



FRANK EGGLETON

## RONA LOVE

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Rona readjusted her sunglasses and pushed the button on the traffic light. The wind fluttered. *Hurry up*, she thought, as the cars went ambling by. The Cross Now finally turned green and her arms and legs sped through the air. As the shop's electric doors slid open, she waltzed past band posters and guitars hanging on the wall. The old man's eyes widened slightly as he peered down through his round glasses. He stood up in recognition. While he disappeared through a back door, she drooled at the amplifiers, all sexy silver and black.

The old man came back with a case. "Here you go Mrs Love, good as new." She accepted the case, clicked it open on the counter and sighed at the sight of the shining red guitar. "That's Ms Love," she closed the case and took out some money from her handbag.

"How'd it get like that, anyway?"

Rona put down one hundred and eighty dollars. "I smashed it through my ex's windows." She looked directly into his eyes, "Should I not have done that?" He accepted the cash and cleared his throat, "Well, not if you don't want the pick-ups to fall out, like that." He counted the money, "Um—it's two hundred and twenty dollars."

Rona picked out the last twenty from her purse and showed the bill without saying a word. He looked at the money, then up at Rona. She made sure her eyes held no concern. Whoever talked next would lose. Another customer came up behind Rona. The teenager impatiently looked on, arms folded. The old man finally spoke, "Alright then, two hundred dollars." She cracked a luminous smile, handed the money over, and swayed out of the shop laughing, as she negotiated the weight of the guitar case. It swung in a gust of wind. Rona looked across the road as her hair whipped wildly, *I can't even... this bloody hair*. She explored the view to the left, observing the pedestrians blown about by the wind. Clouds dimmed the sunlight.

She spun right, and noticed a hairdresser's in the corner of her eye. She pushed through the door, and simultaneously asked. "Can you see me now?" A

— The Author —

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woman with green and blonde streaks, red lipstick and gold eyeliner beckoned her towards a chair, *I like her style*. Resting the guitar case by the waiting chairs, Rona unbuttoned her dark camel rain coat.

“What would you like?”

She was brought a coffee from an assistant, who wore a sweater around his neck. He took her jacket. Rona pulled the hair tie from her messy brown bun.

“I’d like a short bob, and black dye.” She looked in her own hazel eyes in the mirror, they appeared closer to green than brown —*Like a brand-new start*.

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The next morning Rona flung her curtains across the rails and pried open the window. She breathed in the warm air and admired the late, bright bloom of the garden’s only pohutakawa tree. She walked barefoot across the bedroom’s wooden floors. The green paint had all but peeled off—Rona liked the effect. She opened her wardrobe and smiled at the guitar amp and pulled it out. With a heave, she lugged the Marshall onto a faded red couch. “There you go, buddy.”

Rona unlocked the case and scooped the guitar up. It was whole again, she felt the weight with one hand and pushed the strings down with the other. The repairman had changed the action, it was smoother to play. Rona found it easier to form power chords. She gazed over the bedroom wall and stared at a poster of PJ Harvey who looked Zen, on stage in her black mini skirt and halter top. She pulled out a pick and a lead from her case, plugged it into the amp. Played around with the effects, to find that sound. The sound that could inspire a song from somewhere, anywhere — if she was to prove herself as a musician, she felt she had to start with something magical. But where was this inspiration to come from? She hummed along to different chords, tapped at the paper with her pen and paced around the room, what to sound like? Sometimes she wanted to sound garage, sometimes new wave, no wave and sometimes she had no idea. How do I write a song? How could she prove herself, after years of not writing at all.

She flicked through Youtube clips and watched favourite bands like The Yeah Yeah Yeahs, the Kills and Batrider. She needed to go and watch something live. *But who could I even go and see bands with? Audrey and Silvia, maybe?* The guitar amp was turned on, played with, then quickly turned off. Rona half stared at the wall, half daydreamed about being onstage and playing that song. But couldn’t figure out where it was going to happen. Impatiently, she paced up and down the hallway of her Mount Victoria villa. It felt as if in the city of Wellington people were creating new things everywhere—everywhere except in her big empty home. It was time to draw some inspiration from somewhere. Maybe from musicians? She didn’t know any anymore, it had been ten years since she had vaguely known some musos. That night she sat alone, smoked out her window and slowly sipped on a glass of red wine. Stared into nothingness. What am I doing with my life?

She practiced her guitar. When she tried to speed up her fingers, it felt like trying to play with cat paws. The clawing continued for a couple of hours, nothing was happening. The internet had some tutorials, but all the guys played acoustic and had man buns. Learning from these people was not an option. She wanted to learn electric for a start. To relearn. Clicking around the net, she found herself watching series one of the television series, *Girls*. Any time she had a mind to set out to try and play, she found herself either watching *Girls*, or on Facebook. For a couple of years everyone had been waffling on about *Game of Thrones*, so next it was time for that. Immediately addicted, she tried taking breaks and picking up the guitar. She had convinced herself that maybe today wasn’t a good day for guitar anyway. *Maybe a job?* That won’t help with guitar, yeah, but it might take the self-imposed pressure off. She continued to watch *Game of Thrones*. Sometimes she would try and distract herself with articles about music. Trying to pick up cues and hints, from what the musicians themselves reveal. Any good information was usually due to the interviewer, allowing the artist to open up and prodding the subject in the right direction. But then all this was forgotten and she went back to watching *G.O.T.*

After a few days, she suddenly looked around her room. She hadn’t noticed it turn slowly into a tip. Pizza boxes, chocolate wrappers, dirty bowls, clothes, strewn all over the floor. She’d really let herself go. She jumped out of bed. Had a shower, drank coffee, cleaned the house and made a list of things to do over the next few days. Scratch that week—no, scratch that month. She scrubbed the floors, polished glasses and windows, washed and hung out clothes. *Cathartic*.

Rona was walking around town. The clock read 4:20pm. The sky glowed orange, with tufts of grey scattered sporadically around like decorations on a cake. The sun kept the cool wind at bay. *I could wear anything in this atmosphere*, she half sung to herself, then wondered if that was a lyric, a melody. Shimming along to the beach, she decided to have a cigarette. After all, it was well deserved and one hadn’t hit her lungs in ages. She searched through her phone, looking at the gig guide. There were a couple of bands she’d never heard of at a nearby venue—and Hauora—one of her favourite NZ bands of all time. *Humf, not on till nine though*.

Time to kill. There was a restaurant by the beach. Why not? The waiter queried, “How many?” Rona looked around, there wasn’t anyone else around, or near her. “Just me, um. Yeah, just me.” She was given a table over-looking the harbour. The sea surface swirled in the breeze and the shore basked in the sunset. The colour tone made her feel warm and relaxed. She pulled out her phone to try and describe the view. *Glowing blue, tiny cloud*, she typed. “Terrible,” she said out loud.

She wasn’t sure, but it felt like others in the restaurant were giving her looks of pity. She wondered if she had been on the News or something. Then it clicked,

*Do they think I've been stood up from a Tinder date?* She shrugged and ordered a glass of champagne. Smoking a cigarette outside, the sun gave way to dark-blue dusk. She wondered where she would be in a year, six months even? A man in a suit asked for a light. She lit his cigarette.

"So, what do you do?" he said.

Rona thought for a moment, nothing came to her. "I've just quit my job."

"What was it? If you don't mind me asking?"

"Well, it was the biggest con job of all time."

"What?"

"Social media, for products that are already huge."

"Oh, that's what I do. So, what are you doing now?"

"Nothing."

"Well, here's my card. Send me your résumé."

"Didn't you just hear me? I don't want a job in social media."

Rona went back to her table, where a large plate dwarfed the food on it. Bright reds, greens and cream-coloured treats, drizzled with an amazing lemon sauce. Each bite took her mind off to another memory.

*What do I want to do?*

She got to the venue. Her boot-heels clanged on the wooden floors—it made her feel like a school teacher. It was early, a few people floated around, waiting for something to happen. She ordered a beer and went onto the deck. The crowd seemed young to Rona. Her face became flushed and she couldn't look anyone in the eye. She texted Audrey, it seemed like an age before she got a text back. Rona exhaled slowly. She stood tall, her old friend was on her way, she wasn't going to feel like a weirdo hanging out with herself all night. She realised, though her favourite band were playing, she probably wouldn't know anyone who was going to be there. She smoked quickly and bought another drink.

She looked up from the bar, her whole body relaxed as soon as she saw Audrey. They pulled each other in tight. Audrey smelt like a day at the beach and the texture of her coat sent joy tingling from Rona's fingertips into her core. 'Why Audrey Hanna, where did you get that scarf?' Rona felt the silk between her fingers.

"Oh, you know, from some vintage shop off Cuba Street. Got my coat there, too." Audrey knew how to dress in style. They chatted as boys peered at them, looking for a gap to join in on their conversation. The boys whispered and nudged and winked; Rona smirked—it gave her a quiet confidence. Women seemed to be checking them out as well.

A random middle-aged man walked up to Audrey and stared at her for an awkward amount of time. "Where are you from?" He strained at her.

"I'm from Dunedin, where are you from?" He flicked his hand at her and said, "No, where are you really from?"

Rona pushed him away, "Get off, guy." A woman that seemed to be with him, pushed Rona back. "Don't you talk to him like that." Audrey put one hand on her hip and stared at the nail polish on her other hand. "My Chinese side is from Dunedin and has been there since 1850. What about your whakapapa?" Then they just stood there, glowering. A bouncer came over, sidled up to the couple and ushered them out of the bar.

"I haven't had that in a while," Rona shook her head, "Who the hell are they?"

They lit up cigarettes and stared down at people walking up and down the street; they watched as the couple yelled from across the street at the bouncer. The first band of the night began to play. It was their debut gig. They had a couple of interesting songs with potential, but it wasn't there yet. The next band weren't much better. Rona realised there were a lot of average bands around. *Was this good or bad? On one hand, there was no real pressure to be good. You could just be slightly better than these guys. On the other hand, what's the point in that? If you do something, might as well do it well, do it right.* Rona felt like this could be an opportunity to discuss jamming with Audrey, but the words weren't coming out properly. What was she going to say? *That she was nowhere near having a song, and it would probably sound terrible. That her ability on the guitar was nowhere near what it was years ago, that talent had been lost?* "Aaaaah," Rona let out her frustration, but not the reason. "What else have you been up to, Audrey?"

"Oh, I got great news today," Audrey held up a glass of wine, "My experimental portraits are going to be shown in San Francisco next year."

"Oh my god, that's so amazing. When? I'll come over!"

"In a year or so. I still have some new pieces I want to add. What about you? Do you still paint your landscapes?"

"Nah, I sort of stopped altogether, when I married Mike."

"Oh, right," Rona noticed Audrey's eyes glaze over and look away when she mentioned him.

The bass and drums rhythmically boomed through the P.A. system. Hauora had a great guitarist. Rona became lost in the music. During the instrumentals her mind started to explode with her own lyrics. She wanted to scream them out, but she couldn't quite hold on to them. They would appear and disappear in the same instant. The band played three of her favourite songs all together, in a ten-minute wave of sonic heaven. She forgot where she was, all problems melted into the ether. The crowd swelled to near maximum. The excitement the songs brought with them resonated around the room. The night became one of those happenings she'd recall being amazing, *if only the memory worked properly.* She

wanted to feel the night take her over.

All eyes were glued to the guitarist. Rona threw off her leather jacket. She began twisting and turning to the wall of sound in her black and white chequered dress. She could almost taste the layers of hard work the band had put in. The band owned the stage, then they owned the moment, then they owned the room.

Everything dropped out, except the drums that kept the pulse of the night going, then the bass oozed back in. The vocalist added melody, and stabbed out words and plucks of electric soul until the whole band were playing the biggest sound Rona had ever heard. Words and ideas rolled around in Rona's brain. The encore signalled the end. It was all over.

Rona pondered, well into her third, fourth and fifth rounds. The entire crowd was joining in on the singalongs at the karaoke bar. Rona found herself chatting with all the hot girls and boys. Her spirits were lifted as she and Audrey talked about the old Dunedin days, the gigs they went to and the trouble they used to get into, with Silvia.

"Oh, I've been, you know, I mean, seeing a guy. Sort of." Audrey offered out of nowhere.

"Who is he? Since when?"

"Toby. He's a few years younger."

"Yay for you. A few years younger, eh?"

"Yeah, well you know. I've tried, but others couldn't keep up with me."

Not like he does. He's a little shorter than me, but you know. Who cares?" Audrey looked at her phone, "Oh, that's him now."

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The sunlight beamed into Rona's room, striking her in the face. She slowly peeled her eyelids open and blinked the world into focus. The ceiling needed a clean. She lifted her head up and noticed drunk bodies lying around. The floor was a big mess and she had massive headache and her lungs felt full of soot. *Oh, how do I get rid of these people?* Some young guy was in her bed, Rona looked down at her and his bodies. They were both fully dressed. The fright was enough to wake her up.

"Right-oh, everyone, the party is literally over!" The people muttered, got up and got dressed and made their ways out the door.

That day, Rona began to think about the right circumstances to get all the right ingredients together to make a band. She wrote a list of things she would need to do:

1. Learn guitar.
2. Write some riffs.

3. Write some words.
4. Get musicians to jam with.
5. Practice.
6. Book gig.
7. Learn performance.
8. Play gig.

She looked at her list—*right*. For a few hours, she relearned guitar. She realised there wasn't a quick way to speed up her fingers, so patiently guided herself into picking up the pace. She sat down and tried to hum a melody and write some words. Afterwards, she looked at the words. *Maybe they need time to just sit, maybe they'll be good later?* The next day she tried the guitar again, and got slightly better.

She threw herself into research. She headed to the library and tried reading every rock biography. But they mostly talked about how the musicians were miraculously found in a park, or at a gig, or on drugs, or at some party, or how they were related to someone. She read music magazines from the U.K. Their stories made it sound so easy—one woman broke a leg, so ended up in hospital and just happened to write all the lyrics for an album in her two-week stay.

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Rona opened her eyes. Looking down at the wooden floors she noticed the faded paintwork—it was swirling. She looked out the window. A bright blue sky. A muffled sound vibrated through the walls. She recognised the tune. She could feel herself singing the lyrics. She looked down into her hands, which were playing the guitar. Her fingers were playing perfect summer garage pop. When she stood by the microphone, the whole sound came in perfectly. She knew the whole structure of the song—it was buried deep down somewhere. She wasn't sure it was freedom she felt, but she felt no fear, she felt lighter than fire dancing in the winter sky. The air outside changed colour from blue to orange, and back again. She wanted to hold the sound in her hands forever. Then she woke up.

She took a deep breath. Somehow, she felt like that song was in her somewhere. She got off the bed, grabbed a note book, and wrote down the lyrics she had been singing in her dream. Somehow, she remembered the chords. She plugged her guitar in. *This could be it*, she thought, *this could be something*.

