

## ***Rabbit Fur Vest***

By Danielle LaValle

Calvin Eustace Lohr is dead. Out of the woodwork now come the women.  
Out of the woodwork now come the children. Finally, the former best friend.  
The one who sold everything in a make-or- break fever dream and beating  
the odds, actually made it.

The casket is closed.

Who was he? Someone who called me at 11:11pm on Sunday  
nights. All the while apologizing for the bother but of course true remorse  
would have prevented such a phone call in the first place. Someone who  
enraged me with his carelessness which was too quickly redeemed by his  
astounding vulnerability. Someone who told me the fragments of his most  
intimate moments but struggled to meet me for a second date.

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Calvin was not put on this earth to be kind, loyal or truthful. He  
was put on this earth to make music. Like most artists he was primarily a  
selfish being. His art was good even if he had not been. Like the great  
cathedrals that slowly killed each generation of stonemasons until finally

they stood complete, there were many people, mostly women who were worse off for having known him. To his fans, however, their pain was dwarfed by the music that they had inspired.

He was also weird. Not necessarily good-weird or eccentric or even bordering sociopathic. It was a weird that at once both delighted me and sent a hollow wind through my core. It defied categorization in a way that made one feel on the edge of a great adventure or bizarre calamity. His mood swings and general indecisiveness ensured you would always have one foot in each.

We almost met again just to kiss. Under a new moon when the last yellow leaves clung to the trees. We talked about it so much it was as if it had already happened. And perhaps it did in a parallel timeline that we were just the fading echoes of.

He had a strange beauty that had only slightly faded with age. A hasty collage of Renaissance angel and Roswell alien. His mind was vast and terrifying to me. Like the glimpse of eternity I once saw as a child. Looking out the window at the night sky the universe extended its long fingers to poke a hole through my baby perceptions. It told me that it went on forever and we and everything we had ever done or ever would do were

so infinitesimally small that they were essentially nothing. But mostly it told me that it was cold and empty. The kind of emptiness that pulls your mind apart if you think about it for too long.

He always told me that I scared him. I would laugh and ask what he meant. That is what I remember most. That and him telling me —after finally meeting me a second time— that his heart was empty. I was either very disappointing or there was a tiny universe in there.

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How do you make someone like this? You could start with one Scottish witch pressed to death under logs, an escaped slave who found her way to Halifax, then a handful of Nazis. Throw in one brilliant mother and one brilliant father. Then turn the dial to genius but ensure that it slides back in middle age leading to something akin to madness. But, even still, if you tried you would not get another Calvin.

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We were in some sort of high gothic conference room. At the very far wall behind a low stage was a faux stained-glass window complete with faux sunlight streaming through it. Warm pot lights were tastefully spaced in the ceiling tiles above us. Large LED candles in enormous wrought iron candelabra lined the aisles. The ‘candles’ were from a craft supply store,

the candelabra handmade by an 8<sup>th</sup> generation artisan in central Italy. On a loop an electric organ played his last composition, "I Must be Alone Because I am Alone."

In the very first row sat his mother, Terri-Lynne. She was flanked by a writer whose international fame was such that she was referred to now simply as "The N". Fame had made a name with more than one letter redundant. Age had curated her down to little more than jutting cheekbones and a generous nose, so that now she very much resembled a highly literate emu.

They leaned towards each other, shoulders and tilted heads ensconced in grief. Two Byzantine black icebergs, their visages swathed in yardages of tulle and lace.

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In the third row I thought I heard a whisper, "Do you think he ever found peace?" My own thoughts answered so loudly that I missed the response. The woman asking was a frail looking redhead. Possibly his niece. No, there was no peace. His blue eyes were hard and milky like Egyptian faience. There was almost no light in them at all. They might have been terrifying if they weren't so sad.

Then someone mentioned Vienna. I thought of his unborn twins. He

told me that he willed them dead. I'm not sure what happened exactly but we can fill in the blanks. There was an "ultimatum" and he was "scared." He was always running to and away from things. He had been happiest there though. I know this because of the rabbit fur vest which he kept in a suitcase but had never worn since. I could have asked him for the full story but I wasn't prepared to hate him. Not at that moment anyway. He had this uncanny ability to make you want him to like you. However brief, like sunshine in winter. And somewhere in there you were convinced that you had to like him too no matter what.

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A small blonde woman wearing a black Kaftan and an enormous rose quartz pendant entered and joined the end of my row. The theta healer without a doubt. It's strange to recognize these people without knowing them. It seems unfair as none of them will know or for that matter care who I am.

Somewhere in the crowd was the girl from 1992. I would not have known her to pick her out but I felt her somewhere there, adding another layer to an atmosphere that was already suffocating. They had spent an entire year on the phone but when they finally met in person his interest instantly fizzled. He had mentioned to me once that in his life he had

participated in eight hour and even 24-hour phone calls. There was even at one point an exorbitant bill to Morocco. I'm sure that it didn't really matter who was on the other end. It seemed to me that he was mostly in love with the sound of his own voice and its meandering postulations.

The worst part was that he had brought all of us together and yet divided us further than we'd ever be. For each of us had conceded some part of our power to him. Intellect mattered not, life experience mattered not, values mattered not. We had all at some point been inexplicably drawn to this person. Now we wore him like a stain that we had only half tried to wash out.

I had not thought about him —outside of the abstract—in a very long time. To do so was to unmoor myself ever so slightly from the rock of the sane and balanced.

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It turns out that I am not OK. I am like a picture that has been popped out of its frame. Grandpa's watercolour now exposed to UV, the colours fading almost instantly. I look over at Penelope his young wife, half tranquilized and held up on either side by her parents and realize that I haven't the right to cry. She looked like a vertical Ophelia. Pale and emptied out by grief despite the vigorous exertion of her sobs. To her he

would always be a soulmate and mentor. He had of course only married her to take care of his tax debt. But there was no reason for her to know that.

But I could hold no sympathy for *her*. She of the kitchen scissor haircut and bathroom peroxide. In a black mini dress with bell sleeves, similar to one that I owned. Thankfully I had worn a black velvet pantsuit. We were like reverse clearance bin versions of one another. I hated her instantly because they had found something approximating happiness once, because she had him before the rot set in. But mostly, because she was the reason that I never saw him again. Instead, all I got was a cryptic text message that I mistook for lyrics,

*I always wanted  
To be a literary character  
Maybe Daisy,  
The beautiful fool.*

*We are all the results of someone's creativity,  
Somewhere,  
Perhaps.*

He was not more than two months into his marriage before he was seeing kitchen-scissor-haircut again. Another thing Penelope didn't need to know. Like two vortices fated to circle each other to death they would never quite be able to fully untangle themselves from each other. He called one night around this time. It was windy and the call kept dropping. "Where are

you?" I asked but he launched into a monologued confession. "I'm sorry that I disappeared. I think about you often with a sense of wonder. I think we overlapped at the wrong time. I'm sorry that I couldn't see all the parts of you. Sometimes I read the letters that we never finished and have to stop myself from finally replying to them. Anyway, I'm married now..."

"Married???" I tried to interject but he continued without pause, "...I don't love her, not that she isn't great. I don't know it's just what I'm doing right now I guess. I'll tell her eventually it's just not a good time. Anyway, I just called because... I wanted you to know that I was thinking about you."

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The sound of stifled sobbing and rustling tissues is suddenly washed over by the enormous doors opening. The theta healer is transfixed. Suddenly, like choreographed gophers, everyone angles themselves in near unison. "Ah," I let out involuntarily when I at last turn to see, "That must be his son."

In walks a very tall young man with wavy hair the colour of honey and dark blue eyes that sparkle like faceted sapphires. An enormous septum ring is nearly grazing his magnificent cupid's bow. I find myself transfixed by his eyes, which are oddly shaped and wide set—so like



Calvin's and yet so alive. He is wearing a kilt, a cropped Dead Kennedys T-shirt, and a rabbit fur vest. He takes his place at the end of the first row.

Just behind him at the end of the second row sits the former best friend. He is wearing a black fedora and black Ray-Bans. His black three-piece suit is a little too baggy in the legs. He looks like an old jazzman, nondescript but also not mainstream. In trying to hide in this way he has of course drawn more and more eyes to him. Once upon a time he had been the owner of a thick head of cherubic curls. His sad downturned brown eyes gave his songs an air of believability. You could easily picture him at a typewriter composing frantic verse to some goddess who would never look his way. But of course, this had never been the actual case.

I had missed his the former-best-friend's heyday. I was living in London without a TV, without internet. I was listening to The Smiths on long rambling walks past crumbling Victorian vistas. In the evenings I read T.S. Eliot with a mug of cheap tea in front of a beautiful curling art nouveau fireplace that would never again hold a real fire but did sometimes hold my candles. I would twist myself uncomfortably into the Liberty fabric covered wingback armchair that had come with my room rental and convince myself that this was cozy. I had no real idea of what was happening in London let alone back home. It wasn't until my father died and I returned that I first

heard his music. It was on one of the last TV channels that actually played music videos. The song wasn't good or bad. It stood out to me though because bizarrely it contained a reference to a cult stationary brand that was never not on my desk or in one of my bags. Ten years later I heard a second song of his. I'm not certain but I think it was about transcendental shagging or something. Passionate romp turns into post-coitus half whispers of devotion but everything is weighed down with an existential melancholy, the uncertainty of being lingering on the edges of even that happy moment. Ironically it came on just after a lover left me sitting on their bed in what was meant to be a quick run to the store. It was a bitterly cold January night. Though I was inside I could feel and hear the snow as though there were no walls to the apartment. As I lay there with the clock ticking the barriers between inside and outside had blurred. It was probably though just a draft from an old window. So that was my total knowledge of the former best friend's music. Background songs to accompany the numbing shock of grief and the unsettling chill of delayed love.

They had once shared a hard loft together, leaving behind a small northern town that did not fit their ambitions. There had been so many women until one night it was just the two of them. In Calvin's words, "Wires got crossed." Though he immediately trailed off barely audible, catching

himself in time. Many years later in Budapest when the former best friend was passing through on tour, rather than meet for a meal or a coffee they had instead found themselves at the Gellért Baths. Somewhere along the way Calvin's amazing ears heard the trickle of music and he led them to what appeared to be an impromptu concert, a fusion of Klezmer and Roma music. The rabbit fur vest was purchased during this time. I assume that they had made it to the flea market in Városliget Park as everyone and everything it seems must eventually find its way there.

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I waited for a break to politely slink off. I was planning on just hanging out in the washroom for a bit. The one they had contained a chaise and a circular settee. It was dimly lit and tiled in a comforting coral beige. Instead, I found myself in a small kitchenette off the main hallway. There were tins of good tea and plates of shortbread. I wondered absently as I waited for the kettle to boil what I had been to him. A mirror? A confessional booth? The boiling of the kettle seemed to stretch out time until a figure (even stooping) filled the doorway to the kitchenette. It was the son. I wondered if he had followed me out. I suddenly felt very self-conscious and in my sudden nervousness grabbed the kettle and filled my cup even though the water *still* had not managed to boil. "How did you know my father?" He

asked with his alien eyes staring a little too long into mine. "Oh well it's complicated..." I began before he cut me off, "Are you the one writing his biography? Are you E?"

My eyes suddenly dropped all the tears I had been holding back that afternoon and for the last year. Then without warning he bent himself nearly in half and hugged me tightly. I opened my mouth to thank him but he was turned away now pulling something out of his black tote bag. "I think this was for you," he said handing me a small hard drive. "It was on his desk with a post-it note that said, 'Mail to E'." I held it in both palms as if it were a baby bird. "Have you opened it?" He looked down at his boots then back up at me, "They are songs mostly."