Circles of Freedom

as told by the Lady K to R. Michael Ferry

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Introduction: A novel of short stories and vignettes of individuals finding personal freedom or acceptance of conventional wisdom. A vignette is a short impressionistic scene that focuses on one moment or gives a trenchant impression about a character.

Chapter 1 is of Lady K [Karen] telling her story to Michael.

Other chapters will deal with different individuals that are interwoven in Lady K’s life. Entropy has been defined as the fear of being overwhelmed or disoriented by emptiness, isolation and alienation and many of the stories will have these themes as the focus.

Individuals also have the “Eureka” moment when they realize something with stunning clarity for the first time. As the story unfolds this theme and others can be told by the Lady K to Michael: and it becomes his goal to tell their stories as best he can.
Introductory remarks:

Somehow every story has got to find a beginning and I am sitting in my patio with a highball glass half filled with bourbon called Makers Mark and ice cubes, sipping away and feeling the cooling breeze off the ocean. I just spent the entire day at Laguna Lake sitting on a bench listening to a life moment reflection as told to me by a woman that I call Lady K.

Laguna Lake is close to my house and my normal routine is to have a cup of coffee and read recent posts in Face book, then finish dressing and go over to the lake to walk. At my age and being retired I think of this as a spiritual moment as well as exercise that my doctor tells me is good to do. At times I take a book that I have been reading at for over a year, but mostly I go to watch joggers jog, strollers stroll, kids learn to fish, couples walk hand in hand and I just sit observing and enjoy letting my mind drift to where ever it goes to.

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CHAPTER 1

CARLA BLUE
“Hi my name is Carla; Carla Blue” is how she introduced herself over a year ago. She was dressed very nicely, as usual. I had noticed her sometime ago having coffee in the plaza where my office was located. But we had never spoken, just sort of nodded as our eyes met.

“I really need a ride to Cal State, is that on your way? My ride sort of left me stranded and the next bus is not until 5:30”

Noticing the hesitation and my surprise she continued quickly, “I am a student there so I have a student ID, I sell real estate so you can call the office and verify that I am me,”

She laughed then she continued by offering me the photo ID and her business card. Both had images of a smiling young lady, black with Asian undertones, a real ambiguous ethnicity really, and short hair with curls, stunning good looks that I had noticed all the medical doctors always looking at her.

I glanced at the student card that looked like every student ID, useful for getting books at their bookstore and lunch at the cafeteria, but the business card was outstanding. Printed on very heavy stock it had a very high gloss coating and was printed both front and back. This was a card that no one would lose or throw away. Carla Blue, Medical office Specialist serving coastal Orange County, her phone number and the office number was the entire card. It was the image on the back that was stunning: high resolution image of her standing in front of the medical center, short skirt, high heels, a vaporous blowing blouse, subdued smile with just a hint of forbidden knowledge. It simply read, “Earning your trust, Carla”

Just then an older man came walking over in a hurry, “Carla, I’m sorry I can’t meet today. We have an emergency going on”. He was wearing a white smock over surgeon blues, was slightly balding and in a manner of words pear shaped and spoke with an Indian accent. Carla gave him the most gracious smile and said. “I totally understand, I can find a ride or take the bus so there is no problem. And we can re-schedule the appointment, is that OK?” They walked a short distance away and talked for just a moment before Carla came back and asked, “Well is Cal State on your way?

I was taken aback by her openness and just how straightforward she was. I grew up with more of a him- and- haw about issues. I was taught by example to be evasive when asking, to insinuate or hint at and never, never ask directly.

Her attitude was just so different and at this point I was looking for a different type of friendship in my life. I knew I wanted to meet someone somewhere where quiet conversations were possible, just getting to know someone, their likes and dislikes, what they are truly looking for. How they feel about family and friends, what are their passions in life and to get a feel for their personality and how they came to be who they are: I wanted a friendship with someone truly different than I. What I want out of the next phase of my life is a solid friendship that is mutually supporting.

One thing so very different is that she ended a sentence with a question that required a yes or no responses. Not the open ended understated sentences that I grew up with. How refreshing to me: do I want to give her a ride, yes or no; am I going that way, yes of no, and how gracious she accepted a no answer when given.

“I do drive close to Cal State, so it is not much out of my way” I replied, curious to know more about this person named Carla Blue. “Are you taking courses there?” “
Right now I am taking some sociology courses…mainly about the woman’s movement in the 70’s and since. So I am studying about you in one respect”

I smiled just a little, “you do not know how boring my life is, just not much to study, but yes, and of course I can give you a ride. I live about 40 minutes from here and Cal State is about halfway in between.”

“That is great,” Carla Blue gave me one of the sincerest smiles I have seen in years, “and I would love to know more about your boring life if you do not mind sharing. I am in the middle of writing a term paper and it would really help me to know someone who lived and became adult during this period of time. Perhaps your story will find it way into my paper.”

“Ha!” was about the only thing I could say, “Your paper would be titled “One who Missed Out”.

“Now that is a great idea. We read essays from that period, talk them to death, watch old new coverage of what was going on, the “bra-burning’ and all, and we get the impression that everyone was doing it. What a great slant, that not everyone was involved. You have not told me your name you know.”

The walk to the car was slow paced and totally enjoyable for the first time. How refreshing to be able to chat about something semi serious, well listen is closer to the truth to Carla Blue’s infectious enthusiasm about her term paper. “My name is Karen”

Extending her hand and giving a firm handshake Carla blue smiles, “Hi Karen, do you mind if I call you Lady K? I think the biggest problem with communication is the illusion it is taking place. George Bernard Shaw said that”

“Communication is always difficult” I replied, “I have been married for over 20 years and I still do not know if Michael and I really communicate. Are you married, boy friend, and any kids?”

“Good Lord no kids, never married thank God and as far as a boy friend not currently. My first goal is to finish with school, but I am not yet sure what I want, Maybe Law or something in Medicine. Last year I finished my Bachelor’s program in Fine Art. But it is almost impossible to make any real money, so despite that Art is the biggest passion in my life I have to be realistic. But before I am over my 30’s I want my career settled, perhaps have my kids and then and only then consider marriage. I think too many rush to complete their life, don’t you?”

“I’m not sure how to respond really, it’s not that life is complete exactly, just that it seems complete and not as satisfying as I thought it would be. My friends tell me it is “empty nest syndrome” because both my kids have left home. Michael and I married, had our children, raised them that much is true. But I am really glad they have left home and are establishing their own lives.” I am very proud of them just as I imagine your parents are of you.”

Well I am proud of myself I know. My Grandmother raised me from the time I was 10 , Mom and Dad just were not in the picture. It was common for Dads to leave but in my case both did. Then when I was 14 I had to go with foster care because Granny was just too old and handicapped to take care of me.

But in those 4 years I felt true unconditional love and when I do marry that is what I want. Right now for me my life is like a blank canvas and I can paint it anyway I wish. Well not exactly blank but you know what I mean I think”
Lady K, “What I think I want more than anything is a sense of freedom, or a real freedom that I can share with Michael” Here is the quandary to be both attached and independent. You really seem to have it so together for someone your age, how old are you if I may ask.”

“I am 25, almost 26 now. Graduated from High school at 17, worked for a couple of years then started to study at So Cal. I started to study both art and psychology and still have an interest in psychology, but not enough to get really serious about it.”

The drive was effortless; it seemed as if we both could be who we were and share that, nothing judgmental or envious, just two adults talking and accepting the brief moment of time spent together.

“It doesn’t really matter where you come from, what a matter is where you belong. Take this exit and in a few lights you will come to where I can get out. What is the most romantic time you were with Michael?”

The most romantic moment I remember thought Karen as she exited the freeway and started North on State College.

The most romantic thing: When I got inside the house and found a note on the table that said follow the rose petals. I followed the rose petals through the living room and upstairs, finally I got to his bedroom door and found another note on the door that said close your eyes and walk in. So when I closed my eyes he walked over to me and kissed me and walked me over to the bed and sat me down. Finally he told me to open my eyes and I saw all of my favorite breakfast foods on the table. It was so wonderful.

Carla paused before saying, “that’s so beautiful! Would you like to stay in touch, go for lunch sometime of coffee?” I bet we have lots we can talk about.

Karen once again was caught by surprise. Why would this beautiful young lady think we have lots to talk about anyway? She is just my daughters’ age, but what a wonderful idea, to develop a friendship with someone so young. “Yes I would like that; I would like that very much.”

“How wonderful,” Carla Blue smiled. “Here is my card and let me have yours.”

Karen decided to drive the rest of the way home on surface streets. The traffic was not really bad and she was enjoying just looking at some different stores and things. What a wonderful and varied shopping area, oriented toward youth, the college crowd for sure. What a delight to drive through and just see the kids walking around, chatting all holding books or lap tops. Young adults really with their lives ready to unfold.

What was it Carla said, education first, then career, then perhaps a boyfriend and have a baby and then think of marriage, was that the priority now a days? She had said something about the rush to complete a life: how totally different from me. I was anxious to marry Michael and become complete. This was the unstated goal or purpose given to me by my parents. Well stated perhaps in a very oblique way such as, “of course a college education is important if you are going to marry a professional man” or something like that. I was never asked what I wanted for a career, they just assumed I would marry a proper man, have grand kids and be like Grams, Pops and them.

I was not supposed to have a career. I remember a discussion Michael was having with his friends and they asked him if he was going to allow me to work. They all were so adamant that their wife’s would never work proclaiming that it was the man’s job to support the family. What a laugh that was. Our first almost argument was over me working or not from Michael’s viewpoint, from my viewpoint it was more if he had the right to control me. Good Lord Times have really changed: me working or not was a big issue back then.

How quaint it seems now, is this Carla wants to talk about? For a woman with my background there was just no other option than marriage.
Of course we all went to church as a family. Three generations taking Communion and being one with God. The problem was that we did not bring God home with us, just expectations. A couple of times in high school we had the minister over for dinner, but those visits created more of a strain than anything. I had to dress proper because he was coming. Discussions were if it would be alright to serve wine instead of the martinis that my father loved to make, perfectly of course. He would make a picture for four, taste it and if the martini was not just right then he would pour the entire picture out and start again.

What a real delight for Dad when the minister mentioned that his favorite mixed drink was the classic American cocktail called a dry martini. Dad absolutely lit up as he and the father talked about different gins, different ratios of booze to vermouth and how absolutely horrid was the substitution of vodka for gin. I learned that the olive was not a garnish as many bars used it but a vital ingredient to add “brine” to the drink and that certain olives were too salty or to bringing and which ones were superior to others and which ones were just tolerable. It is vital to have the right olive at the bottom of the glass before pouring the drink into the glass, and if you like extra brine to have two olives or even run the olive around the top of the glass, and of course you must hold the glass by the stem so that you do not warm the drink to room temperature. So for a couple of years the minister would come over for cocktails, but not dinner. I did not learn a lot about the Church but I sure learned the theory of a martini cocktail.

Well I did learn that making a martini is like love. It should be entered into with correctness or not at all. My career and what I was interested in never came up. The minister, my parents and grandparents were guiding me to be the perfect wife for some future “lucky man” My only job in high school was to remain pure and virginal. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief when my breasts were so slow to develop, mom would tell me that some girls it just took longer and not to worry as every girl around me and under me were developing boobs that the guys loved to look at and talk about.
The Drive Home

“I’ll think about it” Jesus how could I have said that, I will think about it”. Karen is simply talking to herself or more like it fighting inside herself as she takes the long Orange County commute home. Traffic is a mess as it always is in late afternoon. The day is gorgeous and work was one of those rewarding days that being a computer analyst were really worth the stress. Complex problems that needed to be resolved in a hurry were part of Karen’s normal. Thinking for a living pays very well in OC. “Jesus I never swear and damn it that’s all I can do now”

Traffic on the 57 was miserably slow, stop and go and for no apparent reason, which just makes it worse. “If there were an accident I could understand this crap of traffic backed up, but no, hell no we are all just doing some sort of God damn stop and go dance, behaving like mindless drones” Karen stops and tries to puzzle over driving, swearing and what happens next: Or rather how to manage what to do next. “How do I tell Michael, do I tell Michael when do I tell Michael. All right, alright stop this, think! I think you are right. All that just entered my mind and I have not really thought about it: but there is emptiness that I do not like admitting!”

Guys have hinted in the past, but they were more shy hints that I could easily ignore and pretend that nothing was serious. But this was serious, and in front of his wife, staged so I would know that she would know. “Good God, I have not even felt another penis in my life …ever!” and here I am excited like a high school kid being asked to a dance. No I love you, no romance, none of that at all. I have resented it when Michael grinds against my ass in public. And our kisses have become more like chicken

Michael knows about Geoffrey, so talking will not be a complete surprise to him since I mention him all the time when describing my day. This emptiness had been growing for years now, and the move to OC was helpful for only a brief period. Thanks to my Catholic upbringing I had been a virgin when I married Michael. We have a pretty good life, two children, both adult now. Geoffrey I do like, or maybe I just admire his intelligence and openness. He is so different from Michael in that aspect. Geoffrey is open and a flirt, well perhaps a tease is more like it. We have worked together about a year now, and when problems reach a critical stage he is the one I count on. How strange it seems that he can be teasing one moment and so focused the next. “I know this is not love!” He is also married and intends to stay that way. He told me about his open marriage and the sharing He and Anne have. I did not really believe him until today at lunch when I met her. “Damn I was awkward” And for no reason, I must have sensed something was different. But I was not sure until we left the restaurant, funny how I can be uncertain of some things still. I hate when I am really naïve, at my age no less.
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“Good God, I have not even felt another penis in my life …ever!” and here I am excited like a high school kid being asked to a dance. No I love you, no romance, none of that at all. I have resented it when Michael grinds against my ass in public. And our kisses have become more like chicken pecks now. “Hello peck, goodbye peck, how are you peck, let’s go to bed peck, what’s for dinner peck” I am a mother, I am a business woman, I am a friend, I am a lover, and I’m an angel undercover and all I get is peck peck peck. “Jesus what a life”

So now it is perhaps to late I have thought: small tits in a forty four year old body with a clingy husband and a job that requires so much energy that I am too tired to fuck anyway. I look at how close Anne and Geoffrey sit together, their smiles, how he teases her and teases me at the same time. I just know that under the table cloth he is running his hand up and down her leg. I can even sense when he stops and know right where his hand is and smile back at him so he knows I know what Anne is feeling.

The three of us were alone riding down the elevator when Geoffrey gently pulled me against him and leaned over my shoulder. I could feel him move against me, rubbing ever so softly until I felt his erection against my butt and see Anne looking down at her feet. I know with Michael I would have been so angry at him, but this was thrilling. All Geoffrey said was, “I want to fuck you” And All I could say was, “I will think about it” when I know I want this. I just do not when I started to want this. And does it even matter, the when I mean. I just know that right now I like feeling like a woman desired and not feeling like a wife. I like the excitement of the thought for sure. My kids are grown, Michael is stale and Christ he is becoming clingy and all around me affairs are going on.

A month or so Geoffrey was telling me he was thinking of proposing an affair and I had assumed it was with me: but no it was someone else and damn what a surge of disappointment, the thrill of being asked and the let down of not being asked as if I were on some god damn roller coaster so I know I want this. And maybe he was just testing the waters to see my reaction. Hard to really recall how I reacted, I think I just smiled, maybe I looked down or something. I know I did not send any negative messages. Oh, I think I laughed or chuckled, I know I smiled, did I lick my lips, “Damn I wish I could remember exactly what he said and how I reacted” I can take some control in my life. It seems that forever I have been pleasing my parents, my husband, my kids: my life is somehow obligated to everyone else except me. I feel consumed, eaten alive by everything. I am married and damn there is this feeling of emptiness and alienation from Michael, isolation from my kids and my parents still think they should control what I do, where I live. “Christ, I cannot even fart correctly”

I often told Michael about Geoffrey’s teasing and fooling around with the staff: his almost fearless manner in talking sexually with almost anyone, how he could take the comebacks and how he would intentionally try to embarrass everyone and just enjoy being teased back. He could do this in such a manner that no one was offended. He can slip from telling a joke to making a crack about someone’s body parts and immediately move into solving a complex problem. I am always more puzzled than not by how Michael does react. I wish I had more clues on how to talk this over, because I have decided not to do this behind his back. “It is really irritating at how polite Michael is when I talk about Geoffrey” Now that is what is really confusing and madding about this whole situation. At times Michael seems to indicate he is cool with me being flirted with and at other times he can show such resentment. I think the flirting started about two months after I had hired Geoffrey. We had had a computer dump and it was his job to find the bug and clean up the mess.
After working on this for a couple of days the problem was back on my desk and I had to take an afternoon pouring over code until I realized where the problem really was. With that small guidance Geoffrey was able to resolve the problem in another day writing some frantic code.

To say thank you Geoffrey purchased me a fun turquoise scarf and a book on how to dress for success. All he said was that I would look great in blues or purples instead of the brown power suits I felt I must wear. The scarf really looked great, and the book provided the reasons why and slowly I began to change from brown to blues and purples. The question for me is was this a thank you or a flirt. At the time I took it for a thank you, but as time passed I realized it was a flirt, or at least a pre-flirt or precursor flirt and felt just how fun it was to be flirted with. Now Michael was surprised and pleased as I was, and of course he only had to go on how I had interpreted the thank you gift. Shortly after that the group I went to lunch included Geoffrey and his teasing of everyone was always in fun and spirited and when we were alone at my desk he could always give me a subtle smile after lunch.

Valentine’s day was about two or three weeks away when Geoffrey suggested about presents and what everyone should wear on Valentine’s day. Our office had never had a party on this particular day and we were convinced what fun it could be to dress special for this day of supposed love making and at least have lunch together as a group. My only objection was that I really had nothing to wear and no real time to go shopping for this type of thing. Geoffrey was of course ready for this and told me he knew where a great blouse was, close to work and that during the lunch hour we could easily go get it and still have time for lunch.

He had found a small boutique with doll type tunics that were stunning. One in particular was a gorgeous maroon cotton linen mix shirt with button up cuffs, pleated contrasting fabric underneath that was just slightly sheer so your bra served as an accent. It felt so sensual when touched that I actually blushed at the idea of wearing it in public let alone to work. But what fun to be shopping with a man who was actually interested in what would be alluring for me to wear. Geoffrey convinced me to get the shirt and surprise my husband on Valentine’s Day. He insisted on a matching maroon bra and panty set that just screamed husband seduction and really seemed so totally focused on myself and Michael…

Damn. Another resentment just entered my mind: how much anger with Michael when he buys me a sexy nighty as a present. Yet here I am remembering how exciting to be with Geoffrey buying alluring clothing to turn Michael on. I did not recognize this as a flirt, that Geoffrey was excited by the idea of me turning Michael on, but now I know this was when Geoffrey began to focus on me: to fantasize about me sexually. And how strange it was to know that Michael and I had nothing exciting going on and Geoffrey was excited by the idea of me and Michael. He wanted to teach me how to seduce my husband. What a fun idea to remember. How to relight a flame that has really gone out: well, of course the results of me seducing Michael were a disaster. But the idea was fun and the effort was also exciting and now

Geoffrey wants to fuck me and that is exciting because I really do not think I have ever been fucked before. “Now that is a strange thought!”

I remember taking a leather jacket to the cleaners to have it cleaned and how shocked I was at the expense. “Bullshit!” I said and stomped out “Will being fucked be the same, will I just stomp out?” And the first time Michael and I tried baking a chocolate cake from scratch we just had to throw it out it was so bad. But we laugh at it now and I do get my leather jacket cleaned. What did Geoffrey say? “this only works if it works for you.”
Suddenly the cell phone starts to ring. Karen looks and sees that Geoffrey is calling. “Hi there”, she says brightly. Geoffrey voice is clear and equally bright, “Hi Karen, I just wanted to check in and see if everything is all right”

“Well traffic is miserable now, it has been stop and go every since I got on the 57”

Geoffrey chuckles, “The 57 is always a nightmare, but that is not what I meant. I really want to know if you are all right. Anne truly enjoyed lunch and meeting you. She thinks you are funny and is still laughing over the joke about the nude beach”

Karen smiles, “I heard that joke at Church if you can believe that. I really do not know a lot of jokes to be honest … that might be my only one”

“Well it is a great story, do you mind if I borrow it?”

“not at all, I think it would be great to hear you tell it, and I promise not to give away the punch line” Damn, I just got cut off by an idiot!”

“I should let you go, I know traffic is miserable. I just wanted to say once again that this will work only if it works for you. So, see you in the morning. bye for now.”

“Bye Geoffrey, thank you for the call … I am doing great by the way.”

The feel of stress flowing out of your body is amazing thought Karen as she reached for a CD to play. Traffic was picking up to 40 miles an hour and she felt like she was free as a bird flying down the freeway. Singing “This is my island in the sun, where my people have toiled since time begun” Karen did feel free, the anxiety simply disappeared into nothingness as she listened and sang to Harry Belafonte’s old blues disk. Geoffrey really cares about me she thought. I did not make that connection … I thought it was about his scoring another woman, “but this does not work unless it works for me”. Now all I have to figure out is how can this work for me. It is clearly my choice, my decision. Geoffrey is not using me, he wants me, and he wants me to make the decision, he is empowering me; not obligating me. Suddenly reaching for a Tobey Keith CD Karen listens for a short while then joins the chorus

“Whoa she’s my little whiskey girl
my ragged-on-the-edges girl
Ah, but I like ‘em rough
Yeah, I like ‘em rough
I like ‘em rough”

“Well Geoffrey,” Karen softly said to herself as she pulled into the drive, “anyway you want it, you got it.”
The noise of the lawn mower covered the sound of the car in the drive. Karen is able to take the time and watch Michael mowing away. Memories and reflections just flood in her mind as she takes the time to watch. For over a year now Michael has been out of work and yet he does keep busy and seems positive Karen reflected. “I really do love that man.” It seems that for all these years he has given me support when I needed it. Well not financial support, but support for me as a person. Of course there were those moments when He did not understand what I wanted or needed, and some of those moments were years really. He still does not understand all of me, but I know he loves me and has never intentionally done anything to hurt me.

“So why do I have this anger at him” Damn I wish life was simple! If I could only wave that magic wand and live happily ever after. “I do not want to hurt him, I do not want a divorce, I do not love Geoffrey and Lord knows I would never want to trade places with Anne” Geoffrey has told me of some of Ann’s affairs, the poor choices she has made, and that for some reasons she at times eats bits of glass. Now that is very odd I think.

Getting fired, laid off, downsized no matter what you call it, it was pure devastation for him Karen realized. He must have sent out hundreds of resumes and is now going to job fairs in spite of knowing that companies are looking for younger or even brand new graduates to fill the few positions. He has even started making custom bird houses and lawn decorations to sell at flea markets. Not making any money but he does cover the expense and I make enough money that money is not a problem, so what is it with me? I have a husband that loves me, supports me, does not complain at me and my mind has been on Geoffrey for months now. “I really want to hold on to the love we share”,

Karen abruptly honks the horn to get Michael’s attention and waves at him.

Michael looks startled then get a big grin on his face as he removes the ear muffs, “Hi there,” he yells and waves, turns off the mower and walks to the drive. “How was your day, Hon” Karen smiles and answers mischievously perhaps nervously, “Boring day for sure, but lunch was very interesting, I finally met Anne”
At some point it became clear to me that this recollection would be a long epic and my mind was spinning in its own circle but always came back to; “Why me?”

Every conversation has those moments where a pause is natural. That moment finally came and I asked her, “Why me?” Lady K also felt the need to pause and light one of those very long and thin cigarettes from the 1960’s and looked at me before answering. I have observed you for several months now as you come to the Lake to draw. Some time ago you spent a morning drawing a dead bird and another time you spent a flash drawing a young girl, but you drew her nude and from that I thought that you had come to realize that you can keep another in your heart but not in your life. I just wanted time to pass so I could confirm what I saw then. Next summer the city has plans to drain the Lake, clean it, sanitize it and in so doing will change it forever. I will never again visit with the Lake when that occurs as the magic will be stolen.

I began to really look at this mysterious person that I swear to God I had never seen before. How could she have observed me without me knowing? I knew exactly the drawing she was referring to so I knew the honesty of her statement. She was older than me I now realized, not by much and not just in years. She moved with the grace of a cat; slow movements that were simply fluid and smooth.

“You are patient when anyone comes to see what you draw. You smile and take the time to let them look without being aloof about yourself. You share yourself and offer to let the kids use your ink and brushes and you bring copy paper just in case anyone has an interest. Why I have asked you to do the portrait is that you do not push yourself on others but allow them in when they approach you.

Sometimes I just feel stupid; here I am mentally undressing her as she is answering my question. She is the only woman I have heard that can cuss and use the foulest language and yet sound so sincere. I sometimes think that I am shallow Hal in disguise. She is just so shapely and my mind wonders how is it to have sex at this age with such an appealing woman. Concentrate on what she is saying. My thoughts are interrupted when she says, “...besides, you are the only person I have seen using a sable brush with Sumi ink”.

“Shall I go on?”

“Please continue.”
Getting out of the car Karen takes a deep breath as she and Michael hug and peck. The kiss was the normal peck but Karen held the hug a little longer. Michael is really a great hugger, lousy kisser, but how nice to feel his arms around me and the feel as he massages the small of my back Karen thought.

“What made lunch so different”? Michael asked as he continued to massage her back “so you finally got to meet Anne?”

“Oh let me tell you after my shower” Karen quickly responded, “you know I like to un-wind after the drive, and traffic was really slow today.”

“Sure, I fixed a pork loin today, would you like barbecue sandwiches or something Asian for dinner?”

“Oh let s go with something exotic like the Asian”, Karen smiled as she broke free, received the little butt swat and walked slowly into home. “I’ll shower as you clean up” Funny how little things or words make a difference. Years ago I would say “We will talk latter” and how upset Michael would be until I talked about my day. When I finally learned to say, “Let me tell you latter” how much his reaction were so different. Maybe learning sex is like learning something just that simple.

Why do guys always like swatting the ass? What a puzzle. For years I thought it was sort of a control, ownership action, “My wife, my ass, belongs to me” But for a long time now Michael did not act possessive in any way, even slightly distant and the butt pat was even intimate and non sexual anymore. Life goes by so quickly, you have to find joy whenever you can, share every second that you can thought Karen as she slowly undressed to shower.

Geoffrey and Anne just seemed to talk so well at lunch, a delightful give and take, back and forth. Some blushing on Ann’s part, but you could just tell they were really together, just how they touched, smiled and responded one to another. None of the halting pauses that I have with Michael. Awkward silences that just drift into an abyss: I read, he watches TV and we make comments about a stupid show.

“that’s what so different,” Karen exclaimed, “Anne and Geoffrey actually talk!”

The only real friend I have to talk and share with is Carla Blue. Odd how friends seem to come into your life when you least expect it. Anais Nin put it beautifully when she said, “Each friend represents a world in us, a world possibly not born until they arrive, and it is only by this meeting that a new world is born.”

Carla and I have talked about the most private aspects of our lives and I have grown just being able to share about myself and Michael, my anger as well as my love for him. Most of my friends were not like this at all, as a matter of fact she is the only real friend I have, the rest are more work friends, just acquaintances really, people I have nothing to do with outside of work. Some friends of Michaels that we do “couple” things with and that I just sort of tolerate. Michael’s friend Mark is ok, but his wife is a drag, sort of judgmental bitchy Orange County housewife type. What I like is that Carla is my friend, not a couple or a work acquaintance. I share some of the chats we have with Michael and he has said many times how he would like to meet her, but she is my friend. And now I have Geoffrey as a friend and maybe even Ann.

A long hot shower always feels great. “I have been married exactly half my life”, Karen mused. Sheltered from sex the whole time is the bewildering thing. My parents molded me in their image and the Church’s image, and then Michael and I just did the act together. I bet Michael’s ideas were molded by his parents also. I only began to express myself sexually since Geoffrey was able to be so open. The first time was getting into the elevator with co workers and Geoffrey and he made some comment about doing someone in the ass and that someone else shot back, “promises, promises” And we all laughed. Of course for a year I have been friends with Carla and we chat about sex, but it is different
That was the first time I realized I had three holes and only used one of them. I only can speak openly about sex with Carla and Geoffrey. Michael maintains his embarrassed silence every time I have even tried to mention it, and the only safe avenue is when the TV shows has something that approaches the subject. Before marriage the emphasis and talk was all on character and savings oneself for god and husband and no one ever mentioned personalities and talking and how you really do screw!

At least I never got into giving myself to God and Sisterhood road that my friends did. I had always pictured myself married, kids of course: but not married and a career and the breadwinner of the family. Where did the white picket fence go anyway, along with the conversations?

I guess. Michael and I were as prepared for marriage as anyone around us. Of course that meant taking a life journey without a road map. Celibate priests providing instruction and other blind leading the blind advice from Good Housekeeping articles about how this marriage can be saved. Well, half my life I have been married and half my marriage has been a quasi “do your own thing” in a topsy-turvy society. No wonder the divorce rate exceeds the marriage rate now.

“Christ I hope this does not lead to divorce”

Now that did come up about ten years ago, but the kids were early teens then. I have five women and four men on my staff and about twenty divorces and only myself and Geoffrey have a long term marriage. Half the women are in a “long term relationship” and all live alone, the guys do not talk about women, have muffin tops and play video games. Of all of them Michael would be the best choice for marriage; at least he stays in shape and even has all his hair at this age.

Only now am I capable of sin. How strange, fidelity was such an unstated, unthought-of aspect of my life: just there; like gravity is just there. I have never associated it with satisfaction or anything like joy. And certainly it has nothing to do with personal growth. More like something to ensure the legitimacy of offspring. Perhaps all marriage is some relic of an economic pact between men: the father giving away the bride, the husband receiving the gift and the offspring bearing his name all because of fidelity. Well they are his kids and I am not going to have any more so what use is fidelity?

At lunch Anne could not believe my stories about sin and boys and “going to far” and that yes I had saved myself for my husband. I had shared some of this with Geoffrey before but never with another’s wife let alone in front of him. What a sense of freedom just to be able to talk about the puzzlement of going too far which of course my parents never would define. We all knew it had to do with babies and penises and never to touch one not even through Levis or blue jeans. A hand on the breast was close to going to hell but a finger on the outline of a bra was not and it was the grey area that we giggled about in High school. At college everyone pretended they knew and the talk was very grown up or somehow sophisticated or pretend knowledge.

“This is how I want to talk with Michael. just openly and freely and share in the laughter of where I was and where I am now”

The hot water was gone and the change from a steaming hot atmosphere quickly grew chilly so that goose bumps were all over: slowly drying herself off Karen thought about Michael, what to wear, when to bring this up, what his reactions would be, how to be soft but determined.

“what is that old saying, Happiness is not the goal, but happens en route to the goal”

Well, we will see Karen smiled as she reached for a pair of sleek hip hugger style pajama bottoms.
Dinner was amazingly delicious. A very simple bowl of Udong noodles, fresh vegetables and thin slices of pork in a bone marrow sauce. Michael certainly had the knack with food. How simple and delicate the broth was. Similar to a first class Pho but slightly more beefy if that makes sense, “Michael, the house we have built is complete”, is how Karen started. Dinner was over and they were sitting side by side on the sofa, a silly reality TV show is on, something about couples running from country to country discovering who they are as a couple as they discover new and different cultures and how they react to stressful conditions as a couple.

Michael who is fidgeting with the remote just stares at it for a while, then very quietly looks at Karen and simply says, “I have no idea what you mean by that”

“Sure you do”, Karen responds sharply, “you know exactly what I am talking about: Our life is complete, we have finally accomplished what we thought we wanted when we married.”

Nervously moving the remote from hand to hand, “I think we have a very solid marriage. I know we have had some problems, but the kids are now grown and we have time to concentrate on us now”

At least he is talking Karen thought, not the dreaded silence that had ruled their marriage most of their marriage. “It’s just that when we started we had vision and in twenty years we have accomplished that.”

“Do you mean that we have played the whole nine innings and now the game is over?”

Men, sports analogies God damn it this is a pivotal point for us and he wants a stupid sports analogy, controlling herself Karen moves closer and gently puts her hand on Michael’s knee, “no the game is not over, at least I hope it is not. It is just what do we do now. We have accomplished our vision is all, and now what?”

“Well, travel I suppose, you have always wanted to go to France. Maybe take a road trip up the coast”

Why is this so damn hard for him to understand what I am talking about, why is his head so deep in the sand?

“No dear, I am talking about us, day to day, week to week, year to year. Now what? Do you understand that we got married thinking of kids and careers and white picket fences and, and we have done that. That part of our life is over, complete and now we are not sure of where to go next. We are just spinning our wheels existing side by side and going nowhere?” It is more like at work when a project is finished you want a new project, something different to do or explore, not just another project that repeats itself, or like an artist doing a painting and understanding when that painting is really finished and they start a brand new work.”

Now the silence is there and Karen forces herself not to continue, to let the silence continue, to allow Michael to absorb what she means, to feel her mind, to understand before she explains herself to death. An Asian father and daughter team is scaling a tall building, climbing all dressed in harnesses so if they fall they are still safe.

His response is very slow and very deliberate, “Are you talking divorce?” he whispers.

Karen removes her hand from his knee moves sideways to be closer to him and rubs the back of his neck for a while before responding.
“Life is complicated only because different people have different wants, needs and desires...sometimes all three mesh with another’s and at that point we experience joy and happiness that we want to last a lifetime.” She continues, “But our needs, or wants, or desires change and no I am not talking divorce, I am talking about being independent, becoming a whole person, a separate person, not an us, but two strong individuals being together.”

Sometimes silence is golden and at other times it hangs desperately in the air waiting to be filled. The noise from the TV gratefully filled the air, the dialog of individuals expressing how they managed to accomplished some trivial task with suitable background music to amplify what is being said, to give it meaning, an emotional connection. Karen decided to let the background sounds fill the silence. Now is the time for me to take my time, to become patient with this man I want as my husband. I need the words to explain I want him as my husband but I no longer need him as a husband.

Very slowly the words finally escaped from Michael, “I suppose if we are lucky the changes occur and we still mesh, or tolerate not meshing for a period of time.”

For the first time Karen was comfortable with the silence, sinking deeply into her thoughts, feeling Michael’s breathing against her chest, allowing the rhythms to carry her into past silences and absorbing from that silence, not fearing it. No one knows the future, perhaps to mesh again but becoming different people in the interlude she thought.

Such an intimate moment, his arm and his breathing gently moving up and down against her breast, broken only by his question, “what was so interesting at lunch?”

Karen moves slowly but gracefully away from his body and tucks her legs under her and staring at the TV and taking a deep breath says quietly, “Geoffrey wants to have an affair with me, he wants to fuck me.”

How does anyone interpret silence, it has no body language, no sound none at all, not even background music to help. It is just there, a void nothingness.

Finally she hears what Michael is saying, “I thought he was already fucking you.”

Karen was prepared to carry on the discussion, in her mind she was saying, “This is a journey I have to take by myself Michael, but I need and I really want your support” The answer is not outside but inside myself. Instead she stammers, “No no Michael, why would you think that? I have never been with another man, never in my whole life!”

Sound of the TV commercial fills the silence, surreal umbrellas flying against blue skies...

“When the night falls on you
You don’t know what to do
Nothing you confess
could make me love you less”

If silence is a religion this is not it. If a vow of silence brings you closer to God this is not it. There is nothing that paralyses the mind more than fear: except for silence and a memory. This is the silence that paralyses thought. It is worse than any violent reaction or screaming or throwing ceramics against the wall as in the movies or fear.
"When you’re standing at the crossroads
Don’t know which path to choose
Let me come along
Cause even if your wrong...
I’ll stand by you “

What does he mean by asking me that, no, not asking, telling me that. How could he even think that after all the years we have been married, raising kids, struggling to get our careers off the ground? Tears or just the moisture of tears fill Helen’s eyes, how after what we have been through could he possibly, possibly have that idea. Karen’s mind goes to being a child where her mother’s voice would list all the complaints a parent could have against an eight year old, but it was the silent look of her father that always brought cringes to her.

“Take me in into your darkest hour
And I’ll never desert you
I’ll stand by you “

“Never?, What about Marty, and that guy who kept sending you Christmas cards?”

As if In a fog the questions finally becomes real, traveling from a mist into her mind. What is he talking about, what is he saying. I have not thought of Marty in Years and what Christmas cards? “Michael, I have only had sex with you, you know that!”

“I do not know that. Tell me about Marty and the cards” Michael’s voice is soft, not threatening, not accusing: but simply patient and understanding: Mature and responsible: an adult seeking information before making any decision.

“What cards?” Karen is truly bewildered, “what are you talking about?”

“Christmas Cards, sent by Louis: they started arriving after you attended a G.U.N.N.E. conference in Phoenix.” You have attended several conferences the last ten years, and only Louis sends you cards. Before the move you and Marty worked together and he almost always attended conferences with you”

Slowly Karen absorbs this new information and tone of what she is listening to.

“Michael, I have only been with you. I was as surprised as you by receiving the cards . Marty and I were work friends only, sometimes bar friends. The conferences were all work related, career necessary and totally without sex of any kind. I would never lie to you about this.”

“Michael, this is new to me, I have no idea how to have an affair. I only know that I have not lied to you before tonight, and I will never lie to you”, then as an afterthought she added, “if this is going to work, it must work for you also, it must work for us.”

How long she wondered had he kept this secret. This idea that she had already had affairs was not new to Michael at all. He had the thought for almost a decade. Remembering back she did understand the cards and Louis and why. The fun she had teasing him at breakfast before they both flew in separate direction, flew home to their very safe but boring homes. How she had tried to tease and seduce Michael the same way and how upset he had seemed and how embarrassed she was for the attempt for months. Every Christmas the cards came and every Christmas she had both fantasies of what might have been and embarrassments at Michael’s being turn off. And Marty’s bumbled attempts at seduction had horrified her. No way would she ever want that clumsy ass

He was her boss at the bank that she did systems analysis for. This was at the time that banks were just experimenting with Offsite banking machines, everything was new and she was creating the system to run the entire conversion. Of course there were hours of overtime and dozens of out of town conferences, but nothing sexual, ever: at least from her viewpoint. Of all the men she had worked for he was the only one who ever tried to take advantage of being her boss.
“The only way I think it can work for me is for you to be honest now”, Michael said, “Why have I been off base for over ten years with this?”

Karen is standing and pacing in the living room, thinking that this is the time to be as free with Michael as she is with Geoffrey. She very gracefully goes over to Michael sits on the floor in front of him and looking in his eyes says, “Ok here is the complete truth and story of both the damn cards and Marty. Louis was bank executive at the Conference widowed and for whatever reason took an interest in me. He teased me about my naiveté about sex and joked with me until I would laugh. He was almost fatherly in his attention to me. The last night of the conference he told me that in the morning he would show me how to seduce my husband. The last morning at the airport we met and he took me outside to a grassy area. He didn’t say anything, he just smiled, took my hand in his and led me away a short distance to where he laid out a picnic blanket on the grass.

We still hadn’t spoken a word when opened up a small picnic hamper and took out a bowl of strawberries and pot of cream. He then selected the biggest and juiciest strawberry from the bowl, dipped it into the cream then gently brushed the fruit against my lips. I went to take a small bite but he pulled it away from me. He then went back to just brushing it against my lips until my lips parted and I started to lick off some of the cream. I somehow knew that biting it wasn’t allowed so I gently licked the fruit and took the tip of it into my mouth so I could remove the cream as he pulled it away from me again. He dipped the strawberry into the pot of cream again and returned it to my lips, this time I took the whole of the fruit into my mouth and seductively sucked off the cream without biting into it. At that point he told me to put my hands behind me and he tied them with a necktie.

We then took turns eating the berries and cream. He would dip one into the crème and offer it to me, if I refused he would eat it and dip another berry and offer it. When the berries were gone and it was time to leave he untied my hands, gave me a deep hug, held his finger to his lips so I would not say a word, He went home and I came home. Know this Michael; I really had wanted to suck him, not the berries. I told him this the night before. I tried this with you Michael and was rejected. You almost scorned me with how you reacted at what was a playful attempt to grow with you. You did not want that and I vowed never again would I embarrass myself to you.

And Marty, you want to know about Marty. That fat son of a bitch is the reason we moved to Orange County. But let me tell you something first about Louis. He was the only person in my life that wanted to give me something, to share: something of value with me, something personal and wanted absolutely nothing in return. He set it up purposely so that I could not be used in any way. If he had done his strawberry thing the night before I would have gladly sucked his cock or done whatever he wanted, and he knew that because I had offered. He intentionally waited until we were both leaving; he intentionally chose a public place: all he wanted to do was to give me a gift.

Television sounds fill the room. Karen takes a deep breath, gets up turns her back to Michael and watches the commercial, mindlessly. She allows the images and sounds to simply surround her as she attempts to clear her mind. The news is that almost one billion dollars is earned from on line dating sites in the US. That one dating service is now going to provide additional security by screening members against sex offender lists, more news on how parents can protect their children from predators if they use a social network. Home security commercial that want to monitor your home and a company selling Turkey burgers by showing a woman’s ass in a bikini. Now a commercial showing if we just wore the right platform high heels we would all have the perfect bubble ass.

Woman got raped in West Covina and a car crash in La Habra, kids speeding ran into a tree and now more commercials. Karen takes another breath turns to Michael and begins,
“I think it was the lack of protection I wanted from you, that I did not get, but really wanted that bothers me the most. You are my husband and part of the promise was to hold, love and protect me. Several times I told you that Marty was a terrible person to work for, always making sexist jokes, bragging about how great he was in bed, asking me if I were lonely and wanted release. You suggested that I dress more discreetly, that I simply avoid him as much as possible, that somehow I was responsible for his actions. I just wanted you to listen. You gave solutions to a problem that you had no understanding of. I am no longer angry at what you did and I am no longer bothered by this. However it did affect our relationship for years. How you interacted with me and how I interacted with you. Perhaps every couple experiences this being together but not being together.

I have no answer as to why you have been off base for over ten years, feeling whatever you felt because of your fantasies of me and men. I promise you this Michael; I will not lie to you about Geoffrey. You will have to learn to live with the truth. I am exhausted and I am going to bed. You can join me or not, stay with me or not, good night”. A gentle kiss on the head as Karen thinks, I am not angry, I am really surprised that I am not angry.

Michael alone remains sitting on the sofa as the TV moves into the nightly standup comedy shows: Audiences laugh. “Holy shit, now I know what it is like to hold a cat by the tail”.

“Loneliness is so, so different than being loved, it is the feeling of being unloved. I demanded my solitude with Karen and the kids, carefully explaining that noise disrupted my thinking time. It is painful to be alone now. This is the scariest thing I have ever experienced.” Michael listens to the sounds of going to bed: water running and teeth being brushed, the momentary pause and the toilet being flushed, the sounds of water as hands are being washed. “

“The dread of loneliness is greater than the fear of bondage, so we get married”. Now what? What the shit do I do now? Be a man and stomp out of the house? Be a wimp and cry? Jesus Christ who can I ever tell, confide in about this? Affairs are supposed to be secret, discovered so that at least anger can replace loneliness. That way I can tell the world of my anguish, yell it from the rooftops and folks will understand. I used to joke that I came into the world alone and will die alone, but this is different. I am not cut off from this process, this affair. I only have one close friend that I have ever confided in, and there is no way in hell I am going to tell him, “Hey, guess what, Karen is going to have an affair and fuck someone” Now that is loneliness, not being able to confide in anyone! It has nothing to do with man and the universe.”

“What did Karen say; I will have to learn to live with the truth? I can join her or not? In bed, in life?” Michael chooses to get undressed in the living room so as not to wake Karen. Turning the

TV off he goes to bed and quietly looks at Karen sleeping. She is curled with her back toward his side of the bed, no covers, hands tucked under her face. Her hair is cut short and curly now and she really looks much better than with the older Bob style she had for years. That was such a matronly look: really old fashioned. The new cut was very fashionable and seductively framed her face. Michael mused that she has had it now for months but he had not really paid attention.

She got it around the time she started to wear bold colors to work. She eventually changed her entire wardrobe, everything from inside out. It was erotic to look at her shapely butt move in unison with her breathing, and fun to know that she wore bikini panties now instead of those terrible ‘grannie panties’. Also her bras no longer disguised the fullness of her nipples, at times with certain blouses you could see the shape of the nipples and the shadow they cast. She still dressed very professional and looked classy all the time.
But there has been a difference that I love seeing. A mature woman, still sexually desirable to me, “and who can I share this with, she is sexually desirable to another guy, and that is a new thought, a new reality. It is scary, but it is also exciting.”

Gently he bends over and kisses her softly on her head. “you have told me I can join you or not. Ok dear, I want to join you. You do not have to take this journey alone. I want and need to give you my support in this journey.” I know I had you on a pedestal, the wife pedestal. When you jump off I will catch you, or I will fly away with you as you soar.

Lying on his side he moves close to Karen, cuddling her back side as close as is possible. Quickly he falls into the rhythm of her breathing. Sleep will come he knows, not quickly or easily, but sleep does come. For years now Michael has fallen asleep creating different dreams all of sexual interactions with Karen as the star of the movie. He knows this is not a real dream state but it has been a pleasant way to remove the stress of the day.

Real dreams he just does not remember, but pre dreams come in a rich variety of passing thoughts and activities that he always gets an erection that he allows to recede quite peacefully, as he knows it will return with the next pre-dream. There are dreams and pre-dreams that resemble everyday life on occasion but generally Michael prefers the ones that are always sexual, this is how he has fallen asleep again and again and again.

This is really a no harm no foul fantasy, a part of the pleasure is the controlling the unknown, directing the action and it always leads to sleep. Well not always, sometimes like tonight it leads to fidgeting and agitation and loss of control.

It is always a stranger, a faceless description less stranger that somehow Karen meets. Not in a bar or street corner, but somehow they are just in a room and somehow I am the observer. So this person is saying to Karen, “Let me guess, you keep having strange, disturbing, recurring, and intense fantasies of a powerful, masterful man having his way with you. Perhaps he tears off your clothes and takes you. Perhaps he throws you over his knee and gives you a long, hard spanking. Perhaps he ties you naked and spread-eagled to a bed and proceeds to alternately tease and toy with you for hours. Perhaps he locks his collar around your neck and orders you to kneel at his feet -- and you do, both fearing and loving every second of it.

Karen is always startled of course, disbelieving that the conversation is even taking place. She looks horrified as the man continues, “Have these fantasies become so intense and recurring that they make up almost every sexual fantasy you have? Have they become the centerpiece of your thinking when you daydream?” Now this is asked in a matter of fact manner, as if the guy is talking about the weather or asking directions to a local business or someplace.

“What did he say? “ … sure you can come to my house: no need to be discreet and we can have some fun” This is not my pre-dream! “…I have been looking for a sub who understands exactly what I am trying to articulate.”

“Articulate what? And what is this shit? She is walking away with this guy! I need to think of something else.
Laguna Lake is a wonderful spot to take Karen. There is always has parking available so that in not the usual headache. Away from the beach, across the way is a semi wilderness area that has an enjoyable hiking and biking path. It is one of the few places that folks are friendly, wave, smile and say hello. Generally Karen is shy but she warms up with children and dogs. Well if they are on a leash: the dogs that is. This time we saw a loose dog with the leash trailing behind it and Karen grabbed the leash and started walking the dog in the direction it had run from.

“Perhaps we can return the dog to its owner,” is what she said.

It was fun walking with a dog and Karen on the boardwalk, taking in the scenery and listening to the sounds of the seagulls eating the leftover scraps that folks had left. In about ten minutes we came to older guy in modern swimming shorts just sitting with his legs over the edge of the boardwalk and the dog immediately began to jump around knowing that this was where he belonged.

“Hello” the stranger says, “I am just enjoying the view of the ocean from here, would you like to join me?”

“Is this your dog”, Karen asks, “I found him running on the boardwalk back there”.

“Yes it is, he is well trained”, responds the stranger smiling, “Plato always does what he is told”

I just love looking at Karen at the Beach. She generally goes without a bra in nice sundresses now. Earlier I insisted that she dress much more discreetly and then she got tired of my control and dressed to please herself. She has small breasts so it is difficult to tell by anyone except me. And the dresses in certain light reveal the panty line which is a turn on for me. Today she is wearing a thong and only I know for sure, which is also a turn on.

Right now she is standing ever so slightly in front of the old man, more to the side I guess and the sun’s light shining through her dress is amazing. Her legs are almost totally visible as if she is only wearing her thongs and as she rocks back and forth talking to the guy some parts of her body are revealed and others hidden from view. She even stands differently now. This is amazing to me, before she would cross her arms and hands in front of her, sort of defensively and put her weight on one foot as if daring anyone to come closer. Now she seems to stand with her feet in a wider stance and equally bearing her weight as she gently rocks back and forth heel to toe; just a slight movement to be sure, just a subtle rocking movement. And she now puts her hands behind her just above her butt and sort of pushes in and out as she rocks; much more sensual and inviting for sure.

For an older man he seems to be a nice guy, twinkle in his eye as he looks up at Karen rocking beside him. He has a closely trimmed goatee, full head of blondish grey hair and is certainly in shape. Most guys his age have ugly hairy protruding bellies but he is more to the slender side and you can tell he enjoys working out.

“I did not hear you, Karen laughs and bends over with her ear closer as the guy is whispering more than talking. I know that dress and that the front falls open to reveal her titties and that is just what she wants I know it. It is fun to watch their banter back and forth and intriguing to watch as he gently rubs the back of her ankle as she laughs and jokes with him. It is as if they are in their own universe.
Weekend mornings seemed to always be pleasant for Karen. She enjoys always a slow and rhythmical waking. Of course there is a routine as all lives have, but for the most part hers are pleasant and peaceful. Her waking starts with Michael cuddling against her back, feeling the motions of his breathing and the closeness of his body against hers. This is her time to think of things she currently cannot do without. Simple things that just add to being alive, nothing important really and nothing permanent: such as liking her latte without foam, soaking in the bathtub and a Zen moment with tea.

A time to plan the day, what she has to do and wants to do; leisurely read her emails and have the time for thoughtful responses, not the quick one liners that she does at work. Fortunately she can now receive work emails at home and keep that system separate from the household emails. That is one of the larger things that Karen adds to her mental list of things cannot do without.

Thoughts of “what I am good at” enter her head and Karen smiles thinking I am really good at touch, communicating and laughing. Well I think I am, last night perhaps not, but at least I was able to be honest and let Michal know. We did not laugh of course, and the touching did not exist, but ideas we did talk about and communicate and without too much of a struggle. I did sleep well and I know I feel a new sense of freedom with, damn what should I call it, my declaration of separate but equal, my declaration of independence, who knows what I should call it, it just is a freedom. I finally think I can walk through life with an open heart.

I am a glass is half full woman wanting to fill the glass, perhaps that is the best way to express the change. Thoughts of childhood, growing up isolated in Wyoming, being Catholic. Simple, devout and deeply pious memories interrupt the reverie of childhood thoughts. And at times even the interruptions turn pleasantly into distant thought, memories and back into her current inventory of self thought.

Generally Karen’s meanderings flow from shopping, to clothing, to Geoffrey, to Michael in a leisurely ebb and tide day dream as she wakens. Weekends allow this as weekdays are so frantic in waking, dressing, moving, driving to work, working, thinking, making difficult decisions. The occasional lunch with work mates and the semi-intimate sharing of personal lives, politico type discussions, then back to the daily grind.

This morning is similar but so different. Michael had not slept well, tossing and turning abruptly, quick movements from his back to side, brushing against her and rubbing her body with furtive, disjointed up and down motions. Finally his agitation seemed to settle down into something resembling sleep. Nonethe less today is the concern for sure. I can only wait on the edge: perhaps today will be a long dark corridor just to get past.
For the first time in her marriage Karen did not know how to precede, how to start the morning routine. Perhaps just stay in bed and pretend to sleep for forty-eight hours then I can disappear into the work week might work she thinks.

Michael is awake and pretending to sleep she knows. Finally he gets out of bed dresses and goes downstairs as daylight begins to fill the room. Today is going to be one of the perfect weather days Orange County is famous for Karen is thinking as she hears the front door open, the SUV starting and listens to Michael drive away. “Shit, this is not going to be a routine weekend”.

Suddenly Karen realized what Geoffrey was saying when he told her that to change someone else you first had to change yourself. “So I am changing myself and want Michael to be a part of that change is how simple this really is”. No thinking shit, no drama just my understanding that he is struggling to belong also. Belong to what is what we do not know, some thread that makes belonging our fabric of life. We both are doing that, everyone is doing that I guess. But why does it have to be such a damn struggle is the problem.

Well the real problem is in understanding that the “tie that binds’ comes from understanding each other. I am demanding that he understand me and I must understand him also.

Slowly and with a new calmness Karen wants to get out of bed, and take advantage of the new day and new perspective. “Perhaps I am just delusional that somehow my growth will become our growth.” I think back to when commitment meant something: generally long marriages that were perfect to those seeing the marriage, looking from the outside; but at the core were wrecks of two lives. However, the old fashioned word “commitment” does not mean the same to all people. “Sometimes I wish I did not see life so complicated, that I could simply have an off and on switch to turn my brain off.” How did my Aunts and Grandparents do this, this thing of committed marriages?

When I was twelve years old and studying Catechism my commitment was to God and family. I never gave any thought to commitment and marriage I just assumed that it was there now and forever and ever Amen. Commitment meant monogamy back then. No doubt in my twelve year old brain what monogamy meant either, it was clear and very precise: one marriage per lifetime was the whole idea; one and only one sex partner was the translation,

There is a woman at work that always comes to lunch and then is on her cell phone the whole time. This drives me insane, why does she bother to join us? Every now and then she makes a comment about what the conversation flow is. Any more I take it as being insipid. She is working on her third marriage and whole heartily believes she is monogamous because she is sexually exclusive with one guy at a time: Amazing to me. The other day she put her phone down and declared, “Regarding exclusivity, I personally cannot think of any reason for someone who is married to share intimacy with anyone else. If they are permanently comatose, divorce them and keep taking care of them, but marry someone else. Otherwise, what’s the problem? Now this is a lady who practices divorce not marriage and confuses intimacy with sex.

“I am very intimate with Michael, it is the sex that no longer works.” .” The word monogamy comes from the Greek words “μονός”, monos which means one or alone, and “γάμος”, gamos which means marriage. Euphemism is a substitution for an expression that may offend or suggest something unpleasant to the receiver. Most people say intimacy and mean sex. Nothing really wrong with this use of the word in the beginning, however as individuals become more trusting of each other then euphemisms become misleading. Who the hell says lets go make intimacy for Christ’s sake?

I am generally an optimistic person with a great sense of humor, fairly easy-going and I don’t think that I’m to critical about things, but I also believe that it takes two people contributing to a marriage to make it work. I want Michael to become a like minded man where we can participate in activities together and encourage each other to pursue their interests as well. And my current interest is Geoffrey.
What do you do when a marriage no longer inspires you, or encourages you?"

Lady K finally gets up just wanting a long hot shower, some breakfast, read her emails and to enjoy the day. Karen finally gets up just wanting a long hot shower, some breakfast, read her emails and to enjoy the day. Showering alone in the house has become a rare luxury for Karen. They had recently remodeled the entire bath into a luxurious showplace deserving attention by any of the Home remodel magazines. All the planning and effort to details had paid off, with the exception of the enclosed shower. Michael had described it as having an openness to natural light that provided a natural healing nature.

“I just feel totally exposed” Karen thought, “hell that is not a feeling it is a reality.”

It now was large enough to host a slumber party for the entire neighborhood and it took months just to get accustomed to the space and the dozens of faucets that you could control individually. Hot on number 12 with a low mist, cold on number 10 with a massage force of water and so on. The exterior wall now had a glass curtain wall of insulated panes with mini blinds between the panes. Beyond the curtain wall was a customized rock wall with chunks of glass imbedded in it and beyond that was the Fence dividing the property from the neighbors: so it did provide the natural light and the privacy to the inside. Against the inside of the glass were several glass shelves that now had assorted tropical plants that thrived on the humidity and light. The shower door was large and clear so that from the other wall of the bedroom you could see the plants and the natural light caste shimmering lights throughout the room, so this was an amazing visual experience and there were times that being a part of that experience was exciting.

“When did I lose my interest in sex with Michael”?

Lady K is adjusting the faucets so they are all on a mist setting with very hot water. The result is the entire shower area becomes a mist that objects dissolve in the distance; like walking in the fog, but a hot exhilarating fog where moisture is somehow felt against the body. “I think sometime when the girls were in their teens. It was not sudden at all, just a growing dissatisfaction that kept growing from somewhere deep inside of me. Medically I was alright I know that, but after a few years my interest dropped to zero or even lower if that is possible, how about minus 50 of so on whatever scale there is to rate interest in sex. Even his touch, his voice and mannerisms were just such a torment and difficult to accept. Michael knew she was rejecting him, but did not know why and even struggled to provide more in the way of support, and the more he made efforts to improve their life the faster she ran from him.

The girls were just starting to study being Catholic and the catechism when I first became aware of my conflicts with Michael, sex, our lives. One marriage and one husband to submit to for a lifetime, oh my God how do I convince my children that this is the right path when I have realized that a lifetime is a very long time! Thoughts behave like the orchids on the shelves, vaguely visible but not entirely clear or focused.

“Michael is not a villain at all, he truly attempted to support me, never was he abusive or cheating, he was just there.”

He suggested marriage counseling and going to a couples retreat at the time, but how do you explain to a counselor or anyone for that matter that the problem is very simple

Michael is there is the problem. Well I can tell the marriage counselor the problem is that Michael is a three minute fuck. Why is that marriage counselor so solemnly asks, well the answer is that for ten years I wanted him to be a three minute fuck and now I want more. Respect is giving honor and somehow I have to show appreciation for his strengths, his efforts to lead and love me at a time that I just want him “not there”! And at the same time I somehow must encourage my kids to become young women that willingly submit and honor some future guy all for the love of Christ, when all I really want is that they find happiness in their adult lives.
How can I teach that The duty of the wife will reflect it lived out in the marriage relationship And the church talks about the mission of submission. I am looking for equality and me respecting myself more than I want to become more spiritual by becoming more submissive.

Whoever wrote Ephesians would not understand wanting equality, not superiority or separate duties. How do you explain to a priest that when your husband even touched you that you felt violated just because you did not want to teach your kids to submit to their future husband? It is not that I did not try to find some answers to how I felt, it just that the answers were not in the books, not in counseling and for sure not in a sponsored communications for couples led by someone who believes that couples really communicate. Back then I had no idea how to express that I was bored, that I was angry at “Mr. Ephesians”, that I just felt empty and unhappy and violated by my husband’s touch and had no sexual desire at all. I even tried to talk to my mom about this, visited a Psychiatrist once no solutions there: so the best I could do is lie on the bed as stiff as I could be and get the three minutes over.

Carla Blue simply dismisses the whole biblical thing as a silly book written by men, interpreted by men as a means to keep women in their place. But this was how I was raised and how I raised my girls; so there is meaning for me, I just have lost faith in what it says I guess.

How do I explain to anyone that I wanted three minutes and that now I do not and for whatever crazy reason I cannot interest Michael in anything beyond what he has learned to do? If there is learning plateau is there also a un-learning plateau?

"I have lost my youth during the last ten years"

Lady K gingerly step out of the shower mist to air dry. Summer at last, when you do not have to towel off and hurry into warm clothing. Summer is a time to slowly allow your skin to dry and feel water droplets slowly evaporate. Enjoy the moment is the key. I did not withhold sex from Michael, but I did withhold affection and good sex, any sex for that matter starts with affection. Michael certainly had excellent taste in caftans. Last summer he purchased 3 of 4 for her to wear to the beach. All were lace mini-dresses that could be worn at home or used at the beach as bikini cover ups. They had silk decorations sewn over a sheer soft lycra body with an even softer sheerer cotton lining. A deep V neck and flowing sleeves made for a truly feminine look and feel. Almost translucent they clung to the body and moved with it in a rhythm that was magical. Lady K often slept in the caftans during the summer and today she just slipped one over her head.

The most romantic moment I remember thought Karen as she went into the kitchen to do a breakfast for herself. Carla Blue had asked her this, “What is the most romantic thing you remember?”

The most romantic thing: When I got inside I found a note on the table that said follow the rose petals. I followed the rose petals through the living room and upstairs, finally I got to his bedroom door and found another note on the door that said close your eyes and walk in. So when I closed my eyes he walked over to me and kissed me and walked me over to the bed and sat me down. Finally he told me to open my eyes and I saw all of my favorite breakfast foods on the table. It was so wonderful.

Michael’s feel for reinventing a house was really very subtle and delicate. The bedroom darkish, master shower flooded with light, the hall from the bedroom even darker and then the brilliant light of the breakfast area and kitchen hit you like explosions of lights. “Really remarkable”, Karen mused to herself. One wall was wall to wall mirrors similar to closet doors, but beautifully and individually framed and inset into the wall creating a surreal sense of depth.

The surface of the mirrors was about 3 inches inset into the wall and the mirror reflections showed the outside patio with all the plantings inside pots plus the interior reflections of the room itself. Kerens’s favorite spot was in the corner at a nook with a low table.
This semi private spot was in the corner at a nook with a low table where her notebook could be used and charged, a chaise lounge with the largest and the softest pillows for support: Just room for one person in fact. The patio faced east and was bathed in morning light. The patio doors were light oak and filled with 10 panes of glass that had special gas that prevented any heat from entering the house. The floor was a dark stone tile sealed with a high gloss finish that reflected the sheen in a mirror like fashion. It had a breakfast bar that separated the kitchen from the breakfast area plus the nook. You could only eat from the kitchen side of the bar because the nook side and a second chaise lounge set against the side. There was room for exercise equipment, some weights and even one of these “ab” builders and plush carpets and mats to work out on. It really was fascinating to watch yourself in the mirrors as you “pumped Iron”; so much better than working out in an isolated room.

“Well, list time”

Things that make me smile:

Holding a slice of kiwi up to the light, seeing a new leaf unfurling on a favorite house plant, watching my friends dance, text messages from Carla, emails from Geoffrey, hearing Michael use ‘pet-names’, dry humor, dancing, seeing a look of delight after someone has eaten something I’ve prepared, the look of bliss on a clients face, LOVE.... and every morning making a list of what makes me smile.

Michael is so sweet and tender at times Karen thinks as she looks at the breakfast nook. Her cell phone, notebook laid out with some chilled fruit and even hot oatmeal: her current favorite breakfast, orange juice and her latest book on Buddhist thought. How thoughtful, maybe even a romantic moment just looking at the precision of the layout and knowing that the thought was there.

Karen sometimes enjoyed reading the on line personal adds, as well as answering emails and planning her work load. Today had an intriguing personal:

“Are you a very bad Good Girl? 30+ (Orange County)”

If this is you, you’re attractive. Probably height/weight proportional. Fun. Have a wild side. You’d look cute and sexy out for a drink. At home you are definitely affectionate and a rule breaker. You like a man to be in charge and you love to please. You’re up for making time spent together fun and unrushed and you appreciate assistance. You’re between 30 and ?? Would you consider bending the rules together? I sure hope so and that you’ll write me back to tell me just a little about you. Photo would really help. I know there is a lot of spam, so if you write and want a reply, put “your good girl” in the subject line. Then I’ll know you’re real and will get back to you after golf this morning. See you soon! We can work around your schedule if today is bad and can meet someplace in public for comfort :) Come on, it’ll be fun and you can benefit from some assistance towards expenses!

Well at least this shows some imagination, not the general MWM 4 MWF. It describes me when I was in Middle school. At least all the nuns thought I was a good girl! How bad do I have to be to be considered a”very bad good girl” I wonder. It was Carla Blue who really introduced me to the personal ads and
what fun it was to read them, and even respond to some and play around teasing what she calls “the object”. I should try this with Michael, sort of rewrite it and send him an email from an admirer. Or even answer it and see where it might lead. Or of course send it to Geoffrey.

I am height/weight proportional: the only problem is that my proportions are that of a 10 year old girl. A cute and sexy 10 year old very bad good girl out for a drink? I bet it would surprise the shit out of the object. A rule breaker? Well when I see Geoffrey I am going to be breaking every rule I was consumed with as a good girl.

Carla Blue has told me she is always in charge and only allows the object to think he is in charge. How strange it now seems that I so misunderstood Carla at the beginning. I had thought she was a starving, bright college girl getting her career on path. Instead she was a brilliant entrepreneur using her brilliance in ways that were unimaginable to me at the time.

Emerson wrote, ““What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny compared to what lies within us.”

He should have talked with Carla after writing that!

Opening her email Karen felt a rush of blush at seeing several from Geoffrey. Several work emails and a couple from Carla. Perhaps I should take care of work before seeing what Geoffrey has teased me with. Most of the work emails were nonsense and trivial stuff that only took brief answers to routine questions and management notifications of upcoming meeting, status reports due dates and one interesting conference to attend to in San Francisco.

It was the emails from Geoffrey that made Karen think in a blinding thought: “Everything is about communication that is the bottom line really. . Somehow I have to learn not to say “you should do something, perhaps if I say have you ever thought of … it would work easier. Just plant the seed that it was their idea in the first place.” I am blaming Michael for my behavior and making both of us miserable. Last night was a poor start because I just vented my anger and resentments and blamed him. I did not say or show what I wanted at all. I love Michael and want his commitment to our marriage just as I am committed to it; I just want to explore my sexuality that I have denied myself.

I am attracted to Geoffrey sexually but that is not really it at all, I am more just attracted to sex period. I have lost an interest in sex with Michael at the same time I have an intense need to explore sex. This is what I want to communicate, what I want, not what Michael wants or even Geoffrey wants. I cannot blame my parents or Michael for what I am searching for. I can accept that it is what it is, but that does not mean it is what it will be forever.

On the screen was an image of a woman in lingerie that Geoffrey had cut and pasted Karen’s face on over the models face. The caption said, “Wow, how I dream of you!!! And some x’s and o’s that meant kisses. Earlier Geoffrey had sent several emails describing the conundrums of kissing to her, or the steps to a perfect kiss from a confused man’s point of view: a really fun satire on how to do sex manuals at the book stores. This image had her face oversize on top of the models making a satire of some pro basketball ads. Geoffrey had this knack of being serious in a light hearted way. He was always saying that, “the problem with sex is that everyone takes it so personally!” Suddenly out of nowhere, I began feeling bored and unhappy. In an attempt to figure out what was causing my unhappiness, I looked for answers in books, tried to talk to my Mother and eventually went to see a psychologist. All of the information I received attributed the way I was feeling to my husband, and similar to the majority of women, now I began to view my husband as the culprit too. Somehow we both were victims and I knew it and Michael avoided the issue. Communication is everything and I am still learning how to be really good at it.
Perhaps I should write an essay to Geoffrey about leaning to communicate by reading and responding to the Craig Lists personals. My God some are such a crack up of misplaced fantasy. I do find it fun to do this type of play. Sometime ago I responded to this add:

Submission/Domination isn’t so much about sex as it is about mental stimulation.
Being submissive in no way means that you are weak or stupid. I don’t care what shape, size or race you are. Willingness and Attitude is more important than a perfect body/looks. You must be submissive and willing to give yourself to Me. You will not serve me out of shame or weakness but out of pride and strength.
In return I will give you an escape from the boring day to day routine you are living thus far.
You are a woman who is in charge in every other aspect of your life.
A woman with firm views and a clear concept of what you want out of your life.
BUT there is something secretly submissive in you that yearns to be satisfied, something nasty about you that needs to be let out.
You are tired of being constrained by society’s conventions and frustrated by your inability to realize your innermost fantasies.

What a fantasy. Now I would gladly do this for Michael or with Geoffrey but who in the world would do this for real? Fun to tease and play with these guys and they do take it seriously. How funny.
Well I did meet one guy if I really get honest with myself, but that was more like a distraction than anything else. The fantasies sent by Geoffrey were just different; more personal of course because he knew me but more than anything because he was willing to lead me, not direct me.

I have learned I am not spontaneous at all. I like to plan so when writing scripts before we met were suggested that had great appeal and is similar to Geoffrey’s suggestions. Geoffrey has always in some manner asked permission to do what he does in emails and I have said sure, why not because I thought it would be a great way to get inside his mind. Surprisingly he is so patient that I am able to get into my own mind.

Today is photograph day that we have chatted about for weeks now. It was a game at first with Geoffrey sending me photos of naked women and suggesting that I was better looking and would photographs better. We would tease back and forth about me and body parts and how I would take the pics and how to disguise my face or just take a naked butt shot and at times how to make it into something artier.

My idea was to be naked in the pool up to my knees in water but have my face painted in white like a court jester or a mime: put red, very red lipstick and rouge so I sort of was disguised and send it to him. There are some excellent places to buy real stage make-up so I had a really easy time getting the materials. Where I am really clumsy is in just setting a camera on a tripod, focusing it on a spot of water, hitting the timer and getting into the right location in time. If anyone had been there making a movie it would have been hilarious so I just had to admit how funny the situation was and be so ever thankful that Michael was not around. Would have been impossible to explain to him why I looked like a mime and was butt ass naked taking photos of myself to send to my would be lover anyway. Digital images were just starting but the cameras were so
expensive and the software was so complex that film was the choice. I also found it stimulating not to be the first to see an image of me naked. There are some excellent places to buy real stage make-up so I had a really easy time getting the materials. The camera is the tricky thing, setting the F stops and shutter speed so the hair is in what is called critical focus and the background blurred and foggy so it does not detract from the true focus point of the image. This is similar to portrait photography where you want the eyes in critical focus but the ears just lightly out of focus. It had to be natural light of course. Morning was the best time to try this at a particular time when the area was in soft shade so that harsh shadows would not spoil the image with too much contrast and to make matters even more complicated is that I had to visualize all this in my mind before exposing the film. Geoffrey had a dark room so he would process the film and see me even before I did.

Morning sounds are all creating an atmosphere of peace. There are several wild parrots flying around outside and even their noise is pleasant today. Michael is driving up; intriguing how every car makes a distinctive sound, car door closing is even unique and the honk as the door is locked. Unlocking and opening the door is identifiable as uniquely Michael’s. Karen looks up from the notebook and gives Michael a warm smile and waits. Both she and Michael had practiced conflict avoidance all their marriage. Often there could be a silence for a few days after an argument. But this was not an argument; this was a renegotiation of living together, of being married, of having a future.

Gingerly Michael pokes his head in the breakfast area and leaning against the door way ask with a smile, “Is it safe to enter?”

“Yes, of course, I think I know why I am so angry and it has nothing to do with you. I am angry at myself, and I am very sorry that I lost my cool and blamed you for the decisions I have made in my life.”

“What do you mean,” Michael asked in a confused way, “I am really surprised to hear you say that.”

“Well, would you like to fix some coffee and we can talk some more without the anger, or at least I can try not to be angry at you. I might still be very angry at me, but please understand it has nothing to do with anything you have done or not done, it has to do with me, the me I am right now in my life.”

“And this me will miss very much what might have been if we do not grow individually and as a couple.”

One of the simple pleasures Michael enjoyed was a perfect cup of coffee. He used to prefer the French Press method but recently had taken to making what he calls camp coffee. He measures the grams of ground coffee and the ounces of bottled water, brings the water to a boil and lets it rest for one minute, then and only then does he pour the coffee into the water and gives it one minute to be absorbed, mixes it with a long wooden spoon and finally in three minutes will strain the coffee through a fine gold mesh into a carafe. The aroma is refreshing and the taste of the brew is so different and smooth from any other method. No cream or sugar for Michael but I like the flavored creamers on the market now.

Pouring their coffee Michael brings it to the nook, places the cups of the table and bends down to give Karen a kiss on the forehead. “Let’s just be peaceful today,” he says, “Mark is coming by shortly and we had planned to plan our landscaping business”.

How awkward, thought Karen there goes the great seduction plan.
At this point I was in total fascination as well as totally confused. It is such a rare thing for anyone to come up to me and talk about anything other than the weather or the Lakers if I am wearing a Laker shirt that it simply took several minutes to begin to process what I was listening to. The timeline, the action, the thoughts just were a kaleidoscope of images in my mind ... a jumble of confusion.

“Look, I need some clarification. It is not that I need to know where this is going, but I am puzzled over where it has been!”

Beside her was a basket which she carefully opened and asked if I would like to share a sandwich. A thermos of fresh coffee and different treats of one kind and another.

“I am doing my best to focus on the positive’< she said, “if one focuses on the negative it has a way of taking control of your life. How can I make this clearer?”

“As I listen you sound so vulnerable. What was in your mind when you thought of having an affair? How could you feel vulnerable when you were in control? What happened with Mr. X”

Anais Nin put it beautifully when she said, “Each friend represents a world in us, a world possibly not born until they arrive, and it is only by this meeting that a new world is born.” I was terrified at the idea of wanting sex with Geoffrey. To this point I had only been with Michael. My problem was to stay in my existing world or be terrified at entering another. Mr. X was more of a detour, a curiosity or a fantasy. Perhaps I should call him a “nether” world. And being in control is feeling the fear of any change really, but having courage to do it anyway.”

“OK, I just have to know this, “are you submissive.”

“I found out that I was not. I just needed to travel that concept before I could really come to define myself and the path I would travel for the rest of my life” I think every woman has deep feeling of outrage or anger and that part of the re birthing into another requires somehow to allow that anger and outrage to disipate. Now where was I?

“Breakfast,” I whispeared.
“How awkward,” Karen repeated, “there goes the great seduction plan.”

“This is going to be very peaceful. I just want to be clear on some new rules for you and me is all. We can talk and explore them anytime but from now on we will talk, about anything that is on your mind or in your mind. It is just not right for you to think I am having sex or an affair when I am not, and it is not right for me to somehow give you that impression by what I do or say. So from now on just ask and I will be honest in my answer. For you to carry that in your head does not work for what we do in the future. Anything you want to talk about we will from now on. That is rule number one.”

“Now hold on please, we do talk, we do share, we discuss things and stuff all the time”

“This is different from how we learned to talk and interact from our parents and friends. Our talks will be completely honest and open about anything you or I want to explore. This is the only way we can develop complete trust in each other.”

“Hell, no one talks that way, it just is not done and you know it. Women always say you can tell me anything and then get pissed when stuff is brought up. You are that way and you know it. Last month I commented on some young chick’s ass at the beach and you did not speak to me for a week. Now you tell me you are going to fuck Geoffrey and I somehow I have to life with it. If this is going to be a new program then you have to get with the program also.”

I know I do. This is new for me also, and we both will stumble a lot. This is not going to be easy Michael, just necessary if we are going break years of how we were. We both know what is going on is not working and I think we both want our marriage to work, I mean really work. Not the pretend marriage that Gram had”.

“What do you mean by pretend marriage, they were together for almost fifty years and I never once heard them argue or scream at one another; and I certainly do not believe they fucked others and it was alright with them and the world? You know that is a pretty big damn egg just to lay on me.”

“Michael, it is a big egg to lay on you. I am totally new at this you know, this talking about desire and wants; it is new for you also so there is no need to be angry or try to get me defensive. You certainly are tired of walking on egg shells because I am angry and made you the target. Well, you are no longer the target of my anger. “

“So Michael, do you have a best time you never talk about, or do you want to talk about your business idea, or perhaps Gram’s marriage?”

There was no answer and at the moment no need to answer. We slipped into a comfortable pause of listening to the sounds of silence between us. It felt right just to listen to the sounds of breathing, to casually look at the notebook screen of Geoffrey’s image of me, to have the warm presence of Michael moving to sit beside me and feel his legs against mine. For the first time in the longest time my anger was gone and I could sink into being with Michael again.

“My parents marriage was a disaster,” Michael started, “and I never knew that. I always thought it was a perfect marriage. But when Dad passed I really think that my Mother blossomed into a new person. It was strange to see to be honest. I expected her to somehow become depressed in grief and despair. She did express feeling some loneliness at times, but for the most part she really became a happier person. It took her a year to transform her life, bit by bit, small changes in the house at first and then having the inside painted to colors that for years she had wanted.

“Out with the beige!” was her expression. This was when I started really studying some interior design and watching those design show on the TV. I felt great being able to help her with the house; it was a giving back for all she and Dad had done for me. I was thinking I was in charge, sort of like Dad was in charge; that
that I somehow was rescuing my Mother from the depths of despair. What a surprise when Mom told me that my ideas were great for me and I should do them with my house: but what she wanted was to do her home her way for her.

When she was finished redoing the house she said, I have always wanted to travel, to take a cruise, to see Hawaii and Alaska: but Dad was always working sixty to eighty hours a week and more if I really think about it. When she got back from Hawaii she got a cat of all things. Dad had always said that animals just stank up a house and even when we were kids would not allow any animals in the house. I remember wanting a dog for years, all my friends had pets, but Dad would never allow it. So when Mom got a cat I was totally surprised. I had no idea that she would want animals in the house or allow it or anything like that.

It was when Mom talked about her cat that I began to realize how lonely her marriage was. One evening she said that her cat was the best communicator she ever knew. “She is genius. So many of my difficult situations in life would not have occurred if I had been as aware of my needs and direct and honest about them as she is. She does not mince words, she is kind, and she has an enormous vocabulary of the words important to what she likes and wants. She expresses emotions and is not co-dependent. She cares about the feelings of others. She does not over think. She does not waste time. She does not overanalyze. She does not try to read others’ minds. If she wants to know something from you, she asks. She doesn’t assume. She lives in the moment. She is connected. She is talkative when she needs to be. She is grateful and delightful.”

My sisters and basically the whole family thought she would do better by remarrying. Our sincere goal was for her to find substantially someone like dad to once again complete her life. How relieved we all would have been had she done that and had a real live once again. Whenever we hinted at our goal for her she would reply, “I would like to connect with a nice, brilliant, creative, interesting, emotionally present, experienced, spiritually connected, open minded and grown up man for dating purposes, but marriage, but marriage, Oh no, I have endured one marriage; never again.”

Her parents, my grandparents divorced Irish Style you know. They lived in separate homes, attended family get togethers and just smiled at each other without talking directly to one another. They would make snide comments about each other, but in over twenty years I do not remember seeing them ever really talk. I never really knew Dad’s parents. Do you realize that every one of our friends are now divorced, ours is the only surviving marriage and most look at us as role models?

Karen loved listening to Michael when he was this sincere and honest. Snuggling closer to him she unconsciously felt closer and the warmth of his body, his breathing was soft and quiet and in unison with hers. “I have never thought of myself as a role model Michael. I am not perfect and have never felt that way at all. I was concentrating on being a good wife and mother I think. Now I am not sure I was either. We raised our girls the way we were raised and I just do not know if that was right. We raised them to conform to society and not to be individuals or free or happy with whom they are.”

Michael softly continues, “You asked me a best time I never talk about. The answer is there is not really a best time except for what goes on inside my head. And to be honest what goes on there you do not want to know about. My head is full of dark corridors with closed doors, corridors that are endless and intersect like off-on ramps on the freeways. Every corridor has hundreds of doors and all are closed, some slightly ajar but not open, secrete doors hiding secrete thoughts inside a secrete corridor.”

“If I can learn to walk down your corridors Michael I will. I would at least like to try. If you allow me the time to learn with you I think I can go there with you.”
“Michael, are you willing to let me into your corridors? I have a hard time thinking that there is something so drastic that I think less of you. That is not my problem at all. I know you and I have loved you all our adult life.”

Michael took several minutes before responding. I could tell this was very deep, hidden and personal for him. Carla blue had told me before that some men have buried so deeply their desires that they could never reveal.

“When we were in Hawaii at the beach I loved how men looked at you sexually. I am sure you noticed it also, but you pretended not to notice. However there were times I could tell you were blushing. God, I get a hard on just thinking about it.” That is in my mind. That is one and just one of the doors in my secret corridor.”

Michael I think this is common tell you the truth. Guys look at any and every woman. They dream and fantasize and every girl from about age 9 knows it and learns how to deal with it. I think it is fun that you still mentally undress me. I like knowing what gives you a hard on. It is kind or erotic and intimate at the same time. Sometimes guys are verbal, but mostly they just look, others are obnoxious and perhaps what you think is a blush is just the opposite. I don’t know, rarely does a gawker say anything lightly funny or attractive or appealing.

“Look,” Michael continued, “this is just one door and one corridor. I do not know why it is so strong in my head. I wish I did, I wish I could just get it out is all.”

Karen took a long moment and gently began to touch Michael in a reassuring manner. “Thank you for talking with me is about all I can say. What you think is bothersome does not bother me at all. You bought that suit for me to wear in Hawaii and I did, so let’s just enjoy the memory.

“But this is different, Husbands are supposed to protect their wife’s, not put them on display.”

“You put me on display for you to look at! It was fun for us, we both enjoyed it. Protect me yes, support me yes, and be there emotionally yes: but not to confine me or think that you own me or to suffocate me.”
After the briefest moment the doorbell rang. Mark had arrived early. He was at times obnoxious to be around and his wife Anne I could not stand at all. She was a typical “Wives of Orange County” and seemed all wrapped up in herself and her silly dramas. For the life of me I did not understand why any guy would be around her. Mark was just so conservative in a ridiculous judgmental way; he had no compassion for people at all. But if he and Michael could really start a business that would be great. They could call it M&M’s I guess.

“Karen can you get the door and I will start another round of coffee”?

“Michael I am not dressed for company and you know that”

“Yes you are dressed perfectly if you really want to travel in my corridors”.

I looked at Michael and recognized his embarrassed smile.

“Go on; get the door dressed as you are. Tease Mark a little, did you know that he and Anne no longer have sex?”

Love is wanting to be with another: grow and become the best person you can be; without jealousy, without fear Karen thought. What is this fear inside me, that Michael wants me to expose myself to other men? How far does he want me to go, and even more how far do I want to go. Big talker I am, big thinker but the fear is there and the desire to overcome my hang-ups; I want to explore my sensuality as far as I can I know that. While there are many different ways to define love and there are many different ways to love someone (or even yourself),

“Go on”, Michael continued his smile now broad and his eyes twinkling, “show him out to the patio and have coffee with us.”

Turning around and giving Michael a quick kiss I had mixed emotions. Fear mixed with a measure of excitement, a lot of guilt about how I had been last night when talking about Geoffrey, but I still had this feeling that I would like to share with him my time with Geoffrey. I did not want to cheat and now Michael had finally opened up a little about what was going on with him; that is a real bonus I think. I was experiencing a little erotic tingle thinking about the possibility of teasing Mark in front of Michael.

Pressing against him and a wiggle of my butt to grind against Michael I asked in my most teasing voice, “Why would you want that? Would you be jealous if I turn Mark on and then just leave? I smiled teasingly at Michael, winking and, giving my bottom a wiggle and just stood there with my hands behind my back trying to look as coy as possible.

“Hell no I won’t be jealous, I have seen guys look at you with lust”. Mark is just so full of himself and conceited that I want him to be envious that I have a wife that is sexy, sensual and playful and he has a prude”.

I have always considered myself good at hearing the “unspoken word” Thought Karen as Michael disappeared into the kitchen, obviously I was tone deaf to what Michael’s unspoken words were and I am not sure what he means by flirt with Mark, and why in the hell is he not having sex with Anne? I believe that in any Relationship encouraging the other to be who they are and be willing to support them in being themselves is a foundation to build on.

There are moments that are what the fuck moments and this is one of them. I thought I was being so smart and could control what was going to happen this morning and now I am completely out of control, excited by my little photographic experience, wanting to seduce and talk with Michael and now somehow I have to figure out what to do with Mark and for Christ’s sake Michael wants me to expose myself to him and flirt with him and goes off and leaves me to figure out what he means.

I had thought my explorations would be with Geoffrey, not Michael. That thought had anticipation and was so pleasurable in thought; but to do this with Michael was terrifying. Mark just was not my type. My dreams always had a tall dark haired and darkly handsome man and Geoffrey came pretty close;
but Mark certainly did not. Perhaps submitting was more so if you were not attracted? Mark had short very
curly hair like steel wool, was beginning to go bald and his movements were just slightly awkward and dis-
jointed; not the suave smooth movements in my imagination. He does have gracious manners and is intel-
ligent in a business sense and is always impeccably polite and perfectly groomed. I am debating with myself
and just go and, and, and and in a circle of confusion.

The doorbell rings a second time as Karen goes to the door wondering what kind of submission would I
like, how do I want to tease and submit; this is way beyond the hugging hello and good bye Mark is accu-
tomed to? That is such a silly custom anyway, just because someone is your husbands friend why should I
have to hug them hello and good-bye?

Michael has put me in this spot for a reason and I just am not sure of what that reason is. This is the mo-
ment that I wanted and dreaded. Geoffrey would have led and directed but Michael wants me to somehow
perform for Michael and Mark is but a surrogate I guess. I have always enjoyed dressing sexy for Michael
and wearing what he liked. This was especially so with the caftans he found so much pleasure in. At first she
wore sports jerseys and little if anything under them and loved the loose feel of the oversized fabric against her
skin. The little teddies sold as the ultimate in seduction left her feeling to overt and obvious and often Michael
would not even respond. Total nudity was out because I am just not one of those hippie type chicks wanting
it all in the open. Karen did enjoy wearing as little as possible when she was home and often would not really
get dressed on weekends.

Sometimes it was fun to go out together for lunch or dinner and go braless with a somewhat revealing top,
sandals and hip tugger jeans and her favorite top was really an oversized T. shirt that could slightly fall off her
shoulders just ever so slightly, just a slight threat of falling more and revealing her breasts to the world. It was
a fun game she had with herself and Michael that at times lead to some passionate sex when they were home.
Generally Karen did this at a particular fast food counter that had all males waiting on customers and women
handling the back. Karen had learned how to lean over and pick up the order allowing her blouse to open and
for just a second reveal her breast and nipples to the pimple faced counter help before gathering up the food
and taking it to the table. Michael eyes were always on the counter guys with a knowing smile on his face.
The trick or fun was to do this in such a manner that only Michael knew it was on purpose.

“What would be, well normal” Karen thought as she opened the door and prepared for the ritual hug from
Mark

She could see the surprise in Marks face as he opened his arms for the hug saying, “Hi hope this business does
not inconvenience you.”

“Oh not at all,” Karen replies as she walks into his hug and allows Mark to pull him in. He is much stronger
than I thought Karen thinks. Generally they would hug for a second and pull away, their bodies never re-
ally touching. Amazing how you can give a hug and not touch. This time Karen felt Mark ever so softly run
his hand down her spine, not putting pressure on her skin at all, more to feel the silk fabric of the caftan or to
explore to feel a bra strap Karen thought. This was the moment to pull away or not and Karen simply stayed
in the hug so Mark could feel that she was bra less. Sort of giggling to herself Karen felt her pulled closer into
Marks body as he put both hands on her waist and exclaimed, “Wow, you are a knockout in that dress.”

Delighted and amused Karen was not really surprised, she knew this was Michael favorite Caftan as the
print truly covered everything and yet permitted her body to be on display at the same time. A form within a
formless cover is how she thought of it...And it was exciting to allow the hug to go on longer than usual.

“Why thank you, this is just so comfortable for lounging around that I love it. Michael is in the kitchen
fixing coffee, would you like some? I think he has some cinnamons rolls also.”

Turning and leading the way to the breakfast nook Karen could feel the eyes stare at her butt and just
chuckled at guys in general and just how she was going to play this game for Michael. How far should I
Let this go and what fun it is to be in the lead. Karen could not believe she was actually playing and even more astounded at the power she felt. “I am in absolute control of this” she thought. Michael loved taking photographs of her and always had his camera. It made no difference what I looked like or where we were. We could be waiting for a table at a restaurant and he would take a picture of me. Sometimes laughing and saying “Show a little more leg” and I would do that just for a second. We were in Vegas and at a bus stop was a bench filled with posters of sex ads and Michael just had to get a picture of me on the bench. At times he just liked me leaning against a wall when we were walking, totally casual and totally me. Other times he wanted me to really model and pose for him naked or just showing body parts. I know just how to stand to emphasize my ass that Michael likes and I bet that Mark with be blown out of his mind; teasing Mark will be fun.

Men are really simpletons with this idea of exposure. I really resent when I am walking down the street and pass a bunch of guys and have them eyeball me as I walk past. Sometimes they make comments but generally they just move their eyes up and down and follow you. They are like a pack of mad dogs really and you never know how dangerous a pack they are. Mostly benign and infantile and they just do not understand that.

Karen found herself humming to herself a tune from long ago. “Seduce my mind ...and you can have my body ...find my soul and I am yours forever”.

And yet if guys like this why have I been disgusted at this aspect of sexuality all these years. I think I was just being confronted at my own inhibitions, my own reluctance to be thought of as a sexual object instead of taking that ball and enjoying it. Men look, they gawk and stare and mentally undress every female they see. We know this and I have always avoided it. The truth is is that I have known Michael is a voyeur for a long time and resented it, and that resentment has prevented our being intimate. Why would I think that having an affair with Geoffrey would be any better? Why is it safer to have an affair, and willing submit to another when I have refused to explore with Michael?

“I know a part of the fun now is knowing that Mark is not sexual with Anne.”

A small amount of indecent exposure is exciting, the trick is how to shock Mark, or embarrass him. Both would be great I think. I have to be just so totally innocent in how I do it, be accidental about it, just enough so that Michael gets excited and knows I am doing this for him and Mark has no clue that I want to embarrass him. This is really pretending to be a seductress with out being obvious or overt in any manner. Just a pure simple and innocent young girl that just somehow exposes her little tits to a guy.

“LOOK, look at me!” Kind of thing.

What is unsettling is the not know where it leads. This is the frightful aspect for me. All my life I have known where anything leads, this is why I am so successful in my career as an analyst. I do analysis, I know, I can predict. I wonder why my mind roams. I guess I cannot focus on anything at the moment. Life is pretty good for me, decent job, decent health, decent friends, yet my mind wanders all over the place.
My best friend from high school is getting married to a guy we both knew in high school that we
made fun of. Is that what life is at mid age?

We thought he was just the ugliest guy around and now she is engaged to him. Good lord how
people change, I guess I am changing also. At one time I wanted the normal…normal guy, normal
sex; normal kids…just to be a normal soccer mom and raise normal kids. Christ, been there sort of.
Had a normal guy and normal sex life, the regular thing you know: but I got bored, he got bored.
Never fought with him, nothing wrong, just we both got bored. People keep telling me to keep a
journal of my thoughts and goals and all that, I wonder if people really do keep a journal that way.
Barnes and Nobel has hundreds of journal books that have blank pages with cute illustrations and
do people buy and use them or just give them to buddies at Christmas. So I started and wondered
what would I write about.

And here I am leading Mark to the patio wondering if my butt wiggles just enough to entice him.
I do not know how much I can add more positive energy to this marriage, but I am going to try.
Anything I cannot transform into something marvelous, I will let go. I now know it is wrong for
women to expect the man to build the world she wants, rather than set out to create it herself.

“Michael thought having coffee in the patio was good. That way you two can talk business and I
can finish up my work in the nook. I just love the view.

Karen was standing in the doorway of the sliding glass doors, hands stretched out holding the
doorway as she gently rocked back and forth allowing the sunlight to illuminate her. She knew the
canada was translucent in this position and slowly moved her feet apart so sunlight would stream
between her legs. Mark came up just behind her, almost touching, just close enough so that Karen
could sense his closeness.

“It is a great view,” Mark whispered, “and I am seriously loving you in that outfit.”

Karen felt her body slowly backing into Mark’s as she grinned, “Well, I am glad it passes
inspection.”

Here, lets go sit down, Karen said taking Marks hand and leading him to patio. To Karen’s surprise Mark
just ever so slightly brushed up against her as he followed. Mark stopped to take in the view of the columns
stone work and furniture. Michael had really done a great job and Mark was truly impressed.
“My God, Michael did this, this is great. What kind of stone is this?’

“It is a Palos Verde slate I think. Let me show this particular tile, I think it has the face of Jesus in it”

As they walked over by a column Karen again felt Mark brush against her, his arm brushing against her breast and then he just looks away pretending it was accidental. This is so different from the well focused business man Mark that I have known. This guy is so horny he is responding to my little baby flirt as if it were a major come on …That or he knows how to pretend flirt also. Amazing the thoughts that can creep into my head and she silently loved the attention he was giving her. Stopping at the stone Karen pointed it out with her toe.

“See the shadows and how the stone has this bearded face shape in it?” Karen asked.

Mark had his hands to himself, safely on his hips and looked intently at the stone, vainly trying to see a face, let alone a beard of Jesus. “Well, not really. I guess what you see as a head I just think is a natural rock formation from how they quarried the stone.”

Deftly Karen dropped to her knees and using her finger to outline the formation as a child would draw in the sand. “Here, just follow my finger,” Karen said again. As she did, Mark just stopped dead in his tracks and stared down at her exposed breasts, seemingly forgetting why he was at the house to start with and for sure paying not attention to the stone that Karen was playfully drawing his attention to. He put his briefcase down beside the coffee table and stared directly at her tits; his eyes moving up and down her body. Karen felt the flush come over her face as she looked up at Mark and made direct eye contact with him.

“Do you see now,” Karen asked

“yes,” Mark replied, “I see everything you are comfortable showing me” Mark very slowly moved his eyes down to the stone, then back up until he was looking Karen in the eyes, “are you comfortable?”

“Yes, I am”, Karen replied, understanding now it was a Catholic wives duty to serve her husband.

“Good, I like it when I know you are comfortable in that position.” His eyes returned taking in every inch of her, pausing his eyes on her nipples that were straining against the thin silk material. Karen loved every inch of his stare, She could feel her face flush even deeper and could feel the wetness come over her, but she loved every second of it. He looked up at her, made eye contact, smiled, and turned back to his briefcase as Michael came into the patio.
I kneel, supplicant before you
my will
offered up in quiet acquiescence
awaiting your approval

or reproach
the fine line be-
tween pleasure and
pain
becomes ever
tsweeter with your
control
with every touch,
kiss, word
smoldering embers
are kindled
tormenting desires
awakened
I quiver
captured by heat
and hunger
bend me to your
will
My Lord
show me what you
most desire
my purpose but to
serve
through your dominion I find myself
You, the Master of many
my only
Circles of Freedom