

Nothing Less Than Everything



Michael Stream

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ISBN: 1-55410-027-5

Cover art and design by Martine Jardin

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Published by eXtasy Books, a division of Zumaya Publications, 2003

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"Why don't you take a ride into the city for lunch—there's someone I'd like you to meet."

You had just sat down by the pool, the butler had just set the tea and the morning paper on the tray next to your seat, and he adjusted the umbrella to shield you from the early morning glare. It was about ten, and already the sun was a brilliant fire within the dark blue sky. The thought of dealing with the traffic, the two and a half hour drive from Amagansett to Manhattan in the middle of August.

"Awww, I just sat down here." You tried not to let your anger show—you never liked fighting on the phone. When he came home tonight you'd tell him how you felt, how hurt you were that he stayed over in the city last night, and that when he called you early this morning he didn't remember what day it was. You knew the meetings were important, it was all he talked about this past week. But he shouldn't have forgotten your birthday.

"I got us a suite in the Pierre. There's someone who wants to meet you."

There was a playfulness, a daring in his voice that you haven't heard for years. You thought about the

last time you were in the Pierre. "Who?" You leaned back in the seat. "Tell me!" He stayed over in the city the night before to meet with a Hollywood producer. For all your annoyance, part of you understood why he stayed there. It was more than just movie rights this time—the two other novels he had written had been so successful, both as books and then as movies, that this time he'd sold a new screenplay as soon as it left his printer. Now he was in a position to insist on some influence over the movie. He was hoping for what they call 'creative input', a say in everything from initial casting to the final editing of the script and the scoring. "Who? Steven Spielberg...? Brian de Palma? C'mon, tell me!"

"No, sweetie. Wear something nice. Real nice. I have a table for three at the Tavern on the Green."

It wasn't what he said—it was that little sound in his voice. He had something planned—maybe he remembered what day it was after all. You slid your sunglasses down and looked over at the man who was watering the plants. "Juan, please get the Mercedes ready. I have a lunch appointment in the city."

It took nearly an hour before you were on the road. You couldn't make up your mind what to wear. You took one dress after another out of the walk-in closet, you held them up against you, and as soon as you would settle on one you returned to the closet, scanning the wall of shoes. There was perfume to select, there was makeup and hair, all with the wind of an open convertible to worry about. You thought of your husband all the while, remembering that feeling

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he had in his voice, hanging your hopes on it like a schoolgirl running for the phone...

This was going to be good.

He was sitting alone at a small table that had a single seat and a semicircular leather booth. There were three places set. Joe rose from his seat and greeted you warmly, and since he was sitting in the chair, you slid into the booth opposite him. You tried to hide your disappointment that the mystery guest wasn't there. You smiled at him. Your husband was thrilled to see you.

"He'll be here in a little while." You looked at the empty place setting on your left, and wondered.

The restaurant was an island of light. Daylight spilled down from the skylights, the crystal shimmered, and the tables around you were filled with elegant men and women who lingered over their drinks, unhurried by any pressures outside. There was an indoor fountain, and there were large leafy potted trees scattered about the marbled room. Every table had a large crystal bowl of cut flowers on it. The wine tasted good after the two-and-a-half-hour drive, and the two of you had a nice talk.

Joe looked wonderful today. You studied him in the light and saw the effects of a summer running every day on the beach. His was trim and energetic in his blazer. His hair was still thick and dark, the gray

was evenly scattered, and it lent your husband a polished, dignified look. The summer tan made his blue eyes seem lighter, more lively. You realized he was one of those men who aged gracefully, but you decided not to mention that. He seemed so happy today.

When you were first married, the difference in your ages didn't matter, but once he passed forty there were times when the two of you seemed to have lost some inner bond. The years made him take stock, At the same time, as his novels began to sell, and sell spectacularly, some inner unhappiness grew in him. You saw less and less of the confident, vibrant man that was eager to take on the world. Once he was a man who loved to take chances with life, as if every escape convinced him that the world had some purpose for him. But now, there was a quiet, unreachable place inside him. There was doubt. Sometimes you'd walk into the bedroom and see him standing by the window, staring at the beach, and you knew enough to just turn and leave, because you knew he wouldn't tell you what he was thinking.

You didn't discuss his moods because you knew you were at the center of his inner anxiety. He had achieved professional and financial success—all he had ever wanted. And so it was a more emotional, a more intimate challenge he was unsure of. Your love was built on sex. Sex for the two of you had always had an intense, fiery, even a dangerous quality. You loved sex. Joe was the first man you'd ever met who welcomed all your passion, as if was thrilled to find a woman who challenged all his strength.

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But that was years ago. Maybe the years sitting at computer had softened him, maybe the steady stream of rejection letters in those early years wore away at him. You still made love, there was tenderness between you, but there was an urgency, an electricity that was gone. There were a few times in the past year when you came up behind him while he was working late at night, you stoked his hair with your fingers and you whispered: "Joe, come to bed." But he wouldn't turn away from his story. Whenever that happened, for days afterwards he wouldn't hold your eyes, but when you looked away you'd feel him watching you. Studying you, as if wondering at your devotion, and you sensed an attentiveness in him, an eagerness to please you with small favors and courtesies. Many times you walked the wet sand of East Hampton Beach, and you thought about your life together. You knew that for all you loved sex, you loved him more, and so you'd grow old with him, thankful for that blessing, those sweet years of passion with him.

This past spring he showed signs of awakening. One day, you stood on the veranda and watched him run out of the house and up onto the dunes. Joe hadn't run for years. You followed him as he ran far off to the east, until he became a small black figure indistinguishable from the running children and walking lovers. You watched him and you hoped. He ran almost every day this summer. He cut down on the booze. He ate better. And now you could see him,

healthy and smiling, eager to share something new and exciting with you.

"Happy Birthday," he said. Finally. You looked down, thankful for the acknowledgment. He told you days ago he had no choice, the meetings about the screenplay couldn't be moved. You swallowed that hurt. You knew how important this was for him, if this movie was all he hoped for it would be the breakthrough he wanted so desperately. And it wasn't just his ambition—a few years ago you would have been ecstatic over a big house in the East End, but now that you'd been there almost three years, your sights, your horizon is, well...even higher. Last summer the two of you took that ride along Dune Road, and you stopped the car and stood by the high concrete wall outside Steven Spielberg's house. You listened to the shouts and laughter from the party, you heard the splashes in the pool and the two of you guessed at the voices you heard. You stood there like shy children on the edge of a playground. Stallone? Oprah? Billy Crystal? And then suddenly he reached for you, pulled you close and whispered in your ear: "Someday we'll be in there..."

You were lost in that memory when you saw him look over your shoulder and start to get up. You turned and saw a tall black man approaching your table.

It was Luther Flanks.

At first you couldn't speak. You were immediately struck by one thing—he looked even better in person. You stared up at him; he had the tall, proud bearing of a king. Your husband is tall, but Luther was taller.

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And leaner. He was a bit underdressed for the place—all the other men in the restaurant were wearing jackets and ties, but no one would tell Luther Flanks what to wear. He wore light khakis and a dark red muscle shirt, one that looked as if it was custom-made because it fit him so perfectly. You saw the ridges of his chest beneath the thin, smooth fabric; the short sleeves were stretched by the lean hardness of his arms and shoulders. The collar was open; there was a thick gold chain around his neck.

Your husband introduced you, "Luther, this is my wife, Michelle." And to you, "Luther is going to star in the movie."

He extended his arm and smiled. "I'm so pleased to meet you, Michelle."

You sat there, dumb for a second, it took you a moment to take his outstretched hand. He beamed down at you and his eyes were bright, like two suns. "Michelle," he said your name again, he got this look—it was almost like he knew how...dreamlike his voice felt to you, as if he knew you'd always imagined what your name would sound like on his lips. Whispering it into your ear, while he's...

You reached your hand out and he took it; his fingers were so, so long. "H-H-Hello," you had to fight to get it out. A shudder of warmth ran through your body.

Can he tell? you wondered as he slid into the open place in the leather booth. *Did he see it in my eyes?* You looked across at your husband and wondered what

he had told Luther. You were like a shy girl suddenly sitting next to your first crush, the captain of the football team, the boy who you'd always thought was unattainable. You hoped that he didn't notice the staring, the stammering. *Did I stutter? Did I seem stupid?*

You felt like you were dreaming as he started talking to your husband, because you couldn't believe it was him sitting there next to you. He sat just a foot or two away on the curve of the leather seat. He was slightly closer to you than he was to your husband. You realized you're staring open-mouthed, and so you look away, and the world you had forgotten about comes back into focus. The light and color of the restaurant returned, voices rose again, but people were staring over at your table as they resumed their conversations. It seemed as if the presence of this star had shifted the gravity of the place.

He spoke to your husband. It began as easy pleasantries about the flight and the wait for his limo. Then some Hollywood gossip. Your husband listened to Luther with rapt attention. You knew he loved gossip, he was eager to hear all the stories. What Madonna said to Jack Nicholson. What Bruce Willis did last week on the set. But all the while Luther spoke you remained silent. You couldn't help but look at him. You stared for a moment, then forced yourself to look away. His skin was the color of dark coffee and, even without makeup, there wasn't a single blemish. And that voice! It was incredibly expressive. The few times he chuckled, he settled into a deep bass laugh that made you shiver inside

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You picked up the menu and hid in it. You didn't want to get caught ogling the man, so you kept your eyes on the menu—but still you listened to his voice. He was talking about his latest movie, complaining about the director, and you started to get the feeling he was getting a bit bored. Maybe he noticed that your husband has no stories to tell. Two book adaptations don't really amount to all that much. Your husband really isn't anyone of consequence in Hollywood. You listened closely and became certain: Yes, Luther was bored. You knew the pitch and timber of Luther's voice from the long hours in dark theaters. It was a voice you loved, and yes, there was no mistaking the undertone of annoyance. Your husband asked him about the producer of their movie. You knew why—this movie would be shot all over the world and your husband would be traveling constantly to adjust the script and consult with the director. He knew this was his chance to get on the inside; to get to know the directors, the producers, the money players, and that's what you both really wanted because that's where the juice is. He kept asking Luther about them—could he have been any more obvious?—and you knew—knew—that Luther was getting irritated. You looked at your husband and went to nudge him under the table with your foot, but something stopped you. Something unbelievable.

Luther's hand was on your knee.

You forced yourself to take a breath, the fear of

crying out had trapped the air in your throat. You flicked your eyes down from the menu and there you see it: his big right hand pushing your skirt back slightly over your knee. All black skin and gold jewelry, the big watch and the three gold rings studded with diamonds big enough to find light even under the table. Big wide knuckles, you remembered from the last movie he was in: *Rematch*. The scene where his hands were being taped up before the fight.

You reached down and touched the back of his hand.

"Miss?"

You looked up, and realized the waiter is waiting for your order. You came back to yourself, the noise and glitter of the restaurant returned as you muttered your order. Prime rib was the first entree you recognized, and so you ordered it quickly – anything to shift attention off of you.

While your husband ordered you looked up at Luther, his eyes were fiery, you knew he was measuring you. Sizing you up. Checking you out. You didn't look away, you heard your husband in the distance ordering the beef Wellington. You didn't look away, you held his eyes and felt his touch.

The waiter prompted him, and Luther looked down at his menu. You could breathe again. You looked at your husband. Could he tell? Was your face red? His look was strange, hungry and you peered into his gray eyes as you felt Luther's fingertips move...closer.

You heard Luther asking about the food. He took his time, considering the filet or the lamb before

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deciding that no, he wanted something special: roast duck. It wasn't on the menu, but that didn't matter.

"How would you like that, sir?"

When the waiter left, Luther lifted his hand off your knee, reached for his napkin and placed it on the table. He started up from his seat. "I need to use the bathroom."

You tried not to look as he walked away, but you couldn't help it. That butt of his was way too tight, way too cheeky in his white khakis, and your eyes followed him as he rolled away, fascinated by that easy, graceful saunter of his. You followed that butt of his all across the restaurant—and so did every other woman.

"I wish you could see yourself," your husband said. He smiled, though.

For a minute you were stuck there, you looked down and realized you were blushing. "Sorry," you muttered, like a sheepish little girl.

"I think it's cute—I always knew you had this thing for him."

"Well, he *is* good-looking."

"Something tells me you want to do more than look." You knew he was looking at you, but you didn't want to meet his eyes. "Lots more."

There was nothing to say. You remained silent for a long while, unwilling to deny your feelings, unable to speak them out loud. After a few minutes he reached across for your hand, took it in both of his and caressed it softly.

"Hey, it's OK."

Still, you couldn't talk, and you wondered for a moment if he knew where your hand had just been. Could he sense your feelings? Did he know what it felt like, did he know how...thrilling the feel of Luther's hand on your inner thigh was? Did he know how stirring it was, how it tore you loose from your mooring, how just the brief touch of him made you wonder?

"Hey – I mean it. I don't blame you."

Now you had to look up. Because you couldn't believe what he just said.

"You mean..." You were trembling.

"Yes!" He was almost laughing. "I mean, you've been wetting your panties for him for years. You drag me to every one of his movies. Well, here he is."

Before you had time to answer you see him out of the corner of your eye. Luther was walking back, and once you saw him you pulled your hand away from your husband. At once you felt a stab of guilt – it was rude, it was abrupt, it told more than any words just how important this was. Once you saw his tall, black frame in the doorway you couldn't help it, you just yanked your hand away like it had been caught in a light socket. You didn't want Luther to see. You didn't want to...well, you didn't know at that point what you wanted.

Luther slid into the booth. This time he took a position even closer to you – close enough so that anyone arriving in the restaurant would assume that Luther was your man, rather than your husband. You looked around and realized what this must look like,

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you looked at some of the other women in the restaurant, and yes they noticed his interest in you. And that was a good, good feeling—imagining that they sensed how much he wanted you. You watched them as he reached for your knee again, you watched them as your leg began to tingle with the caress of those big, bony black hands of his—and a sweet, almost piercing feeling welled up inside you. All your life you wanted to be the sort of pretty, glamorous cupcake that men drool over. And here you were, with one of the hottest men on the planet, and his hand was slithering up your leg...

And you realized you'd forgotten all about your husband.

Well, he'd forgotten about you too. He was too busy discussing the script with Luther. Telling him his vision of the movie—you'd heard him discuss this many times. He'd lie in bed, and you'd fall asleep while he ran on about the dynamics between the two main characters, or the way he controlled the tension with the change in location. With Luther's hand on you, your husband seemed far, far away. You stared off into the glittering light, the big leafy plants and the mist rising from the indoor fountains. You lost yourself in the light and the air, while he stroked you and made your heart race. Luther didn't sound very interested in what your husband was saying. He nodded, he grunted occasionally, because all his attention was on you. All the while his fingers were speaking to you. Asking you?

After a while, even your husband sensed his disinterest in the script. "What do you think?"

While Luther continued to work you with the tips of his fingers, he smiled and said. "Since you asked—the script needs a lot of work." He began deconstructing the movie. "The sub-plot in Istanbul—it doesn't make any sense."

You looked over at your husband, you can see the flash of disbelief in his eyes—he wasn't used to criticism, he'd been so proud for so long that he had two novel adaptations in production—he hadn't expected such a blunt assessment.

Luther didn't hold back. "That part about the two cops—that whole section—lose it. It really doesn't work at all."

You looked up at Luther and he seemed so dismissive of the script—you wondered if he was really going to do the movie.

It seemed like your husband was wondering the same thing, because he looked very unsure, very uncertain.

"OK. I can work that scene out."

You glanced over at him and notice the slight wavering in his voice. He seemed to be swallowing a lot of anger, you knew how proud he was of that chapter with the two cops. He must have rewritten it about a dozen times, he couldn't leave it alone. He'd spend hours in his room and bring it out to you as if it was a freshly polished jewel, And he'd stand there waiting while you read the latest version. Now he was just dumping it altogether, because he really,

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really wanted to have Luther in the movie.

"I can have you a new version in...about a week? Will that be OK?"

He was looking up at Luther. He was selling out. No, it was worse than that. You looked over at him and you could see the need in his eyes. He was... folding.

Luther shifted back in his seat. He was used to power, he was used to people jumping to do what he wanted, and he knew enough to hang back, to see what else he might shake loose. "Well—I don't know—the whole ending..."

He trailed off, letting it hang there while he reached into his pocket and drew out a cigar tube. He unscrewed the cap, pulling his hand off your knee and leaving you there, feeling cold without the touch. You were hanging, just like your husband was.

He pulled the cigar out of the tube and sniffed it. "You know, women are a big part of the audience." Your husband said nothing. He was waiting. He looked like he was hoping.

Luther reached into his pocket again and took out a solid gold cutter. As he clipped the tip of the cigar you saw there was more than gold—the edges were lined with a half dozen diamonds. He placed the cutter back in his pocket and stuck the cigar in his mouth. He lit a match and concentrated deeply on his cigar, rolling it through the flame with the tips of his long fingers. There was no smoking in the restaurant, yet a waiter ran over and placed an ashtray in front of

Luther. "You see, you can't have a successful movie unless you appeal to women." And with that, he leaned back close to you and placed his hand on your thigh again.

He took a drag on his cigar and looked at you.

"I can have you a new script by — by — Thursday."

You husband seemed so far away. You and Luther were looking deeply at one another.

"Thursday is too late." Luther's voice was deep and commanding. He didn't even look at your husband. He was still looking at you. He was so strong. So confident. So bold.

"OK. OK. I'll have it in a day or two."

Then there was silence. You were still looking at each other, and as you looked at his bright eyes you remembered what your husband said. He was smiling as he commented on you and Luther. So maybe it really was OK. Maybe there really wasn't anything wrong with the way you were looking up at Luther. It was only natural—he was, after all, one of the sexiest men in the world.

You told yourself you were only looking, only playing. You told yourself your husband didn't seem to mind as you lost yourself in his eyes. You kept looking at him as you felt his hand move, you held his eyes as you felt the fiery movement up the inside of your leg. No, you weren't encouraging him, of course a man like that takes chances. And your husband is just sitting there—all he cares about is his damn script, his movie.

"You know, you have a very lovely, lovely wife." Luther smiled and looked away.

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You looked down like a blushing child.

"I mean it. She's beautiful."

"Thanks." Your husband seemed nervous, uncertain. As if he was still thinking about that script of his.

"I mean, when you showed me her picture I knew she was pretty. But when you're sitting close to her... Mmm, mmm" He kissed his lips. "Good enough to eat. Yumm."

"Stop," you said. But shyly, as if you loved having a man talk about you like this. And how long had it been?

"Did he tell you I have a thing for girls like you? Girls you can really hold on to?"

"No," You started to giggle. You'd heard about guys like that, guys who liked plump girls. Maybe their mothers were big, heavy women with...jugs, they called them. So when he said this, you started getting very, very aroused because the thought of this sexy, proud man, seeing your picture and wanting you, needing you, was more than you had ever wished for.

"Well, you're just my type." He reached his other hand around and lifted your chin up, forcing you to look at him. "I love, love pretty white girls like you."

Could he tell? Did he know? Could he see it in your eyes—how aroused you were? So aroused that you felt sinful. A married women shouldn't feel this way about a man she just met. She shouldn't look so hungrily at another man, she shouldn't allow any

man to...to...feel her up like this. Even if it was Luther Flanks. So you fought the feeling, you tried to forget the warm yearning down where his other hand is teasing you. You turned away from Luther. You looked over at you husband, and you see that he's as red as you are.

The maitre 'd and a team of waiters approached the table. One waiter takes your glasses, and asks if you'd like more drinks. Another waiter places the food before you. And all of this is watched by the maitre 'd, who seems determined to give this table the best possible service, even if the other patrons have to wait their turns, with folded arms and folded menus.

You watch the activity and wonder what is happening. Here you are, sitting in a nice restaurant with your husband, and Luther Flanks is putting a move on you. He's not really hiding what he's doing, some of the waiters are watching you, noticing where his hand is underneath the tablecloth. When they leave, one of them turns back, as if he can't believe what he just saw.

You sit there and begin to eat. The prime rib is perfect, yet you're too distracted by all this to really enjoy it, so you eat very slowly. They start talking about the script again, and now Luther is really lording it over him. He's actually making fun of some dialog, you realized that in addition to his other talents, Luther is really quite funny, and you start to laugh too. He's mimicking the dialog in the final scene of the screenplay, and you can't help it, he really does make the entire scene seem...well...silly. You're sitting there, laughing, and you see your husband laughing,

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too, but you know this must be tearing him up inside. And suddenly you understand what is going on. Why he brought you here. Why he showed Luther your picture.

He's one of those guys...

You think back and remember. Maybe it was Maury Povich. Maybe Sally Jesse. It was a show about husbands who like to watch their wives with other men, and you remembered looking at them, thinking that there was something about them all, something familiar. They were all smart, intelligent men, and all of them treated their wives with respect, even devotion. But all of them had a certain common quality deep underneath, something only a woman could see. Beneath all the elegance and manners, they all had some inner doubt, some uncertainty about who they were.

And they were just like your husband.

"How's your dinner? You're not really eating." Luther was the one that had noticed.

"It's a bit...cold."

Luther looked up, raised his hand off your lap, and before he even motioned to the maitre 'd, a waiter came running. "Take this away and bring another...it's cold."

"Yes, Mr. Flanks."

You start to demur, you don't want a fuss made, but he stops you. Clearly he likes this, he seems like he's accustomed to snapping his fingers and making things happen. Luther seems like the type of man that

likes being in charge. Never mind that it's a subtle way of his claiming possession, ownership of you. It feels so nice to have a man like him show off for you.

The maitre 'd motions for a wine list, and when one is brought to him, he hands it to Luther. "My apologies sir. May I offer you and the lady a complimentary bottle of wine?"

Strange, the mystery of our feelings. It was just a few hours ago when you were sitting around the pool and feeling sorry for yourself, despite the comfort and luxury of an East End home. You thought he had forgotten your birthday. Who would have thought that just a few hours later you would have one of the most intense...the most erotic moments of your life. Because until that moment when the waiter handed Luther the wine list, you were an actor in someone else's dream. Your husband brought you there for some weird, perverted fantasy of his. In that instant, a devilish flare rose up in you. You looked across at your husband, you made sure you caught his eyes and gave him a look that let him know that what was going to happen was deliberate. Calculated.

You want to play games?

Well, let's play games then.

You slid to your left, and leaned deep into your new man. Even Luther was a bit surprised at the sudden ease, the unexpected playfulness of the way you melted against him. "Yes, let's get us a nice bottle of wine." You whispered into his ear in your nastiest, dirtiest whisper.

Luther leaned back slightly so he could look at your face. You saw a look of surprise in his eyes and

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you were thrilled. Yes, for just a brief moment your boldness seemed to throw him, but then the look of surprise quickly flashed into one of delight.

Your husband knew better than to ask to see the list. He sat watching while the two of you nuzzled and examined the list. Luther learned you liked Chardonnay, and you learned he just liked...well, whatever was the most expensive damned wine on the list. So you giggled and compromised on a seven-hundred-dollar 1967 Chateau Lyons. You leaned into Luther, you felt him caress your neck and bare shoulder, and you felt more alive than you'd felt in years. It was so much like a dream that you acted like a dream. You allowed yourself to be more...daring than you'd ever acted before. So you didn't stiffen at all as Luther began to stroke your hair and ear with his long fingers. No, you sat there, staring back at your husband, loving the power you had seized.

"You agree with me about that ending, don't you?" Luther asked you. His eyes were smiling.

An hour ago you would have protested. A few minutes ago you would have hesitated. Now you took the bait and dove in with both feet. "I never liked it." You looked at your husband and smiled, loving the game. Loving the power. "It just always seemed flat."

"Obviously written by a man that doesn't understand women." Luther leaned over and gave you a gentle, respectful kiss on the cheek. "Obviously written by a man that doesn't appreciate—" more

kisses, "—a woman's heart."

"Obviously not..." you repeated, as you felt his kisses on your neck, and as you felt your body come alive with sensation. Yes, you hungered for it: sex. Sex with this gorgeous, godlike man. "He doesn't know shit about women." Now you laughed as you looked at your husband. He was red, lost in the strange brew of shame and arousal that he himself had stirred.

They came and poured the wine, and yes, the waiters were in on the little game now, because they set two wine glasses on the table: one for you and one for Luther. The waiters didn't even glance at your husband. They poured the wine and waited while Luther appraised it. You were in the center of the world. The attention of the entire restaurant was focused on the two lovers. The two of you were making spectacles of yourselves.

Luther raised his glass to you. His eyes were bright with fire, and he smiled. "Happy Birthday."

Luther was behind you, hands kneading your breasts and he was whispering filthy, dirty things into your ear as your husband fumbled at the door of the ninth floor suite. "Fuckin' jerk—can't even work the key," Luther whispered. You started to giggle. Two bottles of wine had made you very, very silly.

"Pay attention to what you're doing," you say to him. Your husband is leering like a dirty little boy. He was so fixated on the sight of you and Luther that he couldn't find the slot for the electric card. His hands

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were shaking.

"No wonder you're so anxious for sex—does he always have trouble putting things inside holes?" Luther said, loud enough for him to hear. You started laughing uncontrollably, staggered on a heel and he caught you in his long arms.

Finally, he got the key in, the green light blinked and he pushed the door open. The Hotel Pierre was perfect. The entry room had a bowl of fresh-cut flowers on the coffee table and there was a chilled bottle of wine in a sterling silver stand next to the couch. Your husband held the door open and motioned his wife and her lover-to-be into the room like a doorman. Yes, he seemed to be getting off on this—he even gave a slight polite bow to you both as you passed him. You smirked at him as Luther pulled you into the room. When he sat down on the couch you joined him, sat on his lap and threw your arms around his neck.

Your husband wasn't going to be the only one who got off on this.

"Fix us a drink." Luther barked. Now that the three of you were alone, Luther turned up the heat a notch. There was a brittle hardness in his voice, a low guttural sound of command that sent delicious shivers running down your legs. You kissed him on the neck.

"What would you like?" Your husband's voice seemed very far away.

"Excuse me?" You had your mouth against Luther's

neck so you couldn't see the look on his face when he said that. You didn't need to. "Is that how you talk to me?" You could feel the challenge in his voice.

"I-I-I'm sorry...What would you like, s-s-sir?"

You nibbled at Luther's ear, you loved the deep richness of his voice. "I'll have a bourbon on the rocks. And the lady?" Luther pulled away and looked at you.

And you looked right back at him and said: "I'll have whatever...my man...is having." Breathless.

You loved the sinful, cocky smile he gave you, loved the dream you were living. Not only Luther Flanks, but Luther hot and nasty. Luther pushed you back on the couch and pulled your blouse open, snapping the buttons, not caring because he was doing what he had to—diving face first into your breasts. Burrowing his face between your breasts, rubbing his stubbly cheeks in the—passion-soaked dampness of them. You were gasping for air, the memory of what passionate, sweaty sex felt like came rushing back.

You heard your husband with the drinks and the ice, but he seemed far, far away. After a few minutes Luther seemed to calm just a bit. He lay on top of you and started kissing you on the neck and cheeks. You listened to his deep breaths, he was snorting gulps of air like a bull. You loved the searing heat of this, being the center of an erotic dance the three of you were executing, knowing that Luther wanted you too much to drag it out the way he would have preferred. You whispered in his ear: "Lets go inside." It was a whisper too faint for your husband to hear, it was a

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private, intimate whisper to the lover you had always dreamed of.

Your husband set the drinks on the table. Luther pushed himself off of you. "We'll have them inside." So your husband picked the pair of glasses and carried them into the bedroom. The two of you sat up in the couch, Luther stood up first and held out his hand. "Let's make love," in a voice that made you start to shiver.

The antique bed was high, and the covers had been pushed back by the maid. Your husband was standing near a Queen Anne chair on the opposite side of the bed. Luther led you over by the bed. When you were standing there he turned you around so you were facing him. He took your face in both of his, you stood on your heels and accepted the most perfect, the most gentle, loving kiss you'd ever felt. And there, on that strange birthday, your heart left its moorings. You started to cry—it was a joy too intense, too searing for words.

He placed his arms on your shoulders and sat you down on the bed. He opened his neck button and with a flick of his arms, his silk tie whistled free. He crossed his arms across his chest and removed his cufflinks. They were huge solid-gold plates, and he slapped them down hard on the table. There was silence while he did this; you and your husband watched him as if his undressing was some dark, mysterious theatre. He unbuttoned his shirt and you looked at the hard tightness of his chest and abs, you

realized that you'd never seen his body in any movie, and you're stunned with surprise, because his body is spectacular. His shoulders are wide, his waist is narrow, and he seemed to have the coiled power of an athlete.

"Outside." Luther shot your husband a quick glance and motioned over his shoulder with his thumb.

"I won't bother you — I'll just sit here."

"I said...outside." His teeth were clenched, and you were afraid of what was coming.

"A-a-all right." Your husband started towards the door. And now that you were relieved that there wouldn't be any roughness, you were free — to enjoy. To savor this, having two men strut for you. Being the prize, being the aim and objective of the stronger man. So you didn't mind at all when Luther called him back.

"Hey." He turned towards your husband and said. "Alright? Alright what?"

"All right, sir?" And he stood there, actually waiting — to be dismissed.

Luther pointed to the door. "I'll call you if we need anything."

You realized, sitting there, that you were soaking wet. Everything you ever needed was standing right before you.

All night long you tried to remember. In between the screams and the fingernails, in the back of your mind

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while you were biting his shoulder or shouting some dirty, filthy thing that only whores would say—in between all that you were searching yourself, wondering *when did I give up on life? When did I shut myself down? Because now I know what I'd missed all these years. I'd given up believing that such a feeling is possible.*

Yes, you'd forgotten that men like Luther really do exist. He wasn't just on the screen. He was a real man. A man with long, hard bones and gentle, knowing fingers. A man with a voice that blew electric fire into your ears, raining streams of delight all the way down through your body. Yes, there were such men, and yes, one of them is yours.

At first he hurt you—you'd never had a man like this. You hiked your legs as high on his shoulders as you could, you spread your secret petals wide open. You were daring and brave, but you still screamed as he started inside you. It wasn't just the size—it was the fatness of him, the unexpected clenched hardness of that big black thing of his.

He heard your cry, he told you he would stop and give you time, but he lied. He just kept going. He ignored your fingernails on his back, he paid no attention to the muffled shudders that escaped you as your hands roamed all over his back and ass searching for someplace soft, someplace that wasn't just the hard, unyielding muscle that was hurting you so. Yes, he slowed down. The initial stab that made you scream became a slow, agonizing pushing that

left you open-mouthed. Breathless—you wanted to cry out—"Please..."—but that thing of his just drove the breath right out of you. You lay beneath him and you knew—yes, he was slowing down. He was coming in slow, but it wasn't out of concern. No—he liked this! You held him close and you suddenly knew he liked the feel of opening up a new woman. So much so, that he slowed down just to drag out the feeling. So much so that he growled in that deep, so, so sexy voice of his: "Can't stop. Just can't."

No, you hadn't forgotten. The dream always lived inside you. The wish for a man like this had been forged in your soul so long ago, and now that he was all the way in, now that you felt the glory of him all the way up inside you, the dam burst free. You were crying, you realized in the stillness of his now unmoving body—you were sobbing.

"It's OK, baby" And his kisses fell on your cheek like a healing rain. "Good girl."

You wanted to say something, but all you could do was whimper and cry. So sweet this was, and so frightening, because you knew now that having to live without him was to live not at all.

"Luther..." All you could speak was his name.

"Shhhh..." So gentle. For all his hard power, there was such gentleness in his deep whispers. "I'm gonna do that movie. I'm gonna do it just so I can have you again." He waited. He let the silence and your breath seal his words. "He thinks this is a kink for him. It isn't for me. I'm gonna make that movie. Me and you...we gonna do this lotsa times."

"Ohhh..." *How did he know?* He seemed to have an

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almost magical power to see into your heart, to know what it was you wanted to hear. "Oh! I want that. I want that more than anything." You wondered how many women he'd had, how many woman had laid just where you are, beseeching him, knowing that just one time with him would ruin them for anyone else.

"And we're gonna do it without him. This isn't a game."

God, he was good! As he was saying these things he was making the tiniest sliding movements inside you. Your hands were on his ass, you could feel the muscles shift slightly as he made the smallest little thrusts, just a half inch or so up and down inside you. Up and down.

"Can't believe that with a women like you—he'd play games."

In and out. So slowly. And then you knew—he could...feel what his words were doing to you. He was whispering in your ear—"Just me and you, baby." Kiss. Kiss...and that thing of his was feeling you inside there. Feeling how you liked it. It was sliding along the secret insides of your soul. "You're my baby now. Just mine." And there, you couldn't help it. The feelings were...pouring...inside you. He had broken your heart open like an oyster.

All night long it was like that. He'd had hundreds, maybe thousands of women, yet he gave you the special feeling that you were the best. You were special. You don't know how many times the two of you made love, because it wasn't a series of separate

events. No, it was a long evening of bliss, a long, magical evening beneath him while he drove himself into you like a demon until he spent himself. You'd feel him spasm, and he'd lay there, softening but still inside you, gulping air. You caressed him, you kissed him. You told him what a wonderful, special man he was. Until at the end of the evening, it was you who learned the secrets to his heart. It was you who knew where he needed to be touched, and how soft the caress of your fingers should be, because you could make that thing of his start to grow inside you all over again. And it was you saying things that would bring him back alive for you again...

It was late in the morning when you opened your eyes. You were lying against Luther's chest; for all the tightness of the muscles, his skin was surprisingly soft. He had small patches of stubbly hair, and all night you slept in the aroma and dark warmth of the most wonderful man you'd ever met. The sun was spilling through the curtains, and you lay still, listening to the sounds of Luther's deep breaths.

There was a knock on the door. "Breakfast."

When you saw the door open you started to cover yourself, but when you saw him, you picked your head up off of Luther's chest. You realized what was happening, you kept yourself exposed, and started to smirk. You knew he was strange...but this? Borrowing the busboy's jacket so he could wheel the tray in, and play servant to the two of you? Serve his wife and her

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lover breakfast? So strange, he is. So childish.

So cute.

"Just leave it," you whispered. "I don't want to wake him." You rest your head back down on Luther's chest.

"Yes, ma'am." He reached under the tablecloth, opened the leaves of the rolling cart, arranged the silverware and pulled two of the chairs over from the corner. He did this slowly and carefully, and he kept looking at you all the while, fascinated, as if the hard power of Luther's lovemaking had changed you utterly and he might spot some change.

"Guess you had the night of a lifetime, huh?" He was leering. You stared back at him and drew little circles on Luther's chest. He was waiting to hear about it. He wanted to hear you say how good this man was.

"I got news for you," you whispered. "It's going to be a great morning, too."

Not since the day you were married had an act of sex changed the two of you so. And like that day, the day when your new husband pledged his life to you, that night when you lay beneath him and you knew he couldn't help it—he couldn't keep himself from coming even though the two of you knew it would mean his soul would be yours forever. Just like that day, years before, that night in the Pierre brought the

two of you to a different level.

It was days before you could bring yourself to discuss Luther with your husband. The storms inside you were still raging. At night you closed your eyes and you were back in the bedroom with Luther, remembering the words he whispered in your ear. Your husband wanted you desperately, he couldn't keep his hands off you. You knew from looking at him that some new channel of desire had broken open inside him too. You held him off. "No. Not yet." You were still too confused.

And angry too. Looking back there was no denying the anger—your husband had used you, he had placed you square in the center of a strange drama, some weird, inexplicable dream of his. After days of coming up behind you, putting his arms around you and nibbling in your ear—doing everything he knew to arouse you—only to have you pull away from him coldly, he blurted out: "I'm sorry." You turned and looked up at him, his eyes showed fear—fear that he had lost you, fear that he couldn't live without you.

"Not yet." Slowly you took hold of the anger. You felt its sharp edges. And what changed it all for you was realizing that it was anger that brought you over the threshold. If you were hurt, you would have ran out of Tavern on the Green. But anger made you stay. Anger made you bold, and strong—and yes, wicked. Anger at your husband made you snuggle up to Luther, and there was no denying it: you weren't sorry at all, because that sweet man had taken you on the ride of your life.

"I want him again, Joe." You'd just sat down to

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dinner. Your husband was an accomplished cook, that night like all other nights the meal he prepared was perfect. You sipped your wine and watched him across the table, letting the words that you chose so carefully sink in. After a moment you reached over and took his hand. "I love you—I really do, but I want him. You need to understand that."

"I know. I knew that, once I heard the two of you through the door of the room." He lifted your hand to your face and kissed it.

"But why? I don't understand this. Even one time...to offer me to someone else. I don't understand," and you started to cry.

He got up from his chair and came over to you. He knelt on the floor, placed your hands in his and said: "Because I love you. You'll never believe how...desperately I love you. I remember how you were, how you used to act when we—when I—was younger. Stronger. The way you used to...act...when you'd get excited. The sounds you made. The way your face changed. The way you smelled. I want that. I need that."

"But someone else? How can you stand to just watch?"

"Because you're so beautiful like that. And the feeling, knowing he was...and you were..." He was gulping air. His eyes had a fire, a light in them. "It was hard, painful. I was crying in the other room. But it was also the most intense feeling I'd ever had. I want you to love him again."

You knew the look in his eyes. He was mad, crazy, and he looked just the way he used to look when he was slamming himself into you, spilling his soul deep inside you.

"But I want you, too," you said. You were crying.

"There's a different way. For us." He slid himself along the floor, kneeling again between your chair and the table. He lifted both of your legs on his shoulders, and then hoisted them up onto the table. He reached behind you and pulled your ass forward on the chair, forcing your legs further onto the table. The dishes crashed to the floor. He lifted the top of your skirt, reached for your panties, pulled them up to your knees, and threw himself at you.

Your heart was slamming in your chest. You reached and felt his hair, and as you felt his lips on you, a shiver ran down your body. And there was silence, peace while you felt his lips on you. His tongue sliding up and down the folds of you. Just the tip, just the smallest, gentlest breath of it. Kisses. Kisses on your inner thighs, kisses on your clit. These were kisses dropped like prayers; gentle stirring that let you ease back in the grace of your lover's attention. Kisses that let him feel the heat of you, the scented dampness. When he started with his tongue again, heavy breaths rose in your chest like magic.

"Tell me about him." Kiss.

You were high up there, lifted above him by the efforts of his lips and tongue. High enough to dance. "Let's just say..." She came alive inside you, the girl that always raised the ante. "Let's just say — you don't want to know."

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Even on his best day, your husband never, ever ran the game in the bedroom.

Now he was really at you, he was ravenous down there, rolling his lips and mouth roughly, desperately deep inside you. Like an animal.

"Tell me...please."

"You have to do better than that, Joey." Your grabbed his hair with your fingers, you held his head steady. Right there in the exact spot. The burning spot.

"Please."

"Stay there. Stay right there."

Your thighs were shaking, small breaths, small sounds heaved out of you, and that place, that spot. It was...

"Joey. Joey...I'm thinking of him right now!!"

If you had hurt him you would have stopped, but the only pain for your husband was the ache of a sinful, dangerous new desire. By the time the calls from Luther started, you and your husband had recaptured all the fire, all the heat that you once had. Once again, he was mad to have you. Once again, he couldn't keep his hands off you.

Luther was the catalyst.

The phone would ring, your husband would come out to the pool and tell you that you had a caller. Neither of you ever mentioned his name, because

Luther's special place in your heart gave this new ritual an almost frightening voltage. You laid down by the pool, listening to Luther's deep, raspy voice. Hearing things no married woman should ever, ever hear. Fingering yourself, once in a while stopping to edge your sunglasses down so you could look up at your husband in the bedroom window. He was watching you, waiting.

You made him wait, because you liked the attention. Once your control was limited to the bedroom, now your entire life together was your realm. When you'd hung up the phone, he'd come down to the pool, he'd sit by you and begin to stroke your feet. He'd run his hands along your legs, and you just lay there in the sun, sipping your drink, your heart still fluttering from Luther's words. He looked up at you with wonder, as if the words of another lover made you shimmer with erotic light. You loved the searing, unbearable desire that your husband had for you now. The gardeners watched from between the bushes. Spanish whispers like Latin prayers.

Luther agreed to make the movie, and so whenever your husband makes another trip to some exotic shooting location, you make sure to go with him. You've already been to Malta, Paris, and Rio, and now you're sitting beside him on a long overnight flight to Hong Kong. By now you and your husband are quite daring in your affections—in the darkness of the first-class cabin you kick off your shoes and prop your

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bare feet on his lap. While he caresses your soles, you tell him how exciting these trips are. How special they are. These are electric moments between the two of you. The two of you toy with the knowledge of what's happened, the voltage of that strange, inexplicable night. He sits there rubbing your feet, asking again why you came with him, and you give him that teasing undertone about 'excitement,' or the 'romantic places.' You smile when you see the heat in his face. He swallows and asks the stewardess for a blanket. "Her feet are cold." She starts to open it out of habit, but then she sees what's happening in the dark. She stops, and hands it to him, unwilling to be a participant in such an intimate act. He covers your feet on his lap, and now you lay it on good, you put an extra lilting raspy undertone in your voice when you tell him how...thrilling...these trips are.

"I feel like a new woman." Even in the darkness you can see his strange, sinful excitement. "God, I love these trips."

He fumbles under the blanket, unzips himself and in a few moments his head is tilted back in the seat, his eyes are closed and his hands are rubbing his thing against your feet. Such a strange power you have over him. You stare boldly at the stewardesses. There are two of them, and they both know what's going on. They look away when they see that you're not ashamed. You're not shy. No, you feel...special, because you're the one in the first-class seat. You're the one with the rich, talented man that's mad to

touch you: the friend, the soul-mate, the anchor of your life. You're the one with the lover on the side, a lover so good, so sexy, these women have no idea...

You continue to whisper to your husband, you smile and say the secret things that set him off. He finishes whatever he does under there, you feel a sudden wetness on your feet and he clenches his eyes and his lips tremble. The two of you lay there in the stillness, you close your eyes and listen to the low burn of the engines, you imagine that vast dark Pacific rolling beneath you. With your eyes closed, you feel him drying your feet, and when he's done you sit up in your seat, lean over and nestle against him. "I love you so much," you say to him. "I love our life together."

The two of you never mention Luther directly. You never spoke again of that night in the Pierre. That's the game, that's the tease between the two of you—not mentioning him. Not mentioning the dark Love Prince that looms over your marriage like a Great Plains thunderstorm, because not speaking of him, not saying his name, makes him seem even more overwhelming. More powerful. More mysterious. There was the marriage before Luther. And now everything is different. It was good before, but now it's...perfect. Once you lay beneath Luther and felt what it was like to be loved by a champion, a thoroughbred, once you felt the Man—from that moment on, you knew that you could never be like other women again. You couldn't believe that bullshit anymore—that you could only have one or the other—either a loving, devoted husband or a sex

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machine. But never both.

Well, you have both.

You lay next to your husband in the dark, first class cabin. He strokes your shoulder and he kisses your forehead. In an hour, you begin your descent. Daylight breaks on the plane as you land, and the two of you are numb with fatigue as the cab banks and lurches it's way through the crowds on the way to your hotel. You're so tired you don't even notice the suite, or the view of Hong Kong from the fortieth floor. He tips the bellboy, and as soon as the door closes the two of you drop your bags and climb into bed, hungry for sleep.

You'll wake up first; you see by the light it's early afternoon, and you nudge him awake. "C'mon, let's go see the shooting." He's half asleep, he looks at you blankly, and so you reach your hand under the covers and begin to caress his ass. You know how to get his...full...attention. "Come on, sleepy boy. They're shooting the train station scene today, if we hurry we can make it."

You know the shooting schedule better than he does. He struggles awake while you busy yourself, you put your perfume and makeup on. You reach into your bag and pull out a light blue Tiffany's box, he sits there watching while you open it and pull out a string of perfect white pearls. "Help me put these on," you say. He climbs out of bed and walks over behind you, you look in the mirror and see the look on his face as he pulls them around your neck, he

fastens them with trembling hands. You reach behind you and stroke his cheek.

He didn't buy them.

They've closed the downtown streets that surround the train station, there are barricades for the waiting commuters and trucks for the film crews. There are hundreds of people milling around outside hoping for a glimpse of a star. They snap pictures of you and your husband as you climb out of the cab—just in case the two of you are one of those mysterious, faraway celebrities. The two of you find your way into the station. You walk through the revolving doors and enter a cavernous space of high marble vaults and huge skylights. The building is a legacy of centuries of British rule. By now you know what to expect on a movie set, and so the shouts and the screaming, the milling around and the arguments don't surprise you. Luther is there, he's leaning against an empty ticket counter off to the side, sipping a Coke while the makeup girls work on him. He sees you coming, he looks across the girls and follows you while you and your husband check in with the director. You'll look down shyly, as if the blaze of his eyes is too fierce for you.

He'll do his job—Luther is a professional and he lets nothing distract him from his performance, his art. He waits patiently for the scene to be set up, everyone else will be screaming and yelling, but he'll stand there calmly. He waits, because a star doesn't step into a scene until the cameras are ready to roll. While he waits some of the extras gravitate towards him, many of them young Chinese women—they

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look up at him and speak to him in broken English. He smiles, he flirts, and yes, you've heard the stories—you know he has a hand in selecting extras, and you're sure he'll have one or two of the Asian beauties before he leaves the city.

You're not worried. There's plenty of him to go around.

When it's time, he walks into the center of the lights, and the set falls quiet as the drama begins. He doesn't need the big screen. When the cameramen and the rest of the stage crew stand silent, Luther takes charge. Even halfway across the terminal you can sense the majesty of the man. His passionate voice thunders off the station walls like a prophet. In a few intense minutes he completes the first scene, and now the whole corps of sound booms and cameras has to shift to the tracks below.

"I'm takin' five," he says to the director—but he's looking right at you.

Your heart starts to beat as you watch him roll out towards the main doors. You can feel your pulse jump, so you drop your husband's hand. "I need to find the ladies room," you say, you feel your husband's eyes on your back as you practically run out of the station. When you get through the revolving doors, his handlers are waiting by some equipment trucks. There are three of them, they have their orders, they lead you past the crowds all the way down the street. When you get to Luther's trailer, one of them opens the door for you.

It never diminishes, this feeling. So much is the same every time: the relief in his eyes, the big ivory smile and that strange noise he makes when you open your blouse and he pushes his face between your tits. The deep gulp of air, as if there's something in the scent of you that he's hungered for in the weeks since he's seen you last. That sound he makes—it's so much like a sob that you reach for his head and hold him close. No, it's always the same, always the way a dream should be. Wordless and strong, when he's ready he pushes you back on his bed. He looks down at you like a Sultan. Now that you've had him a few times, the pain is gone, you've learned to take a man of his size and so when he climbs on top of you, you throw your legs high over his shoulders—because you want all of him, you want to feel his balls slap against your ass. You want to scream, you want the world to know.

It's always the same, yet each time you walk down the steps of his trailer you feel the same awe, the same disbelief that once again he's taken your heart. Every time he does this he steals another part of your soul.

You say nothing as you go back inside the station. Your husband must have been watching the door; he finds you with his eyes and follows you into the station. As if he could sense the intensity of your passion in some unsteadiness in your walk, some unconscious hesitation to come back to him. You make the long walk through the station, the crew is hushed, you look at the clock and you realize that the two of you had kept everyone waiting. It's been twenty-five minutes, trains are backed up outside the

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city, thousands of commuters waited...for the two of you.

Every time it's the same. Your husband hides his knowledge as you approach. He looks away, yet when you sit down next to him he brings your hand to his lips and kisses you. Not once, but twice, and his eyes are bright. Always, always the same. In your room tonight he'll love you in his way. His is not the way of the black steed with bulging veins—no, his way is a gentle, slow ardor of the lips. You'll sit in your chair and he'll kneel, and he'll say your name.

He'll kiss you and say your name.

He'll kiss you and say how happy he is to have you as his wife. How beautiful you look. Radiant. You'll lift your nightgown, and you'll lay back in the moonlight that streams in from the window. You'll feel the bliss of another love, his lips soft like a firefly on the fleshy, scented earth of you. Such a strange man, a man like no other. So daring, to carry you where you wouldn't have gone. So brave, to welcome the sight of you with another man. So knowing, sure of your strength, certain that he was yours forever.

About The Author

Michael Stream is a writer living in New York with his wife and family. People that know him would be shocked to discover how much he loves woman's erotica.