

For April 18

Love, Darling, Always Love

by

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He whispered sweet nothings, took me in his arms, kissed me deeply on the mouth and, the ritual completed, I knew that I was loved. My destiny had thus commenced, which would be for me to dedicate myself to the lover: I would sleep in his bed, I would carry his children, I would wash his clothes, and I would cook his dinner, just as I had been taught. But he didn't come to the meeting we had set for the next day, and heartbreak invaded me because there could be only one explanation: he was dead. I put on my mourning clothes. Since I had always been a private person, I didn't ask myself questions, and I was a widow all by myself. I didn't understand why I began to be called the Crazy One. I nonetheless carried my widowhood with dignity and raised my children in wisdom and in submission.

I was a very good little girl and on the evening of my wedding I was surprised by enormous anxiety when the young man who held me so tenderly turned very red and started to breath heavily. I called him several times by his name, but he didn't respond to my voice and appalling spasms shook him. My mother had told me to put Vaseline on the top of my thighs and to let him do what he wanted, but she had not told me about such a strange crisis. When he fell inert on top

of me, I was terrified. I was sure he was dead and I would be accused of murder. I got up and fled. I never went back. I live in a doorway and charitable people throw me a little bread. Sometimes they ask my name, which I have hidden so carefully that I have forgotten it myself. A year or so ago, winter was so cold that police cars patrolled the city and took away by force those who live in the street. But I wasn't seen in the rags where I live because I am very short and very thin.

It's not so easy to die! Men dry up like autumn leaves. We see them weaker, they vacillate, and then they're gone. My husbands never live to dawn. It's rare that they even get to bed. Most of them haven't finished the first kiss when the servants fold up my wedding dress and prepare the mourning clothes. In the space of a nap, the next spouse is ready and the gravedigger dies often between my marriages. How many they are, the handsome young men that are taken away inanimate, and how paleness suits them! I'd like to hold onto them, hold their hands, but Death, my rival, is already stealing them. That's why I'm still a virgin. Desire is burning inside me and it kills them. I run from lover to lover, out of breath, crazy with love, forever consumed by the passion I spread.

Gentlemen, for twenty centuries you have declared your love for me. You bury me in flowers; I receive admirable letters, your passions annoy me like flies and I cannot even take a step without

making your hearts beat faster. It's exhausting. I would like to be able to look at a man without it affecting ten others and I'd like to be able to dance without risking a slip in the blood spilling from your wounds. I'm like an executioner haunted by his victims. This morning, while fending me off, I felt a moment of remorse: it seems the prettier I am, the more you suffer. If I were good, I would have to be ugly? You kiss my footsteps, and blame me for your lumbagos. You sell your last bits of property to offer me necklaces I don't like and your mothers follow me on my walks to speak ill of me. You say I am cruel, unfeeling, frivolous, that if I understood how you suffered, I would not permit it and I would spare you. Done. I give up. But to whom? I can only marry one. You chose. You have all sworn to die if I didn't love you. The one who gets me condemns the others to death.

Ah! I thought I'd be shouted down, that each of you would cry : Me! Me! Why are you all leaving, shoulder to shoulder, heads down? Must I be alone because I am beautiful?

The shadow was nuptial, august, solemn, and boring. Oh! How boring, as the lover puffed and panted over me. He did have broad shoulders though, the profile of a Roman emperor and non of the steps in the lovers parade had been skipped. He had kissed my hand, taken me for walks in lovely gardens, and offered glasses of champagne which I drank with emotion because my sisters told me one of them contained an elixir of love. They said that one made stars light up in full daylight and the sky would twinkle with diamonds—unless it was just a metaphor and the fireworks explode only in the soul—but the light never changed. Between the engagement and the wedding, the time seemed long because impatience gnawed at me. I lost several kilos, for

which I was congratulated. They said the less there was of the body the more there was of the soul and that the spouse would be pleased that I was manageable. In the morning, at the wedding, I'd said yes to all the questions I was asked. Then the women conducted me to the conjugal bedroom and undressed me. They complimented me on my breasts, light and tender like the childhood I had barely left behind, on my flat belly which would soon swell, and on the curly tuft, fertile forest where the husband would soon clear himself a path. They rubbed me with fragrant creams and left me alone among the pillows and lace, awaiting the arrival of the Lord. The custom was that he entered naked and erect so as to awaken in the virgin the ardor of her love. I was terribly impatient to behold my destiny, completely in his hands. I had been well instructed as to my duties, which included the four adorations to be expressed in a weak voice, as if broken by emotion, the three kisses that would enlarge, if possible, the promise, and the special Kiss which my sisters had patiently taught me with the help of the silver dildo, in the possession of the women of the family for fifteen generations. I performed all my duties with application and the spouse climbed on top of me as I had been promised. A week earlier, his mother came to deflower me in grand ceremony. In my in-laws' family, the dildo was ivory, ringed with gold at the base, a jewel worthy of royalty. Only women have the right to see dildos, and the rule is they never speak of them to the men, who might become jealous of what represents them and makes their work easier. Of course it seems strange to me, but I am too well brought to discuss these things before having a first child. After a few days my scars were healed and the beloved sank easily into the Vaseline. Everything went on as prescribed, without the least hitch: so, why was I bored?

And it went on and on! Coming and going, puffing vigorously, no break in rhythm. I was immobilized beneath a machine erected for eternity, forward, backward, forward, backward.

Nothing to do but wait. I tried to pass the time studying the ceiling, which was, certainly, beautifully painted in frescoes. There was a blue sky and a railing ran around all four sides. Little angels leaning over it, supported on their little elbows, watched the newlyweds. My God! In a minute I'd looked at everything twice and I was looking for another distraction. I was pinned under the lover and could hardly move my head to the right toward the heavily embroidered velvet curtains, well closed, that let in no light whatsoever. On the left there was only the carved armoire and an armchair covered in silk. Where were the promised ecstasies? How long would the morose gymnastic of the bridegroom last? I went once more over the events according to the rules: everything had gone as planned, so, why was I so badly compensated? Little by little, my boredom turned to anger. A good girl, well brought-up, respectful of all her duties, is not condemned without reason to suffer such treatment. I hadn't failed for my part, I was sure. Suddenly, I knew I couldn't stand any more. A powerful surge uncoupled my strength and with a chop on the back I sent the lover flying. He fell on the floor, bleating stupidly.

So that's the whole story. Jail is glacial. Right now the judges are deliberating. They waited six weeks to see if the husband had not suffered irreversible injuries. Thank God, he's all right and can still run around, so I'll be spared the death penalty. But it will certainly mean permanent celibacy. I can no longer live in the house of my sisters. If I'm lucky, I'll be sent out as a servant in a far away family. Otherwise, the kitchens of the prison. In order to prepare myself, I am given everyday fifty kilos of potatoes to peel.

Sometimes, to entertain myself, I carve one in the shape of a dildo and I give it the Sacred Kiss. It makes me laugh so hard that the guards come to see what's so funny, and I quickly hide my profanation in the pile of potatoes.