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## Three Larissa Stories

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## Three Larissa Stories

### Abstract

Three short stories: "Larissa and Elementary Chemistry," "Larissa Goes into Business," and "Larissa's Greatest Fear."

### Keywords

rodent, naivety, dating, aging

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March 8, 2013

## Three Larissa Stories

by Teresa Milbrodt

### Larissa and Elementary Chemistry

This was when we were ten and eight: my sister and I fed our white mouse fireflies until it started glowing like a lightbulb about to go out, but you couldn't see it unless you turned off the lamp or covered the mouse's cage with a blanket and stuck your head underneath, and we didn't do that a lot because it smelled bad. At night we let the mouse run around our bedroom floor and scare the cat so it hid under the bed, but the mouse was smart and didn't follow. We thought she was a mouse like an angel, like the ghost of all mice that had died when they were eaten by eagles and foxes and cats, or mice that died in traps our dad set in the garage. He said those were bad mice that carried diseases, they weren't like our white mouse, but it was sad and gross and I still hate destroying furry life, even small smelly disease-carrying furry life that eats my cat's food and leaves pellets in the pantry.

But when I was ten all of nature was bright and shining and on July nights my sister and I ran around the backyard, going after fireflies as the mosquitoes went after us, but we didn't feel their needle noses because we were cramming glowbugs into our peanut butter jar. We never put holes in the lid because we wanted the insects dead by morning since our mouse ate fireflies like candy, only wanted those crunchy bulbs.

We got a second mouse (the guy at the pet shop who had pimples like constellations said it was a boy) and fed it fireflies, too, until both mice glowed like nightlights, only they weren't bright enough to read by even when we put them on a book. At two in the morning we woke up and heard the mice skittering in the cedar shavings, and after that our second mouse started to inflate like a little white balloon, and it turned out she wasn't a boy, and that was when I learned never to believe people who work in pet shops. Somehow the babies glowed, but we didn't know why because they hadn't eaten fireflies.

Then this awful thing happened and the father ate one of those babies and we were so mad we wanted to squeeze him to death, but our mom said we couldn't be too mad at the father mouse because it was instinct and we had to understand that. We didn't understand that nature meant eating your babies, but we didn't kill him since neither of us wanted to be the one to do it.

After a week we put him back in the big mouse cage because we wanted the mice to make up and be a family, and he went after those babies because he still hadn't learned, and my sister screamed and grabbed him too tight. We didn't hear anything, but a little red drop of blood came out of the mouse's mouth. That was it.

We tried to give the mouse to the cat but she wouldn't eat it, so we wrapped him in toilet paper and troweled a grave in the flower bed. At night we looked on the floor for his guilty glowing ghost, but never saw anything. My sister whispered to me in the dark that she didn't mean to do it, and I said I knew that, and for the moment that made everything okay. We still had seven baby mice that crowded around their mother to nurse, and when we let them run around on the rug they left little glowing pellets like stardust. Before bed we dared each other to eat just one firefly and see if in the morning our little toe, perhaps the tip of a finger, would glow with that strange and tiny light, but we always backed out and said maybe tomorrow. Now I wish I would have done it, because it was still a time when anything might have happened.

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March 8, 2013

## Three Larissa Stories

### Larissa Goes into Business

**Y**ou can't blame me because we were in second grade, the economy was based on lunchtime desserts, and I never had anything good. That's why I sold my boyfriend Chris to Jenny for two chocolate cream-filled cupcakes. Chris had refused to marry me and wouldn't even kiss me on the playground behind the slide. As part of the deal, I had to take Jenny's boyfriend Mark, and everyone knew Mark picked his nose and ate it. I made Mark bring me a candy bar every time he kissed me on the cheek, and I told him he had to kiss me because that's what girlfriends and boyfriends did. I didn't breathe when his lips touched my skin so I wouldn't sniff the boogers on his breath.

By the end of the week all the girls in second grade had realized my brilliance and claimed a boyfriend, except for poor Kate who had to take Doug since no one else wanted him. Doug lived with his grandparents who were from some country that no one could pronounce. He wore glasses and smelled funny, like the weird rice and vegetable mixtures his grandmother packed in his lunch. Everyone knew it was stuff that she picked out of the garbage disposal and threw into a bowl.

But Doug brought Kate a bracelet on the Wednesday after he had been declared her boyfriend. It was the fake-gold-chain kind with shiny paint that wore off in a few weeks, but it was better than a candy bar. We clustered around Kate to examine the

present. On Friday Doug gave her a little sampler box of chocolates, and Kate kissed him on the cheek without Doug even having to ask. He and Kate held hands as they waited in the bus line to go home.

Doug's value skyrocketed. Kate was offered candy, dolls, one week of lunch desserts, even Eric, the most popular boy in class, in trade for Doug. She refused. I was sick of Mark, so I convinced Hillary that Mark was a great boyfriend because he brought you all the candy you wanted and he didn't smell that much like boogers. Hillary agreed to trade me her boyfriend Nick if I threw in some gumdrops. I sighed but gave her the gumdrops since Nick's mother made the best chocolate chip cookies of any mother in the second grade. Then I had a "talk" with Nick by the slide at recess, and quietly explained that if he didn't bring me at least four cookies the next day I'd trade him to Mallory. Everyone knew Mallory still wet the bed.

Some of the boys didn't care whose boyfriend they were. They were assured of their value because they were cute or athletic and in no danger of getting stuck with a bed-wetting Mallory in the near future, or even having to surrender half of their dessert. But other boys, those who hung their coats on the lower racks in the back of the classroom, realized that there was status to be gained through being paired with the right girl, and status to be lost through being attached to Mallory.

After Nick brought me cookies and I told my best friend Trish what I'd said to Nick. Soon she was dragging her boyfriend Aaron away from his soccer game and to the slide for a "little talk." Aaron just drank milk at lunch the next day and told the cafeteria lady he wasn't hungry, but after school in the bus line, Trish showed us girls her four packs of gum.

The next day we heard Chris was grounded for a month because he'd tried to steal two bags of red licorice from the drugstore across the street from school. They were for Jenny, but since he didn't have them, Jenny traded him to Mallory. Chris escaped lunchtime in the cafeteria, and Trish whispered to me that he locked himself in a bathroom stall to eat his sandwich and pretzels. He was scared that someone would make him kiss Mallory on the playground at recess.

Rumor had it that Aaron and Sean were working together to lift candy bars and gum from the gas station across the street—one kid distracted the cashier with questions while the other kid slipped candy into his backpack—but this was not our concern. This was second grade, and the law of the jungle prevailed. Pretty soon Aaron and Sean topped the social ladder along with Doug, even though they all had glasses and everyone knew their mothers sent notes in their lunch sacks.

We never found out who squealed to the teacher. Probably Chris. We got a half-hour talk on how trade was mean, and after that the lunch and recess monitors watched us like prison guards. There could be no more exchange of cookies or candy or jewelry until later, years later, when we were wearing lipstick and mascara, short skirts and high heels. Now the trade meant bras and back seats, dinners and diamonds. Now the competition was serious. But we already knew the rules of the game.

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## Three Larissa Stories

### Larissa's Greatest Fear

I'm making breakfast, oatmeal with lots of raisins and brown sugar and cinnamon and chocolate chips, because I don't want it to taste healthy but I'm at the age when I have to worry about my colon and pacify it with fiber and direct kind thoughts toward it. I feel this pain in my right side and stop with my spoon in the air and the microwave still running. I have to watch the oatmeal so it doesn't explode out of the bowl, but I worry the pain is a harbinger of doom, the first sign of appendicitis. My dad had it when he was a kid and said it felt like he had the flu, then he threw up, then he had a stabbing knife cramp in his right side and had to go to the emergency room.

This is my nightmare, the stomachache that gets worse then I have to be cut open before something explodes, and my oatmeal is done, it has exploded all over the microwave like my appendix will do someday because it's out to get me. The appendix is an organ scientists say humans used to need but don't any more, so I wonder why it wasn't phased out like rotary dial phones or milkmen or chalkboards that use real chalk. We have better organs, new and improved, so there's nothing for the appendix to do but get bored and inflamed. I make new oatmeal because my colon needs me and my colon is something I still need, unlike my appendix, but I can't eat because there's that pain in my right side.

On my walk to my new job at the shoe store I consider how tiny and innocuous things sometimes aren't, how scissors and sticks take out eyes and certain bees are evil and you can get hit by lightning when the sky is blue. Millions of these warnings scroll under the screen on the nightly news, which makes me wonder how the hell is anyone still alive when the latest bulletin is about this guy in Memphis who fell off a ladder and got knocked unconscious and drowned in four inches of water. My stomach is unhappy because it is empty and I can hear my appendix muttering but I can't make out the words. I tell the guy who's outside the shoe store with a coffee cup full of change that my appendix is talking to me, and he asks if I need a quarter to call someone, but I can't call my appendix so I shake my head and think about the number of people who are killed by vending machines every year. I know I saw the statistic somewhere and it was higher than I expected but there was no explanation of how it happened, if the victims aggravated the vending machines or if they were just maneuvering the machine to coax out their bag of chips, a small thing that did not seem dangerous.

Teresa Milbrodt received her MFA in Creative Writing from Bowling Green State University. She is the author of the short story collection *Bearded Women: Stories* (Chizine Publications), and the forthcoming novel *The Patron Saint of Unattractive People* (Boxfire Press). Milbrodt has published her stories in numerous literary journals, and several have been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She lives in Gunnison, Colorado, with her husband Tristan and cat Aspen.

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