



AMANDA FOX

*The
Albatross
and the
Mermaid*

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by Amanda Fox

<http://www.foxtales.ca>

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Dedication

For my husband, who never gives up.

For my children, who make me both laugh and cry.

For the rest of my family, for their enduring love and support.

And for my “amant de reve”, because without him, this book wouldn’t exist.

Prologue

He told me that he loved me. He'd said it a total of eleven times over eight years; I'd counted. Counted each finger on both hands, plus one. Five instances occurred in the throws of passion, when his mottled penis--an appendage the color of plums and overripe strawberries--plunged in and out of my developing body. Twice, he'd mouthed the words across the dinner table as I cleared the dishes between courses--between the stew and custard, and the meat pie and spice cake. Three times, he'd said it in various locations around the great house: when he caught my arm on the way up the grand staircase, when he pushed me up against the stone wall in the cellar, and in the nursery as I lulled baby Stephane to sleep. The last episode happened in the kitchen when, with his wife's back turned, he whispered those very words into my ear. "I love you Seraphine," he said. "I love you."

The day I knew for certain that Henri Bouchard's love for me was false, was the day my life took a turn for the better. It was May 2nd, 1786 at about 3:30 in the afternoon, five years prior to Toussaint L'Ouverture's joyous insurrection. A revolution had been brewing for some time and reports of many uprisings throughout the Caribbean had reached the house over the years.

Undoubtedly, we were all waiting for the big one to finally deliver our salvation, and as such, the mood between the supervisors and the workers was tense, orders coming down even harsher than usual whenever details of another outbreak made news. Cook always seemed to know about the gossip on and around the Lazare plantation, and that was how I found out about things.

Now, I wouldn't say that I was a very smart person in those days, but that doesn't mean I lacked the potential. It's in us all; it's just a matter of circumstance, and as you will see, mine were less than ideal. What little schooling I got was acquired mainly by accident as I dusted and tidied up around the master's children. Marie Rose--Henri's eldest daughter--took me as a friend and taught me the basics of how to read and write. Cook did what she could as well, but like most of us, she too lacked an education. At best, she tried to impart upon me the essential facts of life, or whatever those could've been living in such a terrible place.

And while I don't really blame myself for my predicament, I do wish sometimes that things had been different. Perhaps I should've made better choices, or maybe I should've appealed to the spirits for more guidance and help. No matter. Now that I'm

dead I have the clarity to see things for how they truly were anyway.

I know most people fear the end, but in my world, being dead isn't so bad. If that were the case, most of us would never have made it through the fires of hell. Decidedly however, we came across the sea with the firm notion that after death, one is once again reunited with family and friends-- that when a person dies their spirit returns to the homeland for a great feast with all those who have passed on before.

That belief, my friend, is what gave us hope, enough to persevere through the long days and lonely nights of captivity. Considering this, it may seem odd that more people didn't put a rush on the process--you know, getting to the "better" before it was officially time. Admittedly, some did do that, but we weren't put here to cut our own lives short, and this left most of us making the best out of a really bad situation.

Certainly, my people found reasons to live, reasons to believe that life could change, if not for themselves then at least for the generations that came after. We learned from our hardships and took those lessons with us, and that is why, as one of the dearly departed, I remain an invaluable member of my community.

And now that I'm in a good place, I don't like to dwell on the past. There is one situation however that I must clarify because of the important lesson that it taught me. What love truly is or isn't--or was or wasn't in that time before--is my topic for debate.

As the rounds of precipitation began in those early days of the vernal equinox, it became glaringly obvious that Henri Bouchard never truly loved me, and it is with this tidbit of information that we return to our story...

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The month of May fell right in the middle of harvest season, which ran a lengthy six months of the year, from January to July. An unusual amount of rain had flooded the earth that spring, causing the plants to grow faster than the cutlasses could be swung. Thus, the field workers were forced to labor into the twilight hours almost every evening, and I can't tell you the number of accidents--of cut faces, and slashed arms and legs--that those nighttime operations caused.

While the first and second gangs toiled among the tall stalks of cane in the blistering heat by day and in the shadows by night, I continued on with my job inside the house. While it seemed like I had been working for two or three lifetimes already, in reality, only a quarter of a century had passed. I was barely a woman.

Born on the plantation to a woman named Beatrice, I ended up an orphan at the age of three when my mother was beaten to death for drinking water when she should have been chopping cane. With no one to watch over me, I got shuffled around among the others until one day Lillian--a woman who had lost her own child during the passage overseas--took pity on me. As the cook, she managed to get me inside the great house, making sure I had enough food to eat and a warm place to sleep.

Thanks to her, I persevered, growing up alongside the eldest children of the Bouchard family. In the kitchen, I helped to gather vegetables, prepare meat, wash dishes, and scrub floors--any and all of the numerous tasks involved in running a household of that size. At the age of fifteen, things changed and I was put in charge of the Bouchard's three youngest offspring--Stephane, Natalie, and Anaise.

Becoming the nursemaid on the Lazare plantation was not a decision of the

missus, that's for sure. There were arguments over who should get the job, but as the man of the house, Henri had the last say. "You have a pleasing and kind nature, Seraphine. The little ones have taken a liking to you, and I think that you are perfectly suited for this job." That was his explanation and I had no reason to doubt him.

The position was passed to me from an older woman named Mitzi who had succumbed to a devastating illness of the brain--when she couldn't remember the children's names anymore and when she started behaving like she'd been possessed by the devil. It was a common affliction among us, and sadly, Mitzi was sent out one day, never to return.

After I accepted my post, I wondered about her often. When I asked him, Henri simply said that she'd been discharged of her duties and had gone to live with her cousins in town. In my heart however, I knew she'd been killed--probably burned to death or eliminated in some other equally abhorrent manner.

Ignorance is bliss as they say, and so, as a teenager I tended my charges happily, unconcerned for my own safety if things ever went awry. Again, it wasn't until later that I came to see Henri for the despicable man that he truly was, and not until after the grand contretemps that I am leading up to, that I contemplated the rationale behind his arrangement.

I think now that Henri entrusted me with the position of nursemaid for one reason, and one reason only. It brought me closer to his children, closer to his family, and indirectly, closer and more available to him as well. That must've been his intention, because that's exactly what happened.

Mind you, the particular moment that I knew I was meant to be more than an aide to the Bouchard's children didn't involve erotic words or sexual innuendo. With an easy stroke of his hand up the length of my spine--a casual touch where there hadn't been one before--he so much as told me that I'd become an object in his quest for personal gratification. In fact, he spoke of something completely off topic when he made the move.

We were in the study and he was giving me instructions on what to do with Stephane and the girls while he and the missus were away for the morning. "Seraphine, make sure the children bathe once they've completed their lessons. The girls need to have their hair washed as we are expecting visitors later on this evening. Furthermore, the linens in the sleeping quarters need to be cleaned and the pillows fluffed. Please see that this is all done by the time we get back."

On the last sentence of his diatribe, he moved up quite close to my front and reached around to trace over the vertebrae of my spine. As he did, his eyes met mine with a glazed-over look, like I was something delicious to eat and he was a very hungry animal indeed. Now, as I'm sure you can gather, whether or not I got involved with this man was never an option left open for debate. I was the slave and he was my master. *That* made it a done deal.

Oh, I may have put up more of a fight, but Henri seemed like a kind and gentle man, and I was such a lonely, young girl. I confused his sexual advances as signs of love and affection--two things that I craved more than anything--and thus sex with Henri became part of my job. I'm ashamed to admit this, but it was something I actually enjoyed most of the time, right up until the end that is.

The end. I remember that day as if it weren't a lifetime ago, mainly because it

took place just before my twenty-fourth birthday, eight long years since Henri had procured me as his lover. Before I go any further, let me describe to you the man who stole my virginity, the man who was to become the bane of my existence.

To begin with, Henri was the color of boiled snapper, his skin ghoulishly pale next to my cocoa brown. His hair was the texture of a horse's mane and his eyes were so squinty that it was like the sun was always shining in his face. Oddly enough, he was devoid of eyelashes, but his eyebrows compensated for his lacking there by crossing over the middle bridge of his nose where they almost touched--two caterpillars saying hello.

Speaking of his nose, his nostrils were so narrow that I often wondered how he ever got enough oxygen. Moreover, his legs were like sticks and they pointed inward at the knee, giving him a rather feeble gait. When he stood naked however, he had a roll of fat that hung like a tire around his waist. Without a doubt, he was a rather pathetic human specimen, but then I was never drawn to him for his physical qualities in the first place.

Albeit homely, Henri's demeanor was amicable and his temperament seemed even-keeled. From what I'd seen, Henri was a good father to his children and a kind husband to his wife, who, if you ask me, was a very ill tempered and quarrelsome woman.

She never liked me--that's for sure. She must've known about my affair with her husband and was simply staking a claim to her territory, making it very clear who was, and who *was not*, the wife. Certainly, I would've found it hard to believe that she didn't know about the two of us, or the others.

Yes, of course there were others. Even I knew that. No man of status in the colonies--planter, trader, businessman or otherwise--was restricted in the number of lovers that he took. How did I cope with this knowledge? Well, I just imagined myself at the top of Henri's list, focusing on his feelings for me (or what I interpreted were feelings for me), and closing the door on the rest.

And Camille, well, I often wondered what he ever saw in her to begin with. I didn't like to think that he picked her and I both, for I saw no similarities between us.

Now Henri's personality, while affable enough, was certainly not the aggressive type, and it may have accounted for his less than stellar achievement in enterprise. Compared to other planters in the Caribbean, Henri Bouchard held title to only a single plantation--Lazare--which he'd named after his father.

Henri and Camille, and their six children lived with us most of the time. They'd come from somewhere far across the ocean, but stayed on the plantation a good three quarters of the year, sometimes more. Supposedly, they stayed so that Henri could ensure things ran smoothly, so he could guarantee that none of his underlings ever tried to displace him as overlord. His power I guess, was not so far reaching.

If you recall, the day in question--the "end" as it were--was a hazy May afternoon, and I was in one of the guest rooms in a remote section of the east wing. Henri and I had just finished having sexual relations as he was want to do at least four or five times a week. As I said before, I enjoyed my encounters with Henri and I will never forget my first time.

"Open your legs for me, Mon Cherie," I remember him saying. "I promise, I'm not going to hurt you." Tentatively, I unfolded, Henri helping some by pressing my knees to the side. When he then caressed my private area, the feelings that I felt were so intense that I actually cried. It'd been so long since I'd experienced intimate contact that these

initial touches were overwhelming.

“Seraphine, it will be OK. You are such a dear girl, but don’t worry. I know how to make you feel so good, you’ll cry for me every time we’re together.” His arrogant words somehow made me brave and I mustered enough courage to watch what he was doing. Skillfully, Henri slid his fingers through the thatch of coarse black hair that covered my secret lips and everything moved along quite easily until he attempted to push his finger inside.

Met with resistance, he worked slowly, alternating gentleness with pressure until he was in up to his knuckle. “My goodness, Seraphine. I knew you would be unyielding, but this is better than I’d hoped.” Licking his lips, he poked and prodded until he was able to add another finger and yet another, stretching me until he'd ultimately replaced his digits with his erect penis.

With the enthusiasm of an unseasoned soldier, Henri's penis always stood up for me, and the more times he entered my body, the more I actually enjoyed the experience. I was proud to know just how much I aroused him, and sometimes when I saw him coming, he would almost gallop, a horse running to the trough after a long, hard ride. In the very least, our unbridled affair brought a variety of welcome pleasures to us both and I was grateful for the physical satisfaction that was prevailed upon my person.

As the years crept by however and as I thought more and more about the privileges that freedom would bring--a notion that was almost conceivable by that point in time--I began questioning both Henri’s motives and my desire for him. So when I raised my head off the pillow that day in May overcome by feelings of exhaustion and desistance, I was less than surprised.

“Come here Seraphine. Let me look at your face in the sunlight.” Sluggishly, I moved off the rumpled bed, pulled down the skirt of my cotton shift, and went to stand beside him near the open window. With each step, I felt the residual ache between my legs from where his penis had been only moments before, and my feet moved like stone tablets. I'd had enough, and I hoped that he wasn't expecting more.

There was a faint breeze that day and on a current of heated air, the poignant aroma of a hemp pipe wafted up from the shed down below. Somebody was smoking that afternoon, secreting away a few moments of bliss. Inhaling deeply, I tried to share in their diversion. When Henri reached over to clasp my hand--his palm was cold to my warm--I knew that something was wrong with him too.

Relinquishing his grip to finish buttoning his shirt, he murmured, “You are so beautiful Seraphine. Do you know that?” His eyes now vacant, he kept the compliments coming. “Your skin makes me think of a chocolate sun, radiant and sweet. And if I could press my nose into these lovely ringlets of yours for all eternity, I would be ecstatic.” He began nibbling erroneously at my neck, pulling a coil of hair to its full length.

What happened next, I consider to be a major turning point in my life to follow. Without warning, Henri pushed up behind me and shoved me hard against the window frame. Pressing his formless body into mine, he wrapped his arms around my slender physique and cupped one palm over my breast like it needed his support. Stroking and fondling me there briefly, he then firmly encircled my waist with his other limb.

“I have something to tell you Seraphine,” he said, anger in his tone. “I can’t see you like this anymore.”

With that, he pinched my breast, much harder than usual. Confused, I froze,

wondering what I had done, wondering what had brought on this display of fortitude. It was so unlike Henri to use aggression in his sexual games. Was he angry because, as he'd stated, we couldn't be together anymore? Had he detected my feelings of distance and distraction? As I tried to understand what was happening, Henri was gaining momentum, tightening his arm around my middle like some giant snake intent on crushing its prey.

"The true nature of a person is exposed when things don't go their way," Cook used to say. With Henri's sudden change in personality, I thus began to panic. Slapping at his wrists, I tried desperately to get him to stop, but as I sputtered and gasped, he started thrusting his pelvis up into my buttocks, threatening to take me again, more vigorously than he ever had before.

Screaming, I smacked at him fiercely, prying his hands away from the folds of my dress, thrashing about like my body was on fire. Much to my utter amazement, as quickly as it all began, everything then stopped. In that instant, Henri transformed into a mouse before my very eyes, shrinking away until he wallowed alone in the middle of the room. There, shaking his head, he lingered in his private space far away from where I stood. For a split second, I felt sorry for the man who had been commandeering my body for eight long years. When I looked down at the floor, unable to make eye contact, Henri walked out. It was over.

Following that day, there were to be no more sequestered kisses, no more coy looks, and no more declarations of love. Henri was done with me. What'd happened for him to end it, I was never quite sure, but I have made my guesses. Did he ever truly love me? The irrational part of me says "yes", but the sane part is convinced that he did not. Isn't it odd how a person can be so enamored with another that they don't see the pit of danger that lies two feet in front of them? In my case though, I don't believe it was a person that was the attraction. I think it was more of a situation or an idea. Henri had always been kind, but I was never enthralled with the man. I believe now that I simply got lost in his conviviality toward me.

In that bedroom--reeling from what'd just ensued--another one of Cook's famous sayings came to me. "It is sometimes easier to forget your own plight, if you focus on the plight of others." So with Henri gone, I looked back out the window and surveyed the vast fields of sugarcane where my blessed brothers and sisters dotted the landscape like flies on the carcass of a dead goat. Amid the tall stocks of cane, the workers tried to hide, or at least they should have. I'm sure they wanted to--anything to avoid the overseer as he milled about with his instruments of torture.

In the face of horror, the occasional glint of a razor-sharp blade caught the light from the sun, and I watched as the brilliant flash rebounded throughout the rows of crops. It made me think about how the field slaves spent week after tireless week, month after month, and year after year, digging and hacking away until their backs held a permanent arch. More specifically though it made me think about their situation compared to mine.

I knew that I was luckier than most. The floor that I walked across to get to my bed wasn't dirt-covered and littered with garbage. No, I lived inside where I was spared the annoyance of beetles, moths, snakes and insects. Make no mistake however. Even though my circumstances may have sounded better than those of the field workers, they still carried the inflictions of a double-edged sword.

Not one of us had it easy, and I, like everyone else in the house, moiled over the tasks that were meant to make the lives of the whites winsome and worry free. We were

at the beck and call of our master and his family every second of every hour of every day. Being so close to those in charge had its own set of obligations, one in which, as I'm sure you understand by now, I became more than just a little embedded.

And while I will admit to having had sex with Henri on numerous occasions, I have to count my blessings that I was never forcibly plundered, though you could argue otherwise. What I mean to say is that I was never brutally raped like so many other slave women, including others on the Lazare plantation. Henri had never been harsh toward me and he certainly was not one of those twisted sorts who enjoyed stuffing explosives into women's anuses or who got off on thrusting hot branding irons into their vaginas.

Owing to the fact that Henri was such a pansy in every other aspect of his life, it would've astonished me to find out that he'd ever engaged in anything too nefarious. He was the type of man to pass the buck of wrongdoing on to someone else, but you never know. I'd witnessed an unexpected side to him, and after that, I was never too sure.

With Henri's news and his curious exit from the room, I was left alone--angry, relieved, disappointed and afraid. Ultimately, I'd been rejected, but more than that, I'd been betrayed. The man I thought I'd loved, (and whom I was positive had loved me in return), had just walked away without a single word of clarification.

The weight of the world had been lifted off my shoulders at last, and yet, as I took this independence, it felt like I was being squashed by melancholy. I did my best to hold them back, but sadness triumphed, and my tears fell. As the emptiness moved through me, it all became glaringly obvious--who or what I'd been to Henri Bouchard had nothing to do with love. Invariably, I'd been an asset, an article, a piece of property like a hammer, or a cracked serving bowl--a thing for him to use, abuse, and discard at leisure. I felt foolish to think I'd ever been more.

Whether it was the darkest brown, or the lightest tan, it didn't matter. We were all the same. We shared a likeness of complexion that was simply *not* white, and that is what sealed our fates. We were slaves--human chattel--working for the benefit of the white man with no payment or recompense of our own. Cheated, deceived, forcibly expropriated, we'd been stripped of family and social foundation, and left to rot for somebody else's boon.

Through the heartache and suffering, we tried to stay strong, but for some of us, our bodies just stopped, giving over to death--a welcome end to an unspeakable journey. We tried our best to stay alive though, doing what was commanded of us until our hearts bled with sorrow and our bodies ached with pain. Some of us cut cane in the fields, working from the drone of the conch shell or the toll of the bell at sun-up, to a procession of maimed and enfeebled silhouettes at sundown. My people were forced to work into the dimness of every evening, until the overseer prodded them back to their bunks for the night.

Others worked under the roof of the great house, and that is where I found my place. By the time I withdrew from that fateful room, the sun had begun to set, and I knew that dinner preparations would be underway. I hurried back to the kitchen, not completely at ease, but carrying a lighter burden in my heart than I'd had hours earlier. My troubles however, were far from over.

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After everyone had finished eating, Henri called across the table to his wife. "I have something for you, mon cherie." This sudden announcement brought a flurry of excited claps from Camille. The children, who were half way out of the room already, rushed back in.

"Papa, what is it?" giggled Natalie.

"What have you gotten for Maman?" asked Stephane quietly, always the consummate boy.

"Let me see! Let me see!" squealed little Anaise. The older children as well, though they never spoke, stood at attention near their mother. Everyone was waiting anxiously, including the other house slaves, to see what Henri had brought for Camille. I too, stopped what I was doing and paused to get a look at the gift.

"Oh, Henri. What is it? Do tell me. Please! Please!" Camille begged, though to me, the tone of her voice didn't indicate genuine surprise.

"Be patient, my love. I'm getting to it," Henri laughed. And like royalty, Camille sat on her throne and waited. A second later (and so typical of her) his queen sarcastically cajoled, "Don't tell me you remembered. You never remember."

"Ah, but my darling. This is an extra special day, is it not? As a commemoration of our twenty-fifth wedding anniversary, I honor you--my wife, my love--with a token of my affection." With that, he got up from his seat and reached down deep into his pants' pocket, pulling out a long, fancy-looking box. But while Henri may have been talking to his wife, he was staring directly at me, smiling like the devil. Walking over to where Camille sat, his eyes were glued to mine. "You are so beautiful. Do you know that?" he said. The statement was like a knife in my chest.

When he placed a necklace around her lily-white neck, Camille shrieked in delight. Standing tall, Henri declared, "So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man," he paused, "or woman," he paused again, "put asunder." His valiant words made my heart sink, and I watched as Camille fingered the shiny treasure that lay between her breasts. When I looked up again however, I saw two people glowering at me--Henri *and* Camille both.

"It's lovely isn't it, Seraphine?" Camille gloated. "Would you like to get a closer look?" The question was hurtful and she knew it.

"No Madame, though it does look very beautiful from here," I replied, practically choking on my words. "Monsieur Bouchard must love you very much."

"He does indeed, don't you darling?" She turned to Henri as he bent down to kiss her on the cheek.

"I will always love you Camille. You are my one and only."

You know, in my heart, I wasn't a vindictive woman, but sometimes somebody's got to do a thing or two to make up for what's been going on. After Henri had walked out on me that day in the bedroom, he should've left well enough alone. But after his display the same evening at supper when he gave that self-righteous bitch the locket, and after Camille had taken a swing at me herself with those hateful words, I'd had enough. Can you say revenge?

Of course, as a slave, there wasn't much I could do, but I thought of two things. The first and most important element in my plot was to remain calm. I couldn't let them see how much they'd hurt me; I couldn't let them see my pain. This, I knew, would be my easiest task since I'd been doing it my whole life. As a woman of color, I'd bested the art

of masking my misery.

The second component to my stratagem was to take the locket. Camille surely didn't deserve to have it. It should've been mine because of all that I'd given to Henri, don't you think? After all, I'd given him my love--selflessly, willingly, passionately, without question or defiance--and what had he done? Nothing. Not one thing. I gave and he took. He took until he was tired of taking, until it was inconvenient for him to take, until the taking posed a problem.

Real love isn't based on convenience or profit. It has its roots in beneficence, and with Henri, it was never about that. The worst part of the whole deal though was not what he took or how much, but the fact that he wasn't even marginally grateful for any of it. He'd betrayed my innocence, disregarding any sense of obligation to say thank you or act civilly toward me in the end.

So I stole the necklace, though the details of the deed I kept to myself. One night, almost two years past the day it'd been proffered--when the family was downstairs entertaining guests and I was tucking the youngest into bed--I snuck into the master suite and took it.

There is another saying. My relatives are full of them. It goes, "The giver of the blow forgets; the bearer of the scar remembers." I will never forget what happened during those years because I bore many scars, most of them invisible. And no one suspected me. It'd been too long and I'd played it cool enough that I was never pinned as the probable culprit. I'd managed to keep my disappointment about my relationship with Henri to myself, but it's not like I had to feign happiness for very long. I got over him, realizing that what I thought I'd wanted wasn't worth a pot to pee in. Henri--that pitiful excuse for a man--was definitely not worth anymore of my tears.

And Camille, well, she looked for it and looked for it, blubbering on like a baby that some horrible thief had taken her precious pendant. Of course, she was right, but no one believed her, not even her own husband. Henri blamed the loss on her propensity to slovenliness, making her angrier than ever. She vented her outrage by having us all whipped in the hopes of finding out the truth, but no one said a word. I'd made absolutely sure that no one knew anything.

Once I got my hands on the locket, I immediately buried it with my mother's belongings, what little I had left of her. I didn't remove it from its hiding spot until years later, before I left Lazare. Now, don't assume that I was free after that, because not one of us during that time was ever completely free. Freedman or slave, black was still black, which meant that we were still treated as less than equal. That is often the case today, am I not mistaken? Yes, recompense can be a long time coming.

For me, it was worth it to have the necklace. It was something: better than nothing. I needed an object, a tangible item that I could take away from the situation, something I could hold in the palm of my hand and say, "This is what I got as payment for the hours I put into that job."

My people say there exists a fair maiden born of the sea, a nymph with long silky hair and shelled jewels adorning her swan-like neck. They say she climbs the waves like a dolphin and rolls across the sandy ocean bottom where she is caressed by the seaweed and kissed by her children, the fish. They say that this divine water spirit is responsible for the protection, emotional healing and spiritual growth of all those who bow to her power. When I heard that she could bring me luck, I called to her, and low and behold,

my Mami Wata answered. She blessed me with kindness and the rewards of love.

What happened to the locket? Well, I gave it to my daughter on the day of her wedding. My sweet girl Angelique was born out of a relationship that I shared with a man in the years after Lazare, and as older parents wise to the world, we cherished her dearly. She ended up working as a servant for a wealthy family, with many of the same duties that I'd done as a slave. She was paid for her efforts, however measly, and allowed to procreate at will--two things foreign to me for the first thirty years of my life.

I am gone now, my body buried with some of my other family members--my husband included-- in a small graveyard close to the Lazare plantation. Over the years, I've watched over my relatives as others watched over me, providing guidance and inspiration when called upon. What advice am I most often asked to give? You should know the answer to this by now, but if you must inquire, I will tell you.

Love, I would say, takes work and is supported by sacrifice. It is about seeing the value in others for who they are, not what you want them to be, and it pertains to the repudiation of greed. It's about giving, not receiving. Only self-deprecating people think of it that way. No, real love is a voluntary and gratuitous desire to give of oneself, and if you find it, I would say, you should cherish it forever.

Superstition, Admonition and Dissuasion

To say that a Caribbean man is superstitious is a little like saying that all white women have flat asses--both statements being mostly true, but not always. In my case though, the stereotype is legitimate. I'm a grown man with sprinkles of grey in my beard and wrinkles around my eyes, but I still listen when my Auntie warns that danger is lurking around the next corner for her dear and unsuspecting nephew. I also believe that certain kinds of behavior can bring darkness upon a person's soul, and I'm not one to engage in those sorts of activities. There have been times though, when I've acted, praying that the spirits were deep in slumber for an hour or two.

Now, I wouldn't call myself a "religious" person. I prefer to use the term "spiritual" instead. I don't go in for that "it's my way or the highway" kind of bullshit--you know, the staunch doctrine that excludes and even punishes others of different faiths. I do however try to live according to the golden rule, that is, I do unto others as I would have done unto myself.

As a boy growing up in the suffocating and extinguishing climate of poverty, I was taught that if I reached out a hand, good things would eventually come my way. I believe it was my Auntie who said, "You reap what you sow." It was just one among many proverbs passed down to me from the older generations.

In order to understand where I'm coming from, I should explain (for those of you who don't know) that the original African culture became a powerful and knowledgeable civilization mainly by way of the spoken word, a practice that has endured through ancient times, filtering into the entire Caribbean area during the years of slavery. As such, it is a legacy that links the Caribbean present to the African past, the very existence of which demonstrates that we have survived those deleterious years of colonialism, European lead destruction, and black vassalage.

And while I do want to emphasize the relevance of verbalization in African and Caribbean culture, I shouldn't leave out the influences of art and symbolism as vital ingredients of our lives as well. We convey ideas not only with the use of elaborate words, but also with pictures, drawings, patterns, colors, and every kind of visual representation imaginable. Yes, we are artists, as well as orators.

Note further that the importance of language and visual expression pervades all aspects of black culture, including our spirituality. More specifically, some Caribbean

people use both verbal and pictorial interchange in ritual, during which time they call to the ancestors in the hopes of receiving the secrets of substantiality and enlightenment.

From what I understand, if I listen carefully to the advice that's out there--heeding the natural rhythms of the universe by taking the advantageous routes and avoiding the unfavorable ones--I am sure to find my own best destiny.

I truly believe that there are pathways laid out for each and every one of us--good ones, better ones, and bad ones too. In prayer, the people of the past speak, revealing what those pathways are, but only if you listen. That's the key: you must *choose* to listen and ultimately that is at an individual's discretion. I, for one, intend to take the advice that my forefathers and mothers have to give, and in the end, I believe it foolish to follow a road once traveled that's already proven to be destructive. Therefore, I try to live according to the recommended moral standards, and like I said earlier, I've only slipped up a couple of times.

As I'm sure you've surmised by now, in my culture, not only is the spoken word paramount, so too is the respect of elders. When they talk, we listen and if we're smart, we listen carefully. When I was a little boy, it was my mother who had the most to say, and one of the things that she said repeatedly, was that you could tell a lot about a person from how they related to children, senior citizens, and animals. She said that most people are nice to others who are of equal status, but only genuinely kind-hearted souls--the ones you can trust and love without reserve--are those who befriend the poor, defenseless beings of the world.

Moreover, my mother made it infinitely clear that I should trust my own instincts. "Do what feels right in your heart Adrian, and don't let anyone try and tell you otherwise." You should also know that Mama was the type of woman who sought out examples of her theories to prove them as adages of truth.

For instance, she used to extol to my siblings and I the virtues of every one of our teachers from kindergarten on up, saying that they were some of the best specimens that the human race had to offer. Now, she recognized that this particular postulate didn't exist without exceptions, and for teachers, there were two cases, according to her, when that honorable mould got broken. First, you had to watch out for the overworked pundit, she'd say, whose attitude had become derisive from staying on the job for too long. Then there was the case of the evil school marm who was hell bent on sabotaging the keenness for learning in young black children.

To my mother, racism was simply an affliction of the mind. It was like having cancer and about as hard to overcome. Instead of eating away at the internal organs of a person however, she speculated that racism controlled the logical mechanisms of the brain, causing some to have seriously warped attitudes about people of different colors and races. "You must open your heart to the love inherent in every person Adrian, regardless of their outward appearance. Look beyond the physical to see the spirit. Always remember that." I've never forgotten.

As an extremely supportive individual, it was also my mother's dream for her children to have the best in life, to have the things she could never dream of having, and further, to give back to the community and the world at large in ways she never could. Always the optimist, my mother's wisdom follows me to this day, and I have to say, I give credit where credit is due since most of her hypotheses have tended to lie in the bed of truth.

Now, you might also ask if poverty has dictated my tenets in life, because, as I mentioned earlier, I did indeed grow up very poor. In response, I would tell you that neither pennilessness nor fortune makes the man, that neither one of these conditions is capable of changing the ideals towards which I strive. Additionally, it is important for you to understand that I do not speak of my childhood impoverishment with the expectation of a sympathetic ear. I'm not looking for pity. I do for myself and take responsibility for my own plight. What is out there is free for the taking. You must simply know what you want, and want it bad enough to get it.

Besides, no matter what a person's condition, it's all a matter of perspective. Is your cup half empty or half full? My cup is overflowing, but I didn't always see it that way. Shit happens to people. Shit that can destroy you, or shit that you must eventually overcome. My situation started out pretty much average, but it ended up in the drudges of the filthiest crapper you could possibly imagine.

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I will begin by saying that I was born in a place where the sun knows no mercy, where the weather is either unquestionably warm or scorching hot all year round. My family was poor, but life was good and we were happy--I was, at least. When I came to North America at the age of nine, we ended up in an area that looked a whole lot nicer than where we'd lived before, but from what I gathered later was really like living in the bowels of the richest country on earth.

Admittedly, I grew up on the underprivileged side of town, in a medium-sized city, in the end unit of a row of derelict townhouses, next to a train yard, and about one block from a huge electrical station. I was the third of four children to immigrant parents--two hard working factory laborers who were happy to find steady jobs on the greatest continent that the world supposedly has to offer. We moved here because my father said we'd have a chance at a better life, but things didn't pan out quite the way he promised.

When I was eleven--two years after being uprooted from the only place I'd known as home--both my mother and younger sister died in a fire at our house, a fire that for a long while after, my father blamed me for causing. It didn't happen quite the way he thought, but then, he wasn't home at the time. Where was he? Good question! He was out with one of his women friends--an infirmity that our move had only encouraged--and I guess it made him feel better to tell himself and everyone else, that the fire was my fault.

I remember that day like it has been bonded to my brain matter with the strength of a million bottles of epoxy. The nightmare began late in the evening of September 22nd, shortly after midnight. My father was out gallivanting as he'd made a habit of doing a couple of nights a week, carousing with one of a few women he kept on the side. My siblings and I used to speculate that he would meet them at work, or on the street, or anywhere for that matter, though none of us ever really knew for sure. Wherever he was, and whatever he was doing, he wasn't at home. As for the rest of us, my brothers and sister were asleep and my mother was in her room with her door closed. I'd already been tucked into bed (my Mama doing that even to us big boys), but I'd since gotten up to go to the bathroom.

The moment I slid off my mattress, I could smell it--the stench of blackened toast, smelly socks, and frying electrical wires all combined into one frightening emission. For

some weird reason, I thought it best not to disturb Mama until I knew without a doubt that there was a problem, so I headed into the hall to see what was going on. I didn't need to take more than one step outside of my bedroom and I immediately walked into a thin cloud of smoke.

Like a zombie being called by its master, I took to the stairs, and with each tread, it got harder and harder to breathe, harder and harder to see. We didn't have anything as sophisticated as a smoke detector in those days, and by the time I'd reached the bottom, I saw that flames were already roaring uncontrollably throughout the living room and into the kitchen. When I called for help, I hadn't more than opened my mouth and I felt my mother by my side clutching my shoulders.

"Go! Go! Let's get the others!" she shrieked, pushing me up the steps. As it was, Daniel and Kevin had heard the commotion already and as we were racing towards their room, they were racing towards us. Haplessly, we slammed headlong into each other at the top of the stairs where there was a fumbling about of legs and arms amidst the murky grey air and more panic than I'd ever experienced in my life. My mother was shouting the loudest, "Daniel? Kevin? Are you both here?"

"I hurt my knee. I can't get up!" Daniel cried, having fallen in the confusion.

"Hold on," my mother said. "OK. Adrian. Kevin. Help your brother outside. I'm going to get your sister."

Of course, we did as we were told and we did it quickly, grabbing Daniel under the arms and haphazardly making our way out the front door. Shuffling away from the building, we fully expected to see our mother and Claire close behind, but what should've taken two minutes to accomplish, took forever. They never came out.

My father returned home about half an hour after it all started, just as they were pulling my mother and sister's lifeless bodies from the house. I can picture it still. My brothers and I were standing on the front lawn wrapped in blankets by some lady from down the street, crying and crying and crying, screaming occasionally for Mama and Claire to come out, to come back, to just be all right, sobbing and bawling and mumbling in a frenzy of fear and dread.

When Emmanuel Moreaux finally got home and got out of his car--walking slowly towards our trio of devastated forms--I thought for a moment that he was going to turn around, get back into his shitty old Honda and drive away. He just had that kind of look on his face--like it was too late, like the best parts of his life were gone, like there was no point in him sticking around. He didn't leave, though he paused for a lot longer than he should have.

"Are you Mr. Moreaux?" came a voice. He didn't answer; he just nodded his head, up and down, up and down, obviously in shock. Then suddenly, like someone had stabbed him in the back, he bolted straight toward the ambulance where they were preparing my mother's body. He knew she was dead and not because of the plastic over her face. I'm sure he could feel it. Maybe he knew that something dreadful had occurred even before he pulled up to the house. Maybe that's what brought him home in the first place.

Whatever the case, he pushed the attendants to the side, flung himself over the gurney, and began smashing his fists into her corpse. As he pummeled her, I pictured her the way I like to keep her even now, with her youthful body and kind face, her beautiful smile, her luminous skin, her shiny hair, and her gentle and perceptive eyes. But then

abruptly in my mind, her flesh began to smolder, burning up in the same fire that was still spitting at us from inside the house. I saw her frying and blistering before my very eyes until she eventually turned into a pile of ash and bone.

Once the emergency staff got my father to let go, he crumpled into a heap on the ground, grabbing at his head and rocking back and forth for a long, long time. The rest of that night and the next week and month are still a blur, some thirty odd years later. Somehow we managed to get through the funerals and the burials, and everything that goes along with the expiration of human life, but I don't really have a good recall of any of it.

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After their deaths, home life was like living in a morgue, the absence of those two females having taken the spirit out of the rest of us--three young boys left with a single male parent, who, by necessity, had to work double shifts just to keep a roof over our heads and some food on the table.

When my father *was* at home, it was like he was trying to make up for lost time by hibernating in his pitch-black room, talking to Mama in the great beyond. We often heard him mumbling to himself when he thought we were downstairs watching television. And now that he's older, he doesn't even try to hide his eidolic conversations anymore. To him, my mother always has been and always will be, right there by his side.

At least (and I give him credit for this), my father had the acumen to keep up with his faith, and he made sure that we visited our sanctum of salvation every Sunday where the communal spinsters and widows took my brothers and I under their wings. Those ladies became our surrogate mothers, and I thanked God for them sending the staples of nutrition in baskets--rice, meat, and salads--whenever they thought we looked a little too skinny. They also collected used clothes, dropping off garbage bag after garbage bag of old sweaters, too big jeans and worn-out sneakers onto the concrete steps of our townhouse.

If it hadn't been for the fellowship at our church, I would've ended up dead; I truly believe that. It was because of their unqualified support however that my brothers and I survived, prospered, and even had a chance to go to college. For that, the church women rounded up enough money through fundraisers and donations to give us a good head start at paying for tuition and books at our district facility of higher learning.

Even with the aid of the church though, my shattered childhood didn't set the tone for a very promising future. After the fire, I had a lot of anger to deploy, and at school, I picked fights with other kids for no reason, giving and receiving more black eyes than you could count. I was a bully to some and a punching bag for others, suddenly one of the bad kids.

At home, the scenario wasn't much better. Before the deaths of my mother and sister, we'd been quite close, but after, it was all we could do to remain civil in each other's presence. Without my father around, things got pretty brutal, a typical evening usually starting with some kind of snide or negative comment made by Daniel.

"What the hell? You couldn't have saved a little milk for someone else? You don't think about anybody but yourself." That was generally how it began, with him complaining about something trivial. Once he got started, things escalated until one of us

ended up hurt or until our dad came home.

“I’m coming over there to watch TV, so move.” “You jerk! Get your ass out of my spot.”

At that point in the conversation, after things had begun to deteriorate, Kevin would jump in. “You two are so pathetic. Why don’t you both just leave home? It would save us all the hassle.”

“Yeah, you heard him. You should just leave. So go get your stuff and get out. Move the hell away. I don’t want to look at your ugly face anymore.”

“He was talking to you, stupid Adrian.”

“Shut up the both of you.”

“I don’t have to listen to you. You’re not my mother.”

Talk like this was common around our house, but the part about “my mother” was a slip and it got to us all. It put a stop to the conversation that particular night and for two whole weeks after. That’s how it was most of the time though. It was awful.

During those dark days, I wondered if I'd ever pull through, if we'd ever be a family again, and if I'd ever have a normal life. And things were looking pretty bleak for me, when something popped out from underneath the dryer in the basement one rainy afternoon.

The dryer was broken like most of the stuff we owned and I was banging around with my father’s tools trying to fix the damn thing. Finally, after about half an hour of frustration, I put a big dent in the door with my shoe, kicking it about ten times. As it jolted back toward the wall, I noticed a shiny bit of silver glinting up from amidst the big pile of dust that littered the floor.

Bending down to take a closer look, I realized exactly what it was. It was my mother’s long lost locket--a piece of antique jewelry that'd been passed down through the generations from my grandmother and from her mother before. As I sat on the concrete gazing at my newly found treasure, I remembered searching for it with my siblings, by my calculations about one month before the fire.

To the others who carried it--my kinfolk--the small, argentate trinket was a token of solidarity and strength, and to my mother, who kept it on her person or knew of its exact whereabouts at all times, it represented both of those things. It was beautiful--silver, inlaid with a few diamonds on the front and inscribed with the initials of its original owner on the back.

As the story went, the locket had belonged to one of my mother’s distant relatives--a house slave--who had stolen it as retribution against her white master. Apparently, the piece of jewelry had been given by the plantation owner to his wife as a present on their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary, a gift that was also meant to mask a hidden affair between the white man and my distant cognate.

Hundreds of years later, after I discovered it, I took the locket up to my room (leaving the dryer to rot) and I lay down on my bed. Then, slipping one hand behind my head, I tightly clasped the silver pendant to my chest and closed my eyes. All of a sudden, visions of my mother and sister hovered over me, their ghostly arms reaching down to touch my face. Happy to have them back, I smiled and said hello. It was the first time in a long time that I'd thought about them in a peaceful manner, without smoke and flames engulfing their bodies.

“It’s going to be OK,” I heard my mother whisper. “You must live Adrian. Live

for us.” It was at that precise moment that things turned around for me somewhat. Afterwards, whenever I needed my mother’s help, I clutched the necklace tight, allowing the shape of the cool metal to imprint onto the suppleness of my palm. Miraculously, that simple act would bring her back.

To me, the locket was a sign that my mother would always be there, and in that respect, it kept me safe from the demons that threatened to haunt me on a daily basis. It made the passage of time bearable, and I took her cue and tried to enter back into the world of the happy living. I never told another soul about my treasure, keeping it hidden at the bottom of my sock drawer in a small, leather pouch that I later found at a flea market. As for that proverbial cup, mine wasn't half full yet, but at least it was not spilling its contents all over the table.

The locket was my saving grace and not only did it help to mend the broken part of my spirit, it did something else as well. Without a broken spirit, my mind was free to wander you see, and it ended up in the same place as the minds of the rest of the boys my age--in a seething pool of fornication. The locket set my brain to conjuring up ideas about sex between the races, and it all began with that slave girl and her white master. I wanted to know what their union would have been like, what the two of them actually *looked like* together.

Admittedly, I'd heard the narrative many times before regarding who'd stolen the necklace and why, but as a young boy, I'd never really given it much thought. After its discovery however, at the ripe age of sixteen, that heart-shaped pendent sparked the inception of a whole slew of daydreams in my already overactive imagination. The story came back to me and scenes of a white man having his way with a black woman suddenly overtook my consciousness.

It was strange though. At that stage in my life, I'd only ever seen two black people in an affectionate embrace, like when I'd witnessed my father and mother kiss, or when they'd stolen a more intimate moment, my father pressing up behind her while she did the dishes.

Sure, I'd occasionally spotted a white couple holding hands on the street, or observed them making out on one of the soap operas my mother was prone to watching, but I'd never actually witnessed firsthand two people of different races doing anything even remotely sexual, and never once had I contemplated a black person and a white person actually getting it on. It just wasn't something that was a part of my universe--until then, that is.

And so, together in my daydreams, my lovers engaged in all kinds of wild shenanigans, tricks that only a teenage boy could dream up. Sitting in class, I pictured those two people bound at the hip--their arms a pair of discharging wires, flailing and lunging, the contrasting hues of their bodies winding together like the stripes of a candy cane. I imagined them trading spit and twining tongues, his thin lips swallowed up by the fullness of hers, and I envisioned his throbbing, melanoid penis penetrating her dewy pink vagina.

I thought of it all, and when I was finished with those two people--the black woman and the white man--thoughts of the past turned into thoughts of the present. I took my fantasies to the next level, changing and rearranging the players until eventually I'd become the main character of my fantastical dramas.

In my mind, my white lover was everywhere: crouching forward in the desk

ahead of me at school, handing back my change at the corner store, driving the bus, opening the church door, etc. etc. They all needed me, and in my dreams they trembled beneath my dark brown torso, their creamy thighs pinned open by my chocolate-colored hands, their sun-kissed flesh writhing helplessly as I pushed myself deep inside each and every one of their pallid forms.

I wondered if white girls had the same physiology as black girls. Not that I knew much about black girls, but I made the comparison anyway. Did black breasts and white breasts look and feel the same? Did black girls and white girls have the same skin texture, and were their nipples the same color? What happened when you touched a white girl's pussy? Did it get just as wet, or maybe wetter than her darker counterpart? Did both races make the same sorts of noises when they reached that wondrous transpiration called orgasm? I had a million and one questions, but no one to give me the answers. Did women even have orgasms? Of that, I wasn't quite sure. I knew that boys did, having experienced enough of those myself thanks to the efforts of my right hand. The inner-workings of women--both black and white--was something I'd yet to encounter.

As the days and years progressed, I went to school, hung out with my friends, played some sports, and did what most other guys my age liked to do, with the exception of one thing. As a young man, even though I thought about girls incessantly, I didn't actually date any. I couldn't bring myself to get that close to them, subconsciously believing that if I got attached to a female, she too would get burnt up, disappearing in a puff of smoke and a heap of ashes.

I avoided black girls especially. To me, they all resembled my mother or my sister, and seeing them in someone who wasn't the genuine person, only reminded me that they were never really coming back. That concept was like a specter--an evil ghost that only brought tears to my eyes-- and I found that if I somehow kept them tucked away in that special place in my heart, far away from the world of dating, then the living was much better.

Not wanting to date girls didn't curb my desire for sex however. My nether regions were still itching for some satisfaction. Besides, the girls liked me. They said that I was a good-looking boy with a friendly smile, and--when I managed to keep my temper--an agreeable nature. Thus the trick for me was figuring out how to fulfill my physical needs without getting caught up in a relationship.

Oh, I'd heard the lectures in health class advocating abstinence and promoting the use of condoms if you just couldn't hold yourself back. Mr. Brown had shown the requisite movies explaining how babies were made, but no teacher had ever spoken about how to avoid getting bogged down by the emotions of a liaison. My father wasn't much help either. He was always too busy hibernating up in his bedroom talking to my mother's ghost.

No, it was my older brothers and their esteemed friends who took it upon themselves to prescribe the secret to my success. "Yeah, women, they can be difficult. All you really need to know is one thing. Women want men to take control. You just gotta take it, man." My brother's friend Junior thought himself a true aficionado, and he would drone on and on about the subject. But Junior must've had to take it, because although he said he'd been with lots, the girls seemed to run in the opposite direction whenever he came around.

My brother Daniel on the other hand, was concise and to the point in this regard.

“You’ll figure it out kid. Just make sure you use a condom.” Again with the condoms--that was the best I got. Thus, I was left to make my own way in the world of love and sex. Luckily, my mother had shared some of her wisdom before her untimely demise, telling me to be kind to girls, to respect and treat them as equals, and to judge them on their inner selves, not on their outer appearances. Those notions must've stayed with me, because I never listened to what the other boys had to say.

Granted, it took me a while, but my first venture into the coital realm was with a slightly older woman. She was twenty-one and I was eighteen. At that point, my hormones had been operating in overdrive for years, those same hormones having never cared an ounce that my mother and sister were dead. I knew then that I needed to allow a woman past my defenses because my hand was damn near ready to fall off. So when Tina, (and yes, she was one of the few white girls who lived in my neighborhood, and one of even fewer who inhabited my circle of friends), came on to me like gangbusters at a party, I bargained that she would be as good as any to do the job.

“Stop by my apartment around 4:00 p.m., and we’ll head out to the movies from there,” she suggested casually, though I knew from the hungry look in her eyes that she had an alternate plan. Just as I suspected, we never did make it to the theatre. When I got to her house, she was barely dressed. “Just finished a run,” she said. “Have to shower.”

“I’ll wait for you on the couch,” I replied, nervously tripping over the coffee table. “Take your time. The movie doesn’t start until 5:00.”

I was awaiting her next move when she poked her head around the bathroom door and flashed me some skin from underneath her towel. “Do you want a drink or something?”

“Or something...” I gulped. And that was all it took. She walked straight over, dropped the flimsy scrap of terrycloth from around her waist, and stood there for a moment, allowing me to soak in the image of her naked body. At first glance, all I saw were her breasts with their raspberry nipples. My gaze lingered there for a while before traveling down to the junction of her thighs, to the thatch of auburn curls that barely covered her slit.

She too must've been eager and horny, because that was all I got in the way of preliminaries. No kissing, no petting, no fondling or touching of any sort. She just knelt down, unzipped my pants and brusquely took out my penis. Of course I was rock hard, just the anticipation of ejaculating inside a woman almost enough to send me packing.

“Good. You’re ready for me,” she said, unrolling a condom onto my penis. She then turned around, spread her legs wide over mine, and installed my dick inside. The best I could do was to just sit there, stunned and silent, while she did all the work. I thought it smart to let things proceed that way since she seemed to be the one with the expertise. At least I assumed she had some. Apparently she had enough to get the job done.

When she sunk down onto me over and over, I remember it sounding a bit like a miniature toilet plunger, or like a rubber boot being repeatedly pulled from the mud, or something else extremely sloppy and wet. She pumped until eventually I grabbed her hips and pulled her down hard onto my lap, spurting inside her vagina with the force of a bursting water main. It was the only time I touched her. As impersonal as the transaction was though, I must say that I lasted longer than I expected, and even longer than she

expected too. “You surprised me Adrian,” she stated when it was all over.

“Thanks, I think,” I said, unsure if she was complimenting me or not. After that day, we had sex a few more times and then we went our separate ways. Even though she wasn't the most romantic of sorts, she still wanted to be appreciated, and fucking a guy who was using her as a replacement for his own whack jobs probably wasn't the biggest turn on. She ended the affair after our third time together. I can't say that I lost any sleep over it.

When I finally headed off to college, I was exposed to even more females, most of which didn't have the brown skin or brown eyes that I was still sidestepping at all costs. I'd gotten somewhat comfortable with white women at least, and so saying, my future was set.

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My ex-girlfriend Shana--also the mother of my beautiful daughter Sophie--was what you might call a “standard” in the white community. She had shoulder length brown hair, and a pretty face with a dimple on one side. She was moderately intelligent, having attended the same community college I did (which I guess makes me moderately intelligent as well), and she ended up with a decent job as a respiratory technician. She is a good mother to Sophie, and really, that's all I care about anyway.

Shana grew up in a middle class neighborhood with a single mother and a younger sister, her father having split when she was twelve. She lived in a house with the proverbial white picket fence, a single car garage, and flowerbeds filled with tulips in the spring and pansies in the summer. What made her stand out for me before I actually spoke to her, was her derriere--the same bobbling and fleshy behind that probably took her down a couple of notches by the axioms of attractiveness in the Caucasian world.

We met one day in psychology class where we sat next to each other, sharing paper and notes, gum and ideas. Our friendly banter led to lengthier chats, and later, to a few lunch dates at the campus student centre. Getting to know Shana was easy and safe, and we became fast friends. But although we hung out and discussed our day-to-day experiences, conversation between us never got too deep. We always kept it to the “how was your weekend, did you finish your essay on time, did you see that car accident on the way to school, the weather has been crazy lately” kind of stuff.

After a while, even though our relationship was more chummy than anything else, it seemed logical for it to turn into something more. We both liked each other; we were both single and we were both looking for some sort of physical companionship. That was the way things went. We became lovers as well as friends.

Sex with Shana was enjoyable. When we did it, I always came out feeling satisfied and content. She got me off and I did the same for her. I will admit however, when I found out that she was expecting a child, I was less than thrilled. A baby was not something that we'd discussed and definitely not something that we'd planned. We'd always taken the necessary precautions, but then a man can only do so much. If a woman wants to get pregnant, she will, and I believe that Shana wanted that baby to happen. I think she'd hoped it might open me up a little and keep me around more, because I will concede, I worked a lot back then. I still do. I loved Shana but I wasn't disposed to being with her twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

By the time I'd reached my twenties--when Shana and I met--I'd outgrown my trouble-making phase and regained confidence in most aspects of my life. I know that finding the locket helped me out, but in the ways of love, I was still walking in a shadow of fear. So whether it was subconscious or not, I kept Shana at a distance and with the exception of getting pregnant, she never tried to push for more. She just waited for me to change. She waited for me to take her by the hand and pull her inside my zone, and when I didn't, she packed her bags.

You must realize that Shana was the type of woman who wanted me to do all the work--not physically mind you, like mopping the floors and changing the diapers--but mentally. I had to chase her, pamper her, and compliment her. She was the girl who expected the flowers and the cards on a regular basis, the type of girl who had to be told a hundred times a day that she was pretty. But while Shana needed to be babied and rewarded simply for existing, I was still wandering around in the dark, searching for myself in many ways. I was in no position to lead anyone anywhere, even ten years after the fire.

So ultimately, Shana left for one main reason I suppose: the disconnect. I don't think that she honestly understood my lifestyle, my propensity for work or my desire to always go beyond what was sufficient for sustaining us as a family. When she told me that she was leaving town, taking our daughter and going to live with another man no less, I wasn't really surprised. It was almost as if I'd expected it, maybe even wanted it.

That didn't take away any of the pain however. I was left numb. I'd tried with her--damn hard, or so I thought. I'd given her everything a woman could want: a nice house, nice clothes, and a beautiful child. I'd treated her with respect and caring, and for the most part, we got along. Our lovemaking was never cataclysmic, but then I didn't think that for me, it ever would be. I asked her to stay, but I wasn't about to plead. So she left, near the end of September on the anniversary of the fire. Now that hurt. It was a cold move I thought, but I was forced to take that bitter pill, and it roiled around in my stomach, rankling my attitude for a long while after.

Because of what happened with Shana, I came to believe that pretty brunettes with flushed cheeks and Barbie-doll blondes could never be satisfied, not with any man, no matter how well-off or well-endowed, regardless of his maturity level or willingness to adapt. It was all just part of the white North American attitude, women who changed their men like they changed their shoes. I told myself that white women were inconstant and wavering--the winds of self-absorption and apathy--and I proclaimed that any man who actually took one of them as his partner would have to be willing to put up with that crap. I also told myself that those bloodless and transparent vixens deserved to be slammed into one giant book of abomination, and I openly declared, to both family and friends (and to the odd stranger on the street) that none of them would ever get their claws into me again.

I was done with trying to break through the race barrier, done with trying to please females who were incapable of contentment. After Shana, I swore off white women forever and that put me back at square one, staring into the face of the black Madonna, or, from where I stood, waiting to dive into the fires of hell itself. Nonetheless, I was prepared to get a handle on my situation. I was ready to date all those chocolate and caramel-colored women that my friends had been telling me about for years.

What happened to Shana and my daughter? Don't worry. I'm not one of those

deadbeat dads. I take care of Sophie and I remain on a friendly basis with Shana. I knew immediately after she left that we would never get back together, but Sophie's welfare depends on our ability to stay civil, and so we do. After her departure, I dated on and off. Another five years passed and that is when I met Isabelle.

Green, Red and White All Over

I was born a Virgo--a September baby conceived from a passionate New Year's Eve romp and expelled from my mother's womb during the season of colorful leaves and apple picking. As a kid, I lived in an average-sized city, in a clean house with ample food, surrounded by a nurturing family that genuinely cared about my wellbeing.

As the only girl in a lot full of boys, I learned the ways of the world from the men I adored, riding shotgun until the age of thirteen--when my gangling limbs would no longer fit--in a rusty, old wheelbarrow through the fields of my grandparents' garden. I happily obliged when the old man pulled carrots from the dirt, brushed them off on his overalls, and handed them to me for a taste. For countless hours, I recall sitting on his stoop, perched high up on his lap, watching the storms of summer roll past, sharing in bowls of strawberries and unpasteurized cream, and listening as he crooned the songs of his youthful days.

My grandfather was a man's man, full of charisma, athleticism, and quiet strength. He was well liked by everyone, but what impressed me the most was how he allowed me--the only girl out of eight grandchildren--to control the majority of his attention. It was all about the eternal ticking clock, and my grandpa always lavished me with his time in endless amounts. Thinking back, I realize now that when we were together, we didn't speak to each other much; we just observed the world going by one dragonfly at a time, enjoying the peace of our shared moments.

Now, when I wasn't lollygagging with my grandpa, my own father kept me very busy. As the daughter of a hard-working and enthusiastic teacher, I spent a good portion of my vacations sprawled out on institutional white floors, cutting out letters for bulletin boards, and setting up workstations for the batch of new students that would stream into his classroom at the start of each academic term. Unlike my grandpa--his father--my dad was a talker and I was his sounding board.

Let it be known that my father was also a rebel. His philosophies about life both inside and outside the classroom were not those of the mainstream, and he ruffled more feathers than you can imagine with his new and innovative teaching methodologies. Back in the days when teachers supposedly knew everything and students supposedly knew nothing, back in the days of overhead projectors, note-taking, and standardized tests, my father functioned in a land outside the box. In his approach to holistic erudition, he strived to include the realms of the social, philosophical and emotional self. Furthermore,

he was a firm believer that there was more to learning than what was found in a textbook, and he postulated that children had the capacity to teach themselves, other students and even their own headmasters, if given the opportunity.

It was his opinion that the curriculum of the time stunted students' capacity for creativity and adaptability in an ever-changing world. He did his best to alter these modalities of education however, in whatever small ways he could, and I did my duty by listening with perky ears as he tried out his ideas on me, acting as his guinea pig and unaffected advisor in all things scholarly throughout my childhood years.

Of course there was life beyond study hall in my house, my father also schooling me in the ways of society at large and my place as a young woman in it. I absorbed his advice on boys, and how not to let them take advantage, on girls, and how to maintain a sense of self in a big, bad, and male-dominated culture, and finally, on how to create a fair and loving relationship between the two.

And although my father took his job as the consummate teacher very seriously, my experiences with him were never boring. He was a kid in his own right who wore suspenders and rubber boots to the grocery store, who donned long johns in the summer, and who shaved his head for the fun of it even when it wasn't the cool thing to do. He was definitely outlandish, and with him, I was free to explore the unbalanced side of my existence.

Besides all of that, my father was the best storyteller ever, spinning never-ending yarns about screwball scenarios such as the donkey parade in Rio, or his alleged attack by a wild boar during his trip to Brazil. Yes, Bill Weston was good at holding my attention for hours on end, and he had a knack for making me laugh until my belly ached.

On a slightly negative note, my father was also an expert at asking questions, often ones that I refused to answer. Nothing was ever off limits as far as he was concerned, and as the years progressed, he pushed my brain to respond at an increasingly higher and more observant level.

Now, I don't want you to think that there were only men in my life. There were women too--women who had very close relationships to those men. My mother and father for instance, were as devoted to each other as any two people could be--best friends who went everywhere and did everything together.

Speaking of my mother, she was a nurse, not to mention a product of the 1960's, who loved to discuss sex in its myriad of approaches. With her, the questions were expected to come from me, though I didn't often rejoice in her open-mindedness. But with Carole Weston (she preferred that I call her Carole) it was certainly an option if I ever needed it.

My grandmothers and aunts, on the other hand, fit the stereotypical feminine mould. They were ladies who wore aprons, who cooked three meals a day, who looked after the multitudes of children that they bore, who doted on their partners hand and foot, and who put themselves at the end of the familial priority list. They were also available anytime I needed them, in case I wanted to learn how to bake a cake or stitch a hem, though for the most part, I chose not to partake in that sort of stuff either.

Really, I preferred hanging out with the men of the family, and that was OK too. You could say that I was a daughter of privilege, and as a result, I flourished. The measure of my success didn't translate into social ascendancy however. It manifested itself in academics.

I grew up a bit of a nerd, too smart for the cool kids, but thankfully not a complete outcast. I wore glasses as thick as coke bottles, and my hair resembled a dried-out hay bale. My pants were perennially too short for my long legs, and although I lacked a sense of style, at least I was acne free. What saved me from being called names like “four eyes” and “dork face” (and this is only speculation on my part) was that I never bragged about my intelligence.

As girl, being smart and proud of it would've been very bad for my social status. No one wants to be shunned by his or her peers, and as a means of prevention, I attempted to hide as an average student. I made sure that no one ever saw my test scores, or heaven forbid, got a hold of one of my report cards. Surely, I would never have been named prom queen of my high school, but I managed to fit in, and that was all I ever really wanted back then anyway.

As a teenager, you might wonder if I had any sort of romantic life. Admittedly, as a sexual being, I was definitely a late bloomer. Oh, I'd noticed boys as early as third grade if I remember correctly, crushing on a few in the fastidious and obsessive manner to which I am prone. But I remained pure and virginal right up until the end of my high school days when my hormones came crashing in like a tidal wave, washing away any thoughts of good grades or concern for my impending university career.

Thankfully though, I'd secured my status as a scholar, and even with my lapse in study habits, I managed to prevent a total academic catastrophe. My grades never dropped more than two percent and I was accepted into the program of my choice at a prestigious university close to home. It was in that fateful year however that I really let loose, at least as loose as a “club eighty-fiver” ever could. It was then that I officially connected with my premier love--Matthew Joshua Emit Williamson Jr.--and when I finally got a peek at what it meant to be a woman.

* ... * ... *

From the very first time I saw him in my sixth grade classroom with Mrs. McKenzie yelling at him for throwing an eraser at someone's head, I was certain that Matt was the kind of guy I would remember forever. He just had “it”, even way back then.

What was ‘it’ about an eleven-year old boy that could be so awe-inspiring, you ask? First, I will tell you what “it” was not. It wasn't the style of his hair or the label on his jeans. It had nothing to do with how smart or stupid he may have been, and it surely didn't involve his parent's bank account. It pertained to carriage and confidence, and his way with people. That's about it.

As a boy, it appeared that he felt good about himself. Furthermore, it didn't seem that he was afraid of anyone or anything. I knew it; the other girls knew it, and every other boy on the playground had either witnessed or been directly involved in events that supported this theory. On more than one afternoon, the whispers of an after school fight spread through the halls like a wildfire on a windy day, with our boy in question as one half of the main event. He wasn't just a bully though. He was a bully with a conscience, fighting only in defense of some poor soul or for the protection of our school's reputation. He had balls for sure and I reckoned that one day, they would get him somewhere.

As you might imagine, I dreamt daily of my bad boy from the age of eleven on up, but there was a daunting predicament that kept us apart--we ran with two completely different crowds. In high school, he spent his spares playing blackjack in the cafeteria, and I spent mine in the library. He played sports; I studied. Thus, Matt and I didn't really come into serious contact with each other until the end of high school, when my friends were, through some weird twist of fate, his friends as well. Once we actually started talking however, it was obvious that we had a palpable affiliation. Yours truly--miss goody two shoes--was about to get lucky.

I don't remember the minutia from those good, old teenage years. The exact smell of my inaugural lover's breath, the shape of his lips and the modulation of his laugh have all gone to a place where such treasured memories will remain for all eternity. And even though I can't recall exactly how the angles and planes of his face were arranged, there are some elements about our time together that I've never lost. The first memory involves the particulars of the night I surrendered my virginity, which, as it just so happens, occurred on the exact same calendar day as the day of my very own conception--New Year's Eve.

This odd bit of data could be proof that kismet *does* exist, or it could be just another random occurrence in this giant adventure we call life. I believe it to be the former however as such coincidences seem to chance upon me like honeybees on a hive. Incidents and details from the past seem to turn up for me again and again in the future only in slightly altered and twisted forms. Weird I know, but that's simply the way things have always been.

We hooked up at a party on that special evening of celebratory hysteria, December 31st. I'd come home from university for the Christmas holidays when a friend of a friend invited my best girl Jen and I to what was supposed to be the season's most rockin' bash that our little hometown had to offer.

As I'm sure you've already gathered, Jen and I weren't the biggest of socialites, and I will concede by stating that this party was likely to be our only option for an end of the year thrill. Presumably, we may have ended up spending the midnight hour alone in Pizza Hut. Worse case scenario would have had us sitting at home with my parents watching the big ball drop over Dick Clark's head. So what did we do? You guessed it. We made the decision to honor our invitation. To be honest though, it was more Jen's idea than mine. I was merely going along for the ride.

"You should live dangerously for once," Jen said. "If it sucks, we can always leave."

"OK," I replied tentatively, not sure if going to a party would really be better than sharing popcorn and apple cider with my mom and dad.

Sure enough, it was always Jen who was the more adventurous and delinquent of the two of us, if you could even call her that. She was the one who skipped calculus class on a regular basis to have sex with her boyfriend, and she was the one who cheated on her science tests by sitting behind someone the likes of me. The most reprehensible thing I ever did was to let Jen cheat on her science test by sitting in front of her, but that was an isolated incident. Afterwards, I felt so guilty that I told her to find someone else to do her dirty business. She laughed and said, "Don't worry Isabelle, deep down inside you're just a really good person, and that's why I love you!"

Having set our sights on the party, I will admit that I wasn't expecting to see

anyone in particular there. I'd figured it to be an evening of senseless banter with a bunch of people who were either too drunk or too high to realize that neither Jen nor I were ever really part of their crowd in the first place. You could say that I'd planned to do something out of character for once, though after you hear the rest of the story, you will see that my wayward behavior was destined to escalate.

When we arrived at 32 Inglewood Crescent, we were greeted by a girl--probably someone a grade or two below us in school-- throwing up in the front garden of a very nice suburban bungalow. It was obvious at that moment that no parents were to be in attendance at the party, and we were left alone to find our way inside. Once we got past the pile of vomit strewn all over the flagstone steps, we moved into a smoke-filled living room.

"Yeah, man. The real party is downstairs." Those prophetic words came from a guy flaked out on the couch, a beer bottle in one hand, a huge reefer in the other, and a cloud of smoke around his head so thick that you could barely differentiate his long greasy hair from his hat.

"I can't imagine what the *real* party is going to be that we haven't already seen," Jen giggled as we stepped over a heap of coats and headed down the hall. Pushing our way down the stairwell, we passed a handful of guys and girls making out, and more people smoking--a great combination of marijuana and cigarette with the addition of what could faintly be detected as the aroma of excited female.

It was onward to the "real" party, to the basement filled with more bodies lounging, more people smoking, petting, drinking, laughing, dancing, and a couple of guys hanging around a giant pool table. When Jen and I scanned the room for familiar faces, I was shocked to see Matt's athletic form standing unaffectedly against a makeshift bar. Jen saw him two seconds after I did.

"Look who it is!" she screamed over the heavy thrashing of a Metallica song.

"Yeah!" I yelled back.

"Are you going to talk to him?"

"No. Yes. Well, maybe, but not yet anyway. Let's get something to drink first." Spending the next twenty minutes standing in the corner of the large rectangular room, we sipped on some beers that the friend of a friend had brought, and I watched him. I knew that Matt had been dating someone on and off for a couple of years, but that night, it appeared he'd come alone.

We never did great each other formally, but in the din of that basement space, through the smoke from a quite few joints, we traded looks back and forth. Barely one word came between us over the course of the three-hour soiree, but somehow we managed to convey the shameless longing that coursed through each of our bodies, playing the game of seductress and playboy quite well for two underage paramours.

On more than one occasion, during a drawn out game of snooker, he prodded the long smooth handle of his pool cue in between my thighs as I wiggled past him and his crew. In response, I knocked out a few sultry homeruns of my own with the requisite hair tossing, eyelid batting, and body accentuating strokes, all to which he paid great attention. In a manner far from innocent, I played with the buttons on my blouse, undoing the top one, fluttering the brushed cotton to catch a breeze, and refastening it. I performed these, and as many other tricks as I knew, in an attempt to get him to notice my stirring passion. And it worked. By the end of the night, when the partygoers were

either passed out or heading home, I was overjoyed to find myself parked next to him on the dank cushions of an old futon.

But wait just a second, you say. That doesn't sound anything like the girl you've described yourself to be. True enough, it wasn't my typical character, but that's what a couple of drinks will do for a person who'd never partaken in anything stronger than carbonated grape juice before.

"Hey. Great party, huh?" Matt smirked.

"Yeah, really great, but it's over," I replied sarcastically, watching as he slid his hands anxiously in and out of his pockets.

Over the years, we'd become acquainted, as it was that everyone knew everyone else in a high school the size of ours. Even before we'd spoken face-to-face, whenever we were in any sort of close proximity, there always seemed to be a definite steam that rose up between us--a whooshing blast of air like from those giant, iron presses at the dry cleaners. When Jen started dating a friend of Matt's, our contact took on more intimate proportions, and we'd gone out a few times before that New Year's Eve, when he'd claimed to be a single man.

When I went off to university however, there were no long good-byes or tears of sorrow. We'd yet to make it to the land of coupledness and the terms on which I left were fairly casual. Our time away from each other hadn't extinguished the embers that glowed between us though and that night the inferno was just getting started. So there we were, eyeballing each other when suddenly, Matt blurted, "Wanna come over to my house? My parents are out of town and my brother is having a party."

"Ummm," I was dumbfounded by the suggestion.

"I'm sure lots of people will still be there. It *is* New Year's Eve after all."

Of course, I knew what "going over to his house" really meant, and I was eager for the event to proceed for two reasons. One, I desperately wanted to lose my virginity--I was a freshman in college after all--and two, I desperately wanted to lose my virginity to this specific guy. So I checked in with Jen, and Matt and I took off.

Upon arriving at his house, we were greeted by an almost identical scene to the one we'd just left, with the same loud music blasting out the front door and cars lined up and down the street. As we made our way inside, we also found the same assortment of partygoers in the same sorts of poses and arrangements--including Matt's brother planted face down on the sofa. "Don't mind him," Matt snorted, "He's always like that. A real party animal!" He then took my hand and led me up the stairs to his bedroom.

When the door clicked shut, the finality of it all hit me and I was terrified. I accepted my own incompetence however, stood stock still, and let Matt take the lead. "Come over here," he summoned, patting the bed with his wide-open palm. Moving closer to him, I still wasn't sure that I should've been there in the first place. Matt, conversely, not willing to take a chance that I might leave, reached over, grabbed my wrist, and pulled me in so that my belly button lined up with his nose. "I'm not going to bite. You should know that by now," he laughed fiendishly. Then, like it was the most logical next step, he asked, "Do you want to see something?"

Naively, I thought that by asking if I wanted to see something, he meant that he was going to whip out his cock and get me to suck it. Instead, he pulled a shiny booklet from between his bed frame and his wardrobe. "Here, take a look. Do you like this kind of stuff?" It was a porn magazine that he'd flipped open to a page with a dark haired girl

being taken from behind by a very skinny and bald white guy.

I'd never seen anything like it before, having only subscribed to nature and science periodicals, and it was at that moment that I understood how very different Matt and I really were. I did my best not to look completely stunned, but I knew that he saw the all too apparent geek in me. "Wow! Interesting..." I mumbled.

"Do you want to try that?" He kept the hard questions coming.

"Ummm, I guess. Though shouldn't we kiss first?" It was all too methodical and systematic. For my first time, I'd anticipated being so swept away, so involved in the petting and foreplay, that the insertion of the penis part was almost inadvertent. As brainy and unpracticed as I was, I was still a girl who longed to be seduced, not just callously plugged and forgotten. With Matt proposing that I bend over and let him shove it in like we were some kind of mechanical sex machine, I was taken aback, and after my kissing question, he got the message.

"OK, let's see if you taste as good as you look," he proclaimed, tossing aside the raunchy manual and dragging me into his arms. When our bodies converged, all my doubts and fears vanished. This full on contact with the male of the species blew me away, and I was sure I could detect every sinuous fiber in that boy's body. As he moved around me, it was like being fondled by the proverbial octopus, his hands like groping tentacles. Lifting and unfastening clothes, he caressed me into oblivion.

I don't recall if we ever kissed directly on the lips that night, but when he dipped into my underwear--after having already pulled off my jeans--time stopped. I remember sitting on his lap, facing away from his still fully clothed physique, my legs spread wide as he reached at me from behind. Slipping the crotch of my panties to one side, he smoothed his fingers over my vulva and out onto the quivering flesh of my inner thighs, every once in a while, stopping to pinch my throbbing clitoris. When I was about ready to lose my mind however, he pushed me off and snatched at the magazine again. "Here, read it." It was an order.

Beyond furthering the inquiry into his intentions, I lay down on my belly, opened to a random page and began with the first passage that came into focus. "Kimmy was a slut. She liked to be fucked in all the dirty ways she knew how--in her pussy, up the ass, like a dog, on her back, legs spread wide. She liked it all, and she liked to suck cock too. Sucking cock was one of her favorites." As I read, Matt seized my hips and hauled my bum into the air, his breath warm on my tailbone. Lucky for me, with all of my hard work at school, my literary skills were unwavering. "Kimmy wrapped her warm lips around his cock, licking it up and down, and up and down..." I paused briefly when Matt pulled at the elastic waistband of my panties, slid them over my trembling cheeks, and pulled them down to my knees. "She moved her wet tongue," I continued while he opened me with his fingers, preparing for penetration.

The scraping of his zipper as he freed himself sounded like a military jet passing, and when he nudged up against my hole and pushed his penis in a fraction of an inch, I froze. Not met with a brick wall or screams of dismay, he then dipped and withdrew, dipped and withdrew, until he was submerged deep within my folds.

I should mention that Matt's was the first male organ I'd ever seen in the flesh, and in the handful of instances I made its acquaintance, I knew that it was larger than most. It looked like a stuffed workman's sock--the woolen kind with the red stripe around the top--that thick and about that long. And even though I never felt pain the first time--

only a sensation of fullness and distension--I prayed that I was not getting torn up when his pubic hair began chafing at my bottom.

“Touch yourself,” he said, though I barely heard the words. Busy bracing for war, my elbows were hidden in the mattress, my hands shredding the edges of the magazine. “Keep reading and rub on your clit with your fingertips. I’m going to cum soon.” Just as an aside, I am amazed now, from the point of view of a woman who has been with more than one mature male in her lifetime, that my teenage lover had both the incite and the concern to even suggest this simple trick.

Doing what I was told, the contractions of my vagina began to increase--my body egging him on--and with a clap of both palms against the sides of my rear, he shoved himself in as far as possible, his hips stuttering as he discharged into my newly initiated vagina. Even with his insider tip though, my orgasm didn't happen.

When he pulled out, I immediately turned to get a look at his penis, amazed at what two bodies could accomplish. And even though it was slick with the blood of my ruptured hymen, he didn't blink an eye. He just got up, snuck over to the washroom across the hall, and brought back a damp cloth and towel. If I'd thought that Matt was cold and heartless when we first started, he sure made up for his lack of caring after by washing me off himself, and taking his time to thoroughly pat me dry. He then drove me home and sent me to bed with a passionate, “I can't wait for this to happen again” kind of kiss. I was left to sleep off the affects of the alcohol and our romp, tucked safely within the covers of my own bed.

I must confess, as smart as I was, I didn't insist on using protection. I didn't even think of it. Keep in mind that this happened when AIDS had yet to proliferate drastically into the heterosexual community, and after a brief pregnancy scare about two weeks later, I bought a pack of condoms to keep in my purse. Even with this small slipup however, I would venture to guess that my first sexual encounter was fairly good by most people's standards. Unquestionably, I will always remember and cherish the particulars of that night.

There's another recollection of my time with Matt that I must tell you about because of the sheer coincidence that it had with another very important moment in my life. Naturally, after Christmas vacation had ended, I went back to school, only seeing Matt a few more times after the big cherry-popping incident. Over the next couple of months, we talked on the phone and hooked up--once for spring break, and once on the Easter long weekend--each time finding a way to get close, each time finding a way for him to fill me with his magnificent penis. I was still pretty green when it came to sex, but with Matt, I was learning fast.

Once final exams had finished for the winter term, I returned home and immediately began working at my summer job as a waitress. One Friday, after having not seen Matt for about two weeks (and feeling slightly depressed because of it), I was making my way home from Jim's Family BBQ and Restaurant when, at 11:22 p.m. on May 17th, I witnessed the worst shock of my teenage life.

It was dark that night, with no stars or moon in the sky. I'd just pulled up to a red light and was loosening the handkerchief from around my neck, when off in the distance I saw two figures strolling down the street. As I was about two blocks from the local movie theatre, I made a guess that it was a pair of lovebirds heading home from a date. Aptly, they were holding hands and swinging arms, walking with what seemed like no particular

goal in mind other than to be together.

It was warm that evening too and my driver side window was rolled all the way down. Wishing that something so sweet would someday happen to me, I slowed my speed to catch a glimpse of their faces. When I did, my constitution changed instantly--I went from wistful to furious in two seconds flat. It was Matt and another girl.

Seeing him with someone other than myself made me so angry, so furious, that I didn't move when the light turned green. Even with a blast of the horn from the car behind me, the two sweethearts kept joking and kissing as they walked, so locked in their own realm of romance and bliss that they paid no attention to the steam that was rising from my nearby Toyota Tercel wagon.

With my whole world crashing down, I barely managed to pull over to the side of the road before the tears began. It felt as though Matt had driven a knife straight through my heart and for a long time after they'd passed, I sat there under the glow of a single street lamp blowing my nose, sobbing heavily, and claspng hard onto the steering wheel. Once I'd stopped hyperventilating, I forced myself to head home, navigating my way through the deserted city streets, drunk with rage and disappointment.

A guardian angel must've been with me that night because I made it home safe, parked the car in the driveway and snuck inside. Tiptoeing past my dad asleep on the couch, I locked myself in my room and from under sodden sheets that night in May I vowed never to speak to Matt again.

Now you and I both know that the story couldn't possibly end there, and you're right. Ten days later, on a Tuesday afternoon--after a short shift at work--I was obliged to confront my deceitful lover. I was in the kitchen making a snack when I heard the telltale sound of Matt's Grand Prix out the front of my house.

Let me add that after that night on the street, I hadn't seen him or even called him. I didn't care what he had to say. I'd simply decided that a split was necessary, and when the doorbell rang, I wasn't sure what to do. With my parents out, I knew that allowing him past the front door would mean a chance of him touching me, kissing me, fondling me, and finally wedging himself between my legs and pushing my head forward over the nearest horizontal surface. So I waited a good three minutes, praying that he would go away, hoping to avoid the confrontation I knew was coming. But he must've known I was home because he stayed and started banging on the door instead.

"Just get it over with," I told myself, gawking at him through the window. "Tell him to get lost." And on a deep breath, I made my approach. "Stay there!" I shouted.

"What's going on?" Like he didn't know.

"You can't..." I was trying hard not to notice the way his jeans creased at the crotch. Finally, I exploded, "I just can't do this anymore. I can't see you anymore. It wouldn't be right."

At that point, he knew he'd been caught. "Let me come in for a minute, Isabelle. I can explain."

Shaking my head, I sobbed, "Please don't."

"Isabelle..." He pushed inside anyway and ushered me into the family room where we sat on the sofa, his arm hooked tenuously around my shoulders. "OK, so I take it you know, but Mel (short for Melanie--the girlfriend) and I, well..." He confessed that they'd never really broken up, that they'd been a couple during all the times *we* had been together--before Christmas, on that special New Year's Eve, and for all the times after as

well. "But I do like you, more than you think."

"Really," I sniffed. "That makes me feel sooooo much better," I said, giving it my drama-queen best.

"What was I supposed to do? Hurt her, or hurt you?" And then it all came out--his love for Melanie, his teenage desire to see what other girls were like, hence his feelings for me.

We talked for a while, and when I'd cried out all my tears of disappointment and desperation, Matt pulled me tight to his side. Now, it's not that I'd changed my plan of giving him the boot, but with the strength of his arms and the warmth of his hands on my body, I began to slip into a familiar pit of uncontrollable prurience. Before I knew it, we were tangling tongues and groping like we were auditioning for two spots in hell. When his fingers breached my panties however, the question erupted--the question that was to be his ultimate undoing with me. "Do you think that somebody can love two people at once?" he asked.

"What?" Because it came out in the midst of our heavy petting, I assumed that it was his eighteen-year-old penis talking. "Ummm, no!" I spat. "You just want to get laid. Admit it. You like having sex with me, and I like having sex with you. That's it! Don't even try to pretend that you care about me the same way you care about Melanie." I didn't enjoy being treated like I was stupid. That, to me, was an even bigger insult than the lying. "You have to leave," I growled.

Matt hung his head. "Awe, Isabelle." Either embarrassed or upset, he stood, pulled up his pants and stuffed his hands deep into his pockets. "What I was asking you was for real," he mumbled, shuffling despondently out of the room, with each step, transforming from a browbeaten and downhearted Matt, to the confident, shoulders back, chest out Matt that I'd come to love. The heart breaker, the dream maker, the love taker, he had messed around with me.

What came next, while seemingly typical, was in fact a prediction of my life to come. You see, Matt paused momentarily at the door and said, "When you're thirty Isabelle, I'll be back. You'll have missed me so much that you won't be able to turn me away then!" And with that, he was gone.

Letting him walk out on his own, I envisioned him gliding calmly down the concrete steps and nonchalantly climbing into his car. When I heard the squeal of his tires as he pulled away, I was actually surprised.

Now, I'll admit, Matt did a real number on me. Oh, I knew he'd been dating someone on and off for an extended period, but when we initially met and started flirting, he'd assured me that they were no longer together. When I saw them holding hands that night by the theatre, I knew he had lied. I also knew what I had to do. In my mind, there was only one option--the only one a self-respecting girl could have. I had to let him go.

It may have been a tough break, and I know I was a bit weak in doing it, but he was the sexiest guy I'd ever met, thoughts of him having taken up most of my brain space for quite a few years by then. And I probably would've done anything for him too, but sleeping with him while he still dated the love of his life was not going to be one of them. I know what you are thinking too--that I allowed myself to be used by a man who never really cared about me in the first place. To this day, I'm almost positive that my feelings for Matt greatly exceeded his feelings for me, but I could be wrong. Maybe he did love us both, or sensed what he thought was love. After numerous experiences with men

however, I've decided that love, while a feeling, is also a decision *and* an action, both relative to the choosing of particular pathways and the treatment of others.

I guess Matt never had feelings strong enough where Mel and I were concerned to sway him one way or another at the time, but then again, like he said, he *was* only eighteen. So I made the decision for him. Whatever happened though, doesn't take away the fact that he was the first boy I was ever smitten with, and the one that I will always count as my first true love.

Super Blackman to the Rescue

While I am a stickler for dates, there are some instances that are memorable and others that I would give anything to forget. As the following is an account of the former, please make note that although it was Tuesday, October 7th when I first saw Isabelle Weston, it was not until Friday, October 29th that we actually met.

Well before I set my gaze upon her, I heard her ingenuous laugh floating through the corridors of my workplace--a good-sized law firm located in the city's downtown core. She occupied an office on the same floor as me but in the opposite corner, and if you followed a diagonal line from her turf straight through all the other desks and walls, you would've hit upon my space--a much smaller cubicle for a less important employee.

She'd moved her stuff in during the week I was off with the flu, and on the Monday I'd come back to Braun, Bower and Associates, I saw that the office of Jack Bower--a recently retired partner in the firm--had been re-inhabited. It was stacked high with boxes and books, two extra- large filing cabinets and a couple of wilted plants that someone had shoved in the corner. There was also an antique hall-tree poised by the door, upon which hung a fuzzy, pink cardigan.

Naturally, I kept my eyes peeled that day for my newest co-worker, but by 4 p.m. when her whereabouts remained unknown, I asked around. "A young lawyer taking over for Jack, and one most likely being groomed to replace him as partner. A woman, smart as a whip and not too hard on the eyes either," was the general consensus.

When she finally graced the office early Tuesday morning, it was her laugh that caught me off guard as she joked with a lady named Gina--a secretary whose kids were visiting with their nanny. As women do, they cooed over Gina's baby and listened intently as her older sister chattered on about the number of squirrels she'd seen that morning. My anonymous quarry took part in the conversation like an old friend, her voice filled with warmth and charm. When she spoke to the child, she had me spellbound. "What colors were the squirrels you saw, Olivia?" she asked.

"Well, one was brown, and one was grey and two were black. And one was brown and black. And guess what?" The little girl whispered. "One didn't have a tail."

"Brown squirrels are my favorite." I heard Isabelle whisper back. "They look like they're made of chocolate. And I like chocolate. Now make sure Darla takes you to see the wolf display. You're going to love it. You even get to see their teeth."

From that moment on, I wanted to be Isabelle's object of endearment. She'd caught my attention and so, as the days went by, I found myself watching her, listening for her, hearkening her every syllable, and studying her every move.

Unfortunately, we never seemed to cross paths directly. My work was never her work, and with her own secretary and underlings designated specifically to her cases, she never needed to come to me for anything. I figured that unless I boldly went over and introduced myself, or unless she accidentally tripped over my foot, we were doomed to remain strangers for all eternity.

As a single man, I was open to new relationships, having dated on and off since my split with Shana, and although I'd sworn off of serious involvement with women--white women in particular--Isabelle was not one I could keep at a distance. I actually found myself *needing* to get to know her. So later that week, when the notice came out about the staff Halloween party, I saw my chance. For my commissionaire of kindness toward children, my emissary of wisdom, my siren of sweaters, I was prepared to do anything.

When the night of the party finally arrived however, I was completely out of sorts. It'd been two weeks since I'd pulled the invitation from my mail slot, and I'd spent much of that time planning and plotting my approach, the "get-up" part of the evening my biggest concern.

After much deliberation and numerous trips to the costume shop, I decided to go dressed as Super Blackman. It was an ensemble I'd put together myself, and while not consisting of the obligatory superhero tights, it had tailored black pants, a flowing red cape, and a fitted, blue top with the letters SB--for "Super Black"--stitched competently enough on the front.

That evening, I showered fastidiously, soaping every inch of my anatomy, just in case--by some extraordinary twist of fate--we met and Isabelle wanted to get close. I brushed my teeth twice, giving my tongue an extra good scrub. I splashed on some of my best after-shave, smoothed my freshly cut fade, and finally, suited up.

Arriving at the hall, I had a singular focus--to find and meet Isabelle. So as the masqueraders mingled happily, I pressed my way through the crowd, examining every person as they walked by, careful not to miss her. At last, I spotted the object of my quest standing by the punch bowl, sipping on a beverage and talking with Mr. and Mrs. Simmons, two long time employees of Braun and Bower.

Swathed in a long, milky-white gown and holding a glittering staff, her costume had the makings of some kind of heavenly creature, and magically, I was pulled toward her. Now, I already knew she was beautiful, but up close, my angel with golden hair was even lovelier than I'd anticipated, her cheekbones resting high upon her unpainted, ivory face.

Just as I was about to introduce myself to the woman of my dreams, Lisa--a fellow paralegal--popped up from out of nowhere. "Nice costume, Adrian. Who died and made you Superman?" she laughed.

"It's 'Super Blackman', for those of you who don't know," I replied dryly, "And he has twice the fashion sense and ten times the power than the regular Superman." I glanced over to see if Isabelle was still there.

"Oh, and what are you doing here anyway? You never come to these events." I hoped she wasn't onto my scheme.

“Well, I thought I would stir up the pot a little. These kinds of things could always use more excitement,” I answered smoothly.

“Ain’t that the truth?” Lisa chortled, pausing long enough to ingest an orange and black hors d’oeuvre. With a mouth full of food, she then elbowed me in the ribs. “Hey, I’ll bet you haven’t met our newest staff member.”

“No, I don’t think I have.” I pivoted toward the buffet, feigning indifference. With my back turned, Lisa caught Isabelle by the arm and whirled her around.

“I want you to meet someone,” I heard her say. “This is Adrian.”

I turned back. “I’ve seen you around the office,” I said, offering a handshake. It was really just a ploy to touch her, and having captured her fingers, I was sure she could feel my hand trembling as I thumbed across a scrape on her knuckle. Standing next to her, I rapturously absorbed the warmth that emanated from her flesh, not quite sure where my designs were heading, but definitely happy to have made her acquaintance.

“Yes, I’ve seen you there as well,” she answered, her eyes harboring tales of mermaids lingering in a deep ocean. “It’s nice to finally meet you.” She was smiling, but there was a hint of sarcasm in her tone. I could sense that she knew I’d been surreptitiously watching her at work for some time.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you too. What’s your name?” I asked.

“Isabelle,” she answered, “Isabelle Weston.” And although I already knew it, it was nice to hear it coming from her lips--a provocative name for a provocative woman.

“Hmmm, Isabelle...” I let my mouth sample the essence of the word, and at that moment a flash of the future entered my head. My cranial crystal ball showed Isabelle and I linked arm in arm, already a couple, and the idea that she would one day be a prominent figure in my life made certain parts of my body tingle with anticipation. It made other parts--my heart, for example--pound in fear.

There was an obvious problem, you see--a complication of profound proportion--and it didn't matter that to measure the level of our physical attraction would've meant sending the Richter scale off the charts. It didn't matter that I imagined myself plugged deep within her folds, held so tight that I begged for mercy from too much gratification. It didn't matter that in the one minute I'd been sharing her personal space, I knew that I would be enamored with her forever. What mattered was the fact that she was just the kind of female I'd been trying to avoid for years. She was a white girl and for me, that spelled trouble--big, big trouble.

It's All in the Stars

After Matt, the sign of my birth--the symbol that portrays me as a virginal maiden clasping sheaves of wheat to my bosom--became my guidebook to all that was worthwhile in the ways of love. Emotions hit me hard. They don't bounce off me easily, nor do I readily forget the transgressions made by others. As such, I ventured forth into the next chapter of my life somewhat crippled by the "Matt" experience, my dealings with men always beginning with trepidation and ending in disappointment. Being single made it easy to excel at university though and I progressed at lightning speed, receiving my undergraduate degree in no time flat and going on to study law where I finished at the top of my class.

Dating was something I did occasionally, but only when it was a forced endeavor--like when I was unknowingly set up, or when I was feeling particularly amorous, read: horny. Mostly however, I kept to my books and myself.

Sure there were men who had caught my eye, but I wasn't looking for more drama or heartache in my life. I already had friends and a supportive family, and if the urge ever arose, I also owned a dildo. If I ever found myself craving a real man's touch, I was never left lonely for long, guys being fairly easy in that department. My thinking back then was, if I happened to meet someone with whom the element of attraction was super strong, then I would've gone for it. If not, then I wasn't searching for a relationship just for the sake of having one.

As an intellectual lover, the impetus for what excites me resides somewhere in my head. It is a certainty about me today just as it was when I was a young adult, and if you'd been playing matchmaker back then, you would've looked for someone who was both smart *and* funny, someone who could carry on a conversation *and* be quiet, someone who was confident yet humble--basically someone who knew who he was and what he wanted out of life. He definitely needed to be the kind of guy who would be faithful to just one woman--me.

And even though it may sound like I was doomed never to love again, you will be happy to know that a little more than a decade after Matt, (on the waning cusp of autumn), my sixth grade crush came back to me--the one with the eraser, the one who, when we were both eighteen, fucked me doggy-style with his massive and precocious cock while making me recite passages from a dirty magazine. This time however, my

lover had a different body, a different name, and a completely different ethnic background. I knew it was the same person though from the very moment we met, and when we shook hands that first time, I was reminded of Matt's last entreaty--"You wait and see. When you're thirty, I'll be back."

My specter from the past moved the same way, spoke the same sorts of words with that same deep voice, and looked into my soul with the same sort of intensity. He seemed to be the grown up embodiment of Matt, with two huge differences: one, he seemed to be an even better version of my previous paramour, and two, the new guy was black.

Let me explain how we met. See, right after passing the bar, I apprenticed at a small law firm on the east side of town. It was a great starting position--the perfect place for the activist in me--but after I'd been there a few years, I realized that my presiding colleagues had locked in all the top spots. Since it was my plan to be the boss someday, I was forced to take another job at a larger firm--one Braun, Bower and Associates. With this switch came the promise of a partnership within a few years, a much larger salary and better benefits. More stress was inevitable with the post, but I was prepared to take the good with the bad.

I was supposed to have started at Braun and Bower on a Monday in October, but ended up undergoing emergency dental surgery instead. Thankfully, when I rolled into the office early Tuesday morning with an ice pack on my face and yellow bruises around my mouth, the staff was more than supportive. The first week was slightly overwhelming, but after that, I felt right at home.

When I heard about the company Halloween party scheduled for the end of the month, I saw my chance to wind down and meet some of my new office mates. Sure, it sounded like a fun evening, but on top of that, I was hoping to see one person in particular. Undoubtedly, you've guessed him to be the "Matt" impersonator and yes, I'd been watching him for weeks by then. You could say that I was finally ready to break out.

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When I arrived at the hall that evening dressed as an angel--a costume I'd borrowed from my cousin's girlfriend--the party was in full swing. People were dancing and drinking, laughing and talking, and I pushed my way through the crowd, quickly spotting two of Braun and Bower's most devoted employees--a husband and wife team by the name of Simmons. "Hello Simmons' family. It's nice to see some familiar faces," I said, securing a place near the food table.

"Oh, hi Isabelle. We were wondering when you'd arrive," they chimed in unison. Chatting with my new friends, I then began to scan the room, hoping to catch a glimpse of the person I'd really come to see.

Just minutes into the party (and much to my delight), I located him about six feet away. Things got even more interesting when he turned and met my gaze. We ended up staring at each other until it got weird, until I had to look away. When I reached for an hors d'oeuvre, a young woman by the name of Lisa appeared at my side. She'd been a big help in getting me settled at work, but more importantly, I was quite aware that she knew my object of interest.

“Hi Isabelle,” she said, giving me a big hug. “How are you?”

“Good,” I answered. “You look pretty.”

“Thanks. So do you.”

“Hey, I want you to meet someone.” Swinging me around, she set me face to face with a black Superman. “This is Adrian,” she said, motioning to the guy whose sturdy legs and soft-looking skin I'd been drooling over for weeks. He looked handsome dressed in a flowing red cape and blue muscle shirt.

“I've seen you around the office,” he said, reaching out to shake my hand.

“Yes, I've seen you there as well,” I answered, reveling in the strength of his fingers. I didn't add how many times it'd actually been--how many times I'd gone over to the copy machine near his desk, or how many times I'd watched him from the back of the lunch line. I'd been paying close attention to his reserved elegance and upbeat demeanor religiously, whenever I got lucky and he walked past my office, whenever he was talking to a co-worker, whenever the sky was blue, whenever I breathed the air...

“It's nice to finally meet you,” I said.

“It's a pleasure to meet you too. What's your name?” he asked, our hands still joined. I was thankful that his costume didn't include gloves, because then I wouldn't have felt the energy coursing from his body into mine.

“Isabelle. Isabelle Weston,” I replied, happy to have finally made his acquaintance.

The Swimming Lesson

“I think we should go swimming,” Isabelle said in the middle of lunch--our first date after the Halloween party.

“Where did that idea come from?”

“I don’t know,” she said, slurping her water through the chewed end of a straw. “I guess I was just wondering what you looked like naked.”

The statement came out of nowhere and I almost choked on my bagel. “Oh really?” It's not like we were discussing anything racy, unless you count fairy tales or politics as racy.

“Yeah, but I thought it might be too forward to ask you to take your clothes off, so my strategy was to get you into a bathing suit instead. That’s the next best thing,” she laughed. Back then I was never quite sure if Isabelle’s comments were serious or not. Even today, I can't always tell.

“I don’t swim.” I said.

“What do you mean, you don’t swim?”

The truth was about to come out. “I mean I don’t know *how* to swim.”

“Ohhhh,” she paused, leaning forward across the small, round table. Now, she could've said, “What’s wrong with you?” or “I thought everyone knew how to swim,” but true to her nature, she replied, “Well, if you don’t know how to swim, then I guess I’d better teach you.” Let me add that this promise of a swimming lesson was really a seductive suggestion, and the subdued fluidity in her voice hit me right below the belt.

Isabelle has always been able to get me to do almost anything, even flipped out schemes like submerging myself in water just for fun. And it was true, as a kid, I'd never learned how to swim. It just wasn't something people did where I came from.

So when I got to the edge of the abyss--or to the edge of what was known to the rest of the world as the John Hancock Community Pool--I stood knock kneed in fear. With my brand new bathing trunks tied tight enough to cut off the circulation to the lower half of my body, I wondered where my brain had been when I'd agreed to such nonsense. Frightened, I poised there with my toes curled, hoping I was not about to die a tragic death in front of the woman I'd so hoped to impress.

“Black guy in the pool! Black guy in the pool!” I thought I heard someone shout.

No one ever yelled that, not out loud anyway, but I could see the sentiment in the faces of the white folks as they splashed around in front of me.

You must understand, in our town, the population is overwhelmingly white. Oh sure, there are a few visible minorities here and there, but Caucasians predominate. Granted, we all manage to work side by side, and we even socialize a little, but as far as relationships go, *that* is where people draw the line.

To see a black woman or man with a white partner is still uncommon enough in our parts that strangers sometimes stare, but it was practically unheard of when Isabelle and I first got together. When we had children it was almost as if they were circus freaks and the response was different depending on which one of us was out with the kids.

If it was Isabelle alone, she was always pegged as the babysitter or nanny. In their minds, she couldn't possibly have birthed two "darkish-skinned" babies such as ours. The general assumption was that black mothers spawned black babies and white mothers spawned white ones. Anything that deviated from the accepted norm confused the hell out of people. It was like substituting tofu for steak at a meat-lover's dinner--you just didn't do it.

If it was a daddy's day out, it was an altogether different story. When the children were small, well-wishing white folks (usually older ones) would actually cross the street to tell me just how "beautiful" my darlings were, letting me know in some backwards way that my children--nappy hair or not--would be loved by the members of a free-thinking and openhearted community. "Oh, she is so adorable. A little lighter-skinned than her poppa mind you, but I'm sure she will darken up with age." Someone actually had the nerve to say that about our daughter.

"Darken with my foot up your ass," I wanted to scream.

Funny enough, if we all went out together, we just got half-hearted smiles. I suppose the fact that we stood out left some people confused and consequently speechless. Even today, in our fair-sized urban centre, I can easily count on both hands the number of mixed families similar to ours.

You might say that being black has been a bit of a challenge for me, and it has. After emigrating from the Caribbean, it was perhaps the biggest challenge I had yet to face. Back home, black was normal. It was the dominant color of the people around me and I didn't know that it could be any different.

In North America however, black is more of a characterization--a representation. You are black first and everything else second. I will admit that it's gotten better over the years and I can actually go places now where it doesn't feel so strange to be blessed with a dark complexion.

Having said all of this, take into account that the events I'm about to describe happened some fifteen odd years ago when the ratio of blacks to whites in our town was even smaller than it is today. Black people stuck out like sore thumbs back then, especially if they happened to be roaming about in a typically white stomping ground like the neighborhood watering hole. Realize further that such a spectacle was even more of a showstopper if the black person in question was carousing intimately with someone of the opposite color. Case in point, Isabelle and I.

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She was already in the water when I came out of the change room. "Get in on the stairs," she called, pointing to the end of the pool--to the white, plastic railing I was sure led to my demise.

"OK." I could feel my legs shaking as I padded tentatively across the deck.

"The water's pretty nice. They must've turned the heat up just for you, Adrian."

Once I actually got in, I discovered it to be a lot chillier than I'd hoped, and my skin rebelled, raising bumps of dismay up and down my arms and legs. I must tell you, if there's one thing that Caribbean people hate, it's being cold, and at that moment, it was as if I was descending into the waters of the Arctic Ocean. My instincts were telling me to get out and run home, but as soon as Isabelle skimmed up next to me, her hand brushing over the line of hair on my belly--the same line that lead to my nether regions--I knew I would be her willing prisoner forever.

Like a shark, she circled me, moving in such close proximity that on every go 'round her hardened nipples punched at my body. Just as I was about to collapse in a tailspin of lust, I somehow managed to drag her up against my chest.

For the very first time, our bodies touched--I mean *really* touched. Sure, we'd linked hands and brushed shoulders whenever we'd sat together, but this skin-to-skin contact was new, and if I thought that those other bits of contiguity were a thrill, I was totally unprepared for the effects of having her whole body melt into mine.

I was in shock, and when she wrapped her strong legs around my waist and muscled the back of my neck with her warm hands, my penis throbbed so hard that I thought I might explode right there in the pool. Pressing her lips close to my ear, she said, "You're a *very* good swimmer, Adrian."

"Th...th... that's me," I stuttered. "A regular dolphin."

"Oh, you poor thing," she murmured, rubbing up and down my arms. "It's not that bad is it?"

"It *is* pretty pathetic. I'm pathetic. All I can do is stand here."

"Come on, you're hardly pathetic. You're just learning," she continued. "There are some people who won't even go near the water. So you're at least ahead of them."

"I might be in the water, but you couldn't pay me enough to put my head under right now."

"Don't worry. It'll come someday. There's no need to rush." With that, she began plucking affectionately at the waistband of my swim trunks. As luck would have it, at that same moment, a lady and her daughter swam past, their expressions suggesting that our interaction might be more than a friendly splash in the pool, which it most certainly was.

Seeing this, Isabelle immediately eased her chest away from mine. Keeping her legs locked around my hips however, she lay back in the water, her torso floating, her hardened nipples calling out to me. Once the people had moved on and we were alone again in our section of the pool, Isabelle pulled back in close, a twinkle in her eye. "Well, well, well. What do we have here?" She brushed over my bellybutton and dipped inside the top of my bathing suit.

"Wha... wha... what do you mean?"

She smiled. "With what I'm feeling under the water, I think *you* will be teaching me some new tricks pretty soon."

She was right. There was one part of my anatomy that was dying to show her a

thing or two, my penis begging for more than a mere hug. "I'm ummm, I'm sorry," I said, embarrassed.

"Sorry for what, for complimenting me? Jeez, Adrian. I like it! Remember, I'm the one who wanted to see *you* naked."

"That's true." I replied, wanting my erection to settle. Given the circumstances, I didn't need anything extra to worry about. And I think Isabelle understood how I felt because she promptly let go and floated away. With a safe distance between us, I watched as she did a few underwater somersaults and a handstand, her toes wiggling just above the water's surface.

We swam for a little while longer and when I'd nearly turned into an ice-cube, she finally motioned for me to get out. "Come on, your lips are turning blue." Moving swiftly, I flapped over to the end of the pool, up the steps in a matter of seconds. "No running on the deck," Isabelle teased.

"I'll meet you out front," I waved, pausing long enough to watch her wiggle away.

Happy that our excursion hadn't been a complete disaster, I showered quickly and headed out to the lobby. "Ready to go?" Isabelle was sitting in a chair reading the newspaper.

She got up and reached for my hand. "Adrian, hang on." "What is it?" I wondered if she'd forgotten something.

Linking my arm with hers, she pulled me in close. "I really appreciate you coming with me today. I had fun and I hope you did too."

"Yeah, fun!" I answered sarcastically.

"I know that coming here wasn't easy, but you did great!" As she spoke, she began playing with the zipper on my jacket. "By the way, you looked pretty great in your bathing suit too. In fact, I will always remember *exactly* how you looked in those wet swimming trunks!" Mashing our torsos together, she then gently pressed one palm onto the bulge that was growing in my jeans, tracing with her other hand the outline of what I believed to be a heart--big and bold--onto the centre of my chest.

"Thanks for the compliment, but I think we'd better get out of here before we cause any more trouble," I replied.

She laughed. "Definitely."

Big Penises

The aphorism about the black man having an elephant-sized penis is true. At least it's true for Adrian and I must say, I'm happy about that. As for the rest of black mankind, I don't know, but for me, the others don't matter anyway. Now, I'm not so shallow as to base my affinity for Adrian on the size of his penis. As an enlightened individual, I try not to get caught up in the visceral criteria of a person, but I will say that I have given the subject some thought. In fact, I thought hard about it after seeing Adrian's python for the first time. His snake shocked me, to be honest, and not because I'd never seen one that size before. Remember Matt? He was no small change himself. No, I was shocked because I didn't expect it.

Between Matt and Adrian, there had been a couple of other gentlemen with whom I'd shared more than a sandwich. No serious contenders, but others nonetheless, and what I learned from being with those other guys was that Matt was unusually large. The rest of them had regular-sized penises by comparison--none too small mind you, but none too large either. I thought that Adrian would be of similar proportion.

Call me sheltered, but I hadn't heard the stereotype about black men and their penises until *after* Adrian and I had hooked up. None of those "other" intimate encounters had included men of the darker persuasion, and by that I do not mean to suggest that all black men have by default, schlongs the size of tree trunks. I feel I must qualify my statement however, as it is a typecast none-the-less.

Size had never been an issue until Adrian. It had never been something I really thought about, let alone used as a basis for cementing a relationship. Before him, size was simply an amount. Matt was big, the others medium. It was just another attribute like hair texture or eye color, and I took what I got. It was certainly never something I demanded.

Now maybe it was my conversation with Lisa and the corresponding discovery of Adrian's hammer that got me to thinking, who knows? I will recount the details of the situation and let you be the judge.

"So how's it going with you and Adrian? You guys seemed to really hit it off at the Halloween party." That was Lisa's polite way of asking if we'd slept together yet. God only knew the whole office was in on our exchange.

“Yeah, I really think I could fall for this guy,” I replied.

“So, you mean you haven’t... you know,” she said, elbowing me as we did our occasional mid-day jaunt around the park.

“No, it’s only been a couple of weeks Lisa. We did go swimming though. That was fun.”

“So you’ve seen him partially naked then?” Her eyes lit up.

“Yesss...”

“Nice body?” She brought us to a halt. “Wait, don’t tell me. I’ll just bet he has a nice body--a great chest, a perfect ass. Definitely a perfect ass! And a you-know-what that could plug a drainpipe, I suppose.” She was chuckling but I knew she was serious.

“Now why would you say that?” Her comment seemed odd to me, though after seeing Adrian in his swim trunks, I knew she was probably right.

“You know what they say about black guys...”

“No, actually I don’t,” I gulped. “What *do* they say?” I hoped it wasn't something horrible.

“They say that black men have extra large penises, Isabelle,” she whispered, cupping her hand over her mouth like it was a secret.

“Oh.”

“So, do you think he does?”

“Does what?” I was lost in speculation.

“Does have one!?!”

“Ummm, yeah. I think so,” I replied, my voice cracking slightly.

“You are soooo lucky,” she sighed, pulling at my arm to continue our walk.

So was the promise of an extra-large appendage what kept me going back for more? Was it *that* important? I will answer with a modest negative here, but I have to add that after being in its company, I was definitely set to thinking. By the time I'd met Adrian, I was older, more experienced. I knew what I wanted and needed from a man, and when I saw Adrian’s penis--when I saw how very thick and long it was--the importance of its size came into question.

Before going any further with this discussion, I want to make one thing perfectly clear, and that is, that I liked Adrian *before* I saw it. I liked him a lot. After it came out of his pants however--when it flopped against his belly all erect and shiny like a piece of sirloin steak whacking against a cutting board--I knew it was something that would add to the long list of positive criteria for having him as my boyfriend. To be blunt, I knew it could possibly make him a keeper, all other things considered.

* ... * ... *

Three weeks, lots of phone conversations, and four official dates after the night our hands lingered palm to palm as Super Blackman and Angel (and this includes lunch at the café across the street from our office, dinner and a movie, and that one very sensual swimming lesson) the moment was upon us to get naked. I was afraid that if we didn't do something soon we'd end up on top of the photocopy machine giving Al, Lisa, Beverley, and all the rest of our colleagues at the office a really good show.

The proposed day of our release was a Saturday late in November, and the morning in question, I was awake by 6 a.m. We were supposed to meet at three, so for

me that meant nine hours of fretting and primping. After lying around until I couldn't stand it any longer, I rolled out of bed and headed to the kitchen for a small bite to eat. A piece of toast with peanut butter and some tea was all I could manage.

At nine o'clock, I called my mother and we chatted about the week's events. She told me the same sort of stuff she always does--who'd died and who was going to die, and whose marriage was on the rocks--all the happy stuff.

Once updated, I headed to the bathroom where I proceeded to floss my teeth and brush them twice. I plucked my eyebrows, applied a facial mask, brushed my teeth again (just in case) and finally, turned on the shower. Under some close-to-scalding hot water, I shaved my legs meticulously, careful not to nick myself around the ankles and knees, smoothing my armpits and bikini area as well. I finished with a hot-oil treatment on my hair, (something I hardly ever do), and even pumiced the bottom of my feet.

Make-up and hair styling came next, after which it was time to find the perfect outfit. For that, I stood in front of my closet for what seemed like forever, finally picking out a pair of jeans, my favorite pink cashmere sweater, some black panties and a matching bra. Upon exiting my bedroom--ready for my date--I saw that it was only eleven o'clock. Not even noon. I still had four hours to go.

Needing to do something with my time, I decided to head to the gym to burn off some of my pent-up energy. Surely, you can appreciate that this meant I would have to do most of the same stuff I'd just labored through, all over again. Figuring that it would kill the hours left until Adrian's materialization, that's exactly where I went.

At the recreation centre, I ran and I ran and I ran. By the time I'd sweated out most of my nerves, you could almost see the smoke rising up off the deck of the treadmill. Another shower, blow-dry and some make-up, and I was on my way. One last stop at the market to pick up some treats for dinner, and I was back at the location of my concupiscent destiny.

As ready as I was to see Adrian, when the doorbell rang at three-thirty, I nearly jumped out of my skin. Now, I don't recall exactly what outfit he was wearing--possibly because I was so focused on getting him *out* of his clothes--but I can tell you that his hair was neatly trimmed and that he smelled fantastic.

"Well, don't you look dashing," I purred into the collar of his coat. "And you sure do smell good. What's the special occasion?"

"You know," he laughed, pulling me in for a more sensual greeting.

"I do," I added, itching to get him out of his pants.

Once we'd moved past the threshold of my front door (and that took a while), we ended up in the kitchen. Adrian had built up an appetite from running around all morning, and I too, was starving, having lasted the better part of the day on a belly full of butterflies. A few toasted tomato sandwiches and we were off to the living room. Sitting nervously on the couch, when our thighs brushed, I almost said, "I want you to fuck me."

But it was Adrian who broke the ice. "I like your sweater. It's really soft," he said, stroking up and down my arm.

"It is. I mean, I'm glad. I mean, I wanted you to touch me," I answered feebly.

"You didn't need to wear a soft sweater to get me to do that. You just needed to ask."

"What if I asked you to strip me naked and kiss my whole body? Would you do that?" Slightly subtler than "I want you to fuck me" but not much.

“That goes way beyond stroking your fuzzy sweater, now doesn’t it? Maybe I want to take my time.”

When he leaned over and pressed his palm into the crux of my thighs, I giggled, “That’s not exactly taking your time, now is it?” I was positive he could feel the wetness seeping through my jeans.

“No it’s not,” he replied.

“Do you always go for the biggest prize first? Why not start with my earlobes or something?”

“You’re such a flirt. Do you mean what you say and say what you mean? Or maybe you just want to drive me completely mad.” He pinched my big toe, hinting at more playful punishment to come. “Don’t worry, my dear. If you think I’m about to give you everything at once, you’re sorely mistaken. You’ll get what you get when I give it to you.”

“Oh, so you think that you’re the boss, huh?” I asked, rising onto my knees. “I’m the boss.” I grabbed his wrists and pushed him flat on his back, scrambling to straddle his waist. “And don’t you forget it.”

It didn’t matter what we said to each other, in jest or not. It may have only been our fourth date, but we both understood how the relationship would progress, ultimately with Adrian in charge. “My boss,” he paused, clenching my hands so hard that the pain was almost unbearable. Sarcastic but sweet, he then pleaded, “Come. Show me what to do bossy lady.” With that, the ice grip of his hands melted away, the heat between us turning into a raging fire.

By the time Adrian had turned his attentions to my earlobe--licking and sucking that delicate flesh with his masterful mouth--I was undulating in his arms like a mermaid in a stormy sea. We could easily have jumped to the next level right then, but just as he’d warned he would, he kept the focus of our cavorting above the shoulders, at least for a little while longer.

What he wanted that Saturday was to give me a taste of his goodness, leaving me begging for more. He’d handed me the keys to his car. He’d even let me turn it on. But there were to be no rides that day--no cruises in the country, or devil-may-care races around the track. Not even donuts in the parking lot. It was simply meant to be a long, slow idle in the driveway, with a mini-lesson on how to use the clutch. I found out then that *sometimes* he likes to make good things last the same way I do. I did however, get a peek under the hood, and let me tell you, his engine was sweet.

Our kissing marathon must’ve lasted a good half an hour, and finally, when I assume he couldn’t bear the pressure building in his pants any longer, he allowed me to explore past the waistband of his jeans. Moreover, I had suffered long enough at his mercy, and I’m sure he could sense my desperation.

We both needed more, and I for one, was ready to take anything I could get. Practically willing his penis to pop out on its own, I was just about to rip the zipper, when he grabbed my wrist. “Slow down baby. I’m not going to run away.” As he loosened the provoking apparel, I groaned. “You’re not excited are you?” he asked, grinning from ear to ear. I couldn’t answer. I was too far-gone, too zeroed in on that place on his body that promised to lift me higher than the clouds.

“Come now,” he whispered. “Come get what you need.” Settling him back into the cushions, I shimmied down his pants and displaced the fabric of his underwear--the

white jockeys of an unpretentious man. To my delight, his “Chief of Staff”, his “Donald Pump”, his “Buster McThunderstick” was about as wide around as my forearm and about that long. Unable to control myself, I gagged a little.

You would've thought that I'd never seen a penis before. And I hadn't. Not one like this. If Matt's was large, Adrian's was gigantic. If Matt's was white, Adrian's was so dark that it was almost purple. It looked like a mahogany stair rail. Furthermore, it was uncircumcised--a condition of the male organ that was new to me--and I was enthralled by the way the slackened skin slid up and down over its rigid shaft.

It was definitely a slab of gold in my greedy little paws, and I fondled and rubbed it, caressed and held it. I tickled it at its base and squeezed it tight around the middle, watching as it bounced back and forth like a spring-mounted diving board.

As I explored my new toy however, Adrian kept amazingly quiet and still, only fixing his gaze on what I was doing, his hips vibrating almost imperceptibly. Wondering if I'd given him a stroke, I listed forward with my mouth just to see what would happen. "Oh, Jesus!" he cried. I hadn't killed him after all.

“Are you all right?” I asked, suspended mid-air.

“If you do that, I'm going to cum within seconds.” He sounded sincerely concerned.

“I think I can handle it.”

"Oh," he said.

“So, do you want me to put it in my mouth or not?” When he lifted his hips and closed his eyes, I knew I'd been given the green light. First tasting the liquid pearl that had pooled at the tip, I then proceeded to lick him around and around, and up and down until he was slick from top to bottom.

With some moans actually escaping his lips, I knew that for Adrian, the end was near. Undoubtedly, a seriousness of task and outcome had taken over, the leather on my couch transuding with the zeal of a third person. So saying, I backed away slightly in an attempt to make myself a more serviceable, cock-sucking machine.

“What are you doing?” Adrian roared.

“Relax.” I scooted down to pull his jeans and underwear the rest of the way off. "I am adjusting you." Then pushing his legs apart for better access, I went back to work. As predicted, shortly thereafter, Adrian blasted his seed into the back of my throat, the full amount of which took four gulps to swallow.

Now Adrian's next move, while not unappreciated, was totally unexpected. After regaining his faculties, he vaulted forward, grabbed my shoulders, and hurled me onto my back. “Take these off.” He whipped my bottoms across the room. "And show me your ass."

Bouncing onto my hand and knees, I was more than ready. "What are you going to do?"

"You'll see," he murmured, smoothing circles over my cheeks. “Now spread your legs wide and put your head down.”

Immediately, thoughts of my first time with Matt came streaming back, exciting me all the more. Then, with the flip of his wrist, Adrian gave me something that Matt had *never* given to me--an unheralded and sharp swat on the behind.

I laugh here because Adrian has lectured me time and time again on how to lay down a proper spanking. “It's not really how hard you do it, that's important,” he always

says. "It's more about the way the hand connects that gives it the best sting." Every time he explains it, I get a demonstration. "Here, let's see if you can notice the difference."

His first hit is intended to be the bad one--the one against which I shall judge the next. Fingers splayed with ponderous gesticulation, it leaves much to be desired. The second hit is supposed to be his trademark move, and for this one, his fingers are lined up in a tight row. Then, with dexterous reflexes, he tags me with a sharp strike similar to that of a whip, invariably leaving me both singing his praises and yowling in pain.

"That's how to do it, baby. You'll never meet a white man who can spank you the way I can." I chuckled the first time he said this, but I don't anymore. I have since discovered that a black man's penchant for asses is some serious business.

Having never been spanked before that afternoon on the couch, while the experience left me somewhat stunned, it also left me extremely aroused. When I wiggled back at him, Adrian gripped my buttocks and pried my cheeks apart.

"Jesus, Isabelle. I wanna fuck you so bad."

"Adrian, please..." I was shaking.

"Please, what?"

"Please put something inside."

Without hesitation, he slid three fingers in deep. "Take it," he commanded, twisting and turning his digits. "You've got to be ready for what you'll get next time." As I squirmed--rotating my hips with each respective push and pull of his fingers--Adrian reached under and began rubbing my clitoris. Within seconds, I was catapulting through heaven's gate. "Yes, baby. Let go..." I heard Adrian whisper, though truthfully, nothing could have stopped me then, and I slammed back against his hand--swallowing him, rejoicing in him--until my contractions were no more than feeble twinges.

Once I was able to breathe, we both just stared at each other. Without stating the obvious, we knew that this was the beginning of something special, and although we may have gotten naked that day, we didn't have intercourse. As much as I would've liked it, his "beef train" did not stop at my "tuna station", nor did we play hide and seek with his "one-eyed trouser snake".

Whatever you want to call it, we simply didn't do it. Fucking was still two weekends away. We did manage however, to exchange fluids and DNA, claiming eight more orgasms between us--five for me, and three for Adrian--over the next twelve-hour period.

Here Kitty, Kitty, Kitty

For most men, licking a woman's vagina is a delicacy, or so I'd been told. It's not something Caribbean men do, or at least, not something to which they admit. Where I come from, a man is supposed to act like a man, both in relation to other men and in relation to his woman as well. Thus, in terms of sexuality, anything even remotely homosexual in nature is considered taboo. As such, if you recognize that licking a woman's vagina means putting one's face where another man's penis may have been, you should be able to deduce why cunnilingus (for someone like me) is an unacceptable exploit.

Admittedly, not all Caribbean people think this way. And don't assume that everyone practices what they preach, because who knows what happens behind closed doors. The bottom line for me however was that I hadn't done it, nor was I planning on doing it, though I'd be lying if I said that I hadn't thought about it.

And no, I hadn't even done it with Shana, though she *had* asked--about a trillion times. When I finally got angry and told her in no uncertain terms that it would never happen, she broodingly left me alone.

With Isabelle, even though I'd avoided the act for a good month and a half, I was worried. Every instance we were naked together (and that was practically every time we were alone behind closed doors), we got more and more into it. I knew that eventually she would ask me to do it--she was a white woman after all. I was also concerned about how she would react to my answer.

"Will you lick my pussy, Adrian?" I imagined her saying.

To which I would reply, "Absolutely not."

"I'm leaving you."

Would she have discarded me like a coat with a broken zipper? I didn't think so, but I wondered if maybe she would make fun of me, or say OK and then get it somewhere else. I was positive that any number of white men would happily oblige her, and lots of other black men too.

So when she arrived at my house that day--one and a half months past the day we met--I had almost worked myself into a frenzy. While she sat at my kitchen table flipping through my newest sci-fi novel, my nerves had me fidgeting with the icemaker on my

refrigerator door. At any moment, I pictured her ripping off her clothes, spreading her legs, and telling me to do it. "Lick me, Adrian. Lick me. Lick me. Lick me." This mantra had become my worst nightmare.

"Would you like something to drink?" The glasses were on the counter, the orange juice already poured.

"Sure," she said, looking at me suspiciously. "I think I'll have some orange juice."

"Do you want anything else?" Big mistake.

"You know what I want," Isabelle answered, her typical flirtatious self.

That's all it took. I wanted to run until I hit the other side of the planet. "Let's go out to eat. There's this new place I've been dying to try."

"OK. Though I thought we might stay here." In a flash, she was across the room, rubbing up against my crotch.

"Oh, well..." I was having trouble. "Ummm, I don't have any food. We'll have to eat beans and toast." As you can see, I was reaching for ideas.

"I like beans and toast," she said, her hand shooting inside my fly.

"No, really, I want to take you out." Sucking in my pelvic region as if someone had punched me in the gut, I bolted over to the sink.

"You seem edgy, poor thing. I can fix that." She started coming after me again.

"No! No! I want to take you out!"

"Whoa, easy big boy." She held up her hands. "We'll do whatever you want. Let's go out to eat."

"Good," I sighed, happy for the break.

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The actual drive to the restaurant went off without a hitch. I occupied Isabelle with talk of a big case at work, and she kept her hands out of my lap the whole way there. We also managed to walk inside with relative civility, only linking elbows and kissing playfully. Once we'd sat down however--at a cozy corner booth near the fireplace--and our legs brushed, I knew her mood was back in full swing.

Browsing through the menu, she'd taken off one of her boots, (though I don't how she managed it), and was curling and uncurling her toes against my leg. "What are you going to have? I think I will try the steak or maybe the salmon." She slid closer and began nibbling on my ear.

Figuring that there was no conceivable means by which she could expect me to lick her pussy at the table, I accepted her advances and gave her buttocks a squeeze. Dragging her hand slowly up my thigh, she then unzipped the closure she'd attempted to invade earlier in the kitchen, resting her palm fortuitously on my hardening staff.

"Are you ready to order?" It was our waitress.

Startled, Isabelle and I looked up. "We'll both have the salmon and a glass of water," I practically yelled.

"Wow, you're smooth with the ladies," Isabelle snickered after the woman had left, her hand now completely inside my pants.

With her thumb rubbing the tip of my penis, I unwittingly came a little. "Shit!"

"Adrian, you're all wet," Isabelle purred. "Did you pee yourself?"

"You'd better stop," I begged. Just as she pulled her hand out of my drawers--sucking at her fingertips--the waitress came back.

Banging our glasses down loudly, she hissed, "Here are your drinks. The food will be ready shortly." She was not impressed. "Can I get you anything else?"

"No, I think we're good," Isabelle smirked. "I know I am."

Dinner continued much the same, with both of us staring at each other, eating slowly and licking our lips. Then, after about five minutes of utter silence, Isabelle announced, "My pussy is so wet that my legs are sticking together." Immediately, my focus went to her lap. When I couldn't reply, she reached over and grabbed my knee. "Adrian, can you smell me?" Raising the hem on her skirt, she offered a glimpse of her stockings. Now, if the comment about her pussy hadn't done it, the peak at those stockings certainly did, and just knowing that she was accessible in that area sent the raving lunatic in my pants into a tailspin. When she added, "I need your help," I almost fell onto the floor.

"We have to leave. Here, take the keys and go start the truck." I growled, practically pushing her out of her seat. "I'll get the check." In a hurry once more, I was desperate to get back home.

After Isabelle left, I struggled to put on my coat, struggled to cover up the dilemma in my pants, and struggled to find a waitress who'd mysteriously made herself unavailable. It took some doing, but I eventually paid the bill and ran outside.

When I got to the pick-up, Isabelle was leaning back in her seat, her skirt lifted, her underwear off. "What's going on?" I asked. "Aren't we heading back to my place?" Her pussy was indeed as slick as she'd predicted.

"Soon." She slid lower and spread her legs as wide as possible given the confines of the space.

Scanning our surroundings, I reached over and began to stroke her outer lips. "Does this make you feel better?"

"Oh god, I don't know." Her head was back, her hips bucking, her pussy begging for some relief.

Inviting and wet, she appeared so delicious that I *had* to taste her. With the tip of my tongue, I prodded her tentatively at first, worming around the edges of her folds, inhaling her aroma and savoring her tang. Soon however, I was unable to hold back, and I lunged at her labia, slurping and sucking and nibbling away until my face was ripe with her juices. Hell, I probably would've swallowed her clitoris if it hadn't been attached. As for Isabelle, I assumed she liked it because after about one minute, she yanked on my ears and pulled my head in even closer.

What possessed me to drive at her like that, I don't know. It could just as easily have been my hand going in to pleasure her, but it wasn't. Perhaps if we'd stayed home, none of it would have happened, or maybe I would have done the same thing there. Maybe going to the restaurant had nothing to do with it. Who knows?

Isabelle and I have always been so comfortable with each other that we just blend. When we are making love, it is sometimes hard to tell where her body starts and my body ends. So after my first blitz on her vagina, the skies cleared up and the rain clouds floated away. It was suddenly comprehensible that putting my face close enough to her most private region--looking at it, touching it, smelling it, and finally tasting it--was something I *could* do, that it was something I *wanted* to do, something I *enjoyed* doing.

And no, Isabelle didn't ask for it, and it didn't even happen the way I'd expected it to. My guess was that Isabelle would've simply pushed my face into that spot during an intimate moment. Much to my surprise, she remained hands off the entire time--well, almost the entire time. Again, this reinforces to me that the impetus to lick her must've come from within.

Now, it's one thing to refrain from doing something because it's supposedly awful, and quite another to refrain from that same thing because it's forbidden. Forbidden things that are allegedly extraordinary never remain undone for very long. So yes, I wanted to try it. I wanted to do it, and I did it, off limits to me or not.

Oddly enough, Isabelle has never asked me why I chose that place and that time to do what I did. She seemed quite content with how it all worked out. Right after, she plunked herself onto my lap, and kept on plunking until I'd squirted the rest of my load--what wasn't already starching my underwear--into the far reaches of her heavenly cavity.

All things aside, I feel that I should address the point about deviating from what I'd originally thought were righteous beliefs. You will recall that my cup was half empty for a very long period of my life. Well, Isabelle changed all that. Instead of concentrating on the negative, she taught me to focus on the positive. Thus, the question regarding cunninglingus became not why, but why not, switching its promise in my head from something that might downgrade my masculinity, to an act that might be beneficial to us both.

I knew that Isabelle's pussy looked nice, and that it smelled good--two plusses that licking her had right off the bat. I also knew, without a doubt, that she would like it. And the list went on: I loved her, and I wanted to do things for her. Furthermore, she was happy to lick my penis, so why not return the favor? I trusted that she wasn't sleeping around behind my back, so the idea of consuming another man's semen seemed a bit redundant.

Aside from my father, (whose advice on women probably wasn't the best anyway), and the other Caribbean men who had given their two cents' worth, lots of other males claimed to enjoy it. So why should I miss out? It certainly wasn't going to hurt anybody. It was only going to bring Isabelle more pleasure. So I did it once, loved it, and kept right on going.

You might ask what I say to my Caribbean brothers on this topic. Well, in short, I don't say anything. It is really none of their business. That's not the real question though, is it? Do I still consider myself a manly man when I do it? Damn right, I do. If there's one thing I've learned, it's that a real man's philosophies about his relationship are based on wanting to please his partner, not in trying to keep things from her or in acting solely to protect himself. You become a man by taking risks to help and uplift others--women in particular. I think you will agree that my ideologies have changed for the better. Isabelle would sure say they have.

The First Time

What I am about to describe to you isn't the first time that Adrian and I engaged in sexual intercourse. Actually, the very first time was not my moment of truth and besides, it was over with so quickly that it's hardly worth recounting. In fact, the very first time Adrian put his penis inside my vagina, it lasted all of about four minutes, if you count the three and a half minutes of kissing that went on before it. Four minutes and we both came so hard that it must've seemed like 422 Mountview Drive had suffered some kind of minor catastrophe. Even now, I picture dear Mrs. Brown scrambling to find shelter under her kitchen table.

An elderly widow, Mrs. Brown lived in the condo next to mine, and when she wasn't stroking one of her five cats, she was checking in on me, as I'd become her surrogate daughter for the time we shared adjoining houses. It was on his fourth visit (surprisingly not before) that she met Adrian. When I got to the door, they were already engaged in conversation. "Isabelle has told me so much about you," I heard Mrs. Brown say. No doubt she'd been watching out her front window for visitors.

"And I've heard so much about you as well, Mrs. Brown," Adrian replied, pleasant as pie.

"Oh, Mrs. Brown," I joined in. "I'm so glad you've finally met Adrian. Now you have a face to put to the name." I might have added "and the sounds" if the meeting had occurred a couple of hours later. Admittedly, it was the first night that he and I went at it like gangbusters. "He's just coming over for a little visit," I said, pausing to exchange a knowing glance with Adrian.

"That's nice dear," Mrs. Brown said, ignoring my hint.

"Well, we'd better get going. It sure is chilly out here." I rubbed my arms for effect.

Mrs. Brown talked a few more minutes, asking Adrian about his family and his background. Finally, when I couldn't take it any longer, I said, "I'm completely frozen. I think my toes are turning to ice."

Downtrodden, Mrs. Brown acquiesced. "Yes, you're right, dear. I'll see you later."

Jumping at the opportunity to be alone with my new boyfriend, I hauled Adrian

inside. "Bye Mrs. Brown! Have a good night," I yelled, quickly securing the latch.

Alone at last, we kissed, our passion leading to a whirlwind of sexual escapades that I won't soon forget. Now, as I've indicated by the title of this chapter, this was to be an evening of firsts. To be exact, it was the first time that I told Adrian I loved him, though the words didn't come out quite the way you might expect.

Let me specify that this monumental occurrence took place during the third of five sexual encounters we had that night--after one round of sex in the living room and another in the kitchen. We were then refueling on homemade pizzas when Adrian suggested that we go into the bedroom. "It might be fun to try it the old-fashioned way for a change."

"Sure, let's go," I said, hurrying him down the hall. Once in my room, we both dove onto the bed, wrestling and playing. Somehow, during our romp, Adrian ended up on my back.

"I'm never going to let you get up." His tone was menacing.

"OK. What if I don't *want* to get up? Then what, tough guy? Your threats don't hold much power do they?"

He ignored me. "Do you think I could fuck you if you stayed on your stomach and kept your legs together?"

"I don't know."

"Well, let's see," he said, yanking at my pants.

"I guess it's a good thing you're taking off some of my clothing," I joked. "That will help."

"I'll leave your underwear on."

"Whatever you say."

"So pretty," he mumbled, prying my ass cheeks apart.

"Are you trying to rip me in half, Adrian?"

"Quiet." He seemed distracted.

"I love the way you tell me to be quiet," I teased. "In fact, I think I just damn well love you." Neither one of us had said it for real. It was far too soon for that.

"You'll love me a whole lot more if you could just stop talking," he snapped, urgently kissing the back of my neck. Fumbling about to remove his own pants, he then prodded at me with his cock, apparently serious about oiling his dipstick with my legs closed. "Now stretch out your arms."

Willingly, I made my body as long as possible. "Like this?"

"Good." He yanked my panties to one side and repeatedly inserted and withdrew his fingers into my vagina, smearing my juices onto my rear. "That should do it." Finished part one of his treatment, I knew what was coming next and I eagerly curved my spine like a sleepy cat, molding my bellybutton to the blankets.

"Let's make it last, baby," he sighed, penetrating me with relative ease.

"Mmmmm, yes."

Rolling my hips in a slow figure eight, I consumed him hungrily, happily, but just when I could feel his excitement mounting, he pulled back out. "Turn over."

Seeing him there settled on the bed, I imagined him as a young boy, his eyes wide as he gazed upon my womanly form. With his penis completely straight--a ready rocket--I wanted to tell him that I would be his for all eternity, but before I had a chance, he patted his thighs. "Come. Sit on my lap,"

Coily I refused, standing on the mattress like a mythical giantess instead. Straddling his outstretched legs, I watched him from above as he gradually moved in, his appearance ominous in that dimly lit room. If I hadn't known better, I would've thought him dangerous, his skin color manifesting as something negative to me for the first time. Before then, he'd always been Adrian--sexy, funny, thoughtful, athletic, and nice--Adrian. He'd never been "black" Adrian, but then of course, he was. He was black and I was white.

Our color differences were unmistakable even if, for the most part, I didn't see them. That night however, his dark brown flesh held a particularly vehement aura and I feasted on the way his fingertips disappeared into the shadows of my crotch. Desperately, I needed him to see my flushed insides, my blossoming inner lips, and my delicate rosebud. I needed so much for him to examine me up close that I stepped out of my underwear and splayed my cream-colored thighs as wide as possible.

"Do you want something?" he asked, toying with my swollen labia.

"Yes, I do. Could you please..." I opened myself wider.

Smirking, Adrian re-inserted his fingers into my cavity. "Is this good?"

Noticing his penis bouncing around like a fidgety knee, I ground onto his hand until he'd bumped the curve of my cervix. "Yes, that's perfect." After about twenty seconds--my thighs burning--I stood up and moved directly in front of his face.

"Now what?"

"Mmmmm," I whined.

"Tell me what you want or you'll get nothing."

I frowned momentarily, not sure I could be so crass. "Adrian, look at me," I ultimately whispered.

"Look at what?"

"You know."

"No, I don't. You have to say it." He wasn't about to let me off so easy.

"I want you to look at my pussy," I said, forcing myself to say the full sentence. Then, like a regular trollop, I added, "I want you to suck on my clit the way you did yesterday. Suck it until I cum all over your face."

"That's what I like to hear," he growled, gently easing my lips apart. "You know I love the way you taste."

"Go slow this time," I sighed, holding his ears as he began probing my opening. "Slow..."

Ponderously, he dressed and undressed my engorged labia, tonguing my hole and nursing on my folds until I was ready to scream. On a reprieve, he assuaged his erection. "See what I have for you?"

"Put it in," I implored, plunging to within inches of his cock.

Pulling his foreskin tight, he said, "Come on." And making my descent, I swallowed him inch by glorious inch. "That's nice," Adrian sighed. "Now wash that pole."

Laughing, I did my best to fulfill his request, mimicking a merry-go-round horse for as long as I could. When my thighs began to spasm however, I pulled off, collapsing at his side. "I can't go anymore."

"Come back baby. Rest on your knees." He helped me readjust and we continued on with pasted torsos, grappling arms and twining tongues, loitering with the actual "in"

and "out" of it all in an attempt to delay the inevitable. A couple of times Adrian had to pause, his face vibrating, his eyes clamping shut like he was trying to stop a train wreck. "Here," he said. "Set your feet out to the side so I can push myself all the way in."

Eagerly complying, I widened my aperture, driving him to the very end of my passage, thereby heightening the friction between us. With increased zeal, I undulated back and forth, and back and forth, kissing him ferociously, pounding onto him for all I was worth, the culmination of which left us both blown away.

After, with our private parts joined and sticky--my chin pressed into the sweaty skin of his back, his forehead stuck to my collarbone--we rolled in and out of an effortless slumber for a good five minutes or so. Rousing at last, we hugged each other tight, both of us luxuriating in the scent of our sex, both of us contemplating all we'd done that day.

And just when I thought the moment was over, Adrian began outlining some kind of shape onto my back, tracing it over again and again. Realizing what it was, I smiled in silence, the heart becoming a permanent etching on my skin. Without a doubt, I knew that it was his subtle response to the comment I'd made earlier that evening.

And you'll never believe this, but apart from his tendency to draw hearts all over my body, that was how Adrian expressed his love for me for the first decade of our marriage. It wasn't until our tenth wedding anniversary that he actually looked me in the eye and said the words "I love you"--not even once.

Going Away

"I have to go away for a while," I mumbled, struggling to say the words. It was business--my other business--and I wanted Isabelle to understand. Sure, we both worked at the same law firm, but unlike Isabelle, I wasn't one of the head honchos. I was never going to be. Agreed, a paralegal makes more than chump change, but a man in my position needs to keep his options open.

Like most black men who are transplants from other countries--who were not born in the land of hopes and dreams but who moved here with their parents as children, or who came here on their own as young adults--like those men, I have more than one job. Note that I didn't say *two* jobs, I said *more than one*, the number of subsequent jobs fluctuating depending on their duration and profitability.

I have my main job--the one that pays most of the bills--but I also have a couple of others on the side: temporary positions, pieces of work, if you will. In order to make money, I might even help out a friend with one of *his* jobs and then take a cut of the paycheck. I've also been known (in a tight squeeze)--when my heat has been shut off or my child support payments are overdue--to hustle for a dollar. Please understand that felonious activities are not practices of which I make a habit, but I have succumbed to the allure of their dividends--had to--on more than a single occasion.

Let me explain what it is I do outside the office. Simply put, I'm a businessman. I buy product in North America and sell it again for profit in the Caribbean, bringing stuff to places where certain items just aren't available. Usually my trips last for a couple of weeks, but more often than not, it's more like a couple of months. On a day to day basis, I meet with established clients, round up new ones, and chase down customers who owe me money, shuffling around from place to place until my feet hurt and my brain is ready to explode.

It may be difficult, be I love this job. I'm damn good at it too, if I do say so myself. The best thing about it is that I set my own pace and make my own hours, and I would do it as a full time gig, except that it's not very reliable. Some years people want to buy; others, they don't or can't. Thus, my sales career stays on the side, wavering in boon from one year to the next.

I'm sure you've heard the saying, "Don't put all your eggs in one basket." Well,

there's another one that my Auntie lives to repeat and it goes, "No hang you clothes all pon one nail." As an immigrant whose homeland accent is a constant reminder to the white man that I am a foreigner, in whose opinion (and of this I'm almost positive), I am an interloper trying to usurp his jobs, his tax dollars and his women, I take such messages to heart.

For poor people--not those trying to get by with a single car or those who have to wait a month to pay off their Visa bill--but for people who come from bona fide insolvency--who will *never* have a Visa card and who know all too well that the women at the social assistance office are bitches--for those poor people, it is engrained in their heads, just like it is in mine, that it can be profitable (almost mandatory) to spread themselves around, sometimes in more ways than one.

As such, I pledge allegiance to a number of different jobs in order to keep my head above water, and I take very seriously the responsibilities of each and every one of them. Some people aren't set up with their daddy's money and others don't have the connections to secure themselves a lucrative profession. What I needed was for my white woman--Isabelle--to grasp and tolerate this mode for survival.

Not only that, but I wanted her to understand the rest of my complexities as well. She needed to appreciate the influences that had shaped my world, and she needed to tolerate all the baggage and history that came along with loving me. She also needed to support the choices that I made, however much at odds those choices were with hers. At that point in time--in the relatively new phase of our relationship--I had my doubts that she would ever identify with me completely.

And so, on the day that I told her I'd be leaving town for a couple of months, I hoped she could see what was compelling me to go, but when I saw the hurt look coming even before the edges of her mouth turned down, I was skeptical. She didn't want to hear about it. She didn't want to conceive of the time that we would have to be apart, and as the moment of my departure approached, she became more and more agitated.

I worried that she would assume I was going just to get away from her, or to take a break from our increasingly intense relationship, as some men might do. But to say that she would miss me and that I would miss her, was an understatement. We had become good friends, great friends, best friends, and so much more. We just liked being around each other. She made me laugh and I calmed her nerves. She was quirky; I was sedate.

She didn't need me though and the more I got to know her, the more I knew she was definitely *not* another Shana. Isabelle didn't need me to take her places or do odd jobs for her. She likewise didn't need me to support her emotionally or financially. That was obvious. She had a loving family, supportive friends and she made a shit-load of cash as a lawyer and soon-to-be partner at Braun and Bower. Indeed, she wasn't like most other women, and certainly not like any other white woman I'd ever met.

But before continuing with this discussion, let me tell you what I *thought* I knew about white women back then. Yeah, I'd heard black people talk--my cousins, my friends, my friends' sisters, men on the street, the women at church, etc. etc.--and the outlook for a black man and a white woman to make it as a couple seemed to me about as good as shooting oneself in the foot.

First, there was the "big picture"--the panorama that I was forced to confront each and every day of my young life. If you don't already know, (and if you don't, you *must* be white), you might wonder why some black people feel so strongly that blacks and

whites should remain separate, particularly when it comes to dating, falling in love, and propagating the species. Well, that's easy. Consider for a moment that whites enslaved blacks for hundreds of years. Recognize further that many of them still don't see blacks as equals, that they don't trust us, probably never will.

But if the general mess between the races wasn't enough to deter me, there were also the specific personality flaws of the Caucasian female that, from what I'd been told, could only cause heartache and pain in the long run. If you asked them, any number of black men (or women) would tell you the same thing. They would say that white women only want black men for their bodies and supposed sexual prowess, that they are depraved and spoiled sorts who only want big cocks and swerving hips in order to fulfill a couple of forbidden fantasies. But beware, you'll be told, she is fickle in her desires, dropping the object of her lust like a hot potato once she has used him up.

And it doesn't stop there. As used to getting her own way as she is, the white woman is basically submissive, self-deprecating, and vacuous. That's how she will snare the black man in her trap, doing what she's told, servicing his every whim and engaging in all kinds of kinky sexual stuff that any self-respecting sister would never do. But in the end, she can never be satisfied or faithful, having to slake her desire for change and lust by taking more than one man into her bed.

She sounds pretty terrible, doesn't she? However bad I thought white girls were, it wasn't bad enough because even with this long list of considerations, I ended up with my white girl anyway, though afterwards I was kicking myself for having done so. Of course, I never thought that Shana leaving had anything to do with me at the time. In my mind, there was no way that our separation was anything but her fault.

Back then, friends and family did their best to make me feel better however. "You can't trust 'em you know. Not any of them," said good ole Mr. Lespinasse, a friend of my father's. This was his comment when I first brought Shana home. It was also his comment when we broke up.

After Shana, I told myself to stay away from those white imps and I managed to do just that for about five years, dating a number of women from various ethnic groups to pass the time. Though none of these relationships ever really got off the ground, they were all very nice women who were special in their own way. It was almost as if I was subconsciously waiting for someone else to come along though, and I kept my distance emotionally, using them for sex and companionship.

Now, when Isabelle entered the picture, I felt the attraction immediately, but I tried to stay away, reminding myself just how hurt I'd been by Shana. You can't control lust though, can you? Besides, Isabelle seemed different from Shana *and* different from what I'd been told about white women in general.

For one thing, she was strong--physically, emotionally and spiritually. Furthermore, it appeared that she knew what she wanted out of life and that she was on the right track to achieving it. Moreover, she had the cast of an authentic human being, like what she said she meant, (with the exception of her sarcastic comments), and like what she intended was for us to be together forever.

On the subject of sex--and this is where you might say I could've been fooled--I never thought that she wanted me because I was black. In my opinion, she wanted me for me. OK, I'll admit, she wanted my body to both pleasure and consume in every way known to man, but I honestly didn't think that it had anything to do with the color of my

skin. That was a key part of what I held to be true about Isabelle. My happiness with her was and is, based on this assumption.

Considering all the racial issues, I count it as a good thing that Isabelle is white. She managed to get past my defenses that way, and she fooled me all right, but not in the manner I'd been warned she might. She never pretended to be stupid or obsequious to get me into bed, and she never gave me the impression that she wanted to use my body and throw me away.

When we first started dating, it was my perception that she only wanted to love me, and it was *because of her color* that I let her into my world. After Shana, I'd been guarding against those evil Caucasian attributes, but when none of them ever surfaced, I allowed Isabelle to breach my outer trenches. After that, she wheedled her way in past the rest.

Isabelle, in all her alabaster glory, was everything my mother had taught me to find in a lover and partner, but I didn't realize it in the beginning. All I knew at that stage in our relationship was that my going away, (whether it was something I felt compelled to do or not), was going to be tough on the both of us.

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When I called to remind Isabelle that my flight left at three, she said, "I'll be over within the hour. I have something for you." At this, I smiled because she *always* had something for me. From home-baked goodies to movies she thought I might enjoy, her hands were always full. And true to her word, when she showed up at my door fifteen minutes later, she was carrying a tiny present bag. "Here. I made this special for you."

"What is it?"

"You can't look at it yet. Wait until you are alone and things are quiet, OK?" She leaned in for a kiss.

"OK," I said, happy to have her in my arms. "I think we have some time before my cab comes."

"I like the sound of that," she purred, leading me down the hall and into the bedroom.

Squirrel-dogs and Bubblegum Wrappers

“I must warn you Isabelle, I don’t talk very much,” Adrian confessed one day, about a year into our relationship. It came out as we were walking in the park one afternoon.

“Well, that’s great news. And why are you’re telling me this now?” I asked, somewhat perplexed.

“I just thought that before we go any further, you should know what I’m really like.”

“Go any further with what? This walk?” I knew what he was getting at, but I wanted him to say it.

“You know, with our relationship.”

“Oh, that little thing...”

“Yes Isabelle, *that* little thing. The little thing that is turning into a really *big* thing.”

“Big? I hadn’t noticed,” I said, trying hard to keep a straight face.

“Don’t lie. You know things are getting serious between us.”

“It seems to me that things have been serious between us since the day we met, so why are you just now giving me the lowdown on your shortcomings?” I wondered what kind of thought process went into making a statement about one’s own faults. “Are you trying to make yourself look bad or something?”

“No.” Adrian answered plainly.

“Besides, you seem to have done a pretty good job at keeping up your end of our conversations so far,” I said. And it was true. We’d had some great discussions.

“I just want you to know about all of my bad traits before we get too involved.”

“Too involved? Haven’t we already established that we are fairly involved with each other?”

“You know what I mean. Before I ask you to marry me or something.” I think the words slipped out.

“Oh, OK.” I smiled despite myself. “So what are your other bad qualities then?”

“Well, apart from being quiet, I can be messy. Not too messy though. And I like to sleep in. Not like noon or anything, and only if I’ve been up late the night before.” He

continued, "I leave gum wrappers in my pants' pockets a lot because I like to chew gum, and they usually end up in the washing machine. I also have this thing about dogs. I'm afraid of them I mean, but only the little ones. They are yappy and they remind me of squirrels. Whenever I see one, I picture it lunging at my face like the rabbit in that Monte Python movie."

He rattled on for a good four or five minutes, listing all of the qualities he thought might ultimately send me packing. Finally, I had to cut him off. "Ummm, Adrian, you're not being too quiet right now. It sounds to me that you enjoy talking," I laughed.

Caught, he cleared his throat. "Well, I *am* quiet most of the time, unless I have something really important to say."

"You mean like squirrel-dogs and bubblegum wrappers?" He had no comeback to my sarcasm, so I took advantage of the silence. "Well, I think I have a pretty good handle on what you're all about and besides, who said that being quiet was such a bad thing? Maybe it's good. You know, you think before you speak. If anyone has a problem, it's me. I'm the one who talks too much. So if you talk a little and I talk a lot, then maybe we'll balance each other out."

"That sounds about right," he said.

When I turned to kiss him on the cheek however, I saw that he was frowning. Suddenly, I felt queasy. "Unless of course you are telling me this stuff to get *out* of our relationship," I said, kicking at a big pinecone. "If that's the case, then you just need to say it." I was being insecure; I knew it, though I couldn't figure out why he'd ever want to break up. Things between us were going great.

"Jeez, don't ever think that," Adrian pleaded. "I just don't want to get in too deep, and then have you bail. I couldn't handle it. Not with you. So I need everything to be out in the open." At that point, he steered us over to a park bench and we sat down. "Speaking of out in the open, there's something that I've been meaning to tell you."

"What is it?" I was almost afraid to ask.

"I have to go away for a while." He was staring at my mouth.

"Where?"

"Remember I told you? I have to go south to sell off all the stuff I've been collecting over the past year."

"Yes, I remember," I said, sad almost immediately. "So when do you leave?" I didn't want him to go, and I couldn't imagine being without him for more than a day or two.

"Right after Christmas. That was the only time I could get off."

"How long?"

"Two months probably." He looked away.

"Two months. That's a long time."

"Not that long. It'll go by fast. You'll probably be so busy with work that you'll hardly even notice."

"Yeah, hardly."

For a while, we sat in complete silence, me stroking the stubble on his chin, Adrian twirling the ends of my hair around and around his fingers. Nothing more was said. Nothing more needed to be said. I knew that he valued his jobs. They weren't something I ever wanted him to stop doing, but I won't lie and say that my stomach didn't hurt already from missing him so much.

A World Apart

After a four and a half hour flight, and a long drive to the motel, I was finally supplanted in a musty room with floral upholstery and matching bed coverings. Sitting down on the edge of the mattress, I yawned deeply and reached in to empty out my pants' pockets.

It came out of the left side, along with one tiny paper clip, two pieces of balled-up lint and a handful of bubble gum wrappers. The thin parchment--a flecked color-combination of eggshell white and waxy green--was like an accordion, a hand-folded band of paper about two inches wide by what must've been twenty-eight inches long. Weaving back and forth, it collapsed on itself in the shape of a perfect square.

A delicate souvenir, it reflected the discriminating nature of its maker and as I expanded the pages of my simulated book, I caught a glimpse of seven different shapes drawn in black ink. "Seven symbols for seven days. Study one each day until the week is over and start again as needed," Isabelle had said--demanded almost--earlier that afternoon. I knew it was important to her that I did this right, so I carefully repositioned the keepsake back to its original form and turned my attention to the image on the front.

Day one. The first page was almost blank except for a single character etched in the shape of a slightly deformed letter "H". An alphabetical aberrant slanting casually to the right, it looked like a feeble old man ready to topple to the ground. Beneath it was a word written so small that I had to squint my eyes to make it out. It read "fortitude".

Philosophical as always, Isabelle had given me a gift that left me wondering. I thought about that first word, "fortitude". What did she want me to think? Was my trip supposed to be a trial of sorts? Was it a test for me, or for her, or for the both of us? Would she need to call on the gods of "fortitude" to help her get her through my time away, or did she assume I would?

On the second day, I was presented with another odd-looking symbol, this one in the shape of a very tall letter "M". Its corresponding word was "progress". Again, Isabelle had me guessing. Was I supposed to be making "progress" while I was away? I sure hoped so. That was my main goal.

With each day came a different symbol and another word--more messages and more hidden meanings--"strength", "peace", "fortune", and "patience". Her inner tricky

white girl was finally coming out, and as the week went on, every moment that I missed the touch of Isabelle's hands on my face or the taste of her mouth on my lips, I found myself thinking about her booklet.

Admittedly, she is a smart woman and she knew that I'd need a part of her with me--something that could speak for her when she couldn't, something that could touch me somehow when her hands were so far away. By giving me the booklet, she was forcing me to think about her *and* about our relationship.

On the seventh day, returning to my motel room completely exhausted, I almost forgot to check my manual of revelations before dropping off to sleep. But whenever I climb into bed, (even thousands of miles away), I think of Isabelle, and thinking of Isabelle made me remember to check my final message. When I flipped open the booklet this time however, I didn't see exactly what I was expecting. There were no more symbols (at least no more of the kind I'd been getting up until then), and no more words either. On the very last page, she'd simply drawn a heart.

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During the day and into the early evening hours, time flew over the next five weeks, but each night, once I'd gotten settled at the hotel, it was just the opposite. That's when I got lonely. Back at page seven of my gift--the heart page--I stared at the symbol. Of all of them, at least I knew what it meant--what *she* meant. Isabelle had proclaimed her love for me many times before that day, and the feelings on both of our parts were definitely there.

As I held the paper that Isabelle had so carefully crafted, I thought about her hands, and thinking about her hands made me think about her stroking the smoothness of my back or flitting her fingers over my penis. Slow and gentle at first, I envisioned her tracing back and forth over my swelling member, as usual, provoking more restlessness than release.

It's on a very rare occasion that Isabelle will bring me to the top of the mountain and shove me straight over, and in one instance, she actually walked away completely. I remember that day only too well. Isabelle was in the middle of giving me the best blowjob ever, when suddenly she stopped and got up. "Where are you going?" I cried as she fixed her clothes, preparing to leave.

"I have to be in court early tomorrow. It's a huge case, and I still have some last minute preparations to address. Please say you understand?"

When she leaned down to give me a good-bye kiss, my hard-on practically clawed its way up her leg. "Ummm, but, couldn't we just finish this. I mean, you're not going to leave me here, are you?" Frustrated, I wanted to grab her hips, hike up her skirt, and jam my cock into whichever hole it found first, but I didn't. I didn't want to scare her off. We'd only been seeing each other for a few weeks by then. Instead, I just lay there and watched her leave.

Talk about blue balls. I ached for hours, even after playing with myself multiple times to ease the throbbing. Of course, I wasn't too happy about it at first, but when she came back to me four days later, we fucked like no one's ever fucked before, and when I *did* cum, I was surprised that the blast didn't shoot out one of the various openings in her head.

I've since figured out that her little stunt was a test to see how I would react when she asserted herself. Really, she wanted me to use force and bring her back. How do I know this? Well, the next time she pulled a similar trick, I did just that--I couldn't stop myself. I let her think that I was allowing her to go, and then I chased her out to the kitchen and pushed her facedown onto the table. She sang for me louder that day than I'd ever heard her.

When I'm with Isabelle, my body demands urgency you see, but that's hardly ever what I get. And maybe it's because she doesn't always give me exactly what I want when I want it that has me hooked. Who knows? In my lumpy bed that evening--so far away from home, so far from the woman I was growing to love--I was desperate for her touch, and kneading over the thickness that was mounting in my drawers, I vowed to prolong my pleasure in a manner similar to hers.

Without Isabelle there to hold me back however, my hand was inside my shorts in no time flat, visions of her body loving mine dancing in my head. And as enticing and romantic as that sounds, after about one minute of jerking off, I discovered that things were not going as usual. Whether it was from being away from her for so long, or from not engaging in sexual intercourse for weeks, it didn't matter. I was beating my meat for all I was worth, yet my penis was sloppy.

"Fuck!" I yelled, the word echoing off the walls, confirming the fact (as if I wasn't aware of it already) that I was alone in a crappy motel room. Diagnosing the problem as a state of hyper-arousal (if such a thing even exists), I was determined to make it work. Thinking that it couldn't hurt, I tried pleading with my own manhood. "We'll see her again soon," I soothed. "But tonight it's just you and me--like in the good old days. We've had some fun times together, haven't we?" I tightened my grip. "Come on..." Tighter. "Can't you just pretend that she's with us tonight?" And like I'd said the magic words, my wilted flower began to grow.

Performing up to speed, I shoved my pants down to my ankles and sped up the tempo of my cock play. In my head, I tried to mellow things out, concentrating on an image of Isabelle poised between my legs ready to take me inside her mouth.

"Do you like this Adrian?" In my daydream, she fluttered a kiss onto the tip of my penis, then began licking from the very base of the shaft right up to the top. "Do you like it when I lick you this way?"

As it happens, during sex, Isabelle often asks questions. It seems that she really wants to know, do I like the way she licks me, touches me, or kisses me? Is she doing things right? Of course I do, and of course she is, more than she could ever imagine. "Do you like it when I lick you this way?" Yes. It's the same every single time. "Am I wet enough for you?" Yes. "Do you want me to take you all the way inside?" Yes, yes, and more yes!

For me, making love to Isabelle is easy and we've never had to try very hard to make it work. For the first year however, my all-consuming passion for her, lead to a fear of losing myself--of loving her too much--and of giving myself over to another person completely, none of which I'd ever done before.

In my room that night so far away from home, those fears came rushing at me like a rhinoceros in heat. Back at the motel, I looked down at my penis--erect and raring to go--and I mulled over the moments before when it was hanging like a limp noodle. It was then that I saw the depth of Isabelle's influence over me. She'd invaded my system and I

knew that if I stayed with her any longer, that I'd be lost to her love forever. This implied that I could never leave, and it also implied the reverse, which is what I think I was having the most trouble with--that I would die if she ever left me.

Inundated by thoughts of a heavenly ball and chain, and hounded by a cock in desperate need of some release, it was all I could do to finish what I'd started. So I put the issue of our relationship on the back burner, reassured myself that I wouldn't be without her much longer, and watched as my phantom lover went into action, her mouth hovering over the tip of my cock as she swirled her tongue around its head circle after slow circle.

I imagined Isabelle plucking at my nipples like she was pulling feathers out of my chest, her golden hair flowing onto my thighs as she laved up and down my shaft--tonguing it, pressing her lips to it like it was some giant popsicle on a hot summer's day. "Don't do it on the side like that Isabelle. I don't like it."

"Don't you?" I knew she would ask.

"No, I like it like this." I visualized myself lifting her head and shoving hard into her illusory mouth, urging her to go faster and harder.

Now, it would've been nice if I'd actually squirted into the back of her throat, and it would've been great to see drips of cum dribbling down the sides of her face. Instead, when I came, the white liquid hit me square in the eye, blinding me for a few seconds until I was able to get a washcloth to wipe myself clean.

The rest of the trip progressed pretty much the same, and by the end, I was more than ready to see Isabelle.

Coming Home

Adrian had been gone a couple of months--seven weeks, one day, and five and one-quarter hours, to be exact. Just as he'd predicted, I'd been busy with work, but busy didn't take away the sting of his absence. It couldn't keep him out of my head and interestingly enough it was the topic of conversation when he called me just two days prior to his return.

I hadn't more than said hello when he asked, "Do you see me everywhere you go Isabelle? Do you look for me, even if I'm not there?"

"Yes," I replied truthfully. I thought about his charismatic smile and his sexy, brown eyes.

"I am on your mind then?"

"Of course you are on my mind, and quite frankly, I don't know how you can even ask me that question. I am obsessed with you, don't you know that?" I was desperate to see him.

"That's good, because I'm going crazy here without you too. Literally."

"What does that mean--literally?"

"Oh, don't worry about it. It's just that my body isn't working properly."

"Your body? Are you sick or something?"

"No. Not sick. I'm having some trouble with my penis, that's all." Adrian sounded forlorn.

"Maybe something is wrong with you. You've never had a problem before."

"Oh, I know what's wrong, but I won't be able to fix it for another few days."

I still hadn't clued in. "Aren't there any doctors down there?"

"Jesus, Isabelle. You are so dense sometimes. My problem is that I miss you. My penis especially."

"Oh," I said. "Well, my vagina misses you too." And she did.

We both missed each other and on the day of his homecoming, I couldn't get anything done. My stomach was in knots and I had a million questions running through my mind. Would Adrian be the same? Would his absence have changed things between us? Would he want me just as much as he did before he left? Now, I realize that all of this speculation may sound silly to you, because, as you might point out, he'd only been gone

for two months. But when things are going so well, you don't want any of it to change, and no one can ever tell what some time away will do to a relationship.

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His flight was scheduled to touch down Sunday evening at 8 p.m., and I'd spent most of that day getting ready. At 8:01, I was sitting in the kitchen, drumming my fingers on the table, waiting for the phone to ring. The last we'd spoke, he'd said he'd call for a ride.

At 8:09, I hadn't heard from him. At 8:45, still nothing. At 9:01, I started to worry, so I called his cell. No answer. At 9:15, in a panic, I checked with the airport to see that his flight had arrived safely and on schedule. It had.

At 9:30, I was angry. At 9:56, I was never going to speak to him again. At 10:30, I took what little clothing of his was strewn around my condo, and folded it neatly in a pile by the door. At 11:00, I cried for a while, imagining him in another woman's arms, in another woman's bed.

At 11:30 p.m., I berated myself for being so insecure. At 12:20, I tried to get some sleep but ended up laying awake most of the night over-thinking the situation. Finally, by about 5 a.m., when I was no longer able to fight off the mental and physical exhaustion, I fell into a pit of slumber. At 7 a.m., my alarm clock went off, waking me to the sounds of Stevie Wonder. "I just called to say I love you. I just called to say how much I care..."

"Thanks for reminding me Stevie." I slammed down on the snooze button and pulled the sheets back over my head. "Shit!" I yelled into my cave of loneliness. "I have to get out of here."

Plodding despondently down the hall, I almost tripped over Wilma, my cat. "Freakin' men. Who needs 'em anyway?" I said to myself. Wilma spied me from around the corner, alternating paw licking with face swiping in that nonchalant, self-cleaning way that cats do. Seeing her impassive face, I wished I were a cat. Life would've been so much simpler.

True, Adrian was just a man, but he was a man I'd fallen head over heels in love with, and an absentee phone call on a night when I'd expected fireworks in my bed, or in his bed, or any bed for that matter, signaled a problem. After all the time we'd spent together, hadn't Adrian come to understand my temperament? Wouldn't he know how worried I'd be if he didn't call?

As it turns out, I was both right and wrong about the whole situation, a revelation that was to come later that day.

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After forlornly getting ready for work, I headed out into the briskness of winter. A light snow had fallen the night of my terrible woes and there was a thin blanket of white on every surface. As I approached my car, I noticed something out of place. Someone had drawn the figure of a heart on my windshield. "Who did that?" I said to a passing squirrel. Then sliding in to start the engine, I waited for the car to warm up, studying the glass in front of me. Rubbing my hands together for warmth, I pondered the curves of the mysteriously placed shape.

And then it dawned on me, as surely as it has dawned on you. Undoubtedly, the heart was the work of my lover. It was a message to me from Adrian, the same message I'd sent with him on his trip, the same message I'd outlined on his chest that day at the pool, the same message I'd sung or stated or conveyed in some way--repeatedly--over the previous twelve months.

Now, it also dawned on me just how the heart must've gotten where it was, how Adrian must've come over very early that morning to do the deed. While I'd been seething in my bed, he'd been outside playing. And while I was happy that he hadn't forgotten about me, I wasn't too thrilled that he'd made me worry and wait.

Arriving at the office, I was still angry, but when I saw Adrian planted in his chair--his elbows practically buried in the surface of his desk--those feelings vanished completely. Overwhelmed, my knees actually buckled and my body began to shake. I set my hand against the wall to prevent myself from falling.

There we were, me at one end of the hall, Adrian at the other, the silence unbearable. Everyone around us had stopped working while we both just stared at each other. At last, Adrian broke. He got up and approached me slowly. When we were about two feet apart, I melted. My chest deflated and I held out my arms to welcome him home. "I missed you so much," I murmured, on the verge of tears.

He picked me up and spun me around, kissing me hard on the lips. "I'm so sorry, Isabelle," he said.

"It's OK, Adrian," I whispered, "I love you too."

The Missed Phone Call

It was about 8 p.m. when the wheels of my Boeing 737 hit the icy cold tarmac, delivering me home seven weeks and one day since I'd last kissed Isabelle's sweet lips. As I waited in the airport for my luggage to come spinning around the carousel, I watched the other people greeting their loved ones and I wondered what to do. Now, any normal boyfriend would've simply made the call, but for some strange reason, I didn't. I couldn't.

As I said earlier, Isabelle and I were at a pivotal point in our relationship. We'd been seeing each other exclusively for over a year, working at Braun and Bower by day and dating a couple times during the week at night. And when I wasn't trying to earn some extra cash at one of my other jobs, I'd reserved my weekends specifically and entirely for her.

We ran errands together, attended gatherings linked arm in arm, and stayed at each other's houses from Friday at 6 p.m. until late Sunday evening. We'd even begun making space for each other's clothes and bathroom necessities in our respective homes. On top of all that, she'd met my family and I'd met hers on numerous occasions.

Needless to say, things between Isabelle and I were serious, and coming home after two months away--for me--was a little disconcerting. I wasn't quite sure how to handle it. Now maybe it was fear--a fear of returning to the closeness I knew was likely to get more intense, or a fear that she wouldn't have missed me as much as I'd missed her.

If you'd seen me standing in the airport, you would've thought I was lost. Truly, I felt lost. Yes, I'd wanted to call her the moment I'd landed, and yes, I'd wanted to drive straight over to her house and make passionate love to her. I'd wanted to see her blue/green eyes and her gentle smile, caress her milky white breasts and tweak her rosy pink nipples. Mostly though, I'd wanted to fuck her on the cold, slate floor in her front hallway with my pants down around my ankles and her legs straight up in the air. But instead of acting on any of those impulses, I called a cab.

The ride into town was no less torturous. More doubts came into my head and I speculated that maybe I was nervous about speaking to her face to face after having been gone for so long. Foolishly, I wondered if maybe she'd disappeared during my absence,

or moved away without telling me. As you can see, I was going a little off the deep end. Besides, we'd spoken on the phone plenty of times during my trip, and I knew nothing had changed.

Since our introduction one year and three months earlier, my life had included her. We enjoyed each other's company and respected each other's opinions. Moreover, we had lots of things in common, both of us liking science fiction novels, spicy foods, music and dancing, both of us enjoying activities such as running, skiing, and hiking. You name it; we both loved it.

We seemed to have body clocks that functioned on the same level as well, both of us wanting to sleep, eat and fuck at the same times of day. Furthermore, we both had the same set of moral expectations and standards, the same goals in life.

And so, after all my deliberations--to call or not to call, to run straight to her house and fuck her senseless, or suffer on my own--I finally decided that what I really wanted to do was to approach my return with the same sort of karmic expression that Isabelle had declared in her booklet. I somehow wanted to convey to her that I had the same feelings in my heart that she had in hers, and this decision left me with a whole new situation to work out. Through it all, as Isabelle put it the next day--like a typical man--I forgot to call her to let her know I was home safe. "Men don't multitask very well, do they?" was her comment on my little slip.

Now, some of you may laugh at this next part, but I couldn't help myself. I had to do it, and the idea came to me on the cab ride home from the airport. "Beautiful night out tonight, isn't it sir?" the cab driver stated, the snow falling gently outside.

"Yes, it's nice, though it's lot different from where I just was."

"And that is?" he asked.

"The Caribbean," I replied, wistfully remembering the hot weather.

"I'll bet it was nice there. Sure you want to be back home?"

And that was all it took. The combination of his question and the snow, and I knew exactly what to do, exactly what I *needed* to do.

* ... * ... *

Rushing to get to bed (and thereby forgetting to call Isabelle), I didn't want anything to spoil my plan. At 5 a.m., I got up, an hour and a half earlier than my usual six-thirty. Feeling like the third little pig in the second half and slightly more obscure version of the big bad wolf story, I headed over to Isabelle's house in my long johns, boots, and over-sized coat. Parking a block away, I walked anonymously down the sidewalk and up the driveway toward my target, my hood pulled over my head.

Outside her house, I crouched behind a large bush to make sure I wasn't being watched. When I knew the coast was clear, I bolted over to her car to outline the shape of a heart in the thin layer of snow that had collected on her front windshield. I then paused briefly to admire my handiwork, praying that Isabelle was still snuggled deep under the flannel sheets of her queen-sized bed. It wasn't much, but for a non-creative guy like myself, it was the best I could do on such short notice.

When I got to work at 8 a.m., Isabelle had yet to arrive. Sitting at my desk, I tried to prepare for the day ahead, but it was no use. My mind was on her and when I looked down at the phone on my desk, it suddenly dawned on me (a little too late) that I'd

forgotten to call, that I'd forgotten about our plans to get together.

"Shit!" I said out loud.

"What's wrong, Adrian?" Lisa asked, walking past with a load of paperwork.

"It's nothing," I lied. "I just forgot something."

"Is it anything I can help you with?"

"Not unless you can turn back time."

"What did you do?"

Fumbling around with the pens on my desk, I was getting more and more nervous. "I forgot to call Isabelle last night," I blurted.

"How could you forget that? You guys have been inseparable since last year."

"I know, but my mind was on something else." And it was true, the "something else" being my special message to Isabelle. Ultimately, I'd been so wrapped up in doing something good, that I'd inadvertently done something bad--something very bad.

"Well, I know Isabelle will forgive you. Whatever it was that had you preoccupied must've been important." I hoped Lisa was right.

Waiting for Isabelle was agony and I sat, gripping my head in fear. After about fifteen minutes, I heard faint footsteps clicking at the end of the hall and I looked up. By the expression on her face, I couldn't tell if she was happy or upset, and I wondered if she'd gotten my frosty message, if she'd even noticed it, or if she'd thought it was just someone fooling around.

Approaching her with caution, I couldn't stop staring at her mouth. I wanted to see her smile, and I was about two steps and one second away from bending down to beg forgiveness when her lips widened. She was beautiful.

"I missed you so much!" she said, stretching out her arms for a hug.

Picking her up to swing her around, I reveled in her scent and squeezed her as tightly as I'd been longing to for weeks. Then I kissed her. "I am so sorry Isabelle."

"It's OK, Adrian," she whispered, grabbing my face. "I love you too."

Mr. Bunny and the Cousins

When I was a little girl, my hair was brownish red--the color of autumn--and it fell in ringlets around my face. My mother used to say that it got that way because I twirled it incessantly, like I was trying to twist it right out of my head, which sometimes I was.

I never let anyone else touch my hair, though I remember teasing my cousins with it, brushing it across their arms whenever we had sleepovers at my grandparents' house. "Only three of you at a time. That's all I can manage," my grandmother used to say, secretly happy that we *all* wanted to come to her house, that we *all* wanted to watch Star Trek with grandpa in the basement.

My cousins and I--eight of us in total--used to take turns spending the night at the home of Dick and Margaret Weston, turns that were decided upon by whomever's parents needed a break the most after a long week at work. During our visits, we played in the fields beside the house--chasing grasshoppers and dragonflies, watching out for snakes, and collecting toads. We made forts in the long grass and played games like "daddy is home" or "baby is sick". For such pursuits, my oldest cousin Patrick was always the "daddy", Ben, the youngest, was always the "baby", and as the only girl, naturally, I was the "mommy".

When our afternoon adventures were over, we'd help grandma pick vegetables from the garden for the evening meal. Marg (as my grandfather called her) worked hard all day, cooking and cleaning, doing laundry in her old ringer washer, and catering to my grandfather's every want and need, not once missing a beat if one of us children happened to scrape a knee or get a bloody nose.

She was everywhere and nowhere the way women of that generation were, but at precisely 6 p.m., it was her time to shine, and she would call us all to the table where our places were meticulously set with the appropriate silverware, napkins, drinking glasses and teacups. Inevitably, the food was a combination of meat, potatoes, some of those fresh garden vegetables (because anything from the garden was healthy) and bread with lots of butter (because in those days, we didn't know any better).

No doubt, making supper was my grandmother's specialty, and she boiled and baked, scooped and served, with the hand of a maestro, her food so delicious that we

would always eat every last bite. After we'd had some dessert--there was *always* dessert--and the table had been wiped, it was my grandfather's turn to take over. Playing cards was his thing--the game either gin rummy or poker. If my grandmother sat in however, it had to be euchre.

Gambling with my grandpa was fun, the card games lasting until bed, which, like dinner, had a precise time. At 9 p.m., whether we were tired or not, whether we liked it or not, we were ushered off to the spare room--a space decorated with mauve wallpaper and porcelain figurines--to the four poster, queen-sized bed once belonging to my aunt. "Isabelle goes in the middle. She's the girl." The same proclamation was made time and time again.

The next ten minutes were then spent organizing this particular arrangement, and after all the pushing and shoving between the boys had abated, we ended up lying sideways on the mattress with our feet dangling over the edge. "That's enough kids. Your grandpa will have to come in if you don't behave," was grandma's shaky threat.

But of course we weren't quiet because we wanted grandpa to come in. We wanted him to tuck us in the way grandma never could, wrapping the blankets around us so tight that it was as if we were mummies. "That's it you three. Good night." His voice was so deep, so serious, that we'd stay silent for a good five minutes or so, none of us daring to move an inch, none of us daring to make grandpa mad.

Undoubtedly, once we'd heard grandma and grandpa's bedroom door thump shut, that's when the giggles took over again. But we managed to keep things fairly calm from that point on, the boys only jabbing at me with their sharp toenails or stretching out their arms and legs so wide that they squished me between them. In retaliation, I would pinch at their bums and punch their arms as hard as a little girl ever could. Hushed at last, I would gently stroke them with a strand of my hair just to see if they were still awake, which of course I knew they were.

"Stop that Isabelle. Don't be such a pest," they'd hiss, flicking at me like I was an annoying bug. But I'd keep on until eventually one or both of them would wrestle me onto my back, holding me down until I begged for mercy. "That's what you get Isabelle," they'd say, their lean but muscular legs squeezing tight around my middle, their adolescent penises protruding ever so slightly from under the cotton fabric of their pajama pants. "If you don't stop, we'll grab your hair and rip it right out. You wait and see. You'll be left bald and all the other girls will laugh and say 'Isabelle has no hair. She looks like a bald boy.'"

One night, during the wrestling, Patrick, who was only eighteen months older than me, announced, "We're not letting you up until you show us something, Isabelle."

"Show you what?" I asked naively.

"You know."

"No I don't," I replied, genuinely confused. When he placed his palm at the crux of my thighs, I clued in. "What about you, Josh?" I posed the question to my younger cousin. "Do you want to see something too?" He nodded in response, but didn't speak--probably couldn't speak. "Well then, you have to say it. One of you has to say it or I won't do it."

As it was his idea, Patrick acquiesced. "Show us your 'Virginia'," he whispered. Calling it a person's name was good enough for me, and I told them both to move back. The two of them then sat in the middle of the bed, wide-eyed and eager, while I got

ready, bunching my nightgown up around my waist. When I was comfortable--leaning back against the pillows--I tentatively moved my underpants over to one side, providing my captive audience with a glimpse of my treasures.

For a good two minutes, I watched them watching me. I watched as they shifted about, clasping and unclasping their hands, wiggling their toes, not sure what to think. Everything was especially quiet when Patrick spoke. "Can I put something inside?"

Intrigued by the idea, I said, "I guess so, but you'll have to be careful. I'm not sure how far in it goes." In truth, I hadn't actually explored the area myself.

"OK," he replied, snatching one of the glass figurines off the bedside table.

"I'll bet it'll be cold," said Josh, finding his voice. And it was. It was cold and I was so very warm. When Patrick first prodded me with the rabbit's nose--holding it at arms length--I felt my face flush, and when he slid it further into my slit, I almost burst into flames.

"How's that?" he asked, carefully pushing deeper into my hole.

"OK," I answered tremulously, paralyzed by the newness of it all. The boys too were awestruck and, wanting to see everything--wanting to fully comprehend the inner workings of the female body--they squished in close to witness the bunny doing things they could only dream of doing with their own fingers.

While Patrick played--moving the rabbit around in circles, opening me up to their gazes--I tried to remain unaffected. It felt so good however--so wonderfully hard and intrusive--that I spread my legs wider and moved my underwear completely out of the way. Relaxing in my own world, I reclined, luxuriating in the sensation of erotic euphoria until Patrick spoke again.

"Isabelle, your face looks funny and you're all wet down there. Did you pee yourself?" He actually thought that I had. "Grandma will be mad if you did." At his comment, I was so embarrassed that I kicked him away and yanked my panties back into place. Immediately, Patrick put the rabbit up to his nose. "Yuck! Girl smell!" he said, throwing the object into the pile of rumpled covers.

"Hey, give it to me. I want to smell it too," said Josh, frantic to find what Patrick had so quickly discarded. Recovering it promptly, he too took a good long whiff, both boys then laughing heartily and tossing the rabbit back and forth like it was a football. Let me tell you, after that night--after they'd so callously slighted my budding sexuality--we never engaged in relations of that sort again.

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Almost two years after Adrian and I'd started dating, the moment was upon us to make our relationship permanent. It happened on a night similar to those summer nights at my grandparent's house, the stars alight in the sky, the moon shining down on my soul. Returning home from a very long day in court, I was greeted by Adrian's velvet voice on my answering machine. "I'm coming over at eight. I have a surprise for you."

It was 7:45, and in desperate need of a bath, I called him. "Are you still coming over?"

"I'm on my way."

"OK. Well, I'm just heading upstairs to get washed, so you'll have to let yourself in."

“Sure. See you in a bit.”

Filling the tub, I added some lavender bath oil and climbed in. Once submerged, I let my arms and legs float leisurely, and I was almost asleep with my head on the bath pillow when I heard Adrian’s keys rattling at the front door.

“It’s just me,” he called up. When I didn’t answer, he called up again. “Isabelle?”

“Yes...”

“Just checking. I’ll be there in a sec’.”

“Mmmmm,” I sighed, the thought of my lover joining me in the tub a tantalizing image in my mind.

While Adrian busied himself downstairs, I rested, letting the warm water soothe my tight muscles. A few minutes later, he made his appearance, a sight for sore eyes.

“How are you?” he asked.

“It’s been a long day. I’m tired.”

“Oh, that’s too bad. Maybe a little massage will help.”

“Maybe.”

“Or maybe I should let you get some sleep.”

“No. No. I want you to stay.” I trailed my fingers along the side of the tub. I didn’t want to be alone. I needed to relax more. Unwind. Make love. “So what’s your surprise?” I asked, wanting him to know I was in the mood.

“It wouldn’t be a surprise if I told you, now would it?” He smiled.

“I guess not.”

“Then you’ll just have to wait and see,” he said, reposed against the counter. Watching as I laved around my breasts, under my armpits and up and down my thighs, Adrian asked, “Does the water feel good between your legs?” He’d begun unbuttoning his shirt, his eyes glued to my nipples as they bobbed up and down in the suds. “I like it when you have things between your legs.”

“I do too,” I added.

“What sorts of things do you like?”

Seductively, I lifted one foot and began scrubbing between my toes. When his crotch actually jumped, I answered, “Hard things mostly.”

“Mostly?” His eyebrows arched. “You mean you like soft things too?”

“Sometimes.”

“Like what? Cotton balls? Socks?”

“Whatever.”

“My tongue?”

“That too.”

“I like my tongue between your legs.” He licked his lips.

And just when I thought he was about to get naked and climb into the tub, he left the room. “Where are you going?”

“I’ll be right back. I have to get something.” Two minutes later, he was peaking slyly around the edge of the door. “Shut your eyes.”

“Are you coming back in?” I asked.

“Shut your eyes,” he said again.

“Right.” The heightened smell of the lavender made my insides tingle.

“No peeking.” The next thing I knew, he was tying a scarf around my head.

“Don’t you trust me?” I asked broodingly.

He tightened the knot. "Here baby, lean back." Catching my head, he forced his fingers into the wet strands of my hair. "Do you like it when I touch your hair?" He knew that my hair was my weak spot. He also knew that I trusted him with my life.

"You know I do," I purred.

"Good. Now hold still." Immediately, I felt something harder, less human, clamping onto each of my nipples. "That's perfect. Now I think it's time you stood up and showed me how clean you are." With that, he pulled the plug, caressing my thighs and fondling between my legs as the level of the water dropped. When he pulled at my nether lips, I pressed for some penetration. "Not yet, baby. You'll just have to wait." And almost as if it were a punishment for wanting more, he yanked hard on one of the nipple clamps, stretching my flesh like it was a giant elastic band.

"Oowww," I whimpered.

"Does that hurt?" I could tell he was smirking.

"Only in a nice way," I lied, the water gurgling down he drain. "Adrian. I'm cold. Can you get me something to cover up?"

"Really? You're cold? That's too bad."

"Can you get me a towel?"

"I don't know. Can I?" he asked.

I knew this game well. "Will you *please* get me a towel?"

Leaning down to kiss each breast, he then gently placed something soft over my shoulders. "There's another towel on the edge of the tub. Now sit down so you can spread you legs for me."

Impassioned, I waited for his next move, the sound of what I guessed to be a plastic bag rustling no more than two feet away. "Were you shopping?"

Prodding at me with something soft and gooey, he asked, "How does this feel, Isabelle?"

Mango. I knew the smell. "Feels good."

Poking the fruit just inside my hole, he growled, "I like to put things in your cunt. And I like to put things in your mouth too. Here, now taste it." Accepting what he offered--savoring the sweetness mixed with the tang of my own juices--I then detected something else infiltrating my vagina. "Do you like bananas?" Adrian asked, mashing a soft pulp over the entire area.

"Yes. Do you?"

"I do."

"Good, because you're going to have to clean me out."

"You'd like that, wouldn't you?" It wasn't a question.

"You know I would."

In my mind, I pictured Adrian at some giant pussy-eating contest, having worked his way through about ten other women, his cheeks smeared in everything from chocolate to blueberries. "Suck on my clit." I implored.

"Hold on Isabelle." He backed away. "I haven't even gotten to the surprise yet." He undid the blindfold. "You're going to be shocked when you see this." He reached into his plastic bag and pulled out a small figurine. "Do you know what it is?"

"Well, it looks like a rabbit." And it *was* a rabbit, a porcelain rabbit.

"Yes, and?"

I was trying hard to make the connection. "Hmmm..."

“Glass rabbit... cousins... don’t tell me you’ve forgotten? You’re the one who told me the story.”

Finally, the light bulb came on. “Oh, yeah.” It was a rabbit just like the one my cousin Patrick had used on me so many years before. In fact, thinking back, it looked like it could’ve been the exact same rabbit. “Where on earth did you get that?”

“Like you said, I’ve been shopping. I found it at an antique store. Do you like it?”

“I’m not sure.” Memories, both good and bad, came rushing back.

“Don’t worry, Isabelle. I’ll be nice to you with it and we won’t play football after,” he laughed. “Now, open up those pretty legs of yours. Mr. Bunny is coming for a visit.”

“You’re crazy,” I giggled.

Dead serious, Adrian crouched on the floor in front of me. “My goodness. You’re such a dirty girl. You’ve got banana and mango everywhere. Mr. Bunny will have work hard to get you cleaned up again.” Tenderly, he poked the nose of the rabbit inside my lips. “You must taste delicious because Mr. Bunny wants more.”

“Yesss,” I moaned, remembering just how good it’d felt when Patrick had done the same thing. “Push it in more.”

Unable to take his eyes off of what he was doing, Adrian circled around and around my hole until finally he slid the glass figure almost all the way inside. “I think I’d better help with the cleanup. This might take a while.” He bent down and began licking around the spot where the rabbit entered, the combination of the hard object and his soft tongue ushering me into the twilight zone.

About ten minutes later, after Adrian had plowed into me with his own rock hard appendage, he hit me with yet another surprise. “Isabelle, do you want to see what else I found while I was shopping?”

“Sure,” I said.

“Sit down.” He patted his lap, his back against the bathroom vanity. “And close your eyes again.”

“Another surprise?” I asked, snuggling in close.

He stroked my cheek. “You know, Isabelle. I could stay like this forever.”

“You mean sitting on the bathroom floor?”

“No, dummy. Not in the bathroom--just together.”

“Just together,” I repeated. “That’s sounds perfect.”

Moments later, he was grasping my hand and trying (with difficulty) to slide what I knew must’ve been a ring onto my finger. “Need some help?” I asked, wondering if it was what I thought it was.

“No. No. I’ll get it. Just don’t look.”

“OK,” I sighed, letting him wrestle the “surprise” onto my finger for the better part of a minute.

At last, (and leaving me somewhat sore), he’d accomplished his mission. “OK. You can open your eyes now.”

“It’s gorgeous!” A stunning silver band encircled my left ring finger.

“Do you notice anything special about it?” Adrian asked.

“Well, let’s see. Besides the fact that it’s a ‘ring’ and that it’s ‘beautiful’, I’m not sure.”

“I’ll give you a hint. Check out the three stones.”

“The sparkly ones must be diamonds and the blue, is it sapphire?”

“Correct, and?”

“Well the sapphire is my birthstone, and since you’re a Taurus, the diamonds are yours.”

“I’ll always be there to keep you safe, Isabelle. You know that, don’t you?” he stated, kissing first the back of my hand, then my lips.

When we broke apart, I asked, “So is this like an engagement ring or something?”

“Or something. Engagement ring. Promise ring. Token-of-affection. It is what it is. I just want us to be together forever.” With this covenant irrevocably declared, we kissed again, this time our rising passion taking us out of the bathroom and onto the bed.

Crime and Punishment

Just before our first child was conceived, Isabelle was made partner at Braun and Bower. Working upwards of eighty hours per week, she was hardly ever home, and when she was, she usually had her nose in some files or was asleep on the couch. Needless to say, during that time, our sex life wasn't the greatest.

One evening--horny as hell--I decided to prepare a nice dinner for the two of us in the hopes of rekindling our passion. I needed to get laid--bad--so I made some chicken parmesan and a caesar salad; I lit some candles and poured some wine. I'd been suffering for almost two weeks by then which, for me, seemed like two very long years.

"I'll be home by seven at the latest," Isabelle had said earlier that afternoon.

At eight thirty, I heard her car. "Adrian..." she called from the front hall. The pasta was cold, the salad soggy. "Hey, what's all this?" She came in and set her briefcase on the counter, prancing over to for a kiss.

"Oh, just dinner. I thought I'd surprise you. You said seven, right? At the latest?"

"I'm sorry. I was on my way out the door, when Michael caught me. I had to sign some documents and he wanted to discuss a meeting that's popped up for tomorrow."

I was mad. "Don't worry about it. We can heat the stuff up in the microwave."

"OK." She patted me apologetically on the shoulder. "Just let me go pee. I'll be right back."

When she returned, her hair was down and her blouse was unbuttoned almost to her navel. I could see the lace at the top of her brassiere. "Here. Sit." I pulled out her chair.

"Thank you." She unfolded her napkin and sampled the merlot. "So how was your day?"

"Pretty good until about seven o'clock. Then I had to wait for this woman to come home. All my hard work in the kitchen almost went to waste."

"It didn't go to waste." She put a piece of chicken in her mouth. "This food is delicious and I'm starving. I haven't eaten since lunch."

"Well, I'm glad I could be of some service. It seems you don't need me much anymore."

"Oh, I need you. I just haven't had the time or the energy." She took another sip of wine. "So tell me what you did today."

"Well, I was at the office until about four, and then I drove to the east end to check out some government auction stuff."

"I see." She licked some sauce off of her top lip.

The room was quiet. "Isabelle, don't you want me anymore?" The question had been burning in my mind for days. I had to know.

"What are you talking about? Of course I want you?"

"Well, it doesn't seem like it. Can you even remember the last time we made love?"

"I am sorry, Adrian. Work has been so busy. You know that. When I get home, I'm exhausted."

"I'm exhausted too. Who do you think is doing everything else around here?"

"I know. And I *am* sorry. It won't be like this forever."

"Now that you're the boss, maybe it will never end."

"It'll change. In fact, things are slowing down already. It's just that the last few weeks have been so crazy."

"Yeah." I didn't really care how busy she'd been. I needed some attention.

"Oh, Adrian..." She came over and sat on my lap, lining her breasts up with my face. "Are you feeling neglected?"

"No." She smelled heavenly--like warm rain and flowers.

"Yes you are. I can tell when my baby is getting antsy."

"Don't worry about me. I can take care of myself."

"I'm sure you can, but that's not the point." Unbuttoning her blouse all the way, she shifted positions so that she was straddling my legs. "Don't you know how much you excite me?" She pushed in closer to my crotch. "To me, you are the sexiest man on earth."

"Really? The sexiest man on earth, huh?" I snorted.

"Yes. And there are approximately how many men on this planet? Like three billion?" She nuzzled into my neck, sliding up her skirt to grind on top of the growing bulge in my pants.

"Well, there's one good thing about you being a lawyer."

"What's that?"

"I like your clothes. They make for good fucking."

"Is that so?"

"Yes. This skirt is nice. And your heels, you can keep them on."

"I will."

"But the top has to go." Discarding it, I sucked at her nipples through her bra.

"Mmmm, Adrian. I like that." She was squishing my erection.

I lifted her off. "Suck it."

"My pleasure." Unbuckling my pants and shoving down my briefs, she took my penis out and began wreaking havoc, sucking and slurping and licking with such ferocity that I almost came right then and there.

"Isabelle, stop."

"What's wrong? I thought you missed me?"

"I have missed you, but I want to cum in your pussy, not your mouth."

"Oh..." She stood up and went to climb onto my lap again.

"No. Bend over. You need to be reprimanded for your delinquent behavior, Ms. Weston." I wanted to spank her, and spank her good.

Swiping the dishes out of the way, she laid her chest on the table, pointing her beautiful heart-shaped ass skyward. "Like this?"

"Perfect." Bunching her skirt up around her waist and holding onto the band of her bra--twisting and pulling it tight--I proceeded to slap her poignantly on her left ass cheek.

"Ouch, Adrian. That hurt," she whimpered.

"It was meant to hurt." I gave her another one, only marginally less severe. "You've been a very bad girl Isabelle, neglecting your husband, making him wait, making his balls ache like crazy."

"Put in your cock, Adrian. Please!" Her juices were dribbling down her thigh.

"Please! You think that 'please' is going to get you what you want? What about what I want--what I've *been* wanting?" I slapped her again.

"Pretty please..." she purred. "Pretty please with sugar on top."

"If you insist." Reaching around to grab her breasts with one hand, I moved her panties to one side with the other and thrust forward, my dick so stiff that it slid in all by itself.

"Ohhhh... That feels incredible," Isabelle cooed.

"Well, Ms. Weston. It *has* been twelve days."

"You've been counting?"

"Yes."

"I guess I have been remiss in maintaining our relationship."

"You could say that. And now you're really going to get it." So saying, I plundered my wife, further marring her derriere with a smattering of handprints and flogging away at her pussy until it was bright red and swollen, until I thought my dick was going to fall off, until neither one of us could move any more.

In through the Backdoor

I remember the night our first child was conceived for two reasons: one, because it was such a momentous occasion, and two, because my ass hurt for days after the blessed event, that night being the first time that Adrian and I ever engaged in anal sex. It was also the very first time that Adrian and I'd ever had intercourse without a condom and the newness and excitement of it all sure made for a pretty hot time. Now, it's not that we weren't already considering having a baby, but we hadn't really planned it, which is why I think it happened so quickly in the first place.

So we started with one condom, but it got used when Adrian stuck his penis into my rectum, after which there were no more condoms left for anything else. Now I realize that for some, anal sex is no big deal, but for me, it was a major milestone in my once sheltered sexual life. And the idea came up the same way most things do for me--in the middle of a seemingly unrelated situation.

Three years into our relationship, Adrian and I were taking advantage of some warm autumn weather, hiking through the hills close to our home. As we trekked along that Saturday, our talk involved details of the week past. Almost at the pinnacle of our climb however, Adrian suddenly changed the focus of the conversation to something completely off topic. If I recall correctly, we were maneuvering our way up a particularly steep and rocky slope--Adrian in the back, me in front--when the question came up. "Have you ever had a cock in your ass?"

"What?" I blurted, the notion causing me to slip slightly. I turned around. "What did you say?"

With a look of rapt anticipation, he bluntly posed the question again. "Have you ever had a cock in your ass?"

"Is that all you ever think about--sex?"

"With you, yes," he said, patting my rear. "So, have you?"

"What made you think to ask me that?"

"Looking at your bum wiggling around in front of me for the last half and hour has set me to thinking."

"Oh really! And all I get to look at it the huge hill ahead, contemplating potential

encounters with small forest animals. Maybe we should've traded places, but then I might've asked you the same question." I knew full well what such a notion would do to my Caribbean man.

"Do you actually think that I would let another man put his penis inside my you-know-what?" He sounded mortified.

"Oh, so when it's mine, it's an 'ass', and when it's yours, it's a 'you-know-what'?" I said, stopping momentarily to catch my breath.

"Ass, you-know-what, it's all the same. I'm just not letting another man near it."

"The idea's not so far-fetched, you know." I grabbed onto tree branch and heaved myself up onto the ledge at the top of the incline.

"Are you serious? Like I'd ever do something like that." We both sat down for a rest and a much-needed water break.

"You're not homophobic are you?"

"No," he paused, the word quick to come out. "So long as no man ever tries it on me, I'm fine with it."

"What if *I* were to put something in your bum? Would you let me?" I asked, almost positive he wouldn't go for that either.

"Whoa! What? You?"

Yep, I knew him well. "Yes, me," I said, smiling despite myself. Tormenting him was priceless.

"Why would you want to do something like that?" he asked, his brown skin actually looking pale.

"Well, you might like it. I read somewhere that anal penetration is good for stimulating a man's prostate. It's supposed to greatly enhance sexual pleasure."

"But it's anal," he said, as if that alone were enough to make it a bad idea.

"Your anus is just another part of your body Adrian, like your mouth or your penis. So what's the problem?"

"Stuff comes out of there," he whispered.

"Ummm, Adrian. Stuff comes out of those other places too."

"Not the same kind of stuff."

"OK. But you could clean it first."

His eyes bugged out. "I knew it. You *have* done it before, haven't you? How else would you know all these details?" He was staring at me suspiciously.

"Honestly Adrian, I haven't. But I have thought about it *and* read about it."

"Oh, so you've been planning it?" He stood up and brushed off his shorts, obviously upset.

"No. I just like to read about new things. I always have. And with you--with sex-- I want to try everything. Besides, you should be flattered." I wanted him to know how special he was to me. "If I didn't feel totally comfortable with you, I would never have mentioned the idea."

"Thanks, I think," he grinned weakly, taking a long drink of water and swiping away some drips with the back of his hand.

"Shall we head back now or is your bum too sore just thinking about it," I joked.

"My bum is fine, thank you very much," he replied, holding out his hand to help me up. He then pushed me into the lead again, making sure (I think) that I was in the front--nowhere near his bottom.

......*

Later that same day, after a nice dinner together, we were cuddling in bed, Adrian with his chest to my back, our legs intertwined. Under the covers, next to his semi-naked body, I could feel his erection poking at me and I wiggled in response.

“You’re teasing me, aren’t you?” he asked.

“Teasing you with what?” I knew his mind was still on my ass.

“You know what.”

“Oh, my ‘you-know-what’!” I chuckled. “Damn right, I am.”

“Do you want something in there?” Instantly, he got harder.

“Maybe,” I purred, wondering if he would really go through with it. From the very moment we’d begun dating, Adrian had been reluctant when it came to taboo issues, and anal sex (for him) was certainly something that crossed the line. It’d taken him a while before he licked my pussy, and in the beginning I wasn’t even sure he was going to do that. But over the years, we’d become so close, so comfortable with each other that nothing seemed off limits.

So when I slid my underpants off that night, he started kissing the back of my neck, pushing his penis in between my cheeks. “You’d like that wouldn’t you? My cock in your ass?” he asked, savoring the words like he was savoring the idea.

“We could try it. But you’ll have to be careful.”

“Show me that pretty bottom of yours first. I want to make sure that you’re ready for me.”

“Maybe I’d better make sure *you’re* ready for me,” I said, positioning myself over his rigid shaft. “Adrian, you are so hard right now. You must be excited to fuck me in the ass.” Indeed, he *was* excited, some pre-cum oozing out the tip. When I licked it, he groaned deeply and I knew he was up for the challenge.

“Come on then. Let’s do it.” He was in a hurry, probably worried that if he didn’t act fast, he would chicken out.

“But I want to lick you,” I whined, yearning to taste him more.

“Not today. We have other business. Now turn around and show me what I’m going to get.” His penis jumped as he spoke and his eagerness set my body on fire. I needed him inside. I needed to know just what it would be like to have his extra-large member filling my tight little passage. So I took my position--poised on my hands and knees--and lifted my tailbone. “That’s nice,” he said, stroking circles over my cheeks with one palm while assuaging his erection with the other. “Your ass is round and fleshy, just the way I like it.”

“You’d better like it. It’s the only ass you’re ever going to get.” And to make sure he was impressed, I reached back to open myself up.

“You’re a bad girl, showing me your asshole like that.” He leaned in so close that I could feel his breath on my skin. Goosebumps rose.

Maybe you should put something else in there first. Your penis is rather large.”

“How about my finger?” He grabbed some lube off the side table and drizzled it down my crack. “How’s that? Does it feel good?”

“Mmmmm,” I moaned anxiously.

“Now hold still,” he said, gently prodding at my “other” opening, the sensation slightly intrusive at first but better as he penetrated me further. After a few minutes of

playing, he was effectively plunging in and out with his two longest digits.

“Adrian...”

He knew what I wanted, but as usual, he wanted me to say it. “Use your words, Isabelle,” he said, punctuating the sentence with a quick flip of his wrist. “Say it, or I won’t do it.”

“Please Adrian. Put your penis inside my bum.”

“That’s my girl. Your sweet ass is so ready.” Pulling his fingers out, he turned me onto my back. “I think this way will work better to start. Now lift your legs.”

“Should we use a condom?” I asked, a little unsure of the proper etiquette when it came to anal intercourse.

“I guess so. Hang on.” He reached over to the dresser again, grabbed at a box of Trojans and shook one lonely packet out onto the bed. “That’s the last one.”

“Just put it on,” I begged, both ravenous and terrified at what was about to come next. Struggling to get the rubber onto his throbbing penis, his face contorted and I laughed.

“What’s so funny?” he asked.

“Just you. You look like you’re trying to stuff an elephant into a sock.”

“Well, for some reason it’s difficult to get this damn thing on tonight.”

“Maybe your penis has grown. It sure looks bigger. Have you been using that penis enlarging cream again?”

“Very funny, Isabelle... There. It’s on. Now, put your legs up.” Holding the arches of my feet to spread me wide, he aimed his rod directly at my hole.

“Adrian, I don’t think it’s going to go in all by itself. You’re going to have to help it some.”

“OK. You hold your feet then. I like to see you spread open that way.” Pressing just the tip of his penis to my chocolate eye, he gradually alternated pressure with release until it was about one quarter of the way in. “How’s that? Does it hurt?”

“It’s different, but it’s OK.”

“Do you want more?”

“Do you?”

“Yess,” he hissed, pushing harder.

“Ahhh,” I cried. “Easy or you’re going to rip me in half.”

“But it feels so good,” he said, winding ponderously.

“That’s better.” I took what he offered, little by little warming up to the intense sensation. After a while, I wanted to control the situation. “Here. Let me go on top,” I said, reworking things so that I was squatting over him, facing away, his hard staff sliding into my cavity like a drill in the oil sands. “Oh my god, Adrian. I am going to cum already.”

“Keep going. You are so tight.” Pulling me down, he ground my buttocks into his hips.

“Oh god!” I couldn’t help it; I blew, thrashing about like I was some monster rising up to conquer the world. When I’d finished, I held completely still. “Are you OK?” I looked back to see his face.

“I think it’s still attached,” he murmured. “But can we take it out?”

“Take it out? Did you cum already?” I wasn’t sure.

“Not yet,” he said, easing me off slowly. “I think my penis froze.”

“What?” I asked, lying beside him.

“My penis froze. You know, like a brain freeze but in your dick. It’s hard to explain. All I know is that my penis froze right when I was about to cum. It literally just stopped working.” He was holding his member as if it was about to fall off.

“Why don’t you remove the condom and see how it feels. Maybe it was too tight.”

“Yeah, OK.” Like he was performing brain surgery, he slid the sticky latex off his semi-erect organ and then milked it to make sure it was still functioning properly. “I think I’m OK, but how about if we hold off on the anal stuff for right now. I’m not sure I could handle any more.”

“Anything is fine with me,” I said, ecstatic to have him back in the comfort zone. Then mounting me the old-fashioned way--protection free, as you will recall--he drove into me for all he was worth, flooding my welcoming vagina with his seed.

Ten calendar months later, a chubby-cheeked baby boy was born, the product of a sexual experiment gone marginally awry. You’ll be happy to know that after this initial episode, the mystery of the “penis freeze” was resolved and Adrian was able to successfully, and quite enthusiastically, cum in that place where the sun don’t shine.

The Couch

Thursday, March 11th, I came home to find Isabelle waiting for me. “I need some help with these boxes,” I said, piling through the front door. “They’re heavy.” She took two off the top and placed them on the hall bench. “Thanks. I thought my arms were going to break off. So, how was your day?” I asked, leaning in for a kiss.

Without answering, she said, “Where were you? I’ve been trying to reach you since three.” She looked stressed.

“I was sorting out something with the freight company.” I kicked off my shoes. “And I think my cell phone is dead.” I pulled it out of my pocket to check. “Yup. Sorry about that. Was there a problem?”

Something I said seemed to hit a nerve and tears began welling up in her eyes. “Can you come into the kitchen for a second. I need to talk to you.”

“What’s wrong?”

“Just come,” she sniffed, ushering me down the hall.

“Did something happen with the kids?” I was dragging my feet. “Isabelle, tell me.”

“No, the kids are fine.” She tried to get me to sit down.

“Isabelle. Stop it. What the hell is going on?”

“It’s your brother,” she said, holding onto my arms.

“What?”

“Daniel’s been killed.” The statement came out like a gun blast and my upper body blew back so urgently that Isabelle had to prevent me from falling over. “It was a car accident. Kevin called. It happened just after lunch.” She drew me in close. “Oh my god, Adrian. I’m so sorry.” She stroked my cheek.

“Today? Did it happen today?” I asked breathlessly.

“Just after lunch.”

“So when’s the funeral?” My mind was spinning.

“I’m sure they don’t know that yet, Adrian.”

“How did Kevin find out before us? He’s so far away.” After finishing college, Daniel had stayed in town, but Kevin had relocated to the east coast for work.

“I think Amena called your dad and your dad tried to call you, but you weren’t

answering. He didn't have my cell number, so he called Kevin and then Kevin called here. I was just getting home with the kids when the phone rang."

"Where are the kids now?"

"Downstairs watching television."

"Do they know?"

"Yes. They were putting away their lunch boxes and getting a snack while I was talking on the phone. I couldn't keep it from them. Anyway, I'm sure they could see it in my face."

"What happened?"

"Somebody ran a red light and hit Daniel on the driver side. He died in the hospital. Put up quite a fight I guess but there were too many head injuries and he just couldn't hold on."

"I need to see them," I said, a wave of nausea wrenching my stomach.

"You'll see your dad and Kevin soon enough. I think for now you should just sit down."

"No, I need to see them--the kids..." I started to pull away. With the terrible news, I needed to make sure that my own children were safe. After only two steps however, anguish and shock forced me to the floor.

"Addy, just stop." Isabelle knelt beside me and we wept together for a good twenty minutes.

"Daddy." I looked up to see Cecile standing at the door.

"Come in sweetie," Isabelle called to our daughter.

She came over and put her arms around my neck. "It is going to be OK, daddy."

"Dad." Remy too had come in, his eyes red and swollen.

"Hey," I said, subtly inviting him to join the three of us.

"I'm OK," he stammered stoically.

"Adrian, you should probably call your father," Isabelle said. "I'm sure he'll want to talk to you."

"He'd probably rather talk to Kevin." All those years later, my father still blamed me for what'd happened to my mother and sister, and with Daniel's death, I was positive that things would only get worse.

* ... * ... *

Two weeks later, we were getting ready to journey south to scatter Daniel's ashes into the warm waters of the Caribbean ocean. "Isabelle, have you seen my passport?" I asked, rummaging through some papers at the side of the bed.

"No, I haven't," she called. "Don't you usually put all your stuff in that box by the computer?"

"I know, but it's not there."

"Maybe you moved it."

"No, I didn't."

"You don't think you did. It's late. You're probably just tired and stressed about tomorrow. Let's go to bed and I'm sure it will turn up in the morning. Our flight doesn't leave until 4:30, right?"

"No, I can't go to bed. I have to find it and the least you could do is help me."

She came out of the bathroom casually brushing her hair. "Of course I'll help you. Where have you searched?"

"Everywhere."

"Did you actually *look* in the box by the computer?"

"Yes," I snapped angrily.

"I'll look again just in case. All the other passports were in there a couple of days ago," she said, heading downstairs. Frustrated, I began rifling through some other stuff in the closet when I heard Isabelle come back into the room. "Here it is, Adrian." I turned to see her holding the dark blue booklet. "You can stop looking."

"So where was it? I've been looking for that thing all damn day."

"In the box beside the computer."

"Sure, smarty-pants. Make fun of me."

"I'm not making fun of you. That's just where it was--stuck between some papers."

"I guess I just missed it," I said, shaking my head.

"Sometimes we can't see something that's right under our nose. But at least now you can relax."

"Not really. I'm not looking forward to this trip. Bad enough that I'm saying goodbye to my brother, but now I have to spend a whole week with my father."

"Just do the best you can. Be nice. This has got to be extremely hard on him as well."

"You know how small Rochelle's house is. I'm sure something will happen with all of us crammed together for so long."

"It will if you say it will. We'll all just stay positive and things will be fine. Maybe this will be good for your relationship. Your dad is going to need you now more than ever."

"He has Kevin."

"I don't understand how you can still be bitter. What's past is past. He's never really done anything to you."

"Except avoid me."

"How can you say that? We see him all the time."

"Sure, we *see* him, but I don't ever talk to him. Or rather, he never talks to me."

"I don't think either one of you talks from what I've seen."

"What do you expect? He made it perfectly clear after my mother and Claire died that he thought it was my fault. After all, I was the one who had all that 'garbage' lying around in the basement. And I was the one who never bothered to clean it up. Then the fire happened. Stupid. I lost them too. Doesn't he realize that we've all suffered?"

"The fire was electrical, Adrian."

"But he thinks that without all that junk in the basement, the fire wouldn't have gotten so far out of control before somebody noticed it."

"Come on Adrian. I wouldn't call some comic books and a couple of boxes of collectibles 'junk'. It certainly wasn't enough to make a difference. Besides, you were all in bed and there was no smoke detector. No one would've known anything until the smoke started coming upstairs, which is exactly what happened. In fact, if you hadn't come out of your room to go to the washroom, everyone would've died. I think it was because of you that you and your brothers got out alive."

“Well, my father believes what he believes and he’s not about to change his mind. God only knows how much Kevin and Daniel tried to get him to see the truth. He won’t even give me a chance. He’s very stubborn.”

“So you say, but maybe you’ll have to be the one to initiate the healing.”

“Forget it, Isabelle. I’m not going to bang my head against the wall for nothing.”

“Sometimes making a change takes courage. You’ll probably have to dig deep to work this out with him.”

“Like I said, forget it. You don’t know my father and you wouldn’t understand.” I was getting annoyed at her for putting her nose in what I thought was *my* business.

“Look, I know you’re stressed right now, but you don’t have to be nasty.”

“Yeah well, you just wouldn’t get it. We’re not the same.”

“Oh really? Not the same? How’s that?”

“Well, we come from two completely different worlds.” Thoughts of my brother’s death and the fire were bringing back doubts that I would ever be completely safe when it came to love. “Come off it Isabelle. Don’t tell me you can’t see our differences. You come from this stable and supportive family where everyone loves everyone else and you all have each other. And what do I have? I have two brothers whom I see occasionally--correction, make that *one* brother--and I have a father who acts as if I don’t exist. How could two people like that ever make it together?”

“What? So you think we won’t make it. Is that what you’re saying?”

“I don’t know. Maybe not.” My insecurities were getting the best of me.

“Give me a break, Adrian. We’ve been together for almost ten years now, we have two beautiful children and we’ve never had any major issues. As far as I’m concerned, things have been great.” Exasperated, Isabelle began jamming her clothes harder than necessary into her suitcase. “I try to understand everything about you. And no, maybe I haven’t had all the same experiences you’ve had, but that doesn’t mean I can’t be sympathetic.”

“That’s nice, but sympathy doesn’t equal comprehension and it certainly won’t prevent our differences from eventually pulling us apart.”

“Sometimes I can’t even believe you. The only thing that will pull us apart is your own dubiety.”

“See. There you go again. How can we be together when you use words that are straight out of the dictionary? Why don’t you talk like a normal human being for once?”

“A normal human being?” she hissed, whipping a bunch of socks at me from across the room. “I’m not going to stand here and listen to this crap. Maybe, a good night’s sleep will set you straight. I love you, but I’ll see you in the morning. I’m going to sleep on the couch.” She grabbed her pillow and an extra blanket and left the room.

“Oh yeah! Well, maybe you need a smarter man,” I shouted after her.

Two seconds later, she was back at the door shaking her finger at me. “This makes me sick. I can’t stand seeing this side of you. You are one of the smartest men I know, not to mention one of the nicest, most kind-hearted, most passionate, most business-savvy individuals on the planet. I’ve never judged you by the life you’ve lived, nor do I think it has made you any less of a person. It’s quite the opposite. If I’d been in your position--experiencing all that sadness and heartache--I probably would’ve ended up in the nuthouse.”

Sadly, I couldn’t hear the compliments she’d just offered--I was too lost in my

own sorrow. "Humph. Maybe you don't know me at all. Maybe, you just *think* you do."

"Whatever you say Adrian. Let me know when the aliens bring you back to earth. Until then, you're on your own for the pity party. I've had enough," she said, storming off.

Once she'd gone, I curled up on the bed and pulled the blankets over my face. I tried to remain calm, but in no time, images of my brother began swirling around in my brain. At first, I saw him passionately kissing his wife Amena on their wedding day--one year prior. Next, I saw him rancorously slapping down cards on a win at our monthly poker game. After that however, those joyous and playful images turned gloomy and I saw him that night outside our burning townhouse, his eyes filled with fear and dread. Finally, I envisioned him in what I imagined were the moments after the car accident--with pieces of metal and glass stuck in his body, and fountains of blood spurting from his head. Shaking uncontrollably, I lay there, trying to keep warm, but when Daniel stared back at me in the dark, I jumped up and raced down the hall. "Isabelle, help me," I cried.

Immediately, she rolled out of her cocoon. "What's wrong?"

"I can't be alone right now."

Before I knew it, I too was wrapped in her blankets. "Poor baby. I shouldn't have left you alone. That was so stupid of me." As she spoke, she stroked my head and kneaded her fingers in my hair.

"I saw Daniel. He was there in our bedroom and he was dead. His face was all bloody and he was looking at me, calling out for help. But I couldn't... I just couldn't..." I sobbed.

"It's OK, Addy. Daniel's at peace now--nothing can hurt him anymore. And he would want you to remember the good things, not the bad."

"But it's so hard," I murmured, holding onto Isabelle as tight as possible. After a few minutes, enveloped by the warmth of her body and the security of the covers, I slowly began to feel safe again.

"Adrian. He'll always be in our hearts," she paused. "And I want you to know that I'll always be there for you--no matter what."

Rubbing my eyes, I answered, "And I'll always be there for you too. I didn't mean what I said earlier. I know that we'll be together forever. Besides, how could I ever live without you?" I kissed her ardently. "Without this?" A combination of sadness and a dire need to feel good was fueling my passion for Isabelle, sending me into some uncharted, sexual territory.

Shoving my hands under the edge of her satin nightgown, I pinched grievously at her nipples. I needed to do something fierce, something relentless, something fast--something to say that I was still alive.

"Adrian, are you sure you want to? I don't know if now's the time."

"If now's not the time, then I don't know when is," I growled.

"If you say so," she purred back, placing her hand on the fullness in my shorts. "You are definitely hard--really hard. I think I'd better take a look and see if everything is OK down there," she cajoled. She then headed under the covers for a quick look and a lick, manipulating my cock with both her tongue and her hands. Taking my testicles into her mouth, when she fingered my ass with her thumb (for the first time I might add), I nearly hit the ceiling.

"Isabelle," I yelped.

She hauled herself up to face me. "Please Adrian, let me lick you there. I've been wanting to do that for such a long time."

"Ummm," I sighed, the hunger in her voice sending my rules about sex out the window. "I guess you can."

"Hang on for a second." Without warning, she was out of the room and up the stairs. I knew she was going to check on the kids. All must've been clear because she came back just as fast. "OK. Everyone is sound asleep. Now lie down on the couch," she said, throwing the blanket over the both of us so that only our toes were sticking out.

Hovering over my cock, she went back to sucking it, again plying pressure with her thumb to that hole I'd kept private for so long. I couldn't help but get harder the more she played, and at last, when I was about to blow, she slid down more, lifted my bottom and burrowed her face into me like she was a mole foraging for food. First, it was just the tip of her tongue, followed by some soft kisses. Then finally her whole mouth went to work, and she slurped and licked and poked me into a state of heaving wonder.

"Oh my god, Isabelle," I bawled.

"Does it feel good?" she stopped long enough to ask.

"Yes," I groaned, begging for more.

"Let me try something." When she slid her digit persuasively inside my passage while still laving at my pole, I couldn't breathe, let alone think. All I knew was that if she'd didn't stop soon, I was going to explode, my hips pulsing upward of their own accord.

Desperately, I grabbed at her head. "Stop! Stop!"

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing. Bend over the couch. I need to fuck you." And I did, hammering into her as forcefully as our furniture and her body could handle.

If there are moments that define or change a person's character, I count that night in the living room as something significant for me. Looking back, I think I let Isabelle do what she did because I needed to connect with her on a higher, more intimate level.

As I'm sure you realize, the death of my brother was just another blow to my already wounded heart. What I needed at the time was to feel Isabelle's strength as my partner. I needed her to nurture me--possess me almost--in order to keep from sliding back into a pit of despair. And that's exactly what she did.

From that day forward, Isabelle and I were one. Today, what we have together is something that goes beyond boundaries; it goes beyond judgment and hesitation. It is what I would call "pure love".

Sexy is as Sexy Does

When I look at Adrian today, I see a man who excites me to the point of distraction. As far as I'm concerned, he is the sexiest man alive because of the way he laughs like a hyena whenever I say something even remotely funny, because of the way he squeezes my hand when we're walking down the street together, and because of the way he looks at me with pathetically desperate eyes when I take my clothes off before bed. No doubt, Adrian finds me attractive--our physical connection being a big part of our relationship--but when we met, one of his initial observations about me had nothing to do with my appearance.

On our first date, we went out for lunch to a place across the street from Braun and Bower. Inside, after getting two cups of tea and a couple of bagels, we sat at a small round table in the back of the cafe. Once settled, Adrian jump-started the conversation. "What do you want out of a relationship?" he asked, wanting to know upfront (I supposed) everything there was to know about a woman like me.

"Didn't we just sit down? You're already hitting me with the serious questions," I chided.

"I'm sorry."

"It's OK. Say and ask whatever you want. I can handle it."

"OK," he said, looking a bit incredulous.

"I mean it. Do you want me to answer the question or not?"

"Sure."

"What do I want out of a relationship? Do you mean a relationship with *you*?"

"Yes, with me." He blinked openly.

"That's easy. I want everything," I said, stating my requirements frankly.

His eyebrows went up. "Everything? That sounds like a lot."

I knew that with Adrian, it wasn't going to be a brief fling, like I'd ever had too many of those anyway. "Yeah, it is, but if I'm going to get involved with someone--like *you*--then I want everything. Not like jewelry and clothes. Not stuff like that. I want what they--or *you*--have inside."

"Really? You sound like a very demanding woman, Isabelle Weston."

And he was right. To say that I am demanding is a little like saying that Bill Gates

is doing well for himself. “I am, but I think I have a right to be. If I’m going to *give* everything--and that’s just the way I operate--then I expect to *get* everything in return.”

“That’s fair,” Adrian replied, taking my hand in his. It was so easy to touch each other from the start, and it was also easy to talk as though a long-term relationship was in our future.

You might say though, that Adrian and I haven’t made it to the end yet. There are those of you who will point out that we still have another twenty to thirty years to put into our marriage before we can claim victory. Sure enough, if we both live to the ripe old age of ninety, we will have even more years than that.

In contemplating the future though, I see two things--both certainty and mystery. With regard to certainty, I am *certain* that what is to come will be good, but that doesn’t mean bad things will never happen. It means that no matter what, I’ve decided to find the “good” in whatever circumstances come my way.

With respect to mystery, it should be obvious that I’m unaware of the exact course that my life will take. No one can see the future and though some people may be better at making predictions, I don’t know anyone who owns a working crystal ball.

I am a superstitious person, though I’m not the type to throw salt over my shoulder or avoid cracks in the sidewalk. I do believe however that certain kinds of behavior bode poorly for a person, and I try very hard to avoid those things. Furthermore, I trust in karmic law such that good begets good and bad begets bad. It’s up to the individual to make the most of opportunity and to stay away from the negative forces that swirl around us on a daily basis.

With Adrian, I give love and I receive it. I choose to be happy, so I am. I am thankful for what I have and I don’t need more. Furthermore, I don’t consider it a fluke that we met. We needed to be together so our lives could be better and hence, our paths collided. Life has this uncanny way of working itself out, don’t you think?

The Gift

For our tenth wedding anniversary, I wanted to give Isabelle something special. After all we'd been through, I knew it was time for me to do more--to give more--and I was ready. Thus, I wracked my brain for weeks up to that day, and it may have taken me a while, but eventually I came up with an idea. Actually the plan transpired during a conversation that Isabelle and I had in the backyard one afternoon. It was the summer before our anniversary and I recall precisely the moment the notion came to me, the proceeding events bringing my life full circle up to that point.

It was a warm day and I was hunched over Remy's bike fixing the chain when Isabelle came out with some drinks. Standing beside me, she watched as I cranked at the offending parts. "Adrian, do you know what you are?" she asked, breaking the silence.

"No, Isabelle. What am I?" I squinted in the sun.

"You are the best!" she said, very matter of fact.

"Oh, yeah? Why do you say that?" I asked, wiping a bead of sweat from my forehead.

"It's just the way you are. You're just a really great guy." She handed me a glass of lemonade.

"That's a bit soppy, wouldn't you say?" My back almost in spasm, I sat down on the concrete.

"It's not soppy. I see you with Sophie, with our kids, and with other people, and you make them feel good." She plunked down beside me. "You must feel good about yourself. Do you?" Even after ten years together, we hadn't asked all the questions there were to ask.

"Now I do but I didn't always." I took a sip of my drink. "When I first met you, I didn't."

"Hmmm, I would never have known that. You always seemed to be smiling back then. So at peace with the world."

"I was hardly at peace. I was smiling all the time because of you."

"I didn't do anything. You're the one that made *me* feel good." As we sat in the sunshine that afternoon listening to the kids play, it dawned on me exactly what Isabelle had just said--some of the same words spoken by my mother some thirty years earlier.

My mother always called me her special boy--the peaceful one, the sunny one, the one who brought happiness with him wherever he went. But just as with Isabelle, it was my mother who was all of that. Micheline Moreaux made *me* feel like smiling and she made *me* feel at peace. It was my mother who made *me* feel special because to her, that's exactly what I was. She always told me how wonderful I was, and I simply filled that role.

Now, as I thought about my mother and how much Isabelle reminded me of her, it came to me. I knew right away what to give Isabelle as a gift, and the present I decided on will both shock and please you, I think. Those were Isabelle's reactions anyway.

So on the evening of our anniversary, after all the guests had gone home and the kids were tucked into bed, I set my scheme into motion. I waited until Isabelle was washing her face in the bathroom, and then I called to her. "I think I ate too much," I moaned from the bed. "My stomach feels a little off."

As expected, she immediately poked her head around the door. "Oh, my poor baby. How can I help you?"

"Maybe a cup of tea..." I let my voice trail off pathetically.

"I'll go make up a pot. Mint tea is just what you need," she said, tying her bathrobe. "I'll be right back." Things were going like clockwork.

After she left, I immediately snuck over to the closet, reaching up behind some boxes to pull out her present. The object of my search was in the exact location I'd kept it since Isabelle and I'd moved in together--in between my comic book collection and my stack of old high school yearbooks. It was still hidden inside the pouch I'd bought for it as a teenager, the leather worn to a dull shine, the stitching coming apart at the seams.

Now, I must confess, the locket was something I'd never told anyone about--not ever--not my father or brothers, not Shana, and not even Isabelle. For those thirty odd years, it was my personal treasure, and it's what kept my sister and mother's love in my heart all that time.

That night, with Isabelle in the kitchen making a pot of tea, I took it and put it together with a card I'd made for her--a plain piece of paper with nothing but a heart on the front and some words written inside. I placed the two items under her pillow and sat tentatively on the bed, leaning back with my hands resting across my belly. I tried to relax but I was excited.

When Isabelle returned a couple of minutes later, she stopped. "Hmmm, what's with you? You're lying there like the cat that swallowed the canary."

"Oh, nothing. I'm just resting. I told you, my stomach feels a little off, but that tea is sure to help."

The mattress gave way as she sat down and placed a tray at my feet. "Careful. It's hot," she warned. "Do you want me to turn on the television or something?"

"No, let's just have our tea in peace."

"Good idea. It's been a busy day. Some quiet will be nice." As we sat there side-by-side, sipping at the steaming hot liquid she'd so kindly made, we remained silent, enjoying the closeness and comfort of being together.

Once Isabelle had finished drinking her tea and eating up all the cookies, she leaned against my shoulder and began stroking my chest. "You know that always gets me going," I sighed.

"That's the point," she laughed, pushing her hands under my shirt. "Unless of

course, you're too sick."

"No, I think I'm OK. But hold on a second." I wanted to give her the locket and then make love to her.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

"Nothing. I just have something for you." I reached under the pillow and pulled out the leather pouch and the note.

"What's this?" She seemed surprised.

"It's a present."

"I see that, but what's it for?"

"It *is* our anniversary."

"I know, but I thought that our gift to each other was having the dinner party. You didn't need to get me anything. I don't need anything. You know that."

"Well, this isn't something you need. It's something that I want you to have," I said, moving the gift closer to her. "Here."

Taking the card first, she looked briefly at the heart that I'd drawn on the front. Carefully opening it, she then looked to see what was inside. Smiling, she read the words out loud. "My spirit ran to greet you before my feet left the porch." It was from a song I'd heard as a kid, one that my mother used to sing.

"It's lovely Adrian." Isabelle kissed me on the lips.

"OK. Now the present." My hand was shaking as she took the pouch.

Suddenly, everything got serious. "You're not going to cry on me are you?" she asked, trying to lighten the mood.

"No," I sniffed. "Just open it."

Pulling the necklace out of its case, she knew right away that it was a whole lot more than a simple locket. "Oh, Adrian. I love it!" she proclaimed. "Put it on." Once I'd hung it around her neck, Isabelle came at me like a cat in heat, sucking on my nipples, and licking up and down my chest. She was inside my shorts in a matter of seconds, yanking on my penis like she'd never touched it before.

You know the thing about positive feedback. When she's horny, it makes me hornier and I'll admit, the sex that night didn't last very long. Isabelle squirmed around on top of me for a while, rubbing herself against my front, eating away at my face, biting my lips and probing her tongue deep into my mouth. "I want to suck on your tongue the way I suck your cock," she growled. "I want to fuck you and suck you at the same time."

And just when I thought it couldn't get any hotter, she lifted herself off, spun around, and squatted down on top of my staff. Seeing Isabelle positioned this way--with her private parts so open, so vulnerable--I could barely hold back. Pumping me in a slow methodical rhythm, she massaged my member with divine purpose until I jerked and spurted my load nearly to the roof.

"I hope the kids are still asleep," Isabelle laughed once we were settled again.

"I don't care," I said, wrapping her in my arms.

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Some of you may say that I've never really confronted my fears, that I've never been able to maintain a close and intimate relationship with another black woman since the death of my mother and sister. But in stating this fact, you must then ask yourself if

it's absolutely necessary for me to love a black woman in order to deal with my past. I don't think so and I'll tell you why.

Undeniably, the Shana situation did a quite number on me, and when she left, I felt as though my pool of potential mates had been reduced to almost nothing. I couldn't bring myself to seek out meaningful associations with black women, but that holy mess with my ex put white women off my list as well. So what did I do? As you know, I shopped around the other races, with no success there either.

When Isabelle came along however, it was almost as if I couldn't stay away. If I were to imagine a conversation between my penis and my brain regarding this issue, it would go something like this:

"She's hot," my penis would've said.

"Yeah, but she's white." That would've been my brain.

"She's hot." My penis would've said it again. You know how penises are.

My brain would've tried rationalizing the situation. "Well, since she's white, I just won't get too involved."

"Damn, she's hot." Penis.

"I can keep my distance. I don't want to get hurt, that's for sure." Brain.

"She's really hot. When do we get started?" Penis.

"Do you want to go for lunch at the deli tomorrow?" And so it went.

With Isabelle, I intended to play it cool--not concerned with falling in love or already blind to the fact--and in doing so, I fell like a rock from the moment we shook hands. The funny part of the whole deal was that in meeting Isabelle, I've connected with a woman as similar to my mother as I'm ever going to find. And while she may not be black, she is everything else that my mother was and more, color being the only exception that I can see.

Furthermore, being with Isabelle has shown me that the disintegration of my relationship with Shana was almost entirely my fault. I know now that her "whiteness" never had anything to do with it. You get what you give, and to that relationship, I gave nothing. Nothing of great value anyway. Oh, I gave her a house, and a child, and clothes, and material things, and I gave friendship, but that was it. I never really loved her the way the act of love is intended, and I couldn't have expected a more intimate connection with her because I didn't try to have one.

I got lucky with Isabelle, because she brought the love to me. Somehow, she got me to open up my heart and we've been going strong ever since. Thankfully, my fears of abandonment have completely disappeared as Isabelle has always been there for me and I, for her. Sure, we've had our share of fights, but never anything earth shattering.

On the eve of our tenth wedding anniversary, after I'd detailed the long and complicated history of the necklace to my beautiful wife, Isabelle and I lay slaked in our marital bed--the heart-shaped locket nestled between the pristine ivory mounds of her breasts, our hands clasped under the covers. From outside the open window, the crickets convened.

"Isabelle?" I had to know if she was coherent enough to process what I was about to say.

"Yes?" She was wide-awake.

I took a deep breath. "I love you." It was the first time ever that I'd said the words to a woman, to anyone for that matter.

“Mmmmm...” I heard her smiling.

Reigning in my confidence, I said it louder. “Isabelle, I love you.” Expelling a huge sigh of relief, I squeezed her hand tight.

“I know,” she replied. “And I love you too.”

As white as Isabelle may be, in loving her, I think I’ve come to accept the deaths of my mother and sister. Without question, she's helped me find peace in this crazy world, and I now realize that out of chaos and devastation, the element of divine beauty can still emerge. If one door shuts, another will open. Trust me, I’ve been there. As for the necklace, it has found a home at last--given by a man who loves his woman more than anything, and kept by a woman who truly deserves to have it.



Amanda Fox was born and raised in Cambridge, Ontario. Graduating from The University of Western Ontario with degrees in both philosophy and anthropology, she then went on to study education at The University of Ottawa. Still enjoying the vitality of Canada's capital, she lives with her husband, three teenage children and three very spoiled cats. "The Albatross and the Mermaid" is her first novel. Visit her website--www.foxtales.ca--to read her blog or any one of her numerous short stories.