Danyl A. Doyle
1809 Little Bear Court
Longmont, CO 80504
303.818.7252
dandoylechannel@gmail.com

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One Night At The Morrissey

I wore my emotions outside of my nearly see-through dresses, bondage-strap heels, and my long black hair swung like a weapon. I carried the soul of a woman—enigmatic, sensitive, and mystical while men bury their feelings. I made men look at me, want me, and then watch me walk away. They didn't have to guess what I felt.

Unless I was acting.

Which I love.

I graduated this morning from the University of British Columbia with a master's degree in music and drama. It was my twenty-fifth birthday and I was *ready* to celebrate.

I had done the open mic on Wednesdays at The Morrissey in downtown Vancouver since I was nineteen, the drinking age in Canada. I'd set up my Roland keyboard and sing my heart out.

Loved the applause.

Known for touring bands, the gritty and choatic bar professed a dark and moody atmosphere. The walls were adorned with posters of bands, graffiti, stickers, and punk flyers, giving it a rebellious aesthetic. The decor was minimal but vibrant with a sense of counterculture. Tonight was unusually crowded for a week night, making it challenging to get through with my heavy keyboard case and small amp. These folks liked punk, new wave, and alternative rock. I had discovered early in life that the most effective way to manipulate a man was to bat my eyelashes, smile, and do a sexy hip wiggle. I sat the case down and stepped onto it with my left foot, letting the slit in my slinky black skirt show a muscular leg. . “Hi, fellows.” To attract more attention, I flipped my butt-length black hair over my right shoulder.G

Half a dozen young men immediately jumped to my aid, nearly having a fight about who got to carry my gear to the stage.

A tall, blonde-haired, blue-eyed man in his early thirties was already there since he was the first to sign up on the play list. You got to do three songs and then had to step down. The bar gave you a free glass of wine and a slice of pizza if you played their open mic. The fellow was sipping a cheap dark red.

“Hi, mind if I set up my keyboard since you haven’t started playing yet?” I dazzled him with a smile, knowing he’d comply. I had it down. I was a lesbian and had no interest in men, but I knew how to manipulate them. I wasn’t ashamed to use my sexual charms. I had promised myself before I hit puberty that I’d die with my hymen intact.

“Go ahead.”

I was surprised he didn’t ogle me like most men; instead, he regarded me with the kind of indifference reserved for plastic furniture, which was either deeply insulting

or highly refreshing. *Maybe he's married,* I thought, *But that generally doesn't stop Canadian men*. I put the steel stand together and was surprised this tall and muscular guy didn't offer to lift my heavy weighted keyboard onto it; instead, he was looking intently though his music sheets. I was a weight lifter and could have easily done it myself, but it was a principal: men should be a girl's servant. I flipped my long black hair over one shoulder so the ends hit his music stand and asked with a smoky voice, "Would you mind giving me a hand?"

He didn't say anything. Instead, he gave a slight crooked smile and placed it on my keyboard stand. Without speaking, the guitar player again turned song sheets as if worried about what to play. This must be his first open mic, an amateur.

I was disappointed. Usually men salivated to do anything I asked. It made me feel powerful, especially since I had absolutely no physical attraction to those male things. I was a lesbian with the conviction of a new religion and the practical application of a holy gospel—which is to say, I preached loudly about the benefits of being one. For example, no sweaty and panting man on top of you bruising your womanhood, and from what I heard, they always wanted to be on top. "My name is Pfeffer Alvarez. What's yours?"

He flashed a brief smile under his thick blonde mustache. "Interesting name – its German and Spanish. Pfeffer means pepper and Alvarez means son of the elf army." An elusive grin. "I'm Ryder Anderson." That was it. No handshake, no lustful stare, nothing other than the attempt to impress me with his broad knowledge. He handed me copies of three songs and with an ambiguous tone, said, "You're welcome to play and

sing along if you want." He had the kind of confidence that comes from either supreme talent or extreme naiveté. His wry grin suggested I wasn't capable of playing with him.

I'll show you! I thought. "Sure! I love performing."

I hoped to get on Canadian because I wanted to be the next Paula Abdul or Joni Mitchell, and from that step, break into acting. Since Vancouver is Canada's Hollywood, I figured it wouldn't be that difficult since my father is a very wealthy businessman with connections all over the map. I figured that at some point, I'd be famous in North and South America since I also sang in Spanish.

When he was ready, Mr. Detached looked at me. "Join when you have a sense of the song and can play it without messing up."

Pissed, I stomped my spiked red heels with leather bondage straps running up my calves. I nearly flipped him the bird, my arms wrapped in sexy matching red leather, but instead, I looked at the music sheets. They were originals with complicated jazz-type chords and strange and unexpected changes. The lyrics were sensitive, ethereal, and soulful. I examined the too handsome man for several moments and recognized who he really was under his entirely masculine appearance: *He* was a *she* like some of the guys in here tonight, and this one had a woman's mystical soul. I inhaled sharply.

The Morrisey's acoustics to cackle and pop with power surges, sometimes distorting a singer's vocals then going chrystal clear unexpectedly. His first song was a sad, jazzy-blues balladGOk and I caught on quickly, harmonizing. He sang in a high Irish tenor, the kind you heard on the radio while I could do sultry, smoky, and even country or opera. Our sound filled the room as we harmonized, our music twisting, lovely, and strange – a mix of Middle Eastern, Hawaiian, and pop-rock filled with

dissonance and weird harmonics that vibrated both floor and ceiling, shaking the overhead lights although our amps were not set that loud.

The diverse crowd of goths, punkers, and college students went quiet, then they floated into the Zone – a quantum field where the Resonant God's play. It swallowed us whole.

My eyes were on this handsome, if mysterious, man on stage. I was strangely compelled by his presence and this music that rattled my soul. When our chords clashed there was an underlying vibration that pulled everything, all the waves and particles, harmonically together. The colors in the room liquefied—red neon bleeding into purple shadows, the crowd's faces smearing like oil paint. I hadn't taken ecstasy, yet my body totally got into this feeling as the room shifted into a zone where music rewrote physics.

The guitarist smiled—eyes closed, head tilted back—the look of someone making love with a beautiful woman on a tropical beach.. Me too. My girl was a cute blonde with blue eyes and hard muscles. We found moments of cohesion, of connection and coherence, getting to know one another through music, finding unexpected harmonies and playing counterpoints that were independent and complementary, and then we modulated to a new key at the same moment as if we had played this song a thousand times. I had known him in a previous life. Our connection was inexplicable, supranatural, and cabbalistic. We played two melodies, one song. We are relatives. No, we're twins, conjoined at the heart of music and born from the cosmic egg at the beginning of time.

The audience groaned; their ears and hearts in ecstasy.

When the song ended, everyone stood frozen to the floor. I thought women were going to rush the stage for him and men for me because their eyes were as wide open as their silly-looking mouths. The music that had poured from us was either a divine inspiration or a mass hallucination—the audience's reaction suggested they couldn't tell the difference and neither could I.

Smiling like the Happy Buddha, Ryder immediately went into his next piece and within a few seconds, I joined on the piano, harmonizing with a pop-rock gravely voice like Janus Joplin. This song shifted the mood from mystical and nostalgic to a hot, rocking fever. People started bumping hips and throwing their arms around. Yells and whistles. This idiot came up to my keyboard and stood with his mouth hanging open like he wanted to sweep me into his arms and kiss me.

I was used to that, but tonight was different.

These people were entranced.

Make that bewitched, enchanted, charmed, filled with the magic of our music.

A double line of fans surrounded the stage. Women drooled for him. Men stood with peckers pushing against their pants. It felt like we had been playing together for years and we were already famous. I wished an A&R gal was in the crowd.

When the song ended, the audience went nuts, hollering, “Play, play, play some more!”

Music man’s pants ballooned out happily as he moved into a Scorpion-like love ballad filled with complex jazz chords and unexpected changes that tried to trip me up, but the shifts came through my fingers before they actually happened. WTF?

Heat pooled in my womanhood, but it wasn't the familiar pull I felt for other women. This was something else—like our music was rewiring my body, making me hungry for connection in a way that transcended gender, transcended flesh, transcended this planet. We were long-lost cosmic twins finally finding one another.

This alluring tune was mournful, yet passionately erotic as if two lovers had been separated by war and found one another after a major battle, the buildings bombed out. By the end of the second verse the tough audience had tears in their eyes as they hugged and slow danced, barely moving and making out passionately. This man knew how to massage emotions with music. If I could work with him, we'd become famous. I was already rich, so that didn't matter.

His body was responding the same way mine was—I couldn't pretend not to notice his sensuality buldging, aching for love and connection, for me. The music was doing something to both of us, something primal and strange that had everything to do with our instinctual belonging with one another.

Three songs and he was supposed to stop, but the people wouldn't let Ryder, who was high as a kite with a yellow happy face painted on it, step from the stage. It was now my three song set, and hell if the pop songs I had selected would have the same effect. I handed him copies of my three and he glanced at them. Curiously, he wasn't sweating from the hot stage lights. "Yep, I know them." He didn't need my sheet music. Confidence rose from his body like steaming hormones off the back of a through-bred race horse. He wore a short-sleeved white Polo shirt from which his muscles bulged with *broad* shoulders, *big* biceps and *hard* forearms like Superman's twin brother.

Damn, if I wasn't a lesbian, I'd want him.

"Let's keep playing your originals. The people love them."

He didn't need encouragement.

Soon, the crowd was either quiet and listening intently, or they danced, rocking out to our music. It had to be our uncanny harmonies. That and the way his songs fused jazz, country, classical, and hard rock. Each was surprising and delightfully unexplainable. The rhythms and harmonics sent shivers up my spine and sizzled in my scattered brain. When we transitioned to another of his songs, I glanced over at him. An enigmatic smile belied a nice hard-on that stood from under the body of his guitar. Our music was so steamy and sensual it did something nasty to everyone in the room. *Gonna be some fucking tonight*, I thought. Like him, my womanhood was yearning for a female partner, or did he want to be with a man?

When my set ended, they chanted, "More, more, give us more!"

Ryder checked with the manager, who nodded.

He handed me a half dozen original song sheets.

We played them.

We played as if we had practiced for weeks, our voices harmonizing magically. Telepathically, I caught the stops and didn't mess up but a few times when out of nowhere, he threw in an unexpected, uncalled for, chord change that didn't fit the song, but to my amazement, it worked! And to my shock, the clashing chords did something mystical to the song, and more importantly, to the dusty tough and pulsating crowd writhing before the stage. With them, I went into the quantum field where everything is superimposed onto everything else. All was none and none was all.

I thought, *This musical man should already be famous*.

Thirty minutes shot past, slowed, spiraled, and cantilevered in a strange sort of time distortion that looped back upon itself. We played as though we'd been performing together for years, which was totally impressive since neither of us had any idea what the other was about to cdo.

The other singers waited anxiously. No one wanted to follow us, but the stage manager waved a cut sign as the audience chanted, “More! More! Give us more!”

They booed him, but he shook it off. “Listen folks, you know the open mic tradition here at the Morrisey. This incredible duo should have only played three songs each. I’ve let them entertain you for half an hour. Let’s give the other musicians an opportunity.”

Most folks turned to the bar, much to the owner’s delight because for the last forty-five minutes, they had been drinking only our music.

We packed up and people asked for our autographs, thinking we were some famous duet that happened to pop in. A salivating young woman told Ryder, “I’ve never heard anything like your music. You’re better than Michael Jackson and Siedah Garrett, Rush, or U2. You’re better than anyone!” She was all but hyperventilating. “Where can I buy your albums?”

Ryder’s smile came from the sun as if celestial laughter bubbled inside this man. “I have some demos, but not with Ms. Alvarez’s keys and voice. They’d sound flat and you wouldn’t like them.”

Three men tried to carry my keyboard out to my car, but Ryder, with calm confidence and a soft smile, said, “I’ll take care of my friend’s gear.”

I unlocked my new cherry-red Ferrari's trunk—blood money on wheels, as my girlfriend liked to remind me. My father's fortune came from people during World War II that he refused to name. 'An old family business,' he'd say, and the conversation died like someone cut its throat.

Ryder swung the keyboard in. His bright smile showed a missing tooth on the bottom row that left an ugly black hole.

I said, "Nice playing with you."

No stare, no look of lust. My mouth fell open. I'd spent years perfecting my sexy performance—a hair flip, a leg reveal, and a pursed-lip smile that promised everything a guy wanted, but he'd get absolutely nothing. It was a game I'd mastered so completely I did it automatically. But standing next to Ryder, my usual moves felt hollow, like magic tricks performed for a magician. I thought maybe he's gay. I knew several men who'd go down on this hunk in a heartbeat. I'd call them if I could get his phone number. I looked up with my most vulnerable, sexy, and coy eyes. "Think we could play together again?"

An insignificant, habitual shrug combined with a Laughing Buddha smile, unashamed of the black hole in his mouth. "I just got here from Banff. I haven't found a place so I'm staying in my camper shell." He nodded at a silver Tacoma down the street with a matching topper.

"Where are you camping?"

An embarrassed grin. "Walmart. It's bright and noisy. Didn't sleep much for two nights."

I blurted out, "You can stay at my place. I have a two bedroom house." I remembered that he might be like other men. "I'm a lesbian. You understand?"

An inscrutable upturn of his lips, a bright twinkle in his blue eyes. “Each to their own. I’d appreciate a night at your house. I could use a shower.” He looked back at the bar. “I was thinking about having that piece of pizza they offer and maybe another glass of merlot. Want to go back in?”

I shook my head, making my long hair fly and slap his chest. “Probably not a good idea. They’d mob us again.” I thought for a second. “Do you like Chinese take-out? I’m not much of a cook, but I have some very nice merlot at home.”

“Are you sure?” He slid a big hand over his gut. “My stomach's doing somersaults. Do you feel okay?"

Now that he mentioned it, I felt queasy. "Its just the excitement," I said weakly. "Probably because we were quantum entangled and our atoms got mixed together."

He burped loudly and urped up some purple stuff, then wiped his lips with a bare arm.

Made me want to vomit with him.

Dizzy as a blonde bimbo, I started to collapse. He kept Humpty from falling apart. At his touch, I knew him, I knew every cell in his body and he knew all of me. I spouted out, “Fuck! This is real.”

His tanned face went pale and he clenched his jaws. “What’s real?” He pulled my hand up to the center of his hard chest and instantly, the pounding of our hearts synchronized. We calmed. I felt the ground once more. He started to, but refrained from wrapping his powerful arms around me, knowing I’d freeze and scream. I didn’t want to scream and he didn’t want me to, so I stepped back and let go of his hand. We stared at

each other's faces. I felt mine melting in and out of his. My beard felt soft, warm, and comfortable.

He said forcefully, "This needs to stop."

"Yes."

Like that, a multicolored soap bubble surrounded us as if we were water babies. Moments later, we were normal, our breaths soft and slow, a feeling of wholeness within. I said, "Listen, I've played with a lot of people and something happened between us tonight. I mean musically. I was having visions of cutting a record. I wished some A&R person was in the room."

"Yes, it was very special. This has never happened to me and I've been playing and singing since I was a kid."

My feet now solid on the sidewalk, I asked, "You know what's weird? I couldn't hear a damn thing you were playing. I was following your fingers on the guitar and hoping for the best."

"I couldn't hear you either. It was like we were encased inside separate transporter machines and yet everything I played, you played, amplifying the sound."

"There's no doubt the audience heard both of us."

We stood next to my car on grey pavement, the Milky Way smiling overhead, then I was up there, looking down at this mythical couple who understood one another completely. I asked, "How old are you?"

"Thirty-four, and you?"

I flashed my most beautiful smile. I wanted to seduce him, not sexually, but emotionally. I wanted him to be mine because he belonged with me. There was

something precious and cuddly about him, despite his muscles and height. “I turned twenty-five today.”

“Happy birthday to you,” he sang in a beautiful Irish tenor, then gave a confused look. “So young yet you own a house?”

I looked down at the pavement. “My parents are wealthy. Father bought it so I could walk to the university since I was going for both an undergrad and graduate degree in music,” I spoke too fast, “My businessman father calculated that he’d pay enough rent during the seven years to buy it for me. Plus, he knew Hong Kongers were heading for Canada due to the coming Communist take over which would escalate the cost of Vancouver housing. He paid cash for my two bedroom near the music department.” I was embarrassed, but what the hey, it was a misfortune of birth. My grandparents had immigrated to Argentina after World War II with trunks full of other people's treasures. My father moved us to Canada with a new surname and a wall of silence. The money that bought my house, my car, and my freedom were all stolen. Ryder's music, his open smile, his missing tooth were earned. Everything about me was purloined, fake, and not mine. I needed his reality, his earthiness to become whole. I sensed it deep in my soul.

Ryder was completely, starkly, and *divinely* different from Mr. Fabian Alvaraz, my creepy father. There was something kind, feminine, and unearthly about him, especially when he laughed and smiled like the Buddha.

I wanted to take him home to meet Doodle Dog, my standard poodle. She was a better judge of character than me because she could smell evil. If she growled or backed away, I'd know this quantum magic was just my imagination. But if she grinned

and lay her head in his lap, then this night was the beginning of something I couldn't control, manipulate, or predict. And for once in my calculated life, that thought didn't terrify me.

I laughed to myself. If she didn’t like Ryder, I’d kick him in the nuts hard enough to make him into a woman.

Then for sure, she and me would like him/her, his/her, he/she.