Seems like I'm always leaving Long Beach. Not that I don't like living here. Just that there's always a reason to head south to Laguna or north to L.A. I can drive these freeways with my eyes closed. I will admit that he wears a lot of black but I'm not gonna judge a man by the color of his clothing.

Only twelve hours gone now and I can't quite remember his name. I can see him though. Standing on one foot at the corner of Broadway and Cherry like he would topple in a gust. The 710 freeway that circles the city looks like a simulation of itself today: sailboat masts in the harbor, the carousel on my right and the tallest buildings to the east competing for sky. The Toyota Grand Prix races here every year in April because it snakes around like Disneyland's Autopia.

Was it Louis? No, because he doesn't feel like a Louis. His hair is dark and unruly. The glint of silver in his pocket that I chose to ignore: Someone named Louis doesn't carry a concealed weapon. A good gust. And there had been one. Clouds gathering tight and dark over the ocean. Rays of escaping sunlight dazzling shop windows on Broadway. The scent of wet asphalt and thick drops beginning. He smiled like he was in on a conspiracy with the atmosphere.

I can't stay still. The 710 North looks inviting but I could just as well stay home. Walk to the beach at 4:00 when the wind picks up. It was okay until he stood at the threshold of my apartment door. Before that he just walked the city talking about how I should speak so that he could understand. I still don't understand. But he did. Just lucky I guess. Or maybe it's the way I speak to animals. He is wild like that.

Laundromats and car washes and dollar stores. Not a good part of town. He grabs my arm and ducks into a shop that smells of smoke. The sign over the door says *"Eye of the Cat"* and that's when he lets it out that he's a witch. Not a warlock?  No, a witch. He's on the small side. I squint looking for a glow or something. He's more like a wood sprite. Something peering at you from behind one of Arthur Rackham's trees. He stares into a case of long, sharp tools and his face reflects in the glass.

In Long Beach you can live alone and never be lonely. On Sundays everyone is on their postage-stamp porches sipping coffee with their cats. Kites rip through the wind above the oil derricks off shore. Men with fishing poles pass by on their way to the sand. This is perfect solitude. But not so. It's just like me to ignore signs. The dagger fits in his pocket so it can't be more than a few inches long. It's brightly polished and when he removes it to show me I can tell it's a thing of beauty to him. His ownership, somehow a rite of passage.

I move to the door of the witch store with its heavy sandalwood air and inhale the exhaust from the traffic on Broadway. He follows me outside, so shrouded in his pleasure he does not sense my fear which, to be fair, I've learned to hide pretty well. I say, "Let's eat" and lead the way to *the Potholder* where you can get immense omelets any time of day piled with all kinds of weird vegetables and sauces. It's always crowded inside *the Potholder* because it's famous in Long Beach. The building is old and made of brick. The walls are thick and the windows dusty.

The witch-boy is vegan. He studies the menu. He might be twenty to my twenty-five years. Colorful murals plaster the brick walls, right over the grout and grit, distorting the already strange images: The eyes of an elongated orange horse gaze forever from the abandoned porch on which he stands near a crazy bright green cactus. I already know I want artichoke and hollandaise and hash browns and he is wondering about the spinach. If it's cooked in butter.  He must weigh less than 100 pounds which, without a dagger, wouldn't make him much of an opponent.

Having diffused something of the occult with breakfast, we head back to the shore via Broadway, then west on to Second Street. The rain is picking up and I'm ready to be back in my space. I'll write sitting on floor pillows in my tiny, 2nd floor apartment with hung windows on two sides that look out over the bar on one side and the oil derricks on the other. Deteriorating 1940's wooden stairs will be slick with rain and my cat, Weezie, will be sitting in the window sill waiting for me to let her in. I'll reach up and stroke her damp fur and open the windows and the scent of night blooming jasmine will mix with the ocean and the rain and it will be a perfect recipe for casting my own kind of spell.

As we near Grenada Street, I'm thinking how to say goodbye to him before he finds out exactly where I live. There is no doubt the day was magic. His long black coat billows out behind him in the wind and black boots splash with every stomp in the puddles. That common ground, the rain: When we came upon each other at *the Upstart Crow* this morning, he was in the cooking section and I was reading lesser known poets. We communicated with an energy unique to people who love storms. I was feeling high in that way that makes smiling easy. Rainy days are probably the only time you would call me approachable. And I recognized him at once. He was beaming while reading about subsistence farming. Silver rings on his fingers, a silver cuff on his petite wrist, and that edge of light coming from the pocket of his black jeans.

It wasn't long before our bookstore conversation moved out to the sidewalk, down Second Street to the bridge over the bay, down Ocean Avenue that dead-ends into the sand unless you turn north on Pacific Coast Highway. We just kept walking, this little man and I. Cities yield strange friends. And friendly strangers. And strange strangers. In Long Beach, you live with them all. You don't want them all to know where you live, necessarily. As we near my apartment building I consider passing it by. He is talking about his birth parents, his adoption at 8, his lover waiting at home for their evening ritual. He tells me that sky-clad means nakedness and this is how they perform their ceremonies and the object in his pocket somehow plays a part and I'm ready for him to stop talking now but we are at the top of my stairs.

Weezie's tail hangs damp over the window ledge as she watches us ascend to the door with its blue paint peeling in the damp salty air. There is not the usual Rasta music droning from under my neighbor the weed seller's door. In fact, the entire street is pretty empty today. Beach people aren't much for rain I suppose. The witch has an expectant look on his face and I am not good at disappointing people. Still I don't wish to participate anymore in his Wiccan dream, fascinating as it is. I wonder if I've led him on. If he's thinking that social norms don't apply to witches. That he can pull that card no matter what I say. There's nothing left but for me to fish my key from the pocket of my jeans and be civil. Offer him a beer. Some ice cream. While I feed Weezie pieces of baloney I bought for her at the liquor store across the street yesterday.

"It's been a day," he is saying, backing down the stairs, coat billowing, black hair wet and weighted over his eyes, "I'll never forget." The stairs disappear under him as he drifts backwards, dark eyes still smiling. "Catch you at *the Upstart Crow*," I call down. He turns now and his boots slosh out to the street and east back to Second Street. I unlock the door, slip inside as if I am being followed. I am. Weezie is at my heels asking for baloney.