

Lost Souls

By O. Grey

I fumbled with the keys like an idiot, trying to unlock the door to my hotel. She stood behind me and I could feel her eyes on my back, watching me. The thick air seemed to devour us in its heat. Finally unlocking the door, I pushed it open and gestured for her to go inside. “Ladies first,” I said watching her hips sway from side to side as she walked past me. I closed the door and started to loosen my tie. I knew this was going to get weird fast, so I tried small talk.

“Boy, it sure is hot today, isn’t it? I bet it’s in the nineties. What do ya think?” My voice quickened, and I could feel the blood rush to my cheeks.

“Oh, yes. *Very* hot,” she said, leaning toward me and reaching for my top button. Sweat dripped down the side of my neck and I lightly grabbed her hands to stop her. They were so small and fragile. She looked so young.

“How ‘bout a drink? I’m a little tense. I’ve never done this before.” I turned away from her, raising my eyebrows at how forward she was. I headed to the mini fridge and pulled out the bottle of vodka I had bought just for the occasion, and poured a shot in two glasses.

Behind me, I felt a small breeze as she crossed the room and went to the glass door that overlooked the patio. “So what are you into? You like it rough, dirty? I can do dirty. You wouldn’t believe what I could do for the right price,” she said. She sounded like she was a car salesman, selling her woman hood to anybody with a thick enough wallet.

I turned to face her, handing her a glass of Brandy as I opened the glass door and sat in one of the chairs outside. She followed and sat across from me.

“How about we just talk for a minute? Like I said, I’ve never really done this before.”

“Sure, whatever you want bud. You’re the one paying,” she said, as she leaned back in her chair and took a gulp of her drink. She closed her eyes and sighed with satisfaction, like it was a treat for her to be sitting in the sun.

“Let’s talk,” she said.

I tapped the rim of my glass with both thumbs as I considered how I would say my next words. She obviously had no clue. I looked up and at her, taking in her features, she must be nineteen now. After a few moments of silence, she opened her eyes and squinted at me.

“Do I look familiar to you?” I said.

She sat up and set her drink on the table in front of us. “Ah, shit. Are you with the bank?”

“No, Mel. I’m not with the bank,” I said, motioning for her to calm down. “Wait—why are you in some sort of trouble?”

She stood up suddenly, and glared down at me. “I never told you my name. How did you—what are you, some kind of stalker?” She reached for her purse, and backed toward the wooden fence behind her. “I have a gun ya know, just for crazies like you. Rosie told me something like this would happen—you aren’t choppin’ me into bits Mr. I’ll shoot you right in the pecker.” She held a small revolver, pointing it at my lower region. Her face twisted into something that was probably supposed to be intimidating, but really, she looked as if she’d eaten a sour lemon.

“Melony Louise Pickett,” I said each word slowly. Ignoring the gun, I looked down at my drink, running my ringer around its rim. I was lost in the motion. “Born in Mobile, Alabama. Your birthdate is April 21, 1950. And I bet you don’t have a lick of where your parents are.” I said the words robotically, as if they’d been rehearsed.

“How—how do you know all that? Who are you?” she said, her voice shaky as she stepped closer. I turned to look at her.

“Your brother, Jamie Pickett.”

The gun lowered and so did her eyes. Her legs seemed to grow weak with the sudden realization. She stumbled back into her chair, and began to fan her face.

“My brother, eh? Why didn’t you just tell me? We were about to—you know,” she said, gesturing to the closest bed inside. “If you think I’m servicing you, you ‘bout lost your damn mind. I may be a lot of things, but I ain’t no sicko.”

“No, no way. That was never the plan. I just, I had no way to get ahold of you. And when I searched the records, your name came up on file for—.” She cut me off, swatting away my next words.

“Yeah, yeah, I know.” She looked away from me, both knees pointing inward, as she slumped in her heels. Her gaze returned to mine. “What happened? Why did they leave us?”

“Mel, they died when you were three. Momma would have never left us in there, and I got put into an all boys home. I was only 14.” I paused wincing at the memory, grabbing the hair on the top of my head. “They wouldn’t let me see you.”

I watched as a tear rolled down her cheek. She looked away from me, trying to hide it. “So why now? Why are you just coming to me now?”

I closed the space between us, and wiped the tear from under her eye with my thumb.

“I never stopped looking, Mel. Not even for a day.”

She burst into tears and I brought her into my arms.