

His Name Is

by Roxane Gay

Larry. He's in his forties, from Albuquerque, short. Her name doesn't matter. She's in her twenties. She's tall, round, beautiful in a subtle, almost uncomfortable way. She's standing in the lobby of a casino off Fremont Street. He sees her, standing still, gray wisps of smoke curling around her. He decides he loves her. He adjusts his khakis, then approaches her. "How tall are you?" he asks. She looks down, relays her height. It is a question she is often asked. "I like tall, voluptuous women," he says. "Do you want to play some slots?" What he's really asking is do you want to play some slots, win some money, keep that money, then fuck me? She's okay with that. After they play slots, her sitting on the stool, Larry standing next to her, finally the same height, after she adjusts to the weight of his meaty arm across her shoulder, his fingers straying to her breast until she shifts, he compensates, she shifts, he compensates, after she's won \$585—a nice round number—and has neatly folded the ticket the machine dispensed in half, then in half again, in half once more and stuffed it beneath her bra strap, she asks Larry for a drink. He tells her not to move he'll be right back please don't leave. He scurries away, his short legs trying to keep pace with his optimism. He returns with a gin and tonic, she drinks it quickly, chews on an ice cube, requests another, watches Larry scurry again, enjoys herself, smokes a cigarette. After four cocktails, her teeth humming pleasantly, they walk along Fremont Street amidst girls in short skirts and bare asses, red-faced men from states that end in vowels rolling from one side of the street to the other, staring up at the videos on the canopy above, the noise pitching higher and higher, ignoring the Mexicans shilling strip bars with glossy postcards, until Larry can stand it no longer, asks if she would please pretty please consider coming up to his room for another cocktail. She nods and Larry places a possessive hand against the small of her back, steers her through a casino, to an elevator, down a long hallway then another and into his room where he opens the mini-bar, waves at it

expansively, smiles as she drinks one, then two baby bottles of booze. Beneath his clothes, Larry wears boxers and an undershirt. She is briefly reminded of her father who always wears undershirts, winter spring summer fall, then she shakes her head, enjoys another baby bottle of booze, climbs onto Larry's bed, still made, tells him that her mother told her to never sit naked on a hotel comforter. She hopes he has condoms that he won't kill her won't come too fast won't fall asleep on top of her. Larry sits on the edge of the bed, nervous, sweaty. She undresses, tucking her slots ticket into her purse, then throwing her clothes on top of her purse, hoping she gets a chance to cash the ticket if Larry doesn't kill her, gets a little turned on by the thought that Larry might kill her, tries to concentrate though the room is not so much spinning as listing from side to side. Larry lies on top of her, he kisses her, his lips, she thinks, are dry, but she prefers dry to wet because overly wet in the mouth is never a good thing. Larry fucks her and as she feared, he's done quickly. He lies next to her, his meaty arm across her chest. He's drowsy. He says, "I don't normally do this but you were so beautiful. My name is Larry." She pats his arm, stares at the ceiling, admires the patterns created by water stains. "Have you done this before?" he asks. She tells him that it's her first time in Vegas. She's a good girl from a small town. When he falls asleep, she washes herself in his bathroom using a washcloth and hard sliver of soap, dresses and slips out. She is alive. She returns to the casino, cashes her ticket, stands in a busy aisle flanked by occupied slot machines. His name is Keith. He's in his fifties. He's from Valdosta. He's short. When he sees her, standing still, gray wisps of smoke curling around her, he decides that he loves her.

