

Eggs and Old Spice

by Rachel Venturino

I hate the city. Honestly, it was a very poor excuse for a city but even those minor requirements I absolutely could not stand. The noise of babies crying, cars honking, a crowd of old friends yelling as they catch up (as though more volume means stronger emotions), the constant sirens of police and ambulances – I had become sick of it by 24. I had always imagined myself living somewhere remote, maybe the desert amongst the cacti and lizards. I'd prefer a lizard as my neighbor than the college freshman who had his mommy and daddy paying rent. Lizards are more considerate, they're solitary creatures who don't scream at three in the morning, waking up the 87-year-old woman below us. At least, the ones I've known never screamed.

I had always imagined myself being that crazy old man in the middle of Mexico, maybe 5 miles from the nearest small town. I would travel there at least once a week with a donkey that was on the verge of keeling over and a crudely built cart that's always lop-sided. Everyone in the market would know me by the sound of the wagon and my horrifyingly bright hair – an obvious outsider but treated as if I was always there. I would flirt with the old woman I'd buy mangos from in the market and spend the day playing chess with the retired men of the town. I'd fall in love with a tan girl. She would be shy and probably taken by another man. I always wanted to live in the sweat and culture of Mexico and to spend everyday hearing their passionate voices. Their fast voices with more vigor than the states I had known.

But a needle driven city was where I lived, living Gerard's dreams of staying up beyond the witching hours and listening to underground music. The only sunsets I experience anymore are mixed with a swirl of his vomit as I hold back his hair. We can be more disruptive now, the secrecy of Gerard's lifestyle no longer being a shame or discomfort for our parents. They aren't here to pound their words into our groggy, hung over minds. They don't and won't know how many times Gerard has pissed on a church or a playground, and how many times I was too tired or too lost myself to redirect him.

"Yo Adrian," a bad, slurred Italian impression came from my front door, and that bad impression was carrying a carton of eggs.

Every time I saw Gerard, he looked somewhat familiar but just a bit off from what I'm used to. We used to be twins sharing every aspect of ourselves up until late high school. The same curly, ginger hair, the same clothes, the same way of speaking. But in high school he began damaging his hair with the chemicals of black hair dye and receiving at home piercings from a girl who wanted so badly to be a part of his life. His eyes are mine, his chin and jaws are mine, but everything else has become lost in translation. It's comforting and sad when I look at him now, because I'll never know how I'll look at my funeral. I won't have the luxury of seeing what the mortician has done right and wrong to my body. Some twins have been lucky enough to see themselves dead, to be prepared, to have a sibling who embraces the twin motto and doesn't change their appearances so drastically. But when Gerard dies, which he inevitably will die before me, I won't get to see myself dead. Maybe it's not as large of a luxury that I believe it is, but dammit, I want to see how I'll look wrapped in satin with silver thread and wire closing my eyes.

"Gav, we're going out tonight!" Gerard began shifting through my cupboards.

“I really don’t want to. We just went out last night.”

“But there’s this concert downtown, I don’t like to go alone.”

“You don’t need me there, you have other friends.”

He kept talking, but I knew it was the same as every other obscure concert he told me about. The lead guitarist studied with the legends, or that this was so-and-so’s son who’s all the rage at the underground clubs, or the drummer was Satan himself with tattooed sclera’s. I heard it all about these bands that only lasted on the scene for a month or two only to break up over laziness or creative differences – but I suppose that’s the beauty of enjoying bands no one else has heard of. I hate concerts almost as much as I hate the cities they’re held in. But still, I allowed Gerard to guilt me into being his shadow – once asking what would happen if he couldn’t find his way home, or if he got hurt. He tried convincing me that he needed someone sober to watch him, although he never allowed me to stay sober.

“I heard that German is gonna be there.” Gerard had found the largest skillet I owned and placed it on the gas stove. He allowed gas to escape into my apartment before allowing the last click to light the flame. He told me once that he enjoyed daring to see how large he could make the flames; I told him I didn’t want to lose my deposit.

“What German?”

“You know, the one I was telling you about a few weeks ago. That German who smells like Old Spice.” The way he cracked the eggs directly into the pan bothered me. He never waited for it warm up first, always impatient. Mixing the yolk and whites together in the pan rather than a bowl, allowing the undersides to burn and stick to the bottom. The spatula, made to craft the eggs into fluffy chunks, was more of a decoration for Gerard to sling around as he spoke.

“You say that like it’s special. It’s a well-respected brand. I smell like Old Spice too, does that make me more desirable?” I asked.

“I guess, but this was a German.” He stared at me as though something was meant to click in my mind, that this man of German descent meant something. The spatula clattered onto the counter and Gerard stood with his hands on his hips. The scrambled eggs were well beyond the point of being burnt, I could smell my skillet being ruined again. “God dammit, Gavin! Don’t you get it? The man’s a fucking German for Christ’s sake!”

“Will you please just explain why it matters?”

“I mean, Germans are known to be pretty good in bed, right?” Gerard shook his shoulders as he spoke.

“What are you talking about?” I’m not sure when the stabbing sensation had arrived to my forehead, but it was here that it became prominent.

“You know, they’re known to be pretty kinky, right?”

“I don’t think nationality effects that about a person.”

He slid the eggs onto a paper plate and joined me on the couch trying to explain why this Old Spice man being German was so important. “You know, their accent and straightforwardness and stuff. It’s all really hot, you know? Just how blunt and angry they are and their history of violence. It’s hot.”

“Their history of violence?” I repeated it slow, hoping he would see how terrible it sounds.

“No, Gavin, not.” Gerard stopped for a moment, flustered and trying to find the words. “I don’t know. You just don’t get it.”

“Yeah, I guess not.” There was a moment of silence between us as Gerard ate. We watched Maury repeat the same lines he did every episode. “You are not the father,” “you are the father,” “so-and-so says he’s having an affair,” “we have the lie detector results right here.” Crowds cheer and scream, but it wasn’t what it used to be. When we were younger, Gerard and I spent our mornings with Granny watching guests on Jerry Springer throw chairs at the audience and come out as transgender to their families. Granny was a horrifying woman, waking us up in the middle of the night with a \$1 Halloween mask on. Her throne was the recliner in front of the television, and she ruled over her home with an iron fist. A blunt woman who cursed like a sailor and wasn’t afraid to hit anything disobeying her. She would slap us behind the head in unison and warns us about whores and liars. She would stick her finger towards the television and speak in her blunt, Appalachian voice. “You boys look out for those colored girls,” she’d say. “Those colored girls are on here all the time not knowin’ who their baby daddy is. Not knowin’ who their own daddy is either. They ain’t nothin’ but trouble.”

“I assume you’re looking to have a night with this prophesized German?” I asked.

“Yeah.” Gerard’s mouth was full. “That’s the game plan.”

“How do you know he’s gay?”

Gerard shrugged, as though the sexual orientation of the man didn’t matter. “Isn’t that another thing about German guys, though? Aren’t a lot of them gay?”

I tried to withhold my laughter. “Where are you getting any of these assumptions from?”

“I don’t know. I read stuff. Media and all that. They sure as hell act gay.”

I told him, “It doesn’t count if the only other Germans you’ve seen are on Logo.” He laughed at me, focused on stuffing the last pieces of egg into his mouth. “No, I’m serious,” I continued. “A lot of guys on Logo live in New York too, does that mean every man there is gay?”

“Well, fuck Gavin.” He was yelling now, yelling as loud as a chewing man could. “Might as well be. Every man has the chance to be gay. They just haven’t met me and my fine little ass yet.” As he spoke, he walked back into the kitchen, throwing away the paper plate. “I think most people are secretly gay.” He leaned in the doorway of the kitchen, arms crossed and staring at me.

“Agree to disagree, I guess.”

“Okay, well go take a nap so you aren’t just whining all night.”

“Gerard, I really just want to stay in tonight. I haven’t read in so long.”

“Gavin, please.” He acted tired and stressed, almost as if he were mocking me. “I haven’t fucked in so long. Just be my wing-man with this German?” I didn’t want to look at him.

“Besides, what if you’re right and this guy isn’t gay? What if he decides to beat the shit out of me because I am?”

“You’re fully capable of defending yourself.”

“People can’t do a lot of things when they’re intoxicated.” There was a pause between us. I looked out the window, wishing desperately to pick up and run away to that small town in the

depth of Mexico. Wishing I had the strength to abandon my brother to his own devices so that I could live my own life. I felt so exhausted of life, of the city and other people. "Gavin."

"Alright, I'll go." Would I always be damned to give in?