

## Lost and Found

By Emma Pierson

I love music videos. Ruby Red is my favorite idol. I think I have now watched all her music videos a thousand times. I watch them on the new phone I got for Christmas which is the best thing because I can watch as many music videos as I want in class, go on line, what not. Especially this class I'm in now, American History, because Mr. Fontaine is easy and he will just give you a B or C as long as you not disruptive, that's what I heard from TyShawn at least and he's four years older than me and two grades above me because he got left back once in elementary school and then he was left back again last year—year he was supposed to graduate. I'm in 10<sup>th</sup> grade.

Anyway, I'm slouching down low in my chair, one pink headphone in my ear, other hanging down. I got my tightest jeans on today, I like how they put my body in a lock, and my Tims. I'm watching Ruby Red's newest video, which I can't stop watching because it's just so sexy. Her skin is like golden caramel colored that glows like she bein' kissed by the smoothest sun. Sun that shines somewhere else, not here, like Jamaica or Puerto Rico. My skin's so dark. It's fine, but when I think about it like that it's just like I am burnt, I got left out in the sun for too long. I am a piece of toast that got left in the toaster or some shit. Ruby Red got highlights too, but her hair is in these nice waves kind of attached to her head, like they had had in the 20s I think. They shine! And every scene of the video has a new man in it that Ruby is grinding up on. And you can tell the guys are so happy to have that. I have a nice body I know that. My shape is

similar to Ruby Red's and I know TyShawn's friends and him talk about it because Denise told me she overheard that in the cafeteria one time.

All the sudden I hear Mr. Fontaine say, "Estelle, Why do you think the Gold Rush is important for us to remember as historians?"

I sit up in my chair and pull my headphone out my ear. I have no idea what's happening and I squint at the board. But I can't think of anything so I just say, "I pass." He turns his head away and pretends like its okay, but I know he knows I was not paying attention at all.

"Class, what about the Gold Rush is important to remember as historians?"

I sink back down in my chair and put my headphone back in.

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After school we all pile up outside the building and the security guards herd us up the block like we are sheep or something. The mean white lady says, "Go home, go home, what about go home don't you understand?" and the nicer man say, "Keep it movin'." *Every* time he say that. We eventually get up the block, but we are waiting for our friends and what not. I wait for TyShawn to see if I he wants me to come over or not. He sells Kush to kids at school and to people that live in his project so he's so many nice sneakers and he keeps them so perfect, always worries about dirtying them and creasing them. He has a fit too when anybody steps on his toe. He got a nice haircut

and dark dark chocolate skin like velvet. Him and Nigel come walking up the block. They think they have such swag.

The first time that I went to TyShawn's house, it had been different than how it is now. This was a couple months ago I think when everyone kept on telling me he liked me and I liked him. We would always constantly talk in class and in the cafeteria, watch things together on our phones, he would chase me in the hall during free period and come up to me when I was on my own to talk. Then once he said he had something he wanted to show me at his house. So we took the 1 train uptown together to his house and we flirted the whole way there. He kept on stealing my phone and I tried to get it back and we wrestled.

When we got to the elevator in his building I asked, "Are your parents' home?"

Then he smiled a little bit and said, "no, they not here, don't worry" as he inched close to me and put his hand on my waist. Then his lips were coverin' over mine, and he was licking my tongue like he was hungry for the taste of it. That was when I got these butterflies, different from any kind that I had before. We got into the house and he put me up against a wall so I could barely even look around. He started movin' his mouth down to my neck and so every piece of my skin feels special, I am feeling pieces of my skin that I forgot I even had. It's like some magic creature shivering up my spine, climbing up, touching each little ball at a time. His hands slip underneath my bra and his fingertips are just lightly brushing over my nipples and my body had never been made to feel so good.

We move to his bedroom that is small and smell funny and a little bit too cold. Especially when he started taking his and my clothes off, but I didn't really say anything because I know he been with other girls and he know what to do. Those amazing Goosebumps started to go away to be replaced with cold chicken skin and I started to think about his body. It looked so different with no clothes covering his private area and I had never seen that thing so close up before, all the hair sprouting out around the top and his inner-thighs, soft and with the same shape as a girl's. I knew that I looked like how I was supposed to look, but he looked weird and different from how I expected. Out of nowhere I didn't want to be there anymore, but I didn't act like it. I wanted him to see me like Ruby Red or someone like that, strong, knowing what I am doing, sexy. So then I lost my virginity.

On my way home I just felt bad. I had this aching feeling in my stomach like I was a fruit with a rotten pit that you cut open but then you have to throw the whole thing away. I ran to the train so I could get there in time to use my school metro card. But then I started feeling something drippin' down there, I brush it off as probably something normal like the wetness is usually. But when I was on the train and I sat down in one of the corner seats across from the door with the shiny metal, I saw in the reflection on my light blue jeans, a red stain spreading. I quickly closed my legs and I clenched my teeth and my jaw and my thighs. Even deep inside me was clenched and I didn't look at anybody's face on the train, I just stared into nothing, waiting for my stop, and imagined the stain getting bigger and bigger, crawling all the way down to my ankles. When I got off I tied my jacket around my waist and when I got home I just walked past my dad who is sleeping in front of the TV and went straight to the bathroom. My pants made me look

as if I was dying, like someone sliced me open down there and I just been sitting in a puddle of blood without even moving. I take off my pants and my underwear and stuff them in a plastic bag and throw them in the garbage. I fucking hated those pants so much because they just soaked up that disgusting red blood. It leaked out of me so slow and hot but it seemed to be screaming out my business for everyone to hear a mile a minute. Then I got in the shower and washed myself with so much soap until it burned.

Anyway, I am walking with TyShawn and Nigel after school, but they hardly talk to me so I feel stupid and I just pretend like I have my own business goin' on in my head. I get the feeling he not interested in me for today. That's how it is now. I always think about him and always lookin' around, lookin' out for him to see if he's there, but he always seems like he don't care, like he is absolutely fine without me. When we together we hardly talk at all, just watch videos on our phones or we always just have sex at his house and I know it's good for him because he always finishes. Then he always smoke weed out the tiny window in his room with bars on it. He doesn't ask me if I want but I wouldn't do that anyway. I can't really understand him because, how could he want me in that way, want to be with me, touching me and seeing my body like that, but then he not want to talk to me? When I am with him I just want to put my hand on his face, you know, with my fingers round the back his neck and my thumb pressin' up on his cheek, move them back and forth like wind-shield wipers kind of feeling his smooth skin. I feel I am aching for that. I want to just stop the world like a time machine and just have him and me, everyone else frozen and then I just tell him what I am thinking or ask him a question about his family because I never seen them.

One time, we was in the train station going to his house. He was lookin' down his phone, watchin' something what not, and I tried to be playful like we used to be before we started havin' sex. I snatched his phone away, expecting him to laugh and then we start wrestling or something, but he was serious. He sucked his teeth when I ducked out of the way. He said, "Estelle, I ain't PLAYIN'." The vein in his neck bulge out thick like his blood was mad at me too, like a snake trapped underneath his skin lookin' for a way out. I looked at him for a second kind of confused; he looked like he was gonna throw himself at me, so I handed his phone back and then just watched the rats scurrying around in the train tracks.

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In homeroom, Mrs. Wenslo makes an announcement that health class today is going to be extended an hour because people are coming in or something. People saying, "Mrs. Wenslo, why though? Health is so boring. It's such a joke." She just responds by saying something obnoxious, then the bell rings and everybody get up to go to first period.

I hate Mrs. Wenslo. When I started hanging out with TyShawn, there started being rumors passed around that I was pregnant. We don't use condoms, but he *always* pulls out before he finishes. They've told us that's not an effective method but it really is because I know that's what he always does and nothing ever happened. Anyway, Mrs. Wenslo tell me to come see her after school one time and ask me if I'm pregnant. She acted like I was in trouble and I was like No, bitch, mind your own business. I didn't say

that but I was thinking that. Ever since then she's always eyein' me up and down, lookin for a bump in my stomach so she could say, "I told you so." Sometimes I get scared that a baby's gonna start growin in there just from her eyes lookin at me and her mind imaginin it. I hate her.

As I expected TyShawn is skipping health class. I think I heard him say, "Fuck health, I don't need no bunch of mentors and what not telling me what to do." I am disappointed but I also relax a little knowing he won't be seeing things I do or hearing things I say. We see a whole crew of these young grown-up people, like they probably in college or something, maybe 10 of them, mostly girls but some guys. Most of them is white and a lot of them are just kind of plain looking, like a sandwich with nothing on it, just two pieces of wonder bread. I already know what's gonna happen I think.

TyShawn's right, they're gonna tell us to do stupid exercises and talk to us like we're children that can't understand English. That's what always happen. Two years ago we had this assistant teacher. Skinny white girl with pale pale skin and long blonde hair. People called her "vampire" and what not. They would say, "Look out the ghost is coming." She knew we laughed at her and didn't take her seriously, but I couldn't really feel bad because she was always snapping at us to be quiet and stop bein' disrespectful and use "inside voices" and what not, and talk to us like we was actually babies.

Anyway, some of the girls that are here look really crazy, like this one girl, her skin is really light but I could tell she's black, with freckles and red hair, but she has it in long dreadlocks with little beads and feathers attached to some of them. She don't match at all; she has on a skirt down to her knees with flowers and a plaid shirt with all

different set of colors and then these huge snow boots with fur like she is an Eskimo or something. This other girl who is bigger with dark skin don't even have any hair, she had it all shaved off, which look weird. Why would you make yourself look like that? I would feel embarrassed, like nobody would want me if I looked like that. There was one guy who look kind of like TyShawn actually but dress totally different. He is wearing jeans that look kind of old and dirty, and a old T-shirt, nothing to make him look special, kind of poor looking.

Our whole class is whispering to each other, laughing and wondering whose these people are and what they doing here then everybody gets quiet when one of the white girls says "Hello everyone! Thank you for having us here at your school. We look forward to meeting you and sharing stories." In my head I'm like, yeah right. She go on talking, "we represent a mixture of experiences—some of us" she pauses and looks around at the rest of them, making eye contact like she asking them silently if its O.K., "have been victims of rape and sexual abuse, including myself, and some of us are volunteers at various rape support hotlines. All of us are advocates against sexual abuse and violence against women." I am shocked. Everybody is shocked. The whispering and laughing in everybody just gets knocked out of us like a basketball hittin' you in the stomach. These white girls have been victims of *that*? "So, should we...let's introduce ourselves?" She look behind her and everyone nod. First girl step forward. "Hello! I am Andrea." The big girl with no hair is second in the line, "Hi guys, I am Joleena," she says. Another white girl who is so thin and frail, kind of looks like an older lady, a little bit hunched and boney, but she smile *huge* when she come forward and looks like she trying to look at each one of us separate from the rest. Her name is

Digby, which is a funny name. When the girl with freckles step forward, I can tell she is shy and quiet and she mostly looks down, and her name is Soweila. Maybe she is some kind of spiritual somebody, I always wonder about that. The girl who talked first comes forward again. Her name is Cassy, she's curvy for a white girl, and she said, "Alright, what we've planned to do first is to separate into two groups, boys in one, and girls in the other. So everybody round up and shuffles out and then it's a small circle in the middle of homeroom classroom and Soweila starts telling us what she gone through.

"My half-brother was born 10 years ahead of me when my mom was 18. I loved him so much when I was really little. I remember even though it was so long ago. He would pick me up from Kindergarten, tell me funny stories. Pick me up and throw me in the air." I can't stop looking at the way Soweila is talking, she lookin' above everybody's heads, not lookin' at anything in particular, like she searchin' the air for her memories. "I loved the way his whole face changed when he smiled. And it was contagious. If you saw him smile you couldn't help smiling too." She shuddered at that and her face got dark like she tasted something bad. "Anyway, not long after that, he started being really different. I could tell something was wrong when he would pick me up from school, and then he just stopped coming and my aunt came instead. He never graduated high school and kept getting different jobs. He would disappear for weeks at a time. He would come home late in the night and I would wake up because he would be bumping into furniture in the dark, breaking things. Years go by, my mother screaming at him bloody murder, telling him he is wasting his life, hurting himself, and he's just gonna end up like the rest of them." She looks down and starts digging at her nails now. "Then he starts touching me. He starts coming into my room early in the morning when my mom

is still at her night shift, talking to me funny and then touching me. When I tried to say no he grabbed my hands. I didn't know he could have such a mean touch and I kept wondering where that smile went and who took it away. He raped me once. But my mom came home and caught him. She started screaming a bloodier scream than I had ever heard come out of her. She grabbed him and threw him on the floor, than knocked him out with a lamp. She didn't say a word to me. She just turned and left the room. Then there were police swarming around our house, asking me questions, putting handcuffs on my brother, his body all limp, his heading rolling around and hanging down the front of his chest." Soweila looks like she's in pain now. She shivers again like her memories are spiders crawling around on her and she's trying to shake them off. All the sudden I want to tell her that her freckles are so pretty, like little tiny stones next to a river. I want to tell her that her freckles won't let the spiders crawl on her because they are magic freckles, and they are beautiful. "We never talked about what happened really—me and my mom. She just wasn't that kind of person. She didn't like to talk about emotions. Every day I tried to talk to her about it but I could never gather the courage. I would do anything to go back in time and cry myself into her arms, curl up in her lap, just—try and situate myself as close as I could to her womb. I dream about the way it would feel to have her hold me; I know she would have if I had just asked her to. But she died before I had the chance, a couple months later, in a car accident. I get very angry sometimes because—of all people, you know?—she didn't do anything wrong. She was always working so hard for us. She worked in the middle of the night for us and made sure we were fed and went to school. Why did God choose her?"

Soweila stops talking. She's lookin' down at her hands, rubbing them together like she's washin' them under a invisible faucet, like she's tryin' to get rid of something that got on there that's staining her. Then she starts crying. I have never seen somebody cry like I seen her cry. She is kind of normal about it first, sniffing and looking down, wiping her tears with her finger. But after a minute, it was like she said, "fuck it" and just threw her head backward, making all the noise she felt like. I started crying too. I couldn't help it. Her story woke up all the thoughts about my mom that was sleepin' on the shelves in the back of my head, getting all dusty and what not, while I was just waiting for them to die. I looked around and I noticed that girls in my class and from the program is crying too. I expected Cassy to say something to make everybody remember that we are in school, give us something to wipe our faces with, something to read, to practice on, something to think about, so that we don't have to feel so uncomfortable or *something*, but she just sat there with her eyebrows all drawn up—her forehead with lines in it and tears rolling down her face like the raindrops that just sit on the window pane for a long time and then decide to roll down randomly. She looked so sad and peaceful. She leaned over and squeezed Soweila's arm with her hand so smoothly with the nicest kind of pressure it looked like, like she was really trying to give her something with that touch. I don't why but I got the urge that I wanted her to squeeze my arm too, with her big light-skinned hands, even though I don't have no story like that.

On my way home the pictures of Soweila and Cassy kept melting through my eyes. That sounds weird but, it was like the pictures of them were so soft right behind my eyes and they were coming through and getting all up in everything I looked at,

made everything else softer too, softened all the edges. When I was walking on 56<sup>th</sup> St. I heard a “meow” really light coming from somewhere I can’t see. So I stop and bend down and there’s a little cat hiding underneath a car— the kind that have all colors, you know, black, orange, white. I say, “here kitty, don’t be scared.” At first it looked at me like it wanted to hurt me or something, like “don’t touch me, big-ass human,” but I kept holding my hand out for a while and it started to lift itself up from crouchin’ down, sniffin’ the air, it’s wet nose twitchin’. After it smelled me, it pushed its head against my hand like it never smelled anything better. It kept brushin’ up against my leg, looking up at me, talking to me with its meows and its big blue eyes. I got up to walk away thinking how cute, but it just followed me, meowing, and I started talking to it. I said, “I can’t wait for spring. I can feel that it’s coming though, don’t you? The snow is almost melted.” I told the cat about how my mom always used to get me Easter baskets and take me to the park and hide colored eggs in the grass, leading me around so I could find them. I talked about my mom to the cat all the way to my house. Her soft skin, her hair in long braids, her purple lipstick.

When I got inside, my dad was there. He told me to go out and get some groceries for him. He does that a lot because he too lazy to go do it himself. The cat was sitting on the stoop when I walked back out the door. It saw me and sat up, meowed at me like it was asking me a question or telling me something important and I smiled. I felt so happy to see that cat there. I said to the cat, “see you when I get back, Ebony.” It just came out my mouth without even thinking. I don’t even know why because that’s my first name and I always hated it so I said everyone to call me Estelle, my middle name.

Then something happened. On my way to the store I decided to take the shortcut down 53<sup>th</sup>, when I saw TyShawn. It was such a crazy bunch of feelings that all came over me then. At first I was like, happy, because I always wait around trying to see him.

“Hey. What you doin’ this part of the city, TyShawn?” I axed him and smirked at him, kind of trying to tease him or something even though there was nothin’ funny bout it really.

“Don’t worry ‘bout it, Estelle. This your neighborhood?” I nodded. He was standing close to me and smiling like he did when he wanted me to come home with him. That’s when I noticed something was different. His eyes were acting all crazy, like they had some electricity in them, but then I had those butterflies start flying around in my head and I forgot about everything.

“How you doing, though? I haven’t seen you for a while.” But I knew he didn’t want to actually know because he didn’t even give me a chance to answer. He was already kissing me and touching me a lot. I was confused because we were in the middle of the sidewalk and I couldn’t go to his house now because it was too late and I was getting groceries for my dad anyway. He took me by my waist and started moving me along the sidewalk and kissing me so hard and kind of pushing me. He unlocked a shiny nice black car with a button on some keys he got from his pocket and we got in, even though I knew he didn’t have a car. Everything was clean as new, the seats were leather and there was a screen with lights and so many buttons. He pulled me onto him so fast and just yanked on my clothes ‘til he had my stockings down. He just started having sex with me. I tried to play along with it, tried to slow him down by kissing him, but he was just in

his own world, like, looking through me. So I stopped looking at him and just waited for it to be over. When it was, he didn't say a word.

"I should go get these groceries for my dad now. He gonna wonder where I been." I said, finally.

"Aight. You want me to drive you to the store?"

"Okay, yeah. It's just around the corner."

So I said goodbye and got out the car. I went inside the store. I got the milk and eggs. I got the chicken breast and bacon. The corn and the cheese and the coffee cake. I paid at the register. When I walked out the store, there was a bunch of people right at the edge of the sidewalk, next to the street. A girl was leaning over looking at something and covering her mouth and a kid's voice said, "that's nasty." Someone else's said, "it was that black car—ran right over it." I moved through the layers of people and saw the cat, my little cat, Ebony, in the street. Her middle was all flattened, blood all caught up in her fur, her paws twisted, and her blue eyes...she must have followed me there.