



It's Now or Never

by Beth L. Thompson

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I'd have followed his voice to the end of the world but that night I followed it out the window, down the drainpipe, emulating the slick, sluggish progression of sewage because that's what people thought of me, so why not lean in? Out the window and into Jen's Chevy, past Amoeba Annie's house – that's what I called her 'cause that's how she was – where even her lawn looked slapped-face sour.

Annie who yesterday told everyone she'd seen the Devil in my knees. Something in how they'd responded with hellish relish to Long Tall Sally. And I'd imagined a thousand tiny demons dancing rings 'round my kneecaps, like in a ceilidh, and that had been enough to get me through class.

To get me on the freeway with Jenny, the night star spangled and dye black, spinning in the wing mirror like a vinyl.

Because what was it Whitman said about being free? Jen was brilliant for putting me on to people like that. Artists from the past who spoke as if from the future. And I thought they really were from the future because in the end we grew into their words like clothes we'd been too small for at the time.

The King was one of them. So that, down in the crowd, so many buds in a bed ready to burst at the right note, I burned to be him. So that, when I threw myself onstage, flop-headed as an August rose, it wasn't so much to get to Elvis as to jump from the ledge of the square-ass world and tremble at the feet of a new one.

After they escorted him, I stayed there on my back, panting at the velvet sky like a fish that had leapt just to know there were mountains.