

The Uncertainty of the Meek



Part 1—A Tulip Breaks the Snow

My mom always told me, "Michi, you'll inherit the world someday." Sometimes it was with consternation, sometimes it was with concern, but most of the time it was with love and pride. Since I became a woman, I've often thought she was right. Despite the vogue for self-help "experts" and counselors to tell women that they need to speak-up about what they want and be assertive, I have found my timidity was a silent blessing. I have never acquiesced to others demands; my timidly is a choice I made. It is a quiet way of keeping myself in the world. I suppose, my meekness has always worked because I've been lucky enough to be surrounded by people who truly love me. I've always known what I've wanted, even when I had no idea that I knew.

I am, and always have been, a lesbian. I don't think of myself as being "in the closet," but I'm not particularly inclined to speak about my personal life, so most of my neighbors and coworkers don't know. Despite my reluctance to enter a potentially embarrassing conversation about whom I'm sleeping with, I'm not ashamed of my sexual life. I occasionally think that straight people are the ones who need a good dose of self-consciousness about their blatant sexual behavior; they display it to the world from billboards and supermarket tabloids. But I feel little liberty to condemn, as I never thought about my sexuality at all until I was sixteen, and then may have just lucked into one that suits me so well.

Sarah slid her arm around my waist and snuggled against my backside. We'd been having sleepovers for as long as we had known each other, so I didn't think much about it. She ran her fingers through my hair as she told me she wanted to play in the ABA after college and be the next Dr. J. I was always tired before she was, so just listened to her talk.

"Michi, I know there aren't any girls in the pros, but I'm tall enough to be a small guard, and nobody can shoot better than me." I nodded sleepily, contented with her body heat and her gentle strokes. Soon, I lost track of her words; it was the rhythm of her voice that I loved, the edge of excitement that was in every sentence. Her soothing fingers in my hair and the sound of her voice were guiding me into a wonderful sleep.

She moved her face closer to my ear. I felt the warmth and dampness of her breath. Her other hand caressed my hip, slowly, tentatively. The sound and feel of her voice was like a trusted caress. Even more than my very loving parents, Sarah was the rock I built my secure world on.



From the fourth grade, Sarah had been my best friend. Sarah is my opposite. She is assertive, even aggressive, charismatic, always knows what she wants, and is absolutely loyal.

When she played playground sports, she was always a captain, even if she was the only girl. She bloomed early into a rock-hard amazon, and could take any boy in school in anything she wanted to. I suspect she could pee her name into the snow better than the boys if she wanted to. I was neither good nor bad at sports, but my lack of apparent enthusiasm usually got me picked only before the deeply incompetent athletes in playlot divvying. But Sarah always picked me first, even if she thought she'd have to play twice as hard to make up for my less than Jordanesque efforts.

Once I told her she should pick me last, since nobody else would take me before then, and she could get Tim Johnson or Noah Finkle, excellent athletes who always ended up together since Sarah would not be separated from me.

She paused, her pretty green eyes scrunched up in concentration, before saying, "Michi, if you ended up on the other team, I couldn't win. I'd never want you to lose."



It was the summer before our junior years, and either I would spend the night with her, or she would with me. Our parents became good friends, despite having little in common, solely due to our unshakable bond.

"Michi, what do you want to do when you grow up?" Her finger traced lines on my upper arm, lazy and directionless. Her words were hot on my neck and felt better than ice cream on an August afternoon.

"I don't know. I'll find out when I get there."

"You don't have a plan?" She sounded almost indignant. Her words came out as staccato stabs, each word enunciated with a perfect beat between. Her finger stopped its lazy path as she flattened her palm on my shoulder.

"No, you know I don't, Sarah. I guess I'll get married and live next to you and your husband." It never occurred to me that I wouldn't get married, but I always imagined my adult life as living next to Sarah. The men in our future lives were invisible and irrelevant.

Her hand slipped away from my shoulder as she rolled away. Our hips lost contact. I felt my own breath speed up. My safety blanket had fallen off in the night.

She rolled back, pressing herself against me so that every cell of my back contacted her chest and stomach, as if we shared oxygen through our pores. One of her hands held my hips to hers, pressing on my inner thigh. Her other hand wrapped around my shoulders pulling me firmly into her urgent embrace. Her lips danced on my neck as she spoke.

"What if we never get married? Will you be my roommate?"

"Of course! But won't we get married?" I simply had never thought it could be otherwise. I didn't mean to sound panicked.

"Oh, Michi, Michi, of course you will if you want." As she pressed her lips to my ear, I felt shivers race through my body. There was an energy, a presence in my body surprised me, and I began to shake slightly. I felt a tear drop from her eye.

Her hand tiptoed from my thigh past my ribcage, brushing the outside of my breast, to stroke my cheek.

"Have you thought about who you'll marry?"

"No!" It wasn't a denial, as much as an almost incoherent expression of surprise. I had been asked out a couple of times—always by awkward, clueless boys who perhaps thought I was awaiting their rescue—but I never thought about dating, let alone marrying. It was all an abstraction.

"Lisa Brown went down on Noah last week."

Her tongue flicked my earlobe as her lips traced the words on my flesh. The feeling was like nothing I'd ever encountered—strange, wonderful, unnerving. I felt like crying, but I didn't know why. I kept shaking. Sarah stroked my cheek again.

"Do you think you'll go down on your husband when you're married?" It was one of the cruellest things Sarah had ever said to me. There was a hint of mockery in her voice, not that silken caress that met my ear so often.

"Oh, shut up, Sarah, I wouldn't even know. . ." I broke into quiet sobs. I didn't know why I was crying, but I couldn't stop. Sarah's arms moved around my shoulders, and she began rocking me gently.

"I'm sorry, Michi, I'm sorry." She turned my face towards hers and kissed my cheeks and eyes over and over. I buried my face in her skin and cried until I fell asleep.

When I awoke, she was sprawled, my best friend, all over the bed in her usual way. Her mouth hung open, a line of drool hung like a spider's web from the corner of her mouth to a wet spot on the pillow. One of her arms, surely painfully asleep, was still under my shoulder. I sat up, propping my pillow against the wall and took one of her hands into mine as I thought about the night before. I still didn't know why I had cried or what I had felt.

No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't figure out what had happened. All I knew was that I had the best friend in the world. Glowing, I took her hand and pressed it against my cheek.

Part 2—A Blossoming

The start of school signaled an end to our summer-long slumber party and Sarah's arrival as the class beauty queen. By sixteen, I had most of the curves I have now. I was reasonably attractive and moderately fashionable. I didn't draw attention to myself, so drew little notice from my classmates. Sarah, always my opposite, was one of the people who everyone in school knew of. If you started a sentence "Sarah Fielding. . .," everyone knew who you were talking about.

She broke her leg rock climbing in September, and the forced time-out from athletics allowed her to develop breasts that must have been waiting for her to slow down a second. Sarah will never be voluptuous, but by the time her cast came off, she went from being the nearly breastless amazon queen to a true beauty whose slight cleavage would draw stares when anyone could get a look.

Sarah's previously small cadre of boy followers grew into an army of suitors. She intimidated these boys too much for them to ask her out or even for a dance. However, a growing number started to send clues her way that they were ripe for the picking.

Our Friday and Saturday night sleepovers often turned to gossip about the merits of this boy or that. While I couldn't imagine dating anyone myself, I assumed that Sarah—always unwilling to settle for anything less than exactly what she wanted—was sizing up these boys in earnest.



Michi," she said, her hand brushing across the front of my leg, "Steve asked me out today."

Like usual, I saved up my words for when they were truly needed, so I let her go on without interruption.

"He came up to me after trig. He wants me to go to a movie with him next weekend." She pressed her lips into my ear and gave me a little tickle over my sensitive ribs. I drew in my breath and felt a shiver move down my side.

She continued to caress me, running her fingers through my hair or stoke my cheek as she went through the ritual of questions about the current suitor. "Is he cute, Michi, do you think so?" "Michi, do you think he'd try something?" "Do you think he'd be nice to me, Michi?" "Does he really want to go out with me, or does he want to go out with Sarah Fielding?" The last question always bought a slight giggle from me, which she paid for with a kiss on my neck.

Occasionally, our weekend nights together were interrupted by a date. I would stay home and read a book, while Sarah would come up with a list of everything the poor boy was doing wrong. It didn't occur to me until much later that I had gone farther with Sarah than any boy she had ever dated, yet I was neither trying, nor even realized that we were making out.

Once, after I had done something extremely unusual—perhaps stayed out too late—because a friend had egged me on, my mother asked the usual parent question, "If she asked you to jump off a cliff, would you?" With Sarah, I would have. I didn't feel I had to do anything she said, but I trusted her so completely that I could not conceive that she would ever do anything—or ask me to do something—which would hurt me.

So, when Sarah's caresses became bolder, it didn't seem unusual or threatening.



Sarah had finished her Saturday night summary of Friday night's poor date and was chatting on about the movie she had seen. The movie was apparently much more interesting than poor Rob. By now, she was routinely kissing my neck and caressing the sides of my breasts, with occasional brushes over the top. I was usually aroused, although I didn't quite think of it that way—somehow, I just thought about it as being flushed or excited, or even simply very friendly-happy. Her caresses raised goose-bumps on my skin and made my heart race; I closed my eyes to savor her gentle kisses; I drank in her words with feverish need, but I never allowed myself to think of what was happening. I was the most timid with myself.

Our evenings typically consisted of her feeling me up while chatting away about whatever the topic of the day was. But that night, she sucked my earlobe into her mouth and stroked it with her tongue while her hands went under my t-shirt and slowly moved up to the undersides of my breasts. Her words didn't resume as her mouth moved across my neck and her fingers began tracing circles around my nipples.

She pulled my shoulder down towards the bed and kissed her way across my neck, her hand now vigorously caressing my breasts. I must have known what was about to happen, but my mind was almost blank. In the darkness of the room, all I could see was Sarah's silhouette, her beautiful green eyes sparkling, and her halo of golden hair. She sat up, and my breathing almost stopped. Slowly, she pulled her t-shirt off and tossed it aside.

Taking each of my hands, she kissed their palms in turn, pressing them to her cheeks, and then breathed in from them deeply. I could see her breasts rise. The only sound I heard was my heart beating.

She kept my hands in hers and lowered her lips to my ears. More breathily than any words I had ever heard before, she said, "Michi, take off your shirt for me."

The jolt of her words breaking the long silence almost took me out of my growing trance. I responded too slowly, and she took my hands and guided them to the bottom of my shirt and helped me take it off.

She laid me back down and kissed down from my neck to my right nipple. I threw my head back, biting my lip. The pleasure was almost too intense. Her tongue circled my nipple and then, slowly, she pulled her mouth away.

Climbing on top of me, she took my head into her hands and kissed my lips. My lips parted for her tongue, and we kissed, our breath coming in and out of crushed nostrils in weak gasps, until we could no longer hold out. She pulled her mouth away from mine, and we sucked in the air, now full of the scent of our arousal.

She kissed my face a hundred times, rapidly placing her moist lips on my wet skin. She sat up next to me; her skin glowed red and was visible even in the dim lighting of my room. I could see every one of her teeth as she smiled.

"Michi, please, I need you to undress all the way. Please, Michi, please." It wasn't the assertive voice Sarah normally used, but a desperate plea.

I lifted my bottom from the bed and pulled my panties off. They were soaked. She took them from my fingers, brought them to her face, and smelled them. When she took them away, I could see she was crying.

"Michi, Michi, I love you." She bit her lip, her face an odd combination of desperation, fear, and joy.

"I know." I wasn't aware that I had known until that moment.

"No, Michi, I mean I am in love with you. I need you desperately." Her eyes, turned away from me. She was shaking. Why she should be afraid, my fearless Sarah, at this moment, I couldn't fathom. Of course she loved me; I loved her more than anything else, literally anything else, I could dream of.

Sarah, my world, my universe. I laughed almost silently.

"Sarah, I think I've always been in love with you." As before, I revealed the truth to myself as well as Sarah.

She turned back to me, still looking apprehensive. "I need you to make love to me, Michi. Own me, Michi. Own me."

I kissed her deeply, again until our breaths gave out. "I'm not sure I know how."

She smiled and lay down beside me. Her hand crept between my legs and began stroking me while she kissed my breasts and neck. At first, her fingers stayed away from my blossoming petals, just missing them as

she caressed my inner thigh. I clutched myself to her, and her caresses began to pluck at my nectar. Her hand, if not experienced, was keen to the nuances of my body; she didn't touch my clit or penetrate my tunnel until my eyes had lost focus and my back arched high. Then she drove her fingers into me, slowly at first. But she rapidly increased her pace. She let her thumb stroke my clit when she pulled her fingers out on each stroke.

She repeated my name, softly, desperately, as she humped against my thigh. I began orgasming; my fingers dug into her forearm and side. I could hardly think about anything; the pleasure was overwhelming. It was nearly too much, bordering on a delicious torment. While it seemed like a petite lifetime, I suspect if it had lasted even another breath, I would have crossed to the point of agony.

Once I returned to the world, I could not move. I just lay there, mouthing "Sarah, my love, Sarah, Sarah," and gibberish. Sarah still lay beside me, softly caressing me, rubbing against my thigh while I recovered.

As my limbs regained strength, I began exploring her; making my long held feelings into movement and touch. I kept asking, "is this good?" as my mouth and fingers explored every part of her body. My kisses became soft bites and then kisses again, as I tasted her breasts, her neck, her wonderful, perfect lips, her iron belly, her steel thighs. "Yes, yes, yes," was all my verbose Sarah could reply.

Everything was kissed, caressed, touched, loved, except for there. "Kiss me there, Michi, please. Own me. I'm yours." I plunged between her thighs, putting her legs over my shoulder, and began devouring her. I was determined to make her come until she broke my back with her legs. She finally pushed my head away, "No more. I can't take any more."

The next morning, we didn't know how to behave. Somehow, it had all changed. We were in love and had admitted it to each other, but how to behave in front of our parents, at school? We didn't know. We managed to make it through Sunday brunch with my parents without acting too strangely and then went for a drive out to the countryside where we just held hands and watched the creek run.

Part 3—There's Nothing Sublime About Your Absence

Sarah continued her guise of straightness. She dated boys until they insisted on either too much time (say, two dates in a two-week period) or wanted some kind of sexual satisfaction. Then they were gone. Her mask hid me even more than her, as any rumor's of Sarah's sexuality would immediately draw very undesirable attention to me, something with which I was ill-prepared to deal. Sarah's false love life provided us protection. We were free to show some affection in public, and, more importantly, our parents never questioned our sleepovers, even when they began to happen three or four nights a week.

I could catalog every point on Sarah's body that gave her pleasure, along with exactly the right stroke, the precise pressure to draw her to the height of ecstasy. As for me, Sarah discovered more of my erogenous zones than I did.

I have, of course, given you only the oyster, while retaining the pearl for myself. Our loving was the least wonderful aspect of our love, but the moments of silent hand-holding, of hugs after her sports victories, her joyous awe at my stories, all the things which measure the wealth we had—they are narrative wisps, invisible to the outsider, floating only in breaths we alone shared.

Briefly, while in college, I saw a therapist. It was a short-lived relationship, as she insisted that my relationship with Sarah was codependent and, thus, bad. Her orthodoxy could not encompass what we had. I suspect my relationship with Sarah was like one of those flowers that blossoms only once in a century; most people who encounter it assume that it is some more common bloom, never to realize how precious that singular moment is. Certainly my therapist would have trampled a field of Century flowers while on her way for a cheap red rose.

My therapist was correct in only one thing. You must continue to move when even the earth beneath you is exploding with spears of lava and ash. My ground began to erupt seven weeks before Sarah and I were to leave for Columbia University, our first choice in a list that we had constructed carefully together, school by school.

In an era of high unemployment and grand malaise, my father's company downsized him. There was no hope to be found anywhere on the continent—outside Sarah's heart and my own, of course—so the prospect of paying for an expensive private university education was selfish and imprudent, in my mother's words. We—a world consisting of my immediate family, but not Sarah—would have to weather the storm together, and by staying at home and attending UC-Davis, I would be pulling my share. I had enough scholarships to get a de facto free ride at a California school, but not at Columbia. I could cry, but I couldn't argue the logic.

Sarah immediately planned on to join me, but her parents insisted, with the same unshakable logic my parents employed, that she would not pass up the opportunity Columbia offered.

Two years of catastrophic telephone bills and a summer of intense loving was all we had left. Sarah left for France for her Junior year and returned out of the closet with a French lover.

I remember almost nothing from college after that. The only memory that stands out from the black fog that encased me is the moment I realized my parents knew Sarah and I had been lovers. The night Sarah destroyed me, I blurted out to my mother that Sarah left me. She pulled me into her arms while I cried for however many hours it was, leaving me only to get me water and tissues. After my crying calmed to a minor storm, she stroked my hair and said, "Michi, my sweetest, you'll find another love, I know."

"No, there's nobody like Sarah. I can't love anybody. . ." And then it hit me. My mother just described Sarah as my love. I didn't think she knew. The surprise momentarily took me out of my grief.

She read my mind. "When you were sixteen, I saw you and Sarah kissing rather, well, passionately. I was shocked, but I wanted to think about what I was going to say. I talked with your dad, and, well, we couldn't think of a better solution than just ignoring it. We came to accept it, and then to even be happy for you that you found a lover like. . ." She knew as soon as she said it that she was returning me to my grief. It took me a week to be able to thank her for handling everything so well and for her to tell me the whole story.

Of my post-Sarah life, I think there is no memory I treasure more than the calm, even happy look on my mother's face as she described seeing Sarah and I for the first time, and then starting to notice our hand-holding. I think my mother loved Sarah, just as so many parents love their child's spouse for bringing their offspring such joy.



My life continued on an unremarkable path once I graduated from college. I decided to attend graduate school, quite possibly only because I was particularly talented with languages. My love was the classics: Ovid, Virgil, Cicero, Homer, Thucydides. I would probably be a professor today if I could stand teaching. But teaching is an extrovert's game, so I found translation, an introvert's sport. I have published a translation of Cicero that I'm quite proud of, but my main work comes from translating legal and business documents into French and Italian. There is shockingly little demand for legal documents in Latin, despite the millenniums-old legal tradition arising from Latin texts. C'est la vie.

I settled in Portland, Oregon, with my partner, Anne, whom I met while I was still in graduate school. Several years after buying a house together, we decided we wanted a child. Adoption was the obvious answer, but at that time, gays and lesbians were having a difficult time getting adoptions approved. We both wanted a child that carried the blood of at least one of us, since science couldn't manufacture a sperm from our eggs.

Anne and I, briefly enraptured by the I-ching, sat around a tile-covered table, watching the dust whirls in the sun, as we focused our energy on the sticks we were about to throw. Anne held the sticks, while my hands encased her other hand. Anne's raised hand hung in the bright sunlight, the sun highlighting each of the divining sticks before she thrust her hand down and sealed my fate more than even Sarah's French lover. The sticks splayed out before us, and we both could read the sign. I was to bear the child. Life would dwell in me; life would come from me. And, more importantly, we would know the father.

Anne was disappointed—I knew her too well to not notice—but she didn't complain. In so many ways, it seemed at the time not to matter who bore our child, as we both were creatures of the meek, and our child was sure to inherit the earth, as had we. Of course, it did matter.

Anne and I took our I-ching very seriously. We had placed our energy into it; we had studied carefully, so the decision would be right. Bearing a child would be one thing, but knowing the father proved a difficult matter.

Anne and I both knew men, of course. I had male coworkers, as did Anne, and we both had friends who had friends, but there were no men in our life who we were the slightest bit intimate with. No, we weren't the stereotypical man-hating dykes that everyone seems to want to portray lesbians as, but when you've gotten comfortable with women, men seem odd and threatening, especially for the meek. But we were to know the father—we couldn't have a child without knowing him and knowing him intimately.

Nowadays, lesbians would probably never take the direction that Anne and I did. Most major cities have sperm-banks and willing physicians who will assist desiring woman in to become pregnant. There are sophisticated screening procedures ensuring that not only do you get top-grade sperm, but that your child will have a greater chance of being President one day than locating her father, if you or he so choose. Men can be involved in only a jerk-off way. Most of our friends felt that was the way men should be involved. Sleeping with a man, well, lesbians don't do that once they've left the closet. Bisexuals are a bit of a pariah in the les/gay community, suggesting that perhaps our sexuality isn't as fast as we lesbians would like. But the I-ching gave us no option.



We met Tom Bitteresmeer in a gay-friendly coffeehouse. Not over the top with dyke-power banners, but definitely out. A friend of a friend of a friend recommended him through the chain. A dozen suspicious lesbians scrutinized him before he even learned our names. He looked good on paper—no family history of any icky illnesses, intelligent, calm-tempered, reportedly a very good guy all around.

While I don't have a great appreciation for male beauty, it was obvious that Tom was an attractive man, and he carried that assurance with him when he greeted us. The way he slid the chair out from the table reminded me of Sarah claiming her spot at the table—a sense of belonging conveyed by a gesture of grace.

Anne had been more critical of the candidates we had met than I, and I was no pushover. Her posture said stay away from me; her answers were monosyllabic and usually negative. However, Tom was a charmer, and soon Anne's shoulders had loosened, and an occasional smile found its way to her lips. A third round of tea followed the second, and we started to get excited.

Tom met all of our requirements. He wanted limited time with his child, since he felt it was important for a child to know her biological parents, but he didn't want to interfere with our parenting decisions. For him, the interview process was a chance to determine if we could raise his child the way he'd want to. If not, he'd walk away. He was willing to provide some financial support but expected that we'd take the bulk of it. He was very charming. Very charming. We wanted a charming child.



Part 4—The Secret Language

You're not in love with Anne." He didn't ask; he stated. It was Tom's usual, calm voice, just as if he had said, "It's going to rain." Perhaps with even less concern.

I didn't answer. It wasn't that an unusual a response from me. He seemed to accept my nonresponsiveness and didn't say anything else as we walked under the forest canopy. My mind, though, raged with words. He was right. As had happened so often in my life, it took the obvious to jar my self-timidity loose and admit a truth I had long known but failed to shape into a conscious thought. Anne was convenient and safe. She was

warm and nonthreatening. We could go for a week without speaking, my quick-guide for judging the positive qualities of a lover.

But with Anne, as with everyone except Sarah, not speaking usually meant being alone together. There wasn't the communication of soft glances and subtle shifts in posture. Holding hands communicated only bland affection and none of the hundreds of things that Sarah and I developed a vocabulary for.

I needed to get comfortable with Tom before we commenced what Anne and I hoped were a few sessions of sexual intercourse. Getting comfortable lead me to take more and more walks with Tom. It was autumn, and there always seemed to be another park to explore. Anne was getting jealous, although she rarely spoke of it. I began to suspect she wasn't meek; she was a coward. It wasn't an inwardness that kept her from telling me of her green feelings, it was her unwillingness to have a confrontation and her fear of hearing what she didn't what to know.



The way things evolved wasn't part of the plan. Tom and I were supposed to go from talks to bed and then out of each others lives for nine months, but when he bent his head down towards mine, my lips moved toward his. A kiss was somehow more intimate than our planned coupling. Kissing was unnecessary; it wasn't procreative. His kiss was soft. I had expected it to be rough and bristly. His tongue didn't chase after my mouth. It was a brush, as unurgent as every other aspect of Tom's life.

"You're very beautiful, Michi." He never deflected his compliments with conditions or escape clauses. He made his statements to be accepted or rejected on their merits alone.

My hands found his waist, and I pulled myself against his chest. I counted my breaths, knowing that after too few, I would have to return to Anne. Anne will ask me about our walk, and we would spend a few words. Anne will ask me if I'm still comfortable with this. I'll lie and say I'm having doubts, but I want to go through with it. Anne will take my hand and lead my to our bed. She'll pull back the sheets, and pull me under. We'll swim in those intimate waters for much longer than normal, until the pressure to be alone forces us up for air. Separating, we'll breath in our solitude in great gasps before falling asleep with our backs together. A year before, those gasps would have been greeted with joy, the heady feeling of intimacy and solitude colliding. But tonight, my gasps will be those of the asthmatic.

I let his hand gently lift my mouth to his again and savored the kiss. I pressed my lips into his, feeling the bristles that hid just outside the boarder of his lips. Our kiss continued, my tongue, surprisingly assertive, found his tongue and prolonged the kiss. My skin chafed as our kiss became more urgent. I heard Sarah's voice, so rare now, caress my mind. "Michi, oh Michi, yes" I felt her legs forcefully press into my back as I devoured her for the first time. Tom's fingers in my hair only deepened my memory, as it was her fingers urging me on. Finally, she came and slipped away from my mind. I was very aroused and feared that Tom perceived it.

As I pulled my lips from Tom's, he eased away from me, leaving only our hands touching. His smile wasn't a grin. There was no victory at my submission to him. My initial trepidation that having sex with Tom, or any man, would be a victory for him. He would have conquered a lesbian; brought her back into the fold. It was the stereotype of male power—able to tame anything by shear will and masculinity. Yet, in Tom's arms, there was nothing but a shared experience between two people. We were Tom and Michi.

I hadn't dreamed that there would be much more than a brief vibrator session to get me sufficiently aroused, his quickly getting off while I imagined Anne's hand, and then a chaste kiss good-bye. But even that could be taken as a victory by the wrong man. And could I deny him something of a victory? Despite my fears of male conquest, could I treat him resentfully, as a tool necessary for the job, but hardly tolerable for its crudeness? No, it seemed, in my plotting mind, that my only ethical course was to pretend that it was reasonably good, that he was a fine lover who understood women, as just payment for his help in my quest to become a mother.

But in Tom, there seemed no need for conquest; his skills were not in need of proving. We kissed, mutually, and that was all that he wanted or needed.

We walked silently in through the forest towards a cliff that overlooked the Columbia. He promised me a sunset there, and I suspected we would reach it just in time. I thought about Sarah again. It had been ten years since our breakup. I had managed to mostly forget about her. When I finally took a lover, three years after the break-up, I would imagine Sarah when we made love. I imagined Sarah after she left; I imagined Sarah before she arrived. My initial post-Sarah lovers passed facelessly through my life, supplanted by the ghost of Sarah. By the time Anne came around, I was ready to leave Sarah behind, and Anne's pretty face and quiet manner were enough to put Sarah in a box which was opened only rarely.

But now, walking with Tom, who knew that Anne was just something I used to repress the memory of Sarah, Sarah was reborn inside of me. Her athletic legs kicked open the box, and she bounded out, fully fleshed out of the most powerful dreamstuff I held within. She took me in her arms and talked to me about nothing, saying everything. I dropped Tom's hand and fell to my knees, weeping.

My mood was dark and bitter as tar, yet I laughed with joy at Sarah's presence. It was a presence crushingly large that was enveloping me. Sarah and I argued—you should be happy, No, I should be crying. Where were you all of these years I've been with a stand-in, a cheap, plastic model of you? Here, always locked up in here. It was a foolish argument, by a desperately confused codependent.

Tom's arms surrounded me but did not hold me tightly. His thumb stroked the back of my hand. His touches spoke to me in the secret language. I could talk if I needed to, but he'd never ask. The decision was mine completely.



I had never cheated on anyone before, but if had I slept with a dozen women (or men, for that matter), I would have cheated on Anne less thoroughly than I did those moments with Tom. I wish I could have written it off as a momentary weakness, the afterimage of a bad dream, or some meek person's compliance with the unspoken demands of an assertive personality. But it was none of these.

In some way, Tom contained all of the reserve of Sarah I secreted away while I became a proper adult. My memories of Sarah are all memories of a teenager, a girl who was just starting to venture towards womanhood. Certainly, Sarah was remarkably mature and confident for her years, but there were so many things about her that I would now find girlish and undesirable. But how rarely did I let myself glance at her failings. I kept them at the back of my tome of memories, in the pages that stick together, and start to tatter when forced apart. The ink was smeared, so I kept to my favorite parts of the story, where Sarah was always my shining chevalier, my Lady of the Lake, handing me the sword with which I could conquer my world, the sheath to protect me from the wounds the world might deliver.

Tom was Sarah born again as an adult. Or perhaps the Sarah of my memory, the Sarah's whose flaws were hidden. I feared her Phoenix-like rising would cripple me, but if these feelings were for Tom, and not Sarah, my entire sexual identity would be torn apart. My sex life was a central part of me, and I was not prepared to deal with questioning it.

I laid next to Anne, silently praying to gods I scarcely believed in, hoping that my feelings would clarify, that I could divine who I was, and what I was doing next to Anne. She slept a troubled sleep, tossing and turning next to me, murmuring untranslatable nightmares into the darkness's papyrus. Anne had never been able to decipher my secret language, and I, for all of my skills as a translator, could never read hers. But our emotions crept out in English. She knew I was a wreck with doubt, doubt about her, doubt about myself. I knew she feared she was losing me. I knew our relationship,—I, Michi Lorre—mattered to her, meant something eloquent and sacred to her.



We drank coffee in silence. We always drank coffee in silence. But that morning, the silence was not beautiful, orderly, but raging with uncertainty and mistrust. Her every sip was an accusation shouted from mountain tops to my guilty mind.

The following morning, tension grew only worse. This new silence drove out our sublime silence, its expanding mass crushing the delicate life we knew. We began to make love more passionately—and more loudly—in an attempt to drive the new silence away. We talked more frequently, making small talk about the hummingbirds that had left with summer. We talked about the neighbor girl next door. None of it mattered. It was brittle conversation that snapped in the breeze, settled with an aching crash, and then the new silence returned.

My work suffered. That shouldn't be a surprise. I found words were increasingly awkward. How could they describe my moods? How could a business document about import duties at DeGaulle push aside the crumbling of my life? I flipped idly through a thesaurus, looking for the right word, but thinking only about Sarah's kisses and then Tom's.

At some point in the middle of the "R"s, my hand came to rest on my thigh. My fingers traced words—ancient, lost words—against my skirt. I licked my finger to turn the page, but instead of turning, my finger dwelt on my lip, slowly caressing its surface, turning the sensitive inner lip out to the world. My other hand found sentences that took it towards the edge of my skirt and slipped under it. My tongue found the finger at my lips and pulled it in, and I pushed my thighs together. I closed my eyes and rolled my head around my shoulders sensually, my hands creeping slowly, gently towards my venus and my breasts. My tongue danced over my lips. My thighs rubbed together with increasing energy.

My self-kisses blended in my mind with Tom's kiss, with Sarah's kisses. They fused as my hand found my nipple. They separated when my fingers began pushing against my panties. Those fingers had to be Sarah's. There were no fingers like hers. But it was Tom's hand on my breast, and—I realized almost with an unerotic start—his mouth pressed against mine.

I slowed my pace, rubbing the sides and top of my breast, my belly, my thighs, keeping away from the danger zones, while I let my mind undress Sarah. It was a provocative strip-tease. Her t-shirt coming up just enough to expose her navel before dropping down while she undid the top button on her jeans. Then the shirt went up again, showing her wonderfully strong abdomen. She held it there and kicked off her flats. She pulled her shirt up over her bra, exposing the outline of her erect nipples. She left it half-off while she walked over to me and kissed me on the mouth, a glancing kiss. Then her jeans crept down her legs, as she shifted from right to left, left to right. Her tan, powerful legs shimmered in the light. The t-shirt was off, and she kissed my cheek and then my neck. "Michi, Michi." Her breathy voice was always the most powerful aphrodisiac I'd ever known. My hand became more bold. Sarah removed her bra, exposing her perfect little breasts. She teased me by hiding them with her hands, exposing then one at a time, or even a nipple at a time. "Michi, Michi." I was ready to come.

She pulled her panties off rapidly and jumped on me. It was her hand driving between my thighs, her fingers on my breast. I came harder than I had in months.

I sat in my chair, slowly recovering. My eyes still shut, my breath shallow, broken. I pictured Sarah next to me, holding my hand. But there was Tom, naked now. His cock was full, and he stroked it slowly while he watched Sarah and me. The idea that Tom was watching us excited me, and my hands returned to my rumpled, soaked clothes. I made love to Sarah again, but watched Tom stroke his cock. I kept focused on his eyes while they bored into my own. I saw his face, red, clenched in orgasm, as I came again, even harder than the first time.

It took me a half an hour to recover. I straightened my clothes as best I could, told one of my coworkers I was ill, and left. I walked in the park where Tom had shown me the sunset, trying to figure out who the hell I was.

At seven that evening, I called my office and left a message that an emergency had come up and that I wouldn't be back until Monday. I got my car and drove up to Seattle.



I was in Seattle for a week and a half. My good work had bought me the time for my "eccentric little jaunt." It didn't buy me anything from Anne. I think we talked more during that time—all over that horrid invention, the telephone—than we had during our five years together. It isn't fair to break up with someone over the phone. After Sarah left me, I certainly promised I would never do it to anyone, but I told Anne I had to move out. It wasn't technically breaking up, but, well . . .

Tom helped me find a place when I returned. I stayed at a hotel, afraid of spending the night with him, even if it was in another room. He held my hand when I cried and let me talk with my secret language of touches. I told him everything, but the secret language is not a precise one, so were you to ask him, he'd be able to offer only a rough outline of my emotions.

Anne and I met for coffee or dinner with increasing infrequency. We no longer had intimate silences. I had killed the relationship. Three months later, Anne confessed she had had a date. I saw them at the opera a month after that, and they seemed quite content.



Part 5—Shaping Clay

You probably have guessed the end of this story. Tom and I fall in love, have a beautiful deaf-child who communicates via the secret language, and are happy forever, or until the sun burns out. Well, it didn't work out quite so nicely.

Tom and I no longer had the easy excuse for moving towards intimacy. Perhaps he knew that I left Anne because of the feelings he drew forth from me, but if he did—as I suspect—he did not deign to gloat. Our contacts became less frequent, yet still charged. We went shopping for housewares when my car broke down ten days after I moved into my new place. A Fellini retrospective. Dinner and drinks at McCormick and Schmick's. No walks in the park. They were too assertive for this timid woman. Too assertive, too dangerous.

The friend I stayed with in Seattle, Cordellia, was "one of us," a lesbian I knew from my brief involvement with GALA in graduate school. Cordellia was a bookstore feminist and dyke, up on all the literature and news, but not too involved in the protests beyond an occasional letter. Shortly after my unpleasant fall from the demanding GALA environment, Cordellia took a much less dramatic permanent leave. We remained good friends, with an occasional flirtation, and once Anne had moved on, Cordellia came down for a long weekend.

She just came into my room, nude except a very short and thin t-shirt. I said, "Yes," and she slid under the covers with me. We didn't discuss it. I didn't expect it, but I wasn't surprised.

Cordellia was far more direct than my other lovers. She kissed me forcefully, pushing her tongue between my yielding lips. She pulled her wet crotch to my thigh, rubbing herself while she mauled my breasts with over-urgent hands. She paused only to rip my t-shirt over my head and discard it.

I was very distant from the whole experience, at least initially. Her mouth moved from my mouth to my neck, which she bit hard enough that I thought, quite calmly, "I'll have to wear a turtleneck tomorrow." Yet, when she said, "You're getting wet"—a command as much as a statement—I was indeed getting wet. She continued to manipulate me. Her lips and teeth moved slowly down the right side of my neck, first to my collarbone, and then to my breast. Before she reached my nipple, she grasped my shoulders with both of her hands and pulled herself to me tightly, while letting out a low moan. I felt her orgasm, wetter than any woman's I'd known, against my leg.



Her orgasm triggered a flurry of soft kisses up and down my neck and face. She continued to hold me tightly, scattering compliments about my body, like cheap candy on Halloween. It was obligatory in every sense, but powerfully erotic.

She rolled off me, shocking my reddened skin with the sudden rush of cold air. She lay beside me, breathing deeply. I watched her full breasts rise and fall, looked at her ribs as her lungs spread her taut skin over her large skeleton. Suddenly, I realized I was trembling, shaking with desire. My need for an orgasm was more urgent than ever before. Was it fear that she was done and wouldn't finish me? Or was it something else? The question frightened me.

Her breathing slowed, and she turned to me, her skin glowing, her teeth bright in the moonlight room. "I've wanted to do that for so long." The words crawled out, some suppressed Southern drawl exerting itself.

She kissed me gently, running her hands across my stomach. "You're wet." There was a smile, a hint of a laugh, in her words this time. Her finger pressed into my panties, just missing my clit. I shoved my hips toward her hand, desperate for more of her touch.

"Take them off for me." Her hand moved languidly up my body and pointed to the window. "Over there, by the window. Pull back the curtains."

I didn't dare to refuse. I slid off the bed, keeping my eyes on hers, and stood in front of the window. The trembling in my legs was almost under control. There was just a slight shake in my hand as I drew the curtains back, exposing my naked back and legs to the world outside. She licked her lips as I put an index finger inside the waist of my last remaining covering.

"Now. Pull them down." I did, slowly, as if hypnotized by her presence. By the time I felt the cotton around my ankles, my tremble was nearly uncontrollable. My skin was raised into almost painful bumps; the cold air was stimulating my nipples and clitoris to real pain.

She stood up to stand next to me. She pulled me sideways and kissed me deeply, holding my face in her hands. Our passions were in long profile to any strangers walking on the street below.

When she pulled me back onto the mattress, I thought she was going to give me release, but instead she tortured me with kisses up and down my backside. Her tongue flickered against my spine and butt. She licked my feet, toes, and calves. She crawled between my legs and began fingering me, entering no more than a knuckle before pulling out. Her tongue probed my ass. I started to beg her to finish me. I swore I would do anything for it. Anything.

She plunged two fingers in as far as they could. "Give me head first." She rolled away from me, onto her back. I turned over and started to move between her legs.

"Then I might let you get off."

There was no slowness in my ministrations. I found her clit immediately and sucked it between my lips. If it was too much stimulation, she'd have to kick me off. I couldn't wait for my own satisfaction any longer. My hand reached for my desperate sex, but somehow, I couldn't do it. I had to let Cordellia finish me. So I had to finish her.

She pushed hard against my head with her legs as she let out the same, haunting moan as before. It was the cry of a Will-o-the-wisp on a foggy night.

She went limp, her breath mere whimpers.

"Please, Cordellia, please." I was sobbing.

She got up on her knees and took me into her arms, gently caressing me. One hand ran through my hair while the other hand brought me the relief I was so desperate for. "Come for me, baby," she cooed, and I did immediately.

It wasn't the most powerful orgasm I'd ever had, but it was strong enough to remind me that such ecstasy was possible with another person, something I'd forgotten in my years with Anne.



My life slowly began to revolve around Cordellia's bi-weekly visits. We were completely incompatible, but that only made it more fun. She was witty, pretty, and perfect company for drinks in the fading sun. She drew a constant stream to our table, chatty people with whom she flirted, one and all. Her flirting was completely transparent and saved me from a word of conversation.

She left Sunday nights, often leaving me with strange commands, like some kind of circus dominatrix. "Don't wear underwear this week." "Write an erotic poem in French for me." "Eat peaches, naked in your bathtub at 8:30 on Tuesday evening." When she'd return, she'd ask me if I had done whatever silliness she had demanded.

"No." I still sounded surprised that she meant for me to actually perform her demand, even after the peaches in the bathtub. She would then "punish" me by bringing me close to an orgasm, and then ceasing all attention until I begged her, promising compliance with her next demand, to return to my urgent needs.

Then she got a job in Boston, and our affair was over. I didn't cry, nor even sigh. I got my weekends back. I started translating short stories into Latin in my spare time.

I had worked through some of the more interesting Flannery O'Connor stories when Tom called me again. He hadn't called since before Cordellia had gotten her new job, over a month. A new print of "His Girl Friday" was showing. In a moment of weakness, I had revealed to him my secret love of Rosalind Russell and romantic screwball comedies. I said yes more quickly than I wanted to.

I dressed in my most frumpy, dyky clothes. I wanted Tom to get no illusions that our kisses meant anything. I was a died-in-the-wool lesbian, and no man would thrust me into confusion.

If Tom noticed my wardrobe, he didn't comment. "Hello, beautiful." Strange how happy those words made me.

We laughed loudly. I don't laugh loudly, but we did. Synergy is the term biologists might use. We had a surprisingly talkative post-movie meal. I told him about Cordellia. He couldn't understand it—two opposites like her and me? I said, "Sex," with a shrug and a blush, and he nodded. There was a Ceci or Cecilia for him. I can never get those names straight.

"Sex?" I asked him.

"Green eyes," he replied as if that explained anything. I let my hand linger on my drink, swirling the wine around the glass, letting it aerate while waiting for him to explain his comment. But he just smiled at me, swirling his own glass.

Finally, I had to ask, "Green eyes?" I hated having to ask. Asking is one of the categories of talking I try to leave to other people.

He shook his head, glancing down at his wine. "If you saw Ceci's eyes. . ."

Of course I hadn't, but I remembered Sarah's, and I knew how the right pair of green eyes could captivate me for weeks. I nodded.

We talked some more. Mostly, little statements suggested larger truths. He was remarkably good at that game. Few people are. I think that is why so few people know each other. They demand too much be spoken, explained, written out in simple language, when everything that matters can only be explained in peripheral glances, images that disappear before they come into focus. Is life something you can diagram? Try describing the flavor of your last beer. You can't do it. No writer, and I've read more than most people, has ever described beer so well that someone who has never consumed it would not be surprised by the flavor with their first sip. And beer is easy to describe. Try wrapping your love for your pet up in proper diction. Wrap a verb, some nouns, adjectives, and maybe a gerund around the last time you took a shower with someone. Or without someone. Words are husks, at best, and we have to fill them for ourselves with masa and fish if we're ever going eat a tamale. Did I mention I love fine Mexican food?

The last of our tamales and our empty wine glasses were swept away by the last remaining bus boy.

"Go?"

A nod. "Next Friday?"

A nod. Different cars, different directions.

I am not a horribly weepy person, but I cried all the way home. I wish I could isolate why, whether it was because I was enthralled with Tom, or was it because my heart ached for all I feared I was about to throw away.

When you live the meek life, timidly going about your business without drawing much of the outside world in, it can be easy to let the few things that demand your attention take all of it. So it was with Sarah for me. At sixteen, she took hold of my sexuality and defined it for me. Before then, I had never looked outside of myself enough to know if I was interested in anyone, whether boy or girl. I had assumed I would marry, but I didn't put a face to it. When Sarah showed me that partnership could be a bond between women—lacking only in a ceremony. I had nothing to compare it to, no reason to suspect there might lie something else, or something more, in my blossoming womanhood.

Sarah formed me in the night with her caresses and kisses, glazed me in the morning with her embraces, and fired me in the day with her frightening loyalty and boundless friendship. My shape was one that fit perfectly with hers and no one else's. We were interlocking vases until she changed, evolved into a different form, leaving me without a match. I struggled to find a piece to fit her absence, but I was molded too precisely

And Tom? In my romantic heart, I wanted to believe he was Sarah molded with male clay—a new possibility to return to my freshly formed youth. But Tom was not Sarah. He shared a curve here and there—he had a handle to take in my secret language and a spout to return it; he was just as hard, and just as giving—but to fit to his curves and lines, I'd have to change. I saw that I already had. I saw the cracks on the face in the mirror once I left Anne. The old shape was beginning to crumble, or maybe just lose its hard glazing. My moldability had returned.

And I cried for that. Tom scared me because he was too hard, too self-assured, too thoroughly cast in his own mold. How could I, soft as clay lifted from the seabed, find my own curves if I were pressed against his? The vulnerability that shaping implied was too great to be born twice.



We rented a George Cukor video, and I ended up in his arms. No, I crawled into his arms. I made the move. I took control. He was all about space and time, giving me all I wanted. Now I was about closeness and immediacy.

Forgetting about the movie, I had decided Tom was to be mine. I let my hand gently bounce over his thigh and abdomen for most of the set-up. I took his hand in mine and caressed it, then let it go. I got us beers and returned with a kiss. His hands found my ass, but I removed them, speaking my secret tongue, "let me lead."

I took him to the bedroom and sat him down on the bed. Tom looked at me wistfully, this new assertiveness of mine taking him by surprise. Smiling in return, I slowly stripped off my shirt, knelt before him, and slowly removed his. With each unfastened button, I let my fingers drift inside and caress his chest.

I had never explored a male chest. It was hard and hairy, with nipples that perked up with each touch and circle of my fingers. What muscle, what hardness. This was exciting and scary for me, exploring a man for the first time.

I lay him down on the bed after stripping off my pants, and slowly peeling off my panties. Feeling myself tremble with excitement and fear, I eased him into his own nudity. Was I doing this right? At that moment, I could not have willed myself to pull away from Tom. This was my Sarah, reborn in this hard, masculine figure.

He took me in his arms, and as I eased the length of my body along his, I could feel his muscular legs slide between mine. The long, hard, length of his leg touching mine, the firm muscle, the soft hairs caressing my skin. This new, unexplored sensation was thrilling to me. Rolling on top of Tom, I felt my desire manifest itself as heat rushing from my heart to every cell. My face was close to his, our lips almost touching. I could feel him growing hard in the space just above my legs. This hardness, this distinctly male cock; this is what I desired. How did this desire happen? But who cares? My desire is my desire, and let me have the object of my desire. I held his arms above his head and kept them there. My face just above his, left to right, threatening a kiss. My

breath was hard and measured; his breathing matched mine. A trickle of sweat ran down the side of his forehead.

"Michi, I want you," he whispered in a husky voice. I was trembling too hard, too much excitement coursing through my body for me to respond.

I could feel myself growing moist against his hardness. His cock was so large and wet against my soft parts. I began to slide back and forth atop him, my mouth still perched precariously above his, my breath still hot and panting.

My mouth came down hard on his, and our tongues met, exploring the warmth of each other's mouth. I ran one hand down his chest, caressing the angles and curves of his body. Kisses, strokes, caresses; these are the ways I played with him. Everything was alien, but that is too obvious. What I have always craved was the heat of touch, the intimacy of kisses. Tom was the coming together of two hemispheres—one new, one familiar—into a beautiful, sexy sphere. I caressed his balls; they felt almost like ice cream, soft, tender with hair, and slowly moved up to touch this shaft. Was I doing it right? I let my fingertips play lightly on the tip of his cock. Then I encircled the head with my palm, gave a soft grip, and stroked him gently up and down.

Playing with him like this was like my first experiences with Sarah. There was an excitement in realizing that he was reacting to me. Somehow that sense had been lost over time, I knew my lovers would react when I touched them right. This male body was new thing, so to see the sexual need on his face, the reddening of his cheeks, the loss of focus in his eyes, as my hand moved faster up and down his shaft, was sending me close to the edge.

I was pressing myself against his thigh; I needed that contact as much as he needed my hand. I wanted to let the contact, the feeling build, but ironically, his excitement was too much for me. I stoked him wildly as I focused on the orgasm building in me.

His "Oh, God," and the warm fluid running down my hand was all that drew me away from the afterimage of my own orgasm.

We lay next to each other, silent, for a few moments. I can't tell you what I was thinking—I don't believe I was thinking, I was just there, blissful. Then he pulled me up his body and began kissing me with a passion.

"I didn't intend for that to happen," he said between kisses scattered about my face.

"What to happen?" I was baffled. Did he suddenly regret our sex?

"Coming right then. I wanted to make this last, to get inside of you. I'm not sure I can get it up again soon."

I had forgotten men have that problem. "That's ok. It was wonderful."

He kissed me gently on the lips and smiled.

We drifted off to sleep with my body still draped over his. I slipped off him in the night, waking myself in the process. He slept on.

I couldn't get back to sleep, so I spied on his slumbering form. His lips were parted, a slight smile at the corners. I could see the movement of his eyes under their protective lids. He was erect again. Was he dreaming of us?

I think I may have drifted off again, but it was an uneasy sleep that I struggled to embrace. Soon I found myself my eyes searching over his body. We had fallen asleep with the covers still on the floor, so he was completed exposed to my view. The passion of the moment was gone; I was a documentarian, my kino-eye scanning him for differences between men and women. Were there so many differences? He had lips, fingers, eyes, and nipples. His body was made of muscle and ligaments stretched over bones, and covered with skin. His organs were the same; his mitochondria functioned the same as the mitochondria of my previous lovers'. Yes, there was the beginning of a scratchy beard, and instead of breasts, he had a flat, muscled chest. His pubic hair continued into his stomach hair with only a change in color and texture, but not much change in volume. His muscles were bigger, but Sarah's athletic body hadn't been that different. She didn't have large breasts, and her muscles were at least as defined and hard as his.

But the small differences did matter. It wasn't the hair or the penis. It was the shape of his nose, the width of his wrists. The veins on his hands. There was a different smell. His lips were shaped wrong, as were his eyes. His features were almost coarse, even with his beauty.

Tom had come to mean so much to me, but was this right? Should I be next to him? I couldn't decide.



Tom woke me with soft caresses. They were wonderfully comforting. I basked in them, feigning sleep. I don't think he was fooled, but he continued with his gentle touches and kisses. I gave up the game with a sigh, and rolled to kiss him. He was erect, his penis pushing against my thigh. We kissed, but the kiss was wrong for me. I was kissing him perfunctorily, not passionately. I was too confused to be swept up in the moment again, but too confused and uncertain to stop where we were going.

I was withdrawn, faking enthusiasm. Our loving felt good, but I couldn't lose myself in it. I tried to pretend it was as good as the night before.

There was no pain when he penetrated me. It felt good, but not right. Or maybe it just wasn't good enough. I was expecting something grand: "skyrockets." I got sparklers and ladyfingers. I wasn't going anywhere other than a vague pleasantness. I felt awkward, like this was my failure, and I couldn't allow Tom to know. I tried faking it, pasting passion on my face like cheap lipstick.

From the night before, I could see Tom's building orgasm in his expression. There was a slight grunt and a halo of kisses around my face. He was finished, and I wasn't looking for more.

I suppose the confusion, which was beginning to slide into disappointment, was to be expected. I'd heard that losing one's virginity is almost always an earthly experience, and few women orgasm from it. When I was coming to terms with being a lesbian, I came to feel that the failure of women to orgasm with their male lovers was a sure sign that hetero sex was good for producing babies and little else. I understood when my friends told me that hetero sex would one day disappear, as science untied copulation and procreation.

Yet, Tom had never been completely a man to me. Not that he lacked masculinity, but my image of him was too intermingled with my memories of Sarah for me to allow him the absolute otherness that "male" implied. I expected our union would be a continuation of my lovemaking with Sarah. Orgasms were free and plentiful for us then, so why not now, even if Tom, technically, was not her?

I think not reaching orgasm wouldn't have been so bad if Tom had not been so empathic. He felt my disappointment and took it inside of him, where he magnified it ten times over. He didn't say a word—he isn't the pressuring type—but I could see his disappointment hidden in the corner of his eyes.

The missing orgasm hung over us at breakfast, and we quickly parted for "errands," both happy to be away from the void the non-existent orgasm left. I wondered if he expected to conquer me, win me to the straight world with his manly prowess. I knew Tom didn't think like that, but men are, well, men. From what I've seen, too much of a hetro man's pride rests on his sexual success with women.



We had another cooling off. We talked on the phone occasionally and even got together for dinner or a movie now and then, but there was an edge. The strange thing about the entire disappointment and distancing thing we were going through was that I truly had a great experience while we were having sex. It wasn't miserable—it was joyful. I just didn't come with him in me. I had to face the reality that Tom wasn't Sarah reincarnated, and that reality was too crushing for me to bear. I didn't know what Tom's problems were, but they weighed on him just as heavily as mine weighed on me.

Two months went by. I was starting to miss Tom's company. Our short visits and phone calls did not fulfill the surprising need for social interaction I had. For the first time since I "got over" Sarah, I was lonely.

Then I did the most surprising thing I've ever done. It wasn't meek. It wasn't timid. It was courageous and bold. I called Tom and said, "Hi Tom. You're going to come over tonight and fuck me." I held my breath for the fifteen seconds of eternity he waited to respond.

His voice was the calm, comforting creature it normally was. "Now?"

"Right now."

He fucked me. I came. He fucked me again; I came harder. I called in sick on Monday. And Tuesday. So did he. I had never so sore as I was when I showed up work on Wednesday.



Part 6—Myself, Finally

Two months later, I woke up in Tom's arm, hearing a dog barking outside. I opened his porch doors and smelled roses and coffee, just like any other morning. We ate together, speaking only in the secret language, largely with our feet, which seemed to be the most talkative. I had Corn Pops, Tom had a cantaloupe half, two eggs, and beet/tomato juice straight from the juicer—he is always very healthy.

I dressed and drove into work, where I finished translating a legal document into Italian for a shipping firm. Then I wrote my resignation and a note to Tom.

If I say that I left because I fit too well, too tightly with Tom, I suspect many people would dismiss me as flighty, but it was the geography of our coupling that drove away. It was the precise way he could communicate 'Another bagel, please?' with a lifted eyebrow, the way he said 'I love you' in the cant of toes and fingers, and elbows, all with their adoring regional accents intact. It was the way he knew what book I was about to pick up from the coffee table, even before I did. It was the way he made eggs, scrambled to a perfect fluff, topped with the right amount of cheddar cheese in thin, quickly melting sheets, and placed my fork on the edge of the plate. The way he smiled when I came home.

I had squeezed myself into all of those intimate cracks in his life—all of the spaces between his job and his many friends—and begun to appear as the lines that both separated and held them together.

To be so important to someone is to surrender to their dreamstuff; becoming a captive of their mind, their needs, their definition. Every moment I spent with Tom, subtle pressure shaped me into Michi Bitteresmeer—wife, daughter and worker, not individual. I had, despite myself, found that I loved Michi Lorre more than I loved anyone. That pressure on my form Tom's presence inevitably created threatened the shape I needed to remain Michi Lorre. I had never learned the strength to keep my shape in the presence of others, so I had to leave.

Leaving was my feeble gesture of love. I gave Tom myself until I was on the cusp of being something else—so I had given him everything I had to give. Anything else was a deception, or a gift he had never requested and I had never volunteered. It would have been a gift he could not have reciprocated, and one I could not have resisted resenting giving. So I gave him a life free of me.

I live by myself now. There will never be another man beyond casual friends. They do not appeal to me anymore. There are women, usually younger than I and less formed. But mostly I revel in myself as I slowly harden into something permanent: a monument to meekness.

Send your comments to us at TheMrLee@hotmail.com.