

*From the Notebook of
Aurora Jones*

*The Emerald Burrito
Emerald City.
Gift-from-God Day.*

Dear me,

Today, I witnessed a miraculous happening, extraordinary even by the standards of Oz. I was there. I was in it. I even helped!

Let me attempt to describe the unfolding.

Okay. It's daybreak at the Emerald Burrito. Fonzie's still out of town, so I have to open up. I arrive just as Pinky, the new waitress, comes barreling around the corner. She is teensy, beachball-shaped, and wheezing as she runs. Her huge cheeks billow, her eyes are wide as she rounds the corner, sees me there, lets out a *meep*, skids to a halt on her stubby legs and then waggles there, a tubby little puppet on a spring.

You gotta love Munchkins. I know I do. They are, as a rule, incredibly punctual, insanely polite, and on top of that, sincere. Like Middle America, without the psychosis. Like a midwestern dream, shrunk to workable scale.

Which doesn't mean that they're not neurotic. It's just that their lines are incredibly clear. She is terrified that I'll think she's horrid if she's just one minute late: not because I'll dock her or anything, not because she's afraid of anything I might do. It's just that, well, it would

be *awful* if I were to think that she was horrid!

“Hi, Pinky!” I say, unlocking the door. She attempts to unswallow her tongue. “You look so cute today!”

She nervously smiles, and wiggles a little. She’s a tiny puppy person, and it’s just too hilarious. “Am I late?” she peeps.

“No, you’re early!”

“Oh, YAY!” She’s all better at once. It’s just that easy.

And just as I wonder why *I’m* not so uncomplicated, Mikio Furi comes running up the street. He has, so help me God, a speaker cabinet in his hands. A *big ol’* speaker cabinet, just about as big as he.

Now, Mikio Furi has been here, what, six weeks? And already he understands things better than anyone else I know. He is utterly obsessed with the physics of Oz. How it works. Why it’s not like normal Earth. And what can we do to bridge the best of both worlds.

(Most all the native Ozians are pretty much like me: they accept the magick at face value, are pretty much just consistently thrilled that it works. And all the Joe Science Earth guys I’ve met — be they government or corporate — walk around cracking figurative cinder blocks over their heads. They don’t get it. It makes them crazy. It slams against the brick wall of their educated minds, admitting the inadmissible while belying all their rules.)

Mikio, on the other hand, is fiercely creative, thoroughly inquisitive, totally wide-open to the possibilities. Which makes me wonder why more guys like him aren’t here. Probably that one-of-a-kind rule again, god damn it (although, push come to shove, one beats the hell out of nothing).

He is also — as I’ve noted elsewhere in these pages — almost painfully delicious. He doesn’t seem at all aware of it, which of course is even better. He just shows up whenever, big ol’ smile on his face, long black hair streaming tendrils over bright almond eyes. He is scrawny, a-jitter with the natural speed that some hyper-smart guys seem to ooze from their pituitaries. And he always has some new strange device that he has just developed.

I bet he was always like that. But here in Oz, I really see him coming into his own.

Now, it's strange, how green is not always flattering. It can make you look sickly. It can make you look ... *bad*. Even the soft, benign glow of these wending emerald streets at dawn can, sometimes, throw me back to old George Romero films: packs of sallow, shambling zombie-folk, dressed up like the guys next door.

But Mikio, in this moment, looks more like something from a Mati Klarwein painting: like an acid trip I took eleven years ago, flat on my back on a good friend's back lawn. It was night, and I was lying in the grass, helplessly smiling, unable to rise, pinned to the Earth by bliss, drugs, and gravity, absolutely slaughtered by the glory of existence; and I remember that every blade of grass was *glowing*, radiant, brilliantly lit from within, a tiny neon filament of lifeforce burning. And God was everywhere.

I have always hungered for moments like those; and now Mikio is standing there. Verdant. Incandescent.

Which is to say, he looks good in green.

"Hi!" he says. "Look what I got!"

I feel like Pinkie, then. Utterly transparent. I catch myself starting to wiggle, stop. "Wow," I say. "Are you starting a band?"

"Even better," he says. "Like, a *thousand* bands." As I stare at him blankly, he adds, "You got your CD player?"

And I begin to understand.

Now, Quilla, you know how many times I've bemoaned the fact that I came to Oz with all this great music, only to find that I a) had the only CD player; and that b) my poor headphones were the only speakers here. Which meant that I could listen to Tom Waits, The Genritals, Patti Smith, Scriabin, Johnny Cash, Ween, Lester Loose, Mrs. Miller, Frank Zappa, or Frank Sinatra; I could pop in The Beatles, The Beastie Boys, ABBA, Smegma, The Sardonics, Grand Funk Railroad, Yma Sumac, Spike Jones, Patsy Cline, Porkchop Bones, Cab Calloway, Oingo Boingo, Kitty Krum or Nitzer Ebb; I could turn on Herman's Hermits, Mikki Bobbit, Lump, The Monkees, Jimi Hendrix, Funkadelic, Booker T. & the M.G.s; I could groove to Miles Davis, Iggy Pop, David Bowie, Tori Amos, Billie Holiday, Bjork, Beck, The Meat Puppets, Me'Shell Ndegochello, Pongo Domingo, or Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan; I could

worship at the altar of Tchaikovsky, Chet Baker, John Coltrane, Nirvana, and easily hundreds more.

But only on my headphones. And only by myself.

Yes, *I* could listen, any time I wanted, to the crowning glory that is human music: far and away the best thing that Earth people ever made. I could even turn on others, Ozlings who had never heard. Only one at a time.

Those days are over now.

Now picture, with me, what this moment is like. Behind Mikio — grinning and sweating and toting — comes a happy procession of Ozlandic goofballs. I recognize Ginko and Faffo Boff, the Quadling brothers who both love cheese. They are restaurant regulars, hilarious guys, and they're huffing and puffing with a cabinet between them.

Also grappling with the speaker-type units are a Winkie, two Gillikins, and a clunkety robot, none of whom I know. Evidently, Mikio makes friends fast. I note that the Winkie and one Gillikin are girls, but I'm barely even jealous, so overwhelmed by the moment am I.

Above us, the sky is orange, purple and pink, on its way to brightest blue. The cobblestone streets and emerald-encrusted storefronts that line them are, of course, glowing green. The Quadlings wear yellow. The Winkie wears blue. The Gillikins both favor orange, and Pinky's all in red. The robot, a-glinting with unburnished brass, looks like Tic-Toc's bohemian cousin. And Mikio, pale-skinned, is dressed in black.

As it happens, so am I.

The keys are still in my hands. They, too, seem to glimmer with magick light. "Omigod," I say. "Umm ... did you want to come in?"

Mikio says, "That's the whole idea!"

So I step inside and get out of the way as they struggle through the doorway. There's a pileup in the foyer as they set down the speakers, gasping for breath; and though the shock has only just begun to set in, I find myself strategizing.

Looking around at the Emerald Burrito.

As if for the very first time.

The interior of the restaurant is large yet intimate, dark enough to be cozy, with hacienda arches and squared-off pillars in glorious symmetrical

splay. There are twenty-three tables of dark burnished wood, in a variety of sizes, to accomodate all guests. Each table has a green stained-glass votive candleholder affixed to its center, awaiting spark and flame.

There are lanterns on the pillars as well. The walls are festooned with faux-Mexican tapestries, woven for us by Fonzie's old girlfriend, Tatale. (For a witchling who's never been out of the city, I think she did an astonishing job.) Though we played down the gleaming gem-pocked look — you get enough of that in Emerald City — strategic strings of flicker-stones are draped at the creases of walls and arches; and mounted on the cracked tile ceiling are fifty-seven upside-down flourescent sombreros: a multi-colored touch I stole from El Chavo, one of my favorite restaurants back in seamy L.A.

It's a beautiful room. A great place to eat. Already, I can feel it transforming. I look at Mikio's cabinets, all four of them, start calculating how to mount them, in which corners of the room. The wood of the cabinets matches the tables. Once again, I am stunned by what a genius he is.

"But," I hear myself saying, "will they work?"

"Who knows?" He grins. "But I think they might!"

"Let's find out!" says Ginko, while the others let out a cheer. It's like a musical midget football team, psyching themselves as they take the field.

I guide them to their respective corners, clear tables out of their way. I'm the tallest person in the room, so I come in kinda handy. The Gillikins have brought their tools, which makes mounting the speakers a snap. For the first time, I really look at what the speakers are. I start laughing.

"Popo shells?" I say.

Mikio nods. I shake my head. Popo's a lot like cocoanut. I use it for certain dishes. But I've never seen popo shells chopped in half, scooped out, and mounted in speaker cabinets. He's got a big one on the bottom — his bass popo shell — then a smaller one for midrange, and a dinky popo tweeter.

All of these are wired together in a fine twiney matrix of gibberdeen vines, assorted charms and fetishes (including a plastic Elvis nightlite),

and ... “Are those language bush branches?” I ask, finally getting the picture.

“Exactly,” chirps in the Gillikin girl, who has picked up on my boner for Mikio. Clearly, she has one, too; competition now, rearing its adorable head.

“That’s why I think it will work,” Mikio sez, completely oblivious to gurl-politics (yay!). “It’s so simple, it *has* to. That’s just how Oz is.”

He certainly has a point; and I find myself thinking, *why didn’t I think of that?*; and that’s when he says, “Why don’t you get your CD player and, you know, pick out something perfect?”

It’s in that moment that the panic begins to claim me. My pulse soars. My breastbones squeeze. Little blobules of sweat start to knock at my pores. I realize how much I’ve already emotionally invested in this experience, even though it’s patently absurd. A stereo made of nuts and kindling? Am I fucking joking? Is he putting me on?

“You’re not putting me on, right?” I ask him sincerely. “Because if you are, I will just cry ...”

“... no ...”

“... cuz this would mean so much to me ...”

“... um, Aurora ...?”

“... I’m sorry, I’m freaking out. I’m just so *excited* ...”

“Aurora,” says Mikio, taking me gently by the shoulders. “Just pick a song you want to hear.”

At which point the door flies open, and in struts Señor Poogli, the six-armed chef. He is swarthy and squat and hyperbolic, brandishing his new faux-Mexican mustache with Pancho Villa swagger. When he gestures, he gestures large.

Behind him, Pim and Bom and little Cheeba sneak in.

“AND WHAT,” Señor Poogli demands, “IS THIS?”

“It’s music,” says the Gillikin girl. “And I would like some wavos rancheros.”

“*Hmph!*” Poogli says, with a gesture that suggests that it doesn’t look like music to him. All the same, the first order of the morning is in, and he is nothing if not duty-bound. With a last caustic glance at the lot of

us, he goes tromping off into the kitchen. The g-girl smiles, then looks at me. We size each other up.

Her face is cute and round. Her hair is bobbed and purple-brown. They don't need dyes to get those shades. It just happens. But it's great. Her eyes are purple-violet too, intense and determined. She would make an excellent terrorist. Four foot two, intensely buxom, with just enough waist between bosom and hips to imply an hourglass exploding.

I wonder if Mikio's fucked her yet, can only imagine he will. I see her thinking the exact same thing, and we catch each other there.

"Pinky? Pim?" Breaking the spell, returning to the power-spot that is my job. "I think we've got some hungry people here. Bom? Get these tables set up? Little Cheeba? Go help Señor Poogli, okay? We're about to open for business."

Already, outside the door, the first morning diners are amassing. I can see Ambassador Spang and Enchantra; the twelve blond Winkie children and their mannequin nanny; Squinko the boot-salesman; Bing the extra-smart hamster; and some other characters I don't know. I gesture through the window to them, *uno momento, por favor*; they nod and go back to curiously watching, or talking amongst themselves.

And so, at last, the moment has come. Despite the pulse-pounding pressure, I make my way to my bag. The CD player is there, along with a folio containing fifty CDs that for some reason were on my mind. I take out the player, set the folio down beside it.

"Where should I set up?" I call across the room to Mikio.

"How should I know?" he says. He's right.

"So it doesn't matter where I put it?"

"Only to you. It's your CDs. I'll tell you when I'm all set up."

There's a counter just inside the kitchen door, to the right of the service bay. It's a place where we mostly keep cook books and stuff. I move through the swinging doors and set up there.

And as I peruse, Mikio comes to me, ready. He's got one end of his miracle cable in hand, with a language bush tip carved like an audio jack. "Plug it in," he says, and I do.

At that moment, the only possible selection leaps into my head.

Grinning, I say to Mikio, "Tell Pinky to open the doors."

He leaves the room. I open the player, take out The Plimsouls and slip it back in the folio. The song that I want is the very first track on the gleaming gold CD I then take in my hand.

The name of the song is “Never Been To Spain.”

The artist is the immortal El Vez.

I put the disc in the machine. I close the little lid. I crank the volume to eight and pray. Then I quick kiss the sky and press Play.

I leave the kitchen, just as the first customers enter, and the first susseration of sonic wave whispers out from those beautiful speakers. It’s the sound of the ocean, and it is *loud*, but not as loud as it’s going to get. I think about pinning it back just a little, but then I see the mounting confusion on all those magick faces.

Why cheat them on their first time?, I figure.

Then I just stand back and enjoy.

Out from the sound of crashing waves comes a single distorted guitar. It’s buzzing around one note, like a wiggly bee, and then it starts a steep slow crazy tension-building climb.

When the first clipped power chord in the history of Oz rings out, loud and clear, I watch the crowd lift off the floor.

And by the time they land, one split-second later, the greatest Mexican Elvis of them all is crooning his way into their sweet virgin hearts.

Well, I’ve never been to Spain
But I’ve heard about Columbus.
Well, they say the man’s insane
Cuz he thinks he discovered us.
In fourteen-nine-two,
Who discovered who?
Here’s how it happened:

Words struggle to fail me, but I can’t allow it. All I can say is: *you shoulda seen their eyes*. You shoulda seen their eyes: all those Munchkins and Gillikins, tourists and traders and bigshots and locals, suddenly lost in astounding sonic places they’d never known before.

You should have seen the way they moved, so totally instinctively. Freezing up. Or letting go. Intensely moved.

Or scared to death.

Well, I've never been to Tikal
But I've been to Chichen-Itza.
The Mayan culture: man, it thrived, boy
Before Columbus had a teacher ...

Remember: these are people who never heard rock 'n' roll. Who had no nostalgia. No connection to its history. Not a trace of the stuff in their genes. They weren't responding ironically, from some post-modern dreary ground zero of contempt or knowing mock-embrace.

They were responding to the music, purely on its own terms. And it was fascinating to witness the actual nature of their response. Like watching the first Norwegians to stumble across the bossa nova.

By the time El Vez & Co. cranked the song into high gear, a good chunk of the crowd was really truly gettin' down. They didn't know what to call it, but they knew what it did; like magick, that was good enough for them. Mikio and I were busy struttin' our stuff, from our respective corners of the room, so those near us could pick up on a couple of shoulder-snappin', head-cockin', hip-grindin' moves. I liked — no surprise there — the way he moved.

But the room was full of surprises.

First off was the wily Enchantra: official mistress to the Winkie Ambassador. While the obsequious, every-quivering Spang seemed startled and skittish in his Ambassadorial togs — eyes as wide as his built-in squint allowed, triple chins a-jitter in the river of sound — Enchantra appeared to be channeling the spirit of Uhura from the old *Star Trek*. Her golden feline eyes, black mane, and slinky chocolate physique made the overblown serpentine slinkster moves alluring, despite my post-modern inclination to giggle. I realized that some seduction ploys are not learned at all, but unspeakably natural. (I don't know if this is reassuring or not.)

The fact that she was aiming the ploy at me was not in the least surprising. She's been trying to get me into bed since we met last year, when I first started hanging out with Scarecrow. But beyond that, the

music really seemed to be getting her off; and creepy as she often strikes me, I still thought it was kinda cool.

The mannequin nanny seemed unmoved by the groove, but the little Winkie children were going wild. Several of them had found their way to Mikio's speaker cabinets, where they held their hands up to the sound and laughed as the bass waves whuffed them. And Mikio's friends belonged at the ENIT Festival, all over it like ravesters at some three-in-the-morning peak.

There was more. There was more. More people, flooding through the door. Pinky wasn't sure what the protocol was, but neither could she stop her butt from swaying. I kinda lost sight of Bing, but later on I found the tabletop skritches from where he'd been kicking up his heels.

And onward it went, through the chick singers wailing "*agua ...*," mimicking George Harrison and his "Wah Wah" refrain. Onward it went, until the song faded out. And the wild applause erupted.

I will never be the same.

And I don't want to blow this thing out of proportion, but I suspect that Oz, too, will never hear itself in quite the same way again. Before the day was done, I played *Swordfishtrombone*. I played "St. Alphonso's Pancake Breakfast." I played luscious Jeff Buckley and righteous Rev. Horton Heat. I played psychotic Thrill Kill Kult, spritely Cindi Lee Berryhill, and the red-hot sounds of Dizzy Gillespie, plus a little Latin Playboys and Debussy on the side.

While half the Emerald City tried to pack its way inside our doors.

I'll tell you this much; the Fonz is definitely going to shit. He wanted the most exciting restaurant in Oz, and it looks like he's finally nailed it for sure. Mikio's looking into the logistics of extension speakers, and the possibility of wiring the city for sound. There've already been over a thousand requests. Business is going through the roof, walls, and floorboards; we've never really taken reservations, but it's starting to sound like an awfully good idea.

And, at last count, it seems that three count-em' *three* brand new local bands are forming, as the young-at-heart of Oz claim Earthly music as their own.

Sound like a ripple in the normosphere to you?

It's the dead of night in the Emerald City, as I write down these final words. The place has been closed for about three hours; I've been alone with the room and the succulent sounds.

Now the last CD has gone to sleep, and I'm listening to the silence of the Emerald urban night. No squad car ululations. No drunken roars. No shots. No screams.

It's funny how the music takes me back, gives me tacit sense-memories of the days before I left. How unhappy I was. How hemmed-in by the blindness. How starving for action, in whatever form it took (or, more often, *didn't*).

How glad I am to be gone.

But there's something about sitting here, with the songs and the memories, that makes me weirdly proud of the place from whence I come.

And much as I love this endless smorgasboard of strangeness, I have never been so grateful that there is such a place as Earth.