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Aladdin's

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Aladdin's

I should write more, she said.

I should write more things more often, she said at breakfast that morning. No, she said, really I should, because I can do it well. Of course, she looked at her tomato juice as she said it, because that's just the way she does things. But she did say I should write more.

"I do write," I said. "I write on my computer."

No that's not enough, she said, looking now at the swirls of cream in her coffee. That's not what I mean. I mean write things that are ...

"More creative?" I said, as I usually did, finishing up her sentence for her.

Yeah, you know and a quick glance up at me - surprise! - and then back to the tomato juice. Yeah, write things like that. 'Cause you are good at it, obviously, so you really oughta do it more often.

Very interesting, all this. She usually didn't tell me the things that I did well. That's probably because she doesn't think she does things well at all - the only two things she ever told me she could do better than other people are to drive a car and kiss. Those were the two things that for her were her strong points. Driving and kissing. Kissing and driving. I didn't ask her if these were equally good when done at the same time.

I can't say much about her driving. The only time I ever noticed it was the day we took the keg back to the distributor after her party before graduation. I actually feared for my life that day. Driving in Europe must be something different altogether. I could just see the headlines: "Local Student Killed in Accident on 16 with Keg in Trunk." What a way to die, in a gray 1984 Chrysler LeBaron with air conditioning that froze your leghairs off and a pet rock that watched her drive from the dashboard. That damn thing had this smile on his face that seemed to say "Yeah. She can drive. By the way, is your insurance paid up?"

As for the other one, well ... all I can say is yes, she was right. She sure could kiss. But I don't know what in her long and confusing past made her think that the ability to drive a car and drive a man was all that she could claim over your average person. She had no idea at all that just being HER was more than most people could accomplish, just as she had no idea that others did, in fact, try to do just that. She couldn't see past her own shortcomings to see what others did because of her.

Being her was a full-time job, let me tell you. And being her meant, at least in her eyes, always being consistent and constant and solid and foolproof and alert and awake and aware and prepared and teflon and "this is the answer" and all that. Academically on her toes and socially making all the right moves to get her where she needed to go. Always in the books and at the meetings and in the middle of the right parties and at the table of all the important dinners. It was quite a job, and frankly I began to get sick of it pretty quick. But it was what she did. Sometimes it became too much for her and she shut down and went into what might be called a momentary hibernation. She shut down and turned off the lights that made her shine for so many.

It's odd that she never realized that shutting down was just another part of being her - no great crisis, just part of the day-to-day that made her who she was. I guess she never really got to that page in her owner's manual, if she even looked at it at all. You know what I mean, the way that we question ourselves just after we turn out the light, running through events in our mind, having conversations that will never occur with people who will never care, finding out about what really goes on inside us. We all do it, or so I thought until I met her. All she could do was curl up on my couch and cry, calling out for her mommy with a voice that allowed the little girl inside to say what the consistent and constant and solid woman outside would never dream of uttering.

You can never really be inside someone's head, and maybe my amateur psychoanalysis is completely off base. But I think she never took the time to sit and reflect on what had happened to her in her life. She never stopped to think about the day after the lights went out - she just went to sleep and woke up the next day expecting things to be okay and all right and just fine. When they weren't - and, toward the end, they frequently weren't - she didn't know how to handle it.

But maybe that was it! Maybe she looked away each time she talked about me and what I should do or can do or do better than others because it was just another time the adulthood took over and made her deny that she too could do those things that I could do with such ease. Maybe this was just her way of not setting herself up for the inevitable fall that comes along with anything risky. I mean, Lord knows I've fallen before. But she never had - at least, not that I know about.

Well, all this was coming at me at once, and it didn't take much time. When you love someone, you spend all your waking hours trying to figure them out - it's that mysterious part of your lover that keeps you coming back. So there I was, with the missing piece to the puzzle, in Alladin's on a Monday morning when we weren't even supposed to be there in the first place. But I don't really care where it came from. That was the page of the manual that had been missing. I had it.

And so did she, it suddenly seemed. It all made sense! She had it, too, and she knew all about it, and she just chose to forget about it. She often told me that she didn't want to finish the race any slower than she had started it. I told her that was just silly, that nobody could do that, that it was okay to let yourself limp across the finish line, or even slow down. You owe it to yourself, I told her. But she was smart enough to forget about that. She was SMART! Damn! Who was SHE to be so intelligent and cunning and ... consistent and constant and solid and alert and awake and aware and teflon and "this is the answer" and ready for anything! She prepared herself for these things. She wasn't just reacting, but rather acting on her best interests and knowing what she was doing all the time. Damn her! I could feel my face getting all red. Right there in Alladin's!

Here comes our breakfast. She had scrambled eggs and home fries, as usual, and I had the manhole pancakes and sausage. The smell of the grease woke me from my thoughts long enough to thank the waitress for her help. I reached over to her side of the booth and grabbed the butter.

"You know, I love you sometimes," I said, looking into my coffee.

-Paul Rinkes '94