

# The Prairie Light Review

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Volume 11  
Number 2 *Arcade*

Article 28

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Spring 5-1-1992

L-A-X

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## Recommended Citation

Burke, Michael (1992) "L-A-X," *The Prairie Light Review*: Vol. 11 : No. 2 , Article 28.  
Available at: <https://dc.cod.edu/plr/vol11/iss2/28>

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## L-A-X

*Michael Burke*

She asks me where I'm headed.

"D.C.," I say, and I like the way that sounds. She nods a little, smiles a little. I smile, too, and ask where she's headed.

"L-A-X," she says. I like the way that sounds, as well.

"Business?" I say.

She shakes her head. "I live there," she says, still smiling. When she talks, she looks directly into my eyes.

We're standing in line at a crowded ticket counter at O'Hare. She has curly, auburn hair. She has brown eyes. She asks if I've ever been to Los Angeles.

"No," I say. Then I'm afraid that sounds too harsh. I tell her: "I mean I'd like to, though."

She nods.

The line moves one step forward. She's carrying a dress bag over her shoulder. She's wearing a sweater and jeans. I guess she's a few years older than me. I push my suitcase with my foot.

"I live here," I tell her.

"I figured," she says, but in a polite way. "You don't look Washington," she explains. "Do you fly much?"

"Not much," I say. Then I'm afraid that sounds somewhat fragile. "Well, some," I say. "On business. Couple times a year." She's still looking into my eyes.

The line moves one step forward again.

"I fly on vacations, too," I say.

She laughs a little. "That's nice," she says.

I feel my face turn red.

I look toward the ticket agent, but I don't really see him. Instead, my mind is racing: I'm on a plane, with her, heading west not east, to L-A-X. We kiss, she and I, on this plane, and speak softly to one another with our heads together. After we land, we take a cab to her apartment -- she doesn't have a house, she doesn't have a boyfriend, she has two black-and-white kittens maybe -- and we make love. We make love again and then eat Chinese food and then I brush her auburn hair with my hand and gently kiss her neck, her throat and pull a quilt across us once more.

I suddenly hear the smooth sound of her voice.

"I beg your pardon," I say.

She's laughing a little again. "It's your turn," she tells me, pointing at the ticket agent who is holding his hand forward saying, "Sir? Excuse me, sir?"

I laugh, too, and tell her thanks.

I give my ticket to the agent, put my suitcase on the conveyor belt. I turn to face her once more. "I'm sorry," I say.

"No sweat," she says.

I turn, then turn again so we're once again facing each other.

"This may sound weird," I say, "but I have to tell you that I'm married."

"That's nice," she says. She doesn't change her expression. She tells me: "I saw the ring."

The ticket agent hands back my ticket.

"Yes," I say, then look at my wedding ring as if for the first time. I turn red again. Then I find myself looking straight into her eyes.

"I was only making conversation," she says.

"Oh," I say, "me, too." I try smiling. "Me, too," I say. "I just thought I'd say that. About me being married, I mean. See how it sounds to say that aloud."

She hands her ticket to the agent. The people right behind her, two women and one older guy, are looking at me, listening to every word.

"So," she says, "how does it sound?" Then she smiles again.

"Good," I say. "It sounds good. It sounds o.k."

She nods her head. "That's nice," she says. "That's really nice."