

Alma

YOU, YUNIOR, HAVE A GIRLFRIEND named Alma, who has a long tender horse neck and a big Dominican ass that seems to exist in a fourth dimension beyond jeans. An ass that could drag the moon out of orbit. An ass she never liked until she met you. Ain't a day that passes that you don't want to press your face against that ass or bite the delicate sliding tendons of her neck. You love how she shivers when you bite, how she fights you with those arms that are so skinny they belong on an after-school special.

Alma is a Mason Gross student, one of those Sonic Youth, comic-book-reading alternatinas without whom you might never have lost your virginity. Grew up in Hoboken, part of the Latino community that got its heart burned out in the eighties, tenements turning to flame. Spent nearly every teenage day on the Lower East Side, thought it would always be home, but then NYU and Columbia both said nyet, and she ended up even farther from the city than before. Alma is in a painting phase, and the people she paints are all the color of mold, look like they've just been dredged from the bottom of a lake. Her last painting was of you, slouching against the front door: only your frowning I-had-a-lousy-Third-World-childhood-and-all-I-got-was-this-attitude eyes recognizable. She did give you

one huge forearm. *I told you I'd get the muscles in.* The past couple of weeks, now that the warm is here, Alma has abandoned black, started wearing these nothing dresses made out of what feels like tissue paper; it wouldn't take more than a strong wind to undress her. She says she does it for you: *I'm reclaiming my Dominican heritage* (which ain't a complete lie—she's even taking Spanish to better minister to your moms), and when you see her on the street, flaunting, flaunting, you know exactly what every nigger that walks by is thinking because you are thinking it, too.

Alma is slender as a reed, you a steroid-addicted block; Alma loves driving, you books; Alma owns a Saturn, you have no points on your license; Alma's nails are too dirty for cooking, your spaghetti con pollo is the best in the land. You are so very different—she rolls her eyes every time you turn on the news and says she can't "stand" politics. She won't even call herself Hispanic. She brags to her girls that you're a "radical" and a real Dominican (even though on the Plátano Index you wouldn't rank, Alma being only the third Latina you've ever really dated). You brag to your boys that she has more albums than any of them do, that she says terrible whitegirl things while you fuck. She's more adventurous in bed than any girl you've had; on your first date she asked you if you wanted to come on her tits or her face, and maybe during boy training you didn't get one of the memos but you were, like, umm,

neither. And at least once a week she will kneel on the mattress before you and, with one hand pulling at her dark nipples, will play with herself, not letting you touch at all, fingers whisking the soft of her and her face looking desperately, furiously happy. She loves to talk while she's being dirty, too, will whisper, You like watching me don't you, you like listening to me come, and when she finishes lets out this long demolished groan and only then will she allow you to pull her into an embrace as she wipes her gummy fingers on your chest.

Yes—it's an opposites-attract sort of thing, it's a great-sex sort of thing, it's a no-thinking sort of thing. It's wonderful! Wonderful! Until one June day Alma discovers that you are also fucking this beautiful freshman girl named Laxmi, discovers the fucking of Laxmi because she, Alma, the girlfriend, opens your journal and reads. (Oh, she had her suspicions.) She waits for you on the stoop, and when you pull up in her Saturn and notice the journal in her hand your heart plunges through you like a fat bandit through a hangman's trap. You take your time turning off the car. You are overwhelmed by a pelagic sadness. Sadness at being caught, at the incontrovertible knowledge that she will never forgive you. You stare at her incredible legs and between them, to that even more incredible pópola you've loved so inconstantly these past eight months. Only when she starts walking over in anger do you finally step out. You dance across the lawn, powered by the last fumes

of your outrageous *sinvergüencería*. Hey, muñeca, you say, prevaricating to the end. When she starts shrieking, you ask her, Darling, what ever is the matter? She calls you:

a cocksucker
a punk motherfucker
a fake-ass Dominican.

She claims:

you have a little penis
no penis
and worst of all that you like curried pussy.

(which really is unfair, you try to say, since Laxmi is from Guyana, but Alma isn't listening.)

Instead of lowering your head and copping to it like a man, you pick up the journal as one might hold a baby's beshatted diaper, as one might pinch a recently benutted condom. You glance at the offending passages. Then you look at her and smile a smile your dissembling face will remember until the day you die. Baby, you say, baby, this is part of my novel.

This is how you lose her.

*Otra vida,
Otra vez*