

# Alexandra

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# Preface

This is the first time I have released this novel under a creative commons license. Since 1991, when I first wrote this novel, I have: submitted the manuscript to traditional publishers, released it as shareware, posted some, and all, of the text to various websites and news groups, self published via POD and ebook, and finally posted it on my blog alongside adsense adverts. However, as the internet marketers would say, my efforts to monetize my content have met with limited success. With "successes" such as spending \$300 in advertising in order to sell 8 POD books and earning \$3 a month in advertising revenue from my blog, I can only hope that I am a better writer than I am businessman.

I cannot say that this is the best novel ever written, I cannot tell you that it will change your life, or start a revolution. Various people, through email and website comments, have told me that they have enjoyed this work and that it has connected with them on a meaningful level. If I had not freely shared my work on the Internet the connections between those people and my work would not have been made. And so it is with the intent of connecting my work with even more people, so that they might enjoy reading it, and maybe discover something about themselves, other people and the world we all share, that I release this novel under a creative commons license.

As a writer I have to realize that my work exists independently to myself. My novel only really exists when it is read. Otherwise it is just dead words printed on dead trees (and not even that for the electronic copies). It is only when a reader reads my words that they come alive and as a living thing my novel deserves to live its own life. And so it is in the spirit of allowing my work to stand on its own, to allow it to grow and develop in its own way that I release it under a creative commons license.

The people who do connect to this novel are spread too thinly across the world to allow the mass production and distribution of this novel as a traditionally published book to be economically viable. And so finally, it is in the hope of finding a new way to market and distribute stories that I release this novel under a creative commons license. I hope that a new business model will develop, one that will allow a much greater variety and freedom in the consumption of fiction to arise, and that this new business model will benefit both readers and writers alike.

- Declan Stanley  
30th Nov'08  
Portlaoise, Ireland.

# 1

One of the major problems in my life is an irresistible impulse to fall head-over-heels in love with complete strangers. This may not seem much of a problem, but when you combine it with a deep seated insecurity that makes me sure that they'll never be interested in loving me back, it produces quite a few problems.

The first is an unwillingness, or rather an inability, to express my feelings. The first time I fell in love was when I was fourteen. It was with a girl who used to go to the school across the road from mine. But I couldn't even bring myself to talk to her let alone ask her out.

We used to get the same bus home from school and I'd stand there at the bus stop trying not to stare at her. For a whole school year we stood there, not talking to each other. And to this day I have absolutely no idea if she had any similar feelings for me, or if she even noticed me.

The second problem is that I always pick a girl who under no stretch of the imagination would be the least bit interested in me. In my late teens I fell in love with a girl five years older than me. Today this would not cause me any problems, but the gap between a shy, immature eighteen year old boy and a somewhat more sophisticated, mature twenty three year old woman is quite large. She treated me kindly, I'm sure she was fond of me, but she had absolutely no romantic interest in me.

The third problem is that once I've overcome my shyness and I've struck up a friendship with the girl I immediately jump to the conclusion that she's fallen in love with me, despite the fact that we might be having a very casual relationship from her point of view.

In the normal course of events I can take it or leave it if somebody takes a dislike to me. But once I've fallen "in love" there can be no alternative but that she loves me back. And if she doesn't seem to, well, I've got a vivid imagination and I can make no end of excuses to explain her behaviour. I can think of everything, but that she isn't interested in me.

In between falling "in love", which happens about every three years, I have had more normal relationships with women. Indeed I have many friends who are women, a few of them ex-girlfriends. When I'm not "in love" I can communicate quite well. We can go out on a date, have a great time and end the night with a kiss and a cuddle. Sex was never a problem, because we wouldn't get that serious in that way.

And therein lies the problem. The girlfriends I could talk to, and have an honest and open relationship with, were the girls I was most likely to have sex with, but I had no interest in having sex with them. The girls I wanted were the ones I was "in love" with, and they were the ones I had no hope of making it with.

So at the beginning of this story I started out as a twenty four year old virgin waiting for someone to come along and sweep me off my feet on a whirlwind of passion and romance. Someone I could "make a commitment" to and "share my life" with, someone with whom I could have sex with every night.

I met and fell "in love" with a girl who, for reasons of her own that I cannot tell you, had exactly the opposite problems with her relationships with men as I had with women. We complemented each other perfectly and produced one of the worst relationships ever.

It started on a nice bright June evening at a meeting of the City Camera Club. A member of the Club, who was also a member of the Historical Society, was to give a guided tour detailing the history of the area surrounding the club's new premises. I was standing talking to another member of the club, while we were waiting for enough people to turn up for the tour to start, when I noticed a rather attractive woman come into the room.

Something snapped in the back of my mind and I was "in love" again. I was began to make my way over to her, but just then our guide for the evening decided that there was enough people to start the tour. He clapped his hands together to get our attention, asked us all to gather around and gave a short introductory talk about what we were going to see tonight.

Then he asked us all to move outside. As I turned around I noticed that the woman who was to be the new "love of my life" had been standing behind me, talking to a friend of mine called Paul. I don't remember what he said nor what her answer was. But my heart jumped when I heard her voice.

The only way I can describe it is as the cutest accent I have ever heard, but that doesn't convey the impact it had on me. For me one of the most important things about a woman is her voice. I love accents and the way a woman uses words and the textures of her speech, all add to my attraction for her. And here was a woman able to sent shivers down my spine, even when she wasn't talking to me.

Paul asked her what her name was and I heard her reply "Alexandra", before I got separated from them as the crowd squeezed its way through the door. Outside we turned right and followed the guide down the street. I watched Alexandra as she walked along ahead of me. She was wearing an orange track-suit type jacket, with faded blue jeans. And I thought that she had one of the nicest bottoms I'd ever seen.

We followed the guide around the corner and down a little alleyway. He stopped outside the gates of an old Jewish cemetery that I hadn't known was there. Unfortunately the gates were locked so we couldn't get in to explore. But our guide gave us a brief history of it standing on the pavement outside.

I noticed Alexandra sneak a camera out of her pocket and point it through the bars of the cemetery's railings. I walked over to her and reached her just as she was putting the camera away again.

"Nice shot?" I asked.

"Umm, yes," she gave me a petite smile and I almost kissed her.

There was silence for a moment. Our guide had started to walk on and the group was following him. She turned to follow and I walked beside her.

"So what's your name?" I asked, even though I'd heard her tell it to Paul a minute ago.

"Alexandra," the word danced off her tongue.

My heart was beating so loud and she spoke so softly that I had trouble hearing her. "Alex?" I asked.

"I prefer Alexandra," she replied.

"Alexandra," I savored her name.

We walked in silence for a few moments. Then I asked, "So is this your first time down at the Camera Club?"

"Oh, no. I've been to several meetings," she smiled.

"Really," I was surprised. "I must have been asleep not to have noticed you before."

She laughed softly. "Well, I've seen you around."

"Yeah?" I smiled at her. "Well I go to most meetings." I laughed, "Guess I must be addicted to them."

She was a few inches shorter than me and as I looked down at her, she smiled up at me. Our eyes met and I was lost. There and then she stole my heart with the sparkle in her hazel eyes.

The rest of the tour is like a dream to me. I have a hazy impression of the group following

## Alexandra

our guide around the streets and alleyways, stopping here and there to be told about the historical significance of this or that building. But I judge the highlights of the tour not on the historical pedigree of the buildings, but how close I managed to get to Alexandra as we stood and listened to the stories of our guide. I remember talking to her, but I don't remember what we said.

To my now jaded memory it seems as if I spent the whole tour running about the group trying to be as close as possible to her for as long as possible. The reason I had to keep running to catch up with her was because she kept moving away from me. It wasn't that she didn't like me, or so I thought, it was just that she wanted me to chase after her. A thought to which I should have paid more attention.

But at the time all I thought about was being near her, to be close enough to touch, to talk and listen to her. She had an irresistible attraction for me, like a moth to a candle flame. And I circled closer and closer to the burning passion.

After the tour a group of us retired to the pub as usual. Alexandra joined us, but sat at the opposite end of the group from me. During the night I switched from conversation to conversation, gradually working my way along the group towards her. But unfortunately I didn't get to her before closing time.

For the next week I could think of nothing but her. When I went to bed my last thought was of her and when I woke she was in my first. The physiologists say that men think of sex once every five minutes, well I seemed to have changed that thought to Alexandra. At that time I knew that I was going to have sex with her. Now I know I wanted much more than just sex from her.

It was a sensation of almost physical hunger. I wanted to touch her and see her and be with. To smell her even! I've never paid much attention to smell with a woman before. Except on the odd occasion when I meet a woman who seemingly uses a perfume designed to fumigate the whole room. But with Alexandra it was as if I wanted to devour her with all my senses.

I can't remember what the lecture at next week's meeting of the Club was about. But I do remember the disappointment I felt that she didn't show up before the meeting started. However after the announcements were read and the meeting was concluded I turned to find her sitting in the back row.

I smiled at her and she smiled back. So I made my way over to speak to her.

"Did you enjoy the meeting?" I asked as I stood beside her chair.

"Yes," she stood up. "But I missed the beginning."

There was an electrical tension between us. I wanted to grab her and hug her, but I couldn't.

"Oh, you didn't miss much," I smiled, while the smell of her perfume sent my heart racing.

"Good," she smiled back.

I couldn't think of anything to say. Or rather the only things I could think of were along the lines of, "Let's go back to your place and have mad, passionate sex.", which didn't seem appropriate to either the location or the stage our relationship was at.

"I think I'll go up stairs for some coffee," she started for the exit.

"Err, yes," I replied and watched her make her way through the crowd.

Paul tapped me on the shoulder and asked, "Are you coming for a pint?"

Normally I would but today I wanted to follow Alexandra up to the coffee dock. "I'll be down later, Paul," I said. "Tonight I feel like a cup of coffee first."

"You, coffee?," he faked amazement. "Are you feeling all right?"

"I do drink coffee on the odd occasion," I replied.

A few other people headed for the street exit. "See you later," he said and joined them.

I made my way upstairs and got myself a cup of coffee. I saw Alexandra browsing through

the couple of cupboards that the club stored its small library in. I went over and stood beside her.

"Anything interesting?" I asked.

"Oh," she looked up. "Yeah, it's all about nineteen twenties fashion photographs." She turned the book to show me its pages.

"Oh yes," I half turned and looked at the book. "They had style then, didn't they?"

"Yes," she slowly flicked through the pages and we looked at the old style glamour photos.

I was leaning back against the wall, but close enough to her to feel the heat from her body. As she flipped the pages she lent back and towards me, pressing her shoulder against my arm. I wanted to put my arm around her shoulders and hug her close.

Instead I cleared my throat and asked, "Do you want to come out to the movies with me on Friday?"

She looked up at me, "This Friday?"

"Well yes," I smiled.

"Well..." she hesitated. And my heart stopped beating. "I think that would be very nice." And I sighed with relief.

"Meet you at half seven outside Eason's newsagents on O'Connell Street," I said.

"OK" she smiled back.

I almost left then, but Alexandra turned the page of the book and held it out so that I could see. So we stayed there for the next hour, flicking through photography books.

Then Brian, another member of the club, offered me a lift home, as he lives out in my direction.

I hesitated, not wanting ever to be parted from Alexandra.

"Oh," gushed Alexandra, "Do take your lift."

So I said "OK." And "Goodbye" to Alexandra, and took Brian's lift. And spend the next few days thinking only of Alexandra.

# 2

On Friday I arrived about fifteen minutes early and stood on the street anxiously looking up and down, unsure as to which direction she'd come from. Under the clock outside Easons bookshop on O'Connell Street is a popular place to arrange to meet. Firstly it is a well known landmark. Secondly it is in a fairly busy and public place. And thirdly from the point of view of anyone waiting there are a number of buses that stop there, so you can pretend that people are not looking at you wondering if you have been stood up, and instead convince yourself that they think that you are just waiting for a bus.

Then just as the clock above me began to chime the half hour I saw her walking up from the direction of Abbey St. My heart stopped.

She was wearing a blue cardigan with a matching cotton top and long, flowing skirt, with sandals on her feet. Her long black hair and skirt were blowing in the breeze and she smiled as she saw me. I fell in love with her again. She was just so beautiful it took my breath away. And my heart started pounding in my chest.

"Hi," I said, restraining myself from grabbing her and hugging her off her feet. "How are you?"

"Hi," she smiled. "I'm fine." She shrugged, "A bit tired from work, but you don't want me to go into that."

I wanted her to go into everything. I wanted to know how she spent every minute of every day of her life. But I couldn't tell her that. So instead I just nodded and smiled.

"So," I gestured with my arm and started to walk towards O'Connell Bridge. She walked beside me. "There's a French film on in the Screen cinema that I thought you might like to see." I probably knew the name of it at the time, but I can't remember what it was now.

She nodded, "That sounds nice."

"Do you mind," I slipped my hand into hers.

"No," she smiled and squeezed it gently.

My heart leapt and my grin became ten feet wide.

"So you had a bad day in work then," I said.

"Yes," she sighed. "My boss gave me this load of stuff the other day, that he said he didn't want until next week. Then this afternoon he comes around looking for it and got really annoyed when I didn't have it done." She stopped herself and smiled at me, "But then this is our first date, you don't want me bitching about work."

I just wanted to hear her speak, I didn't care what she talked about. "Not really," I agreed.

It was a bit early for the film so we went into a pub for a drink first. I had a vodka, as drinking a pint before going to a film usually spoils the second half as by that time I'm usually dying to go to the toilet. She had a rum and coke. We sat by a window and were bathed with late evening light filtered through the frosted glass. The sounds of the city traffic could be faintly heard from the outside.

We talked about this and that for a few minutes. I was half turned towards her with my arm on the back of the seat. She sat close to me with her legs crossed and her hands hooked over her knee. As we talked I took hold of her left hand. She smiled at me and squeezed it



down into her lap. We slowly finished our drinks as she caressed my hand in her lap and I toyed with her hair, rubbing it across her neck and shoulder.

We stayed a little too long in the pub and when we arrived in the cinema it was quite full. But we managed to find two seats together in the middle of a row that was not too near the screen.

"So have you done much writing recently?" she asked as we sat down.

I sat beside her. "No I seem to have a terminal case of writer's block," I sighed.

"Well I'm sure it'll pass," she looked around the cinema.

"Yeah. But I keep getting itchy fingers, and thinking that I should be at home doing some work instead of being out enjoying myself," I explained.

"Well you might get some inspiration tonight," she looked back at me.

I laughed. "Inspiration! That's the last thing I need. I've got inspiration coming out my ears. What I need is to get some writing done. Not an idea for yet another story."

"Surely you need inspiration before you know what story to write," she said.

"I've got ideas for five novels and about fifteen short stories that I've haven't written. And probably never will," I replied. "I don't need any more."

"Oh," she said softly.

"Anyway," I smiled. "Inspiration is supposed to come from inside me, or from my own observations, not from copying other people's work. You wouldn't want me to plagiarize now, would you?"

"Of course not," she smiled back.

Yes I used to be that touchy about my writing.

Then the lights dimmed and the audience hushed as the projector sprang into action.

"Do you mind if I'm assertive," I whispered as I slipped my arm around her shoulders.

"Please do," she relaxed against me.

Normally when I put my arm around a girl I rest my hand on the outside of her shoulder, because if you put your arm over her shoulder your hand almost inevitably comes to rest on her breast, which is usually a bit too forward for a first date. But with Alexandra I found my elbow came to comfortably rest just past her neck and my hand brushed against her breast before I knew it. I pulled it away and didn't know what to do with it for a moment. But Alexandra came to my rescue. She solved my dilemma by taking my hand in her's, so we were actually holding hands and being intimate without me grouping her. Then she did something which I shall always remember. All through the film she ran her other hand up and down my forearm. Stroking the hairs on my arm and producing a sensation which made me shake with anticipation.

The film was a French romantic comedy about the director of a yoghurt company who falls in love with the cleaning lady at his office. She discovers a plot by one of the managers, who is also having an affair with the director's wife, to unseat him and take over the company. There was lots of intrigue, good one liners and even some social commentary, all wrapped up in a fast moving plot, before we got the happy ending.

All in all it was quite a good film, but it was turned into a masterpiece because I saw it with my arm around Alexandra.

As we were coming out of the cinema I asked, "So where to now, Alexandra?"

"I know a nice pub up towards where I live," She waved in more or less the correct direction. "But I can't remember its name."

"That's OK," I said as I took her hand in mine. "Let's go." And we walked over to the pedestrian crossing to cross the busy traffic coming down Pearse Street.

We talked about the movie as we walked towards the pub, but by the time we reached the gates of Trinity College in College Green we'd both said how much we'd liked it a good few times and had told each other what the best bits had been and there was a lull in the conversation.

As we walked up Grafton St. I looked at a clock and realized that it was five to eleven. The pubs closed at eleven. I pointed this out to Alexandra.

"Don't worry we'll make it," she started to walk faster.

As we reached the top of Grafton St. and crossed into Stephen's Green I became more and more anxious. I don't know why, I mean it wouldn't have been the end of the world if we didn't get a drink.

"So where's this pub then?" I asked knowing that the nearest pubs were in Wexford St. or Camden St., both of which seemed a long way with only a few minutes to closing time.

"At the top of Camden St," she replied.

"Hold on," I stopped, and because we were holding hands pulled her to a stop. "Is it anywhere near Cassidy's?"

"Cassidy's," she smiled. "Yeah, that's the place."

"We'll never make it," I said.

"Well where else can we go?"

"There's got to be somewhere down Grafton St." I searched my memory. "I know," I turned around and we headed back down towards Davey Byrne's.

We rushed down and managed to get there before the doors closed. I asked her what she wanted and fought my way to the bar through the last-orders rush.

I got the drinks and fought my way back out to find Alexandra had found the one remaining free barstool. As I handed her drink I realized that with her sitting on the stool I could look her straight in the eye.

I smiled at her.

She smiled back. "Cheers," she raised her drink and took a sip.

I took a sip from mine.

"This is nice," she look around at the décor. "Have you been here before?"

"Once or twice," I said. "I don't often drink in this part of town."

"Oh," she smiled. "And what part of town do you normally drink in?"

"Well," I confessed. "It's usually Camden St. after Camera Club meetings."

We laughed. And as I leant forward I put my hand on her shoulder.

"So when's your last bus?" She sipped her drink.

"Oh don't worry about that," I wondered if that was a gentle hint that I wouldn't be going back to her place.

I sipped my drink.

"I'll walk you home if you like," I suggested causally.

"OK," she smiled back. "That'd be nice."

And I thought, Hey shit! She really likes me, then.

I put my foot on the bottom rung of her stool and stroked her hair. As I turned to take another drink and she ran her fingers across my head.

"Hey, it's soft," she continued to rub my spiky hair.

"Well of course it is," I said, wondering why she would think that my hair wouldn't be soft.

"I thought that you had gelled it or something," she continued, stroking my hair.

"No," I smiled. "It's all natural. That's just the way it grows."

"And the way you brush it," she moved her hand down onto my face. "Hmm, you didn't shave tonight."

"Yes I did," the sensation of her hand on my cheek was sending shivers through my body and they all seemed to be gathering in my balls. "I shaved before coming out tonight."

"Oh," she said. "It seems so rough."

"I'm just such a 'macho' man," I smiled.

She smiled back. Then realizing that we were in a public place she snatched her hand away and took a sip from her drink.

We talked for another ten or fifteen minutes, but I can't really remember what we said. All I remember is the irresistible desire she held for me. There was a huge passion for her building up inside me.

We finished our drinks and left. We were among the first to go after they stopped serving. I took her hand as we walked back up Grafton St.

"So where do you live?" I asked, wondering if we were going to have to get a taxi.

"I live in Synge St.," she replied.

"Oh," I said, "just around the corner from the Camera Club."

"Yes," she smiled. "And my office is in Harcourt St."

"What?" I smiled back. "You only have a five minute walk to work every day."

"Yes, it's dead convenient," she looked at me.

"It's not some grotty little bedsit, is it?" I asked.

"No it's quite nice," she assured. "I've a very good landlord in this place."

"You mean you haven't always?" I teased.

"No," she replied. "I've lived in my fair share of grotty bedsits."

"And now you've found a nice place, that's convenient for both work and the Camera Club, you're going to settle down for a while?" I asked.

"Well yes," she sounded doubtful. "But you do get fed up looking at the same four walls all the time."

"Oh," I asked. "Are you planning on moving soon?"

"Well, usually I do," she said. "But where I am now is so good I'd have problems finding another like it for the same price."

We continued talking about the poor quality of affordable accommodation in Dublin as we walked. I told her about my own experiences and pointed out that I had found it just as bad when I had lived in London. Then we reached her house. I thought that she might turn to kiss me good night and not invite me in. But without a word she opened the door and walked in. I followed, closing the door behind me. She led the way to the back of the house to the entrance of her flat.

As you walked in there was a tiny entrance hall, where we hung our coats. With a door directly ahead that led into the bathroom and a door to the right that led to the main room. In the main room her bed was against the right hand wall, a small table and two chairs on the left, with the kitchen set in an alcove "behind" the bathroom. There was also a couple of armchairs, some bookcases and a wardrobe crammed in.

"I'll make us some coffee," she headed towards the sink.

I sat on one of the armchairs and asked, "Do you mind if I make myself more comfortable, by taking off my shoes."

"No," she smiled. "Feel free."

So I did.

She called over. "I won't need to put on a gas mask, will I?"

"No," I laughed. "I spend most of my day with my shoes off so there isn't time for the smell to build up."

We laughed and there was comfortable silence for a couple of minutes as the kettle came to a boil.

I looked at her as she moved in the small galley kitchen, drinking her natural grace: the arch of her arm as she reached up to take two cups from a shelf, the swing of her hips as she turned to take a jar of coffee from a press, the tilt of her head as she spooned coffee into two mugs, her tongue caressing her upper lip as she was careful not to spill anything.

The kettle clicked off and she poured the water into the mugs, giving each a quick stir. I watched her hair fall across her shoulders as she stirred.

She looked up and I quickly looked away.

She came over with two steaming mugs. "Here you go," she handed one to me.

"Thank you," I took my mug.

"You're welcome," she put her mug down on the floor.

She sat on the floor with her back against the other armchair and kicked off her sandals. We sipped coffee and chatted about the films we'd seen and about photography for a while. She sat back and looked up at me. I leaned forward with my elbows on my knees and looked down at her. Then I figured enough polite social interaction had passed.

I put my half finished coffee down beside the leg of my chair where it wouldn't be in the way. Then I slid onto the floor beside her. I gently took her cup from her and put it beside mine. Then I slipped my left arm around her shoulders once more. She leaned into me and turned to kiss. Her lips opened and I pushed my tongue into her mouth. She put her arms around me and I put my right hand to the back of her head.

We kissed for a while, then I slowly moved my hand down to touch her left breast. She didn't object, so I gently massaged as we continued to kiss. A few minutes later we came up for air and I started to unbutton her cardigan. She smiled as I worked my way down the buttons, then pushed it open and put my hand back onto her breast.

I could feel the heat of her body through the thin cotton and her nipple pushing through her bra. She hugged me closer and we started to kiss again. I could feel her soft breast under my hand, with its nipple rubbing against my palm. I could taste her as we kissed. Feel my arm around her, her arms around me, our bodies close. I was in heaven for the next few minutes.

Then she sat up and moved a couple of feet away from me to take off her cardigan. I knelt on the floor beside her and put my arms around her waist. She reached up to my chest and started to unbutton my shirt. She slipped her hands inside and ran them around my body. I leaned forward and we kissed. A few minutes later she was nuzzling my right shoulder and I was licking and kissing her ear. I was feeling decidedly heated and had developed a serious erection.

Moving back slightly I pulled my shirt out of my jeans and slipped it off. She sat up, her hands still on me. We smiled at each other. I started to take off my shirt and she took her hands away. When I'd pulled it off and tossed it away I noticed that she was looking at me with a strange expression on her face. I'm not exactly Rambo, I know, but there was enough hormones flowing that it didn't make much difference.

Putting my arms around her, I leaned close to start kissing again. She froze for a moment, then her lips opened and her tongue slid out. Her arms roamed up and down my back and we held each other close. I could feel the heat of her body as I held her. I could feel her breasts pressing against me as I hugged her. I could feel her arms on my naked body.

I pulled back. "So," I whispered. "Does this come off," I ran my hand along the neck of her top.

She smiled and shook her head, "No."

OK, I thought this is as far as it goes. I was disappointed, but not overly so. I'd never had sex on a first date before and hadn't really expected to have it now.

I don't know if she was feeling adventurous, or if she just took pity at the look of disappointment that must have come across my face, but she added softly, "But it does pull up."

I looked at her and she smiled.

I said, "Yes?" and smiled back.

"Yes," she replied and pulled it out of the waist band of her skirt and up to reveal her breasts cupped in their white cotton bra.

I was mesmerized. Slowly I put my finger tips to each breast. They were so sweet. The skin so soft, yet the flesh firm underneath. I spread my fingers across them and pressed my palms against her nipples. Then I pressed down under and gently pushed them up within her bra. I

glanced up at her face. She was beaming at me. So I lent forward and kissed the soft exposed flesh. I ran my lips and tongue back and across them, then moved down to the cotton of her bra and kissed the nipples hidden below.

She shivered in my arms. I hooked my arms around under her top and moved my mouth up to kiss her. As I opened my mouth her tongue slid past my lips. Her warm body was pressed against mine. Our tongues worked in sync. Her hands raced up and down my back. My arms wrapped around and pulled her close.

Her fingers dug into my back and my face was buried in her hair. With my lips I could feel the heat of her naked skin neck and shoulder underneath the tangle of her hair. Her breath was hot and moist on my ear. We hugged each other as close as we could. Then we pulled back to look at each other.

"So," I ran my hands across her cotton covered breasts. "Does this pull up as well?" I looked up at her.

She smiled and nodded yes.

"Yes?" I smiled back, gesturing with my hand.

She reached around and unhooked her bra. I ran my finger tips up from her waist and under her loosened bra to touch her soft, warm breasts. My fingers circled underneath the firm muscle. I ran my thumbs over her erect nipples and she sighed. So I pushed her bra up, bent down and kissed her left nipple. I ran my tongue across it, next my lips, then I opened my mouth wide and sucked as much as I could inside.

Her hands gripped my head and shoulder and she clenched and unclenched her fingers as I worked away. I switched from left to right breast and back again, using my fingers, and tongue, and lips in all sorts of combinations. Then she put her hands onto the front of my shoulders and pushed me back. I looked up. She smiled at me. Then she pulled down her top and moved away to sit with her back against the bed.

"So, how far do you want to go?" I asked as I moved beside her and put my left arm around her shoulders.

"I think you better go now," she whispered.

I kissed her and she responded.

I thought; now don't do anything foolish to spoil it, Kevin. Just take it slow and gentle. Don't push beyond where she wants to go. I had this fear that my desire would get the better of me and I'd end up raping her.

I put my hand up under her top and ran my fingers around her nipple. She lapped her tongue inside my mouth. Moving my hand down her body I found her belly button just under the waist of her skirt. I rubbed my fingers in and around it, but she wasn't very sensitive there.

Our mouths and tongues still intertwined I pulled my hand out from under her waistband and moved it down to her leg. I felt her thigh under the thin material of her skirt. And as I ran my hand up and down I slowly moved from the top to the inside of her thigh. She let her legs open wider. I brushed my fingers lightly across her crotch and found that she was very hot.

We were still kissing so I ran my hand back down the inside of her thigh and started to pull up her skirt. I pulled it up to reveal her knee and pressing my fingers against her skin pushed it right up to totally expose her leg and discovered that she was wearing white cotton panties.

All my attention was focused on her vagina now. I was looking down, so I know I wasn't kissing her. But I don't know if she was still kissing me, or if her arms were around me, or what she was doing. I think she was probably not doing anything.

I put my finger tips onto her warm, damp panties and felt her open lips beneath. I pressed my finger against them and traced her slit. She gasped. Taking hold of the edge of her panties I pulled at them, but there was no give. So I took hold of the top and pulled them down slightly to loosen them. Then I slipped my fingers into the leg of her panties and ran them back down and under to touch her directly.

Her lips parted and my finger was inside her. I pushed my finger down and then back up to find her clitoris. Her mouth was on mine and our tongues found each other again. I pressed harder. She tilted her head back I gently chewed her throat. She sat up and turned to face me. My hand lost its place, so I ran both hands up along her sides to push up her top and reveal her breasts again.

She leaned forward to kiss me and I cupped both her breasts. Her head moved in rhythm with my tongue, her body with my hands. Then I slipped my left hand around to hold her close and bent down so I could work both hand and mouth on her left breast. She leant forward and I pressed my hand between her legs again.

I had my back against the bed now, so I just lay back against it as she started to rub herself against my fingers. I was in a sensual haze. All my attention was centered on the movement of her clitoris against my fingers. The smell, the dim lighting, the heat and weight of her leaning over me was the background against which I rubbed her.

Her rhythm stopped and she tensed and pressed down, her arm across my throat, as she tilted her head back and moaned.

Then she sat down on her knees in front of me and smiled. I let my hand drop and relaxed against the bed. I had the strangest feeling. It was a pleasant sort of contentment, as if I'd come myself, though I hadn't.

She slipped her bra straps off her arms, pulled it from under her top and tossed onto the bed. "That was the perfect end to a perfect night," she glowed. "Thanks, Kevin."

One word stuck in my mind, "End?" What did she mean end? Surely this was just the beginning? But she was so happy and contented. And it was such a buzz to have made her so, that I thought, let's not spoil it by disagreeing. After all I didn't want to appear like I was one of those guys who were only interested in their own pleasure. Which, by some strange altruistic twist of logic, I figured I'd be if I asked for it, even though she'd clearly come first and was showing no intention of returning the compliment.

It was enough for me to have made her come. It was the first time I'd made love to a woman and I didn't want to spoil such the event by ending the night on a sour note. It would have been nice to have continued and even spent the night with her, but I hadn't even expected to get that far on the first date and I was more than satisfied. Having to ask for it would have ruined it.

I wasn't really thinking straight the fact of having made another person orgasm just blew my mind.

"So you don't want me to spend the night then?" was the most subtle and diplomatic thing I could think of saying.

"No," she giggled, "of course not."

But even though I was thrilled by having made her come I was still keyed up and aroused. And having the expectation of coming myself frustrated was hard to take.

"Come on get up," she pulled my arm roughly. "Up and out, Kevin."

So I had these two conflicting repercussions swimming around in my mind. On the one hand I was over the moon that I'd made her come. On the other I was feeling dejected, and even rejected, by her not wanting to return the compliment.

Slowly I got to my feet and picked up my T-shirt. I pulled it on and she handed me my shirt. I buttoned it up and opened my jeans to tuck it inside and readjust my underpants, by this time my erection had subsided. I could feel her looking at me, but I didn't look back. I didn't want to leave, but it was preferable to overstaying my welcome.

I wanted to ask her if she loved me. But I didn't speak. I wanted to ask her why she didn't want to do more. But I didn't want to appear to be asking for it. I wanted to ask her why I couldn't stay. But it was enough that she didn't want to sleep with me.

So I pulled on my socks and tied up my shoes.

She was standing against the table as I looked up. I smiled at her and she smiled back. I walked cross to her and put my arms around her. She hugged me back and we kissed again. I ran my hands down to her bottom, gathered up her skirt and slipped my hand inside her panties. We hugged tightly. Then she pushed back a bit.

I looked at her and she dropped her hand to my crotch and smiled. I mirrored the gesture.

"Do you want to go again?" my voice was hoarse.

"Oh, no," she took her hand away and stepped back.

"Oh," I replied and could think of nothing else to do but to get my coat from the end of the bed. As I put it on I asked, "Do you want to go out again?" I looked around at her, "Like tomorrow or Sunday?"

"Emm," she looked down. "I don't know Kevin."

"If you give me your number I'll phone you," I smiled. The thought of having to ask for her phone number after we'd had sex appealed to my sense of irony.

She hesitated, "Tell you what, why don't you give me yours and I'll phone you."

"477217," I replied.

She turned to the table and scribbled on a pad. "OK," she straightened up. "I'll give you a call tomorrow."

"Do I get yours?" I asked.

"Well it's very difficult to reach me," she said. "Especially at work." She paused. "I'm in and out all day long," she added.

"Oh, OK," there wasn't much else I could say.

She opened the door and stepped into the hallway to unlock the door to her flat.

I walked past and stopped to kiss her.

As we kissed goodnight I squeezed her left breast with my right hand. It was a gesture to remind her of what I'd just done, and to say I'd be back. It was also a mark of ownership. It was meant to show that I was close enough to her not to have to ask permission now.

I didn't consciously think that at the time. Then all I knew was that I was head-over-heels in love with her and that she seemed to love me back.

As I walked home those two conflicting feelings of elation and rejection worked their way through my mind. I reasoned that she didn't want to make love to me because she was shy; she was probably as inexperienced as I was, but hadn't read as many books nor seen as much pornography as I had. Anyway the thought of having made her come just blew my mind. I knew that she must really like me, if not actually love me, to have gotten so intimate with me.

I got home and climbed straight into bed. The smell and taste and feel of Alexandra was still with me. And recalling the events of the evening was as pleasurable as acting them had been, with one important addition. As I remembered the feel of Alexandra in my arms, my hands worked my erection. I savored every little detail of my night with her. All my passion came back renewed. And when at last I came it seemed to go on forever. It was the best masturbation I have ever done.

Afterwards I fell into a contented and exhausted sleep secure in the knowledge that the night had been a great start to my relationship with Alexandra. It was only much later that I realized what a disaster it really had been.

# 3

The next day I woke up happy. So I've finally done it, I hummed, better late than never. I could smell her on my finger tips, even after I'd washed my hands. I was sure by then that she must really love me. And I thought that she must be as impatient to see me again and get intimate once more as I was

So I waited for her to call with a certain amount of anticipation. Wanting to hold her and touch her again. And wanting to make love to her again. To feel her come under my fingers again would be such bliss. I'm afraid I let my imagination run wild. But she didn't phone.

Then I had lunch and waited for her to call, thinking that she must be a late riser. Especially on a Saturday, when you've been working hard all week, you deserve a little lay in. My dreams began to go a little stale when she didn't phone in the afternoon either.

Then I had dinner and thought well if we are to go out to night she must surely call soon.

At around about half eight or a quarter to nine that evening I finally admitted to myself that she wasn't going to call. But I knew she would have a very good reason for not doing so, though I couldn't think of any at the time. The thought that she didn't phone because she wasn't interested in me began to occur to me. But I dismissed it on every occasion.

On Sunday I again got out of bed early and waited for her to phone. She didn't. She didn't phone in the morning, to perhaps arrange to do something in the afternoon. She didn't phone in the afternoon to arrange something for the evening. She didn't phone in the evening to apologise for not phoning earlier and to explain that she'd been rushed off her feet all weekend by an unexpected visitation of family members. She simply didn't phone.

By Monday I was calling her "That Bitch!" and vowing if I ever saw her again I'd give her a piece of my mind and tell her what she could go do with herself as well. But I couldn't understand it. Why did she have sex with me if she didn't like me? And if she did like me why didn't she phone? The thought that she might view our relationship in a more casual light didn't enter my head. It was all black or white to me. Either it was on or it was off. All or nothing. It just shows you what strong emotion can do for your tolerant, liberal ideas.

On Tuesday I got the shock of my life when she came up to me at the Camera Club and before I could say anything asked, "Don't you ever answer your phone, Kevin?"

I felt my jaw open in shock. "What?" I said.

"I was phoning you all weekend," she explained. "And you never answered."

"Never answered?" my mind had still failed to comprehend what she was saying. "What do you mean, never answered?"

She was getting annoyed, "I mean the phone rang and nobody picked it up."

"But I was home most of the weekend," I didn't say I'd barely strayed more than three feet from the phone. "And you never called."

"Your number's 477217, isn't it," she stated.

"No it's 477210," I replied, a glimmer of light appearing in the gloom. "Have you been phoning 477217?"

"Yes," she said. "That's the number you gave me."

"No it's not," I could see she was about to argue that it was. "But that's not important. I



thought that you didn't phone because you didn't want to see me again."

She smiled, "No, don't be silly." She glanced down, "I enjoyed my date with you."

And I was on cloud nine again. Nothing could mar my happiness. She'd enjoyed herself. She liked me!

"Yeah?" I smiled back. "Do you want to repeat it again, say next Friday?"

"OK," she looked up into my eyes.

I looked down into her's and had a deep urge to put my arms around her. But I managed to suppress the impulse.

Then Mary and John came over to us. Mary glanced at Alexandra and gave me a knowing look.

"We're going down the pub," John said. "You coming along?"

"Sure," I said and looked at Alexandra.

"Yeah," she agreed.

So we went down to the pub and had a drink. Over the next ten minutes more members of the club drifted in and joined us for the usual after meeting socializing. I sat beside Alexandra and ran my hand up and down her thigh. She put her hand on top of mine and left it there. This physical intimacy with her sent my hormones racing. As I neared the end of my pint I whispered in her ear.

"So are you going to invite me back to your place for a cup of coffee?" I asked, half jokingly.

"All right," she smiled back.

I raised my eyebrows.

She laughed, "So do you want to come back to my place for coffee, Kevin?"

"That would be nice," I smiled back and quickly finished my drink. We stood up, said goodbye and left.

As we walked around to her flat I wondered what the others were saying about us. What juicy rumors would be circulating around the club.

The first thing I did when we got to her flat was use the toilet. When I came out she had made instant coffee for us both.

"How do you like yours," she asked.

"Oh, black, no sugar," I replied and took one of the mugs from the counter.

She put a drop of milk into the other and sat in one of the armchairs. I sat in the chair beside her. We talked for the next few minutes about this and that. Mostly about the lecture we'd just seen at the camera club. It was some guy who'd been scuba diving in the tropics with an underwater camera. He'd had some really stunning photographs to show. Then I decided to make a move on her.

Kneeling on the floor in front of her, I put my elbows on her knees and smiled up at her. She lent forward, put her hands to my head and we kissed. I ran my hands up her legs and hooked them around her waist. I pushed up against her kiss and she slumped back in the chair. So I ended up leaning forward over her, with her legs to either side of me, resting on my elbows. I put a hand on each of her breasts. Her nipples pressed into the palms of my hands.

I started to unbutton her blouse. She started to breath heavily as I worked my way down and pulled her blouse out of her jeans. I pulled it open to reveal her body. She had a light fuzz of dark hair around her belly button, but my attention was focused on her breasts. Her nipples were clearly visible through the cotton of her bra.

Leaning forward again I put my lips to each nipple in turn and sucked them, leaving two little damp patches behind. I ran my hands under her and she lifted herself up as I unhooked her bra. I brought my hands around again and ran them up and across her breasts to push her bra clear.

Now I could lick and suck her nipples directly, which I did for what seemed like ages. I rubbed and caressed one breast with my hand as I licked and sucked the other. Then I'd

switch and rub my warm saliva into her soft skin with my fingers as I licked and sucked the other breast.

Then my knees and back began to complain so I straightened up and sat back on my heels, smiling up at Alexandra. She smiled back and slid off the chair to sit on my lap, her legs pressing against my hips. I reached up to her shoulder and started to push her blouse down.

"No," she said. "I don't want to take it off."

"How about your bra?" I asked.

"OK," she smiled and pushed the strap down her sleeve and hooked it under her arm. Then repeated it with the other strap and arm and threw the bra onto the bed. I was mesmerized by the movement of her breasts as she breathed in and out. Slowly I bent down to lick and kiss and suck them again. She started to lick and suck my ears and after ten minutes of that I was very hot and very hard.

I sat back and pulled my shirt off. Then I reached down and undid her jeans. She brought her legs up and started to take off her shoes. As she took off her right shoe and stocking I took off her left.

Then I reached inside her jeans and ran my hands around to her bottom. She put her elbows onto the chair and lifted herself a few inches. So I pulled her jeans down around her thighs. I put her leg across my lap and pulled it out of her jeans. Then did the same with the other, and tossed the jeans away.

Her hands were around my neck again and we kissed again, while my hands ran all over her body.

I put my hand to her crotch and felt the damp heat there. "So do you want to have sex, then?" I whispered as she nuzzled my shoulder.

She froze. "What?" she asked.

"Sex," I repeated smiling, thinking that her answer must surely be yes.

"No, I do not," she pushed me away and stood up.

"What?" I was stunned.

"I'm not going to have sex with you, Kevin," she walked over to her wardrobe and took out a silk robe.

I didn't know what to say. There wasn't much I could say. It'd seemed pretty obvious to me that we were going to have sex. Suddenly when I mentioned it she stopped being interested.

I didn't understand why she'd do it last time but not now. But I couldn't think of a way of asking her without it turning into an argument were she would think I was trying to persuade her. And I didn't want that. So I started to get dressed.

Alexandra picked up the coffee mugs. "You didn't even finish your coffee," she said.

"Well it must be cold now," I replied. "You can't expect me to finish it."

"No. Of course not," she walked to the sink and poured it away.

I sat up on one of the armchairs and pulled my shoes out from under it.

"So do you want to go out on Friday," I asked.

"Yeah OK," she replied. "I'll be staying up this weekend for a tennis match I have on Sunday anyway."

The thought that she was implying that she wouldn't be interested in staying up for the weekend in order to see me flared in my mind, but I quickly suppressed it.

"Same time same place?" I smiled.

"Err, no, Kevin," she said. "I think we'd better make it a bit later. I don't know how I managed to make it last time."

"Eight O'clock?" I suggested.

"Make it a quarter past," she said.

"A quarter past eight's fine with me," I replied. I was overjoyed that she wanted to go out with me at all.

## Alexandra

She stood across the room from me and watched me pull on my shoes. I liked the feeling of her eyes on me.

"I still haven't got over the way you tie your laces," she said.

I looked up and shrugged, "I didn't know that it was so unusual."

She walked across and stood in front of me. "It's weird," she said. "I don't see how they don't open."

"Well they don't," I bent down to demonstrate. "Unless you pull the lose end." I pulled the laces open.

She laughed.

"And then I'd tie them again," I said.

She said nothing as I re-tied them.

I looked up at her and smiled, "So you really don't want to have sex with me then."

She shook her head. "I can see than I'm going to have to play it very cool with you," she giggled.

I felt a momentary unease that she should use a phrase like "play it cool". But I reached around her and hugged her, pressing my cheek against her stomach. "Not too cool I hope," I whispered.

She laughed and ran her fingers through my hair.

I didn't want to move I just wanted to hug her and feel her hands on me.

"Come on," she stepped away, "time for you to go." She walked to the door to open it for me.

I followed and as I walked passed I stopped to hug her again. She hugged back and we kissed. I stepped back smiling as I put my hand to her breast and squeezed it through the silk of her robe.

"See you Friday at quarter past eight," I smiled.

She smiled back and ran her hand across the back of mine. "See you Friday," she repeated.

I turned and walked out, confused and frustrated. Frustrated, because I'd wanted to make love to her and she hadn't. Confused, because I felt she'd rejected me by not having sex with me again, but then she'd kissed and hugged me, so she clearly hadn't rejected me. It gave me much food for thought as I mulled over the contradictions over the next few days.

So once again I found myself standing outside Eason's on a Friday night waiting for Alexandra to show. I couldn't help wondering if this was going to become routine. If I was going to spend months, if not years, standing around on O'Connell Street anxiously looking up and down for Alexandra to appear. And if I was going to spend months, if not years, wondering how she felt about me.

Then she arrived. She looked gorgeous in the late evening sunlight, even though she was dressed casually in jeans and a red T-shirt, with a light jacket that matched. It occurred to me that she'd probably dressed up for our first date, but I as usual had just worn jeans and a T-shirt. So this time she'd decided to dress more casual. I don't tend to dress up and forget that people dress to impress each other. I believe that a beautiful girl looks beautiful regardless of what she wears. If I think that a girl only looks good because of her clothes and make-up I tend to be put off. Though it's not always possible to decide in the heat of the moment.

I wanted very much to hug Alexandra as she came up and smiled at me. But she stopped just short, so all I did was smile back and say "Hi."

"Hi," she responded and shivers ran up my spine.

"I thought we might go to another film," I suggested.

"Yeah," she nodded. "There's a good one on up in the lighthouse."

"Do you mean 'September Bride'?" I asked.

"Yes," she smiled. "That's the one." She looked slightly worried, "You haven't seen it already, have you?"

"No. That's the one I was thinking of suggesting, as well," I smiled back.

"So what time does it start at?" she asked.

I checked the time, "In about two minutes."

"So lets go then," she turned and started walking.

I quickly caught up with her and slipped my hand into hers. She smiled and squeezed it tightly.

The film was set in Northern Ireland and was about this headstrong young woman who has an illegitimate baby and ends up living with two brothers. All three, needless to say, get ostracized by the local community. It was a moving insight into the life and times of the period. It left a lasting impression that a lot of the prejudices still exist to this day.

We went for a drink afterwards and had a very heated discussion about the rights and wrongs portrayed in the film. It being a good film there was a lot to discuss. Even though we started out in what could be considered very tricky ground, where our differences in views could easily have mortally wounded our relationship, we ended up discussing such esoteric generalities that neither of us got in the least bit offended.

When we left the pub we didn't say anything about where we were going, we just started walking back to her place. The night was lovely. I was walking hand in hand with a beautiful girl, on my way back to her place, having been entertained and stimulated, and with a few drinks inside me. It was a near perfect night, with more to come.

She led me into her flat without saying a word. As I hung up my coat on the back of the door she asked, "Do you want some coffee?"

"Sure," I said.

"Black no sugar," she stepped into the kitchen alcove. "Right?"

"Right," I agreed and sat in one of her armchairs. There was a tube of tennis balls and a racket on the other. "So have you played much tennis this week?" I picked up the racket and tested the tension against my finger tips.

"Yes," she smiled. "I beat the number ten ranked player on Wednesday." She put two mugs on the counter, "But it was only a friendly, so it doesn't count for the rankings."

"Yeah," I said. "But now you know you can beat her."

"But now she knows to," she smiled back as she spooned some coffee into the mugs.

I put the racket down and bent to my shoes. "Do you mind if I make myself comfortable?" I gestured to my laces.

"No," she screwed the coffee jar closed and put it back in the cupboard. "Be my guest."

"I am your guest," I smiled back as I took off my shoes and stockings, tucking them under the chair, out of the way.

"I'll be back in a moment," she walked towards the door. "Make the coffee when the water boils, will you," she flicked on the light and closed the bathroom door behind her.

I heard her moving around inside, but couldn't quite figure out what she was doing. The kettle boiled just as she flushed the toilet. I got up and poured the water into the mugs as she washed her hands. A few moments later she came back out.

"I didn't know if you took milk and sugar," I nodded towards the coffee. "So I didn't put any in."

"That's OK, Kevin," she poured a drop of milk into her coffee. "I don't take sugar."

I took a sip from my mug. She'd refreshed her perfume in the bathroom and she smelt gorgeous. I brushed my fingers across the side of her face and lightly caressed her ear. She smiled back and sipped her coffee. I continued to caress.

"Why are we standing," she looked around at the armchairs. "Let's sit." She walked over, dumped the tennis balls and racket on to the floor and sat down.

I walked over and sat beside her.

"So how often do you play tennis then?" I asked.

"As often as I can," she replied. "Usually about three or four times a week."

"You really do like it then," I sipped my coffee.

"Oh, yes," she said. "I couldn't live without it."

Her hand was resting on the arm of her chair so I reached over and started to stroke her fingers. She wiggled them and stroked my hand back.

I can't remember what we talked about for the next ten or fifteen minutes as we sipped our coffee and stroked each other's hands. But I was very aroused by the time we finished.

She took the empty mug from my hand. "At least you finished the coffee this time," she smiled.

"I feel I might need the caffeine tonight," I replied.

She walked across and put the cups in the sink. I stood and followed her, stopping behind her and putting my arms around her waist. She leant back against me as I hugged her and buried my face in her sweet smelling hair.

Then I ran my hands up to squeeze her breasts. She turned smiling and we kissed, my hands running across her back, her hands through my hair.

Stepping back I opened my mouth to say something, but she put her finger to my lips. "Don't talk, Kevin," she whispered and kissed me again.

I pulled her T-shirt out of her jeans, pushed my hands underneath and ran them up her back. She leaned forward against me and sighed. I hugged her as she nuzzled my shoulder. Then I unhooked her bra. She tensed and leaned away. I smiled at her and ran my hands around to lift her bra clear of her breasts. As soon as my hands were on her breasts she sighed and relaxed again.

We kissed lightly. She brought her hands down and put them around my waist. I lifted her T-shirt and looked down at her breasts. She kissed my cheek and ear as I caressed her breasts. Then I cupped one in my hand and bent down to kiss her nipple. Her hands came up to rub my hair again.

I pinched her nipple between my lips, released it and I lightly licked it. I ran my tongue around and across it, pressing my lips to her breast. Then I opened my mouth as wide as I could and sucked inside as much of her breast as would fit. She gasped her breath hot and moist on my ear.

I slowly closed my mouth and pushed her breast back out again, circling my head as I did so, tightening my lips across her skin, until just her nipple was caught between them. I ran my tongue back and forth across it, pressing it first against my top lip, then against my lower.

Her left hand was massaging the back of my neck, her other had a handful of my hair. She was looking down at me and I could feel her breath, fast and ragged, against the side of my face.

I looked up at her and smiled, then knelt in front of her and rubbed my nose against her belly button, brushing it through the light fuzz of hair that surrounded it, smiling at the tickles. Both her hands rested on my head, but she made no attempt to guide me.

Then I opened her belt and unbuttoned her jeans. I pulled them open and ran my nose down through the thickening hair until I reached her panties. I could smell she was aroused. I pushed my hands inside her jeans and felt her warm soft skin, with her firm muscles underneath. Leaving my head pressed against her abdomen I ran my hands down her legs pushing her jeans down and pulled them away as she stepped out of them.

Sitting back on my ankles I looked up at her again. At the T-shirt bunched up to expose her breasts and at her hair falling down around her face as she looked down at me. I reached up to pull her panties down, but she pushed my hands aside and knelt beside me with her legs together. I leaned forward, put my arms around and kissed her. She responded and we hugged each other close.

I was quite heated by this stage, so I sat back and unbuttoned my shirt. She ran her hands across my body as I slipped my arms out of the sleeves and tossed the shirt to one side. I was wearing a T-shirt underneath and I quickly pulled that off and tossed it aside as well. Her

fingers plucked at the hairs on my chest.

I reached over to pull her T-shirt off, but she shook her head and whispered "No." So I put my arms around her again and we kissed.

Our tongues rolled around each other's and she leaned into me, one hand on my back, the other caressing one of my nipples. My right arm was around her, holding her close. And I brought my left hand down onto her breast again and massaged it in time to the thrusts of my tongue.

Then I slowly slid it down her body and slipped it between her legs. I ran my finger along her damp panties and felt her open lips underneath. I brought my hand back up and slipped my fingers under her panties and into her thick pubic hair.

She shifted against me and I moved around a fraction to support her with my right arm and get a slightly better angle for my left. Our tongues and lips still worked with each other, but my attention was focused on the finger tips of my left hand as they slipped through her hair and across her other lips.

Her legs opened wider and I ran my finger along the length of her slit and around the opening of her vagina. Our mouths separated and she rested her head against my shoulder. I could feel her warm skin against mine and her breath against my ear. I slipped the tip of my finger inside and began to rub my hand up and down.

She gasped and her breath began to come faster as I established a rhythm and then began to slowly increase it. She began to rock against me in time with my strokes and moaned as I pushed my finger further inside her. All my attention was focused on my fingers as they rubbed against her and on my ear as her hot breath poured over it. I could feel the weight of her against my arm and her rocking against me as only minor background events.

Then she tensed against me. Her body arching, her arms hugging me close and the muscles of her vagina squeezing closed around my finger. She let out one long last breath against my ear.

We stayed that way for a timeless moment. Then she relaxed again and reached down to pull my hand out of her panties.

She nuzzled my shoulder. I lay back and rested my shoulders against one of the armchairs. She settled on top of me, rubbing her cheek against my chest. I felt elated. I felt as if I glowed. This was almost better than coming myself. My orgasm is a known pleasure, sometimes great, sometimes not so great, yet always something within the normal range of my experiences. But I'd never felt this pleasure before. To hold Alexandra in my arms while she climaxed; to know that I'd made her come; to have had such an intimate exchange with her. It just blew my mind.

In fact, I suddenly realized, I wanted to do it again. I reached down and ran my fingers under her breast, rubbing her nipple with my thumb. She looked up lazily and slowly smiled. I leaned forward and she sat up so we could kiss.

Maybe I was still keyed up because I'd not come, but I rushed into it. I wanted to make her come again. I wanted to relive that thrill of excitement when she came. I pushed my hand back down into her panties. She froze her lips cold on mine. I leant back to ask her what the matter was. But before I could speak she took hold of my hand and pulled it away. I didn't know why, but I knew that I'd offended her.

She stood up and my hands were empty again.

"I think you'd better go now," she said.

I almost asked "Why?", but caught myself in time.

She sat on the end of the bed and pulled her jeans on, not looking at me.

I didn't understand why, but she'd asked me to leave so I thought I'd better go. I dressed quickly. We didn't say anything. We didn't look at each other.

She kissed my cheek as she handed me my coat. I put my arm around her waist and kissed

## Alexandra

her lips. She responded. And I thought, At least she's not angry with me.

"So do you want to do anything over the weekend?" I whispered.

She looked down. "I'm not sure I'll have time, Kevin." Then she stepped away from me. "I've got tennis coaching on Saturday, and I'm going stock car racing on Saturday night with my brother." She shrugged, "And then on Sunday I've got a tennis match against the girl who's ranked second in the club." She looked up at me, "So I really don't have the time."

"That's OK," I smiled at her as I put on my coat.

She smiled back for a moment, then turned to open the door for me.

At the door I put my arm around her and we kissed again. I hugged her and she snuggled into my embrace. I reached down and pressed my hand against her bottom, remembering the feel of her skin under my fingers. She brought her arms down between us. I stepped back my hands going to her hips.

"See you next Tuesday," she whispered.

"All right," I brought my hand up to her left breast and gave it one final squeeze and kissed her lightly. "See you then," I turned and walked out.

As I walked home I had a underlining dread that this was going to become routine. That somehow making love to Alexandra wasn't bringing us closer to each other as it should. That I'd end up walking home alone for the rest of my life. But then maybe this is just hindsight. At the time I was just ecstatic that she'd come in my arms again.

# 4

Over the next month we saw each other twice a week; at meetings of the Camera club, after which we'd go back to her flat and talk and I would make love to her. And we went out on dates on the first two Fridays and then on the Saturday of the following week. I was head-over-heels in love with her, or lusted after her, or was compulsively obsessed by her. My feelings were so intense that I can't really say what it was. But I do know that I thought of virtually nothing else but her and the taste of her kiss. The way her eyes sparkled when she laughed. How it felt to hold her in my arms, or even just to walk down the road holding her hand.

I lived to share my life with her, to spend every waking moment in her presence. I wanted to tell her everything about myself and learn everything about her. I wanted to totally possess her, and more important to be totally possessed by her. I wanted to live in the warmth of her love.

But yet, despite my best endeavors, every time I tried to realize my desires I ended up being frustrated. Every time I tried to talk to her about how I felt for her I became more confused. Every time I tried to get closer to her, I ended up feeling further away from her than ever. I was taking two steps back for every step I took forward.

I didn't understand, nor could I control, my feelings for her. Neither did I understand what her feelings for me were. She seemed to be saying one thing and doing the complete opposite. I was hopelessly lost in a sea of conflicting desires and incomprehensible reactions, both from her and from myself.

I wanted to totally possess her, yet I wanted her to be free. I wanted to be totally possessed by her, yet I wanted to remain free. I wanted to crush her in my arms with all my strength, yet I was afraid that even the lightest touch would mar the perfection of her skin. I wanted to make her love me, yet I didn't want to coerce or trick her into loving me.

I was a mess. And I don't think I made a very good impression on her. Yet every time I saw her I was hooked worse than before. And she continued to see me. She continued to kiss and hug me. She let me make love to her. She gave me enough encouragement to let me pretend that she could love me. To let me fool myself into thinking that she did.

Maybe she did. Maybe her love for me was more genuine than mine for her. Maybe we were both totally confused.

All three dates followed a similar pattern. I'd phone her place on the Wednesday or Thursday, but she'd not be in when I called. I'd leave a message and she'd phone me from work the next day, because by the time she got in she felt it was too late to call me back. We'd arrange to meet in O'Connell St. outside Easons at about a quarter past eight. I'd arrive about ten or fifteen minutes early. She'd arrive about ten or fifteen minutes late. I'd spent half hour fretting about whether or not she'd turn up, impatient to see her again. She'd arrive all bright and breezy and once again take my breath away with her beauty and grace.

We'd have a quick drink and go to a movie. Two light hearted Hollywood blockbusters and another French comedy. I'd have my arm around her during the film, smelling her perfume and feeling the heat of her body, while the hormones raced through my blood stream.



Afterwards we'd go for a cup of coffee and then back to her place. Where we'd kiss and cuddle and I'd masturbate her. Then she'd ask me to leave and I'd end up even more frustrated and confused.

And in between all that we talked, about all sorts of things.

We talked about the movies we'd seen and discovered that we liked the same things, though for completely different reasons. We talked about the best movies we'd ever seen and what we liked most about them. We liked the same movies. Though in one I'd particularly like the plot twist at the end, but she'd think it was the character development made it. And in another I'd think it was the stunning photography that made it, but she'd think it was the in-depth plot. We talked about the worst movies we'd seen and complained about the direction, or the inane script, or the pathetic jokes.

I told her all about my writing. How I was planning on being an international best-selling author. How I had given up a good job, with an inflated salary, in a city of London merchant bank to write a SF novel. She didn't believe me, but she was not alone. Most people can't believe that I gave up a job earning the amount of money that I did in order to become what society calls unemployed.

I explained to her my passion for science fiction and computer games and how I had to avoid games and book shops so I didn't blow my life savings all in one go, rather than trying to use it to eke out a life until I got my big break. (I failed!)

She told me about her passion for tennis. And how she planned to work her way up the rankings of the club she'd just joined. That she loved the thrill of competition and was really quite a competitive person in all aspects of her life.

She described her work and told stories about the people she worked with. She loved making fun of her boss. Some of the things she told me made me glad that I no longer worked in an office. I had had my fill of politics and back biting.

We talked about photography. Since we'd met in a camera club it was obviously something we had in common. She had just taken it up as a hobby and her enthusiasm reminded me of how I used to feel when I first caught the bug in my early teens. I tried to explain something of what I'd learnt over the years, but I felt as if I was patronizing her so I stopped.

And all the while I was trying to persuade her that I really loved her. I was holding back my passion, trying not to push her too hard, trying to build up her trust in me. Yet the taste and smell and feel of her in my arms marked the highlights of my relationship with her. I made love to her because I loved her. And I wanted nothing back, but what she could give me.

And yet I did. I wanted her to make love to me. It was natural enough that I should want to come as well. But more than that I wanted her to love me. I wanted her to worship me the way I worshipped her. I wanted her to desire me. I wanted her to make me whole.

But I also wanted to prove to her that I wanted more than carnal pleasure from her. I wanted to share my life with her. I wanted to go to sleep with her in my arms and wake up beside her. I wanted to eat with her. I wanted to live with her. I wanted to get to know everything there was to know about her. And I wanted her to know everything there was to know about me.

So I didn't insist that she return the complement every time I made love to her. So I didn't demand to know why she left me frustrated and alone at the end of every date. Firstly because I didn't want to appear as if I was begging for it. Because I felt that if we were engaged in some sort of fucked up power struggle that she would have won a victory over me.

Secondly I didn't want to acknowledge that it was that important to me. I didn't want her to think I was ruled by my balls. And I didn't want to admit to myself that I was just lusting after her. In some weird way I was proving to myself that I really loved her by not forcing her to do anything that she didn't want to do.

And thirdly I didn't want to appear as if I was blackmailing her, a sort of I'm not going to make love to you until you agree to make love to me, because she might have called my bluff.

And I wanted to make love to her so badly that I couldn't risk not being able to.

So every night I made love to her and every night she sent me home frustrated. I didn't even unzip my jeans to remind her that I was getting aroused and would have liked something done about it. Until on the fourth date when I finally managed to ask her to return the complement.

I was lying on my back. She lay across my stomach. Her arm across my chest her head resting on top, with her legs curled up under my left arm, as she relaxed in the afterglow of her orgasm.

My right hand was under my head and with my left I was caressing her thigh. "So are you going to give me a blow job, then?" I asked softly.

She looked up at me and smiled. "No," she giggled, "of course not."

And that was it. I didn't want to make her do it, I wanted her to want to do it. And I didn't want to argue with her. I didn't ask her why. It made no difference why. Oh I'd like to have known. But I didn't think I could ask her to explain without her thinking that I was trying to argue her into doing it. The fact she didn't want to do it was enough for me.

I wanted her to want to love me the way that I wanted to love her. But she didn't and even then I think some part of me realized that she would never let me love her the way I really wanted to.

And yet the problem of sex still bothered me. I thought I was head over heels in love with her. And I thought I was expressing the depth of my love by making love to her, by trying to please her, by giving her pleasure. Oh I enjoyed it as well, I wouldn't have done it if I hadn't. But I was getting no feedback from her. When I told her that I loved her she would just smile, or kiss me or some such. And when I made love to her she wouldn't respond. I mean she'd respond to my love making, but she wouldn't actively make love back to me.

So how was I expected to know how she felt about me. If she didn't love me would she let me make love to her? Yet if she did love me why wouldn't she make love to me? I didn't know if it was because she really didn't know how or she just wasn't bothered. And yet I got a real kick out of making love to her. Was it just that the excitement of the physical acts made it that much easier to pretend about the emotions behind it?

Maybe she really loved me and she was just too shy and inexperienced and repressed by her Catholic upbringing to be able to admit it, to either herself or to me. And then again maybe she really was just using me. Maybe I was just being the gullible fool that I normally am. The truth was that I didn't know. I couldn't figure out how she felt. And I couldn't get her to tell me. And to be completely honest I really didn't know how I felt myself. I was knocked totally off balance by the ferocity of my desire for her.

I was in a right mess. I loved making love to Alexandra. I loved making her come. It didn't bother me in the least that we weren't having what might be called "normal" sexual intercourse, That is, the penetration of her vagina with my penis. Using my fingers was enough for me.

Yet it did bother me that she didn't make me come. That she didn't seem to want to make me come. And it bothered me that she wouldn't sleep with me. I mean that in the literal sense, that is to curl up and go to sleep in the same bed. Or even let me sleep on her floor. To have to get and leave after having sex seemed like rejection to me.

It all boiled down to this. If we were just going to have a casual relationship, then surely I should be entitled to get some enjoyment out of it. But yet if we were going to have a serious deeply committed relationship then why wouldn't she talk to me about it. Either way I was beginning to feel used and abused by the current situation.

It shows the measure of my confusion that it was over a month before I thought of contraception. One Wednesday afternoon it suddenly dawned on me. Obviously she didn't want to have straight sex with me because she didn't want to get pregnant. So buy some

condoms and then we can ride all night long. It further shows the measure of my confusion that fear of pregnancy didn't explain why she wouldn't give me head or masturbate me. Perhaps I thought she didn't want to cause a mess on her carpet.

It was only much later that I thought of Aids. I recently discovered that some teachers use fear to discourage teenagers from having sex. Fear of pregnancy, fear that some future husband won't respect you because you aren't a virgin, fear that you'll catch some deadly diseases. And now the deadliest of them all, Aids. (With no known cure at time of writing.)

Anyway, going to the chemist and buying the condoms proved a lot less embarrassing than I'd thought it would. It was my first time and like all things the first time can be a bit nerve racking. But it was quite simple. I just walked into the shop and asked the assistant if they sold condoms. She smiled and said "Yes. There they are." and pointed to the display I was standing in front of. I looked down and found myself confronted by an array of half familiar names. I did a quick scan and selected, almost at random, a packet. I handed over my money and she put the packet into a paper bag before handing it to me, along with my change. And that was that.

Now all I had to do was talk to Alexandra about using them.

I decided to ask her after the next time I made love to her. It was after our next date. We were lying half naked on the floor of her flat. She was lying across me wearing just a T-shirt and panties. I had on just my jeans and underpants. I could feel her breath on my skin as I caressed the back of her head with my right hand. The fingers of my left were still damp from being inside her.

"So would you let me use my penis if I had a condom on?" I asked.

"What?" she looked up.

"Would it be OK if I used a condom?" I repeated.

She sat up. "Why would you want to use a condom?" she didn't look at me.

I thought for a second, unsure what she meant then decided to interpret her question literally. "So you won't get pregnant and so we'll not pass any diseases to each other."

She stood up, "I think you'd better go now." She walked to her closet and put on her robe.

I watched her move and thought how beautiful she was. One part of me wanted to call her a fucked up little bitch, but the other couldn't get over how beautiful she was. So I got up and got dressed, after once again being fucked.

At the door I stopped and kissed her. I'd meant to walk out without doing so, but she was still irresistible. Once my lips were on her's, my arms went around her automatically and I ended up hugging her tightly, ever so tightly. She hugged me back and I was in heaven for those few minutes. Then she stepped back.

My hand went to her breast again. I could feel her nipple through the silk of her robe and the cotton of her T-shirt. "See you next week at the club?" I asked.

"Yes," she said and kissed my cheek.

I turned and walked out and didn't see her for another month.

# 5

It wasn't that I didn't want to see her, or that I avoided her, it was just that she was out every time I phoned and didn't show up at the camera club. I even called around to her flat a couple of times, but there was no answer.

At first it didn't cause me any concern. She didn't come to the camera club the following Tuesday, but while I was disappointed it was nothing unusual. I mean it isn't compulsory to attend every meeting. And when I phoned on the Thursday and she wasn't in, again that was quite normal. She didn't phone me from work on the Friday as she usually did and then I started to worry, but not very much. I phoned her back on Friday night, but she was out. It was no great surprise, Alexandra was not the type of girl you'd expect to be in on a Friday night.

But when she didn't phone me back on Saturday and was out both times I phoned her, I realized that the bitch had gone away for the weekend without bothering to tell me. Great! I thought, here was I hanging around all Friday and Saturday not doing anything because I was waiting to arrange to do something with her and she'd disappeared without a second thought. I was livid. I couldn't wait to get to the club on Tuesday to tell her what I thought of that.

But, of course, she didn't show up. Neither did she bother to return my calls the next day. Or the day after. Or the day after that. So Saturday afternoon I went around to her flat to really give her a piece of my mind. But there was no answer. She wasn't home. Had she gone away two weekends in a row? Without bothering tell me either time. Just to be sure I called back later, and again on Sunday. But there was still no answer.

By this stage my anger had evaporated and a state of shock had set in. I was exceedingly nervous about showing up at the club on Tuesday. I didn't know what to make of her behavior, nor how I should react. I was even more frightened by how I might react if my anger resurfaced. But I decided that staying away would not be any better.

As it turned out all my anxiety and worry was for nothing, because she didn't show. I must have walked around in a daze for the next day or so. I didn't know how to react. She'd obviously dumped me. And because she hadn't had the decency to tell me to my face I didn't quite know why, though I strongly suspected that it had something to do with our last date. But neither did I have a chance to vent my anger at her. She'd just disappeared from my life. I couldn't say or do anything about it. One more frustration to end our relationship with.

Then I realized that tomorrow was Friday and I developed this irrational fear that she'd phone me up. I walked around in dread for the rest of the day. Half the time telling myself that as she'd dumped me she wasn't likely to phone me ever again. The other thinking that as she hadn't "officially" dumped me, that is told me to my face, maybe she'd change her mind and decide to go out with me again. I was scared shitless! What was I going to do?

Then I came to my senses. She was avoiding me, not me her, I had nothing to fear from meeting her again, she was the one with all the explaining to do, not me! She was the one who'd walked out on me. If I ever met her again I was just going to play it cool, as if nothing had ever happened between us.

I told myself this repeatedly over the next few weeks, slowly adjusting to the fact that

Alexandra really didn't love me. That I'd have to find someone else to share my life and raise a family with. But it was still pretty depressing.

Then she showed up in the club one Tuesday night. I'd arrived late for the meeting and found a seat at the back. The lecturer was showing slides so it was dark and all I could make out of the people around me were vague shadows. But a few minutes after I'd arrived I recognized the shape of the head in front of me. I thought, that's Alexandra. Then I thought, no it can't be. But my heart was already beating faster.

I couldn't concentrate on the lecture. Which was a pity, because it was by a guy who'd taken photos while pot-holing. He'd used all sorts of intricate combinations of lights and flash guns to illuminate some fantastic rock formations he'd discovered underground. But I couldn't focus on what he was saying. All I could think of was that Alexandra was sitting in front of me. I could smell her perfume and the memories of our love making came flooding back to me.

When the lecture was over she turned around in her seat and noticed me. "Hi," she smiled. "Long time no see, stranger."

I opened my mouth to respond, but my mind went blank. I'd fallen in love with her, she'd treated me with contempt, then dumped me without a word of explanation, and now she was acting as if we were casual acquaintances who'd not seen each other for a few days.

"So what have you been up to while I was away?" she asked.

"You where away?" I didn't know what to say.

"Yeah," she smiled again. "Don't tell me you didn't notice."

"Oh, I noticed all right," I replied. "I just wish you'd bothered to tell me about it before hand."

"Sorry?" she stopped smiling.

"I missed you," I said. I thought, If I make a fuss about her disappearing will she get offended and walk out on me for good? I couldn't risk it. I'd have to show the true strength of my love for her by accepting her back and loving her even more.

She smiled back, then looked down. "I missed you, as well," she whispered.

My heart jumped. I reached up and stroked her cheek. She looked up and I went weak at the knees as our eyes met. I cleared my throat to say something, but lent forward to kiss her instead.

Once again we ended up in her place again. And once again I caressed and stroked her. Once again she kissed and hugged me back. Once again I kissed and licked and sucked her, ran my hands all over her body, gloried in our physical intimacy. Once again I was sure of my love for her.

And once again, when I'd made her come, she asked me to leave without returning the compliment. Once again we could have sex, but I couldn't sleep with her. Once again I'd told her that I loved her and once again I felt rejected even though she'd not rejected me.

So there I was left wondering what she felt for me. Could I love someone who didn't love me? Could she love me and treat me with what I was increasingly calling contempt? Was I just an easy lay to her or did she have stronger feelings for me? Would this uncertainty ever end? Could I ever love her properly and know that she loved me back?

And then it was Friday night and once again I was standing outside Easons wondering if Alexandra would turn up. A month before I had been wondering if I was going to spend the rest of my Friday nights standing here waiting for her and just the week before I'd thought I'd never have to do it again. But there I was once more, waiting for her to pop out of the crowd.

I was saying to myself, I don't know why I agreed to see her again. She obviously doesn't love me. I'm just going to be hurt again. She's just going to fuck me about again. I should be old enough to know better by now. I should just go home now and forget about her.

But I didn't. Looking back I suppose I was trying to be noble, to take the moral high ground, to prove myself better than her by treating her decently, even while she used and

abused me. But more importantly I couldn't forget the feel of her in my arms. The taste of her when I made love to her, the thrill of making her come, the smell from my fingers that would linger for days.

And then she was there, walking towards me through the crowd, a smile on her face as she saw me. She was wearing a long black skirt, and black leather boots. On top of which she had a chunky wool cardigan, black with green flecks through it. Her long black hair was tied back in a pony tail with a red ribbon. And her green eyes shone out at me.

"Hi," she said as she stopped beside me.

My mouth was dry, but I managed to respond. "Hi," I smiled back, my heart beating faster, my balls tightening at the thought of making love to her.

Once again we had a nice pleasant evening out. We had a drink, saw a movie and went to Bewley's for coffee afterwards. All the time we chatted about this and that, about photography and movies, about work and shopping, about her tennis and my writing. About almost everything, but what I most wanted to talk about, what I felt for her, and what she felt for me.

It wasn't until we were on our way back to her place that I managed to get around to bringing up the subject. But once again my frustration worked its way to the fore.

"So what does us having sex mean to you?" I asked.

"Sex?" she almost laughed. "Where was I when we had sex?"

"What do you mean," I was astonished. "We had sex on our first date." I added quickly, "And most dates since."

"What?" she seemed surprised.

"When we made love," I explained.

"Oh, that," she smiled. "That wasn't sex."

"OK" I took a breath to control my anger. "So if it wasn't sex what was it?"

"It was..." she searched for words. "... just foreplay."

It was damn well just foreplay for me, Bitch! I glared at her as the thought burned through my mind. You made dam sure it was nothing more.

She smiled, and I wanted to smash her face in.

"What made you think it was sex?" she asked.

I fought to keep myself under control. "I made love to you and you fucking came, that's what made it sex."

"No, Kevin," she smiled as she gently shook her head.

I was humiliated. To have made love to her. To have worshipped her. To have given her the greatest pleasure I could. The greatest pleasure she'd let me anyway. And to have her dismiss it as something totally trivial. Something she'd almost overlooked. I was shaken to the core. To have put her in such a central position in my life and to have her regard me as something so inconsequential was devastating.

One part of me knew that this was just what she wanted me to feel. That this was all part of some perverted scheme she had. And another part of me knew that she really loved me. That I couldn't make love to somebody, and have her react to me the way she did, and not have her fall in love with me. That surely nobody could open themselves' physically without exposing themselves' emotionally as well. That sex couldn't be meaningless to her.

The two thoughts combined to make me believe that she was rebelling against her love for me. That she couldn't accept that she loved me, or that I loved her. That somehow she couldn't trust her own emotions. So that on the one hand she was drawn to me and let me make love to her. But on the other she couldn't accept that our feelings for each other were valid. She couldn't respond to me in the way that I wanted, simply because I'd told her that was how I wanted her to respond.

Then the notion of sin came to me. She'd told me that she was a Catholic, that she went to

mass every Sunday. And I thought that she probably couldn't admit that she was having sex with me, because having sex was a sin. That she had reasoned that if I didn't penetrate her vagina with my penis, that if I didn't come, that it mustn't be sex. And the safest way to ensure that was to ignore my penis altogether, to make sure that I didn't come. A sort of homemade version of "Safe Sex" for repressed Catholics.

We continued back to her place, but when we got to the door she stopped and turned to me.

"I not going to invite you in tonight, Kevin," she looked down.

"Oh," I said, wanting to ask why, but knowing it would only start an argument if I did. "OK," I shrugged.

She put her arms around my neck and we kissed. I put my arms around her and hugged. She stepped back and turned to unlock the door. I started back down the garden.

"See you next week at the club," she said.

"Yeah," I replied. "See you then." Wondering if I would or not. I made my lonely way home.

Looking back on my relationship with her I realize that one of my biggest mistakes might have been that I'd usually asked her those "tricky" questions after she'd come, when for all intents and purposes she seemed to have no further interest in me. Maybe if I'd asked her beforehand she'd have been more interested in talking to me about them. But then I'd have run the risk of having an argument with her and not getting a chance to make love to her. And I'd wanted to make love to her so badly. Maybe I had only been interested in "having my evil way" with her after all.

But yet we'd not really argued this time and still she hadn't invited me inside.

So maybe I should have pushed her into arguments more often. Maybe then she'd have believed how important those things had been to me. But then I had told her how I'd felt and she'd just not believed me. And I feel now as I felt then that if the only way I could make her accept what I told her I felt was what I truly did feel was by having an argument with her, then she wasn't worth the bother needed to convince her. I guess it was the sin of pride that made me unable to plead and beg for understanding.

But the next time we made love I was going to make dam sure she didn't ignore my penis.

She didn't actually turn up at the next meeting of the Camera Club, which didn't surprise me. By this stage I knew that if she said she'd see me at the Club than she'd not turn up. But what did surprise me was that she was in when I phoned her the next Thursday. So I arranged to meet her the following day, at the same time and place.

Once again she took my breath away when she arrived, so I didn't mind having stood there for twenty minutes waiting for her. We went to see some Hollywood blockbuster. I can't remember which one it was, but the smell of her perfume and the feel of her snuggling against my shoulder for over an hour gave me a pleasant hormonal buzz. And when we came out of the cinema we headed straight back to her place.

By this stage we'd made love often enough for the thrill of discovery to be somewhat abated. It was still exciting to make love, but we had started to develop regular habits and favorite positions. One of my favorite to this day is me lying on my back with her on top, one breast in my mouth, a hand on the other, with my other hand stretched down to caress her to orgasm.

But this time I tried to encourage her to take a more active interest in my. I wanted her hands to caress me to orgasm as well. So when we started to make love I deliberately put her hand to my crotch so she could feel the bulge of my erection through my jeans. I encouraged her to stroke and caress me. I got completely naked, even though she only stripped to T-shirt and panties.

And when she took her hand from my genitals I took mine from her's, though we continued to kiss and rub each other. She put her hand back on my penis and I slipped my

fingers back into her vagina. We had a long slow delicious session, slowly building up to a climax.

We started off fully clothed leaning against one of the arm chairs. Then we were half naked lying on the floor, first her on top of me, then me on top of her, then her on top again. It must have taken us over half an hour just to strip. All the time we were kissing and cuddling and caressing each other.

By the time I was completely naked we were both more than ready to come. We were on the floor. I was sitting between her legs leaning forward to kiss her. She was resting back on one arm, her other hand on my penis. Her T-shirt was pulled up and her breast was in my mouth, nipple hard against my tongue. Her hand rubbed gently across the tip of my erection, much too gently to make me come, but more than enough to stimulate me.

My fingers once again found their way to her vagina. She was wide open and hot. And I just couldn't help myself. I couldn't deny her orgasm. It was one thing if I'd tried and failed, but I was much too experienced for that. I knew what to do, and I really couldn't help myself. My fingers found their own way across and around and inside. I pumped her for a few timeless moments, then she shuddered and gasped and came.

When she'd relaxed and I'd taken my fingers out I realized that her hand was no longer on my penis. She'd brought it down to push my fingers away. I leant back on my elbow, expecting her to resume her caresses. But instead she stood up and walked out into the bathroom. I was left reclined on the floor, with an erection, wondering what the hell I was supposed to do now.

This was worse than being ignored completely, to have been aroused. To have her acknowledge my arousal, even stimulate and encourage it. And then for her to just walk away from it was... well unbelievable. Yet she'd done it. I was living through it. I didn't want to believe it. Yet it had happened. I couldn't ignore it. I was in a state of complete and utter shock.

What was I supposed to do? Rush into the bathroom and rape her! I tell you I nearly did. Much as I hate to admit it, I nearly fucking raped her. And I'm sure there's not a court in the land that would have convicted me of the crime either.

But I am not an animal. I am not ruled by my hormones. I was not so frustrated and degraded that I'd lost control of my actions. I was devastated, yes. But I was not going to exact any revenge on her. I was not going to stoop to her level. I wasn't going to start playing her fucked up little games. So I started to get dressed.

As I was tucking my T-shirt into my jeans she came out of the bathroom. "Oh, are you leaving," she seemed genuinely surprised.

I said nothing. Just sat on the end of her bed and pulled on my shoes. She sat beside me. I put my hand on her knee. Then moved it up and squeezed her thigh. I looked at her. I wanted to say so many things: that I loved her, that I wanted her, that I needed her, that I worshipped her, that I wanted so much to understand her, wanted so much to reach her. I wanted just once to believe that we'd really understood each other. But I couldn't.

So instead I slid off the bed onto the floor in front of her. She brought her knees together, so I kissed and licked them, working my way up her thighs. I wanted to grab her and make mad passionate love to her. For her to respond and embrace me, open her legs and let me come inside her, to forget everything else and unite us in an act of total surrender to each other.

But she pulled my head away and smiled down at me. "You're lively tonight," she whispered, kissing my forehead. "But I think you've really had enough."

I looked up at her, my hands on her thighs, her hands pressing against my ears as she held my head away. I opened my mouth, but I couldn't say anything. I swallowed, but still couldn't speak. So I looked down and nodded.



"Come on," she stood up and got my coat from the back of the door.

I stood up and put it on. She opened the door to let me out. I stood in front of her for a moment. Then she was in my arms. My face was buried in her hair, pressing against the side of her neck and her shoulder. My hands caressed her hips and back through the cotton of her T-shirt. Then my left hand was underneath, pressing her panties into the crack between her buttocks, my fingers reaching down and around to caress her.

She stepped back and pushed me away. "My, you're spunky tonight," she smiled and kissed my cheek. "See you next week."

"Yeah," I replied, my hand gently cupping her breast. "See you next week."

Then I was outside, walking away, with the door closing behind me.

On the next date I decided to try another tack. Instead of going straight to the cinema I suggested we go for a drink first. Once we were settled at a table with our drinks I tried to talk to her about how I felt for her, how she felt for me and what type of relationship she wanted us to have. But instead I found myself talking to her about sex. Why couldn't I talk to her about love without mentioning sex? It was as if my desire for her was so strong and I was so frustrated, after having my hopes raised and dashed so often, that all my energies seemed to be channeled into lustful thoughts.

But she had no qualms about talking about sex, just as long as the conversation didn't get too personal. And I didn't say anything that she could interpret as either asking to have sex with her or implying that we were having sex.

I can't remember what strange twists and turns our conversation must have taken during our first drink, but half way through our second we ended up talking about masturbation.

"So what would you tell your twelve year old son if you found him masturbating?" I took a sip of my drink.

"Well..." I felt she was going to just shrug it off, but she didn't. "I'd tell him what it was all about. What it was for."

Visions of her inaptness at doing anything for me came to mind and I wondered how she was going to tell her son how to masturbate properly. I doubted if she knew that there was more than one technique. So I asked, "What do you mean?"

"You know," she smiled, "about the birds and the bees."

I wanted to explain to her that I meant if she had discovered him masturbating after he'd been told about the birds and the bees. I wanted to know if she would tell him that it was a sin and that he shouldn't do it. But I felt that the guy sitting at the end of the next table was beginning to take an interest in our conversation and I didn't want to discuss this in front of an audience.

I decided to change the conversation again. Most people in Ireland, regardless of religious or political persuasion, believe that the sex education in Irish schools is inadequate. Though when it comes to the question of what should be done to improve it opinions differ widely. Which is probably why so little has been done about improving the situation.

"Well I'm glad you'd tell him," I smiled, "because if you left it up to the schools he'd not find out about anything."

She seemed surprised. "Oh, I don't know," she said. "We had very good sex education classes in our school."

"I thought you went to a nun's school," I said.

"I did," she nodded.

"And they had sex education classes?" I didn't believe it.

"Of course," she smiled. "Didn't you have them?"

"All the priests told us was that it was immoral to masturbate. And that you shouldn't get your passions inflamed as it might be difficult to control them and you'd end up getting a girl into trouble," I smiled then at how silly it had seemed. But when I think now of the stupidity of it makes me so angry.

She laughed with me. "Really?" she asked.

"Really," I stopped laughing.

"We were taught all about sex," she said.

"By the nuns?" The thought of a nun being explicit about sex was incredible.

"Well it was a lay teacher that gave the classes," she conceded. "But the nuns must have known what she was teaching us."

"What?" I asked. "All about contraception and how to make love, or even masturbate."

"Don't be disgusting, Kevin," She looked away.

"Disgusting?" I smiled. "Which one of those was disgusting?" I thought, you sure find the thought of making love to me disgusting.

"They don't teach you that sort of thing in school," she said.

"I know," I replied. "I went to school as well."

There was silence for a moment. "So where are you supposed to learn about that sort of thing if they don't teach you in school?" I asked.

"Well," she replied. "Where did you learn about it?"

"From books and magazines," I said, "and late night television programs." I smiled, "Particularly channel Four."

We laughed. And I noticed she'd finished her drink.

"Do you want another?" I asked.

"No, Kevin," she shook her head. "I have to make an early start in the morning, so I think it's time I headed home."

"OK" I knocked back the remains of my pint while she put on her coat. I think she was going to leave without me, but when she saw me putting on my coat she waited for me.

We walked back down towards O'Connell St. I thought that we'd be going back to her place as usual. But she stopped and took hold of my arm.

"Listen," she said. "There's just enough time for you to catch your last bus home. Isn't there?"

I shrugged, "Yeah. The stop is just down the road. The last bus isn't due to leave for another half hour."

"Well," she hesitated. "It's just that I have to get up early in the morning to catch a bus home," she looked down. "So I don't think that you'd better come back with me tonight."

I felt a familiar disappointment. "OK," I said. What else could I say. "So you're going away for the rest of the weekend, then."

"Yes," she looked up, but offered no other explanation.

I put my arms around her and leaned forward to kiss her. She kissed me quickly and stepped away.

"I'll see you then," she said. Then she looked down again. "You know it was a very interesting conversation we had tonight," she turned and hurried away.

And left me with a lot to think about. I'd certainly achieved my goal of finding more about what she thought of sex. But I'd failed miserably in finding out just what she felt about me. I had this unshakeable believe that she didn't know how she felt about me. That she was unwilling to look at our relationship and decide what she felt about me. Because if she knew she'd surely tell me.

But at least I now knew some more about her attitude to sex. It was no wonder she knew fuck all about sex. If she thought what the nuns were likely to have told her was all there is to know she must have been in a bad state. I don't mean that they wouldn't have taught her anything. I'm sure that she knew a lot more about menstrual cycles, gestation periods and even genetics than I did. But I'm equally sure that she knew little about contraception. And she definitely knew nothing about making love.

And she didn't seem to have come to terms with the guilt of wanting sex yet. I know that

## Alexandra

guilt. I was raised as a Catholic. And even now I'm not sure that I've come to terms with the guilt that was instilled in me at having normal feelings and emotions.

So I spent the next few weeks thinking, the poor little kid, feeling all these desires that she was not supposed to have. Not knowing what to do with them and so repressing them. No wonder she couldn't make up her mind if she wanted to have sex or not. Or rather, that she wanted to have sex, but she couldn't admit it, least of all to herself.

And all the time I ignored all the trouble I was having with my own uncontrollable desires. Ironic justice perhaps?

# 6

The next week I phoned her as usual on the Thursday night. But she wasn't in. So I left a message and waited once again for her to phone me back. About five on Friday I phoned her again and left a message, thinking that she would get it when she came in from work. Saturday morning I phoned and left another message, but my hopes were low. I figured that she'd gone away for the weekend again. She didn't phone me back that weekend and she didn't turn up at the Camera Club on Tuesday either.

So next Thursday I phoned again, after ten thirty so there was plenty of time for her to have gotten home from her classes. But once again she wasn't in and I left a message for her. On Friday I phoned and left another message. And another on Saturday. When she didn't turn up at the Camera Club that week or the next, I realized that she'd really disappeared for good. I was sorry that she hadn't had the decency to tell me to my face. But that was probably just because I wanted to scream and shout at her to relieve my anger and frustration. But I still found myself dreaming about her every night.

Then a month later she turned up at the Camera Club again. After an unexplained absence of six weeks she walked back into my life.

The club meeting was the judging of the summer competition. The judge had just held up the first of my prints and had started to comment about it when she walked in. I didn't hear a word he said. All my being was focused on the fact that Alexandra was once again in the same room as me.

I'd half thought, really hopped, that she wouldn't attend the Camera Club, that if she hadn't the courage to face me when she'd dumped me that she wouldn't want to face me ever again. Yet the fact that I knew where she lived burned in the back of my mind. And I knew that someday I'd have gone to her flat to face her again.

Now she'd come to me, but in a place where I'd not want to make a scene. Perhaps it was better that way. It'd only hurt to say the things that I'd have ended up saying in private.

The next hour is a haze. As the judge made comment after comment about all the photos entered in the competition I found my eyes constantly straying to look at Alexandra. I'd snap them back and refocus on the print the judge was discussing, but I'd not be able to concentrate on what he was saying. I would try to listen to his words and find my eyes once again on Alexandra.

As soon as the meeting was over I left the main room. I was sweating and my knees were trembling. I went straight upstairs to get some coffee and steady my nerves before Alexandra could engage me in conversation. There was all the normal chit-chat going on among my fellow members of the club, but it all went straight past me. I knew that she was going to follow me up and I knew that she'd talk to me.

The top floor of the club's building had a little room at the rear fitted out as a kitchen and a larger room at the front with a mismatched assortment of tables and chairs donated by members. I was on autopilot as I got my coffee and walked into the front room to sit at a table alone. I had just sat down and taken my first sip of coffee when she walked in. She hadn't gone into the back room to get some coffee first, she'd walked straight in to see me.

"Hi," she said in that soft whisper of a voice that even the memory of can still send shivers down my spine.

"Hi," my voice nearly broke.

"Did we have a fight or something?" she stood beside me.

"What?" there was a strange ringing in my ears.

"You haven't phoned and didn't come to talk to me downstairs," she seemed somewhat puzzled.

My heart must have been doing 120 or more, "No, we didn't have a fight." I swallowed, "I did phone, but you never answered any of my messages."

"Oh," she smiled and sat down. "That was because I was on holiday in Spain."

My heart skipped a beat as two thoughts flared simultaneously in my brain. "She hadn't dumped me after all!" and "She'd gone on holiday without telling me she was going." "She loves me", followed by, "She thinks so little of me that she didn't even bother to tell me she was going on holiday."

I looked down. "Where did you go to?" was all I could think of saying.

"To Madrid and Santander and Avila," she smiled her excitement of the fantastic things she'd seen. "The cathedrals and castles were magnificent."

"I'm glad that you enjoyed it," I cut into her excitement. "Only sorry that you didn't bother to tell me you were going."

She stopped. "Of course I told you," she looked at me.

"The last time I saw you was six weeks ago," I stated. "And the last thing you said to me then was 'see you next Tuesday at the Club'." I shrugged, "I didn't see you till tonight."

She seemed sorry. "Oh that's right," she explained. "I went away for the few weekends before going to Spain. I guess I didn't get to see you then."

Derek and Paul came in with their coffee. Paul split a knowing look between me and Alexandra, but didn't say anything.

"Congratulations, Kevin," Derek beamed. "So you finally beat me."

"Well that's because we finally got a judge that wasn't satisfied by 'Pretty pictures'," I replied smiling, happy to have something else to think about beside Alexandra.

"'Pretty pictures' my foot," Derek put his cup down on the table and sat beside me. "It was because you finally took one that was in focus," he smiled.

"After all those soft-focus, 'Candy box' shots of flowers you did last year!" I replied. "You've got some nerve."

"So, where have you been for the last while, Alexandra?" Paul asked. "I haven't seen you at the Club for weeks."

"Oh," she beamed. "I've been on holiday in Spain."

"Really," he smiled back. "Where did you go?"

Smiling she launched into a graphic description of her holiday. Paul encouraged her by saying that he'd been there a few years ago and they compared a couple of places that they both been to. Then somebody else said that his sister had married a Spaniard and that he'd stayed with her for two weeks at the beginning of the year. And he detailed all the famous places he'd been. Then the conversation turned to holidays in general. And, it being a photographic club, to the trials and tribulations of taking photos on holiday.

And all the time I sat there, while the conversation lapped around me, wanting to take Alexandra by the scruff of the neck and demand an explanation of why she'd just disappeared from my life, why she'd gone on holiday and not even sent me a post card? To beat out of her what she felt for me. To demand an explanation of why she treated me the way she did!

But I couldn't say anything here. I couldn't make a scene in front of everyone. I didn't want to make a scene, because I didn't think an argument would solve anything. I just wanted to talk to her.

As the conversation faded and people started to leave I turned to her and asked softly, "Do

you fancy a drink?"

"OK" she shrugged.

I stood and said "See you later," to the guys.

"Cheers."

"Goodbye."

"G'luck."

Alexandra nodded her goodbyes and followed me out.

As we walked out of the club she started to turn left towards the pub we normally go to after meetings. But I didn't want to be with her in the middle of a crowd again. I needed somewhere we could talk. Somewhere I could tell her what I felt about her.

I put my hand on her arm. "Let's go to Ryan's," I suggested. "It's just up the road and we can talk there."

"Sure," she turned to follow me.

When we got to the pub I discovered that instead of being a quiet, sleepy little place, as it had been on the previous occasions I'd been there, it was jammed full of people. We made our way to the bar and I noticed a couple of free stools at a table in the corner.

"See if those are free," I nodded towards them. "And I'll get you a drink."

"Great," she replied over the noise of the crowd. "I'll have a glass of Guinness." And turned to make her way across to the stools.

I got the drinks and followed her over.

As I sat beside her most of the people broke out into a rousing chorus of "Happy Birthday" to Linda, making conversation impossible.

"Linda sure has a lot of friends," I smiled at Alexandra as soon as they'd finished.

"Yes," she smiled back. "It's great, isn't it?"

"Yes," I smiled back. Really great! I thought, I come here for a heart to heart with you and end up in the middle of a birthday party.

We didn't say much to each other for the next fifteen minutes. Just sat and drank and chatted about photography. All the time I was putting off raising the matter that most bothered me. But eventually I spit it out.

"So why did you disappear on me for six weeks?" I asked.

"Sorry?" she seemed somewhat stunned at the sudden in my tone of voice.

I calmed down a little, "So why did you disappear on me for six weeks." I looked at her, "As far as I knew you'd just dumped me and hadn't the decency to tell me to my face."

"Oh," she said. "Is that why you didn't want to talk to me in the club?"

"No," I got angry at the suggestion that it was ever me that didn't want to talk, when it was her that refused to tell me anything of her feelings, either positive or negative, for me. "That's why I wanted to talk to you somewhere that we could have a private," I gestured at the crowd around us. "Or at least semi-private conversation, away from all my friends and acquaintances at the Club."

"Oh," she repeated.

I waited for to say something more, but after a few moments she looked down and took a sip from her drink.

"Is that all you have to say?" I asked.

"Well I don't know what you want me to say," she replied.

"What I want you to say?" I didn't want her to say anything. I wanted her to talk to me. I wanted to understand her. I wanted to know what she felt for me. I wanted her to understand what I felt for her. This wasn't just some game with set phrases we were supposed to say to each other. This was supposed to be a conversation. Preferably an open and honest conversation where we'd both learn something of and develop a better appreciation of each other.

I took a deep breath and tried a different tack.

"What's the most important think in your life at the moment?" I asked.

She paused for a moment, then smiled and said, "Improving my ranking at my Tennis club."

"And after that," I didn't smile back.

"Well," she shrugged. "Going out with my friends. And having a good time at the weekends."

"And where do I fit in?" I looked down.

"I don't understand," she said.

"As far as I can see," I explained. "I'm ranked lowest on your list of priorities. You'd rather play tennis or got to the pictures with your friends, or even stay at home and read a book, before you'd want to socialize with me." I didn't mention work or her classes because I could understand her needing to do them. "And then you only want to see me at weekends and if you're going away, to wherever it is that you disappear to, you have no time to see me at all!" I snorted, "Not even enough time to phone me and tell me that you're going away. You're not even bothered enough to pretend that you'll miss me."

"Oh," she looked down into her glass. Then swallowed half her drink. "I see."

"Do you?" I asked. "That's good, because I don't. I don't understand what I mean to you. And no matter how often I tell you that I love you, you never tell me how you feel." I looked down again, "You never tell me anything."

We were silent for a moment. I sipped my drink and looked up at her. But she was still staring into her Guinness.

I tried to explain again. "I don't expect to be the centre of your universe," though I'd have loved it if I had been. "But I do expect to be up there somewhere." I shrugged, half attempting to make a joke, "I mean, who gets to walk home alone all the time and who gets all the orgasms?"

She looked at me and raised her almost empty glass, "If that were fuller you'd have it all over you."

"Why?" I asked. "You do!"

She looked away.

"I'll buy you another if you want to throw it over me," I said.

There was silence for a moment. Then she laughed softly. "You know," she looked back to me. "I really think you mean that."

"Of course I do," I spread my hands. "Why would I say it if I didn't?"

She shook her head and smiled. "I'm not sure I'm ready for this," she sipped her drink. "I'm not sure I want it."

I didn't know how to reply, so I sipped my drink.

"This is just going a bit too fast for me," she said. "I just need time to adjust to it." She looked at me again, "Just give me time to adjust to it. OK?"

"OK," I replied and looked down, not knowing quite what she'd meant.

We finished our drinks in silence.

Outside the pub I turned to walk home with her. But she put a hand to my shoulder and stopped me.

"I don't think you should come back with me tonight," she looked down.

"OK," I looked down as well. Once again I didn't have any choice.

She put her hand to the side of my head and stretched up to kiss my cheek. "Goodnight," she whispered.

I reached out to put my arms around and hug her and kiss her a proper goodnight, but she'd stepped away before I could react.

"I'll phone you," she turned and walked away.

I watched her go, knowing that she'd often said she'd phone me and that she never had,

thinking that she was walking away from me forever, hoping against hope that she really would, this time, just this once, actually phone me.

But she had told me that she would phone me! How could I doubt her? Why would she tell me she would if she had no intention of doing so? Forget that she done so in the past. She'd told me that she'd phone me and I believed her. She would phone. I would have faith in her above all else.

So that night, as I walked home along, I occupied my mind by trying to figure out what my feelings for her were. By that time I'd given up any attempt at trying to work out what she was feeling.

Was I really in love with her? I thought about her all the time. It ached when she wasn't there. I wanted to hold her, to touch her, even just to be in the same room as her. I wanted most of all to talk to her. I wanted to tell her what I felt. Or rather I wanted her to believe me when I told her that I loved her. I knew, deep down inside me, that she couldn't accept that I did.

Every time I met her I couldn't stop myself from touching her. Did she think I was some sort of pervert feeling her up all the time? Did she think that all I wanted was to have sex with her? Did she not know that every time I got her alone I just couldn't help myself?

And yet I never lost total control. I never got carried away so much that I ended up raping her. I never did anything she didn't want. And she wasn't just passively lying there letting my do it to her either. She took an active interest in me making love to her. She'd just draw the line at doing anything that'd make me come.

Was it some sort of test? Was she trying to see if I was just some low-life that simply wanted to 'have my evil way' with her and then dump her. I can sympathize with her not wanting to be just another conquest on my hit list. The only thing is, I was beginning to feel that I was one on her's.

But was I "having my evil way" with her even if I didn't get to come? I think now that she wouldn't let me come because she thought that I wasn't. As long as I didn't come, she wasn't conquered. But I never wanted to conquer her. I wanted to share myself with her. I mean making her come was the highlight of... well my whole life at that time. I lived and breathed just to make love to her. Oh it mattered that I didn't come. It mattered a hell of a lot! But as long as I was making love to her I could live in the hope that one day she'd respond. And wouldn't it be a glorious day when she shared herself with me, when she finally admitted her love for me!

It was only much later that it occurred to me that she didn't know how to respond to me. Yet even at the time I saw that she didn't seem to know how to make love to me. I don't just mean the physical acts, but the whole emotional attitude she needed to take to love someone. But for some reason I never connected this to the fact that she wouldn't let me come. I'd always assumed that she didn't make love to me because she wouldn't accept the fact that she loved me. Of course I never directly asked her if she did love me, because she might have said no. And then where would I have been.

So once again I'd tried to get closer to her and had ended up further away. Maybe I was just feeling sorry myself, because I wouldn't be making love to her. Or maybe it was because I couldn't pretend that she loved me when she left me standing alone in the cold street. Either way I didn't have the momentary illusion of being close to her. I didn't have those few precious moments after I'd made love to her that I could pretend that she did really love me. A feeling of rejection hummed in the back of my head.

But now, looking back at our relationship, I realized that night was one of the few times that we really communicated. The closest we'd ever come to each other. I'd finally told her that I was serious about her. She'd told me that she didn't want to be rushed into anything. The thought that maybe we would end up sharing our lives with each other was out in the



## Alexandra

open.

But all the frustration and bitterness that was building up inside me had to go somewhere. A combination of writers block, being unemployed for over a year, having no money, having to live with my parents, a total lack of success in any aspect of my life, was surrounding me in a fog of depression and uncertainty. All my insecurities were being aggravated.

I needed somebody who'd give me a steadying hand through to the other side. But Alexandra had her own insecurities to deal with. I didn't know what they were. But I could see that they were there. Would the stresses we were both suffering under forge us together or tear us apart?

# 7

Then a miracle happened! Alexandra phoned me on the next Thursday to arrange to meet me on Friday. I was stunned. I'd half expected her to disappear from my life for good. But she'd phoned. She wanted to continue our relationship. I shot from the depths of depression to the highs of elation.

And yet the elation was tempered with a hint of suspicion. I wasn't a complete fool; I knew that she hadn't suddenly started to love me. By this stage I was beginning to believe that she never would. And yet my "master plan" had been to give to her as much as I could and to keep giving, until there could be no doubt in her mind that I really did love her.

Some part of me knew even then that I'd fail. That if she didn't want to believe that I loved her, if she couldn't believe that I loved her then no matter what I did she wouldn't be convinced. If she believed that I was lying when I told her that I loved her, then she could believe that everything I did to try to convince her of that love was simply part of some plan I had to trick her.

This is where I first realized that guilt was playing a part in my thinking, because I did have a plan to make her change her mind. I did do these things to convince her that I was in love with her. And I began to have an inkling that I was not only trying to fool her, but that I was trying to fool myself. I was not only trying to prove to her that I loved her, but I was trying to prove it to myself as well.

I was totally confused about how I felt about her. When I held her in my arms and the hormones were flowing I could forget everything else. There was no doubt in my mind. I had her all to myself and she filled my universe. It was once she had come that the disappointment came into it, when I had to get up and go home in the middle of the night. And even when I got home and masturbated to relieve my frustration, it wasn't satisfying any more.

Oh I still got a trill out of making love to her, but I found it increasingly difficult to feel anything deeper. And yet this is when she started to act as if she might have stronger feelings for me. This is when she started to do the things I had wanted her to all along. And this is when I could no longer believe that she meant them. Or rather, that they meant the same things to her as they did to me.

I don't mean that she suddenly blurted out that she loved me. I mean that she started to talk to me, and phone me, and behave as if she had an interest in me other than as a biological vibrator. She started to express an interest in doing things with me, in sharing at least some part of her life with me. Though, looking back, I never did get to meet any of her friends or relations.

So it was with all these thoughts revolving around in my head that I waited for her that Friday night. And once again when she arrived they all fled from my conscious thought. She was beautiful, and I loved her. And nothing else mattered.

She was wearing black shoes and heavy black silk tights. With a straight, dark blue skirt that stopped a few inches above her knees. She had a lighter blue blouse, with the top two buttons open and a light blue jumper draped over her shoulders. Her black hair was tied back

in a pony tail and she had dark eye shadow that made the sparkle in her eyes shine right out.

Once again her beauty took my breath away and my mouth went dry just looking at her. I wanted to put my arms around her and crush her to me. I wanted my fingers to touch her and my tongue to taste her. My hormones raced and I felt an erection building.

"Hi," was all I could say.

"Hi," she smiled back.

She started a conversation and I responded automatically. I don't know what we talked about. All I can remember is that we went to a pub for a drink first and then went to the lighthouse cinema to see a French film called the Hairdresser's Husband. All through the film I sat with my arm around her shoulder, running my fingers through her hair and brushing against her cheek, and her neck, and her shoulder, and her breast. We were both very aroused by the time we started back to her flat. And even though the cold night air served to cool us down a bit, once she'd got me home it didn't take us long to warm up again.

When I first started going out with Alexandra, and making love to her, I didn't take off my jeans or underpants because, at least on the first few occasions, I felt that she would be shocked, or offended, or would panic. Even then I think I knew she was pretending that we weren't having sex. Anyway she didn't seem at all keen to get her hands on me.

Then as our relationship progressed and she began to take off more of her clothing, she never did get entirely naked with me, I began to strip completely. And she defiantly knew that I was getting aroused and that this was a sexual act we were performing. But she still ignored me from the waist down. She'd kiss and neck, and her hands would roam my torso, but they'd never go below my hips.

A couple of times I took her hand and deliberately put in on my erection. I'd squeezed her fingers closed around it and give her a couple of thrusts, as a gentle hint to what she should be doing. But a few moments after I'd taken my hand away she'd move her's back up my body.

So I was forced to accept that she wasn't going to do anything down there. The couple of occasions that I tried, as gently as I could, to push her in that direction I just ended up even more frustrated than before. So I stopped taking my jeans off. It didn't seem to bother her, she'd still strip down to just a T-shirt or blouse and I could make love to her in a fashion she'd accept.

That night, as usual, I made love to her and she sighed in contentment and cuddled up to me for a few minutes. She was lying across me wearing just her blouse. My right hand was tangled in her hair and my left cupped her breast. I floated in that sea of contentment I always got when she came, where I could pretend that she really did love me.

She sat up and I let my hands fall away from her, the spell broken, thinking that she'd say it was time for me to leave now. But instead she started to unfasten my jeans.

I looked up at her puzzled.

She smiled down at me, "I think it's time you got some now. Don't you?"

I didn't say anything. I didn't know what to say. A thought flared, was I supposed to express profound gratitude! But she was pulling down my jeans and underpants and a trill ran through my body. I could tell by the way she touched me that she was inexperienced, that I was maybe the first guy she'd done this to. Though I still didn't know precisely what she was going to do. And why she'd suddenly picked this time to start doing it.

She rubbed the palm of her hand against my testicles, gently pressing and squeezing them. Then she brushed the fingers of her other hand along the length of my half soft penis, back and forth, back and forth, just barely touching it as it stiffened and stood up. She swallowed noisily and I looked up at her.

And found myself enthralled by the look of utter wonderment, mixed with complete concentration, on her face. As her hands worked, I looked up at her face. Her eyes were fixed, unblinking, at what her hands were doing. I don't think she could quite believe what was

happening.

Her tongue flicked about her lips, disappearing inside as she swallowed, then the tip just breaking through her lips as she continued to tease me.

By this stage I was quite hard and the fingers of both her hands were on my erection. As she ran one set along the top, she brushed the other down the underside. Then back up and back down, one hand reaching the base just as the other reached the top. The sensation of her dry fingers barely touching the tip was making sparks fly.

She wasn't really touching me tightly enough to masturbate me, but I'd been so aroused by making love to her, not just tonight, but over months, that it wasn't taking much to make my juices flow. I could feel my balls tighten already, as an orgasm built. She continued to stroke me, seemingly oblivious to anything but her fingers on my erection.

I closed my eyes and moaned, tilting my head back as began to come. My balls tightened and the fire started to squeeze its way out. Then she stopped and took her hand away. I lay there for a few moments, breathing heavily, waiting for her to continue. She didn't. Slowly I opened my eyes to see why she'd stopped.

"Well," she smiled down at me. "I think that's enough. Don't you?"

I couldn't say anything

She stood up and went into the bathroom, closing both doors behind her.

I looked down at my straining erection. And at the tiny bead of pre-come excretion at its tip.

"Fuck," I whispered. "Fuck, fuck, fuck."

But there was no real anger in my voice. I was too bewildered to be angry. I was too stunned to feel anything.

I reached down to stroke my wilting erection, but my orgasm had dissipated by then and I wasn't in the mood to start again.

The sound of running water came from the bathroom. I presume she was washing her hands. Then a few minutes of silence before the toilet was flushed.

She was smiling when she came back in and knelt on the floor beside me. She put her arm around my shoulders and I automatically put my arm around her waist. I didn't know what to say or what to do. Did she know what she was doing to me? Because if she did know what she had done then she definitely couldn't love me. But I couldn't figure out what she thought she was doing to me.

Did she really think that I enjoyed what she did? Was it supposed to be like a kiss on the lips is the next best thing to French kissing, at least when you're fifteen. Or was she so ignorant of sex that she didn't know that boys are supposed to ejaculate when they orgasm. Maybe she thought that I'd moaned because I'd come, rather than because I was about to. Or perhaps it really was because "bringing forth the seed when there is no chance of conception" is a sin and stopping just short was saving her immortal soul from eternal damnation.

By this stage she was running her fingers through the hair on my stomach. She really liked the fact that I had hair on my body. She didn't act as if she'd done something wrong, she didn't expect me to be frustrated and angry. What the fuck did she think? And why the fuck wouldn't she tell me.

In my most paranoid moments I knew she was doing all this to me deliberately. Was she punishing me for falling in love with her? Did she have such low self-esteem that anybody who liked her must be as awful as she was?

Was she deliberately trying to frustrate and unbalance me as some sort of test to see if I really loved her? Or did she just not understand what she was doing to me?

And I meant that last question in every sense, both physically and emotionally, and even spiritually.

But once again when I tried to talk to her about it I couldn't. There and then all those

questions burned too brightly in my head. I couldn't focus on any one of them and I couldn't articulate them as well as I can now. And when I saw her away from that room where all of our "love making" happened it all seemed so distant. Over the intervening days all the frustration would be burned away by my desire, fanning it and fuelling it, so that the next time I saw her I wanted to possess her so badly that nothing else mattered.

So when she phoned me the next Thursday I was delighted to accept her invitation to go out with her again on Friday.

Though I was exceedingly nervous as I waited for her to show. Strange as it may sound I had gotten used to her not returning the complement when I made love to her. I expected it. And I could accept it, at least as long as I could explain it as her being shy and inexperienced. But now that she seemed to be trying to respond to me more fully it was confusing.

I didn't understand why she would want to make love to me now, if she didn't want to before. I didn't even know if she was trying to make me come. Did she think that she was giving me pleasure? Didn't she realize that I wanted to be with her despite the way she treated me, not because of it? Didn't she realize that what she had done to me was worse than being ignored?

In the beginning I'd worked it out logically. I wanted to make love to her, so I made love to her. She didn't want to make love to me, so she didn't. I believe in freedom of the individual. I wasn't about to make her do anything she didn't want to. I hadn't made love to her in order to emotionally blackmail her into making love back to me. I could wait until either she grew to love me or I stopped loving her.

But logic doesn't work with emotion. I realize now that my master plan was working. She was falling in love with me. She was learning to trust me, because I had tried so hard to prove that I did love her and that she could trust me. But by this time I was no longer sure that she was worth the effort. It seems a terrible thing to say, but I had put so much effort into the relationship and she had put in so little. And I hadn't gotten what I really wanted, and wasn't convinced that she could give me what I needed.

However it wasn't so clear to me at the time. I was still convinced that I loved her. Maybe it was just that I wanted so badly to love someone. That I needed that type of intimacy. And I thought that it would solve all my problems. To have someone to support and encourage me, to tell me that what I was doing was worth the effort it took, that I hadn't made the biggest mistake in my life by giving up my job to concentrate on my writing.

I know now that I would have grown to despise anyone who would have treated me like that. What I needed was someone to give me a kick up the backside and tell me to get on with my life. I know now that falling in love won't solve all your problems for you, that it just gives you an extra hand over the trickiest ones.

But at that time I still had my sights set on her, even though underneath I knew it was a self-destructive addiction. So when she phoned the next week to arrange another date I jumped at the chance to see her again. Jumped at the chance to convince her of my love and make her mine for ever. Like a moth to a candle flame.

I could barely wait for Friday night to come along and then I had to wait for her to turn up. There was a great pressure building up inside me, I was brimming over with things I wanted to tell her, things that would show her how I really felt for her, things that would convince her that I was in love with her. That would make her open up to me. That would make her mine.

But once she arrived they all dried up. Every time I started to say something it seemed so weak and insubstantial. Everything was a cliché. Nothing sounded right. And so the conversation never got beyond polite trivialities.

I kept saying to myself that now wasn't the correct time. Wait a more minutes till the conversation is a little more relaxed. Wait until after we'd seen the film. Wait until after we'd had a drink. Wait until after we'd had coffee in Bewley's.

But when we came out of Bewley's, and I'd turned to walk home with her, she stopped and

put her hand on my arm.

"I can't invite you back tonight, Kevin," she looked down.

"Oh. Why not?" I asked.

"My sister's come to stay with me for a few weeks," she explained. "And obviously I can't bring you back at this time of night."

"Obviously," I agreed.

She looked at me to see if I was being sarcastic, but I just smiled sweetly at her.

"You see," Alexandra explained. "She was living with her boyfriend. But now he's her ex-boyfriend. So she's had to move out."

"Oh," I nodded.

"But she's only going to be staying for a couple of weeks," she assured.

"OK," I said. "Do you fancy doing anything else over the weekend?"

"Well," she hesitated. Then looked up at me, "I'll give you a call tomorrow, Kevin."

"Oh, OK," I said, and went home knowing that she meant that she didn't want to see me.

So it was a bit of a shock when she did phone the next day.

The date started off as usual. I turned up early and had to wait for her to arrive. And she breezed along fifteen minutes late, without seemingly a care in the world. We went for a drink as usual, but I can't remember what we talked about. My emotions were a mess. On the one hand I was over the moon that she was taking a more active interest in wanting to see me. But on the other I was scared shitless that she was going to up and disappear on me again, without any warning and without any explanation.

Maybe my memory has been revised by subsequent events but the thrill of seeing her wasn't as intense as it had been previously. And I clearly remember that I didn't have an erection when we left the cinema, despite having had my arm around her for over an hour.

As we were walking back up O'Connell St. I had a mischievous impulse. "I thought you didn't like Science Fiction films," I said.

"I don't," she replied. "Not usually."

"But you liked that one," I smiled.

"That wasn't an SF film," she said.

"Yes it was," I looked across at her.

"No," she thought for a moment. "That was more a fairy tale."

"Well, yes," I conceded. "But that doesn't stop it being Science Fiction as well."

"Oh yeah," she smiled skeptically.

"Yes," I replied. "SF is a wide field. You can have SF love stories, SF adventure stories, and even literature that's also Science Fiction."

"OK, Kevin," she didn't sound convinced.

"You just think that you don't like SF films," I explained. "So if you like a film, by definition, it can't be an SF film, else you wouldn't have liked it."

"That's silly," she looked away.

"I agree," I smiled.

We continued down O'Connell St. for a few minutes then, just as we reached Cleary's department store, she stopped. I looked around at her.

"This is where I get my bus from," she gestured at the row of bus stops.

And I realized that I wasn't being invited back to her place that night either.

"Oh," I said.

"You don't have to wait, Kevin," she smiled. "There are buses coming along all the time. I won't have to wait long for one."

I stood there for a few moments while I figured out that she wanted me to leave.

"Oh." I shrugged, "OK" And stepped close to put my arms around her and kiss her good night.

## Alexandra

She gave me a quick peck on the lips and stepped back.

I dropped my arms and turned to go. "See'ya," I spoke over my shoulder.

"See you at the club," she called after me.

"Yeah," I answered back, knowing that she had said that so many times and not shown up. But then, I told myself, that was the old Alexandra, this is the new Alexandra. The one that appears to show some regard for my feelings.

But I was wrong; she had decided to do her disappearing act again.

# 8

She didn't turn up at the club and she didn't phone the next Thursday or Friday. So on Saturday I phoned her. She wasn't in. I left a message but she didn't phone back. All day I waited. And once again all the buried anxieties bubbled up with in me. All the thoughts that she's had an accident and is lying dead in hospital somewhere and nobody knows to contact me. All the anger and frustration at the fact that I didn't know what she was doing.

And I have to admit all the anger and bitterness that she was out somewhere enjoying herself while I was here sitting beside the phone waiting on the off chance that she'd phone. I know I could have gone out. I know I didn't have to sit in and wait for her. But I couldn't make myself. I wanted to see her so badly that I couldn't make myself miss the chance that she might phone. And yet, even though I blamed her, I knew that I was doing it to myself.

I finally admitted to myself that I couldn't go on like this. A few weeks of bliss, a few weeks of agony. Trying to switch on and off my emotions when she appeared and disappeared from my life. Trying to convince myself that she really did like me, that I wasn't a fool to give her so much and get so little in return. That one day she turn around and tell me that she loved me. One day she'd treat me with a little respect.

Every time I'd tried to broach the subject I'd failed to push it home. I'd always chickened out because I'd not wanted to hear that she didn't love me. While it was in doubt I could convince myself, pretend to myself, that she loved me. But once I gotten her to tell me straight, and if the answer was no, then I'd be fucked.

I was scared shitless that she didn't love me. That I'd invested all this emotional capital in someone who just didn't give a shit. But yet wasn't she acting like someone who didn't give a shit. Wasn't I just throwing good love after bad. Wasn't it time to cut my losses? Wouldn't I be better off without her?

But then I'd have to admit that I wasn't the irresistible catch that my male ego was convinced I was. Admit that my manly charms had failed to woo her. I'll resist the temptation to include a sentence that claims she must be gay. But I do have to admit that I failed to have as much of an impact on her life as she'd had on mine. The fact that I'm writing this proves just how deeply she'd affected me.

It was my own fault for wrapping my life around her when I'd barely knew her. Like I said at the beginning of this novel it was my self-destructive impulse to fall head over heels in love with complete strangers that was to blame. I'm sure the psychologists have a name for this type of compulsive behavior, but I don't know what it is. All I know is that it would take only a little more self pity to turn it into suicidal tendencies.

So there it was. I'd finally come face to face with the thought that I'd break it off with her. That she wouldn't be the centre of my world for the rest of my life. That I'd be able to go without her. I needed to know once and for all what she felt about me. And I was willing to contemplate the thought that she didn't love me. That there was no future for us. I was willing to bring our relationship to a make or break situation. I was going to have some resolution to all this uncertainty and insecurity. I'd finally have an answer.

But first of course I'd have to wait for her to get in touch with me again.



## Alexandra

I didn't have to wait too long this time. She was only missing for two weeks before she turned up at the camera club again. I was standing upstairs sipping a cup of coffee after the meeting when she walked in. My heart almost stopped dead.

She stood in the door for a second and smiled at me. Then she walked over to talk, "So how have you been."

I forced myself to swallow. "Fine," I replied, my heart now racing.

"You haven't phoned me," she said.

"Yes I did," I snapped. "You never phoned me."

"Oh," she looked down.

"Listen," I calmed my voice. "We have to talk."

"Oh," she looked up again. "OK," she gestured at the coffee pot. "Just let me get some coffee first."

I wanted to end it now. I wanted a short sharp ending. I wanted to be finished with her once and for all. But all I could say was, "OK"

Somebody came up to me and started talking about the lecture we'd had that night. I responded automatically, not being able to concentrate on anything except that Alexandra had gotten her coffee and come back to stand beside me. Very close beside me, her free hand brushing against my leg, my balls beginning to tighten.

I could smell her perfume and her hair brushed against my shoulder as she turned to talk to someone else. I walked away and joined a conversation on the other side of the room. A few minutes later Alexandra was beside me again, this time rubbing her arm against mine and once again standing very close. Every time I looked at her our eyes met and she smiled.

She was giving me all these "Come on" signals and I knew that she wasn't going to have sex with me. I knew that if I made love to her that I'd end up even more frustrated that when I'd started out.

And yet, I thought to myself. If what I had said to her had struck a chord. If she has finally decided to acknowledge her love for me, if she now understands what making love to her means to me, wouldn't it be foolish to throw it all away? Wouldn't it be foolish to ruin it by dumping her just when she's ready to really love me in return?

I thought, I've got to get out of here. I've got to get her alone so we can talk about this. I've got to know if she's ready to love me back.

But what it really boiled down to is that I was unable to make myself end the relationship. I was unable to control my emotions long enough to tell her it was over. I was unable to stop my dreams that one day she'd love me back.

I walked over to the counter and put my empty coffee cup down. She followed and put her's beside mine.

"I think it's time to go," I looked at her.

"Yes," she nodded. "Come on back to my place. We can talk there."

When we stepped outside the cold night air seemed to clear my head and when she put her hand in mine there was no acute physical reaction on the part of my involuntary muscle system.

We didn't say much as we walked around to her flat. I was nervous about what would happen, about what I'd say. I knew one way or another that all my doubts would be resolved, at least that's what I thought at the time. I knew that it was make or break time for our relationship. I just didn't know which it would be.

When we got into her flat I hung my coat on the back of the door beside her's. Sitting on an armchair and I automatically took off my shoes and stockings. While she started to tidy up in the kitchen alcove.

"Do you want some coffee?" she called over her shoulder.

"No," I replied. "I won't get any sleep tonight if I do."

She put a few cups and a couple of plates away in the cupboard above the sink. Then she

walked back out into the middle of the room. "Listen," she said. "I know I've been a naughty girl, not phoning and going away and everything."

I didn't know what to say. "Naughty girl"? "Going away"? Did she want me to spank her? Did she think I wanted her to ask my permission before going away for the weekend?

"It's not that," I said. I wanted to explain that she didn't need to ask me before going away. I just wanted her to tell me, to let me know so I wouldn't be sitting around waiting for her to phone me. So I wouldn't be disappointed when she didn't. So I didn't feel as if I'd been dumped.

But more than that, was it so much to ask that she tell me what she felt for me? That she'd talk to me. That she'd treat me with some respect and not take me for granted.

I wanted to tell her all this. But when I opened my mouth nothing would come out. After all those months of frustration it had all clogged up inside me and I couldn't tell her. Now, the first time she'd seemed interested in listening to me, I couldn't find the words to explain.

There was a few moments of silence while I struggled with my feelings and the words I needed to explain them. While she stood there looking down at me. Eventually I ended up just shaking my head.

She looked me in the eyes, slowly sat down on the floor, pulled off her sweatshirt and leaned back against the bed. She was wearing a silk cami-top over her bra. Looking up at me she smiled invitingly. And I was on the floor beside her, with my arms around her before I knew what had happened. The feel of the silk on her skin and the taste of her lips on mine was divine. Then her tongue was on my ear and I was sucking the joint of her shoulder and neck.

I said to myself, I shouldn't be doing this. Yet her skin was hot under my fingers as I unhooked her bra. I told myself that I'd come here to talk to her, as I slipped the straps off her shoulders and arms and pulled her bra from under her cami-top before tossing it onto the bed. I thought, now would be a good time to stop and tell her that I'm not happy with the relationship, as I put one hand to the back of her head, the other to her breast and kissed and squeezed and hugged her.

Her arms wrapped around me and pulled me close. Then both my arms where around her and our bodies were pressed tightly together. She tilted her head up and lay back on the floor.

I lay on top of her and she wrapped her legs around me. As we kissed my mind went into over drive. I thought, here we are in a parody of the missionary position. I knew if we where naked she'd never have lain like that. I thought, but for a few layers of cloth.... That she was bringing me so close just to deny me....

I sat up suddenly.

She looked up at me, but my left hand continued to stroke her crotch and she giggled. She was available. I wanted her. I couldn't resist. With my other hand I started to untie her shoes. First one, and her sock, then the other and her feet where naked. I ran my hands along her legs, up and down the insides of her thighs, feeling her muscles through the denim. Her breath came faster and I ran both hands up to open her jeans.

Denim on silk, on silk as I stroked outside. Then silk on silk on flesh as I slipped my hands inside her jeans. Then silk on hair as I slipped them between her cami-top and her panties. Then straight flesh as I slipped them inside that. Then hard nipples surrounded by firm breasts as I leaned forward and ran my hands up the length of her body.

She gasped. Then my lips where on hers and my tongue probed deep. I rested my weight on my elbows and rubbed the bulge of my erection against her silk panties. She squirmed underneath me and her hands where inside my jumper pulling my T-shirt out of my jeans. Her hands kneaded their way up my back pushing both my jumper and T-shirt before them. I leant on one elbow as she pulled my other arm free. Then reversed the process. Then she pulled them over my head and threw them away. I pushed down and sucked a breast into my

mouth. She arched her body under me and her hands were stroking my body again.

I snaked my hands back down her body and slipped them inside her panties. I pushed both them and her jeans down off her bottom. Then I zig-zaged my lips and tongue and nose down her body as I pushed my hands onto her the back of her legs. I stopped when I reached her pubic hair. I could smell she was hot and damp. My mouth watered. But I forced myself to sit up.

Slowly I pulled her jeans and panties off her legs. Caressing her firm muscles as I did so. She sat up, keeping her legs together and to one side, and put her arms around my neck. She smiled at me before we started kissing again.

Then all my memories fade into an ecstatic blur of sensations. There was warm silk scrunched in my fist. Her tongue probing deep into my mouth. Her hair pressed against her ear as I sucked. Her breast dangling over my mouth as I licked her nipple. The feel of her skin under my fingers. Her hot breath on my ear, and my shoulder, and my nipple. The weight of her as she rolled on top. The weight of me on her as I continued the roll. The constant rush of hormones as we made love.

Then my memory snaps back into focus.

She was on top. We were kissing. My hands were running up and down her back, feeling the silk against her warm skin. She began to rub her body against mine. She pressed her vagina against the bulge in my jeans and started to masturbate herself. I froze. Something inside me snapped and all my passion evaporated. I let my hands drop to the floor. She continued to kiss me and rub her body against mine for a few moments. Then she noticed I'd stopped responding. She sat up and took a deep breath. Looking down at me she smiled.

I don't know if I smiled back. A sequence of thoughts burned in my head. It's one thing to let somebody make love to you and not care if they come. It's another stage of unacceptable to let someone make you come and to deliberately stop them from coming in return. But it was the straw that broke the camel's back to deliberately deny someone their orgasm and yet to make sure you yourself came. I blinked and looked down at her.

She was curled up across my stomach, with her head resting against her left arm and the fingers of her right hand slowly circling my left nipple. I couldn't read the expression on her face.

I put my right arm behind my head and reached down to run the finger tips of my left hand through her pubic hair. She looked up at me and smiled contentedly. I tried to push my hand between her legs, but she squeezed them tight together to stop me.

I waited a few minutes for my thoughts to clear then said, "Listen, Alexandra. About the sex..."

"No, Kevin," she interrupted.

"What?" I asked.

"I'm not going to have sex with you," she sat up.

"Hold on a moment!" I was astonished.

"No," she stood up. "I'm not going to discuss it."

She stepped over me on her way to the wardrobe. I grabbed her thigh.

"Don't do this to me, Alexandra," I pleaded.

She didn't say anything, just pulled her leg away from me. I let her go. She went to the wardrobe and took out her silk dressing gown.

I sat up and started to get dressed. She watched from beside the wardrobe as I put on my T-shirt and jumper. Then I walked over to sit on her bed and pulled on my shoes and stockings. I could feel her looking at me, but I didn't look back. We didn't say anything until I was putting on my coat.

"So," I looked down. "This is the end then?"

"Well..." she paused. "I guess so."

I looked at her and she looked away. "Why, Alexandra?" I asked.

"Why what?" she looked back to me.

"Why did you treat me the way you did?" I leaned against the door. "Why did you do the things you did to me?"

"What do you mean?" she started to smile, but stopped when she saw the look on my face.

"I mean..." no matter which way I looked at it all came down to the fact that I'd make love to her and make her come and she'd not let me come. I knew that there was more to the relationship. I knew that the sex was just a reflection of the other problems that we were having. I knew that I had never properly explained how I felt about her to her. I'd tried and I'd tried, but I could never find a way that she'd accept. So when it came to the crunch all I could think about was sex. I cleared my throat, "I mean that you have no problem with me making love to you and making me come, but that for some unknown reason I'm not allowed come. I mean that you give the impression that you'll only go out with me when you have nothing better to do. I mean that you treat me with total and utter contempt."

She looked down, but didn't say anything.

"When I make love to you it means that I love you," I started to explain. "When I hold your hand walking down the street it's because I want to be close to you. The more physically intimate we are the more it means that I love you."

I paused, but she still didn't have anything to say. "I've told you that I love you so many times. And I've said it in words as well as actions. You've never once told me what I mean to you."

There was silence for a few moments then she said, "You see that whenever I've had a boyfriend before we've always gone back to his place..."

I waited for a few moments, then asked, "You mean that if you'd come back to my place you'd have had sex with me?"

"No, Kevin," she turned and walked away.

I just wanted her to once say something to me, to give me some concrete fact, to tell me what she felt. Even if she didn't love me. Especially if she didn't love me.

"I had a boyfriend when I went to collage in Dundalk," she spoke so low it was almost a whisper. "I went out with him for over two years and during that time I had other boyfriends as well."

I thought, is she trying to tell me that she wants some sort of open relationship? If so why didn't she just tell me? And what has it got to do with having sex with me?

"I mean," she continued. "I went to France on holiday and came back with a French boyfriend. He even stayed with me for a bit. And this other guy knew about him and didn't mind."

I shrugged, "Did you have sex with him?"

"Oh! Kevin!" she stomped her foot and glared at me.

"I'm sorry," I held up my hands. "It's none of my business."

We didn't speak for another few moments. Then I said, "I just don't understand why you'd let me make love to you and yet wouldn't make love back to me." I took a step towards her, "I mean, if you like me enough to let make love to you why don't you want to make love back to me?"

"I told you..." she stopped herself and looked down. "I mean it's..." She dropped her hands to her sides. "You don't understand," she shook her head."

I nearly cried with frustration. "Of course I don't understand! I've never understood. That's what this whole conversation is about. If I understood I wouldn't be asking you to explain it to me!" I brought my hands up and clenched my fists, "Just this once will you explain it to me. Just this once let me understand."

I looked at her, but she was looking at the floor. We were both silent again. Finally I tried one last time.

"I fell in love with you," I spoke softly. "And I wanted to share my life with you. I desired you. I never made any secret that I loved having sex with you. Or that I thought that having sex with you would bring us closer together. That I thought if I gave enough to you that one day you'd turn around and love me back. That one day you'd want to share your life with me."

I looked down. She said nothing. "I guess I was wrong," I shrugged.

"I'm older than you," she whispered into the silence. "Not by much. But I'm older than you. Does that make a difference?"

I wanted to say, "What the fuck has that got to do with anything?", but there were so many thoughts swimming around inside my head that I couldn't say anything.

The silence stretched on. I didn't know what to say. I'd told her how I felt and she'd just seemed to have dismissed it out of hand. She just wouldn't accept that I felt the way I did. And I couldn't see any way of getting through to her, any way of making her believe me. I'd have thought that all the shit I'd been through over the last few months would have been proof enough, that's the only reason I'd put up with it, but no, even that hadn't convince her.

Finally I said, "I guess I'd better go now."

"OK," she walked towards me, but stopped just short of touching me.

Suddenly I wanted her again. I wanted to make love to her so badly. I wanted to feel her and taste her, to lose myself in the sensual pleasure of everything we'd ever done together.

"Let's make love one last time," I stepped closer to her.

"No," she shook her head and looked down.

I put my arms around her, hugged her and she hugged me back. I pulled back to slip my hands inside her robe and she pushed me further away.

"Come on," I whispered, my voice going hoarse. I really, really wanted to make love to her properly to make up for not making her come earlier.

"No," she repeated.

So I stepped away, feeling defeated, and walked to the door. She followed me. I unlocked and opened the door to her flat and stepped outside. She took hold of the door to close it after me.

"So this is goodbye, then," I stood awkwardly for a moment.

She said, "Yes."

Then I stepped closer and put my arms around her neck. We kissed briefly. As she ended the kiss, I slipped my hand inside her robe and gave her breast one last squeeze, before stepping away once more. I turned away from her and walked up the stairs. I heard her closing and locking her door behind me.

As I walked up and out I felt such an overwhelming sense of relieve, literally as if a great weight had been lifted from my shoulders. There was a bounce in my step that I'd not noticed for quite a while. Just like the first night I'd walked home from Alexandra's place. And this time I didn't notice the distance either. I felt as if I was walking on air, that finally I'd resolved all the problems that I'd been having with Alexandra. All the doubts and uncertainties and worries would be over. All the loose ends that I couldn't tidy up had been severed once and for all. I knew all my troubles with her were at an end.

How wrong can you be?

# 9

Having reviewed my relationship with Alexandra in order to compile this account and having discussed what I have related and will be relating to you with other people, there is perhaps one question I should try to answer at this point; why did I want to continue my relationship with Alexandra? Why did I chase after her when it was obvious that she wasn't going to treat me with any sort of respect? The only answer I can make is that I was in love with her. A lot of people are going to say that it wasn't love, that it was lust. That I just lusted after her body. And maybe they're right.

I know that at the beginning I knew nothing about her. That I just projected an image onto her and that I fell in love with that image and not with her. That's what falling in love at first sight is. Isn't it?

I also discovered that there is a psychological condition where people develop a compulsive/obsessive complex about someone, where they project an image of their perfect partner onto someone else and chase after them, even though the other person is in real life nothing like that image and quite often is not in the least bit interested in returning that "love". Sometimes I think that is what happened to me.

But as time went by I think I got to know Alexandra, the real her. I know I got to understand her far better than she ever understood me. And I discovered a person who was quite shy and insecure. I felt very protective of her and wanted to help her grow and mature, to become a stronger, more self-reliant person. I wanted very much not to hurt her, to be as gentle as I could with her. To hold her tight and wrap her in cotton wool so she wouldn't be hurt.

Now I know that is not the way to help someone grow. That to isolate and over protect someone only serves to stunt their growth and make them even less self-reliant. But at the time I just didn't want to cause her pain. I just couldn't stand the thought of her suffering.

Is that love? I don't know.

And the situation was not helped by my own insecurities, my own immaturity, my own inexperience. I didn't want to demand things from her. I wanted her to give what she felt she could give. What she was able to give. I didn't want to push her into doing anything. I didn't want to push her away from me.

I didn't want to force the issue of sex, because I didn't want to alienate her. By this time I was convinced that she was a virgin. At the very least I knew she hadn't had much experience with men. She didn't know what to do with my body, she didn't know what to do in order to make love to me. Oh she was good at kissing and necking, but once the clothes started coming off she was lost. If she wasn't a virgin then it had obviously been a case of a guy "doing it to her", nobody had taught her how to take an active role in the proceedings.

But I had been a virgin myself. I was no macho stud. I wasn't used to sweeping girls off their feet and leaving them breathless after a night of passion. I wasn't sure how to do it, even if it had occurred to me to try. I thought then, and still think to this day, that even if she didn't love me she must have at least liked me and trusted me to have gotten so intimate with

me. For her to let herself be so vulnerable she must have trusted me. Yet in all other aspects of our relationship she seemed to refuse to trust me. At times she acted as if she despised me. And I hurt so badly.

But it wasn't just the sex. I've since discovered that sex is rarely the problem, mostly it's just a reflection of the relationship. If the relationship is good then the sex will be good. If you have an open, honest relationship where you can both talk to each other then you have no trouble sharing yourself sexually with someone. You can not lie to someone when you make love to them, but it's ever so easy to fool yourself. You cannot make love to someone you don't love without it showing, but you can pretend that they love you.

The fact is that we had what can only be described as a severe communications problem. We used the same words, but we didn't speak the same language. When I made love to her I was giving her the greatest pleasure I could give. It meant that I trusted and loved her. It was a statement of commitment to her. To love her and protect her. To share my life with her. To support her in everything she did. But to her what we had was a very casual relationship. When I made love to her it was just good clean fun, a cheap thrill on a Saturday night, nothing more.

She didn't trust me. She didn't love me. She didn't want to share her life with me. And she definitely didn't want me to try to share mine with her. She didn't even consider what we did to be sex. You see she was a good Irish Catholic girl. And good Irish Catholic girls don't have sex before they get married, therefore what we did couldn't have been sex. After all I never penetrated her vagina with my penis, had I?

At least that's what they teach us in school. They show us their crude block diagrams of the cross section of the male and female reproductive organs and tell us that women have periods and men get erections. That sex is when a man pushes his erection into a woman's vagina and ejaculates sperm into her. And that then it's god's will if she gets pregnant or not. They never mention making love. Apart from using "making love" as a euphemism for having sex.

And that's all that sex was to her. We hadn't done that so we hadn't had sex. So she didn't have to feel guilty about sinning. She didn't have to worry about the shame of getting pregnant outside marriage. She didn't owe me anything, because after all it was just good clean fun, not sex. For sex you need trust and commitment and love. Fun doesn't require any of that.

I'd wanted to have an honest, open relationship with her. Open in the sense that we could say and do anything to each other, not open in the sense of having other sexual partners. I'm much too possessive for that. I had deliberately tried not to seduce her, because I think of seduction as tricking someone into having sex with you. Of pretending to fulfill their fantasies in order to get what you want out of them. And I hadn't wanted her to love her fantasies; I'd wanted her to love me.

But I now realize that I had in fact seduced her. That first night when I'd slipped my fingers inside her panties and turned the "heavy petting" into sex. At the time it seemed so obvious that was what I should do. But looking back I think that it marked the first crack that turned into the gulf of misunderstanding that grew between us. She thought it was just good clean fun and I thought it was serious sex.

Or rather I wanted serious sex so badly, sex as a symbol of a serious committed relationship, that is. And all she wanted was a casual relationship, with this new added bonus of orgasms without sex, an extra thrill while skirting the line between what was sin and what was safe.

I began to feel guilty about having tricked her and more importantly ashamed for having tricked myself. All the time I was congratulating myself on how honest I was being, I was doing exactly what I was accusing her of doing; while telling her that I wanted her love freely given, I was trying to use sex as a means of entrapping her. Every time I touched her I was saying "You're mine".

Every time we made love another link in the chain was forged. But the chain wasn't binding her to me; it was binding me to her. I wanted to give her everything I had. While she wanted none of it and seemed oblivious that she could have it. I was getting more and more hooked on her, while she remained adamant that the relationship was just casual.

I realize now that I still felt guilty about not making her come on that final night. That it had in a sense been the ultimate betrayal that I'd accused her of so many times, though I'd never said it to her face. To arouse her passion and to deny her an orgasm was a betrayal of the trust I'd tried to build between us by being honest in my intentions, even when she'd appeared to be lying to me at every stage and at every level. By denying her on that final night I had finally sunk to her level.

Isn't it amazing how the techniques of repression affect one. Here was I feeling guilt over not doing something that the Catholic Church would consider a sin, when the Church would have me feel guilt over having done it, or for even wanting to do it. I felt guilt, because I've been thought that I should feel guilt. And even when I've, not so much reject the Church's teaching as, formulated my own moral code that doesn't include using guilt to try to coheres obedience, I still end up feeling guilty for not having lived up to my own moral code.

The emotions that I've been conditioned to feel go deeper than the intellectual observance of any particular code of law.

I've never actually had anybody tell me specifically that masturbating a girl is a sin. But I presume it is, as masturbating for men, or boys, is a sin. Although the reasons given to me when I asked why (I always was a difficult student) wouldn't apply to a girl. It was something about "bringing forth the seed" without there being a chance of fertilization taking place. But leaving aside the Catholic Churches general ignorance of female sexuality, it has probably never have occurred to the powers that be that women can masturbate and working on the principal that if you get pleasure from it then it must be a sin. I'll assume that what I did with Alexandra was a sin. But I half regret that I never did get around to asking her if she'd confessed it. And I'll always wonder what the priests reaction would have been if she had.

But aside from all this deep thinking on the nature of love and sin and sexuality I discovered what my real feelings for her were. That try as much as I could I couldn't make her out to be the villain. That I really believe she was as much a victim as I was.

My first bitter reaction was to hurt her as much as I thought she'd hurt me and in the same way to. I wanted to worm my way into a position where she completely trusted me and then totally betray her trust. I felt that was what she had done to me. I wanted to believe that was what she had done to me. I tried as hard as I could to convince myself that was what she had done to me. But I couldn't.

I couldn't worm my way into her confidence, and I wouldn't have been able to deliberately hurt her like that even if I could've. But more importantly I couldn't believe that she'd deliberately done it to me. I couldn't believe that she was such a fucked up little bitch, such an evil person, that she had set out to systematically torture me, and degrade me and humiliate me.

I knew that I wanted to believe that she had victimized me so that I wouldn't have to take any of the responsibility. Then I could justifiably feel self pity. Then I wouldn't have to accept that I'd set myself up as much as she'd set me up. Then I would never have to consider that she had been set up and betrayed just as much as I'd been.

I realize now That she had wanted her prince in shining armor to come galloping into her life and sweep her up and away to a fairytale ending, just as much as I'd expected her to make me happy. That she had wanted to trust and love me as much as I'd wanted to trust and love her. But that she couldn't pretend to herself that I was her prince. I didn't fit into the image of her perfect lover. And that ultimately she didn't fit my picture of my perfect lover.



## Alexandra

I finally had to stop dreaming and face up to the fact that I'd been making a fool of myself. I couldn't lie to myself any longer. I couldn't pretend that she was someone she wasn't and couldn't expect her to behave as I wanted her to behave.

I thought now was the time to clear the air, now was the time to tell her that there was no hard feelings. To explain that we had both struck out. That we had both tried for something that the other couldn't give. We both needed to give different things to each other and get different things back. That we had shared some good times together, but that ultimately we were incompatible with each other.

So I phoned and she wasn't in, so I left a message, but she never called back. And I waited for her to show up at the club, but she never came. I called again and again, but she didn't return any of them. I eventually stopped, knowing that she believed that I was still chasing after her, that I still wanted to renew our doomed relationship.

And so I never got a chance to tell her that I was still fond of her, that I wished her well and that I wanted us to still be friends.

I never got a chance to resolve all that ill feeling between us. It was left festering and made the scars take longer to heal.

I never got a chance to tell her that at some level I would always love her, but that we could never make it together. I never got a chance to say goodbye.

# 10

A month later I woke up and realized that I'd spent the last few weeks of my life, since my break up with Alexandra, mopping around doing nothing with my life. At first I felt such relief that I'd ended it with her, but later on more and more I'd been unable to get her out of my mind. I think I was half hoping that she'd come running back to me with tears streaming down her face begging for forgiveness, though I knew in reality that wasn't going to happen.

I looked at myself in the mirror and said something along the lines of, "Fuck me if I'm going to spend the rest of my life waiting for that bitch to come running back to me." I looked at the sunshine outside, "I've tried to make it work with her and she's made it perfectly clear that she's not interested in me." I took a deep breath, "There are millions of girls in the world, most of them more attractive than her." Though looking back I think that last statement might have been a bit over optimistic.

Anyway, I had a shower and got dressed. I even shaved, and over lunch decided to find someone else to share my life with, or at the very least to console myself with. I was going to find a nice sympathetic young woman, who'd feel soft and warm in my arms.

I went into town and wandered around the shops trying to find something I wanted to buy. I wasn't looking for anything in particular, it was just that I felt somewhat depressed and there's nothing for lifting my spirits than spending a month's disposable income in one afternoon. I start feeling near the edge of safety knowing I have no money left to spend. The trouble with credit cards is that it tends to be next month's disposable income that I spend!

But that day I just wasn't in the mood. Maybe I wasn't depressed enough. Or maybe I was more depressed than I thought I was. Even the computer games in the Virgin Megastore couldn't tempt me. And that's normally a sure fire way of getting me to depart with my money.

I guess I was feeling on edge already. It must of been the full moon or something, because I just couldn't get interested enough in anything to want to buy it. Nothing flared my interest. Or rather my mind was only on one thing, finding someone to take my mind off Alexandra.

I ended up in the Gallery of Photography. They were showing an exhibition by some guy called Tony Ryan, who I'd never heard of before. Apparently he'd spent six months living with some working class families in Dublin and had produced thirty, or so, 3 by 5 foot glossy color prints documenting their lives.

One critic had described them as "overblown snapshots of uninteresting family life", and had used the word "patronizing" frequently in his review. I won't say what I thought of them, as the artist might sue me for liable. But let's just say that the critic wasn't far wrong.

However I stopped and looked at each one, partly so I could make my own judgment of them, and partly as I'd discovered early on in my career that galleries are a very good place to meet interesting people (even better than supermarket and launderettes). And to maximize your chances of meeting someone you have to spent some time there, rather than just walking in, glancing at some of the exhibits and walking out again.

Half way along the wall there was a little table with a comments book on it. I very seldom write or read those comments, but as I walked in I noticed an exceeding attractive girl, with

long blond hair tied back in a French plait writing in it. So as I passed I stopped to look. The last entry was "Jasmine Smith: Pathetic".

The photographs didn't hold my interest for very long either. But as I walked out I saw the same girl browsing in the little book shop they have just inside the entrance. So I decided to do some browsing of my own.

However I couldn't keep my interest on the books either. I kept looking up to look at her, though she always had her nose in a book when I did so. I had started at the opposite end of a rack to her and we both slowly worked our way towards the centre, getting closer and closer to each other. Finally we were standing beside each other. I could feel her presence, though now that we were so close I couldn't bring myself to look at her.

She put the book she'd been looking at back on the shelves and started to turn away.

"Excuse me," I spoke before I knew what had happened. "But are you Jasmine Smith."

"Yes," she looked puzzled.

"It's just that I was reading the comments book," I quickly explained. "I saw you writing in it and I assumed that you'd be the last entry and I'd like to agree with you that the exhibition is pathetic."

"Thanks," she smiled. "What did you write in it."

"Oh," I shrugged. "Nothing, I never do."

"You just read them," she said. "And never bother to write anything?"

"Well," I admitted. "I usually don't read them either."

"But you made an exception in my case," she smiled.

"Well, yes," I said, beginning to wonder if I'd done the right thing in talking to her.

"Then you can make an exception and write something as well," she started to walk towards it. "Come on," she didn't look back to see if I was following.

But I was. I didn't much choice but to follow her. She picked up the pen and, turning to me as I stopped beside her, handed it to me.

"Off you go," she said.

"But why?" I asked.

"I just think it's unfair that people should read them without adding any of their own," she said.

"OK" I shrugged and bent down to add a comment. I didn't give it much thought then but I've just realized that ever since I always write comments in the comments books.

Nobody else had written anything in the book since Jasmine's entry, so I wrote, "Kevin Stanley: I agree, Jasmine".

She looked over my shoulder as I wrote. "Kevin," she said. "That's a nice name."

"So is Jasmine," I replied and immediately thought, that's a stupid thing to say.

We looked at each other for a moment. Then I looked away not able to think of anything to say.

"Do you fancy a drink?" she asked. "I know a very good wine bar just around the corner."

I swallowed hard, and tried to keep my voice casual. "OK," I replied, my knees starting to shake a little.

I can't remember the name of the bar. I haven't been in the Temple Bar area of Dublin for months, and I'm not about to interrupt my writing of this novel to go and find out what it's called. However I do remember that it was beside a Barbers in which I once got a very bad haircut. I could have made up a name and avoided writing this paragraph. But I decided to include it to up the number of words in this novel, because I have been told that most international best-sellers have at least One Hundred Thousand words in them.

Anyway it was a small poky place with a couple of tables outside and about half a dozen tables and a narrow bar packed inside. Jasmine and I sat a small table at the back. It was dark, but there was enough light that we could still see each other clearly. Jasmine picked up the wine list and quickly scanned it.

"Do you know much about wine?" she looked up from it.

"I know that I like Muscatel and Cote de Rhone and a few other names," I shrugged. I was going to add "And that Spanish wine tastes like piss", but decided that she might like it, so I'd better not. "But I couldn't name a single vineyard," I added.

"Split a bottle of Cote de Rhone with you," she offered.

"OK," I smiled back.

The waitress came over and took our order.

There were a couple of moments of silence. Then I said, "So, do you come here often then."

She laughed softly. "If you only knew the number of times that line has actually been tried on me by morons," she shook her head, "you wouldn't try to make a joke about it."

"I have an offbeat sense of humor," I half explained, half apologized. "So if I insult you I'm probably trying to be funny."

"Yeah, I remember," she smiled.

"You remember?" I had a sudden sinking feeling, does she know me from somewhere?

"You really don't remember, do you?" her smile broadened.

"Eh, probably," I didn't remember her at all. "I just need a bit of prompting."

"We did a programming course together," she said.

"Ah," it began to come back to me now. "In Rathmines."

"No, in liberty hall," her smile faded.

"Shit!" suddenly I remembered her. "Jasmine Smith. You used to always hang around with Mary Brown and Emma Cocks."

"Yes," she nodded. "That's right."

"You used to have short hair," I said.

"Yes," she ran her hand across the top of her head. "Really tight. It looked dreadful."

"No it didn't," I replied. "But it made you look completely different."

"Well I really wanted to look 'Hard' back then," she smiled.

Then I began to laugh. It was a sudden release of nervous energy that I couldn't control.

She looked at me. "What is it?" she half smiled.

I couldn't answer her, I was laughing too much.

"What's wrong?" she was unsure how to react to my sudden fit.

I took a deep breath. "It's OK," I held up my hand. "It's just that..." And I started to laugh again. I had been steeling myself to impress this beautiful stranger, to sweep her off her feet. And then I find that she already knows me, that all the adrenalin pumping through my veins wasn't needed. Well I just couldn't stop myself from laughing.

"What?" she leant forward smiling, even though she didn't know why.

"It's just that I didn't remember you," I started to explain. "That's not the funny bit. That's just me being a fool again." I took a deep breath and stopped laughing. "But I thought that I was being some sort of macho stud by chatting up this beautiful woman. A complete stranger, like." I laughed again, "And then to find that you knew me already." She didn't see the humor, I shrugged "Well it was just... so... typical."

"I see," she sat back and relaxed. "You were never much of a macho stud."

"Thanks a lot!" I faked indignation.

"Oh. No," she put her fingers to her lips. "I didn't mean it like that." She looked down, "I meant I liked you because you weren't a macho..." she shrugged, "chauvinistic... pig." The last word was barely whispered.

"Well, thank you," I replied. "That's one of the nicest things anybody has ever said to me."

She looked up and we laughed.

The waitress came back with the wine and a couple of glasses. She put a glass in front of each of us and poured a taste of wine into mine. I smiled at Jasmine and gestured at the glass. "You ordered," I said.

She reached over and took the glass.

"Oh. I'm sorry," the waitress was embarrassed.

Jasmine sip the wine, said, "That's fine," and took the bottle from the waitress. Who quickly retreated behind the bar.

Jasmine poured some wine for me and filled her own glass. "So, what have you been doing for the last six years?"

"Oh I got a job when I finished the course," I smiled ruefully. "With a company which went bankrupt four months after I joined."

She smiled. "Yeah, Irish software companies do that a lot."

"Well," I continued. "I went to London and worked for a couple of places over there. I ended up in a merchant bank. Decided I didn't want to become the type of person I was working with. So came home to become an unemployed writer."

"Wow," she smiled. "Six years in one breath."

I laughed.

"And a complete jump in lifestyle," she said, "from a hard working software genius to an 'unemployed writer'."

"Yeah," I nodded.

"Just one thing, Kevin," she asked. "Exactly what is an unemployed writer?"

We smiled at each other. "It means that I gave up my job to devote all my time to writing. But as I haven't published anything I have no income, so I'm penniless and unemployed," I shrugged.

"So what do you write?" she sipped her wine.

"Well I've written a few short stories. And I finished a SF novel last year. Which nobody wanted to publish and which when I read it now really stinks," I smiled. "And I've been working for the last few months on another novel, which is light years ahead of anything I've written before."

"What's the current novel about?" she leant forward.

My smile widened. "It's about a guy who falls in love with this girl, who doesn't fall in love with him," I said. "Then another girl falls in love with him. And he starts going with her to seek some solace and comfort." I filled my voice with irony, "And to ease the pain of his broken heart."

She laughed with me.

"Autobiographical, is it?" she asked.

"Well," I waved my hand. "It's vaguely based on one or two things that happened to me in the dim and distant past. And," I added, "lots of things which might have happened to me if I'd done the type of stupid things the 'Hero' of my novel does."

"Oh," her eyebrows arched. "What type of stupid things does he do?"

"Well," I smiled. "He mistakes lust for love, and physical intimacy with... " I rolled my hands as I searched for the words, "...a deeper, more meaning full communication." I shrugged again, "He makes the mistake of thinking that because this girl has sex with him it means that she loves him." I leaned forward, "Which maybe she does, but she expresses it in a form that he can't understand. And he expresses his love for her in a form which she can't understand or accept as being valid."

"Boy!" she gently shook her head. "That sounds like one hell of a 'heavy weight' novel, full of angst and deep introspective passages."

I nodded, "Yeah, there's a lot of that in it. What you might call 'heavy reading'. But," I smiled, "It's interspersed with lots of steamy sex scenes to keep the reader interested."

"Steamy sex scenes," she sipped her drink. "That must make for interesting research."

I sat back and laughed.

"Speaking of research," I looked across at her. "I have an interesting question you might be able to help me with."

"Oh yeah," she smiled back. "This sounds serious. But go ahead anyway."

I took a deep breath and asked, "How important is it for a woman to have an orgasm when she has sex?"

"Why do you want to know that?" she seemed more amused than shocked.

"Oh, I just want to know so that I can make more believable female characters in my novels," I really wanted an indication of how important it had been to Alexandra. She had never openly admitted to me that she had come. And the only time I'd ever mentioned it directly to her she had slapped my face.

"Well, I can't speak for all women," She toyed with her wine glass. "But I suppose that it really depends on the man. Or rather on how the woman feels about the man." She looked up at me, "And of course how experienced she is. If she expects the earth to move every time or if she's used to little warm feelings."

"Little warm feelings?" I smiled at her.

She shrugged and looked around the restaurant. "Well that's how it sometimes feels to me."

There was a lull in the whole bar and we were both lost in our own thoughts for a moment. I mentally kicked myself for thinking of Alexandra when I was trying to forget about her.

"So tell me then," Jasmine looked across at me. "What does it feel like for a man when a woman fakes her orgasm?"

I smiled at her, "Well if she does it good enough he'll never know. Will he?"

"And if she's no good at it," she smiled back.

In my most paranoid moments I'd often thought that Alexandra had really faked her orgasms, but could never understand why she would. Especially when she supposedly hadn't even considered that we were having sex. But if she had faked them, she was good at it, or at least good enough to fool me.

"If any girl I've made love to was faking it then she was good enough to fool me," I shrugged my half truth. "So I don't really know."

We were both leaning closer to each other across the table, secure in our intimate conversation in the subdued atmosphere.

"But the best thing about making love to a girl, for me anyway, is making her come," I remembered the feeling of elation I used to feel as Alexandra tensed in my arms. "Especially if I'm using my fingers or even better my tongue." I was lost in my memories of Alexandra coming for a moment.

Then I looked up at Jasmine. She was smiling at me.

"You mean that you don't like coming yourself?" she teased.

I smiled back. "I mean that my own orgasm would only get in the way of my appreciation of her's," then I realized that wasn't right either. "I mean," I added. "When you both come together it does make it better. Both from the physical point of view and intellectually to know that she is coming as well. But," I searched for the words to explain just what I meant. "When you make somebody come... When I give head to somebody it's a completely different feeling, to actually know without doubt that you've really hit the right spot, to have her come when you're so intimate with her." I sat back and caught my breath. "Well it's just great."

She thought for a moment. "You mean you like to be able to enjoy the ego trip of making her come."

"Well," I replied. "Don't you like the ego trip of a guy coming when you swallow his prick?"

"Touché," she leant back and laughed.

We were both silent for a moment. Then a thought occurred to me.

"I notice that you didn't have to ask how important it is for a guy to come when he's making love." I gave her a sly smile.

She grinned back. "I've never heard of a guy not coming when he had sex."

"Well, I've never made love to a woman without her coming, But that doesn't mean that I don't think it doesn't happen." I shrugged, "OK so sometimes the earth didn't move. But she always had an orgasm."

She smiled broadly, "Well you obviously know how to do it properly."

"Well thank you," I nodded to her. "But flattery aside, you seem to think that the man always comes. Were as I.." I stopped and backtracked quickly. "...I know that it's quite possible for a man to make love to a woman and not come."

She nodded thoughtfully, "Well it's physically possible." Then she looked up, "But what would think of a man who thought only of his own pleasure and didn't bother if the woman came or not?"

"Well I'd say he was a selfish little bastard." I smiled, "With the emphasis on the little."

She laughed softly. "Well, that is what I'd think of a woman who'd let a man make love to her and wouldn't return the complement."

The conversation moved on and all thought of Alexandra left my head, without any effort on my part. Suddenly I was enjoying the company of a beautiful woman with no thought of any perverted power games, or feelings that I was being used or I was using her. We were just enjoying ourselves.

Jasmine and I did a lot of laughing over the next few hours, as we joked about the times we had together while learning how to program computers. Then we told each other about the various jobs we'd had and the people we'd worked with. And I began to wonder how I could have forgotten her. Or rather, as we were never very close friends, how I could have overlooked her in the first place.

When she invited me back to her place I accepted, with no thought that I might end up spending the night sleeping with her. Though looking back I can't see how I could have overlooked that either.

She lived in a small, old terrace house in Rathmines, just down from the canal. And, the thought flared in my mind, just five minutes' walk from Alexandra's flat.

"This looks quite nice," I said as she ushered me inside and opened the door from the small hallway into the sitting room.

"Thanks," she smiled. "But you should have seen it before, or even while, I was decorating."

"Was it bad," I looked around the room as she pulled shut the curtains. It was decorated in whites and creams and rich browns, I couldn't imagine it stripped bare waiting for wallpaper and paint.

"It was empty for years before I moved in and it has taken me two and a half years to get it to this sate," she switched on a standard lamp beside the sofa and switched off the main light.

"Is there much left to do?" I asked.

"No, most of its finished by now," she took off her coat and held her arm to me. "Can I take your coat?"

"Sure," I took it off and handed it to her.

"Make yourself at home, while I see to these," she went back out into the hall.

I sat on the sofa and automatically started to take my shoes off, I usually lounge about in my bare feet and it shows that I'm feeling relaxed when my feet are naked.

Jasmine came back carrying a bottle of wine and a couple of glasses. She smiled as she sat beside me. "Clean feet," she smiled down at them.

"Well," I replied. "I only took a shower this afternoon."

"Good, I hate smelly people," she handed me a glass and started to pour. "Say when."

"When what," I joked.

"When I've poured enough into the glass," she continued to pour.

"Can't you tell that by the size of the glass," I smiled.

"Not everybody's so greedy that they want a full glass," she stopped pouring, but she'd

filled my glass.

"Thank you," I squeezed her shoulder lightly. "But I do have to admit that I tend towards being a little greedy."

She was pouring wine into her own glass.

"What I need," I looked at her. "Is someone who'll teach me good manners?"

She looked up at me and we held each other's gaze for a second. Then we both looked away.

"So," she put the bottle on the coffee table in front of us. "Here's to you finding someone who'll polish your manners for you."

We clicked glasses.

"Cheers," I sipped my drink.

"Cheers," she replied, then sat back on the sofa.

I sipped my drink, but couldn't think of anything to say.

"So," she put her glass down on the coffee table, her shoulder brushing against mine as she sat back. "How close do I have to sit to you before you'll put your arm around me?"

I smiled, "Well I suppose you're close enough now." I slipped my arm around her shoulders and rubbed my nose against her ear.

She half turned to face me and put her hand to my cheek. "Hmm," she ran her fingers along my jaw. "You've a nice strong jaw line."

"You smell delicious," I brushed my lips against her's and rubbed noses.

We kissed. At first just using our lips and taking short pecks at each other. Then I used the tip of my tongue and her lips parted and sucked it inside. And her hand was at the back of my head pulling me closer, her other hand had somehow squeezed between me and the back of the sofa to reach around and hug me. My hand tightened taking hold of her hair.

But my other hand held my glass, still half full of wine. I tried to ease my way towards the coffee table to put it down without spilling it.

Jasmine sat back a little.

"I sorry," I gestured at the glass. "I didn't want to get this all over you."

"That's OK, Kevin," she smiled. "If you don't want to ruin my sweatshirt I'll take it off." She did pulled up up over her head and off her arms to reveal that she had nothing on underneath.

I hadn't noticed that she wasn't wearing a bra, but I could feel a tension in my loins at the thought. My eyes locked on her breasts and I'm sure my tongue was hanging out.

"Come on," she said, taking hold of my hand and standing up.

I followed as she led me out of the room and up the stairs, turning out the lights as she went, and into her bedroom. She sat on the bed and smiled up at me.

I sat beside her and put my arm around her shoulder. We kissed, our arms embracing each other. Then suddenly I felt very awkward. I remembered the last time I'd done this with Alexandra and I froze.

Jasmine looked puzzled.

"Listen..." I started to talk but didn't know what I wanted to say. "It's just that..."

"Shush," she whispered, putting her finger to my lips. "It doesn't matter now." She took my hand and put it to her breast, "Just relax and don't worry about anything." She squeezed my hand against herself. "OK" she said.

I nodded, but I wasn't really listening to her words. My eyes were entrapped by the sight of my hand on her breast and the sensation of her warm skin under my fingers was rapidly filling my brain. I leant down and brushed my lips across the top of her breast, then a little further down to suck her nipple.

She lay back on the bed. I followed her down, keeping her breast in my mouth. She slid her hand down my body and grasped my erection through the denim of my jeans. I pushed her



breast out of my mouth, then ran my tongue down and across and up to her other nipple to suck that breast in. She bent her head down to lick my ear.

I brought my hand across from her hip, and unbuttoning her jeans, slipped my hand inside. She sucked my ear into her mouth. I put my hand to her crotch, feeling the heat from her vagina through her damp panties. She brought her hand to the other side of my head and clasped a handful of my hair. I pushed her jeans down. She lifted her hips to let them slide onto her thighs. I brought my hand back up to stroke her. She wiggled under me, squeezing my head between her tongue and her hand.

I could feel she was very aroused, so I slipped my hand into her panties and ran my finger along her slit. She sighed. I slipped my finger inside, running the length of my finger against her clitoris. Her breath came hot against my ear. I rocked my finger in and out, then slipped another inside.

She moaned, her vagina tightening around my fingers. I thrust my fingers in deeper, pressing my thumb against her clitoris. Her body tensed against mine and I lifted my head from her breast to look at her face. She opened her mouth and we kissed, her tongue responding aggressively.

I thrust into her and she responded, her body rocking against mine in time. Our tongues wrapped around each other. Her arms were around my shoulders, hugging me tightly, pulling down each time I thrust inside her. My mouth slipped from hers and I buried my face against the pillow, as her breath came hot against my ear.

She moaned, her body tensing as she did so. I continued to work my hand. Then she moaned again, longer this time. And again, deeper. And again, her back arching. And again, her body lifting against mine. Then she convulsed, her whole body as hard as iron. My fingers squeezed inside, but I still rubbed my thumb.

Then she relaxed, going completely and utterly limp under me. I took my hand away and pushed myself up to look at her. Her mouth was open as her breathing slowed, but her eyes were closed.

"Oh, God," she smiled. "You sure know what to do with those fingers of yours."

She opened her eyes and I smiled at her. "Any time I can be of service."

She laughed softly, then hugged me hard. We kissed lightly and her hands rubbed up and down my back.

"Roll over," she kissed me.

"Why?" I kissed back.

We kissed again.

"Guess," she smiled as she brought her hands underneath me to push me over.

I rolled onto my back and rested my shoulders against the headboard. She sat up beside me.

"I won't be needing these now," she said as she slipped her hands inside her panties. She knelt up, pushing them and her jeans down. And then sat down with her legs across me to pull them off and toss them onto the floor.

"Nice legs," I said.

"Nice?" she smiled, running her hands down her thighs. "They're brilliant. My best feature." She took hold of my hand and pressed it palm first against her thigh, "Here, feel that." She rubbed it along her skin. "Soft, humm?"

"Very," I agreed.

She sat across my legs. Taking my other hand and pressing it against her other thigh, she ran them down and inside and back up to brush my fingertips against her pubic hair. Then out around and down again. She slipped her hands down my arms and across to unbutton my jeans. I continued to stroke her thighs as she pulled my jeans open.

"Hey," she said. "I think he's going to sleep again."

"Humm," I'd felt my erection had softened as soon as she'd come.

"I'll have to waken him up again," she leant forward and kissed my penis through my underpants.

I could feel my balls tighten immediately.

"Humm," she whispered. "Still a bit sleepy."

She knelt up and started to pull my jeans down. I lifted my hips to let them slip down. She pulled them off and tossed them on top of hers.

"They can get to know each other," she leant down to speak to my penis. "While I get to know you."

She slipped her hands inside my underpants, hooking her thumbs in the legs and pushing her fingers up to pull the waistband down.

"Humm," she looked up at my face. "Your pubic hair is a lot darker." She smiled, "You don't dye your hair, do you?"

"No," I smiled back, slightly bemused.

"Good, I like piebalds," she looked down again and slipped my underpants off. She looked back up at my penis, but it still lay limp across my abdomen, slightly enlarged, but far from stiff.

She ran her fingers across the sole of my foot. I squirmed at the tickles.

Smiling she said, "Tender soles. But the skin at your heels and the balls of your feet is rough." She looked up at me, "Do you often walk around in bare feet?"

"Only around the house," I replied. "I always put shoes and stockings on when I go out."

"Sensible lad," she looked down at my feet again as she continued to stroke them. "That's why you've got such good arches."

I squeezed my toes as she stroked my soles again. She slipped her fingers up to push against them.

"Humm, strong," she pushed again and I let them open. "Strong and long." She glanced up at my penis again, but looked back down at my feet quickly. She ran her finger along the toes on my right foot and I closed them around it. She pulled gently, but not hard enough to free her finger. "Hmmm," she smiled. then lent down and kissed my toes. I relaxed my grip and she sucked each toe into her mouth, one at a time. She glanced up, then did the same with my other foot.

Then her hands caressed my ankles, then my shins and calves. She bent my right leg, running her hands up and down it. "Nice, strong and hard muscles," she whispered. "I like hairy legs," she lent close and brushed her lips gently along my shin, while caressing my calf with both hands. She pushed my leg down, knee still bent and repeated the process with my left leg.

Then she slipped her fingers inside the bend my knees, her fingers pressed between calf and thigh. She slowly kissed and licked and sucked my knees, first my right, then my left. Next she worked her way up my thighs, switching between them, again and again.

It was only when she reached the top that I realized that my penis was hard again. Smiling she lightly kissed each testicle. Then licked under them and sucked them into her mouth. She held them there for a long moment. Her eyes closed as she caressed them with her tongue.

Then she opened her mouth and sat up slightly, her eyes locked on my erection.

"I think they're full enough now," her voice was hoarse.

My mouth was dry. I swallowed, but didn't speak.

She tore her eyes away to look up into mine. Then keeping her arms and legs to either side of me she crawled up to kiss me. The tip of my penis just brushing against her stomach as our lips met.

We kiss, using just our lips. I opened my mouth to use my tongue but she straightened to kneel astride me, moist vagina poised over my erection.

Slowly she lowered herself. She didn't use her hands to guide me inside. She didn't need

to, I entered her effortlessly. As she sank down I sat up, reaching around her to hug her close. She put her arms around my neck and gasped as she pushed herself all the way home.

She wrapped her legs around my hips. And I could feel myself thrusting up into her. I could feel her pressing down all around me. A moan escaped from my lips as my penis seemed to catch fire. She arched her back, pressing her body against mine. Her fingers dug into my shoulders. I breathed her breath. She started to rock back and forward and the fire spread to my balls. I started to trust in time with her and she smiled.

Then she lay back on the bed, bringing me down on top of her. I pushed my legs out behind us and she squeezed even tighter with hers. I rested my weight on my elbows as I thrust into her. She wiggled and rocked back in time. I pushed deep into her and she squeezed me ever so tightly.

The fire in my loins got hotter and hotter. The tension got harder and harder. The sound of our moans, the feel of our bodies, the trust and counter trust merged into background haze as my orgasm built. I pushed and pushed and pushed. It burned and burned, harder and harder, tighter and tighter, until it snapped and I flowed into her. A burning fire that stretched into infinity, thrusting and thrusting, squirting and squirting, until I was empty and exhausted, and collapsed on top of her.

I lay there as our breathing slowed. Our sweat cooling as it flowed together. My heartbeat slowed and she stretched her legs down and relaxed. I started to cry. I don't know why, but I cried.

"What's the matter?" she whispered as she stroked the tears from my face.

But I couldn't speak. This huge knot of emotion had just welled up inside me.

She pulled my face to her shoulder and held me close. "It's all right, Kevin," she cooed. "It's alright."

And I fell asleep, my tears mingling with our sweat, feeling safe in her arms.

# 11

I woke up alone, with the sun streaming in the window and bed clothes knotted around my legs. It was just as I was untangling myself that Jasmine came into the room. She was wearing a pair of blue silk pajamas and carrying a tray. Her blond hair was brushed and tied back in a pony tail again. She put the tray down on the bed, and I saw that it carried toast and marmalade, coffee and orange juice and scrambled eggs and smoked salmon. My mouth watered.

"Breakfast in bed," she smiled, "is all part of the service."

I smiled back and reached for a glass of orange juice. "Thanks," I said and gulped it down.

We munched in silence for a while.

Then she said, "I don't make a habit of this, Kevin."

I looked up at her but she was looking down at her eggs.

"Neither do I Jasmine," I replied. "In fact," I sat back against the head board. "This is the first time I've ever had breakfast in bed with a beautiful woman."

She looked up and smiled at me. "I would have thought that you'd have had a lot of offers."

"Well I've had my share," I shrugged. "But I haven't taken up very many." I reached for another slice of toast. "I guess it must be my repressed Catholic upbringing, but I've always thought that sex was something special that unites two people and cements the bonds of love and trust between them."

Jasmine had stopped eating.

"I've never considered lust to be a good enough reason to have sex with someone," I said and then looked away.

"You're looking for something serious, then?" she said.

"I know that I could get very used to having you in my life," I looked back up to her. "And very used to being in your life."

"I used to really fancy you, Kevin," she spoke very softly. "I still do so I guess it could be love." She shrugged, "But you never seemed to even notice me back then."

"I was a fool then," I replied and we looked into each other's eyes. "But I've grown up since and now I realize what I've been missing all these years."

"So what do you want now, Kevin," she asked.

"I want someone to share my life with and to grow old and have kids with," I said.

"So do I," she replied.

I leaned forward and put my hand to her cheek. "Do you think that we might be able to make it together?" I whispered.

She looked into my eyes. "Oh yes, Kevin." And we were in each other's arms and we didn't care where the breakfast things spilt. We just crushed each other in our embrace for a long, timeless moment.

Then a thought flared in the back of my mind. "Does this mean that you've spent the last four years waiting for me?" I asked.

"What!" she sat back.

"It was just a thought," I smiled, but she didn't smile back.

"Typical man," she flared. "Thinking that women have nothing better to do than sit around waiting for one of you to come into our lives and make us complete."

"Well," I looked down. "I've been waiting for someone to come into my life and make me complete." And I had found her. And she hadn't wanted me.

"Oh," the anger slipped from her voice. She leaned towards me and put her hand to the side of my neck. She kissed my cheek. "I think I might have been waiting," she said softly.

I put my arms around her and we hugged.

Then her lips where on mine and her tongue was in my mouth. And we kissed long and deep.

Her lips separated from mine and her tongue licked under my chin. I let my head roll back and she licked down across my throat. Her teeth pressed either side of my Adam's apple. She pulled my skin back and forth, took smaller and bigger bites, sucked and licked.

She raised her head and asked, "Do you like this as much as I do?"

"What?" I looked down.

"Having your throat, worked on," she kissed it lightly.

"You like having your throat chewed?" I asked, putting my hand on her neck.

"Yes," she smiled back.

I sat up and hooking my fingers behind her neck pushed my thumb against her throat. She fell back against my leg. I gently squeezed and released and squeezed my hand again.

"You ever make it with a vampire?" I asked.

She smiled. "No," she swallowed and I could feel her throat work as I gently held it.

I pulled her up and bent my head down to run my nose into her soft skin. I could feel the fast pulse in her jugular. I moved my thumb away and pinched some skin with my lips. Her breath hissed close to my ear. I moved my hand to the back of her head and ran my other down to cup her breast. I could feel the pulse in her neck on my lips and the pounding of her heart under my hand.

Opening my mouth I took as big a bite as I could. I sucked as much of her throat into my mouth as I could get. Then I ran my hand down her body and slipped my fingers into her vagina. I started to bite and suck and rub in time with each other. She put her hand to the back of my head and pressed my teeth even harder into her neck. While she ran her other hand down my body and gripped hard on my erection.

I worked on her for a timeless eternity, until she shuddered. I sat up a little and smiled down at her.

She returned the smile, then pushed me up and over onto my back. Straddling me, she crushed my hips between her tights, guiding me inside with one hand as she sank down, completely.

My arms where around her, one hand up to hook the opposite shoulder from behind, the other down to grasp her buttock. I tried to buck my hips. But she was a dead weight. A dead weight with my erection trapped gloriously inside her.

She started to move her hips, a rolling undulation. She gasped and I moaned as the ripples moved up my penis. She started a rhythm and I followed. We fell into a sea of sensual ecstasy and drowned in the depths of each other.

So once again I found myself caught up in an intense relationship at short notice. And this time the feelings seemed to be mutual. Or to be more truthful the situation was reversed. Jasmine was obviously head-over-heels in love with me. But I was still caught up on Alexandra. Ironic, no?

Yet maybe it was because I couldn't fit Jasmine into the "object of my love" box in my mind that I could relate to her properly. I wasn't constantly expecting her to behave in certain ways and being disappointed when she didn't. I wasn't expecting and so I didn't look for signs that she mightn't love me. and so I didn't find any. I was still hung up on the fact that Alexandra didn't love me, so all my insecurities were fully occupied by that and they didn't

have any time to work their way into my relationship with Jasmine.

Even though I didn't categorize Jasmine as being the object of my love she fulfilled the criteria I wanted better than anybody else ever has. I found myself responding to her without having to force myself. And without having to explain away what she did in order to convince myself that she did love me. Maybe it was simply that she actually did love me and maybe I'd loved her a lot longer than I thought.

Over the next few months our relationship developed and deepened. We had so much in common, from politics and religion to how we liked to relax and enjoy ourselves. Oh in the small hours of the night when I woke up and couldn't get to sleep thoughts of Alexandra would come and plague me. But come the morning I could push all thought of her to the back of my mind again and once again focus on Jasmine.

Jasmine and I did so many things together. Not only going out on dates to the theatre and cinema, but being introduced to each other's friends and relations. I taught her the basics of photography and she taught me how to play tennis. She even got me to help redecorate the spare bedroom. It got to the stage that I spent half my time living there.

Our relationship had gotten serious without me noticing or, more importantly, worrying about it. But I didn't think of moving in with her until Jasmine suggested it to me. It was a Saturday afternoon and we'd just got back from a shopping trip down town.

She flopped down on the sofa, while I fixed a couple of drinks for us.

"You know," she said as I handed her glass. "You've been sleeping here every weekend for the last six months."

I sipped my drink and nodded.

"And you've been shopping and cooking," she smiled. "And even doing some laundry."

"Yes?" I smiled back

She paused for a moment then asked, "So why the hell don't you just move in with me?"

"Because you haven't asked me," I replied.

"Well I'm asking now," she said.

"Well I think it's a great idea," I put my arm around her. "If you're sure?"

"I'm sure," she slipped her arms around me.

"Are you sure you're sure?" I pulled her closer.

"I'm very sure I'm sure," she tilted her head up towards mine and we kissed.

Then we kissed some more. Then we cuddled. Then we started to undress each other. Then we made love, long into the night.

I could write a whole book on the joys and tribulations of settling down to a life of domestic bliss with the woman you love, but it's not really within the scope of this narrative. You may feel that I'm wrong to dwell so much on the negative aspects of my relationship with Alexandra and to ignore the brilliant relationship I'm having with Jasmine, but I feel that there is more to be learnt from the mistakes we make than from the successes we have.

Anyway Jasmine has absolutely no intention of letting me fictionalize the intimate details of our personal lives and distributing them for all the world to read. Maybe if you tell all your friends that this is a really fantastic book and that they should go out and buy a copy for themselves I can persuade her to change her mind.

Anyway that first night that we lived together we celebrated in style. Smoked salmon, lobster, champagne and oysters for starters and a long, slow massage and love making session for after. Then we curled up together and let the oil and sweat soak into the sheets.

I fell into one of those heavy sleeps, where you get all sorts of weird dreams. I could feel Jasmine snuggling against me, but I couldn't stop myself from drifting deeper. And then dreaming.

In the dream there was a heavy, enclosing atmosphere. I was in a London tube station. I could feel the hot stuffy air closing in all around me. The oppressive, narrow little tunnels and

platforms that they have, so that the system is permanently over crowded. And in order to change trains you have to walk up flights of stairs and along tunnels and down and around in a confusing three dimensional maze.

Alexandra was with me. We were walking along a narrow connecting tunnel and then we went down a flight of stairs and on to a platform. We stood at one end of the platform near to the tunnel where the train would come from. I think we were talking, but I can't remember what we said. I remember being uptight and anxious about her being there and not knowing why.

Then there was a rumble of an approaching train. And a blast of stale air was forced out of the mouth of the tunnel and the rumble built up to an overwhelming roar. Then a Piccadilly line train zoomed out of the tunnel and screeched to a halt. And there were crowds on the platform forcing their way on and off the train.

Alexandra and I stood alone in the surging crowd and I realized that we were here to say goodbye to each other. But I didn't want to say goodbye. And I think I might have been crying. Then Alexandra turned and walked off. She didn't get on the train she walked off the platform by an exit beside the train tunnel. I turned and walked along through the crowd as the train pulled away and disappeared.

I followed the crowd along the platform. Then I was reading the signs, trying to figure out which tunnel I should walk along to get to where I was going. It was difficult because of all the people pushing and shoving. And I felt like I did when I first came to London, not knowing which lines to get or which stations to go to. And it was all terribly confusing.

Then I was riding the escalator up out of the station. But the weird thing was that I had no shoes on. I could feel the hard metal under my feet, cold even though I had socks on. The grooves in the step pressing into the soles of my feet. And as I neared the top and the air got lighter, I became increasingly frightened of not stepping off on time and catching my toes in the workings of the escalator.

The most unusual thing about the last sequence is that I was wearing stockings without any shoes on. I never do that. I either walk around bare foot, or possibly in sandals with no stockings, or with shoes and stockings on. But I never walk around wearing just stockings. And while when I was a kid I used to be frightened of getting caught in escalators they are so common now that I haven't thought about it in years.

Needless to say before I reached the top and had to jump off I woke up. I found my face pressed against Jasmine's ear, with my mouth full of her hair. I propped myself up on my elbow and looked down at her in the dim light. She turned her head towards me in her sleep. Her lips slightly parted, her breathing calm and even.

And I thought, she's so beautiful. How can I be dreaming of Alexandra, even if it was just to say goodbye, while lying next to someone who is as beautiful on the inside as she is on the outside. How could I betray Jasmine, even in my dreams?

She sighed and I bent down and kissed her lips.

"I think I really love you," I whispered and stroked her cheek.

"Hmmm," she murmured and rolled towards me.

I brushed the hair from her ear and kissed her there. Her arm fell across my ribs. I took her ear into my mouth and worked my tongue and lips all over it. Her shallow breath began to grow stronger against my neck. I brushed my lips along the side of her neck, rubbing the palm of my hand up and down the side of her body. She swallowed, then opened her lips a little more. I ran my tongue gently over them. I moved down and took her throat in my mouth. I could feel her pulse under my teeth as I softly bit down using a steady pressure that wouldn't break her skin. My hand slipped between her legs and I put my length of my finger against her.

She rolled over onto her back, arms and legs slightly spread. I moved my mouth onto her breast. Her pubic hair brushed against my wrist as I started to make small circular motions

with my hand. She slowly moistened and opened as I continued to gently arouse her. Her heart beat and breathing speeded up and my erection grew.

Her arms came up and squeezed me tight and my finger slipped inside her.

"Hmmm, yes," she said and bend forward to kiss my ear.

I looked up at her and said, "So you are awake."

"I am now," she smiled.

And we kissed, our tongues probing deep as I slipped between her legs and got on top of her. I brought my arms up to rest on my elbows. She ran her hand down to guide my erection inside her and I started to trust into her, her body undulating under me as my climax built inside me. Then she squeezed tight, her thighs clamping my hips, her fingers pressing into my back. And I came, a short sharp orgasm that penetrated right to my soul.

She squeezed one last time and sighed, "Oh, yeah!"

I nuzzled her shoulder as she relaxed under me.

"I was dreaming that you were making love to me?" she murmured.

"Maybe you're still dreaming," I whispered back, withdrawing from her and lying on my side.

"Good," she sighed. "I love these types of dreams." She rolled onto her side to face me.

"What type's that?" I slipped my hand down her body to her bottom.

"The type where you're lying naked next to me," she smiled.

I squeezed my fingers, "You want to go again?"

"Hmm?" she wiggled against me, rubbing her hip across my penis. "I might," she smiled. "But you don't seem to."

I smiled back. "You can't judge what my intentions are solely by the state of my erection," I explained. "He doesn't control me, I control him."

Her smile broadened, "Oh yes?"

"Yes," I assured. "Even if he's completely exhausted that doesn't stop me from making love to you. My fingers are always stiff and my tongue always capable of a lick or two."

"A lick or two?" she raised herself up onto her elbow and cupped my head in her hand. "I don't really know what you mean by that," a mischievous smile flickered about her lips as she leant down to kiss my collar bone.

I pulled her shoulder towards me. "Lie face down," I said. "I want to be on top."

"Face down?" she asked.

"Yeah, come on." I pulled my arm from under her and gently pushed her down.

She complied and I rolled on top of her, pushing my legs between her's to part them. Then I pushed my hands under her hips and ran them up to her breasts. I started to rub my whole body against her, squeezing her between my arms and my chest and making swimming motions with my shoulders.

"Hmm," she whispered. "It's not fair, I can't touch you."

"I don't think you could get much more of your body to touch me at any one time," I spoke to her shoulder as I rubbed my ear across her head.

"I mean with my hands," she replied as she reached behind her to grab one of my buttocks with each hand.

I smiled, but didn't say anything about her proving herself wrong. I just concentrated on building up a steady rhythm.

Her legs squeezed mine and I pressed back to keep them wide apart. The action of my body was causing my penis to rub against her and we were both becoming aroused. I continued to rub it against her as I became stiffer and she dilated and moistened. I was rubbing my shaft along the length of her, pressing her lips apart.

She started to moan. At first randomly, then as the rhythm built they came in time with my strokes. First every five or six then more and more frequently as I delivered longer and more



powerful thrusts. Then without conscious thought I was pumping into her. As I pushed in she squeezed tight and exhaled loudly. Again and again, getting faster and harder each time.

I squeezed harder with my hands as well, pulling her tighter and tighter to me, as I pushed inside her harder and harder. She squeezed back, her hands clamped tightly to my buttocks. So that as I pulled back each time her shoulders were pulled up and as I pushed back down her body arched under me.

As the rhythm built her breaths merged into longer and longer moans. And the tension build higher and higher. Then the pressure exploded and she shuddered from head to toe. Every muscle in her body convulsed. I'd never felt such a total orgasm before.

Then every muscle in her body relaxed and I snuggled down on top of her. She let out a long sigh and I could see the corner of her mouth curl up in a smile.

"Thanks," she whispered.

I lay on top of her. My face buried in a nest of her hair. Each of my hands sandwiched tightly between the mattress and one of her breasts. My legs caught between her's. My penis already gone soft, with just the tip of my foreskin still caught in her lips. I'd never felt such total and utter contentment before.

# 12

Needless to say that contentment didn't last. I kept dreaming about Alex. I tried not to, but did you ever try to make yourself not to dream about something. it's probably the surest way of ending up dreaming about it. She really bugged me. She'd gotten under my skin and try as I might I couldn't seem to get away from her.

I tried not to let my affliction with Alexandra spoil my relationship with Jasmine, but I don't think I succeeded. I think Jasmine knew that there was something bothering me and then one Saturday at breakfast I found out for sure.

"Who's Alex?" Jasmine asked as put her empty coffee cup down.

"Alex?" I looked up from the paper to her.

"You talk in your sleep," she sat back in her chair and pushed her cereal bowl away from her. "And you always mention a girl called Alex."

"What do I say about her," I smiled.

Jasmine kept a straight face. "That she's gorgeous. and she tastes nice. And that she has very suckable breasts."

"Oh," I looked down at the paper again.

Jasmine's voice softened. "Is she an ex-girlfriend?"

"Yes," I nodded.

"Is she an ex-lover?" she asked.

"Yes," I replied.

After a pause Jasmine asked, "Was she special?"

"She was special to me," I said. "But I wasn't all that special to her."

There was silence for a moment.

"Do you still love her," she spoke very softly.

"Hardly," I looked up at her, but she was looking away. "She's a fucked up little bitch that treated me with total and utter contempt."

"That doesn't stop you from loving her," she said.

"Jasmine," my heart was pounding. "I love you."

She said nothing.

I leant across the table to touch her, but she was too far away.

"I really do love you," I said.

She looked at me.

I stood and walked around to her side of the table. Her eyes never left me. I knelt beside her and took hold of her hand.

"I really do love you," I squeezed her hand. "You've got to believe me. I really do."

"Oh, I know you do," she put her arm around me and buried her head in my shoulder. "I know you do."

I hoped that would be the end of it, but as we finished lunch later that afternoon Jasmine brought up the subject again.

"I know a girl called Alex in the Tennis Club," Jasmine said. "About three inches shorter than me, long black hair, stunning green eyes."

## Alexandra

I recognized her description. "Alex Murphy," I said.

"Alexandra Murphy," Jasmine nodded.

I didn't say anything, just looked down at my empty plate.

There was silence for a few moments then she said, "So she's your Ex-girlfriend."

"Yes," I admitted.

"Well I suppose that will please some of the other girls at the club," she mused.

"Why?" I looked up.

"There's a vicious rumor going around that she's gay," Jasmine said.

I gulped.

Jasmine smiled, "You seem surprised."

"Well..." I didn't know what to say it might explain a lot, but would open up a whole load of other questions. "Maybe that's why I could never understand her," I looked at Jasmine. "I might have been asking myself all the wrong questions."

"It never occurred to you before?" she asked.

"Well," I smiled. "My macho male ego always thinks that any girl who doesn't fall instantly in love with me must be gay," I shrugged, "Else how could she not find me attractive."

Jasmine laughed.

"But seriously," I continued. "No, it had never occurred to me."

"No I don't think she's gay either," Jasmine started to clear away the dishes.

"Oh. Why?" I helped her.

"Well," she smiled. "She's never made a pass at me." She kissed my cheek as I laughed, then started to stack the dishes in the sink.

Over the next few weeks Jasmine managed to get me to tell her the whole story of my relationship with Alexandra. At first I was reluctant to talk about. It was as much that I was unwilling to admit to myself what had happened as it was that I didn't want to tell her. But as I started to open up to her and explain what had happened it became clearer to me as well. And as I began to understand what had happened I became less uptight about it.

And because Jasmine was there to listen, not judging and not laughing because I'd made a fool of myself, made it easier. In fact I think it made us a lot closer than we had been. I opened up to her in a way that I'd never done with anybody before. And she opened up to me. As the Americans would say it was a very positive growth experience.

The most important parts where the conversations, more like monologues, where I finally pieced together what I had really felt for Alexandra. And once I'd come to terms with my feelings for her I could get on with my life and start loving Jasmine in the way that she deserved.

We where curled up in bed that night when Jasmine brought up the subject of Alexandra again.

"So what did it feel like to snuggle up with Alex like this?" she whispered.

I snorted. "We never slept together," I squeezed my arm around her.

"What?" Jasmine looked up at my face. "I thought you'd had sex."

"Oh, we had sex," I said. "But once we were finished she always kicked me out."

"Oh," she said.

"At least, I think we had sex," I continued.

"What's that mean, Kevin," she smiled. "Either you did or you didn't."

"Well," I explained. "I made love to her, but she never made love to me."

"You mean that she just lay on her back and let you pump away?" Jasmine asked.

"Oh, no. She was on top most of the time." I smiled, "You know how I like to lie on my back."

"Well, yes," she continued with her probing. "But if she was on top doing all the work, why do you say she didn't make love to you?"

"Well..." I paused, then realized that I had nothing to be ashamed of. "I never got to come."

"What?" she raised herself on her elbow to look at my face.

"I never got to orgasm," I said.

She paused for a moment while the thought sank in. Then asked, "How come?"

I looked at her for a moment, then realized that I had nothing to fear from telling her the truth. "I never got to penetrate her." I couldn't make out the expression on Jasmine's face in the dim light. "With my penis, I mean. I make her come with my fingers and tongue," my voice nearly broke. "But she never really showed any real interest in returning the compliment."

"Didn't you ask her?" she said.

"Oh, yes," I sighed. "I asked her if she'd give me head and she thought the idea was ridiculous. And when I asked her if she wanted to have sex with me she always say no. But every time we got back to her place after a date I'd always end up making love to her."

Jasmine was silent.

So I continued, "I remember one time having this really weird conversation where she refused to admit that we where having sex." I shrugged, "I suppose that's what it boils down to, if we weren't having sex then she didn't have to make me come. she didn't feel that she owed me anything.

"That must have been terrible," Jasmine voice was so soft I could barely hear it.

"Not really." I said. "The worst part was the uncertainty," I slipped my hand down to stroke her breast. "Not knowing what she felt for me. Not being able to figure it out and not being able to get her to tell me." I shook my head, "I was left in a limbo with all my emotions flying about, unable to get a grip on the situation."

As Jasmine slipped her leg across my hips she brushed against my penis and I realized that I had an erection. As she sank down on top of me I realized that she was aroused as well. And by the time we'd finished it was the early hours of the morning and we fell asleep in each other's arms.

The following day we were rushed off our feet buying and installing a new set of kitchen presses and it wasn't until we'd settled down in bed that we started to talk about me and Alex again.

"I still don't understand why she did what she did." I sighed. "What I mean is that it all comes back to why she let me make love to her, when she wouldn't make love back to me."

"I think she was trying to give you just enough to keep you coming back for more," Jasmine reached up to pull my arm around her shoulder and squeezed it.

"So you think she was just toying with me?" I liked the feel of my arm around her and her hand on mine.

"No," she said. "I think she might really loved you."

"What!" I was dumbfounded. "That's not how you act when you love someone." And yet some part of me really wanted to believe that she had.

"It is if you're scared of being hurt again," she said.

I tensed, a feeling of dread coming into my heart at the thought that I could have caused Alexandra pain by loving her.

She looked up at me, "What's the matter?"

"You're saying that she thought if I knew that she loved me that I'd use it to take advantage of her," I didn't look at her.

She whispered, "Yes."

"But she still loved me and wanted me," I said.

"Yes," she nodded.

"But she couldn't admit it to me, because that would give me some sort of power over her?" I asked.

"And she couldn't admit it to herself," Jasmine explained. "Because then she'd have to

open up and trust you and then you could... well use her and hurt her."

"So instead of me fucking her," I said. "She made sure she fucked me first."

Jasmine paused a moment, then answered, "Well, yes. I suppose so." She prodded my ribs to make me look down at her, "Though I wouldn't have put it in quite that way." She kissed me.

"And you're not afraid of me using and hurting you," I returned her kiss.

"Of course not," she smiled. "I've got you completely under control."

"Oh, yeah?" I smiled back.

"Oh, yes," she ran her hand down to my growing erection.

"You think that can control me?" I asked.

"Maybe not," she glanced into my eyes. "But this can." And she moved down, put her head between my legs and sucked me completely into her mouth.

Later that week we talked about Alexandra and me again. And I explained how Alexandra had said that she hadn't thought that we were having sex when I made love to her.

"She was so full of bullshit," I explained. "Every time I tried to talk to her all she came out with was bullshit."

"Well maybe she didn't think it was sex," Jasmine said.

"Come off it. Nobody knows that little about sex," I said. "How could she not have known what we were doing?"

Jasmine thought for a minute. "Listen Kevin, would it have made any difference if you'd got to come?"

I opened my mouth to say "Yes", but Jasmine interrupted.

"What I mean is," she turned around to face me. "You believed that you were doing something special, and she believed was that it was just good clean fun. Right?"

"Yes," I nodded. Now that she had turned to look at me my fingers touched the skin at the back of her neck.

"It doesn't matter what physical acts you performed, to her it was just fun and to you it meant commitment," she continued. "No matter what you would have she would still have kicked you out when you were finished. And you would still have gone home frustrated and lonely."

The memories of walking home alone no longer hurt as much as they did.

"So get over your hang up over making love to her," Jasmine put her arms around my neck. "You acted in good faith and she betrayed you. You owe her nothing."

At the word "betrayed" I looked up at her face.

She kissed my chin. "I believe that making love is special for you. I know how difficult it is for you to open up." She smiled, "I mean, it's taken this long for you to open up and tell me what's being tumbling around in your mind since we've been together."

I smiled back, "Yeah, well I didn't want it to come between us."

"No fucked up little bitch is going to come between us," she whispered. "She's a fool to have treated you like that. She's a fool to have let you go." Jasmine shook her head, "And she's a fool to have even missed out on the best bit of sex."

"Which is," I asked as she tightened her arms and pulled me closer.

"You know that already," she licked her lips and brought them close to mine. "It's making the other person come."

We kissed.

"Oh, yeah?" I teased. "So you like making me come then?"

"Yeah," she whispered in between kisses. "But not as much as you like making me come."

We laughed, and giggled, and kissed, and made love.

A few days later we were lying in each other's arms late at night when the subject of Alexandra came up again.

"It got easier once I decided that I didn't love her anymore," I said. "But I still wanted her."

I still ached to hold her." Then I felt my arm around Jasmine. I squeezed her, "Maybe I just ached to hold somebody." I kissed the top of her head, "And now that I've found you I no longer ache."

She squeezed me back.

"So when did you decide that you didn't love her?" she whispered, her lips brushing against my nipples.

I sighed and thought for a bit. "I guess I knew I didn't love her when I couldn't cry myself to sleep after we broke up," I said. "I remember lying awake at night, turning over and over, punching my pillow, with the tears building up inside, but nothing coming out."

Jasmine hugged me close.

"It felt..." I stopped, amazed. "You know, I don't know how it felt." I looked down at Jasmine's face, "I remember doing it. I remember lying awake with the one thought going around and around in my head; 'Why did she let me make love to her if she didn't love me, and if she loved me then why didn't she make love back?'" I swallowed, "But I can't remember the actual feelings I had at the time."

"That's OK, Kevin," she whispered.

"But I still wanted her," I said. "I still wanted to share my life with that bitch."

Jasmine kissed me.

"It seems so unbelievable now," I shook my head. "It's so completely absurd."

I held her tight in my arms as she ran her tongue round and round my nipple. But my mind was still caught up with thoughts of Alexandra, or rather my feelings for Alexandra.

"At the time I thought that it didn't matter what she felt for me," I said. "That all I could deal with was my feelings for her." I sighed, "But now I realize that I did care about how she felt." I looked at Jasmine, "I mean how much self-respect could I have knowing that I was making a fool of myself over some fucked up little bitch who didn't give a shit about me."

Jasmine stroked my neck and stretched up to nibble my ear.

"That was the ultimate betrayal," I said. "That I meant nothing to her."

Jasmine rolled on top of me and squeezed her thighs against my hips.

My hands went around her hips and caressed her buttocks. "Every time we made love she betrayed me, every time I made her come and she wouldn't return the complement." I smiled, "Oh, not because I wanted the cheep trill of an orgasm from her. But because she thought so little of me that she didn't want to give me pleasure. She didn't want to make love to me." I whispered, "All she wanted from me was to be a biological vibrator."

"Speaking of a vibrator," she kissed my nipples. "I could see why a girl might need one with you around."

"Huh?" I realized that I had an erection.

"Well you just ooze sexuality," she rocked from side to side, pushing against the length of my penis.

"Really," I brought my hands around to her breasts.

"I could see how a girl could lose control," she slid up and down.

I could hardly listen to what she was saying.

"She'd definitely need satisfaction after kissing you," she raised herself up and sank back down, pushing me deep inside her.

The fire took control of me. And grabbing her I started to pump into her. She thrust and squeezed back as our mutual orgasm consumed us. We peaked immediately and without pause started again. Then again and again as our passion burned itself out, until at last we lay still.

I lay back, exhausted, as she came to rest on top of me.

She straightened her legs, bringing them to rest between mine, and spread her arms so her full weight came to rest on me. I could feel her breath on my ear as she lay her head to rest on

## Alexandra

the pillow beside mine.

"You know that I really love you, Jasmine," I whispered.

"Yeah," she answered. "I know that you do."

"You're just too good to be true," I nuzzled her shoulder and gave a quick squeeze with my arms.

She chuckled. "Really?" she whispered.

"It's a pity that you're only a figment of my imagination," I murmured as I drifted off to sleep.

"Shush," she brushed her hand through my hair. "Wake up tomorrow and see if the dream has come true."

# 13

Back when I broke up with Alexandra, or she broke up with me, I had this fantasy of her coming back to me and telling me just how big a mistake she'd made and that it was all just a big misunderstanding and that she'd discovered that she really loves me after all, and I, in my fantasy, would reply with a long list detailing just how badly she had treated me, before slamming the door in her face.

It was the one thing that I fell asleep dreaming about most, after having tossed and turned for a few hours feeling sorry for myself because I'd lost Alexandra. It was the one thing that I thought would have made my life complete. As is the way of the world, now that I no longer wanted it I was about to get it.

Jasmine threw a birthday party and invited a whole bunch of people. Mostly her friends, but a few that I knew as well. It was all set to be a great night. In fact it started out excellently. I had a few beers, talked and joked with seemingly everybody. I felt I was going to have a great time, even through I'd only known a few people to start with.

I'd had about four or five beers when Alexandra arrived. Of course Jasmine hadn't told me she was coming, or even that Alexandra had been invited, all she'd said was that bunch of people from the Tennis club were coming. So it came as a bit of a shock when Alexandra walked in closely followed by a couple of other girls. And by the look on her face it was as much a shock for her as it was for me.

Jasmine appeared from nowhere and, grabbing my elbow, guided me over to meet her.

"Hi, Alex," Jasmine smiled. "Glad you could make it."

"Hi, Jasmine," Alexandra replied lamely, her eyes locked on me.

"Oh. I believe that you both know each other," she took us both by the elbow and pulled us a step closer together.

"Hi, Alexandra," I said. "Long time no see."

"Hi," she replied. Then pulling herself together she turned and introduced her friends. "This is Mary and Sinead." And she looked back at me, "This is Kevin."

"Hi," I managed to look away from Alexandra and smile at them.

"Hi," they said in unison.

"Why don't you help yourself to drinks," Jasmine waved at the heavily loaded table.

"Thanks," they spoke in unison again and move towards the table.

Alexandra and I looked at each other for a moment longer. Then I felt Jasmine leave. I said something like, "See you later" and hurried out into the hall. I caught hold of Jasmine's elbow and turned her to face me.

"Why did you invite her without telling me she was coming?" I hissed.

"I wanted to get you two together," she smiled. "And I didn't think that you would turn up if you knew she was going to be here."

She was probably right, but I didn't want to admit it. "I'm not avoiding her!" I said. "She's avoiding me."

"Well I didn't tell her you'd be here," she said. "She didn't even know that I knew you until tonight."



"Why do you want to get us together?" I didn't understand Jasmine. I'd have thought that she would want me to avoid.

"Because you have unfinished business together," she sipped her drink.

"What do you mean?" I tried to keep my voice low.

"You can't run away from her," she put her hand on my arm. "The scars won't heal unless you confront her."

I snorted. "I've tried confronting her," I said. "But she would never talk to me."

Jasmine looked down for a moment. "Well now you have another chance to try."

I looked suspiciously at her, "Is this some kind of game?" I shook my head, "Because if it is..."

"I'm not playing games with you, Kevin," she looked around at her guests. "I can't really explain now. But you have got to decide if you really love her or not."

"I've already decided that!" I took hold of her arm as she started to move away. "That's why I'm with you."

She smiled at me and gently removed my hand. "Talk to her and see what you mean to each other now. That's all I want." She put her hand to my cheek, "Believe me I don't want to share you with her. But you have to get her out of your system." She took her hand away and straightened up. "Now I've got to circulate. Enjoy yourself."

"Thanks," I called after her.

A couple of minutes later I was sitting on the settee in the front room having another beer. Alexandra came over and sat beside me.

"Hi," she smiled at me. "How have you been?"

"Fine," I smiled back. "And how are you?"

"Oh, OK can't complain," she looked around for a moment. And when I said nothing asked, "So you live here now?"

"Yes," I smiled at the joke I always make. "Jasmine charges a rent I can afford."

"That's nice," she looked away again.

"Look, what do you want from me?" I was beginning to experience a resurgence of emotions that I'd been suppressing for months. But I still can't figure what they were. Was it love or hate, anger and bitterness? I really don't know.

"I just want to talk to you," she shifted uncomfortably on the settee.

"Well you never wanted to talk to me before," I think the bitterness had worked its way to the top.

"What?" Alexandra couldn't believe it.

Whether she couldn't believe what I said or that I had actually said I don't know.

"All you ever want to do was go out and have a 'good time'," I crushed my empty beer can. "And I mean that in every sense of the word."

"That's not true," she almost whined. "I wanted to be loved just as much as you ever did."

"Don't give me that bullshit," I interrupted. "Your 'little Miss. sweet and innocence' routine won't work on me anymore."

She sat up straight, "And what's that supposed to mean?"

"It's supposed to mean that I have nothing to apologize to you for. I'm the offended party. I'm the person who was fucked about, who was used and abused and betrayed."

She said nothing as I leaned forward and took another can of beer from the coffee table.

"I'm the person who was hurt again and again," I said. "And who again and again tried to patch up the relationship. Who tried again and again to talk to you, to explain what you were doing to me, to ask you to stop and treat me with some respect."

There was silence for a moment then she asked, ever so softly, "And what respect did you ever show me."

"What respect did you let me?" I replied without thinking.

She said nothing, just sipped her drink.

"The respect I showed you was in treating you like a human being," I started to explain, but knew that she wouldn't understand. "In trying to talk to you as an equal. Trying to explain what you meant to me, how I felt about you, what I wanted from the relationship." I stopped to take stock of my thoughts, but just came up with the same old recriminations. "I didn't use you. I didn't take advantage of your feelings from me to prop up my flagging ego. I didn't reject you. I tried so hard to get close to you, to love you, just to hold you even."

There was silence for a moment.

"You never even let me do that did you. Just to hold you and be with you, to feel you in my arms." I looked at her, "But you don't understand what that meant to me. How important you were to me. How much I wanted you to love me."

"Now that's bullshit, if I ever heard it!" her hands gripped her glass tightly.

I felt devastated. There I was, having once again opened my heart to her, explained how I felt and it had gone straight past her. She would never understand.

"All you were ever interested in was having sex with me!", she realized she'd raised her voice and looked around to see if anyone had noticed. Then she looked back at me, "Night after night you tried to seduce me. Again and again you tried."

I took a deep breath. After all I'd done not to seduce her, not to force her to have sex with me. In my mind I had gone from the fear of raping her to the guilt and recriminations that would follow "getting carried away in the heat of the moment" again and again. And there she was accusing me of the thing I most didn't want to do. The one thing I had never done.

I looked at her and could see the anger that still bubbled in her eyes. Maybe, I thought. Maybe she just said it because she's angry. Or maybe she really believes it.

"Yes I wanted to have sex with you," I said, keeping my voice steady and calm. "But I told you what that meant to me. I told you," and I knew even as I said that she'd never believe it, "that it meant that I loved you."

I knew then that she couldn't believe that I could love her and want to have sex with her. It comes from the early training that "If he respects you he won't force himself on you. If he really loves you he'll wait until you're married to have sex with you." Anybody who won't wait until you're married just wants to fuck you and only says that he loves you in order to have "his evil way with you". There was nothing that I could do to convince her that my passion came from my love for her. Nothing.

I sipped my beer and she sipped her drink. But I decided to have a go anyway.

"You don't understand the strain I was under. There I was getting excited, getting my passions aroused, for want of a better description. And I was supposed to control it. I was supposed to hold it all inside and not rape you. And I did it." I smiled a thin smile, "Oh you'll never know just how close you came to being raped. Just how thin my control was at times. And there's not a court in the land that would convict me of rape if I had."

"You got your kicks out of frustrating and humiliating me. Out of deliberately getting me sexually excited and then denying me my orgasm. Denying me what you dam well made sure you got every time. You made sure you came and made doubly sure that I didn't. How long did you think I could put up with that?"

I looked up at her and she looked me straight in the eye.

"You did what you did because you wanted you to," she said. "You did it because you thought I'd eventually succumb to your desires and have sex with you."

I wanted to say to her that I'd never made any secret of my desire for her. That I'd never lied, nor tried to trick her. That I had wanted to make love to her because I'd loved her and getting my own pleasure was less important than giving her her's. That I was not ashamed of my feelings. That I wasn't guilty about wanting her. That every time I made love to her I was saying "I love you." That the more pleasure that I tried to give meant that I loved her more and more. That the physical love making was just a symbol of the real and deeply felt love I

had for her. But that, no matter how hard I wanted to, I couldn't keep giving myself to someone who couldn't tell me that she felt the same. Who couldn't act as if she loved me. I wanted to stress that my feelings were normal, legitimate feelings, that they were nothing to be ashamed of. To tell her that loads of people felt what I felt. I wanted to tell her and explain everything. But I couldn't even try.

"That's right," I looked away. "And when I no longer wanted to make love to you and get nothing back I stopped. And then you stopped even pretending to be interested in having a relationship with me."

I toyed with the pull ring on the can of beer, but didn't open it. I thought that I should get up and leave, but didn't. I thought I should say something else, but didn't know what.

So I just sat there, playing with the can of beer and looking at the carpet. And Alexandra sat beside me probably trying to decide to leave or to think of something to say and coming up with nothing either.

Then once again my fascination with clichés and stereotypes came to my rescue. A phrase she'd just used stood out in my mind.

"So you thought that I was trying to make you 'succumb to my desires'?" I looked at her.

She shrugged and looked away.

"And what about your desires?" I asked.

She looked back to me. "What?"

"What about your desire for me?" I asked. "You invited me back to your place. You wanted to get physically intimate with me. You knew, at least after the first couple of sessions, that I'd make you come. You wanted to have your 'good time' or your 'cheap trill' or whatever you'd describe it as. I didn't force my way into your flat and rape you. You wanted me there."

She said nothing.

"Was it some kind of test?" I smiled. "Did I not give enough? Was I not man enough for you? Was I supposed to force myself on you, even though every time I asked you said "no"? Did you want me to rape you?"

"That is disgusting, Kevin," her voice was ice cold. "How could you say such a thing?"

I looked away. "One part of me thinks that you really don't know what you did to me. Another says that I got just what I deserved," I shrugged. "And yet another says that you are a shit faced little pervert who gets her kicks out of humiliating and degrading men." I looked at her, "Which is the truth?"

She said nothing and I went back to toying with the can of beer.

"Listen, we both said some things that we really didn't mean," she smiled at me.

I shrugged.

"I still want to be your friend," she said.

I slowly shook my head, "We can't be friends, ."

"What did I ever do to you that was so bad?" she started to shout. Then noticed that people were looking at us and stopped.

I opened my mouth to answer, but couldn't think of anything to say. After all I'd said already, what could I say?

There was silence for a moment. I can't remember if there was much background conversation from the other people in the room, but I think we had definitely become the centre of attention.

"Did I really treat you so badly?" she smiled at me.

I nearly exploded on the spot. "Do the words cruel and heartless mean anything to you?" I said it as bitterly as I felt it.

"Don't be silly," she sipped her drink.

"Silly," I considered the word. "Silly?"

I looked at her and she looked away.

"Silly means stupid. Doesn't it?" I paused a moment. "Well I guess falling in love with you

was the stupidest thing I've ever done in my life."

She looked up at me.

"So I guess I was being silly," I shrugged.

She said nothing as I opened the can of beer. I took a gulp from the can and swallowed it noisily. We sat there for a few minutes, saying nothing but unwilling to leave.

Alexandra tried another gambit, "You've just got a distorted memory of the whole affair."

"Oh I remember it well," I was very angry now. "I remember that all I wanted was an easy lay. I remember that all I wanted was to go out and have a good time. I remember that every time you mentioned love I changed the subject. Every time you mentioned being closer together I mentioned breaking up. Every time you mentioned marriage I talked about divorce."

I could see the pressure building up inside her. But I was on a roll and wasn't going to stop. "I admit that all I was interested in was fucking you. That as soon as I came I couldn't get rid of you fast enough. Once I finished fucking you, once I'd got what I wanted, I couldn't kick you out of my flat quickly enough.

"I remember getting a great kick thinking of you walking home alone in the early hours of the night," I was going over the top, but months of frustration couldn't be turned off that easily. "And I remember the ego trip I was on when you kept coming back for more. When you kept coming back and telling me that you loved me and I kept rubbing your face in the shit."

She opened her mouth to try to answer me, but I was shouting at her now. "I'd despair for weeks on end, ignoring your telephone calls and not returning your messages. And when I came back you'd profess your love for me and tell me how much you'd missed me. Just like the complete and utter asshole that I treated you as."

I had to pause to take a breath and she jumped in. "It wasn't like that," she was totally frustrated and close to tears.

"I know it wasn't like that, ," I just didn't give a shit how she felt. "I was there. Remember? I was on the end of all your..." I tried to find a word, and came up with, "BULLSHIT!" After all the months I'd rehearsed it and called her everything from a "Fuck-faced little cunt" to a "Prick teasing pervert, who gets her kicks out of humiliating and degrading other people" all I could come up with when the time came was "Bullshit". Now that was humiliating.

"I didn't treat you like that," there were tears running down her face.

My anger had been vented, but there was still a lot of bitterness left. "Oh... just go and fuck yourself."

I stood up and walked out. There wasn't a sound in the room. Twenty five people stood around looking shocked and embarrassed. And I felt that once again I'd made a fool of myself over .

In the kitchen I found Jasmine and a few other people tucking into the food.

"Is everything alright?" she asked, an Au d'oeuvre in one hand and a glass of wine in the other. "It seems to have gone awfully quite in there."

I headed for the fridge. "I need another beer," I avoided looking at anyone.

"Don't you think you've had enough?" she ate the o d'oeuvre in one bite.

I stopped, the door of the fridge half open and spent a moment cooling down. I felt like getting really pissed.

"Yeah, your right," I closed the fridge door and walked over to the drinks. "A vodka'd be better."

As I poured myself a generous helping I could feel Jasmine looking at me. I raised the glass to my lips and she came over to me.

"What happened?" she asked.

"We argued," I replied. "What did you expect?"

## Alexandra

"You didn't talk about your differences?" she took the glass from my hands and sipped.

"It's impossible to talk to her," I said. But I couldn't help smiling at the face Jasmine made at sipping neat vodka.

"Sometimes I think I don't understand you," she handed the drink back to me.

I took a large sip.

"But it doesn't last long," she continued.

I looked at her for a moment. "Is this about Alexandra or the vodka?" I asked.

She smiled and started to move away. "I must circulate," she replied.

I watched her go, bemused, but reassured. And I hadn't even known that I needed reassurance. I put the drink down and headed for the bathroom. Strangely enough when I got there it was free. As I washed my hands I decided to call it a night. I just couldn't face the remainder of the party.

Crossing the landing at the top of the stairs I heard a couple of people in the hall below.

"Trust Jasmine to lay on some juicy entertainment," a woman said.

"Yes," another replied as they closed the door. "But wasn't he her latest boyfriend?"

"Is that all my life is to you?" I asked the empty air. "Just a juicy piece of entertainment?" But I was too pissed off to bother getting bitter. I felt I'd already had enough of that to last a life time.

So I walked on to the bedroom, opened the door and found a couple of tangled bodies on the bed.

When I'm drunk I get aggressive. And when I'm tired I get aggressive. But when I'm drunk and tired I just can't be bothered.

I switched on the lights and they froze.

"Hey!" a man's head untangled itself and looked in my direction. "What do you think you're doing?"

"I'm kicking you out of my bed so I can get to sleep," I put an edge in my voice, but I really didn't want the hassle.

"Oh," he got embarrassed. "Right."

They moved apart and started to readjust their clothing.

"Sorry," the woman's face was red, embarrassment, heat of the moment or too much blusher? Who knows?

She pulled up her tights and panties and straightened her dress. The man zipped up his fly, pulled up his tie and stuck his shirt inside his trousers. The woman found one shoe and started to panic when she couldn't see the other. The man put on his jacket and started towards the door, but stopped when he saw that the woman wasn't coming with him.

I walked over to the bottom of the bed and picked up her other shoe. I said nothing as I handed it to her.

"Sorry," she went a deeper shade of red. She quickly slipped it on and almost ran out of the room. The man wasn't far behind.

I sat on the bed and stared at nothing. The noise of the party continued all around. I could feel the silence of the bedroom press down on me. But I couldn't face seeing anyone.

Then there was a soft knock on the door. I looked up, but didn't answer. The knock came again. If I said nothing I was sure that whoever it was would leave.

"Are you in there?" Alexandra's whisper came through the door. She tried the handle. I'd not locked the door and she slowly pushed it open and stepped inside.

I looked at her.

We said nothing for a moment.

I looked away. "What do you want, Alexandra?"

"I don't know," she paused. "But I can't leave you like this."

"Why not?" I could feel tears beginning to build in my eyes. "It's too late to make me believe that you have any feelings for me now."

"But I have feelings for you," she stepped closer.

"No, Alexandra," I shook my head. "I wanted you to want me. I wanted you..." I ran out of words.

"Do you really love me?" her voice was a horse whisper.

I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. I looked at her in disbelief. After all I'd said and done she could still ask that question.

"No, Alexandra," I looked away again. "After what you did to me, how could I?"

Silence for a moment. Then, "I think I really love you." and she was gone.

I sat, looking at the closed door for a few minutes. Had I heard her right? Did she actually say that? What did she mean it? And why had she left?

My tears started to flow then. I don't know why I cried. I don't know for how long. I just lay on the bed and buried my head in the pillow. The party noise was a background haze behind the ringing in my ears and the sting in my eyes. It gradually got quieter. And as the music was switched off I fell into a frustrated and restless sleep.

# 14

I woke up in Jasmine's arms, with a hangover.

I moaned.

"Oh, sleeping beauty awakes," Jasmine replied.

Ignoring her sarcasm I rolled onto my back. She followed me to lie on her side, with her right arm under my head and her left arm and leg over me. I could feel her pubic hair brush against my hip and I felt myself stirring.

"What time is it?" I asked.

"Just over an hour and a half till I have to leave," she nuzzled the top of my head.

"An hour and a half," I echoed, feeling the dryness in my mouth. I knew what she wanted, and what I wanted too. "Just let me get a drink of water," I started to get up.

Jasmine reached over me, stopping me from getting out of bed, and took a mug from the bedside table, "Try this."

I took it from her, smiling, "You're so thoughtful, Jasmine." I took a gulp. "Must be why I love you." At the mention of the word "love" a picture of Alexandra flashed in my mind.

Jasmine watched me in silence as I knocked back the water in a couple of mouthfuls.

Putting the mug back on the table I asked, "So did I get drunk and make a fool of myself again?"

Jasmine reached between my legs, pressing the palm of her hand against my penis and massaging my testicles with her fingers. "I'm horny," she said. "I haven't got any since yesterday afternoon." She lent close so I could feel her breath against my ear, "If you don't service me soon I'll have to go elsewhere to get what I need."

She was beginning to get a reaction from her physical manipulations and I knew she was adding some mental ones to quicken and deepen the response.

I reached over to her. "So you're dying from want of satisfaction, are you?" I pushed my fingers along the length of her slit and hooked the tips into her vagina.

She gasped.

I pushed further inside her and pressed hard on her clitoris with my thumb.

She squeezed back hard in response. "Hey! not so rough," she hissed.

"I'm sorry," I eased the pressure and kissed her softly. "Just a flash of jealousy and possessiveness," I nuzzled her neck.

She spread her legs wider and I continued my probing at a gentler pace. We lay down, she on her back, I on my side, as we continued to rub each other. She matched the rhythm of her hand on me with mine on her.

Soon I rolled on top of her. She wrapped her legs around me and moved her hands to squeeze my bottom. I pushed mine under her shoulders and lifted her towards me. We spent the next three-quarters of an hour lazily rocking back and forward together. It's a delicious way to get rid of a hangover.

After breakfast, as we sat and finished our coffee, Jasmine dropped a bombshell. She banged her cup onto her saucer. I looked up from the paper at the sharp noise.

"You know for the last month, ever since my birthday party," she said, "you've been getting

drunk all the time."

It was the truth so I said nothing.

"Is there something wrong, Kevin?" she asked.

"Not really," I shrugged.

She continued to probe, "Is it something to do with Alex?"

"I..." I really couldn't tell, "...think so. But I don't really know what."

"Has she been on your mind?" she asked

"Yes," I admitted.

"And you feel guilty about thinking of her," Jasmine concluded.

"Shit! Jasmine," I felt angry that it was so bad that she'd noticed, but also relieved that she had. "She fucked me about, something really bad." I looked at Jasmine, "I don't want that bitch to come between us."

She stood up and came around the table to hug me. "Neither do I, Kevin," she whispered in my ear. "Neither do I."

A couple of days later she explained her solution to me, again after breakfast.

"I'm going to have a dinner party, Kevin," she announced.

I had just started to clear away the dishes. "A dinner party?" I looked at her.

"Yes." She nodded and smiled, "I've already invited a couple of people. And you can invite Paul and his new girlfriend."

"Geraldine," I supplied the name of his girlfriend."

"Yes," she handed me her dishes, "Paul and Geraldine. They'll make up the numbers nicely."

"I'm sure they'll be glad to know they're invited to make up the numbers," I started to stack the dishes in the sink.

"It was a joke," she stood beside me.

"I know it was a joke," I gave her a hug.

She looked away. "There's something else," she said.

"Oh," I looked at her. "What?"

"Alex will be coming," she seemed nervous at my reaction.

"Alexandra?" I said. "I didn't think she'd ever want to see me again." I got suspicious, "You did mention that I'd be here." Then another thought struck me.

But Jasmine read my mind and interrupted, "Yes, you will be there." She smiled, "At least I hope you will, because I told Alex you would be."

I ran some water into the sink. "And how did she react when you told her?" I squirted in some washing up liquid and started to wash the dishes.

"She didn't say much," she took her jacket from the back of a chair and put it on. "But I think she is interested in seeing you again."

"And what do you think of that," I didn't look at her.

She sighed. "I think she's as interested in you as you are in her," she said.

I looked at her. "Is that good or bad?" I smiled.

She stepped close to me. "We'll see," she smiled back and kissed me. "See you tonight." She headed for the front door.

"Have a nice day!" I called after her.

"I will," she closed the front door behind her and I was alone in the house.

Alone with my thoughts of Alexandra. Shit! Why did the bitch have to resurface, just as I was beginning to forget all about her? And why did Jasmine seem to want us to be together again? No, that wasn't true. I was sure Jasmine wanted me for herself. But why did she keep dragging Alexandra back into our lives?

I mulled these thoughts over and over in my head for the next week, as the dinner party crept closer and closer.

On the night of the dinner Jasmine came home early. I'd been preparing the food all day. The lasagna was ready to be put in the oven, as were the potatoes for baking. The salad was tossed and dressed and the eggs were cooling in anticipation of the mayonnaise.



As she came into the living room and dropped her jacket onto a chair, I came out of the kitchen, whipping my hands in a towel. I looked at her and she look back. An overwhelming urge to possess her came over me. I dropped the towel and pulled my t-shirt off. She pulled her skirt down and started to unbutton her blouse as she came towards me. We met in the middle of the room half naked and hungry for each other.

We ended up on the sofa. I was completely naked. Jasmine still had on her blouse and stockings. I had my left arm around her and my right on her stomach. She was leaning against me, her head on my shoulder. We both watched the fire blaze as the afterglow of our love making died away.

"So why are you so keen for me to see Alexandra again?" I whispered in her ear.

She didn't say anything for a moment, then moved around to half face me. "Because you talk about her in your sleep," she kissed me on the cheek.

"I do?" I brushed her lips with mine.

She nodded.

"What do I say about her?" I looked down and moved my hand from her stomach to her breast.

"You talk about her breasts," she put her arm around my neck.

"I like breasts," I ran my thumb across her nipple. "I love yours."

"And you talk about her hair," she smiled.

"Her hair?" I put my left hand to the back of her head.

Her smile widened, "Her body hair."

"Yeah," I remembered her body. "I've often wondered if that's why she was so insecure about getting naked with me."

"I think she probably wanted to remain a virgin," she kissed my shoulder.

I said nothing for a moment. "And it bothers you that I dream about her?"

She ran her hand across my chest. "Do you like body hair?"

I shrugged, "It doesn't bother me either way."

She smiled skeptically.

"No I mean it," I spread my fingers across her breast. "It's all a part of being an individual. Each person's body is different." I kissed her on the lips, "I like different things."

"Mmmm," she smiled.

"I mean," I looked down at my hand on her breast. "You've got nicer nipples."

"Huh?" she looked down as well.

"You've got pink nipples," I explained. "She had brown. I prefer pink, but that didn't bother me much. They both taste the same."

"What?" she looked back up at me.

"What I mean is that yours taste of you and her's taste of her," I noticed that I was showing signs of arousal. "That you taste nice when I'm making love to you."

She snuggled a little closer, "Why taste?"

"Because usually I have my glasses off," I started to massage her breast. "And usually have my eyes closed." I smiled, "And when you use your mouth you taste the things you're licking and sucking."

She ran her hand down my body and lightly caressed the tip of my erection. "And do we taste the same all over." She looked down at my lap.

"You have a lighter fresher taste," I nuzzled her ear. "She had a heaver taste." I ran my hand down her body and discovered she was as aroused as I was.

I smiled at her and she smiled back as she moved over to sit across me.

"So once again," I whispered hoarsely as she sank down. "You've used the sordid details of my past love life as an aphrodisiac."

She smiled as I pushed into her. "It worked, didn't it."

## Alexandra

Paul and Geraldine were the first of our guests to arrive. I'd never met Geraldine before and she took my breath away as Paul introduced her.

She was a few inches shorter than me and was wearing a green polo-neck jumper, with a short, black skirt with black tights and shoes. Her blond hair was cut short and parted on the left, but its boyish cut only served to emphasize her femininity.

"Nice to meet you, Kevin," she smiled. "I've heard so much about you."

"I've been looking forward to meeting you to," I replied as I took her coat.

Jasmine came out from the kitchen and ushered her into the living room.

As I took Paul's coat I nudged him, "Nice one, Paul." I added a hint of mock jealousy to my voice.

"Look who's talking," he smiled and turned to follow the women through.

The next to arrive were Sam and Samantha. A couple Jasmine knew from her old tennis club. They were both about the same height, the same color blond hair and when anybody said "Sam" they both looked around. He had blue eyes, but she had green. They were almost like twins, in that their movements complemented each other. Childhood sweethearts that still loved each other. They were beautiful people and spent the whole night disagreeing with each other. But in the nicest possible way.

Then Alexandra arrived and my adrenalin started to pound. She brought with her the proverbial tall, dark and handsome stranger. She introduced him as Bill. And I almost laughed. It seemed such an ordinary name for such a sophisticated looking fellow.

I didn't have much chance to speak to any of them, as Jasmine is a hopeless cook and I was doing all the cooking. So while she poured them drinks and engaged them conversation I hurried around the kitchen putting all the last minute touches to the food.

The dinner went as smooth as anybody could wish. The conversation ebbed and flowed from subject to subject, from heated discussion to mutual agreement. It wasn't until coffee that anything happened.

I had taken the dirty dishes and gone back into the kitchen for the coffee. As I stacked the dishes beside the sink Alexandra walked in.

"Washing up," She smiled. "I'd never have expected it of you."

"That doesn't surprise me," I meant that she never took the time to get to know me so how could she know enough not to be surprised by anything I did.

"What does that mean?" the smile disappeared from her face.

"Oh, nothing," I didn't want to start another argument with her.

She looked down, "Don't you want to talk to me?"

"I'm just surprised that you want to talk to me," I'd said it before I realized what I was saying. But it felt good any way.

"I'd always talk to you," she replied.

"Yeah," I admitted. "But not about what I wanted to talk about."

"Now what does that mean?" she smiled.

I shrugged. "That we have always had a communications problem," I suggested. "Otherwise why would you have had to ask me what I meant twice in the last minute?"

"I didn't..." she stopped, took a deep breath, then started again. "You don't explain yourself properly."

"Maybe," I conceded. "But you never asked me to explain myself. Even when I knew that you had misunderstood what I had said I didn't try to explain because you showed absolutely no interest in understanding me."

She opened her mouth to reply, but I continued, "You never once asked me what I meant, what I was trying to say. You never once wanted to understand me."

She took half a step towards me. Raised her hand, her mouth still open, then stopped and swallowed.

"Why didn't you say this before?" she finally asked.

"Because every time I talked about us being together, you talked about us breaking up," I didn't like the way this conversation was going.

She looked down, "I guess I just didn't believe what you said you felt for me." She looked up, "But I believe you now, Kevin."

I looked at her for a moment, then sighed, "Now that I no longer love you, you believe that I do." I looked down, "But when I did love you, you wouldn't accept it."

"I couldn't, Kevin," she said. "I just wasn't ready for that type of love."

"Well..." I shrugged. "It's too late now, Alexandra. I'm living with Jasmine."

"Yes, but do you love her?" she took a step towards me.

I looked up at her with hate in my eyes, "Of course I fucking love her. I wouldn't fucking tell her that I did if I didn't."

She stopped, unsure what to do or say next.

I said nothing as I calmed down. I knew she'd hit a nerve by the intensity of my reaction. But I didn't want her to know.

"Listen Alexandra," I said a minute or so later. "Let's just accept that we're incompatible. You can't be honest with me and you can't accept that I'm honest with you. If I tell you something it's because I believe that it's true." I shook my head, "it's not the same for you."

"So do I," she stated. "I didn't lie to you!"

I smiled slightly, "No, Alexandra, you lied to yourself. And if you can't be honest with yourself, how can I expect you to be honest with me?"

"I don't lie to myself," she said. But I could see a flicker of doubt in her eyes.

"You can't be honest with yourself, so you can't accept that I'm honest with myself," I explained. "Or by extension with you." I leant forward, "It's not just lying to somebody. it's expressing your true feelings." I clenched my fists, "What you really feel. What you really want."

She looked down again, "What if you didn't know what they were?"

"Then you could have at least listened to what I said," I explained. "And believed me."

"Why didn't you just explain what you meant then?" she looked up at me.

"If you tell a lie to someone and they don't believe you, you can always tell another lie, and maybe they'll believe that," I looked down. "But when you tell the truth to someone and they don't believe you," I shrugged, "Well then you're fucked."

"What do you mean?" she was getting upset.

"Like when I told you that I loved you and you said 'Don't be silly, Kevin'," I remember the hurt even now, the whole bottom of my world suddenly falling out. "What was I supposed to say? Was I supposed to say 'no I was lying. All I really want to do is fuck you'? Was I supposed to beg you to believe me?" I really was desperate to understand. "I mean, what did I ever do to you to make you hate me so?"

"I don't hate you, Kevin," her mascara was beginning to run.

I snorted. "Well you sure have a funny way of showing that you love me."

There was silence for a moment then she whispered softly, "I think I really do love you."

My heart jumped and once again I felt as if the bottom had fallen out of my world. I gripped the edge of the sink and took a deep breath. Then I took another.

Jasmine walked in and the tension snapped.

"So what are you two love birds up to in here? Bill is beginning to get suspicious." She smiled at us.

"I have to go to the bathroom," Alexandra ran out into the hall and up the stairs.

Jasmine looked at me for a few moments, then asked, "Are you alright, Kevin?"

"Yeah," I nodded, my heart beat returning to normal. "I just need a glass of water." I picked up a glass from the draining board and ran the cold water.

"Are you sure?" she stepped closer.

"Yeah," I filled the glass and turned off the water. "Just give me a minute."

"OK," she looked at me for another moment, then she went back into the dining room.

## Alexandra

I drained the glass, filled it and drained it again. Then taking a couple of deep breaths went back into the dining room with the coffee.

I don't suppose that I was much of a conversationalist for the rest of the evening. But nobody seemed to mind. I just sat back and let the flow of conversation wash over me, all the time tearing my eyes from Alexandra, yet always finding myself looking at her again.

Sam and Samantha were the first to leave, as they had to relieve their babysitter. Then Paul and Geraldine had to go, as he had an early start in the morning. Jasmine went to escort them out, Bill was in the bathroom, which left me and Alexandra alone again.

We looked at each other for a few moments as the sound of Jasmine helping Paul and Geraldine on with their coats filtered in from the hall. I couldn't remember what the conversation we had been having had been, so I couldn't continue it with Alexandra. And I couldn't think of anything else to talk about.

"I want to see you again," Alexandra broke the silence.

Jasmine opened the front door and Paul and Geraldine's voices faded as they went out.

"What about Bill?" I asked.

"He's just a friend," she smiled. "There's nothing between us."

As Jasmine closed the front door I heard Bill come down the stairs.

"I don't know, Alexandra," I couldn't look at her.

She stood and took a step towards me. Then Bill and Jasmine walked in.

"It's time we were leaving, as well," Bill announced.

"Yes," Alexandra turned to Jasmine. "It was a lovely evening." Then back to me, "And to you as well, Kevin. I didn't know you were so domesticated."

We all smiled at each other. Then Jasmine and I ushered them out, but I felt no relief.

Jasmine put her arms around me as I closed the door behind them. "Let's leave the washing up till tomorrow," she whispered.

"Yes," I turned and snuggled closer to her.

She held me for a long time without saying anything. Then I took a deep breath and straightened up. "Come on," I looked into her eyes for a moment. Then I took her hand and led her up stairs.

We didn't say anything as we took our turns in the bathroom. Then as I lay in bed watching her undress I let her know what was on my mind.

"Alexandra asked to see me again," I said.

Jasmine stopped unbuttoning her blouse, then continued and draped it across the back of her chair before asking, "And do you want to see her?"

"I don't think that it would be a good idea," I replied.

"Why not?" she took off her bra.

"Because I think we'd end up having sex with each other," I looked away.

She didn't say anything for a moment. "You want to have sex with her?"

"She's an attractive woman, Jasmine," I explained. "On a more base level I want to have sex with every woman I find attractive." I looked at her and smiled, "Of course I don't do anything about it, being a civilized man in control of my base desires."

She smiled back and unzipped her skirt.

"But then there's all these left over emotions knocking around my head for her," I added.

She folded her skirt and put it across the arm of the chair. "So you'd end up giving in to temptation with her?"

"I don't know," I sighed. "But I used to want it so badly and now she wants it as well. What do you think?"

She put her left foot up on the chair and rolled down her stocking. Then repeated the action with her right leg. She rested her elbow on her knee then turned to look at me with just her bikini briefs on. "You know," she said thoughtfully. "I don't believe that I'm the least bit jealous of her."

She took her foot down and pulled her briefs off. "But there is just one thing," she came to the bed and pulled back the covers.

"I want to share my bed with you," she kissed me lightly as she climbed in beside me. "But I'm not going to share it with her as well."

"What does that mean?" I rolled onto my back and ran my hands along her as she settled beside me.

"It means go and meet with her," She ran her thigh up my legs and across my abdomen. "Find out any way you can what you still mean to each other."

I snorted, knowing that I never meant very much to Alexandra. Yet almost immediately another part of me said that I did, and another remembered what she had meant to me.

"OK find out what she means to you then," she reached across me and toyed with my nipple. "Find out if you really love her. Because I don't want to share you with her."

I hugged her close. "You know that given the choice I'd always pick you over her."

"Yes," she whispered as she began to rock her body against mine. "But you'd always wonder if you'd made the best choice. I don't want that edge of uncertainty under our relationship."

"I've made my choice, Jasmine," I could feel my erection growing against the inside of her thigh.

"Now prove to yourself that you made the right one," she moved her body down and rubbed against it. "Let her show you what she has to offer."

I didn't have much choice in anything at that particular moment. Just go with the flow, Kevin, I said to myself. If you can't control them, then just lie back and enjoy the manipulations.

# 15

And that's how on the Friday of the following week I ended up going out for dinner with Alexandra. It hadn't been so bad phoning her to arrange it. She'd actually been in when I called and there were no awkward moments, no heated exchange of views or accusations of betrayal. It was just : "Yes, I want to go out with you." "A meal? That sounds lovely." "Friday night's OK" "Outside Eason's at seven thirty." "Great talking to you again." "And the same to you. Goodbye." and the phone was hung up.

So once again I found myself standing in O'Connell St. on a Friday night, waiting for Alexandra to show up. Wondering if she'd even show. But I needn't have worried. She was even on time. Just as the clock chimed the half hour she came around the corner from Abbey St.

She was wearing a blue silk blouse and a long black skirt. Her hair was tied back in a pony tail. And she'd a bag over her left shoulder and a jacket folded across her arm. As she came up to me and smiled I had to resist an impulse to put my arms around her and hug her. She looked so beautiful that I very nearly couldn't make myself stop.

"Hi," she said.

"Hi," I replied.

We looked at each other for a few seconds.

"Emm," I smiled to break the tension. "I thought we might go for a meal."

"That sounds nice," she smiled back. "How about a Chinese?"

"That's just what I was going to suggest," I said. "I thought maybe the Ming Court, down the bottom of Dame St."

"I've never been there," she replied. "Is it good."

"It's brilliant," I assured her. "I've been there several times and it has always been good."

We started to walk and I felt like putting my arm around her or holding her hand. The desire to touch her just kept building. I knew that I'd have to give into it sooner or later, so I decided to get it over with.

She was going straight down O'Connell St. to cross at O'Connell Bridge. So I put my hand to her shoulder and half turned to go up Abbey St. "Let's go up this way," I tried to ignore the feeling of her silk blouse against her skin. "and we can turn up Liffey St. and cross at the Halfpenny bridge."

"OK" she turned to follow my lead and I had to make a conscious effort of will to take my hand from her shoulder.

We walked for a while in silence. The I asked, "So did you have a good week in work?"

"Oh, don't talk about it, Kevin," she rolled her eyes upwards. "My boss was in a foul mood. Not just today, but the whole blasted week. Nothing I did was good enough for him! He's such a bastard."

"Yeah," I laughed. "But did he sign your pay cheque."

She snorted, "That's the only dam reason I'm going in on Monday, I tell you."

"So what was he bugged about?" I asked.

"Oh, there's this big property deal he's involved with that looks as if it's going down the

drain and he's going to lose an absolute fortune if it does." She smiled, "Serve him right if he does, the greedy little sod."

"A ha!," I exclaimed. "So you really love your boss, then."

She smiled up at me. "He's not too bad, as long as you can keep out of his way until five O'clock."

"Well as long as you enjoy your work so much," I smiled and looked away.

"Speaking of work," she looked up at me. "How's the writing coming along?"

"Oh it's great," I replied. "I've got over thirty thousand words written."

"Really," she nodded. "And how many chapters is that?"

"Well," I explained. "There are nineteen chapters in the novel. And I've finished four of them. In fact I'm just about to finish chapter seventeen."

"Thirty thousand words in four chapters," she shook her head. "That's a lot." She looked up at me again, "And if there's nineteen chapters in the whole novel that's..."

"Oh no," I interrupted. "It doesn't work like that. The biggest chapter has only six and a half thousand words in it. Most of it is in unfinished chapters."

"Unfinished chapters," she smiled. "Like the unfinished symphony?"

"Well," I smiled back. "I intend to live long enough to finish them, and quite a few more novels as well!"

She thought for a moment, "So if you're just about to finish chapter seventeen, how come you only have four complete?"

"That's because I don't write sequentially," I saw a question forming on her face and tried to explain. "What I mean is that I write it scene by scene, but all the scenes don't match up while I'm writing."

She smiled broadly, "Do they match up when you've finished?"

"Well," I smiled back. "That's where the art comes into it." I found my hand was in her's and couldn't think how it got there. "As I was going to explain," I continued. "What happens is that I get... I don't know, like a vision in my head of say two characters walking along the road, hand in hand talking to each other. And then from that I realize that later that same day, say when they're making love to each other, one of them remembers something that the other said when they were walking along hand in hand and I skip to that part of the story and write that conversation."

"Is there lots of love making in this novel," she asked.

"Oh, a little," I replied. "Like every chapter."

"Is this the novel you said you were putting me in?" she asked.

"That's right," I smiled. "I make you out to be this mean, viscous little bitch."

"Only a little bitch?" she smiled back.

"Well actually," I conceded. "Quite a bitch."

"I want to be the super bitch of all time," she said.

"But then nobody will know that it is you in my novel," I replied.

She looked up at me, "Oh don't worry, Kevin. Lots of people think I'm a bitch."

"Yeah," I agreed smiling. "But I didn't use your real name."

"Why not?" she demanded.

"Because you'd sue my balls off," I replied.

"No I wouldn't," she said. "I want to be famous." She looked up at me. "That is," she added, "if it turns out to be a best seller."

"Oh don't worry about that," I assured her. "I have every intention that it will." I smiled, "I mean why else would I put in all those sex scenes."

"And am I any good at it?" she smiled up at me.

"You blow his fucking mind, Alexandra!" I looked deep into her eyes.

She smiled back. Then her face became mischievous and she squeezed my hand, "Yeah, but do I blow anything else?"

I laughed and squeezed back, accepting her challenge. "Eventually, maybe you do, Alexandra!" I replied. "I haven't written that part yet."

We'd arrived at the restaurant. I opened the door for her. As she walked by she looked at me out of the corner of her eye and said, "Maybe you'll get some inspiration tonight!"

I laughed as I followed her inside.

A waiter sprang on us immediately, "Table for two, Sir?"

"Err, yes," I replied.

As we followed him to the back of the restaurant Alexandra looked over her shoulder and winked at me.

I stepped close to her, putting my hand on her shoulder and asked, "What was that for?"

"You just sounded so masterful, Kevin," she smiled back.

"Yeah," I replied drily. "That's me all over."

We sat down and took the menus from the waiter. As I scanned the starters I realized I was starving. We didn't say much until the waiter returned and took our orders.

As we waited for our food we chatted about this and that, while munching our way through a plate full of prawn crackers. Mostly we talked about films we'd both seen, or gave graphic descriptions about how good the films that the other had missed were. We seemed to have liked all the same films, but for completely different reasons.

Then the soup arrived and my conversation dwindled as I began to eat. Even though most of my attention was on my food I could still feel Alexandra's presence across the table as if a great heat was radiating from her. I was beginning to consciously feel attracted to her again. I kept looking up at her, just in time to see her glance away from me.

As soon as we'd knocked back the soup we started in on a conversation about food. About how the food here was good. About other good restaurants we'd been to, and restaurants to avoid. Then we realized that we'd never had a meal out together before and the conversation dried up.

Then the main course arrived and our lack of conversation was covered. The food was so delicious that it we were nearly finished the meal before we got down to the nitty gritty conversation.

"So Alexandra, what do you want from me?" I scooped up some noodles and sucked them into my mouth.

"I'm sorry?" Alexandra tilted her head in question.

I chewed quickly and swallowed. "After this long break in our relationship, what do you expect to get from talking to me now?"

She thought for a moment, then asked, "What did you hope to get from chasing after me when we broke up?"

I toyed with the idea of telling her that it was me who broke up with her, but it would only have started an argument. Then decided to be truthful, "Forgiveness."

"What?" she didn't know if she was supposed to smile or not. "Is that a joke?" she decided to smile.

"No," I took a deep breath. "I felt guilty about the way I thought I'd used you. And I didn't trust my own feelings enough to believe that I'd made the right decision in breaking up with you." I shrugged, "And I still loved you."

This time she did smile, "Which one was it?"

I smiled back, "All of them." I waved my hand beside my head, "All mixed up inside, with a whole load of other things, all sloshing into each other."

She ate a mouthful of her dinner and I ate some of mine.

When she'd finished chewing she asked, "Why guilty?"

I swallowed. "Because I thought I'd used you and I didn't think the fact that you'd used me balanced it out," I pinched another scoop full of noodles in my chopsticks. "Then I decided



that you'd used me more than I'd used you and I wanted revenge," I ate the noodles.

She sat back and watched me chew.

"Do you still want to marry me?" she asked softly and looked away.

I smiled and swallowed. "No."

"Why not?" She quickly added, "I mean what made you change your mind."

I shrugged again, "You said no." I thought for a moment. "But more importantly you didn't take my proposal seriously."

"For someone who tries to be so funny you seem to want to be taken very seriously," she observed.

"The jokes are just a defense mechanism," I replied. "Underneath everybody wants to be taken seriously."

"And do you think you took me seriously?" she smiled.

"I would have given anything," I answered, "done anything for you."

"You would have given anything to have sex with me," she said.

"I did have sex with you, Alexandra," it was my turn to smile. "And you were the worst lay I've ever had."

Her eyes boiled.

"But then," I shrugged. "I've only ever had sex with a few people, so it's not really a valid comparison."

She fought to control her anger.

"Maybe those people were better than average," I added as an explanation.

"It takes two to tango," she looked at me.

I nodded. "That's what I keep reassuring myself with. And that maybe you're just not a responsive as... say Jasmine. Maybe I gave you just as good orgasms as I give her, but you just kept it all inside." I shrugged.

"And that's another reason I tried to get together with you," I spoke before she could reply. "My macho ego wouldn't accept that my powers at making love hadn't totally subdued you."

She thought for a moment. "Is that why you made love to me? To subdue me?"

"Partly it was about procession," I admitted. "About conquering you on some level." I smiled at the memories. "And when you were lying helpless in my arms you were all mine."

"So all you wanted was to conquer me!" she snapped. "What happened to all this sharing and equality crap?"

"Isn't conquering the other person what love is all about?" I asked. "Isn't that what all the songs say. I want to be your baby. I want you to be mine, together, forever, for all time."

"Bullshit! All you wanted was another conquest," she dropped her knife and fork onto her plate.

"You've had a lot more boyfriends than I've had girlfriends," I kept my voice level. "You tell me how you're supposed to keep score. I've always been in love when I've dated."

"Ha!" she glared at me.

I scooped up another mouthful of noodles and didn't reply. I'd eaten another few mouthfuls before she spoke to me.

"I'm sorry," she almost whispered. "I know that you wanted more than a one night stand."

"I wanted to marry you," I looked up at her. "To share my life with you. To have kids and grow old with you."

I looked at her for a moment. She looked down at her plate. Then I slowly finished my meal in silence.

"You only ever wanted one thing, Alexandra," I placed my chopsticks on the plate and pushed it away from me.

"Oh Yeah," She looked up. "And what was that?"

I shrugged, "To go out and have a good time."

"And what's wrong with that," she snapped. "Not every relationship has to lead to

marriage."

"Yeah, but you were having all the fun and I was getting all the frustration," I replied.

She looked angry, but didn't say anything.

"I know, I know," I looked down. "It was my own fault for falling in love with you." I half smiled, "I should have been more considerate."

"And what does that mean?" she growled.

I sighed. "It was supposed to be another joke. You know, to break the tension."

"You never told many jokes," she cooled down a bit.

"Yes I did," I replied. "You just never noticed."

There was silence for a moment.

Then I asked, "Did you ever stop to consider what it was like for me?"

She looked up at me.

"Did you ever consider that I might be telling the truth when I said that I loved you?" I looked away. "Did you ever think what it must have felt like to me?"

"I don't understand," she spoke softly again.

"I mean," I swallowed. "What would you think of a man whose only interest in you was to have sex with you? A guy who would never talk to you, never share anything with you, and who barely listened when you talked to him."

I looked at her and she looked away. "What would you think of a guy who thought only of his own pleasure?"

No that was wrong, I thought. "And what would you think of a guy who deliberately made sure that you didn't get any pleasure out of it? Who restricted the acts he'd let you perform to those which wouldn't make you come."

I looked down again. "Would you want to love him? Would you want to be used and abused by him? Would you want to share your life with him? Would you want to be used and abused for the rest of your life?"

I looked back up at her.

She shook her head, "Well of course not!"

"And would you still go out with him?" I asked.

"No," she was beginning to realize that something was big was coming.

"Would you still want to dream about him at night? Would you still miss him when he wasn't around? Would your heart still miss a beat every time he walked in a room?" they all came out, one on top of the other.

"No," she barely spoke.

"Well neither do I, Alexandra," I kept my tone as neutral as I could. "I'm not a masochist. I don't enjoy the pain you cause me. I don't want to love you." My voice began to break up, "I never wanted to love you. But I was never given the choice. You can't choose who you're going to fall in love with." I looked away again, "If I could it certainly wouldn't be you."

There was silence for quite a while.

"In my life I have one principal that I stick to no matter what," I looked across at her. "And that's to be honest. Honest with myself. To look into my heart and discover what I really want, what I really feel. Not to let other people tell me what I should do. How I should be living my life.

"All around us we have people telling us what to do. From advertisers telling us our life isn't complete without whatever it is they are trying to sell. To religions telling us how we should feel and making us guilty about what we do feel.

"I didn't want to fall in love with you. But once I did I tried to make the most of a bad situation. I tried to be honest with you. I tried to tell you how I felt. Tried to explain what I wanted from you and what I wanted to give you. But you wouldn't listen.

"Yeah maybe you didn't love me. So why didn't you tell me when I told you that I loved

you? So maybe you don't trust me. But in my book it takes a lot of trust to let someone make love to you. You trusted me enough to take me back to your place and have sex with me on our first date."

She took a sharp breath.

"Listen what I'm trying to say is," what was I trying to say. "Is... That the one thing I needed, above anything else, was honesty. I needed you to be honest with me." I took a deep breath. "I was always honest with you. I never lied to you."

"Are you trying to tell me I'm a liar?" she interrupted.

I knew that that was too strong. "Well no..." I said. "The way I'd put it was that every time I tried to be intimate with you, I mean emotionally and intellectually... well... you just sprouted bullshit."

She said nothing.

"It's not that you deliberately lied to me," I knew that she was just about to get up and walk out on me. "It's that you lied to yourself. You believed your own bullshit. You really didn't think that you were treating me badly, that you were just using me. You really thought that you were treating me OK and that I was demanding more than I should."

I looked down, "And that just makes it worse. That makes it really sad."

She said nothing for a moment. Then cleared her throat and asked, "Why is it sad?"

I looked up, half expecting her to have left, half expecting her to attack me.

She looked back, calmly.

"It's sad that honesty is something that you can't accept," I said. "I was honest with you and you saw only bullshit. To you what I said couldn't be the truth. When I said that I loved you it meant that I didn't, because if I really loved you I wouldn't be able to tell you. To you everything is backwards, everything is distorted. You haven't come to terms with what you are, you can't be honest with yourself and so you can't accept honesty from other people.

"You live in a world full of bullshit. And it contaminates everything you see and touch." I ran out of steam, thinking maybe I'd gone too far. Then I shrugged, "Like I said you can't give the one thing I need, honesty."

There was silence between us for quite a while. We were a pool of stillness in the background hum of the restaurant. I looked at her and she looked at me. We both looked elsewhere.

Alexandra cleared her throat.

I looked at her.

She looked down at the table as she spoke. "Something very bad happened to me when I was young," she paused to compose herself.

I interrupted, "I don't want to know, Alexandra."

She looked up at me.

I shook my head, "I don't want to know." I looked away. "I don't know if you've been raped or abused as a child, or hurt really badly by the first person you ever loved, or if you never really got over your parents' divorce, or whatever." I swallowed, "But I do know that something happened that really fucked you up. You hurt inside and I could feel that hurt every time I tried to get close to you. Every time I tried to talk to you, to touch you inside, when the shutters came down and you pushed me away."

The words just flowed out from me. "But you are still responsible for your own actions, you are still to blame for what you did to me. For the pain you caused. The pain you feel doesn't absolve you. If you feel pain then you are responsible for that pain. If you've fed and nurtured it to keep you going through the long dark nights. Then you are responsible for it. If you haven't done anything to ease or remove it then you are to blame."

I didn't think that she understood, and I knew that I couldn't explain it any better.

I took a deep breath and looked at her again. "So Alexandra, I don't want to know your deep dark secret. Because I don't give a shit." I shrugged, "Because it doesn't explain or

justify anything you've done."

We sat in silence for a few minutes. Not looking at each other. Then the waiter came to clear the table. "Would you like to see the desert menu?" he asked.

"Yes, sure," I replied. And he popped the little card into my hand.

I looked across at Alexandra. "The orange sorbet is lovely here," I said. "That's what I'll be having."

She shrugged. And when the waiter came back I ordered two.

We waited in silence, but the deserts weren't long in coming. I tucked into mine with relish. I love sorbet and the icy taste in my mouth picked up my spirits a little.

I looked across at Alexandra and saw that she didn't seem very interested in her's. I smiled at her. She looked away.

"Listen, Alexandra," I said softly. "We're behaving like little children. Let's just put the past behind us. We can't go back and change it. It's finished OK?"

She toyed with her desert. "OK, Kevin," she coincided. "It's a bit too late now to go back and have a fairy tale romance, I suppose."

I'd have liked to say that we should forget the past and act as if it had never happened, but I knew that I could never forget what she had done to me. And I don't think that she could forget that easily either. But that could just have been my ego talking.

So I finished my desert in silence, but with a feeling of dissatisfaction. I didn't think that we had really gotten to the bottom of it. I didn't think that we had resolved all our problems with each other. There had been a lot missed by both of us. And I felt that the evening was drawing to a close without any satisfactory conclusion.

# 16

"So," her voice was a horse whisper. "Do you want to come back to my place and have sex with me?" she looked across at me.

I looked up shocked. Then I recovered my composure. "Why?" I asked, putting an edge in my voice.

She smiled, almost giggled, "What do you mean?"

"I mean, what's the point, Alexandra?" I looked at her.

She looked up at my face. "I don't understand."

I sighed and let the edge drop. "The last time I asked you to make love to me, to give me an orgasm, you asked me what was the point." I remembered that night when I tried so futilely to make contact with her one last time. I decided to add a bit of humor, "I mean, you never asked what was the point in me making you come."

She didn't get the joke. "What the fuck is that supposed to mean."

I sighed. "It doesn't mean anything, Alexandra. It's a joke."

"I never asked you to 'make love' to me, Kevin," she said. "You just did it to me because you wanted me to suck your prick."

I looked down, realizing that she still didn't understand. "I made love to you because I wanted you to come. I wanted to give you pleasure." I looked up, "OK so maybe it was just an ego boost for me to make you come. And yeah I enjoyed it. I wouldn't have done it if I didn't." I shook my head, "But I didn't do it so you'd feel that you owed me something. I didn't do it just to get some cheap thrill back. I did it to you because I loved you."

She looked down and said nothing.

I tried to explain once again. "I gave my love to you freely and openly, without reservation. I made love to you to show you how much I loved you. And I wanted you to love me. That's not greed that's human nature."

She didn't respond.

"I made love to you because I loved you. And I wanted you to make love to me, because I wanted you to love me." I ran out of words, "There's nothing more I can say, Alexandra." I shrugged, "If you don't understand now, you'll never understand."

"It's difficult for me, Kevin." She stopped and smiled, "But then you don't want to know anything about that."

"No I don't," I replied dryly.

"Let's just say," she spoke slowly and deliberately. "No promises and no demands." She looked into my eyes, "That I want to make love to you. That I want to have sex with you. That I love you. And that you don't even have to accept that I do. And you don't have to love me back." Her eyes pleaded with me, "I just want to show you how much I love you." She looked down, "Like you tried to show me."

I didn't know what to say. I wanted to fuck her so badly. And yet I wanted to remain loyal to Jasmine. But hadn't I already betrayed Jasmine by the way I felt, the way I couldn't get Alexandra out of my mind, the way she still had a hold on me? And wouldn't I be betraying myself, wouldn't she have won some sort of victory over me if I let her make love to me now?

But isn't that what I wanted all along, for her to want to make love to me? And wouldn't I be the real winner by finally having "my evil way" with her?

Yet wasn't the fact that she wanted to make love to me the important thing? Not whether or not we actually did it. I'd wanted her to feel the love for me that I felt for her. But now I loved Jasmine and I no longer wanted her to love me. Oh I still loved her, but if she didn't love me I could forget about her, like I almost had. Now that she'd told me that she loved me how would I ever manage to let her go?

But the waiter arrived with the bill and I was spared having to work through all that and coming up with an answer. I took out my plastic and barely glancing at the bill handed it back to him.

Alexandra took note. "Hold on, Kevin," she said. "I'm not letting you pay for this meal."

I smiled back, "Well I was hoping that you'd give me your half in cash. I don't have enough so I have to use my card."

"Oh," she nodded and took her purse out of her bag. "That's alright." She counted out and handed me the cash.

"Thanks," I pocketed it and we looked at each other, waiting for me to come up with an answer.

"Well," I admitted. "You've certainly caught me completely by surprise, Alexandra. I'd never have expected you to ask that." I shrugged, "I mean you always said no whenever I asked you." I leant forward, "OK. I accept that you didn't call what we did sex. So I presume that what you are saying is that you want spent the night with me, to give yourself fully into the act rather than holding back like you did." I snorted, at myself more than anything else, "What I'm saying is that you're going to let me come. Give me an orgasm like?"

She hesitated. "Well yes, Kevin," she said. "That's what sex is all about, isn't it?"

I laughed. "If you had asked me that before I met you I'd have agreed. But now," I shrugged, "I'm not so sure."

She leant forward to touch my arm. "Let's forget about that, Kevin," she said. "I want to get as close to you as I can." She looked into my eyes, "I want to be processed totally by you."

I looked back into her dark, green eyes and had an instant hard on.

Then the waiter came back and I signed the counterfoil and took my card back. As I put it away I looked at Alexandra. She was still looking longingly at me.

"Listen, Alexandra," I said. "I just don't know what you want from me."

"I want to know that you love me, Kevin," she squeezed my arm.

"I never said that I didn't love you, Alexandra," I looked down. "I've always loved you."

She was silent for a moment, then she asked, "And do you tell Jasmine that you love her, as well?"

"Of course I do," I smiled.

"And which time are you telling the truth?" her voice had lost some of the anger. "Which time do you mean it?"

I looked at her, puzzled. "I mean it both times." I shook my head, "I wouldn't say it if I didn't mean it."

"So you're telling me that you love us both?" her voice had changed from anger to incredulity.

I shrugged, "Well yes." But somehow I didn't feel convinced.

Once again she was demonstrating her knack of totally undermining my self-confidence. I had come to her with my feelings all worked out and explained. And once again she was reacting in a way I hadn't expected and was asking questions I'd never thought of.

"How can you love two people at once?" she demanded.

"Quite easily," I smiled back. I was going to tell her that I loved my mother and father and brothers and sisters, but the look on her face stopped me. "I fall in love easily," I added as an explanation.

## Alexandra

"You fall in love easily and you fall out of love easily," she said.

That wasn't true. "I've loved you for over two years now," I explained. "And I only started my love affair with Jasmine when you broke off our relationship."

I looked away from her again, "I've loved you since the very first time that I saw you. I've never stopped loving you. And I never will."

"You just started loving her instead!" she hissed.

"You didn't want me! What was I supposed to? Commit suicide!" I replied.

We glared at each other.

"Listen," I looked away. "I think about you all the time, even when I'm with her." I snorted, "Hell I seem to spend half my time talking to her about you. It's a wonder that she hasn't dumped me because of it." No wonder, I thought. Jasmine really loves me.

"Well I don't see how you can love two girls at once," she said. "I mean really, properly love them."

There was silence for a moment.

"I think you love one of us and only lust after the other," she explained.

I looked at her and saw that she was serious. I decided that I'd have to accept that. She would never believe that I could love two people at once. But I could live with lust. I have nothing against lust. I believe that it's a healthy enough emotion, in moderation.

"Well I admit that there are differences in my feelings for each of you. But I can't tell which one is love and which one is lust." I shrugged, "I guess you'll just have to decide that for yourself."

She leant across the table, smiled as she put her arms around my neck, closed her eyes and kissed me.

I didn't know how to react.

She pulled away and smiled broadly at me. "I don't remember you as being shy in public," she teased.

It was time for one of those spilt second decisions. Something clicked inside me and I just didn't care anymore, I mean I stopped worrying and started to act. O.K lets be brutality honest about it, my hormones took over.

I reached behind her head and with both hands pulled her to me, pushed my tongue into her mouth and kiss her as passionately as I could.

She responded and it was a good five minutes before we came up for air. And we noticed that we were getting a lot of attention from the people at adjoining tables.

We both knew that we were going back to her place, but I still didn't trust my judgment of her completely.

"Are you going to invite me back for coffee?" I asked.

"No," she smiled. "I'm going to drag you back. And we wouldn't be having coffee."

She stood up and half dragged me to my feet and out onto the street. We ended up walking up Georges Street with my arm around her shoulder and her arm around my waist, our hips and ribs, bumping and rubbing against each other.

When we reached the entrance to her flat we kissed long and hard before we disengaged so she could search through her bag for her keys and let us in.

As soon as we were inside she kicked off her shoes and threw her coat onto the bed. I just had time to take off my own coat, before her arms where around me again and her tongue was in my mouth.

I hugged her close and she squeezed back, our tongues rolling around each other. It felt so bloody good to hold her again.

Then I ran my hands down her back and started to squeeze and massage her bottom. She wiggled against me and I could feel my erection pressing against her. She obviously felt it to, because she stepped back and looked down at it. My hands came up to her hips as hers

dropped onto my biceps.

"So..." she whispered, still looking down at me.

I smiled and brought my hands up to gently squeeze her breasts. She sighed and I started to unbutton her blouse. She watched my hands as I worked my way down and pulled it out from under her skirt. I ran my hands along her arms and unbuttoned first her left cuff, then her right. I slipped my hands inside her blouse and ran them up her sides, brushing her breasts as I slipped my fingers into the tops of her sleeves and pushed the blouse from her shoulders. Then I ran my hands down her arms and let the blouse drop to the floor.

She was wearing a black lace bra underneath. I ran my fingers around its edges and gently brushed them across the cups. I traced the straps under her arms and around and across her shoulders. Then I slipped my fingers inside to touch her nipples and gently rubbed back and forth across them.

She let out a deep sigh.

I slipped my hands out and reached around to unhook the bra. As I watched her breasts drop free I pulled the straps from her shoulders and let the bra drop onto the floor. I ran my hands back down her shoulders and under her arms to come up and cup her breasts. Gently I leant down and kissed each nipple. First left then right, then left again.

Her hands came up to run her fingers through my hair.

"So does this bitchy villain in your novel have big tits then?" she whispered.

I smiled without taking my eyes off her breasts. "Oh they're about so big," I cupped my hands around her left breast.

"You should have given her big ones," she ran her hands across my head.

"No," I replied as I leant forward. "I don't like them too big." And I licked her nipple.

"I thought all men liked big tits," she sighed.

"That's like saying all women like big pricks," I replied in between sucks.

"We do," she giggled.

I moved up to look her in the face, "Well I'm sorry to disappoint you." I kissed her lips.

"Oh, no. You don't," she seemed surprised. "You're huge."

I smiled back, "Flatter." And clamped my mouth to her's, pushing my tongue inside, to shut her up.

She ran her hands up and down my body, wiggling from side to side to brush her nipples across my chest.

I ran my hands down her back and pushed my fingers under the waist band of her skirt. Then I ran them around and unfastened it. As I pushed it down she leant back, clasping her hands behind my neck to slow her descent and bring me down to lie on top of her. I leant forward and found my lips on her nipple again. Her legs came up around my waist. And as I caressed her breasts she licked and sucked my ears. I was in heaven again.

I started to work my way down her body. Moving from side to side, kissing and nibbling. I pushed my hands under her skirt and started to pull her panties down. she lifted her body up and I knelt up between her legs as I pulled her skirt and panties free.

Then she lay completely naked in front of me, her legs to either side, her hands behind her head. A smile on her face as she watched me looking at her. She was so beautifully proportioned, with high conical breasts, the muscles defined on her arms, narrow waist and strong hips and thighs. And her long, black hair sprayed across half her face and her shoulder, just reaching the nipple of her left breast.

But my eyes were drawn to her vagina. She had thick curly hair, but her lips were open and moist. I leant down and sniffed. Then gently licked. And before I knew what had happened my mouth was clamped tight, as I sucked and probed and licked for all I was worth.

"No! no," she pushed me away.

I looked up confused.

She sat up to face me. "I want you naked in bed," she smiled.



## Alexandra

Her hands undid my fly and I leant back on my arms to let her pull my jeans down. Then she realized I still had my shoes and stockings on. So she quickly tore them off and pulled off my jeans and underpants.

I lay back on my elbows and let her look at me.

"You've lost all that flab," she whispered.

"I've been getting a lot of exercise lately," I smiled back.

"I bet," she looked up with a wicket grin on her face. "Come on," she stood up and walked across to the bed.

I stood and followed, walking that strange walk I always get when I'm naked with an erection.

She pulled back the covers and climbed into bed. Moving across to the far said and holding the covers up to welcome me in. I climbed onto the bed and reached for her.

She rolled on top, pulling the covers over her head and giggling as I ran my right hand down her abdomen and my left up to her breast. My tongue found her other nipple so I opened my mouth and sucked her breast in. She moaned as my hand found her wet and open. I pushed my middle two fingers inside and she began to rock back and forward. I rubbed in time to her rhythm, my fingers hooked inside, the balls of hand rubbing outside. Her mouth found my ear and my world was reduced to a timeless eternity of just a few sensations, my fingers in her vagina, her nipple on my tongue, her body rocking back and forth, her tongue on my ear and the background static of the hormones racing through my veins.

She shuddered from head to toe, gave a deep sigh and pushed my hand away. "Hmmm, that was nice," she turned her head and lightly kissed me on the cheek. Then she rolled away, snuggled her shoulder into my arm pit and curled up around my right arm. "Good night," she whispered.

Once again she had shut me out in a way that I couldn't argue with. What she had just done would have been an perfect way to end our love making, if only our love making had been at an end. But she had finished and once again she had lost interest in me.

I lay back, put my free hand behind my head and tried to ignore the pressure of my erection against the sheets. She was still playing games with me. After all I'd said she still played games.

Then she giggled. I could feel the little convulsions shake her body. She hugged my arm, hard, and pressed my fingers down into her pubic hair. "How who doesn't appreciate who's sense of humor?" she rolled over to face me and grinned. "I told you I'd do it properly tonight. Didn't I?"

She kissed me, pushing her tongue deep into my mouth. I responded automatically. She pulled her mouth off mine, "Didn't you believe me?" She started to lick under my chin and gently bit my Adam's apple. I thought of Jasmine.

"Do you like this as much as I do?" her voice whispered.

"Mmmm," I replied as she started to rub her body against mine.

My erection pressed into her, my hands made their own way across her gorgeous skin and I was lost in a sea of sensual delight. My body loved her, but that was all. Deep in my heart I discovered a lump of ice that wouldn't melt.

We rode and rode into the early morning. Then fell asleep in each other's arms, exhausted. It took me a long time to come. Not because I wanted to prolong her pleasure any more, but because I didn't want to come in her. And when I came it was just a little trickle. And while she fell asleep, exhausted and contented, on top of me, I lay awake staring at the dark ceiling. One thought kept going through my mind. She was still playing games with me. After all I'd said to her, she was still playing games.

# 17

I woke up in dim light and wondered why Jasmine hadn't pulled back the curtains. Then I realized I was in a single bed with a warm body pressed close to me. I was wide awake instantly. The memories of last night came flooding into my mind.

"Shit," I whispered.

Alexandra murmured something in her sleep.

I realized she was naked beside me and I began to get aroused. It was this small betrayal of my heart by my body that forced me to move. As gently as I could I slid out from under her arm and onto the floor. I stood and began searching in the dim light for my clothes.

As I was getting dressed Alexandra woke.

"Good morning," she smiled at me and stretched lazily under the bed clothes.

I was glad I had my jeans on so she couldn't see the reaction she caused in me. And I got annoyed that my body betrayed my desire when I'd decided that I didn't want her any more. I have to admit now that I still wanted her, it was just that I knew that I would be far better off with out her.

"Hi," I replied. "Did you sleep well?"

"I had a gorgeous time, Kevin," her eyes were still dreamy.

I pulled my T-shirt on and walked to the sink. "Do you want some coffee?" I had hoped to leave before she woke up. To run away so I'd not have to face her. Now she was awake all I could think of was performing the social niceties.

"Yes please," she yawned.

She got out of bed as I filled the kettle and padded across to the wardrobe. I took out the coffee and put a couple of spoonfuls into two mugs. When I looked up she was standing beside me in her silk dressing gown. She leaned close to kiss. I lightly kissed her lips.

She put her arms around me and hugged. "Hmmm," she whispered as she rocked herself against me. "It's nice to have somebody to make coffee for you in the morning."

"Maybe you should hire a maid," I suggested.

"What do I need a maid for when I've got you," she looked up at me.

I smiled and looked away.

Steam was coming out of the kettle. I quickly made the coffee and, taking my mug, sat down at the table.

She looked at me for a moment. Then asked, "Is there something wrong, Kevin?"

I looked away, "I think last night was a mistake."

"Oh," she whispered. "Why?"

"It didn't achieve anything," I explained.

"At least now I know why I love you," she said.

"You don't love me, Alexandra," I put my cup down. "You don't love me and you don't understand me." I shook my head, "And you never will."

She sat down opposite me and I realized that I didn't mind her putting the table as a barrier between us.

"There's a gulf between us which I cannot bridge," I looked at her. "And which I don't think you can bridge either."

She said nothing for a moment. "If you want to do something badly enough you'll always

find a way to do it," she said, quoting from a film we'd seen together.

I nodded, "I agree." And looked down, "I guess I don't want to love you badly enough. I've got Jasmine and she really loves me. I don't need you anymore." I looked up at her, "Maybe I never did, I just thought that I did."

"So where does that leave me?" she was in a state of shock. "After I gave myself to you last night."

A bolt of anger rose inside me. I wanted to scream. Why is so much emphasis placed on Sex? Why is it so important to keep yourself "pure and chaste" for your future husband? But I didn't. I suddenly realized that our whole relationship had been fucked up by her believe in the importance of her "giving herself" to someone.

She hadn't been able to admit her desire for me because she had wanted to keep her virtue intact. Yet she was able to get her desire sated because I wanted to make love to her so much. She couldn't masturbate or give me head, because that is immoral. So my frustration built up and tore the relationship apart.

Now I couldn't trust her. Now I couldn't love her. All because of her sacred virtue.

I looked down. "Like I said before there's a difference between commitment and sex." I looked up at her again, "They're not the same thing."

She gripped the edge of the table, "You just used me!"

"No, Alexandra," I kept my voice soft. "You used me. I was always honest about my feelings for you. I never told you I was going to devote my life to you if you had sex with me." I shook my head, "You were the one who said that you wouldn't give any commitment to me."

"All you wanted was to fuck me!" she shouted.

"That's not true, Alexandra," I kept my voice normal. "I always wanted a deeper, more committed relationship than you did." I shrugged, "And now I've got it. But it's not with you."

"So what was last night about?" she didn't shout, but she still burned with anger.

"Last night?" I smiled. "Last night was about you wanted to have sex with me, for your own reasons." I looked down. "And for my own I wanted to have sex with you."

"And that's all that it was to you?" she seemed deflated. Her anger had evaporated. "Just sex?"

"I didn't feel anything deeper, Alexandra," I said. "I tried to feel the way I felt on that first night. I tried to feel what I used to feel for you. But I couldn't. And I don't think I ever will."

We were silent for a while.

"And what about Jasmine?" Alexandra looked at me. "Will she forgive you for spending the night with me?"

"No," I smiled and shook my head. "She won't forgive me, because I don't think that she'll feel the need to forgive me. And I won't feel the need to ask for it."

"So you'll just walk in and tell her that you've had sex with me?" it was a rhetorical question.

"No," I shook my head again. "She already knows that I've had sex with you."

Alexandra smiled her disbelief.

I smiled back. "You don't understand." I leant forward. "It was her idea for us to do this," I explained. "It was her idea to get rid of all my leftover emotions I felt for you. For me to realize what my true feelings for you."

I leant back, "And for you to realize what you felt for me."

"You expect me to believe that she made you have sex with me?" she almost laughed.

"I already said, Alexandra," I pointed out, "that I wanted to have sex with you." I started to explain. "Jasmine doesn't own me and I don't own her. We're in love with each other. We decided to share our lives with each other. We're committed to each other." I looked straight at her. "And she is not jealous of you. She understands my desire for you."

"You desire me and you love Jasmine," she snorted.

I shrugged, "That's about right."

She stood up and shouted at me. "Do you expect me to accept that, for you to live with and love and 'Be committed' to Jasmine, and for me to be your bit on the side?"

"No," I stayed seated and kept my voice low. "I expect that we'll not see each other again." I looked down, "And I don't think that we can be friends."

She realized that I was saying good buy. Slowly she sat down. We sat in silence for a minute or two. I looked at her and she looked at her feet. Finally she whispered, "I want you, Kevin."

My heart broke. I knew that she meant it. And I started to cry. She came around the table and put her arms around my waist. I hugged her back and we sank onto the floor in each other's arms. Slowly we rocked back and forward. My tears flowing into her hair, her's onto my shoulder.

Finally I managed to speak. "I'm sorry Alexandra," I kissed her ear. "I'm sorry, Alex," I hugged her. Hard!

Then I pushed her away and stood up. She looked down at the floor as I took my coat off the back of the chair and walked out. Not looking back.

For the first time in my life, not looking back.

On my way home I had a long, long talk with myself. A talk in which I convinced myself that I'd done the right thing, that I would be happier with Jasmine than with Alex, and that Alex would be happier without me.

I started off by trying to explain why I fell in love with Alex.

It was like I'd had this ideal concept of the perfect person for me. I had constructed this box inside my head. A box of the "shape" of the person I wanted. And I put the label "The love of my life" on it. Then when I met Alex I'd put her in that box and thought that she do what I expected her to do and give me what I needed. And when she had done what she wanted to do herself I hadn't been able to accept it

And maybe now, I thought. I had just swapped the contents of that box, replaced Alex with Jasmine. But no, I said back. Jasmine has changed utterly the shape of that box. Because of what she has given me I no longer needed the things that form the "Love of my life" that I had needed from Alex. Maybe Alex had given me all that I'd really wanted. And I realized then that she had given all that I'd allowed her to give. That she had given all that she had known how to give.

It was my fault that I had not known how to show her what else she could give. As she had said herself she had needed guidance and I had not known how to guide her. I had not known how to help her sort out the mess that life had made her. But then, I had not known how to sort myself out.

And Jasmine had taken me and quite casually shown me what freedom really was. The freedom I had been unable to show Alex. The freedom she hadn't known existed and so hadn't known she could aspire to. The freedom that Jasmine took for granted. The freedom I had deluded myself into thinking that I had already archived.

Looking back on my relationship with Alex. When I heard myself thinking this I knew that it really was over, once and for all. But looking back on it from her point of view I wonder if her interpretation of it had been right all along. Here I was losing all interest in her after one night of having sex with her. Maybe that was all I wanted all along. Or, then again, maybe I really was a masochist for putting myself through all that pain and suffering.

I mean the physical evidence is all in favor of her interpretation. I tried again and again to... Well let's say it, fuck. That's what it really was anyway. I tried again and again to fuck her. When one angle of attack didn't work I changed my technique. And when that didn't work I tried another. And as soon as I succeed I lost interest in her.

Had I been lying to myself when I said that I wanted to share my life with her? Did I have to justify my lust for her with "morally correct" thoughts? Was I just a slave to my emotions and not as free as I liked to think I was?

Well I've already answered that last question. I've already admitted that I didn't choose to

love her, that I had no control over my feelings for her. And that given the choice I wouldn't have picked her.

I know I would have picked someone who would give the "love and support" I thought I needed. And I know that over time I would have ended up despising that person for not being able to stand up to me. I think I needed someone like Alex to help me grow into another, better person.

And if I hadn't had that relationship with Alex I'd never have been able to treat Jasmine the way I do. I would never have been able to love and understand her the way I can now.

Having that relationship with Alex had thought me a lot. And I hope that she learnt something as well. And in my darkest, and brightest, moments I hope that I have given her the best, and worst, revenge possible, the gift of understanding.

I hope she understands exquisite detail the pain and confusion I felt. I hope that she has trouble sleeping at night. And I realize that if I have help her gain the understanding to lose sleep over what she did to me, then she also has the understanding to come to terms with it and use it to grow and develop into a better, stronger person.

I hope that is my lasting gift to her. Because that is what she gave to me, an understanding of what my faults and weaknesses are and the chance to do something about correcting them.

The bus pulled up to my stop and I got off and stood looking down the road at Jasmine's house. My heart pounded and my palms were sweaty. I had to face Jasmine now. I had to convince her that my love for Alex was dead and that I really truly loved her. That I wanted to share the rest of my life with her. It came to me there and then that I wanted her to be the mother of my children; a thought that had never struck me before. But that seemed so inescapable once I'd thought it.

I wanted more than anything to run up to the house, tare inside, grab Jasmine and hug her ever so tightly. I wanted to explain to her how I felt. I wanted to make her believe that I really loved her. That I really believed she loved me. That we could make it together. That we really could be happy. No shadows hanging over us. No doubts. No confusions. A moment of unnerving clarity that stretched into minutes as I just stood there looking at the house bathed in early morning sunlight.

I'd just spent the night with a woman I'd spent the best part of three years dreaming about. A woman I'd loved so desperately I'd been unable to control myself. A woman who's very presence in the same room as me could give me a hard on. A woman I'd talked about so very often. Too often. A woman who'd hung over Jasmine like an avenging angel.

And I was to arrive now and tell her that it was all over between me and Alex. That I'd suddenly opened my eyes and realized what I was doing. That I been unable to let go of the bad thing and reach for the good. That Jasmine was the best thing that'd ever happened to me. That my relationship with Alex had been self-destructive from the start. That like a veil lifting from my eyes I'd suddenly realized that what I really wanted was what I all ready had.

It all sounded like a bad soap opera. Or to be more exact like a good soap opera.

"At least I still have my sense of humor," I smiled to myself. Then quickly looked around when I realized I'd spoken out loud.

I started to walk towards the house. Each step had to be forced out of me. And I daren't stop for fear that I'd be unable to resume. I walked up the garden path like a condemned man approaching his death. Then something snapped inside and I realized I was being way over dramatic. Jasmine loves me. This was all her idea. Of course she'll believe that it's worked. That I've come back with my love for her renewed and strengthened.

But still my heart was pounding as I opened the door and entered the hall. Her coat was hanging there so she hadn't gone out shopping yet. Then I heard the radio playing in the kitchen. My knees trembled as I walked down and slowly opened the door.

She was standing at the sink filling the kettle.

We looked at each other for a moment.

I tried to speak but my mouth was too dry. I swallowed and started to walk towards her.

She dropped the kettle into the sink and stepped towards me.

I knelt down on the floor in front of her, hugged her knees to me and asked, "Will you marry me." I looked up at her, while still hugging her close. "I'll even get a job. I'll become a responsible member of society. I'll conform as much as I can."

She ran her fingers through my hair, pushed her knees either side of me and sank down into my lap. "No," she kissed me and smiled, her hands still running through my hair. "I don't want that. All I want is for you to become a bestselling, internationally famous writer. OK?" And we kissed passionately.

The End

# Afterword

Thank you for your interest in my story. I do hope that you enjoyed it. If you have any comments, thoughts or reviews and you are a customer of Amazon.com you can go to the paperback version of this book at: <http://www.amazon.com/dp/190708200X/?tag=declanstanley> and leave a review.

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- My own blog (<http://declanstanley.com/novels/alexandra/chapter-17/>)

Once again I would like to thank you for your interest in my work and I encourage you to read more of my writings available on my web site(<http://declanstanley.com/>).

Thank you,  
Declan Stanley  
2<sup>nd</sup> April 2009