



Swingland



Between the Sheets of the Secretive,
Sometimes Messy, but Always Adventurous
Swinging Lifestyle



DANIEL STERN

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DANIEL STERN

A TOUCHSTONE BOOK

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While the stories that follow are based on actual events and real people, names and locations have been changed to ensure discretion.

But most of us don't use our real names, so it doesn't really matter.

However, in the event that by changing your “name” I have given you your real name, know that it was purely coincidental.

The Lifestyle

NOUN. A global community whose members (swingers) engage in sexual relations as recreational or social activity.

Vanilla

ADJECTIVE. *Lifestyle slang.* NOT of or in the Lifestyle.



Between the Sheets

The first car arrived. From it emerged a husband toting a small gym bag and a wife bundled in a full length raincoat buttoned to the top with just a flash of fishnet escaping at the hem. They scurried up the walk to the house that was every other house on every other suburban street, slipped through the front door and shut it quickly behind them. Another car arrived. Then another. One by one they parked and two by two their occupants dashed inside with equal parts urgency to avoid detection and eagerness to escape the outside world and dwell, if only for a little, in the one inside.

I, too, walked up the path and knocked on the door on the designated night at the designated time a month prior while cooling down post-play at a GB that ended up MFM, Gerard, the other M, extended a rare invitation to a couples house party.¹

“Respectful single males are insanely hard to find,” he admitted.

“And skilled ones all but impossible.” Rose, Gerard’s wife and the star of our MFM sexual sandwich winked.

I thanked them for the compliments and gratefully accepted their invitation. However, I knew the odds of a single male receiving a legit invite to a couples party. Slimmer chances have been overcome, I suppose. Like winning the lottery twice or experiencing spontaneous stage five cancer remission, but that’s about it.

Three weeks later, I received the email, downloaded the attached file, and clicked play to view an animated pinup girl reclining atop a martini glass kicking her stilettoed foot into the air. Bannered overhead in red balloon letters:



That instant, everything became about preparation. Diet, grooming, lighter workouts to preserve energy. Regimented, early bedtimes for proper rest. Suspension of all playtime and masturbation to charge my libido. There was no way I wasn’t going to be able to perform.

As Sarah pulled back the door, she informed me that Rose and Gerard were running late. “But they said feel free to start without them.”

In black nylons, heels, and a bustier one deep breath from exploding, Sarah belonged on the fuselage of a World War I bomber. Along with her red lips, talcum powder skin, and Bettie Page bangs.

“How’s about the tour, sweetie?”

Like the home’s outer facade, its living room was standard suburbia, except the furniture was moved to the walls to clear space for a jigsaw of sheeted sleeping pads that stretched to the far wall. Everyday life

pushed aside for tonight.

“Here we have the group area.”

Having shed their raincoats, wives floated around in rainbows of lingerie trailing exotic fragrances and clutching wineglasses with tips of brightly colored nails. Husbands reclined in baggy shorts and Tommies in the Bahamas, taking in the view. On every flat surface candy dishes teeming with condoms twinkled in the candlelight.

“Back here’s the dining room.”

A constellation of a chandelier hovered over a dining table offering two rows of silver chafing dishes. Beside it, a fully stocked bar glistened like a reservoir of liquid courage. Scattered nearby were chairs and fold-out tables arranged in groups accommodating four, perfect for intimate conversation.

“Private rooms are this way . . .”

A short hall led out to a pair of bedrooms, each with a bed stripped to its fitted sheet. Wall-mounted flat screens broadcasted muted porn, the light from which painted the mattresses like the adrenaline-producing lead-up to a wrestling match’s main event. Folded washcloths and bottled waters perched on nightstands waiting dutifully to serve.

“And, finally, the restroom.”

A basket of rolled hand towels rested on the lip of a deep-soak tub across from a vanity sink circled by an impressive offering of single-serving toiletries. Mouthwash, breath mints, floss, individually wrapped toothbrushes, nail clippers . . . A tuxedoed bathroom attendant wouldn’t have seemed the least bit out of place.

Every single male in the Lifestyle has heard countless myths of these parties, but only a chosen few can claim to have witnessed one.

“Oh,” Sarah chirped. “I almost forgot the hot tub.”

I was one of the chosen.

Before playtime commenced, everyone did their homework. Huddled on couches, crowded around tables, and clustered in corners, guests discovered who the voyeurs, cuckolds, the soft swappers and hard swappers were . . . which couples were after threesomes, foursomes, or moresomes. STI results were exchanged like business cards.²

I was partaking of the buffet when a stegosaurian-size shadow laid claim to me.³ I looked up, way up across the table and up still more where, behind the rising plumes of chafing-dish steam, materializing like a pagan god, a face perched atop an Everest of man smiled down at me.

“I’m Bob,” the goliath identified itself, then inserted what looked to be half a barbecued chicken into its oral cavity.

Graft one of those Easter Island heads to a body of proportional size and that was Bob. A horizon line across his shoulder the width of my field of vision. Arms strataed with petrified muscle. Torso thick as a continental plate. And draped over it all was a tarp of a red silk kimono that was probably meant to diffuse Bob’s level of physical intimidation, but instead detailed every peak and valley of muscular topography.

“I’m a boring, straight male” was how I introduced myself to Bob. It’s how I always introduce myself because it usually gets a laugh and lightens the mood, the ideal atmosphere when trying to sleep with another man’s wife.

Bob removed the flesh-stripped skeleton from his jaws and I thought I heard him chuckle at my “boring, straight male” comment. But his response was at most a slight grunt, so it may have just been a gob of meat detouring down the wrong pipe.

“Want to grab a table?” he commanded more than asked me.

We sat across from each other with the intensity of competitive chess players and, within minutes, Bob

had queried about my turn-ons and turn-offs, fantasies, and experience. The only information he betrayed was his name. His first name. ~~None of us have last names in the Lifestyle, when we have names at all.~~

“Limits?” Bob asked as he tore into another hunk of dead bird.

“No kids. No animals. Nothing toilet related.” Those first two are given, but that last one . . . If I’ve learned anything in the Lifestyle, it’s that it’s better to be safe than sorry.

“What about condoms?”

The questions are always the same: Condoms or bareback? Favorite positions? What’s the body hair situation?

I told Bob yes to condoms.

“That negotiable?”

I told Bob it was not.

Bob swigged some lemonade. “Same with us.”

With the broad brushstrokes of our sexual proclivities aligned, it was what was *behind* our conversation that would decide things that night.⁴ Strip away the words and my talk with Bob had really been:

“Should I allow you to have sex with my wife?”

“Yes, please.”

“Convince me.”

And there was the rub. No man would pass into Bob’s wife without first passing through Bob. Make no mistake; Bob may have allowed others to enjoy his betrothed, but that didn’t mean he didn’t love her. In fact, the skill with which he gauged my reactions, weighed my answers, and dissected every molecule of my being was nothing short of a Jedi’s.

“What about oral?”

Case in point. On the surface, Bob’s question seemed simple. Only it wasn’t. Bob didn’t ask about my fondness for oral sex, did he? Just oral sex. In the abstract. It was a slick bit of subterfuge to check if I was selfish, one of the worst qualities a single male can possess. Swingers find selfishness so despicable that a morbidly obese man with full-body acne, halitosis, dandruff, and malignant body odor gets laid in the Lifestyle before a selfish male. Fully aware of this irrefutable and depressing fact, I parried Bob’s verbal joust with my patented “I prefer to give as much as receive.”

Bob’s jaw froze mid-chew. Its muscles inflated, expanded, and hardened like quick-dry cement. Barbecue sauce lavaed over the ridge of his pinkie, paused, then plummeted onto the plate. Eyes still locked on his partially ravaged feast, he asked, “How about kissing?” and resumed masticating.

The selection process is simple. Hubby exhausts every ploy in his psychological arsenal to filter out the liars, fakes, and undesirables. (If only every husband were so devoted . . .) Me, I try to prove that I’m not the stereotypical single male. That I’m in the Lifestyle for the right reasons. That I’m courteous and respectful. All of which are true, but the burden of proof is on me. It always is. And especially that night with Bob, as his wife was by far the most sought-after guest—evidenced by her fan club in constant orbit around her. I estimated thirty minutes of chitchat with Big Bob before I could even hope for the possibility of playtime to surface on the horizon. And even then my efforts could still have been for naught. Things with Bob could have gone a million different ways at any moment. But I’d been in that exact position too many times, so I wasn’t sweating it.

“Kissing’s not a problem,” I assured Bob.

“But do you *like* to kiss?”

“Like” meant Bob’s wife was big on kissing. And Bob stressing it meant he wanted me to know it

Problem was, Bob's "hint" raised a red flag, as it wasn't a hint so much as the most obvious gimme of a time lobbed into the heart of my strike zone—anyone's strike zone. So, with a guaranteed grand slam levitating before me, I was wondering why—when the night had just begun, and with a roster of eager suitors for his wife, and with his Jedi skills—was Bob rushing things?

Bob's mound of chicken had evaporated to a mass grave, so maybe he just wanted seconds. Then the first grunts and moans drifted in from the group area and I thought he might just want his wife to join. Whatever his reason, my Spidey sense had been triggered.

"I do like to kiss. Very much."

"Any good?"

And there it was. Any single male who knows anything about the Lifestyle knows arrogance ranks just below selfishness. Single men convinced they're sex gods are dismissed faster than they can mumble "blue balls" on their way home for yet another round of self-release.

Well played, Jedi Bob! Well played.

"Am I good?" I repeated Bob's question in a failed attempt to sidestep it. "That's pretty subjective, wouldn't you say?" Bob didn't, so I added, "Well, I haven't been told otherwise."

And for the first time since we sat, Bob looked up. His eyes, faded blue icebergs, locked onto mine. I could feel his sight enter me and search, looking for something, anything reason enough to deny me. I watched the machinery in his mind work, and, after what felt like a lifetime but was probably only seconds, he cracked a smile, which I took as acknowledgment that there might very well have been *two* Jedis dining at that table.

"What about down below?" Bob asked, laying down his final test. While it was void of subterfuge and straightforward, it was by far the most vital. So much so that should I have failed this final assessment, it would have undone everything.

See, far above arrogance and selfishness on the rankings of undesirable Lifestyle traits, topping the lengthy list of carnal sins, occupying its very own stratosphere of unforgivable reprehensibility, is lying. Without question, fibbing is the fastest way to secure a one-way trip to blackball status in the swing community. So assured is a liar's exile from the Lifestyle that should a perjurer come clean about a material untruth and *stay* secure playtime, that individual will have rewritten the entire swing rulebook. And no matter how enticing it may be to rewrite history, I do not recommend attempting it. Not unless you're lusting after a celibate existence.

Back to Bob's query: I could have embellished, tried to wow. But where would I have been when the clothes came off? Mumbling "blue balls" on my schlep home, that's where. Which is exactly why I leveled with Bob. "If you're looking for size, I'm not your guy. No complaints, but I'm average."

"I meant do you trim?"

"Oh. Sorry. Yes."

"Balls?"

"Shaved."

"Good man."

Bob pushed aside his plate, leaned his inhuman bulk back in the plastic chair that groaned under his mass and let me know, "I watch."

So Big Bob was a voyeur? I'd had him pegged Dom. But, frankly, I was relieved to have been mistaken. Now that Bob wouldn't be playing second playmate to his wife, I wouldn't have to negotiate his bulk. No suffocation under his weight be of concern should his wife desire the more involved positions.

"Is watching a problem for you?" Bob asked.

I had progressed this far with Bob because I knew fucking Bob's wife was the same as fucking Bob. For

who knew how many nights Bob had fallen asleep next to and just as many mornings woken up beside his wife. Maybe they had kids, a mortgage, car payments. You know, real-life stuff. Inviting a stranger into the bed was not a decision rushed into. Informing me that he'd watch, that he'd always be within arm's reach that he'd chaperone every second of playtime, Bob was educating me regarding this very real, very nonnegotiable fact. So, yes, my cock might only be in Bob's wife, but I would definitely, oh so very definitely, be fucking Bob, too.

"Not a problem," I assured Bob. "Not at all."

So there I was, sliced open, psyche peeled back for Bob to probe⁵—a small price to pay to fuck another man's wife when you think about it. All that remained was Bob's verdict.

"All right, then," Bob said, more to himself than me. "Honey?" he bellowed while keeping his eyes trained on mine.

The dotting crush parted and released Bob's wife. Gift-wrapped in black silk, with tresses of auburn hair that exist only in shampoo commercials, she drifted toward us and docked at Bob's side. Onto his cliff of shoulder she slid a hand—a hand sporting a ring with a rock big enough to skip across a lake. Given the exhaustive vetting to which Bob had subjected me, I couldn't help but see the diamond as emblematic of the size and depth of their love, a sentiment which relieved me to no end. Bob was not a person with whom I like to tangle over a pang of jealousy.

Bob's wife's jade eyes once-overed me before the corners of her lips curled into a hint of smile.

"Honey," said Bob. "Say hi to . . . What did you say your name was?"

-
1. The GB (Gang Bang) ended up MFM (Male-Female-Male threesome) due to two flakes, a newbie who bailed between the hotel lounge and suite, and a self-professed Lifestyle veteran who "mysteriously" contracted a case of performance anxiety. (*Most Lifestyle terminology is self-explanatory, but for swing lingo virgins, there's a handy-dandy glossary at the back of the book.*)
 2. STI (*Sexually Transmitted Infection*)—If you don't know this one, then you're part of the problem and I, as well as the community as a whole, would greatly appreciate that you study up on STIs before venturing into our world.
 3. *Buffer*—A meal consisting of several dishes from which guests serve themselves. Not Lifestyle specific, I know, but here's your first lesson in swing culture: Buffets, quite good ones, are a common party offering. Why in God's name, you ask, would a host lay out a spread at a party? Could anything be less appetizing? Well, first off, it's polite. Second, food brings people together. Go all the way back to cavemen and you'll see it. Lastly, who doesn't love a free meal?
 4. Matching kink is easy—don't pair a foot fetishist with a water sports aficionado, or an average Joe with a size queen; put two subs together and you're in for a whole lot of inactivity—but if swinging were only about sex, there'd be no need for an insightful, informative, and entertaining book such as this. You're welcome.
 5. *Probe* is perhaps not the best term, given the situation. *Investigate* might be more appropriate.



Author Disclaimer

I didn't throw you into the belly of the beast for shock value. Anyone can titillate with a lurid sex story. I did so because it's best you know from word one what you're getting into. I've diluted nothing. Not one drop. Which means you shouldn't expect that romanticized sexual utopia the movies, TV, and especially porn have dreamed up and continue to propagate. Like everything else, the Lifestyle has its pros and cons and all of them are here. Most important, I make it plain that swinging isn't for everyone. But let's not get ahead of ourselves.

I've written for those who want to learn, *truly* learn, about a community with which they aren't familiar. Or for those who have preconceptions but can admit they may not be entirely accurate (and, in some cases, that they are completely wrong). This means my reader must possess an open mind and a certain level of curiosity. If that's you, proceed to checkout. An uncensored glimpse behind the curtain, hairy backs and all awaits.

But maybe it's not the Lifestyle that interests you. Just sex. Well, you're also in luck. Plenty of tales of sex and debauchery are here for your—ahem—pleasure.

Finally, I suspect some of you cracked this spine because you have an itch tickling your libido. Reassured, grasshopper, you, too, have chosen wisely. If it's a Lifestyle guide you seek, budding kinkster, follow me! Not only have I detailed my journey into the swing subculture, but I've also outlined how you, too, can explore the coital landscape.

Alls I'm saying is, use this book however you want. Indulge in the sex and skip the lessons. Or bypass the tales and cut right to the tutelage. Hell, if you want, read it all. I'm extending a helping hand; but only you know how best to use that hand (pun partially intended).

But before you rev up your libido, know this: Swingers are a unique breed. Not everyone is emotionally capable of having, much less enjoying, casual sex with a multitude of strangers. Even rarer is the mental and emotional fortitude necessary to devote hours, days, months, even years to a fruitless search that hacks away at your self-esteem one rejection after another and pile-drives you into a black hole of depression where you'll wallow convinced you're fated a eunuch. However, enough of us possess the constitutional moxie to comprise a highly active community. So, though odds dictate you aren't cut from the Lifestyle (loin) cloth, there's the slimmest chance you are. And this book might just help you figure that out.

Now, as a book of this nature cannot *not* appeal to a testosterone-inclined readership, a word with the single men. No doubt some of you (perhaps most) are reading to realize a backlog of sexual fantasies and orchestrate a life of orgasmic bliss. No one argues your motives are anything but normal (as far as male "normal" goes), but I don't want to set false expectations. So, in the interest of full disclosure:

First, these pages do not contain sorcery, trickery, or shortcuts to getting laid. For "proven methods" such as those, I suggest scouring late-night TV for some instructional DVDs available to you in three easy monthly payments.

Second, this book isn't a plush red carpet leading up to the Lifestyle doors. Even if it was, those doors have been purposely locked, dead-bolted, and all but hermetically sealed to you for good reason, something I'll soon address. Like it or not, there's one road into the Lifestyle, and it's long and arduous and requires

nothing less than the hardest of work and most ardent of dedication, both of which, if applied unceasingly for who knows how long, may earn you a remote chance at Lifestyle acceptance. And that's your best-case scenario.

Now, men, despite my off-putting admissions, I actually do want you to read this book. With all my heart and soul, I do. But first you must know on which link of the Lifestyle food chain you reside. At the very top, ruling the sexual ecosystem, are couples. Just below couples are single women, whom we often refer to as "unicorns" for their rare and mythical existence.¹ Lastly, below the couples and unicorns, way down, pinned beneath the weight of the entire chain crushing their tracheas, struggling to be included somewhere, *anywhere* in the carnal caste system, are single males. It ain't pretty, guys, but the reality is we will never, *ever* be close to equal to couples. The ugly truth is this: a penis without accompanying vagina is nonentity in the Lifestyle. The sooner you accept this fact, the faster you can make the best of it.

I'm not counting you out, gents. The fact that I, a single male, have written this book proves there's hope. Just as the lowliest plankton serves an integral function in the survival of every species on the planet, single men play a crucial Lifestyle role. And it can be a wildly enjoyable role—if you know and follow the rules.

So, fellas, understand things from the vantage of couples and women. Then accept my literary protest shot to your cortex, rehabilitate, and spread word to your horny brethren. You'll be pleased with the results. I promise.

Now, back to the reader at large: Some of you (perhaps many) feel I'm betraying the swingers' code of discretion—our ethical backbone—by not only recounting my sexual exploits, but by also opening doors for others wishing to join. To those who think that, know that I've changed names, altered identifying characteristics, relocated settings, and gone to staggering lengths to protect privacy. But even then there's no tutorial inclusion of the single male, which you may deem punishable by no less than castration. Before you excommunicate me, though, consider the wisdom of countering single male bad behavior with knowledge. 'Twas Nelson Mandela who said, "Education is the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world." And while it's probably safe to assume Mandela didn't have the Lifestyle in mind when he birthed that maxim, do you really possess the cojones to argue with Nelson Mandela?

Even still, some will hold that the smallest divulgence of swing activity to non-swingers is treason. Well, to those puritanical swingers I can only offer that my perceived betrayal is the unavoidable consequence of my grander purpose, one of community betterment. My intent isn't to let everyone *in*, but rather to let *out* our process, rules, and etiquette so those new to our ways can stop spoiling the fun for the rest of us. It's not unconditional inclusion I want, but universal understanding.

Far worse than the consequences I may face in the Lifestyle is the possibility that this book may lose me friends. Some of my most near and dear friends are swingers, many of whom appear in the pages that follow. I debated long and hard whether to endanger friendships and, in the end, was guided by the wisdom of Dr. Seuss: "Those who mind don't matter; and those who matter don't mind."²

I'm no expert, no natural-born talent, definitely no guru. As you'll soon learn, only through a colossal experiment in trial and error did I reach the sexual summit. Although I own up to having worn a cape in a few intimate scenarios, I don't possess supernatural powers of any kind. Perhaps my IQ is slightly above average, but Mensa isn't busting down my door. If pressed to define myself, I'd say I'm Horatio Alger between the sheets: a self-made swinging single male . . . with a hefty dose of Buster Keaton mixed in.

What I claim is extensive experience and a solid record of Lifestyle success. I have standing invitations to large events, house parties, group functions, and bedrooms of women and couples. I claim normal everyday status, ordinary looks (at best), and an average cock size (also at best). I carry a few extra pounds, have a gap between my front teeth, and stand below average height. I have a soft (sometimes double) chin.

and even after a decent number of laser treatments, my back remains a work in progress. Nothing abnormally tragic has befallen me. I have a phenomenal circle of Vanilla friends, and, all in all, I can't complain about my life.

I'm a regular guy. Granted, a regular guy who's had one-on-ones, MFMs, FMFs, foursomes, moresomes, gang bangs, orgies, phone sex, text sex, car sex, and public sex. I've played with white women, black women, Asian women, East Indian women . . . tall women, short women, voluptuous women, skinny women . . . old women, young women, and middle-aged women.

During my Lifestyle tenure, I've lost count of the number of stellar encounters I've had and can tally on one hand the number of not-so-great ones. I've been rejected infinitely more times than accepted, but have always forged ahead.

The truth is, I hope you'll find much of my advice unnecessary. I pray that personal hygiene is not a topic for which you need counsel. I hope you don't consider yourself God's gift to sex. And I wish with everything I've got that you treat everyone with respect, courtesy, and dignity. I really, truly do. But scores of pseudo-swingers (almost exclusively of the single and male variety) have made it so I can't assume anything. To do so would be a disservice to those more evolved, as it would fail to intervene on the Cro-Magnons lousiness, things up. So, to those of you who shower with regularity, who don't wield a *Hindenburg*-size ego, and who make it habit not to act with discourtesy toward your fellow man, I request you endure the mundane topic in order to gain insight from the more in-depth discussions.

I promise you, a cornucopia of copulation awaits. Porn ain't got shit on what's out there. However, there are no guarantees except unrelenting, soul-crushing, suicide-inducing rejection. Between the mysterious alchemy of personalities, the finicky pairing of sexual proclivities, or the elusive science of physical attraction, there are too many unpredictable and uncontrollable factors at play for surefire success. However, when the stars do align and the cosmic tumblers fall into place, nothing—and I mean nothing—is more satisfying.

There's one final group to address: those who feel I'm unqualified to speak to the Lifestyle. Who say a single male cannot, by definition, be a "swinger." Who believe my solo gender pollutes the sanctity of the swing community. With you, I respectfully disagree. I posit that I am *uniquely* qualified to comment on the Lifestyle, as I am painfully aware of what couples and women do *not* want. My nose has been repeatedly broken by the slam of the Lifestyle door. I've been rejected so many times that I was conditioned to expect it. My success and, more important, my failures qualify me more than just about anyone to comment. And so, for better or worse, I have.

-
1. Admittedly, there are differing schools of thought on the etymology of *unicorn*. Some use the term to denote a single female in the Lifestyle. Others use it in reference to a single, *bi* female, which I've also heard called a *golden unicorn*. Still others reserve the term for a single, *bi*, *attractive* women, the Holy Grail of the unicorn species, whom I personally term *golden, rainbow unicorns*.
 2. I know I incorrectly attributed this quote to Theodor Geisel. But I'd rather erroneously cite Dr. Seuss than properly credit financial statesman, and political consultant Bernard Baruch. It just sounds better.

Flirting



My Sort-of Sex Education

Long before I reached the peak of carnal mastery, I was five years old sitting on the big-boy toilet, as I had been doing successfully for some time, when for no discernible reason I began to grow. Horrified by the inflating and hardening that wasn't giving any sign of stopping, I shrieked at the top of my tiny, hyperventilating lungs, "IT'S GETTING BIGGER! IT'S GETTING BIGGER!" Within seconds, my mother burst in to find me squirming rabidly on the toilet trying to escape my erection with the same futility with which a dog chases its tail. Suppressing hysterical laughter, I'm certain, she assured me that my genital mutation would return to normal if I relaxed. From God knows where, I summoned the will to steady the adrenaline and cease hyperventilating. As promised, I deflated.

In an attempt to dispel my penile-phobia, my mother read me *Where Did I Come From?* The illustrated children's book explained the basics of conception, pregnancy, and the birthing process. Problem was, my still-forming brain couldn't synthesize the material. As such, erections tormented me into middle school, at which time I took matters into my own hands (so to say) to wrap my brain around this thing called sex.

Because I was born into the pre-Internet age, banks of ready, available, and (somewhat) reliable information were scarce. It took years of scavenging for me to cobble the scant tutelage found in scrambled adult cable channels, a *Hustler* purchased at overnight camp, and a well-worn VHS tape of *Rosie: The Neighborhood Slut* into a working knowledge of sex.¹ Fully aware that my self-edification was rudimentary at best, I prayed it would be enough for my debut performance with Lindsay, my first serious girlfriend in college.

Tantamount to the miracle that I had found a woman to have sex with was the horror that she wasn't a virgin. She'd had two previous sexual partners of whom I was aware, which meant I was at a severe disadvantage. She'd had firsthand experience to which I could (and most likely would) be compared. But at the ripe age of twenty, I knew it was now or join the nearest monastery.

Due to the coronary-inducing stress of the experience, I recall little from that night. What I do remember amounts to the sexual equivalent of a Keystone Cops short. Two failed attempts donning a condom ended when Lindsay pointed out that I was putting it on backward. Then, despite possessing a decent theoretical understanding of the female anatomy, I proved exceedingly inept. After numerous attempts at entry, I relented and accepted Lindsay's guidance and frequent re-guidance throughout the forty-one-second marathon. I know it was forty-one seconds, as my deflowering culminated in Van Morrison crooning from Lindsay's stereo, "And it stoned me to my soul . . ." To this day, Van's voice curls me into a permanent fetal position.

Sex with Lindsay over the ensuing year took on a haunting refrain, one in which I fumbled about, she exercised inhuman levels of patience and understanding, and all things physical resolved in a smattering of seconds.

That's not to say there wasn't the occasional triumph. One time, I lasted a full half hour.

"What happened?" Lindsay asked, dumbfounded and satisfied (for once), after the fact.

"I have no idea," I admitted, just as bewildered (and satisfied).

"Well, if you want to do that next time, it's cool with me."

It would have been cool with me, too, but I couldn't crack the code of that Olympic performance. And by spring semester junior year it was too late. I'd been accepted into my university's study-abroad program in London, and, a few weeks in, Lindsay admitted over the phone, choking on a deluge of tears, that she'd grown interested in someone else.

"It's just . . ." she gasped, ". . . our relationship . . ." Gasp. "Has become . . ." Gasp. "A friendship." Cough, snot, wheeze.

I didn't protest, because, well, she was right. The connection we'd had over those eighteen months had run its course. It was nobody's fault, just the trajectory of things.

Days after my transatlantic dumping, one of my housemates welcomed a visitor from the States. Melissa was on the thick side, with sandy blond hair and a pre-boob reduction Soleil Moon Frye chest.² Melissa's friend, my housemate, anchored the right wing of the political spectrum, so when Melissa voiced interest in exploring the red-light district, she was met with more than a hint of hesitation. But having just been released back into the dating pool, I was beyond game.

Dim lighting, neon displays, and every inch of shelf and rack space crammed with devices engineered for maximum orgasm, the place was the mecca of adult emporiums—at least compared to the two shops I'd previously (and briefly) patronized. Behind the counter sat a man in a wrinkled tan Windbreaker and stained, unwashed khakis, both of which came off as oddly formal next to the store's extravagant wares. He looked like he hadn't showered, slept, or changed clothes in weeks, and the dubious dark circles weighing down his eyes typecast him as the pervert about whom every parent warned their child.

"This selection is uh-may-zing," Melissa fawned over the bondage wear, mesh blouses, and garments with keyhole areas cut away that most fashion designers considered essential.

As Melissa perused, I tried to discern why every article of clothing was priced in direct proportion to the amount of fabric it lacked, a seemingly illogical strategy.

"Need any help?" the clerk inquired in a Cockney brogue.

"Paddles," Melissa responded before our host could slur out the whole of his question.

We were directed to a wall offering what appeared to be every model ever made in the history of spanking. Melissa purred as her eyes zipped over the stock, instantly assessing each option's worth. Obviously, she wasn't lured by flashy packaging—flamboyant designs or corny sayings such as "Daddy's Little Helper" were immediately dismissed. Products receiving consideration followed a thematic trend: black with minimal flair. At first these designs struck me as boring, but soon I understood the intimidation in their understated appearance. It was the same way movie villains terrorized with deathly quiet and unshakable, even-keeled temperaments. Basically, if Hannibal Lecter were reincarnated as a sex toy, he'd have been the style of paddle Melissa contemplated.

"Li'l help?" Melissa requested as she armed me with a black leather paddle edged in maroon stitching that was quintessential Lecter. A lanyard hung from its handle, which, I presumed, was an effort at safety. My mind briefly wandered to pre-lanyard paddles that had slipped from sweaty grips to shatter nearby vases and maim innocent spectators. How many of these senseless atrocities had transpired before a paddlesmith wisely added a leash?

"Ready." Melissa snapped me back to the matter at hand.

Her ass toward me and bent slightly at the waist, she awaited my assistance. I gripped the paddle and heeding the adage "Safety first," slipped on the lanyard. Instinctually, I assumed a batter's stance and balanced my weight, the way my father had coached me to in Little League. I relaxed my shoulder, measured my distance, and administered what I presumed would be a decent smack but instead sounded muffled and weak against her denim. I swore I heard the clerk stifle a chuckle.

Melissa switched to a wider, firmer model studded with metal rivets and instructed me, "Don't hold

back,” before resuming the position.

~~*It's all about the fundamentals*, my father's coaching mantra echoed in my head. I lowered my center of gravity, kept my eye on Melissa's ass, and leaned into my swing.~~

“Oh, yes!” Melissa declared, then triumphantly snatched the Louisville Slugger (Deviant's Edition) from me. “Spreader bars?” she yelled to the now amused clerk, who pointed to another wall, where a collection hung like a shrine of industrial-size wrenches.

Melissa ran her fingers across the metal rods as though they were erotic wind chimes before removing one wrapped in a black leather skin with matching faux-fur ankle cuffs. She laid it on the floor and straddled it in a V stance, vertically mimicking the position when the bar was in use. She called out, “Do you take travel checks?”

That night we went to a pub and my housemates wasted no time interrogating me about my day trip. But since they weren't brave enough to tag along, I decided they weren't deserving of the details.

After many pints, Melissa and I began to flirt. Furtive glances escalated to stealthy petting and, before I knew it, we were the last two of our party. We trekked back to her bed-and-breakfast and had no sooner closed the door to her room than we began making out.

It should be noted that until this point in my limited sexual experience I'd yet to close a successful one-night stand. It wasn't for lack of trying. As a matter of fact, by this point I could boast many failed (and several aborted) attempts. 'Twas more than a few times I had cajoled lasses back to my dorm room.³ But other than a pity-fueled dry-hump session with the minister's daughter, casual sexual relations were not the fruit. I was (and still am) of the belief that one simply is or is not a closer. And though for years my libido had been open 24/7/365, I'd yet to have my first paying customer.

Within seconds, Melissa and I were naked on the bed and I was convinced I was about to experience my first actual, in-the-flesh, legitimate hookup. Luckily I'd had the presence of mind at the pub to buy a condom from the men's room vending machine and now retrieved it from my discarded jeans. But when I turned back to Melissa, she was in tears.

First Lindsay, now Melissa? I had inadvertently tapped into some innate talent to incite women to cry. And it was not a talent I particularly wanted, nor one that boded well for casual sex, I was certain.

“Did I do something?” I asked Melissa.

“I'm sorry,” she sniffled. “It's just . . . he doesn't love me.”

Though essentially brand new to hookup protocol, I knew crying wasn't a sign of impending intercourse. In fact, the last time a female's tears were lobbed my way, they immediately preceded a swift dumping.

“Master tore up our contract,” Melissa eked out before launching into a new fit of wailing.

Though fairly certain “Master” wasn't his given name, I didn't want to ask Melissa for details mid-bawling. What I wanted was to finally close the deal.

“The day before I left,” she hiccupped. “He ripped it up and threw it in my face.”

Trying to press through this minor detour, I asked as nonobliviously as I could fake, “What was the contract for?”

Melissa paused, breathed deeply, then howled, “Meeeeeeeeeeeeeee!”

While modern-day enslavement was not a topic about which I knew much (or anything at all, actually), I could see my window of erotic opportunity slamming closed, so I threw up a Hail Mary.

“Would it help if I used these?” I asked as I lifted Melissa's earlier purchases from her suitcase.

Time froze. Melissa's tears slowed. Her erratic breathing calmed and her moist, swollen eyelids opened ever so slightly. My offer had parted the dark clouds of love lost and shone down warm, fertile rays of new hope, sparking life in the jagged remnants of her obliterated heart.

Melissa looked at me and, with the sincerity of someone whose soul has been genuinely touched, said

“Oh, honey, you can’t handle me,” then resumed crying.

~~She soon passed out, but I remained awake, smushed between the wall and her spasming body in the~~ after-throes of emotional tumult. I listened to her breath strain through her throat parched raw from crying and endured the mocking of the paddle and spreader bar at the foot of the bed.

Oh, honey, you can’t handle me. Their cackles gnawed at my shrinking sense of self-worth.

Though I was humiliated like I never knew possible, Melissa was right. I couldn’t have handled her. If she’d taken me up on my offer, I would have embarrassed and possibly injured us both. I was barely experienced with one woman, whereas Melissa was a bona fide contracted carnal servant. The chasm of experience between us was intergalactic to say the least.

Lying there naked, crammed between the icy wall and Melissa’s twitching corpse, I experienced my personal Big Bang. I vowed sexual mastery. I promised myself that I would be able to read my lovers’ desires and reliably deliver. I was adamant that when next confronted with a spreader bar or paddle or any implement designed for optimal orgasm, I would be more than prepared. Someday—and by God, Allah, and Adonai, that day would come—I’d belong on this bed, instead of between the wall and mattress.

In retrospect, I see that cataclysmic experience was also an awakening. When I replay that night even today, I can still tune into the same internal stirring that woke in me that night. Some out-of-reach inner itch that, even then, I knew had to be scratched.

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1. *Rosie* wouldn’t prove the most creative or educational of adult viewing fare. However, neither was part of my buying criteria at the time. I’d had to circle the block for fifteen minutes to build up the courage to enter my first adult shop, and the anxiety of embarking on my first visit to an official adult store precluded me from progressing farther than the bargain bin beside the cash register. And so *Rosie* would have to suffice.
 2. For those unfamiliar with Soleil, shame on you! She was the title character from TV’s *Punky Brewster*. Still don’t know? Google her and recommend season four, when she’s at her most “breastally” developed.
 3. “More than a few times” means exactly three:
 - a. A rebellious Southern Baptist minister’s daughter who couldn’t quite pull the sexual trigger,
 - b. A female friend who realized minutes into making out that we were destined to be just friends, and
 - c. A girl I met at a campus party who had barely crossed my threshold before realizing she was still in love with her ex, serial cheater. (Since she physically entered my room, she qualifies.)



My Quest Begins

The next three years were a blur of insta-relationships, each resolving faster than the one before it. One lasted a single day. I kid you not. And while each relationship was unique and began and ended for its own reasons, the thematic trend through all of them was my sexual ineptitude.

Don't misunderstand; I wasn't beyond salvation. In fact, regular practice with girlfriends helped me to improve in certain areas. I'd been told repeatedly that I was an exceptional kisser and more than a few times my oral skills were highly praised. However, my central problem remained unchanged: I orgasmed on a hair-trigger.

Though beyond frustrated, I knew something deeper and more profound was at play. As if my void of stamina had meaning. Like it was letting me know I was doing something incredibly wrong. How one can reliably messes up the process of tab A into slot B and repeat I couldn't fathom, but something told me that if I just pressed on, it would eventually reveal itself. At least I prayed it would.

While my girlfriends rarely, if ever, made mention of my "limitation," it bothered me to no end and I became gun-shy about sex. After I'd exhausted excuses of homework and time-consuming extracurriculars in order to avoid sex with girlfriends, I upped the ante to contagious illnesses and physical injuries. If I recall, a relative met his untimely demise more than once. On a positive note, though my sex life was on life support, I made the dean's list every semester.

A glimmer of hope appeared when I learned of Distraction Technique.¹ I'd seen some documentary on Ron Jeremy, who revealed that by focusing on non-arousing objects he distracted his attention from physical stimulation and thus was able to control his orgasm.² I experimented with Distraction on my own to some moderate success. But no matter how hard I tried not to, I couldn't *not* affect my results. Like playing checkers against yourself: you can't help but know your next move. To fully gauge its worth, I had to try it during actual sex. When I finally did roll out Distraction, I must have looked like Rain Main ODing on caffeine, my attention shifting by the nanosecond from the door to the lamp to the curtains, the carpet everywhere but my girlfriend.

"Is everything okay?" she asked after I'd reset the world record for shortest consummation (yet again). "You seemed . . . distracted."

Though distraction was the goal, my partner taking note was not. As such, I filed away Distraction Technique before I made my girlfriend even more suspicious than I'd already made her.

Sexual rock bottom was my "slow dock" technique. Unable to exile myself from sex in a relationship, I resorted to doubling-up on condoms to desensitize, genitally docking at a tortoise's pace, then requiring a lengthy period of silence and immobility from my partner so I could acclimate to my new environment. My hope was that this elaborate process—similar to entering a hot bath—would relax me enough to secure some stamina. Though it was exceedingly awkward to lie atop my girlfriend, both of us soundless and motionless for several minutes before I attempted initial pelvic thrusting, I didn't know what else to do. And when "slow docking" proved useless after two humiliating attempts, I truly didn't.

Enter Missy, a tangential college acquaintance with whom I'd reconnected in New York City a few years after graduation through a mutual friend. It was in Missy that I'd found my first true *sort-of* sexual

connection. “*Sort-of*” because we only non-sex hooked up. Non-sex because Missy had rediscovered religion and recommitted to celibacy until marriage. She wasn’t a virgin, but she was resolute in her recommitment. And as I wasn’t touting my sexual track record—in fact, I was trying to expunge most of it—I didn’t protest a response Missy mistook for respect for her spiritual rebirth. I didn’t correct her because, well, it didn’t seem to hurt anyone and, more specifically to my benefit, I was relieved not to have to circumvent sex to save myself further embarrassment.

To my surprise, non-sex hooking up with Missy was better than all the sex I’d had. The best was kissing. Our mouths fit perfectly and our lips knew precisely what to do. The entire act was . . . well . . . natural. As opposed to “slow docking.”

My attraction to Missy wasn’t physical, though she wasn’t at all bad to look at; rather, it was of an intellectual nature. Missy was supremely intelligent, enviously quick-witted, and brandished a sense of humor with samurai precision. She was different from prior girlfriends in that she kept me on my toes and challenged me, qualities I wasn’t aware I desired in another until I experienced them with Missy.

Unfortunately, after a few months the non-sex bliss ended when Missy moved out of state for business school and I relocated to Los Angeles for better weather and an acceptable standard of living. We stayed in touch and a year later I visited her over New Year’s. Only hours after my arrival, while we were resurrecting non-sex hooking up, Missy confessed, “I kinda want to have sex.”

I was floored. “What about . . . ?”

“I know. I just . . . Wait. Do you want to?”

“Well, yeah. It’s just that . . .”

“Just that what?” Her tone was laced with suspicion.

“I didn’t bring any condoms.”

My erection, Missy, and I drag-raced to the nearest drugstore, then back to her apartment, where we broke her recommitment. Then re-broke, bombed, and waged all-out nuclear war on it over the three-day weekend.

With each go I prayed that the intellectual attraction between us would transfer to the physical and elevate the experience to the one I’d been questing for. But alas, it did not. Instead, that internal stirring I felt after the Melissa debacle accelerated. I still couldn’t pinpoint what it was saying, and my patience was growing shorter by the orgasm.

Missy moved to LA after business school and was hell-bent on making up for her sexual hiatus. We did plenty of nonsexual activities—ate out, saw movies, hung with friends—but everything was shadowed by the fact that I’d be called to duty at any moment.

As well as physically demanding, sex with Missy was mentally and emotionally taxing. Intercourse had become a game of twenty questions. *Does that feel good? Do you like that? What can I do for you? What position do you want? Are you ready to cum? How about now? How about now? Now?* A Fort Knox security clearance vetting couldn’t have been more thorough. I knew Missy was trying to bring us closer as a couple but her sexy-time interrogations kept me from being in the moment, which, in turn, precluded me from engaging with her on an emotional level.

That Thanksgiving Missy flew home to be with her family, and the day before her return, she called with an epiphany too important for her to wait to tell me in person.

“I think we should break up,” she stated more than suggested.

Sure, we’d hit a rough patch—our Halloween screaming match on Wilshire Boulevard when I was dressed as Superman and she as Lois Lane wasn’t a high point³—but were things so bad that she couldn’t wait to talk in person?

“But I still need you to pick me up at the airport tomorrow,” she added before I could respond to being

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