

# Dhanaivi at 16 in the South Bronx

Like everyone else, I expect clean streets – streets where opportunity bursts from cars and exotic mailboxes, where shining glass and concrete shoot like arrows straight into the sky. Instead, he takes me from one squat, abandoned building to the next, and it's party after party, rooftops and basements, all tarp-slung doorways and boarded up halls. We dance through streets and flights of stairs and alleys and bodegas until the music gets louder and we get drunker and then we just keep on dancing.

So, as disappointments go, America is a pretty fun one.

When he pushes me against the wall and kisses me, everyone is watching, but I don't care. While he holds me against the paint stains, a street lamp casts power-line shadows through apartment windows. Long grey strings knit through each other and pull us along. Outside, I see the yellow lights of Boston Road dipping off toward 3rd Ave, and I don't know the history of fire in this place. I don't know the presidents and I don't know the states and I don't know English. I don't know the subways and I don't know Elvis. But mostly I don't know the smoke that billowed here, the children who laughed and held hands with gasoline. How can you light a whole borough on fire? I don't know that there's only a small difference between that and this, then and now. I don't know fires can't go out, that they just spread thin enough for you not to hear, see or feel. I don't know that this kiss, like everything else – the music, the dancing, the Corona, the rum, the sneakers and the hats – is the water, the match, the extinguisher and the gas.

But I want to know these things, so I kiss back harder to find out. And like everything else here, it works perfectly.

