

Waiting at the Turn

The tabloid magazines proclaimed the devalued author to be heteroflexible. Not gay or bi, but a straight heterosexual person who occasionally enjoys sexual engagement with the same sex. At six feet tall with a strong chin and brow, stony mug, abundant tawny hair and chocolate brown eyes, the author could appeal to both genders. Everyone suspected something given his many close homosexual friends; however, there was that broken-hearted trail of girlfriends that confused the issue. The author didn't mind, believing the adage, any publicity is good publicity. Even better as it associated him with a trending topic. Fucking difficult to stay relevant. He looked forward to having those same gossip mongers confused and wondering again. The man had done his research, or someone had done it for him: women over the age of 50 control three-fourths of the nation's wealth. The author was going to tap into the she-economy by showing himself to be one of the few men who evolved to sapiosexuality, valuing the mind over the face and body. He would soon have that word trending too.

It is 7:00 in the morning. The light through the bedroom window is slightly dimmer than the previous day as Fall stops in for a quick visit. There is little to separate summer and winter in the Midwest. Summer has been shrinking and rainy for the last few years and winter is longer, grayer, colder, and icier. Cabin fever begins in January now instead of February and lasts a month longer through April. The spinster lying in bed with books scattered at her side leaves it only once in the mornings to fill a large no-spill mug with coffee and sweet cream to nurse in bed for the next four hours. The television is still on from lulling her to sleep the night before.

Since taking early retirement from the bookkeeping department of the local bank, she spends the mornings repeatedly, and in no particular order, browsing channels, reading a few pages of several books and dozing off before eventually rising to bathe and dress. The woman never considers herself in the mirror. Except for an increasing bagginess under the eyes, her plain asymmetric features cushioned in a fatty face atop a dumpy body has not changed much over the years.

The author detests sleep for there is always much more to do than hours in a lifetime of days of which he is already past the midway mark. There is no bedtime. Tiredness is pushed away again and again with cappuccinos, energy drinks, and the occasional pill until it overtakes him - slumped in an executive chair with his hands in mid-type across the keyboard and forehead resting against the computer screen, scrunched down in an airplane seat with an unfinished text message on his lap and shoulder leaning uncomfortably against a window or mouth agape and head flung upon the back of his agent's couch in mid negotiation. The author pinballs primarily between the East and West Coasts with frequent spur trips to other places to stay on his hustle. Sadly unable to enjoy the local cuisine at each stop. Starving himself to maintain a lean build. Kissing ass, taking selfies, posing for usies (group selfies), whatever it took to move the merchandise. Scoping for sweet young things to tag him for a hook-up helped ease the monotony, but even that was getting old. Unbelievable. His younger self would have been incredulous that scoring could ever get old. He was ready to couple up and she'd never find out about the occasional side piece anyways. The woman's seclusion in a world separate from his would play to his advantage.

The spinster's home is a tidy one-bedroom apartment above a fine jeweler's on the main street of a 100-year old village in the middle of Illinois farmlands. Before the jeweler's, there was a children's shoe store and before the children's shoe store, there was a butcher shop and before the butcher shop, there was a leather repair shop. The woman has seen them come and go and thinks the jewelry store is by far the best. It is quiet, has no smell about it and does not attract the neighborhood children.

On Mondays afternoons, the spinster walks the seven blocks to the library to borrow books. The man enjoys these walks after spending so much time in taxis, limos and the like. He stays outside of the building and waits for her so as not to attract attention. The woman carries with her several cotton knit book jackets that stretch to cover any shape or size of reading material. A voracious reader of diverse subjects, she doesn't think her reading selection is anyone's business but her own. It was books that had brought them together. She doubted he ever met a woman as well read as her or as unadulterated. The woman suspects he finds the combination of her intelligence and purity alluringly refreshing.

The spinster pulls the Easy Roll mini shopping cart the four blocks to the village grocer's on Tuesday afternoons. That is the day the tuna noodle casserole is prepared and displayed in the deli case and the newly discounted non-perishable items are piled in the trolley cart by the entrance. The man so often seems to be at her side on this errand that she believes he is charmed by the quaintness of the small but adequate store.

Laundry is done on Wednesday afternoons using the compact washer/dryer combo that fills the coat closet by the front door. Winter parka and windbreaker are stored in the bedroom closet. The spinster is more than willing to add a few of his items to her load, but the man considerately never wishes to impose. Financial matters, such as paying bills, balancing the checkbook, and rolling over maturing certificates of deposits are dealt with on Thursdays. Being modestly independent and content with very little is a source of pride for her and, the woman likes to think, garners some admiration from him.

Friday afternoons find the spinster gulping a chocolate malt milkshake with extra whip cream and a Cadbury flake at the Village Ice Cream Shoppe. Sometimes, the man is tempted to swipe a spoonful or two. Saturdays and Sundays are spent solving crossword puzzles, watching Hallmark movie marathons and cleaning the apartment from top to bottom while he writes at the kitchen table.

In a typical week, the author, his personal assistant, social media manager, make-up artist, and agent will travel to LA, NYC, Miami and Philadelphia for book signings and interviews. Along the way, his Twitter and Instagram accounts will be updated daily, photo shoots taken, and dinners eaten with anyone wealthy, beautiful, or talented with usies posted to prove it. While Skyping with his marketing team, he'll autograph books as well as t-shirts with quotes from his books. His first film adaptation was about to be released. He was pimping it so hard, he felt sure it would make money even if the critics considered it crap. That's what makes the woman perfect for him, he thought. She doesn't demand much of his time, a homebody, a loner.

Since she never left town, he could drop in whenever he had a moment. Unpolluted in body (amazing given her age) and mind. Not like those slags you could drive a truck through their snatch and shithole. Always demanding expensive dinners, money, jewelry, cars, and travel. No wonder he slipped up with a few minors. He just wanted to swim in some clean fresh water every once in a while. The woman would take care of that too. Clean up his image, get his manager off his back, help pick up sales.

The spinster couldn't remember the last time she was this excited and anxious. She'd never been to a movie premiere before. It set in motion a lot of other firsts: manicure (a demure pink), hair professionally styled (a bun up-do), evening dress (a long gown with an empire waist in gray silk) and matching pumps with two-inch heels (the highest she had ever worn). There were other public events she could have attended, such as book signings and readings, but she never before could muster up the courage. This was a special event, however, the movie premiere of his first book. It would be spectacular! The woman hoped he would like the way she looked. Yes, she was ready to take the next step in their relationship.

Chicago was the first stop on a brief movie premiere tour that included NYC and LA in that order. The author requested the Chicago stop because it was closest to the woman. She lived in the same archaic town in which she had been born and raised. Still, he couldn't believe she had agreed to attend given her hermit-like existence. It was the show and tell opportunity for which he had been waiting. He'd enjoy watching the critics backpedal years of innuendos of sexual depravity and vulgar romantic choices, especially the prevailing rumor that his degenerate social circle was eroding his fan base. With this woman at his side, all that negativity would disperse.

The spinster took the evening milk train into Chicago's Union Station and walked, shivering and teetering, the half mile to Desert Star Cinema. She waited in the lengthy and broad lobby. A couple of sloppily dressed men with cameras hung around their necks, a portable bar offering red or white wine and a small table of cheese, crackers and assorted cookies were the only indications that tonight was something more special than just the regular movie showings. Standing apart from the office suits atop burnished oxfords and figure-hugging dresses atop spike-heeled strappy shoes, the engulfing chatter panicked her.

The author quickly checked himself in the full-length mirror in the general manager's office before making his appearance in the Desert Star Cinema Lobby. The once fine angles of his face were blurry. Eyelids and eyebrows drooped and cheeks and jawline sagged from the loss of elasticity. When did his body become so thick and settled? He was weakened from whoring the movie and his constantly empty stomach convulsed from all he had ingested to keep himself going. The man quickly pushed these negative thoughts aside so they wouldn't bring his forced high spirits low. It was time to reveal his new image. This was the night the critics and marketing executives would look at him with a more favorable eye. The man exited the office hoping he hadn't kept her waiting too long and that the GM had found her among the crowd and ushered her to the balcony seats which were set aside for them.

The spinster's face brightened as she saw the author make his entrance. She stepped toward him trying to catch his eye. As the distance between them narrowed, the author's attention was diverted by a good-looking barely 20-something laying a hand on his shoulder to draw him near enough to whisper in his ear.

After a moment or two, the author continued the meet and greet. As he moved forward, his gait slowed and wavered from one direction to another until stalled by confusion. The woman was almost at his side. He stooped and rested a palm on each knee until crumbling forward and rolling onto his back. She knelt and bent her head over his. The author dismissively pushed her away and squawked, "Don't touch me, you old hag." It was then that security guards ushered everyone towards the doors and the spinster was given the bum's rush out onto the streets.

By mid-morning, the intersecting geometric patterns were exactly right. This would be the final piece of her exhibition at the Smith Museum of Stained Glass at Chicago's Navy Pier. After years of showings at European venues, the celebrated artist was delighted the first American museum dedicated solely to the art of stained glass windows was close to home. The glass was cut and grinded in the afternoon. The evening would be devoted to cutting the black-backed foil in the shape of the overlay and sticking it to the glass. It would surely be another perfect day and night spent alone and at home since sending an "unable to attend message" to that sex-addicted, no talent, closeted writer.

The End