

Alberta

The story behind HEAD's  
"Afraid to Sleep" album.

Her name is Alberta.

You could've been her.

The nightmares that are some people's lives  
are only a small twist of fate away from our  
own.

You could've been her; maybe if you'd turned  
left instead of right. If you'd accepted that ride  
from someone a few years back.

If you'd taken that offer...

slept overnight... walked home... instead of the  
path you did choose...

You could've been her... she could've been  
you... and from here on in, she is:

(I Drive)...

You're 18 and in control of your life. In and out of relationships, happy to let them think you need them... using their own libido against them. It's just sex and none of the garbage that goes with it... love... what's that? Family? yeah right... you've seen the wonders family provides. Still have the scars, so no thanks, it's safer here. You play the game until the drugs and alcohol run out, until couch surfing starts to feel like home, or worse, when it starts feeling too serious... then you move on...

(Sickness)...

This guy is maybe as twisted as you are. And that's a good thing, right? You like it. He comes right to your edge and crosses the line with you. His sickness tastes so sweet inside of you... It's not like you need him... you've never needed anyone... the thought of being dependent on someone makes you gag. There's no room for a "relationship" in your life. Even with him... The single most important thing in this life is to never, ever let someone else control it...

(Sex Like Rockstars)...

This is the best you've ever felt in your life! He doesn't want anything from you; doesn't expect anything. The sex is amazing and there's no commitment. This guy isn't getting all clingy like the others... and anything goes with him. When you want him, he's there and when you don't, well, who cares where he goes, what he does when you're not around. There's no obligation here... it's the way you've always wanted it. And if you find yourself thinking about him more and more... that's okay, right? Doesn't mean anything...

(Feel Something)...

Your eyes open to a red blur on the mirror. The mirror on the coffee table, reflecting numbers from a digital clock... an empty bottle on its side... upside down numbers - it's 2:30... there's still maybe a line and a half on the mirror if you scrape it all together... you'll need to do that to shake out the fog... This room is a dirty carpet full of broken furniture, scattered clothes, empty bottles, empty pill containers, empty plastic bags... empty... You kick the blanket off - panties still hanging onto one ankle and you can't remember who he was - and sit up, your head throbbing, pounding your life rhythm over and over again

and it's something at least... you're alone and the pain means you're alive...

(Darkness)...

The next few days, weeks? are all muddled into one... the mirror always seems to have a few lines left and the empty bottles are replaced by other empty bottles. Most of the time you wake up alone on the same dirty, stained couch as the night before, but sometimes in a bed, or the back of a car somewhere, before more lines and more empty bottles and more dirty, stained couches... there is nothing else and nothing else matters. You can't remember what it was like to feel something... anything... You close your eyes and slide to the floor, pulling the sweaty, damp blanket on top of you... someone pushes two pills inside your mouth and you taste bitterness before your face is splashed with some sort of alcohol... and that's all you remember... except the darkness...

(Save Me)...

The same face, his face, over and over, only sometimes his smiles of reassurance slide down the full, ridiculous length of his chin and he dissolves, then appears again with his magic wand, only it's not a magic wand, it's a razor blade and he's cutting you, cutting you from the

inside... you're choking on the blood – so much blood – and you can't breathe... the voices whispering to give in to the fight... just let yourself sink a little deeper... it's warmer there where the whispers live... there's no reason to fight anymore... let go and your pain will be over... the whispers are only trying to help you, aren't they? Images flash quickly, confused in their succession, but there's one that stands out... you see him over and over, but never quite enough to really see him... the gentle voices convincing, soothing, but distracting and the image of your father, yes, that's who it is, flashes again and again and you know the voices are a lie just like he was a lie and you can't go there and the pain it gets worse, but it's okay, it's away from the image of your father and the voices, the whispers aren't soothing anymore, more like cries and anguish, sobbing and wailing... and then the other man again – not your father – the same man you saw before, you know him... he's crying now... you can feel his tears, gentle on your skin, cooling the burn inside... the memory of the awful, wailing voices fading, falling, failing under the pressure of a new sound; a cold, harsh clash of confused words... "methamphetamine... you name it... doubtful... waste of time... that much alcohol... cocaine... pretty once... tracks... stomach lining... better off..." You know the whisper voices are still there too, you can feel the razor still cutting... but he's there as well, he's crying

and he needs you... he begs you to stay away from the voices, stay away from your father...

You open your eyes to a dark grey gloom, the only light coming from the buzzing fluorescents in the hallway corridor... You're alone... the man who saved you is gone... the voices, your father, gone too... for now...

(Jesus Junkie)...

Two days in the hospital felt like two months, but you're out now and you're better... a lot better, you know that... but you can't go back there, you know that too... you can't go back to that couch in that living room with the dirty carpet and the parties and the cocaine, the alcohol, the pills... and the lies... it's all lies... but this place, this place doesn't feel like lies. This place... there are others here caught in the same trap you were. And it's okay... we all stray from time to time. God knows that. He's there to help. All you have to do is ask. You can't believe it's only a few weeks ago and you were sleeping on someone's couch in some room, hungover from booze, pills and whatever else, after sleeping with whoever climbed in beside you... and now... now God is the only answer. No matter the question... God is the answer. You know that now. How could you be so blind before?

And then... he walks in to your life again... the other man... he was in your dreams, he saved you from your father and the rest of those awful whispering voices while you were in that hospital bed... and he just walks into your meeting like he belongs there...

(Feel Your Ache)...

At first it feels like he's trespassing. Did he know you'd be here? That changes quickly to feelings of embarrassment and exposure, but... he's here too. You're not the only one suffering... and maybe that's why you can't stop thinking about him. Those few days with him were some of your best and it must mean something that he shows up again in your life, right? Some would call it fate, or destiny... it's God's will is what it is. You think back to that time - you barely got out of bed and it was amazing... it was like the two of you felt everything together... These meetings; no alcohol, no drugs... that makes sense... you almost lost everything in that hospital room... but there's nothing about intimacy and if being with him is a mistake, then it's your best mistake yet...

There's a faint knock at the door of your hotel room and you lie there a moment, realizing you must've finally fallen asleep... the sheets are damp with sweat and you know your father's been here again, invading your dreams, waiting for sleep to claim you, and you can still feel him there, inside you...

The door again... you shiver and pull the sheet close around you, before getting up and looking out the window. Of course, it's him... and you're immediately aroused by the danger...

(Obsession)...

You open your eyes just in time to see the cab pulling away... you're exhausted and sore, and it's beautiful and amazing and... you didn't even feel him get out of bed and why is he leaving? You'd spent a long time confiding to him, explaining your childhood - what you could explain anyway... your father and the nightmares... it all just came gushing out and once you started there was no stopping... and he held you for what felt like forever until you wrapped yourself up in him, tasting, devouring like a wild animal that hasn't eaten in days... until both of you fell asleep, completely spent... and you, no bad dreams just sleep for once... and now he's gone... where? Maybe he's coming right back... with coffee, or breakfast... you close your eyes, sleep claims you once more... you'll wake up again when he returns...



You don't even know where he lives... but the cab company does; that part's easy... it takes a long time to get there though, way out on the outskirts of town and you don't really know what to expect when you get there. Will he be happy to see you? Angry? He didn't even leave you a note - what did he expect? Just to be able to come in and out of your life whenever it suits him? He doesn't call...? No... God directed your paths together... there has to be more... he'll answer the door smiling, happy you found him... he missed you... this morning already feels like so long ago...

There's no answer when you knock. You shouldn't have gone back to sleep - he's gone out already. You can't go back... all that way for nothing... and the cab's gone now... you'll just wait until he comes back... but who knows how long that'll be? What if he's gone back to your hotel and now you're not there? The picture of him waiting for you to answer your door, while you stand here waiting for him makes you laugh out loud... probably that's what happened... eventually he'll give up and come back... you could just wait here, outside... he wouldn't mind though, would he? It's getting cold out here and you'd be much more comfortable waiting inside. You have to admit to being a little curious too... you don't really know anything about him...

Getting in is easy. Everyone always leaves a key somewhere...

The first thing you notice is the “feel” of the place; it feels temporary... there are no pictures on the wall, nothing much to eat in the kitchen... apart from a couch, a coffee table and a TV, there’s almost nothing here. You open the door to the upstairs bedroom. The bed’s made, pillows neatly arranged, there’s an ashtray, empty save for the few dollars worth of change in it... the closet door is open... there’s one suit and one pair of shoes... everything is so neat and orderly... calculated almost... and as you turn away you see it. The gun in his closet... not just any gun...

The cold, black steel of the silencer weighs heavy in your hand and you feel yourself getting dizzy... this gun isn’t for hunting, or for protection... who is this guy? You can’t put the gun back fast enough... you need to get out of here, before he comes back, but as you return the gun to its shelf an envelope falls at your feet. There are photos inside... pictures of people... Your hands trembling, you thumb through the photos carefully... taking care not to upset the order - he’d notice that for sure - and are more than a little relieved when you don’t see your own face in the photos. The room starts to spin; you need to sit down, but you can’t bring yourself to sit on the bed... and your phone rings...

(Everything)...

You don't recognize the number; it's unlisted, but you know it's him. Your voice cracks as you answer, comes out weak and fragile... "Hello... who's this?"

A brief pause and then, "It's your darkest angel... you okay? You don't sound too good... where are you?"

He knows... somehow he knows you're in the house...

"I...", you need to think fast, really fast, but your head is still spinning, "I was lonely. I just went out for a bit of a walk." Lame! He knows. He won't believe you...

"Oh... I thought for some reason..." There's a long pause... "I thought you might still be home. I was going to come over again..."

He's there now... you know it and he probably knows you know it.

"I'll be home soon... if you want to wait until I get back... I could call you when I get there..."

Another long silence, as if he's weighing his options...

"Yeah, alright. Yeah, that'd be good. Call me. You've got my number now..."

Your heart feels like it's going to beat itself right out of your chest as you hang up... maybe he doesn't know. Maybe he believes you. Why couldn't you just be out for

a walk? There's no way he could know. Either way you need to get out of here immediately, in case... if he decides to drive home right now, he'll see you for sure... and there's no way you should be walking anywhere near here...

A quick look around to make sure you didn't leave anything, or move anything, or change anything he might notice... he would notice for sure... the photos are exactly where they were and you're certain you kept the order the same... right beside the gun... the black, shiny muzzle of the silencer just barely visible if you look from the right angle... and then... a single thought pushes its way into your reasoning and you can't let it go... he makes you feel like no one ever has, that's true... and the sex is amazing, that's true too... he's mysterious, dangerous, good looking, all the things anyone would want in a guy... but he's got a gun. And not just any gun. You reach up into the closet, feel the cold steel as your fingers close around the silencer and carefully lift it down from the shelf. You check to make sure the safety is off before tucking it into the back of your pants, under your jacket. And just like that, things feel a little more even; a bit more balanced...

(Hypocrite)...

You open the door to your hotel room and he's there already, sitting on the edge of your bed, the scratchpad where you'd written his address from the cab company, beside him...

"How'd you get in here?" You make sure your voice is light... curious, but not upset at all... happy to see him...

"Everyone always leaves a key somewhere..." Your heart freezes for a moment - that's exactly what you were thinking only a few hours ago... He knows! He knows you were at his house and he knows you found the key! His eyes never leave yours as he waits, then laughs... "I got the manager to let me in... said I forgot my key... he saw us together earlier... it was easy..."

Your eyes keep straying to the scratchpad on the bed... so stupid to leave it... did you leave it on the bed? Maybe... you might have... maybe he hasn't even seen it... you'd taken the page you wrote on anyway, but you can almost read the indentations from where you're standing... he'd only have to look and he'd recognize the address... He pats the bed beside him, motioning for you to come and sit... "I got us something."

Making sure your voice sounds carefree, casual... when inside every nerve is on edge, screaming at you that this guy is dangerous... "I can't wait to see it, but I have to use

the bathroom first. I'll be right back, then you can show me, kay?"

He shrugs, turns his attention back to the TV as you close the bathroom door behind you. Is there any way you've got this all wrong? Lots of people own guns, right? And he's never done anything wrong to you, never even seemed like he might... he's got secrets, yeah, everyone does... and that's partly what you find sexy about him... he's dark, mysterious, even a little scary, but... that's hot. And he's sitting in the other room, on your bed, waiting to show you what he got for you... and then there's the pictures in the envelope, beside the gun with the silencer, in an almost empty house with one suit and one pair of shoes...

You slide the gun carefully from the waistband of your jeans, using two fingers only and look around the bathroom for a hiding spot. There's not much choice... between two towels in the rack above the toilet is as good as it gets in this place... your hand is on the doorknob before you realize you didn't flush and you give your head a shake... you need to stay alert with this guy, regardless of who he might turn out to be...

He motions again for you to sit beside him and this time you do. He says, "David".

"What?" you answer, confused.

“My name... David”, he laughs, “I thought it was time we were formally introduced”.

“Oh... now you’re taking all the fun out of it”, you answer, pleased that your voice comes out calm and controlled.

“Not all the fun”, he says and leans over to kiss your lips as he produces a bag, half full of white powder.

“Um... I’m pretty sure our councillors would disapprove...”

“Yeah... they definitely would disapprove... does that mean you do?” His lips brush yours as he speaks, his voice low, gentle, but strong... and his breath like chocolate and mint in your mouth...

“You’re a bad man, David,” your voice, not much more than a whisper now...

His lips part as he smiles, never taking his eyes off yours... “You don’t know the half of it...”

Your heart races, hearing those words... the words like a confirmation of your suspicions, but you’re beyond caring now... this guy, David, he wants you now and you... oh you need him to want you... what’s wrong with wanting someone to tell you you’re beautiful? Any thoughts of the meetings and councillors fade quickly as you open yourself to his touch, his lips... and the white powder...

“I’m...”

“Shhhh... I know... you’re Alberta – beautiful name for a beautiful girl...”

(Afraid to Sleep)...

You’re lying there wide awake, shivering, tears still wet on your face, trying to shake off the last of the dream... it’s been awhile – since you met the man lying beside you in fact... the dreams of your father had completely stopped, until tonight... The sheets are damp... no, wet with sweat from the two of you and the past two hours, maybe more... like starved animals satisfying every craving at once... but he’s fast asleep now and you’re relieved you didn’t wake him by calling out, or crying in your sleep. You can still feel him inside you – the beautiful ache – and you reach out to touch his back, lying mostly exposed in a twist of covers, but you stop yourself just short... the clear baggy, still containing the fine, white powder sits between you on the bed... the mirror on the night stand... you can chase the last of your father from your head before he wakes up... no need for him to see you crying... just a lot of useless questions and concerns....

Careful not to wake him, you tap a little of the powder onto the mirror, then, deciding it’s not enough to kill the pain, you tap a little more, okay a lot more... you definitely



missed this – the ritual, the high of course and the escape from your own head.

Two lines, mirror-length both – like a bullet through your brain, destroying any memories still haunting you from last night. The memories from your past, another life really... and your father... but in seconds the nightmare of your father is back inside, and you reach for the mirror once more...

It should be working, should be numbing the pain, the memories... instead there's a confusion of scenes from your past all clamoring for attention. Your father, his guns, the alcohol – always the alcohol – your mother, either not home or hiding herself away somewhere else in the house, pretending she didn't know what was going on... she was just as bad as he was for that. Sometimes it was late at night when you'd been asleep and woke to your father climbing in beside you, the gentle, but forceful pressure of his finger on your lips, letting you know to keep quiet... the wild excitement of a shared secret in his eyes and the stink of alcohol.. Sometimes he didn't even wait until night... he'd come into your room while you were doing homework, or reading and just want to "talk"... but he was never much of a talker...

The dull throb between your legs doesn't feel very beautiful anymore... those nights would leave you hurting, bleeding, crying quietly to yourself... he would kiss you on

the forehead when he was finished - that was almost the worst part - like he was reminding you that he was your father and he loved you... and you wanted to throw up, wanted to scream, wanted to kill him... wanted to die.

There was no more sleeping on those nights. You'd get up after the shaking stopped, sometimes hours after he'd left, clean yourself up in the bathroom, make your way painfully downstairs... and he's there, sitting at the table, cleaning his gun... he smiles lovingly at you when he sees you and you smile back, but inside you see yourself screaming, grabbing his gun, turning it and pointing it at his chest, right at his heart... and stopping him from ever coming into your room again...

“Good morning, beautiful... sleep well?”

You can't even answer... you look beside you at the body still lying, half-exposed on the bed... you have no words. After all that's happened to you... after all he did... the pain he puts you through night after night after night... and he asks if you slept well? He barely looks up from cleaning his gun to see your reaction... and you're thankful for that at least - you don't want to give him the satisfaction of seeing the tears streaming down your face...

“Hmmm?” His voice, heavy from sleep, asking again... and still you can't make a sound, your throat is raw and sore from crying and... from him last night... forcing himself into your mouth... you're sore everywhere and your body is

shaking uncontrollably... you need to get out of here... away from him...

(Washing Off the Blood)... You slide from the bed without even disturbing the covers... he doesn't even move... probably asleep again... must be nice. To be that free of guilt, even after everything... comfortable, even carefree, after all he's done to you... It takes all the strength you have left to stop yourself from reaching out and squeezing the life from his throat with your bare hands. But you're not that stupid... he'd overpower you... he's done it before; you have scars to prove it... but he won't be doing it again. Besides... you know where the gun is...

The next few minutes take hours. Later, when you're washing the blood from the walls of your hotel room, you feel a peace inside you... something you haven't felt in a long, long time...

You slide the gun from its hiding spot between the towels, barely noticing the weight this time... it feels good in your hands... cold, black steel... hard and strong... a merciless answer to any question... you're still shaking, but it feels like anticipation now... the excitement of finally knowing the solution to your problems...

He's lying there, sleeping, without a care in the world... you lift your arm and point the gun at his back... using your other hand to steady yourself, at least it helps a little... you squeeze your eyes shut on your tears as you

squeeze the trigger... the body jerks once as the bullet penetrates to the right of the spine - you're amazed at how quiet it is. The violence of the act doesn't match the sound somehow... and you need more... you fire again. And again. Your mind floods with pictures of your hateful submission... of abuse... of sick, twisted, ugly things you'll never have to endure again. The body on the bed stops moving completely and you're filled with a calm you haven't felt in years...

In the bathroom again, you wash the dried tears from your face... then you take a shower. It feels good to be clean again. Clean and free... You can take care of the mess in the other room later.

He'll wait...