at me in the rearview mirror.

You should say something to him, she said.

I hoped she wouldn't say anything about the night before and about what happened between us. I was trying to forget it myself, knew it was the first and last time anything like that would happen.

I told you, she said to me. She turned around. You could say something to him, she yelled at him.

He didn't respond.

She turned back around. Stared straight out the windshield.

I put both hands on the wheel, kept them there, my eyes on the road. We weren't stopping at all. Straight through the heart of Wyoming where the war cries of warriors were only echoes.

Aaron Hellem attends the MFA Program at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. His works have most recently appeared in Facets Magazine, the Bitter Oleander, Antithesis Common, Indite Circle, and Projected Letters . Also, works of his are forthcoming in the Pisgah Review, Avatar Review, and the Gihon River Review.

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