

The Coin Flips. Flops. Flirts.

Two-hundred years ago, no one knew how fire worked, what property brought it to life. They thought it was some mysterious element. Jennifer and I continue to flirt with each other after all these years because some mysterious element keeps that fire burning. It's true that we also flirt considerably with others as well, but we are certainly not swingers. The jealousy that resides with most couples is a stranger in our home. But our loyalty toward each other is not dependent on social strictures or on fear. Our commitment is based on the luxury of requited desires. We have no need to look elsewhere.

Once, Jennifer had a huge office crush on some guy named Ralph. She asked me if I would want to have a three-way with this person. Now I've had my share of sexual experimentation like everyone else, especially during my Bowie years, but 'guys' are not my cup of tea. I'm boring and limited I suppose, since I only get it up for women. So, Jenny asked if I would mind if she could have a little fling with little Ralphy all by their little selves. I said I wouldn't mind. This surprised her and delighted her. She asked me out of curiosity why I could be so generous. I told her it was because I loved her and wanted to see her happy. Which is true. Now, I may have had more cause for concern if the guy had looked like Brad Pitt. But he looked like Jack Black. Generosity is often effortless. Besides, this would fling open the door for my own 'little fling' should the opportunity arise. I'm a smart guy. Generosity is seldom motive-free.

Jenny and Ralph did a lot of heavy petting, but when it came down to the nitty-gritty, Jennifer backed down. She suddenly got cold feet because Ralph was not in a relationship himself and she began to feel his encroaching neediness. Not to mention the fact that once the taboos are lifted and you are given full permission to enact what was once prohibited, those unfulfilled desires are soon deflated and are no longer necessary.

Helen and I are longtime hangout buddies. I met her when I was in my late 20's and she was only 17. Don't even go there! It's not what you think. Even then, wow, what a brain and what a body! She is smarter than Nietzsche and curvier than Mulholland Drive – dangerous curves that could swerve a man's mind, and his car, over a cliff. Her youthful face is irresistible. I can't stop looking at her whenever she appears in my field of vision. Her eyes and her smile radiate a heart-full invitation – the kind of face that drives guys, every time Helen walks into a bar, to launch a thousand beers.

When Helen first moved to LA from England to attend UCLA, she asked me if I could help her secure a place to live. It turned out that some mutual friends of ours had a room for rent in their spacious Bel-Aire home. One evening, a few months after Helen had settled in, I was driving in the area and on the spur of the moment decided to pay these friends a visit. A gay couple, who had been extremely successful as music producers for EMI. Helen had long gone to sleep. I guessed an early morning final exam had knocked the lights out of her usual night-owl routine.

Their home was situated high on a hill surrounded by cypress and greenery, fruit trees and wild strawberries. At one point during the late 1960s and early 70s their house had belonged to The

Doors. Historically, we know the Rock and Roll parties which took place here were notorious and the 360 degree view must have provided hours of psychedelic tripping pleasure. The visual panorama included the ocean, the Valley, West Hollywood and downtown Los Angeles. We sat in my friends' living room, as acoustically majestic as the Hollywood Bowl, overlooking the UCLA campus and the shopping mall wilderness of Sherman Oaks. This was now the 1980s and rapidly emerging technologies were revolutionizing the music industry. A Magical Mystery Tour was playing on a loop in the background, scratch-less and pristine, unlike any vinyl record in my previous listening experience. In fact, it may have been the first music CD I had ever heard. My Digital Mystery Tour of zeros and ones. We talked into the AM hours about art and Reaganomics and the fascist war on drugs spearheaded by William Bennett. And then I heard a faint sound coming from the bathroom. The familiar tinkling music of after-midnight girl pee. Then a quick flush. Then analogue footsteps tapping down the dark wood corridor toward the beat of my heart. Then Helen, rubbing her eyes, almost bumping into me, still bed-warm, her dreamy auburn hair fallen into Strawberry Fields Forever.

"Helen?"

"Mags... Hello, baby," she said, cheerfully, and threw her arms around me in a blanket of love, and whispered in my ear. "Would you mind hanging out with me in my room for a bit?" It was a rhetorical question.

She led the way and I followed her scent down that hopeful hallway, like a blind man. I was wrong in my assumption about the final exam. What had knocked the energy out of this sweet

night-owl was boyfriend troubles. Broken love and twisted sleep had woven a pattern of fine wrinkles into her nightshirt. My eyes travelled over those delicious folds, those convoluted little wounds etched into the fabric of space and time...and the Fool on the Hill. All I wanted to do was smooth out the wrinkles. We sat on her warm bed talking until the wee hours of the morning. As my eyes glanced happily around her room, I noticed she was well organized. She had to be. A busy girl always prepares ahead of time. Neatly laid out in the corner, black bra and fresh panties complied for easy morning access. Waiting eagerly on a hook close by, a semitransparent dress fanned open its floral motif. An obvious precaution in case she woke up late, this exit strategy of prepared clothing would allow for smooth transition from nightmare through flightmode to class. Outside her window I heard the cackle of crows, mockingbird laughter, and the jabber of jays. She sobbed her heart out. Her boyfriend had been a complete shit. She had busted him with another woman. Well, not the actual woman herself, but a strange, red, solitary hair, not Helen's, stuck to the passenger seat of his convertible Mustang. She cried like a rainforest and confided that she would never love again. Crushed by the entropy of deceit, she would be scarred for life. She tossed her arms around me, once more, and wept through the *dew-eyed dawn*... and Bluejay Way.

Sitting so comfortably on her bed, I felt like a guilty dog, collarless and loose in the neighborhood, deriving such beastly pleasure at that awkward moment, as her trembling breasts delivered mountains of youthful sorrow against my tail-wagging chest.

Why Helen and I never connected romantically I will never know. We were certainly attracted to each other on many levels. Age was perhaps a contributing factor. And so was timing. Either I

was in a relationship or she was. But no matter, my heart continues to rotate its heliotropic flower around her sunshine.

One elucidating summer, Helen invited me to participate in a seminar she was taking at UCLA on James Joyce's *Ulysses*. The professor, a Joycean scholar, was more than delighted to have an enthusiast like me audit the class. As Helen and I walked through campus, every head turned to check her out in that semitransparent floral dress. Even the bees came bumbling toward her looking for pollen.

It was Helen who first pointed out Calypso's uncanny beauty. We both looked over in pleasant surprise at this young woman sitting across from us. Calypso responded in turn with a welcoming smile. She was Black Irish – porcelain skin, framed by hair as dark as the Middle Ages. But what struck me immediately was the intensity of her eyes. They blazed a life-affirming blue. Up until that moment, I hadn't really noticed her in class. But once she infected my consciousness, Calypso remained a permanent infatuation. I fell in love with her bubbling girlish enthusiasm.

We would go for coffee after class. Calypso chit-chatted about the slick and silly onslaught of New Wave British rock bands. Style vs substance. Depeche Mode or Simple Minds. Duran Duran or Echo and the Bunnymen. And then she would effortlessly segue into a full discourse on women's rights or the latest book she was reading – Nora – about the patient and long-suffering wife of James Joyce. Distracted, I dunked my donut-soul in an Irish coffee and bobbed my heart in her buoyant, blue-eyed sea.

Once the seminar was over, Calypso and I continued to do the hang through the cool mornings and hot afternoons of that endless summer. Jennifer punched a 17 hour time-clock as a migrant film worker at all the Hollywood, post-production, special effects sweat-houses. While I worked the occasional evenings massaging wealthy clients, whose largess in tips afforded me lots of free time during the day.

I remember visiting Calypso one morning, where she took a summer job as park ranger with the Los Angeles County Zoo. Waiting pleasantly at the entrance for some time before her arrival, I met her playful eyes when she finally approached me, yawning, and slightly late for her morning shift. What had this girl been up to the night before? Her disheveled hair suggested a night of fun in the haystack – or the Hollywood Hills. She smiled and the DNA in her irises hummed a cerulean song to the dominant brown in mine. Eyes as blue and clear as a summer sky on the African plain. We trundled across the zoo's concrete plain over to the cramped, employee, changing room, where I sat in a fake zebra-skin chair as she put on her ranger uniform behind the half-open curtain. Khaki shorts and shirt streamlined her sleek shape, stretching and shifting whenever she moved, like the spots on a cheetah. Out of respect, I looked away as she undressed. Only to have my eyes land on the stainless steel water dispenser perked-up on a table in the opposite corner, where I could see reflected on its surface, every detail of her baby-smooth skin. She never needed to shave her legs because the peach fuzz that grew there was as barely perceptible as Horton hearing a Who. The hot sun had generated a few beads of perspiration, here and there, on her long neck and arms and thighs. These tiny droplets danced happily on the tips of her peachy hair like so many angels on the head of a pin. My sudden wild craving to

collect those elemental beads into a shot-glass and chase down my thirst, needed to be tamed and caged.

We strolled over to her favorite animal hangout – the Orangutans. Smitten entirely by Calypso's beauty and charm, all the alpha males ran over as soon as they saw her approaching their cement enclave – a treeless home away from home, about as dry and inviting as the L.A. River. Between us lay an abyss of stone. Across this desolate moat, which separated captive audience from captive creature, they extended their long orange arms through the retaining bars, hoping to touch Calypso's magical physicality. They stared dreamily into the wild blue heaven of her eyes. Some irresponsible zoo visitor had provided these apes with wads of chewing gum, so they stretched and twirled the sticky gobs, like spaghetti, around their nimble fingers as they listened to Calypso's university lecture.

She opened a massive tome, annotated and highlighted, from which she recited for them in her lovely Irish voice. Over the course of that summer, Calypso had read to her Orangutan acolytes the entire Molly Bloom chapter from Joyce's Ulysses. The smartest animal in the world is Princess, a female Orangutan who has mastered the vocabulary of President George Bush – 40 words – in pictures. Since Orangutans have no larynx, unlike George, they need to point. But by the end of that smart, delicious summer, Calypso's educated monkeys could have passed the SAT test with a score that would have rivaled any over-achieving Asian kids and given them a good run for their (parents) money.

The great apes and I listened attentively, to the last few pages of Molly Bloom's soliloquy, as Calypso slid down that single sentence, phrase by sensual phrase, to reach the final, famous, affirmative word – Yes.

Intoxicated by the sound of Calypso's voice and by her parted lips as she uttered the last precious syllable, yes, I thought, yes, I would never leave that concrete island-paradise. But Calypso had other animals to attend and I had a beautiful wife waiting at home for me to attend. Yes.

So there you have it. That summer, Calypso and I did the monkey business. But only up to a point. Sensual, full-bodied hugs accompanied by sweet whisperings, laying around on her couch, or mine, with our clothes on of course, talking, occasionally rubbing my cheek across her facial skin, grazing her delicate ear with my lips and burrowing deep into her Black Irish hair, whose scent drove my leaping leprechaun over a shamrock.

But when it actually came down to the moment of truth, Calypso's Irish moral fiber reigned victorious. She and Jennifer were fond of each other. As Jenny has been fond of all my women friends. So Calypso retreated, refusing to take it any further.

In a way, it is a bit cowardly, on my part, to always pick women who are stronger than I. Women of solid character. Women with their ethics in tact. Women with a healthy sense of themselves. Being a typical guy, again the dirty dog, I avail myself by always choosing a strong woman to flirt with. This advantage gives me more wiggle room to push the boundaries – imposing the burden of restraint on them.

Consequently, in the final days of this tangled summer, Calypso and I had a falling out. She was angry with me. A complex transfer of feelings left us both confused. She wasn't in a relationship herself, at the time, placing her emotions at a vulnerable disadvantage. For my part, I became too assertive, crowding her independence. I realized things had gotten out of hand one night, when Jennifer and I were waiting in line to see Robin Hitchcock play at McCabes. Jennifer was speaking sweetly and lovingly to me, but I wasn't hearing a word she was saying because I was wondering what Calypso was up to that evening. All I wanted at that moment was to be near her – Calypso – while my adoring wife stood before me, under the dim lamplight, pale in comparison. Awakened by this startling epiphany, I knew I needed to regain my old equilibrium.

We distanced ourselves, Calypso and I, for a few painful months. A year, to be exact. But her friendship was vital to me. I missed her terribly. So I worked on trying to mend our broken fence. I continued to write her the occasional letter or card. I paced myself in order to avoid any further conflict – not wishing to annoy her or to appear overbearing. Besides, this all took place in the eighties, just on the other side of the internet, which meant the old snail-mail system could provide a natural time buffer in which to heal all wounds. Eventually Calypso came around and we have been fast friends ever since. She is now married with kids, and leprechaun be damned, she is still as fine an Irish woman as there ever was one.