

There was a window by Niko Staten

Antonia Suzanne Ludvark had never seen the sun. Born at midnight on May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1982, in a Portland basement to Goth parents, Antonia was destined for darkness.

(And eyeliner.)

The albino shut the door behind her and stared in wonder at the sparkling squared glass. Her blackened heart skipped a beat as she took a timid step closer.

It was there.

She could see it. She could *feel* it.

Each step brought her closer to danger, closer to enthrallment. Each breath took her closer to anxiety. Shouldn't she turn back? Shouldn't she return to the depths of despair, the Emo Land from whence she came?

Her pale fingers stretched slowly, aching, towards the golden beam that threatened her very existence.

*Is it safe? Does it matter?*

"Nothing matters. Only...this."

Antonia took a deep breath, adjusted her black tutu, and took a large, mad jump into the sunlight. She cried out softly as the warmth washed over her.

The heat was new, inviting and exciting. Every pore began to sweat. Every nerve tingled.

The stories she had learned as a child, the warnings from her parents, were all but forgotten. What cared she for the old tales? She was ready for a new story-hers.

But the hours passed too quickly and the sun began to fade. Antonia stared at her reddened skin, her tears like fire.

"No! You cannot leave me! Take me with you!"

Without realizing it, she pulled a loose brick from the pile in the corner of the attic and chucked it at the window with all her strength. Glistening shards burst forth, kissing her face before they clinked to the floor. The scents of sunscreen and

Strawberry Daiquiri filled the room, overpowering her. Antonia toppled forward and grabbed the paint-chipped windowpane.

She could hear them. She could see...

And suddenly, unaware of what she was doing, Antonia Suzanne Ludvark put both knee-high leather boots on the ledge of the pane and jumped.

(Nothing else happened, so you might as well stop reading.)

(Just kidding...)

There was sun. There was sand. There was...

"There's elephant poop on my boot."

A tall man with an angular nose dressed in a purple velvet coat quickly ran forward. He tipped his straw top-hat and made an apologetic gesture with his hands.

"Oh dear, I am terribly sorry about that! My wife and I had lunch at the chili-dog vendor over there, you see, and I'm afraid it gave her dreadful diarrhea."

He pointed across the beach to a twenty five foot tall, 1200 pound elephant. The man waved. Antonia waved. The elephant waved and walked towards them. The ground danced around them with every step she took.

"I was just telling this young woman about the mess of a lunch we had, Cordella."

"Oh my, yes. Those chili-dogs were expensive, too," the elephant sighed. She flipped her ear to the side with her long trunk and gave a devilish grin. "I suppose you could say, it gave me a *run* for my money!"

Cordella chortled through her trunk and Antonia decided that it was the best sound in the world.

"But Frances, darling, you haven't introduced me to our new friend."

Antonia made a little curtsy, as you do when you are introduced to a top-hatted man and his elephant wife. She smiled. "My name is..."

Wait. Who was she?

"I seem to have forgotten."

Cordella waved her trunk. "Names do not matter, my dear. They are cheap, plastic-y things which are easily replaced. "

"Massed produced in China," her husband said with a nod.

"You should choose a name for yourself."

Antonia set down her spiked backpack purse and gave this idea a serious thought. Although she could not remember her old name, she knew that it was part of her other life, a life that she did not cherish. Skulls, black-lights, and 90's grunge music no longer held a place in her heart. She no longer wanted that black lipstick. She no longer wanted the thigh-high pleather boots that farted every time she moved.

She pulled the boots off and dropped them onto the sand. They melted, twisted, into wiggly black snakes. The snakes wriggled around, contorting themselves into a word:

*Freedom.*

She pulled off her stockings and more snakes appeared, spelling the word *Dream.*

Her corset spelled *Release.* Her tutu spelled *Create.* Her long-sleeve top became the word *Become.*

Antonia stood on the beach of Life, naked, and inhaled deep, taking it all in. The words slithered one by one up her body, nuzzling her sunburned skin. And she knew, at that moment, that she had all that she would ever need.

She did not need clothing. She need not need food. Truth would be her apparel. Words would be her sustenance.

She was Fire. She was Beauty and Light. The very Cosmos dwelled within her bosom. She would not be controlled. She could not be contained.

"My name is Stardust," she said at last.

Top-hatted Francis gave a wink and knowing smile. Cordella waved goodbye as they waltzed, oddly enough, towards the chili-dog vendor.

Stardust jumped over a large dung pile and made her way towards the ocean. The bubbly bubbles ticked her toes and she was about to plunge in but was halted by a rotund man with a badge on his jacket and a whistle in his mouth.

"Stop!"

“Is there a problem, Officer?”

“I’ll say. You can’t go in the water like that, Missy.”

“Naked?”

The policeman rolls his eyes and pulled out a breathalyzer . He made a grunt and searched his pockets.

“Jus’ what I thought! Your alcohol level is at zero. Did’ya think no one would notice? Here,” he pulled out two large lollipops. “They’re beer flavored. Better than nothing, I s’pose.”

Stardust put both suckers in her mouth, closed her eyes, and dove into the water. She relaxed and let herself float upon the Sea of Life, drifting calmly towards Forever, towards Everything... towards Herself.