

Whiskey

Myths

by L.A. Strawbridge

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## SITTING ON THE FLOOR LISTENING TO MUSIC

Leaning her head back on the mattress perpetuated the dream state inspired by audio refuge. A primal rhythm of percussion was the natal hum. The guitars were a conversation taking place nearby. Voices melted from anger to pain. It was her world. She hung on every word, every note, as long as it could last.

Music floated out the speakers until almost visible, thousands of tiny dots in every color like on a tv screen mixing together innumerable to create vision. Silence was pure white. Music was everything else. She wanted the music to fill her; indeed, it was the only thing that even came close. For as long as Van could remember, her core was a hole. She always wanted to be deeper and found life, itself, a disappointment. Not like depression, but a conscious study of what life had to offer and deciding it just wasn't enough. She was constantly trying to fill the hole with anything that would make her happy, or at least numb.

Rocking slowly to penetrate deeper, her mind numbed from the rhythm and she was grateful – anywhere but here.

Floating instead on an ocean with waves gently lifting then setting her back down... how wonderful to be surrounded by wetness. The Valley of Dregs and Skidders was a slow death of a place – so hot and dry. Though the ocean would only be a deceiving death. Salt would evaporate the life out of you eventually, just like the valley. Passion burst out of her mind, returning thoughts to the tiny dots. That's what the colors were, she realized. Passion. That's what the valley lacked. It was dead air. Used. Dried out.

Van was listening to her favorite band, BloodFire. Their debut, Whiskey Myths, came out three years ago. She discovered it eight months ago sitting in a diner when the cook came out to change the music. The album was pretty big, even when it first came out, but she didn't pay much attention. Most of the music that was popular at the time sucked. Every time a band was called the next big thing, it just sounded like every other band out there. They wouldn't want her to go off and do something like think for herself. Corporations hate that. Just repeat the same thing over and over – no matter how crappy – eventually people will like it because it's familiar. Van wanted to think that, not just her, but all people were stronger, more independent than that. The more she experienced life though,

it just didn't turn out to be true. Most people are sheep, and if you do repeat something enough times, they buy it, whether it's music, politics, religion or a fake compliment.

It was a small diner, so they just wired four small speakers to somebody's old stereo. Immediately, the whole experience came screaming at her like a banshee spirit jumping into her soul. After only a few notes, she knew the sound was different – raw. Not technically perfect, as they were young musicians, but passionate. She didn't just listen to the notes, but felt them; the rhythm, the emotion of Domingo's voice and the story Julian was trying to tell through his guitar. After three songs, she left the diner to get it, and it's been in her stereo since that afternoon.

## JULIAN WISEBLOOD

Mythology, shamanism, voodoo. The guitarist and songwriter for BloodFire talked obsessively about the ancient supernatural. Known for getting drunk and telling fantastic stories, he swore they were true, but always recanted them the next day.

One story often revived was about going to the desert to play music all alone like the ancient cultures did. Van read that he holed himself in a tent for three days and fasted, smoking a sweet-scented pipe. He chanted and sang. Using rhythm and solitude, he reached a deeper level of consciousness until animals came to him, and they spoke just like people. He said the universe plays a song that can always be heard in the deepest levels of our consciousness. He said if you train your mind properly, nothing is actually good or bad. It's up to each of us to give it meaning. He said, because of his journeys there, the dead never truly die.

His friends laughed hysterically when he talked like that, telling him to "smoke another one" or "lay off the punch." Julian himself wondered if more was what he needed, or less.

As the story went, he found his voice after stumbling into a smoky bar. In between bands, Julian was walking around the city late, as he liked to do. There was something about watching the night turn into twilight that he loved, how the black would become the most beautiful shade of blue, sometimes violet. He saw it as a victory revealed in the sky each night, a renaissance out of darkness. That night, it was still pretty early, maybe one in the morning. Twilight wasn't for a few hours, so he stopped in a bar, having heard this band from the sidewalk. They weren't the best he'd ever heard, especially the lyrics. Though they had this vibe that was so inviting, addictive really, and it just kept drawing you in deeper and deeper in waves until you could no longer get out but didn't want to anyway.

Nearing the stage, Domingo's singing was smooth and warm, which no one would have guessed by looking at him. He was big – wider than he was tall with a pockmarked face and a tattoo on his neck that made him look more like a convict than a singer. There he was with few words, bent forward, being more of a ceremony leader. He was in a different place, somewhere off in his mind, bringing it out to the few people willing to meet him half way. To Julian, it was beautiful and the connection so immediate and deep that it equally frightened and excited him.

He nervously waited until the end of the show to approach Domingo about looking at some lyrics he'd written. With only a vague direction in song writing at the time, Julian tried to explain it the best he could over a beer, but his mind was distracted and kept jumping to other places. The more he talked, little ideas exploded as dozens of inspiration firecrackers going off that he could neither contain nor keep track of.

Domingo agreed to come over the next day, so Julian went straight home instead of walking the streets. He'd been wandering for over a year without a creative spark significant enough to excite him. Confused stirrings never would come into focus. After happening into that smoke-filled room and finding his voice, he suddenly knew the direction to begin. Maybe not the whole vision, but he had the big bang. Going home that night with everything pouring out, three new songs came into being: Shaman's Song, Precious Bones, and Whiskey Myths.

## Lyrics to Whiskey Myths

Copperman at the end of the bar  
Staring into his whiskey  
Sipping each night from that stool  
Bottle at arms length

Fixed in his own actuality  
One night he turns suddenly  
To ask if you've danced with the tribe  
You tell him no

Copperman says  
I hold life  
I'm the keeper of lives  
They depend on me to survive  
In my intuition lies their wisdom  
My remembrance, their redemption  
I fan the embers  
Enduring, undaunted  
Their lives remain  
My relics, unforgotten

With a tip and a final swallow  
He leans in to share his secret  
The Moonrise tribe has called him over  
Invited him into their circle

To share Moonrise myths –  
Tales of those who have disappeared  
An imprint of life, of dreams  
Failure, victory... mystery

Copperman says  
I hold life  
I'm the keeper of lives  
They never truly die  
In my embrace lies their validation  
My fable, their emancipation  
But only if you believe...  
He pours a whiskey  
Takes a sip  
Stares straight ahead

## THE NEXT DAY

“Hey there.”

Lana looked like a tall, gawky version of a vintage pin-up girl. Julian liked her immediately. He loved imperfection and that’s what Lana was.

As promised, Domingo arrived the next day with his brother Rodrigo and Lana, Rodrigo’s girlfriend. Domingo did most of the talking. He talked about all kinds of stuff from aliens on earth to new-age cities sprouting up near vortices and even briefly about the noodle theory in modern physics. He liked the Science Channel. Lana didn’t even pretend to listen. She sat there looking at her long, red fingernails apparently waiting for something.

Lana wasn’t her real name, but that didn’t matter. Who she was now was a dyed brunette with a fat curl bobby-pinned on each side of her head. He wanted to ask her if she liked herself now and if she thought she was pretty. He wondered what her favorite channel was. Lana could be on tv. She stood out in a crowd because her appearance was painfully cliché, like a caricature. She had skinny black eyebrows and red lips that matched her little red jumper with white polka dots. Even more interesting, the cliché didn’t fit. Her legs were big around; she was six feet tall and broad balanced on stumpy, black high heels. Covered in tattoos, she had eleven of them... roses, pyramids, a drawing of a pin-up girl, and a sailing ship. Sitting quietly next to her, Rodrigo was short and stocky like his brother, and Lana was about half a foot taller than him.

Domingo looked at the lyrics and had ideas right away. Good ones. They were a duo one couldn’t quite categorize as musical soul mates, but not the odd couple either. Domingo was straightforward. His appearance and attitude were simple and real in a masculine way, but he had a sensitivity that came through when he sang. His hands were wide with short, fat fingers that swallowed up a microphone forcing him to hold it, almost dainty. He couldn’t write a song to save his life, but Julian’s words possessed him as the undead demanding resurrection.

Julian was smaller in stature, but his ideas were too big, even for his own comprehension. Overall, he had much softer mannerisms than Domingo and used a lot of body language when he talked and when he played, especially with his hands

when he talked. A coarse reviewer once described him as faggy, but he wouldn't be bothered with such stereotypes.

The partnership was a fascinating swim through similarities and differences. Domingo was understated and modest in everything he did, but had sharp intelligence. It was a choice to reveal it subtly. The first time it was revealed to Julian was that first night they all got together.

In the bar, he wasn't articulating his next phase of music well at all, but Domingo got it. He knew Julian was on the verge and wanted to bring Rodrigo and Lana along for the ride. Not immediately realizing what happened, it was a couple hours in before finally putting it together that Rodrigo was a drummer and Lana played bass, which made them a completed band.

Believing women were more in touch, more natural, like the energy spirit in animals, he loved having Lana there when they created. Three times he even saw her morph into a wild animal for one blink of the eye, maybe two. First she was a wild boar, but stood upright, angry and powerful. Another night she was a meek little gazelle minding her own business. The last time was a tiger pacing hungrily.

The leopard was Julian's guide, and it was always a female leopard that sought him out. When holed in his tent, he'd see her stop by in the distance. A ring he wore was shaped as a leopard's head with two green stones for the eyes because he usually saw her at night when her cat eyes reflected moonlight.

Choosing clothes by what had meaning to him, whether it went together or not, allowed Julian to use clothing and its accompaniments to slip into the persona of his inspirations. Silver rings and black fingernails adorned his small hands to feel the part of a tribe. Only the leopard ring was gold. Other favorite items included a leopard cowboy hat; a brown, wool poncho; a full-length, fake fur coat; a black knit cap and a silver medallion necklace on a leather rope.

Domingo's wardrobe, on the other hand, was an ongoing joke with the band. Black concert T-shirts and dark pants cut off below the knee. Everyday. The only thing that changed was the band name.

BloodFire. The name came to Julian at the end of that first meeting. Life and passion as one. It was his starting point – a perspective in which to move forward.