

*Sixth Decade*

I WAS FIFTY-ONE WHEN I DECIDED TO HAVE AN AFFAIR.

That sounds insensitive, doesn't it? I mean, it's not like on the day after I turned fifty-one I decided I wanted to have one, and so went out to find a willing partner in crime. It wasn't a colleague with whom I'd worked on the big presentation, and then, when we won the business, celebrated in each other's arms. If there is such a thing as a typical affair, or a typical reason for having one, I can't say mine fit the definition. My life was anything but typical. Suffice it to say that when the opportunity presented itself, I wrestled, perfunctorily, enjoying the desire, as well as the feeling of being desired in return. I didn't decide *not* to indulge. Jeesh, even that has sexual overtones – *indulge*. Like sticking my pecker into a piece of strange – in (the) *dulge*. I wonder if *dulge* might be a reference to vagina in some foreign tongue. Leave it to me to work the words “vagina” and “tongue” into a simile.

At the risk of sounding New Age, since I didn't strictly decide against it, I suppose I could be judged for deciding to... here's that word again... *indulge*. And judged I was, too, very harshly. And punished. Severely. A more severe punishment than even God could devise. Fifty lashes, fire, gnashing teeth, or some other

torment, I could withstand more easily than what I endured in life for sinking the *dulge* with my purple torpedo. Lesson learned: A woman scorned can inflict unendurable punishment.

It was a chance meeting. The downtown section of Ann Arbor is rife with restaurants, and I often stepped out of the office – the Allmendinger Building, constructed in the late nineteenth century to build Allmendinger pianos and organs, was at the corner of First and Washington – as much to get away from my desk for an hour as to get a little exercise, and try a host of different cuisine.

The Pizza Place – what an original name, eh? – was new in town. A block off Main Street near Liberty, and a couple doors down from a tattoo parlor, it was the type of luncheon place that sold pizza by the slice, buffet style. I had a hankering for pizza that day, and strolled in for a late lunch.

Being the only customer in the diner – have I said it was a late lunch? – I could feel on me the eyes of the woman behind the counter as I tried to decide which slice was right for me: Mediterranean style, Greek, the more traditional pepperoni only, vegetarian, or meat lovers.

When I looked up, the woman, who I deduced was the proprietress because she was no college kid, was smiling broadly, and I thought, or maybe I just wanted to think, that she liked what she saw, despite my aging features, although I still had a full head of wavy hair, graying around the temples. Those commercials for men's hair color? They drive me crazy – “Is your gray hair preventing others from seeing who you really are?” Excuse me, but my gray hair *is* who I am, you moron! But I digress – to hide my

shame, or to build drama?

Getting back to the woman:

*Nah, I thought. No interest in me. She's merely trying to appeal to me as a customer – like the waitress working to inflate her tip by flirting with her male customer, laughing at his jokes, all the while thinking, asshole.*

“I’ll have a slice of the Mediterranean,” I said.

I never much cared for black olives, cannelloni beans, or radicchio, and I prefer a thick and chewy crust to thin and crusty; however, I like feta cheese, red onions and garlic. I also thought that, with her olive complexion and silky black hair, she might boast roots from that part of the world, and that I might score bonus points with her. Not that I was, at that point, thinking of scoring.

When she turned to get a Styrofoam box, my eyes moved down to her generous, but not too generous, backside and bronze legs, Flamenco graceful and ultra-luxurious.

*Oh my, I thought. Peanut butter.*

Still smiling, her teeth bright and even behind full lips, seemingly confident of where my eyes had passed, to touch hips, buttocks and legs, she turned to hand me the box over the counter-top, then proceeded to walk around the “L”-shaped counter to the cash register, where I met her.

“Would you like for something sweet?” she asked, uncertain of her English and in an accent I couldn’t place.

I grinned, and she must’ve read my thoughts since she smiled back knowingly before adding, indicating some baked goods in the glass display next to the cash register, “A cookie or a brownie?”

*What might that accent be?* I wondered. *Spanish?* I was but a poor monolingual sap, a victim of the public school system in America, a society that haughtily thinks the rest of the world should adhere to English as the universal language.

“How about an oatmeal raisin cookie?” I said.

She used a pair of plastic tongs to put the cookie into a small bag as I fished a five-dollar bill from my wallet. I watched her put the money in the till, then count out my change.

The kid in the kitchen, visible through the opening in the wall behind the woman, made his presence known with his after lunch rush cleanup, rattling a host of pizza making utensils.

Handing me a dollar bill and some coins, she looked at me in that way she had earlier, and I found myself reconsidering my previous conclusion that I was but a customer: her dark eyes seemed to welcome my image – like an old lover one hasn’t seen in years who tells you she’s missed you, making you forget, if only for a moment, why it was you ever dumped her in the first place.

“You are very handsome,” she told me.

“Thank you,” I said. “You’re very beautiful yourself.”

“Thank you,” she said, avowing my counter-flirt by averting her eyes.

I waited a moment, admiring her long black mane, so glossy and lavish, before risking a glance at the plunging neckline of her snug top, where a scattering of freckles adorned the tops of her breasts. Unlike Malcolm, an old boss and buddy from my youth, I was never really a breast man, but these proud beauties flat (not!) out begged to be noticed – very large, full and firm. I wondered about her age: *forty-something (to match her bust size)? And that firm?*

*Or is there enough profit in the pizza business to spend on breast augmentation?*

Looking up at me again, she asked if I worked nearby.

“Left out your front door, left again at the corner, right at the next corner, and two blocks, on the left.”

“Then maybe again I see you?” she asked in a tone that revealed unreserved hope.

She was leaning forward, her elbows on the glass counter beneath which the dessert offerings were displayed; I suspected she wished to tender me a better look at her own sweet pastries, now pushed up and together. I felt no shame in not refraining. When I glanced up, those dark and inviting eyes seemed pleased that I’d taken the notice she perhaps hoped I would.

Before I could think better of my response, I said with a smile and a wink, “I’m sure you will.”

I left, like Romeo, without even thinking to ask her name.