



Forbidden Publications



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All Of Me

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ALL OF ME

By

b. lynch black

I am going to tell you a story. It is a love story and it has a happy ending.

The first time I saw Gordon Davis was a Thursday. Tom Briggs, that idiot from the real estate department, was playing welcoming committee, taking Gordon around and introducing him to everyone in the office.

"And this is Susie Bean, our head researcher," he said. "Watch out for her, Gordon - a real heartbreaker. Won't give us poor guys the time of day."

Rather nervy of him; the last time I'd turned him down for a date, he'd stated it probably wouldn't have been good for his image to be seen with such a plain Jane anyway.

"It's Susan," I said firmly and held out my hand to shake Gordon's. "And I'm just very particular."

"And well you should be. Gordon Davis." Taking my hand in his with a smile, Gordon held it for just a moment longer than strictly necessary. "I'll be working in employment and labor relations, so I'm sure I'll be needing your services frequently." Tom leered slightly, but I ignored it.

Gordon was tall, lean, and endearingly rumpled-looking, as if he were a bit worn out from his first week at the new firm. Like me, he had hazel eyes. His dark brown hair was the exact same shade as mine, only where mine was smooth and straight, his was wavy and a bit unruly. A lock fell over his eyebrow; and he pushed it back with his long hands. He was altogether the most attractive man that I had ever seen.

In the weeks that followed, as we worked on a few projects together, I found his personality as appealing as his looks. He wasn't really shy but he wasn't loud or aggressive either, like so many of the men at the firm. When other men would stand about loudly discussing sports events, or teams, or rowdy weekend adventures,

Gordon listened politely but rarely contributed anything to the conversation.

On one of the few occasions when I didn't eat lunch at my desk, I saw Gordon in the office cafeteria sitting alone, reading a mystery. The horrible fluorescent lighting gave him a pale and dreamy look. His long legs stretched out, book in one hand, he read and ate absently, pushing his dark hair off his forehead. Taking my courage in my hands – in the form of my lunch tray – I made my way to his table.

"Hello, Susan," he smiled. "I don't see you down here very often."

"I'm usually pretty busy," I sat without waiting to be asked. "Are you enjoying the book? That's one of my favorite authors."

"Truth to tell, I'm having a bit of trouble getting into it," he shrugged ruefully.

I looked at the title. "That may be because it's the third in the series. Have you read the others?"

"Oh," he turned the book over to look at the back. "No, I haven't but I will. Thanks. You like mysteries, too? What others do you recommend?" We talked about favorite authors and books, which led to movies and plays. The lunch hour just flew by.

After that, I made sure to go to the cafeteria more frequently, until the day came when Gordon popped his head around my cubicle wall to inquire, "Aren't you coming to lunch, Susan?"

That was one of the many things I liked about him. He always called me "Susan." Not "Susie" as some of the more obnoxious attorneys did, or even "Sue" as my careless colleagues in the research department occasionally did. And no one ever called him "Gordie" or "Gord," though Tom Briggs had tried once or twice and been politely, but firmly, corrected. Somehow, Gordon made it stick. Perhaps because, as an attorney, he had more authority than Tom. Whereas, when I asserted myself, people – men in particular – seemed to think me cold.

Mutual love of books and movies, led naturally to going to see the movie version of one of our favorite mysteries. After the movie, we had coffee and talked and talked. Gordon was gentle and quiet and, like me, favored long walks over jogging, contemplative activities over group outings. Friday night movies led to weekend

activities: Saturday in the park flying kites; Sunday at a gallery showing of antique photographs. It was quickly apparent that Gordon and I were meant to be together.

* * * *

One night, on the walk to the train, Gordon asked, "Susan, are you going to the company's concert outing?"

Every season the firm purchased a block of seats to the Philharmonic, usually used for the entertainment of partners and their preferred clients, or important out-of-town visitors. But one evening during each season, an evening concert was set aside for partners and their families. Favored senior and junior associates were also offered tickets for themselves and their spouses. A few tickets always went begging and these were made available to certain senior staff. As head researcher, I was usually offered a leftover ticket at a discount, and I always accepted. However, all I said to Gordon was, "Yes."

"Great! We can go to the dinner together too."

I never went to the dinner. In the quiet and dark of the concert hall, I could ignore the attorneys and their spouses and not feel so much like a thorn amongst the roses. But at the firm dinner, which was always held in a premiere restaurant, I would have been out of place and uncomfortable, seated at a table with first year attorneys. Before I could answer, Gordon continued, "Wonderful! We can sit together and talk about everyone else. Shall I reserve a place for us in one of the firm's cars?"

"No," I said, quickly. "I'll meet you at the restaurant. I have to go home to change first."

He nodded. "Okay. It's a date then." A grin lit up his usually serious face. Gordon didn't grin often, but when he did it was dazzling. I was dazzled then. He kissed my hand as my train came into the station.

It was my habit to come to work on the day of the concert dressed in a slightly more formal version of my usual attire. I would wear my best black wool dress, my

mother's pearls, a silk scarf, velvet opera coat and change my shoes from flats to pumps. This year would be different.

It took me a week to find just the right dress: a deep burgundy velvet, strapless but with an embroidered shawl, beaded evening bag and matching embroidered shoes. The outfit cost me more than I'd spent on my entire wardrobe in the past five years.

On the afternoon of the affair, I left the office early to go home and prepare. A few people may have raised their eyebrows – I was known for my dedication to my job – but others, especially some of the women attorneys, were also leaving early.

I had debated about my hair. One of my best features, it was smooth and dark and fell halfway down my back. On a daily basis, I'd never done much with it except pull it into a twist at the top of my head and secure it with a clip. But I had seen a model in a magazine whose coloring was similar to mine and I had liked the way her hair was done. So I practiced a few times until I could do it just that way, pulling the front and sides back and into a twist just below the crown. This I secured with a barrette decorated with a pale pink silk camellia. The rest I left long and flowing. I carefully put in my contacts and finished my makeup just as the car service arrived to pick me up.

Gordon was outside the restaurant when I arrived, talking with a few of the other attorneys, including Tom Briggs, Dan Fuerstein, and Elizabeth Hutchinson. Elizabeth was the blonde dynamo from litigation. Small and vivacious, and china doll pretty, she'd had her eyes on Gordon for weeks. But she wasn't meant to have him. Oh no.

The look of stunned admiration on Gordon's face was worth every cent I'd paid for the outfit and all the time and effort I'd spent pulling myself together for this affair. Tom and Dan both stood up straighter, and Elizabeth's mouth opened in surprise, then snapped shut at the ugly duckling's transformation. We all made a pretense of pleasant conversation for a few moments, then went into the restaurant. I caught sight of our party in the foyer mirror as we waited for the hostess.

Gordon and I looked like a matched pair from some John Singer Sergeant painting, both of us tall, with the same shade of dark brown hair. We both have hazel

eyes, only his are dark, mine light, with green flecks. Our skin tone and texture was nearly the same, like two different shades of honey.

Tonight I thought Gordon looked a little paler than usual but put it down to the restaurant lighting and his white shirt – he really looked better in the creams and tans he generally wore. I took it as a good sign that Gordon's tie was the exact color of my dress. We were a perfect match. Tom and Dan – gym devotees both – couldn't compare to Gordon's slender elegance. And Elizabeth looked like a washed-out watercolor against our dark splendor.

Gordon didn't eat much during dinner, and when we got to the concert hall, he seemed very pale but he waved off my concern by saying he was overly warm in his suit and tie and vest.

"You look amazing though," he whispered, squeezing my elbow gently. "Like a fire goddess among the ice maidens."

I floated all night on those words. The music of the concert became a backdrop to my every thought. I'd never hear Debussy again without remembering the touch of Gordon's hand on my skin, and the floating, dreamy feeling of my triumph.

We took a company car home. He looked much better – still pale but not sweating and more relaxed. When we pulled up to my door, I said as casually as I could, "Do you want to come in?"

"Not tonight, Susan," he sighed regretfully. "I'm feeling a bit under the weather. But definitely – definitely – some other night." He leaned over to open the door for me, and I met his lips with mine. A brief, but satisfying, interval followed. Overall, the evening had been a success.

* * * *

In the weeks that came after, Gordon and I continued our routine of lunches, movies, dinner and long walks. But I noticed the walks getting shorter, and the dinners were barely touched. I assumed that, like me, Gordon was ready to move the physical

aspect of our relationship to the next step but was too shy to make the move. Which is why, when he took my hand in the movie theatre and held it tight, I felt my heart thump wildly.

On the walk home, Gordon stopped to sit on a bench in the park, pulling me down beside him.

"You know, Susan," his voice was soft in the mild golden glow the old-fashioned streetlights gave off, "I think we've become pretty close over these last few months. Before this, I'd always felt kind of lonely."

That was another thing that Gordon and I had in common. Both of us were adopted only children of middle-aged parents to whom we'd never been particularly close. I squeezed his hand in understanding and he smiled his rueful smile, pushing his hair off his forehead with his free hand.

"I don't know if you realize it, but I've never been particularly strong, physically. I was always a bit sickly, which cut me off from the other boys and their activities. I was sort of isolated and shy with girls because of it. It did, however, make me a good student." He paused, and I reflected that I had always enjoyed robust health. Even my childhood illnesses had been mild and in my adult life, I'd never had anything more serious than a brief cold. My own social isolation had been purely due to my temperament. I'd never liked the rough and tumble world of the schoolyard, or the vicious jockeying for power among girls my age. I was a gifted student for the pure intellectual satisfaction of it. Boys and men had just annoyed me with their physical advances and so I'd always played down my looks. I had been waiting for someone special. And now I knew that someone was Gordon. We were the perfect complements to each other. Yin and yang.

Gordon continued, "You may have noticed that I've been kind of off and distracted the last few weeks." I nodded, my heartbeat picking up again. "Well there's a good reason for that Susan, and I want you to know what it is."

I held my breath as he took a deep one, and tightened his grip on my hand. "Susan, I have a serious liver disease..."

I was frozen for a moment in disbelief. His words were so not what I had expected from him. I listened more carefully. He'd had the disease for several years, chronic but treatable. Now it had become acute, and deterioration would be rapid. His only hope was a liver transplant, a portion of a healthy liver from a donor who was as close a match as possible.

"I've already talked to all the donor organizations, but I have a rare blood type and a kind of protein marker found in only one in 500,000 people."

"Don't you have any relatives? Cousins or something?" I grasped at the idea of a donor. All would be well, if a donor could be found.

Gordon sighed. "No. I haven't been able to track down my birth parents, or find out if there are any other siblings or relatives who match. The doctors say even that's a long shot. That the odds of a relative having the same blood type and protein markers is hardly greater than with a stranger. The HR people at the office said they'd call for volunteers to be typed and matched, and the hospital has a call out for donors. But I don't hold out much hope."

"Don't worry," I told him, amazed at the calm tone of my voice. "There's a match for you. I know it."

"Do you really think so?" He dropped his head a little and I raised my hand to brush his hair back.

"I know so," I reassured him. With a sigh, he leaned against my shoulder. Stroking his hair, I made plans for our future.

* * * *

My blood type exactly matched Gordon's, right down to the protein markers. I knew it would. It was meant to be that Gordon and I should be part of each other. He protested at first, claiming that he couldn't ask me to do something so drastic. But I soon overcame any objections by pointing out that it was only a portion of my liver, that I had always been in perfect health and that even the doctors told him he would

never find a better match. It was Fate.

We cleared it with the insurance company and the HR people. It seemed I had nearly endless sick and personal time coming to me, and Gordon would be eligible for disability. We did the procedure two weeks later and the surgery went well.

Gordon did great and the rejection complications were minimal. My recovery didn't go quite as well. I developed an infection and was actually in the hospital longer than Gordon. But within a few weeks we were both returned to work. Soon after that, we were back to our routine of movies, dinner and walks. We attended the company's annual spring dinner dance and Gordon was well enough to dance quite a bit. He was unpracticed but enthusiastic and soon had the basics down. He and I danced several sets, then he had a turn with each of the women from his department – just to be polite, as he said. But we danced the last dance, rode home together in a company car, this time taking a little longer in saying our goodbyes. Everything was going satisfactorily – if a little slower than I'd anticipated. Still, I appreciated his gentle rhythm and lack of aggression. I'd been hit on in every way from crude to humorous to cloyingly romantic over the years and this slow courtship was a novel change for me. And I knew eventually Gordon and I would be together. It was meant to be.

A few weeks later, Gordon was feeling ill again. They switched some of his medications and finally decided he needed a transfusion.

"It's mostly the platelets they want to try and replace," he explained to me, as we sat on my sofa, picking through the ruins of our take out Chinese food order, and half-watching an old film on cable.

"How much?" I asked.

"Well, three pints to start – but I'm not asking you, Susan," he waved his long, slim hands in protest. "Not after that last time."

"But I'm fine now," I assured him. "Never better. A post-op infection can happen to anyone."

I continued arguing until finally, and with great reluctance, he agreed. The donated blood and platelets were given over the next few weeks.

Again, almost immediately Gordon got stronger and healthier. Within a short time, he was able to take part in an important trial in Washington, where he was so successful it earned him a bonus. He took me out to dinner to celebrate. I had finally recovered from the anemia that developed after the last blood donation. Iron tablets and folic acid had done wonders, leaving me only a little tired. But I felt wonderful on that night. We took a bottle of champagne back to my apartment because Gordon's -- which he'd had since his college days -- was small, spare and uncomfortable.

"I decided a sort of lifestyle change is in order!" he declared, topping off my glass. "I'm going to find a new place, something light and modern. Something grown up. Something with an actual bedroom! You'll have to help me start looking. Our tastes are similar. I've always liked your place."

We did a little necking, but then he excused himself saying he didn't want to tire me out after all I'd been through. He was so sweet and thoughtful.

And frankly, I was getting a little tired of it.

Next, Gordon needed a skin and tissue graft, the material taken from my upper thigh. I developed an allergic reaction from the bandages and the itchy rash required that I be sedated and given antihistamines for several days. But, much to my pleasure, Gordon's skin looked fabulous and you couldn't even tell where the lesions had been. He required another transfusion a few weeks later. Soon, he was the picture of health. And he sent me flowers and DVDs every day while I was home recovering.

Problems showed up with one of Gordon's kidneys. His doctors were hesitant about a lengthy surgical procedure so soon after his liver transplant but this condition could only worsen and undo all the good of all his past medical successes. The opined that since Gordon was now otherwise in such excellent health, that as soon as a donor was found, it should be taken take care of right away. Gordon was glum about it but I encouraged him, saying it looked good for the future that the doctors said he was otherwise in such good health. And, I pointed out, my anemia was completely gone, my appetite and energy were good and since I was the ideal candidate, there was no point in putting it off.

Gordon swore that no matter what else he got, or how ill he became, he would never even tell me – he'd feel too guilty. "Besides," he said, with a grin, his hand rubbing my knee, "pretty soon, I won't be able to tell where you leave off and I begin."

"And what's wrong with that?" I smiled back and put my hand over his.

"I've never felt closer to anyone than you, Susan," he sighed, leaning his head against my forehead. "When this is over, we have to make plans to do something really special together. Get away somewhere sunny and warm."

My heart lifted and I tried to persuade him without words to do something special right then. But after a few minutes, he got up and said he had to go and get some sleep.

"I'm so happy about my new found appetite, I've decided to take a cooking class," he announced as he was putting on his jacket. "It's really early tomorrow morning." He beamed, and brushed his hair back. I loved that falling lock of hair. I wanted to have it fall all over me. "It's just a couple of weekend classes and I can take it before the next surgery. It'll be so great, Susan – you can come over when I get my new place and I'll wait on you hand and foot. Anything you want."

Of course, what I wanted from Gordon wasn't food, but I didn't say that out loud. I knew he understood. He was just waiting for the right time.

I was getting damn sick of watching that clock.

* * * *

Modern transplant surgery is so advanced – not as primitive as even ten years ago. My kidney was grafted onto the still undamaged part of Gordon's where it met the blood vessels and the hilus. Cell growth stimulators and stem cells from both our tissues were placed into his kidney cells. Gordon's kidney stem accepted the treatment and he not only accepted my kidney, he began growing his own new cells; exactly what had happened with the portions of my liver and lung and platelets and skin and tissue. His cells just cozied up to mine until they fused and became one.

Unfortunately, even advanced modern medicine is still practiced by fallible humans. While removing my kidney, the surgeon's instrument nicked the *vena cava* and I nearly bled out before anyone noticed, they were so busy with Gordon. Not that I begrudged his attention. Oh, no. I knew it would be worth it in the end.

Gordon recovered so well and so quickly that he was home within a week and back to work in short order after that. During my long, slow weeks recuperating in the hospital, he came to see me every day, bringing me flowers and gossip from work, and cards from co-workers (more than I would have ever expected). He read to me from recent mystery novels, his head bent over a book, his dark hair falling over his eyebrow. Looking up from a book, Gordon's hazel eyes would meet mine with such expressions of love, awe, and hope that I looked forward eagerly to the day I could get up and go home. I'd reach out and brush Gordon's hair and smile all my love at him.

One afternoon, Gordon arrived at my bedside dressed in a t-shirt and sweat pants. "Did I miss a day somewhere?" I asked. "I thought it was Friday?"

Gordon assured me that it was. "But I didn't come straight from the office. I, uh," he shrugged, a bit embarrassed. "I joined a gym. The doctors say I need to keep in shape – do moderate aerobics and stuff. It's awful," he confided, pulling his chair up close. "Everyone's sweaty and dressed in perfect workout clothes. They look like they spend their whole day there, or under a sun lamp somewhere. They've probably never read a book in their lives. But, what are you going to do? Doctors' orders. As soon as you're well, we'll go for a long walk in the park. That's more my speed anyway." He grinned that lovely grin of his and brushed his hair back off his forehead.

The day finally arrived for me to go home. Gordon arranged for a car and came to pick me up. The female nurses and doctors (and even some of the males) had told me over the weeks how sweet Gordon was, how concerned for me, how he would bring them cookies and candy and admonish them to look after me. "You're a lucky one," they all told me, "to have someone to care about you so much." I had smiled, smug and secure.

I saw Gordon come down the hallway and stop at the nurses' station. I could see

him making them laugh; thanking them for looking after me. He looked different somehow.

He was dressed casually, of course – he wasn't going to the office – but instead of his usual khakis and plaid shirt, he wore a nice pair of front pleat slacks and a designer golf shirt. I could see that the weeks of going to the gym – reluctant or not – were paying off in his muscle tone and skin color.

I gave myself another glance in the mirror. I had always been slender, but now I was absolutely emaciated. My eyes, usually a bright hazel-green, had a yellowish cast – as did my skin -- from the liver enzymes that had built up, causing jaundice. And my hair – my glorious mane of dark, glossy hair – was lackluster and brittle. Still, I figured, as I put on a lipstick that no longer agreed with my skin color, all of this was temporary. In a few weeks, I'd be up and around. I'd go to one of those day spas. I'd get a hair and skin treatment, and my nails attended to. Maybe I'd join the gym as well. Eventually.

Gordon took me home and, after feeding me lunch – one he'd made himself – tenderly ensconced me on the couch with some new mysteries, a DVD and his pager number, saying he had some errands to run and a few things to pick up.

He kissed me before he left. On the forehead.

* * * *

At the end of the week, when Gordon came to take me to a doctor's appointment, there was definitely something different about him. I couldn't pin it at first, until he bent over to help me off the chair.

"Your hair!" I cried out. "You've cut it!"

Gordon reached up and rubbed a hand across the top of his cropped and styled head with a shy grin. "Do you like it? It's so much easier for the gym and I was told... Well, I realized it was getting in my eyes, you know. Do you like it?"

He did look handsome and I noticed his glasses were new too, a very sharp pair of dark tortoise shell which complemented his eyes. He looked good. He looked much

better than good.

I had another surprise when we got to the street. Instead of a hired car service, which Gordon usually used, there was a sleek, silver Infiniti. "Gordon! Where did you get this car?"

He beamed at me. "It's mine! I used to drive when I was younger, but then for years I felt too tired, and I was afraid of accidents. But, thanks to you Suze, I'm feeling well enough to drive. And I find I like it a lot."

After the doctor's visit ("Keep resting and taking your medicines. Your strength will take some time to come back."), Gordon told me he was taking me to lunch "someplace special."

We pulled up in front of a very nice building, but it didn't have a restaurant that I could see, or an art gallery on the ground floor.

"What is this place, Gordon?" I asked as he handed me out of the car.

"Remember when I told you I wanted a whole new place?" His smile was shy and rather eager. "Well, this is it. My new apartment. I hope you'll like it."

I tried not to show my shock. "I'm sure I'll love it," I assured him.

And I did. It was beautiful. Not very large, but light and airy with a view of the river. Gordon had made an excellent seafood lunch and served it with a dry white wine. "Not too much for you," he cautioned, "until you're off all your medications."

After lunch, and while Gordon was making the coffee, he asked if I would mind if he played his messages. I told him of course not, I'd just use the loo while he took care of things.

I could hear the messages from Gordon's well-appointed bathroom. Tom Briggs. "Hey Gord-o, how about coming to the game next Thursday? I got four seats..." A few calls from other office mates. Gordon skipped ahead. A decorator: "We've got that Berber you were interested in, Mr. Davis. We can deliver next Saturday after it's passed through Customs..."

I had just opened the door to step out when I heard the woman's voice. I thought at first it might be someone else from the office, but the tone was too bright, too perky

for a business call. "Hey, it's me," she... chirped, is the only word for it. "I wondered if we're still..." But Gordon abruptly hit the stop button and I returned to the dining area.

"Ready for coffee? And I have a special dessert to put the color back in your cheeks."

I agreed it sounded wonderful. We took our coffee and dessert – a creamy strawberry parfait – and sat on the sofa.

I'd gone to the salon the day before – a long exhausting day – but my hair was cut in a short, flattering style (I might never grow it long again, I decided), my nails were fortified and had tips on them in a pale subtle color. My skin had been massaged, cleansed, exfoliated and brightened, buffed and polished from head to toe. The ordeal had been nearly as bad as surgery, but with entirely satisfactory results. I was wearing a loose but form-skimming tunic and slacks in bright colors that helped to camouflage my still too-thin form.

I was feeling well for the first time in months and the doctor had said if I didn't overdo it, I could "resume normal intimate relations." Of course, I didn't tell him there were none to resume. But I fully intended to start some.

I put my arms around Gordon and ran my fingers across his head. "I can't get used to your short hair," I said.

Gordon reached up and gently took my hand. "I like yours, though."

"I think I've gained some weight too," I told him guiding his hand to my rib cage. "Don't you think?"

"You're looking one hundred percent better," he agreed. "But you don't want to wear yourself out on the first day you visit." He released my hand and stood up. "Now, I've packed you a very nice lunch and saved some of that dessert for you, so tomorrow you'll be fine."

"Won't I see you?" I felt a little sliver of ice in my belly.

"Well, no. Didn't I tell you? I have the practice for that corporate golf tournament."

"No," I said calmly. "You never mentioned it."

"Oh, I'm sorry." He shepherded me out of the apartment and into the car. "I usually tell you everything. I think it's just the hectic couple of weeks that we've had and all the stuff with the apartment and things have been crazy at the office. I'll tell you all about it on Sunday."

He took me to the door of my apartment and handed me the little flowered bag that held the food he'd prepared. With both arms free, he put them around me and hugged me sincerely, but a little cautiously still, as if he thought I might break. Then he kissed my cheek. "Goodnight, Susan. You're looking good. It makes my day!" He waved as he got back in the elevator, his grin ear to ear.

I was a little less frightened. But not much.

* * * *

When I went back to work, Gordon picked me up every morning and drove me home each evening for the first two weeks. We had lunch together every day – sometimes something he made, sometimes something from the cafeteria. For the first few days, I was too exhausted to say much and Gordon talked mostly about the cases he was working on. Finally, I asked him what mystery he was reading as he hadn't brought me anything new for a while, and I was thinking of a trip to the bookstore.

"Oh," he shrugged. "I haven't had much time for reading lately – I've had such a heavy case load and then there's the gym and cooking class – and I'm on the committee for the company golf outing. That's going to keep my schedule hopping by the way, so I've arranged with HR to have a firm car take you home for a few days." He stood, taking both our trays. "I'm glad you're back. We can use a good researcher around here," he winked and grinned.

A few days later when Gordon was in court, I went into his office with some papers. It was unusually messy with books and papers thrown about haphazardly. On the desk were two case files that someone else was looking for, a golf magazine, cooking magazines and a book by one of those health and fitness gurus. I picked up the

errant files and underneath was a card.

It had a cute picture of a fat cat on a large pillow. I had sent Gordon numerous cards and notes over the past, but nothing like this. It wasn't Gordon's birthday for three weeks – I knew because it was the day after mine. On the outside, the card said: *Congratulations On Your New Pad.*

And then, inside: *I Think It's Purrrrr-fect For You!*

It was signed "Tierney" with a little heart over the "i." A heart. How... jejune. My head felt blurry, as if I were spiking a fever. I put the card down and went back to my desk.

I sent the files to the people who were looking for them. I researched cases on E.U. labor laws and on foreign statutes of limitations. I smiled, talked and organized, all the while trying very hard not to think what finding that card on Gordon's desk could mean.

Later that day, I accessed the phone logs for Gordon. Personal outgoing calls weren't logged but, for billing purposes, all incoming calls were. There were ten calls from Tierney over the last week alone. Not one had a billing number next to it. I went back over the last three months. The months since the kidney surgery. And there it was. Two weeks after Gordon had joined the gym. The week he got his haircut.

"Tierney Socher r/y/c." Returned your call. The following week there were two more. "Tierney Socher just called to say hi." Then "Tierney called." That was the week Gordon got his new glasses. Over the past month, several calls a week. Then several a day. "Tierney called." "Tierney called about golf outing." "Tierney called about the kitchen cabinets."

Tierney called a lot.

Our lunches had dwindled to once a week as he became more and more involved with work and the company golf outing. The day after finding the card, Gordon was at lunch with a client (listed in the tickler on his calendar). I was in his office when the phone rang. I recognized Tierney's number on the display screen. "Gordon Davis' office," I answered.

"Hi! This is Tierney, is Gordon there?" Bright. Cheery.

"No, I'm sorry, he's in a meeting." I couldn't believe my voice was so calm. "May I take a message?"

"This isn't Diane, is it?" Diane was Gordon's secretary.

"No, she's away from her desk. This is Susan."

"Susan?" A little doubtful pause. Then, "Gordon's Susan? The one who saved his life? Oh, I'm dying to meet you. Gordon talks about you all the time. He just adores you!"

"Really?" I felt my knees go weak and I had to sit in Gordon's desk chair. There was a lingering trace of his soap and aftershave and I was limp with conflicting emotions: relief and desire; fear and anger.

"Oh yes!" she bubbled on "Now you promise to give him the message and make him promise to bring you to lunch with us next week. Or have him make dinner at his new apartment... Have you seen it?"

"Why... yes."

"Isn't it gorgeous? The whole time he decorated, he kept saying how he couldn't wait for you to see it. Every time he bought something new or changed anything, he'd say, 'Won't Susan be surprised?' I have to run now, but I'm so glad you're much better. It was lovely talking with you," she chirped. Though she'd been the one doing all the talking, I agreed it had been lovely and hung up.

I logged in the call from Diane's desk and said nothing to Gordon. I waited to see if he would say something to me about Tierney. I waited all week. He didn't say a word.

* * * *

Gordon did talk quite a bit about his cooking class though, and I bought him a set of very expensive knives for his birthday. I made sure his card did not have cats on it. He bought me an emerald pendant necklace for mine. His card to me had a painting

of violets in a bowl. The last day of his cooking class, he called me on the phone.

"Just in time!" he exclaimed. "This weekend is your last doctor's visit as well and we're going to celebrate! You look fabulous, nice and healthy again, now we just have to put a few pounds on you. I intend to make you a meal so delicious you'll gain five pounds just looking at it."

I laughed at his enthusiasm. "That will be wonderful, Gordon!" My voice was liquid with relief and love. "We've hardly had any time together these past few weeks."

"And I'll have a surprise for you that day."

"Gordon! Tell me. What is it?"

"Nope. You'll have to wait until after your doctor's visit."

And tease him though I did all week, he didn't tell me more.

When Saturday finally came, I dressed with care. Gordon brought me flowers when he picked me up to take me to the doctor's office, and insisted that I carry them with me. Yellow roses, though he knew I actually prefer white. Maybe they were fresher. "You look great," he beamed, helping me into the car.

The doctor's visit was purely a formality to satisfy the insurance company and the HR people that I could return to working in my past manner. But I wouldn't be putting in hours quite like that anymore, because I knew that night Gordon was going to ask me to be his and my time would be taken up with more important things. His asking was also a formality, of course, because how much more his – or he mine – could we be?

It was true that Gordon hadn't touched me much lately – except in the most solicitous manner – but he'd been ill and I'd been ill. I knew he'd just been waiting for everything to be perfect before we finalized our love. I had packed a change of clothing in the bag that I carried with me.

We left the doctor's office jubilant. "You're doing wonderfully well for a woman who has literally donated flesh, blood and bone," the doctor smiled, pleased with my latest reports. "Now, you'll have to stay on the supplements, but I don't need to see you again for six months." He handed me over to Gordon, waiting in the outer room, and

waved us out the door. "Go. Live a normal life."

Gordon's apartment had acquired a finished look since I had been there last. Plants were hanging near the window, there were little items on the bookshelves, and in the kitchen was a beautiful set of pots and pans. The knife set I'd bought him was displayed prominently with the cutting board. A wine cabinet graced the foyer and there were new prints on the walls, and a very high-end stereo system in the living room.

"Everything looks wonderful, Gordon." I would make a few changes when we moved in together. A two-month engagement would be more than enough. It would be a very small wedding. Despite hiring detectives to search, neither of us had found birth parents or any extended family. Because of all the months of illness, we had very few friends. Or at least, I had. Gordon had some new ones. Would we invite Tierney to the wedding? I'd have to think about that.

Gordon put on some music and opened a bottle of wine, then went into the kitchen.

"I know what with the gym and meetings and the whole golf thing, we haven't been able to see each other much." He chatted while he cut up some things and tossed them in a pan. I just watched him move around with his new physical confidence. "You know, I never thought I'd be able to play golf in my whole life. And I can't, really, I'm a terrible player. But just to be able to go out with everyone else and feel so good and healthy! I owe it all to you, Susie - everything!"

"I wanted you to have it all, Gordon."

"And I can't tell you how horrible I felt when you were so sick each time."

"But that's over now. I'm fine - you heard the doctor. I'm ready to resume a normal life." I moved closer to him and rested my head on his shoulder. He turned and put his arms around me, giving me a more vigorous hug than any in the past few months. I relaxed against him.

"I'm so glad, Suze," he said. "So glad. You're so important to me; I don't know what I'd have done if something had happened to you." His voice was blurred with

emotion as he leaned his cheek against my hair.

"Nothing's going to happen, Gordon. I'm fine and you're fine and we're going to live a long happy life. So, you had something to tell me?"

"Right!" Releasing me from the hug, he smiled and returned to his chopping. "Just let me get this dinner started and I'll come into the living room."

"I'll just use the bathroom," I murmured.

"Okay," he nodded.

* * * *

The bathroom had also changed since I'd been there. There were nice towels, and the toilet paper was blue to match the tiles. There was a print on the wall facing the toilet and when I washed my hands, I noticed a little potpourri jar on the side of the sink. I reached for the hand soap and froze in mid-reach.

There were two toothbrushes in the holder. I caught sight of my pale face in the cabinet mirror. It didn't necessarily mean anything, I scolded my reflection. Gordon probably rotated his toothbrushes.

I opened the medicine cabinet. There wasn't much in there. Gordon's medications mostly. Not as many as I'd thought there'd be. Shaving cream, a bottle of aftershave I'd never known him to wear a little more than half full.

"Suze!" Gordon called. "Are you all right?"

"I'll just be a minute," I replied. Turning on the water, I continued to look through the cabinets. Styptic pencil, a few razors. I washed and dried my hands, turned the water off and opened the linen closet – a real luxury in a city apartment. Towels, sheets, some cleaning supplies on the bottom. And on the middle shelf, off to the side, a box of condoms.

I closed the door quietly, my breath a little short. Gordon was planning for me to stay over. That's what this meant. I felt flushed, and happy but not nervous, and glad I was prepared. I knew we were meant to be together. Gordon knew it, too. I thought the

condoms an oddly unnecessary touch since Gordon knew, surely, that neither of us had any diseases. And, at this point, whatever I had, he had too. And vice versa.

"Suze, are you sure everything's all right?"

"Just fine." My voice was calm and normal. And as my hand touched the door handle, two things occurred to me. One was: that box of condoms was open.

And the second was: Gordon had called me "Suze." He'd called me that a few days ago too. And earlier today. He knew I hated to be called anything but "Susan."

"Well, come on out then, I want to talk to you. And it's kind of important."

I smoothed my hair and my dress and pinched a little more color into my cheeks.

* * * *

Gordon was sitting on the sofa, but jumped up when I came in. "I was beginning to get worried about you," he said with a little laugh. "Can't have you sick again - not now or ever. Sit down here with me, Susan." He took my hand and gallantly seated me on the couch, handing me a glass of champagne.

"Champagne and roses... the lovely dinner. Gordon, how extravagant."

"Nothing too good for you, Susan. I owe you everything. I'm really healthy at last. I'm strong and happy. I have a real interest in life for the first time and it's all due to you, Suze." His hazel eyes glittered with tears and he took my hand in both of his.

"But, Gordon," I touched his cheek with my other hand. "I wanted to do it. It was no sacrifice and this is my reward."

"I've always been lonely. Adopted, no siblings, my parents dying while I was still so young. I was never strong, never had any real friends until you. I've never felt closer to anyone in my life."

"Gordon," I bowed my head, all my suspicions gone. A flood of love filled me

"Susan, I want to know if you'd.... Damn!" He jumped up suddenly as a hissing sound erupted from the kitchen. He hurried to the stove, grabbing a potholder. I followed, and he smiled kind of sheepishly. "I still haven't quite caught the hang of the

timing thing.” He lowered the heat on the pot and began cleaning up the spill, shifting the block with the knives as he cleaned around. “Did I tell you how much I like this cutlery set?” he asked. “It’s just great – and I appreciate you taking an interest in my interests.”

“I’m interested in everything about you, Gordon. I want you to be happy.”

“Speaking of happy...” He cleaned up the last of the mess and turned to face me. “I’d love it if you’d come down to Bermuda next month.”

Bermuda! What a lovely idea! “And what will we do in Bermuda, Gordon?”

He ducked his head, a little shyly. “Well, like I was saying, I’ve never been closer to anyone than you – especially now, after all we’ve gone through, it’s like we’re part of each other, you know?”

“Oh yes, Gordon,” I breathed. “I know. I feel the same; you must know that I do.”

“I know you do, Suze, and that’s why...” he took a deep breath. I held mine. “I want you to stand up for me at St. Peter’s Church in Bermuda on the 25th of next month.”

“Stand up with you, Gordon,” I corrected gently. “With you before the minister.”

“Well, yes, of course, you’ll be with me. I wouldn’t want anyone else as my witness when I get married.”

“Witness...?” My voice worked, amazingly enough, though it was a bit hoarse. “What do you mean... get married?”

“Yes! That’s the surprise! And I owe it all to you. I met Tierney at the gym while you were still laid up in the hospital and she was the one that got me involved in golf and she’s my partner in the company tournament. I know you spoke to her – she told me that you had a really nice conversation – and we’re getting married next month. Just a small ceremony and reception, only about twenty people. We waited until you were completely well because, of course, I want you for my witness. And, oh God, Suze, I’m so happy. And we’ve invited this really great guy, Donald – he’s a friend of Tierney’s – and I’m hoping you two will hit it off.” He finally paused for breath.

"Tierney is coming for our celebration dinner. She's dying to finally meet you. But listen to me rattle on – you haven't said a word. Oh, Suze, I love you." He folded me in his arms, in a kind, gentle... totally non-sexual hug.

"I love you too, Gordon," I said quietly. "How soon will Tierney be here?"

"About an hour."

"That doesn't give us much time then," I sighed sadly.

"Time for what?"

"To be together." I turned my face to kiss his cheek. We were of a height, he and I. "All I ever wanted was to be with you, Gordon."

"I know that." He kissed my cheek and hugged me again, both arms around my shoulders. "Thanks ever so much, Suze. You're like my own sister. The sister I never had. It was so freaky, you having the same blood type and protein markers and who knows... we're both adopted and... maybe you are my sister!"

"Please, Gordon," I murmured against his cheek. "I am not your sister. And don't call me 'Suze'." As I hugged him tighter, I reached behind and grasped the largest knife from the holder, so conveniently within my reach.

As Gordon bled out on the floor of his lovely terrazzo tiled kitchen floor -- in the apartment he had made a home for him and for Tierney -- I sat beside him, working away, telling him all about my love, and how much we were part of each other, and always should have been.

He didn't say much, of course -- he really wasn't able. But I am sure he finally understood.

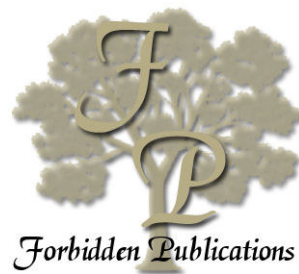
It all didn't take as long as I thought it might. I was finished, even with the cleaning up, before Tierney arrived. I left, closing the door behind me. I left Gordon to Tierney. Everything of Gordon's that actually was still his, that is.

Except for his heart, of course. Which, for all of me, was all I ever wanted.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

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B. Lynch Black is a writer, artist and out-of-work actor born, raised, and still residing in New York City. Most recent publications include: a novella titled, "The Gantlet," purchased by Circlet Press 2006; poem, "A Silver Hair," placed First in Category, Green Rivers Poetry 2005; poem "Indicia" in Binnacle Ultra-Short Poetry Anthology 2005; a short story "Sitting at the Gate of the Temple," purchased Tom Reid/John Howard Short Fiction Anthology Fall 2006; story "In the House of Mourning," published on WriteLink.com UK 2003. Currently, she is working on a fantasy novel set in Occupied Paris during WWII.



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