

# **Sophie Valentine**

Copyright 2013 Danielle Aimie  
Published by Artalure SARL

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## Chapter One

“What do you mean our sex is boring?” I said, hearing my voice prickle and raise slightly as I said it.

“I didn’t say that Soph”, Paul replied over his shoulder as he rinsed his cup in the sink. “I said our routine is boring. I always enjoy making love to you, it’s intense, and we’re good together. It’s just always the same. That’s all.”

That was a very carefully worded answer. Paul could do that. He knew how to make a controversial point, but without upsetting people. Normally I admired it, his thoughtfulness, but at the moment it was frustrating me. I didn’t need anything to be sugar coated, what he’d said had worried me and I wanted to get to the heart of it. “What do you want to do that’s different?” I asked, still with a raised, and unfriendly tone.

He turned and lent back against the worktop, “Whatever you want”. It seemed to be genuine, but it wasn’t helpful. It just meant I felt bad because our sex life had been called into question, with no obvious way to fix it. I hated talking about this stuff.

“I’m going to be late for work.” I shut the conversation down. I gave Paul a rushed kiss on the cheek and gathered my things.

I walked out into the cool Autumn morning. It felt immediately good to get some space. Not space from Paul, just space from the intensity of the conversation. Talking about anything intimate always make me clam up so quickly. I never have any idea what to say, and I always feel awkward and under pressure. What a very English stereotype I seem to have become. I don’t feel like that on the inside. I feel young, confident, brave, sexual and sexy. I just don’t seem to be able to express it, or even talk about it. As I turned out of the end of our drive, I started my walk to work, glancing back at our suburban home. I love our house. I always thought that when I looked at it. It was home. Home is situated in the over populated, but beautiful Hertfordshire countryside. Was everything in my life so middle class and ordinary? Even our location seems too normal for words. I love where we live, I love Paul, but I felt like everything was becoming very predictable. The thrill of life seemed to be drifting away, and sub urban mediocrity was infiltrating my life. My future looked like a very well-trodden path. I always thought I would avoid that, and somehow never succumb to the trudge. I always wanted to live a life less ordinary. Now my mind had been filled with worries about my life of grey. All as a result of one thirty second conversation. Now my thoughts were out of control, finding a life of their own in my head.

It wasn’t actually a thirty second conversation. The bit about sex was thirty seconds, and that was the only bit that I was really thinking about. We had been talking about what we had coming up over the next few weeks, and it had become apparent that we weren’t going to see each other very much. Paul leads a busy life, with work and friends, and it always frustrates me when he doesn’t make enough time for us. I think a stable job creates a stable circle of friends’ day to day. Lifestyles often seem to be centered around people’s work, and Paul seemed happy to immerse himself in all aspects of his work and the interrelated lifestyle. I wasn’t as busy. My work at the gym was a stop gap job, until I found something that I really wanted. I have always wanted to work in events, but despite loads of interviews I had never been offered a job. It just seemed to be so competitive. I’d been in my stop gap job for nearly five years. This morning I’d complained to Paul that I wasn’t happy that he was about to be away from home so much, and I mentioned that we hadn’t had sex for a while. I’d pushed him to find out why, and that’s when he said our routine was boring. It was difficult for me to ask. I wished I hadn’t now.

I couldn’t stop thinking as I quickly paced the twenty-minute walk to the gym. It was the start of a beautiful day, but as quickly as I’d noticed how lovely it was, I deliberately ignored

it. The weather wasn't important today, I needed to get a grip of my feelings and stabilise my emotions. The gym was an unattractive building, and the bright blue sky and sunshine seemed to highlight how dull the lump of concrete and glass really was. No different to most gyms, but on beautiful days it seemed so strange to be leaving the sunshine behind to enter into an artificial, airconditioned world in order to exercise. Reception was quiet when I arrived and settled in, so I carried on thinking. I was lost in my own head for most of the morning, only briefly interrupting myself to welcome someone, or to hand over a towel. Everything in my life seemed wrong, and I couldn't bring myself back from it. Everything I went over seemed to be plain and terrifyingly normal. It took me a while, but I eventually managed to pull myself out of this negative downward spin. I knew this was mostly about sex. I didn't want to change everything in my life. As far as I could tell I was having a wonderful time and I wouldn't change much, other than my job. I didn't want to move, I loved Paul and wouldn't change being with him for the world. The issue here was sex. I felt stupid because I was the one who had brought up the conversation this morning, and now I felt terrible. I had invited this awful feeling with open arms, and now I wished I'd repressed any of the things that had led me to this point. "We haven't made love for over a month" I had blurted out. It wasn't the right time, or even a vaguely good time, but I find it so difficult to talk about things that, when I've wound myself up enough it just comes out. I suppose my frustration had just boiled up and I had to say something. Paul was honest in his reply, but no sooner had I said something I had run away. It wasn't productive.

I enjoy sex with Paul. I'd been madly in love with him when we met. He was a good-looking guy, and funny, and kind. He still is, and I still love him, in a slightly different way, but still entirely. He exercises quite a bit and eats well so he isn't one of those men who fall into middle age before their time. He doesn't use the gym here, but he has a small one available at work which he uses a bit, and he often runs, so he's in great shape. I'm really attracted to him, even though we've been together for eight years, married for four, I still want him. He's all I've wanted, and I'm happy. Why does he think our sex is boring?

Before I met Paul, I'd had a couple of long-term relationships, one at the end of school going on until I was about twenty, and then a five-year relationship with a slightly older guy I met at work. I suppose I am quite inexperienced really, in relationships I mean. I'm sexually inexperienced as well now I come to think of it, but I don't feel like I should be. It feels like circumstances have led me to this point in my life, not desire. I've never had the opportunity to experiment or have strings of one-night stands. I've always been with someone. Maybe Paul's previous life was full of all kinds of adventurous sex I know nothing about? This thinking was making me feel like shit. I felt angry that things weren't right, and I was annoyed that with Paul going away so much with work that we'd have little chance to sort it out. It felt like things really needed to change, but his priorities were on other things. Was I in the backseat of his life?

I was only on a short shift today. As soon as the four hours were up, I went into the gym to work out. Minimum wage on reception was made up for in part by the free gym membership and the convenience of the location. I love working out, it always seems to make me feel more positive, virtuous even. I started on the tread mill and immediately drifted into my thoughts again. Paul is an architect and spends a lot of time away from home during the week visiting projects. We don't make love very often, maybe a couple of times a month, but I'd always assumed that was because we weren't together all the time. When we first met, we had sex a lot. Sometimes we lacked sleep because of it. We were always in bed, we just couldn't get enough of each other. I looked at myself in the mirror as I ran. Does he still fancy me? Am I desirable? I think I am, but this morning had made me doubt all sorts of stuff. I am happy that, at thirty-four, I look younger. Although I've never been whisked away to Paris to model for the fashion designer of the year, I have always considered myself pretty

enough. I'm symmetrical, which is apparently important, with big eyes. They're my favorite part of me, along with my hair. Hair is so feminine, I've always been lucky to have thick and healthy hair. I keep it long and love how it makes me feel. I like my feminine and curvy body, I really do. I'm not one of those women who constantly wants to change things. I'd never consider surgery of any kind. I'm not sure if that's because I'm lucky that I look good as I am, or whether it's because I object to it as a feminist. I'd like to think it was the second reason, but I expect that this feminist stand point is probably a luxury of circumstance. It's not all down to luck and circumstance though, I do control some of it. I didn't have any vote when it came to my symmetry, but I do work hard in the gym and eat well. You make your own luck to some extent. Guys look at me in the gym all the time. I think they probably want me, but I suppose I don't really know. There was a gym regular watching me now. He was working out in the weights area, and constantly sneaking glances at me as I ran. I knew him well. His name was Craig. We chatted when he passed through reception. Does he fancy me? Does he desire me? How can one short conversation make me doubt all of this. Does Paul look at other women? Younger women? I'd had enough, I wanted to stop thinking about it.

Paul was working from home all day. I didn't do my normal work out. I had been running for longer than I'd realised, or intended, so I didn't do anything else. I showered quickly and then set off home. I wanted to stop thinking about things. I wanted to talk to Paul, that was the only way to stop this. All I wanted to do was stop feeling bad and stop thinking.

Paul was in the office when I arrived. He smiled as I came through the front door and asked if I wanted a coffee. All back to normal. Why wasn't he worrying himself into an early grave like me? Why hadn't our conversation affected him to his core and given him a morning of doubt and anxiety? I didn't want things to go back to normal. I was wound up. I wanted to confront this whilst I was still angry enough to be capable of doing it.

"What are we going to do?" I demanded.

"What about?" Paul said with a slight smile indicating his confusion.

"Sex", I replied, with the same unfriendly tone of voice I had adopted this morning. I think now it was even more confrontational. Why couldn't this be a conversation? Why did I feel so much fight in me?

"That's a bit dramatic Sophie". Paul got up from his desk and moved towards me. "I don't think this needs to be an argument."

It didn't, but the only way I seem to be able to deal with things that are difficult for me is with confrontation. It's almost like I'm confronting my thoughts, but it comes across as confronting everyone else. It didn't matter though. I needed to say this, I needed to confront my thoughts, so if that meant an argument with Paul, then so be it.

"We've gone stale" I stated. "Our relationship has lost what we first had together, and I don't know what to do about it!"

"Christ", Paul responded. "Where has this come from?"

"Our conversation this morning," I said. "I don't want to have boring sex. I want to be appreciated and I want passion in our relationship." I was being aggressive. I couldn't help it. I was uncomfortable, and it was the only way I could express my frustration and anger. I could see Paul was reacting badly. He didn't say anything for a couple of seconds. Probably trying to repress an instinctive retaliation to my confrontation. "Ok, well what are you going to do about it?" he asked eventually.

I had no idea. Shit. I just wanted the problem solved please. This was Paul's fault. He was the one who said things were boring. I wanted him to resolve my anxiety and worry. Now the bastard had turned it round and was asking what I was going to do. I hadn't even thought about it. It seemed like such a reasonable question, but it made me so angry. "Don't you care?" I was shouting now.

“Why are you shouting?” He asked.

“I want more.” I continued with a raised voice, but not shouting anymore. Shouting made it very obvious I’d lost control. “This isn’t right. We’re not right”. All my frustration was boiling now. “We can’t go on like this!”

Paul turned his face away, obviously annoyed. “Why can’t we just talk about it?” he asked. “I don’t understand why you’re so angry.”

“I’m angry because you don’t seem to care about this. Are you having an affair? Is that why you don’t care about our sex life?”

“Fuck off” Paul replied bluntly. He seemed hurt but was angrier than anything else. I didn’t know why I’d said that, and I didn’t know what I was going to say next. I turned around and walked straight back out of the still open front door before anything else came out of my mouth. I’ve learnt to recognise when I’ve lost it. I wasn’t being rational, and I didn’t want to say something awful that couldn’t be unsaid.

Now my head was really racing. That hadn’t worked at all. I felt so much worse than I did before. Tears rolled down my cheeks as I stormed away from the house. Everything seemed so confusing that I could barely focus on any individual thoughts or problems. My relationship seemed to be in tatters, my life seemed stale, and I couldn’t address any of it. How had this happened. It all made me feel so angry. I had a burning in my gut, a desire to change things, but not the first understanding of what to change or how to change it. I was walking back to the gym. I needed some space. I had to somehow control the thoughts in my head and make some rational decisions.

I walked past reception and went to get a coffee. I waited for the new girl behind the counter to prepare my drink. She looked like she’d just left school. Too much make up and a blue streak in her blond hair. All kids care about at that age is what they look like. How do they spend so much time on it and still get it so wrong? She wasn’t a pretty girl, but the way she was presenting herself was highlighting that more than it needed to be. I felt a little pang of sorrow for her. I imagined all the angst and self-doubt in her. I gave her a smile as she handed me my drink and went over and sat at a small table by the window. What was I going to do now? I was still too wound up to think clearly, so I ended up just staring out of the window. I took a few deep breaths and tried to step back. I put myself in the position I had been in last night. We’d watched a movie after a dinner together, with a glass of wine and the lights low. It had been lovely. Thinking about this immediately made me feel better. I knew that Paul wasn’t the issue, nor was our life together. I’d been through this already this morning. Why had I forgotten all of that when I spoke to Paul? Life doesn’t change dramatically for the worse in less than twenty-four hours. Not without some kind of unexpected outside influence at least. No revelation or tsunami had entered my life. What had made me feel this bad then? It became obvious as I gazed out of the window. It was my mediocrity that I was fearing. It was the treading water in my stop gap job. The lack of any life surrounding a career that didn’t exist, and the cherry on the bun was the boring sex. I was angry because I had become a person that I didn’t want to be. In a situation that I never thought I’d be in. It had all just kind of happened. It was quite a moment of realisation whilst looking out of that window. I just sat there and kept on looking.

## Chapter Two

After another coffee, and what seemed like hours, but was probably only half an hour of sitting and staring, I had relaxed a bit. It seemed like most of the pressure that had built up had exploded out of me this morning. I felt better. As I sipped my third coffee, I carried on trying to stay objective about what was happening. I definitely needed to improve my career. More importantly, I needed to become the same young, confident, dynamic individual on the outside that I felt like on the inside. I felt sure that would help me with my career, but there were more pressing issues that I needed to deal with first. I needed to apply the same confidence to my situation with Paul, which was just about sex. I needed to be brave and address this without breaking or questioning everything else in the relationship, which as far as I could tell, was fine.

I felt an immediate shift in my mood. The change from negative to positive felt great. I was going to take charge and make things good.

“You ok?” A concerned voice interrupted me from my gaze into the middle distance. It was Craig. He’d finished his workout and was heading to the exit with his gym bag over his shoulder.

“I’m fine, thank you.” I managed enough of a smile to try to suggest that there was nothing wrong. Sitting alone staring out of a window probably doesn’t often give the impression of everything being ok.

“How are you?” I asked quickly, trying to divert the conversation to something manageable.

“I’m ok thanks, working hard, training hard, the usual really. I saw you running earlier, you seemed to be really going for it today” Craig looked at me quizzically as he asked.

“I had a lot on my mind”, I replied. “I like to run when I need time to think”. Is he flirting I wondered, without the slightest care whether he was or wasn’t. Is this a guy who fancies me, or is he a friend? It felt like I’d spent so long not even considering the motivations of others that I barely understood these interactions at all. I’d known him for a couple of years, and yet I didn’t know what he thought of me. I was interested to know. Why not practice my confidence, and my ability to talk openly? They say practice makes perfect, now was the time to start becoming the person I wanted to be. Why not try it out in a situation that didn’t matter? The trouble was, I didn’t have the first idea how to find out.

“Did you like watching?” I asked and focused my gaze onto him. “I saw you looking.” I could hardly believe the words had passed my lips. I hadn’t flirted with anyone for years. I wasn’t even sure if this was flirting, but now I really wanted to know what he thought. It all seemed very relevant to my self-doubts and relationship problems. He looked quite shocked.

“I’m sorry, I wasn’t.....I didn’t.....” he looked mortified. That wasn’t flirting, I’d just made him feel like a pervert. Oh God, I felt really bad for him now, he was a nice guy.

“Don’t worry” I said. “I liked that you looked”. That seemed to soften the atmosphere. I think that might have been flirtier than my opening question. My initial flirtation had probably seemed about as sexy as a knock on the door from the police. He dropped his eyes as he tried to think of a response.

“You have a lovely body, I enjoy watching you. I hope that doesn’t make you feel uncomfortable?”

“Not at all” I replied, not actually caring at all what he thought really. “I didn’t know you fancied me.” I realised as I said it that I’d assumed a bit, he hadn’t said anything about fancying me, just that he was watching me. I wondered if I’d put him in another difficult position.

“Of course, who wouldn’t?” He was looking straight at me now. “It’s just that you’re married, and you’ve never expressed any interest in me. I bet you get attention all of the time.”

He was right in one way. I hadn’t expressed any interest in him. I wasn’t sure I had any interest. He was wrong about getting attention though, I felt like I didn’t get any. I felt better now though. This was a confidence boost that I hadn’t expected. The new me needed this energy in order to take control.

“Do you want a coffee?” I asked. Talking to someone seemed to be making my mind slow down. Spending time on something other than my own thoughts felt really good.

“I need a shower”, he replied, “there is only one working in the men’s, and someone was using it.”

“You can use the staff shower if you like?” I offered. “It hardly ever gets used.”

“Er, ok”. Craig seemed a bit unsure. I had worked at the gym for a long time, and I didn’t think anyone would mind if I let a regular use the staff shower when there was one out of order. It wasn’t something that needed management sign off.

“I’ll show you where it is,” I said, getting up from the table and moving towards the gym. The staff changing room and shower was directly opposite the men’s and women’s changing rooms. It didn’t have a sign on the door, just a keypad lock on a latch. There was a cupboard containing all of the cleaning equipment in front of you as you entered, but round to the left was a changing room laid out pretty much the same as the men’s and women’s. There was a bench in the middle with some hooks above it, and another bench against the far wall. On the far side of the room was an open shower area, with two showers on the wall on the right-hand side. I picked up a towel from the worktop on the left where the basin and mirrors were.

“Here you go” I said as I passed Craig a towel. “You can use one of these. Just put it in the basket afterwards.” I nodded to a laundry basket next to the basin counter. Craig took the towel from me and put his bag down on the bench.

“Thank you”, he said. “Should I meet you back in the coffee shop?”

“It’s my turn”, I replied.

“To what?” he responded, looking confused.

“Watch,” I smiled. I was enjoying myself and wanted to see how he would react. This was definitely flirting, and even though it was probably going to make things awkward for me, it felt good and I wanted to know how much he fancied me. I needed more of the confidence drug. A moments silence passed. I smiled again and continued. “You watch me whilst I’m running, it’s only fair that I get to watch you as well.”

“You want to watch me get undressed?” He still seemed slightly confused, but he hadn’t moved.

“And shower,” I added. I hoped my smile would make this seem more like flirting than blackmail. He looked down at the floor for a second, and then looked to the door as if in thought.

“What if someone comes in?” He asked.

“They won’t. It’s only staff who have the code and the only two staff in the gym today are busy with clients. Besides which, neither of them has ever used the staff changing, they always leave in their gym kit.”

As Craig took his t-shirt off it struck me that this wasn’t really flirting. I mean, it was, but there were definite consequences. Flirting was probably less definitive. His only options were to strip or leave. I suppose he could have carried on talking, and then left, but ultimately leaving was still one of the only two outcomes available. I think I’d expected him to tell me he had a girlfriend, or to say that he wasn’t comfortable here. I expected him to make any

kind of excuse and I was fully expecting to head back to the coffee shop and wait for him. What I wasn't expecting was for him to do exactly as I'd asked.

He was half naked now. He looked good. He was still a bit pumped up from his workout I suspected, because he had more of a movie star physique than I had expected. The lighting in the changing room was bright from above, cutting shadows into the areas of his body that enhanced the definition of his muscular frame. I liked it. He looked at me before sliding his tracksuit bottoms down and over his feet. He pulled his socks off as he removed his pants and stood in front of me in only his boxers. It felt so good to be in such a position of control. As I stood there, fully clothed, I knew that he desired me. He was prepared to put himself in such a vulnerable position in front of me. This was more than him just being physically naked, he was exposed in so many ways, and I was not. He paused for a second, before quickly removing his boxers and walking into the shower.

I watched for a few moments as he turned on the water and waited for it to run warm. His back was to me for a while giving me a chance to study the curve of his bottom for a few seconds. When he turned back to look at me, I smiled and turned to leave. "I'll see you in the café," I said as I headed for the door.

I was gazing out of the window again when Craig came back. He asked if I wanted anything and then went to the counter to order. My racing thoughts had completely stopped now. I had managed to pull myself out of the trap of my own head. I couldn't believe what I'd done, but it was fun. I had felt very in control. I wasn't nervous at all about what I was going to say to Craig, which surprised me. I felt complete calm. Whatever I did or said was up to me, no one else had any influence. It seemed liberating not to care about what was going on in someone else's head. I was doing exactly what I wanted, and he could like it or lump it.

He sat down with his coffee, stirred it, and looked up at me. He was nervous. That made me feel even better. "Good shower?" I asked with a smile.

"Very, thank you," he responded and some of the tension seemed to be removed from him.

"What are you doing with the rest of the day?" I continued.

"I've got to do some work at some point", he said as if it was the last thing he wanted to do or even think about. "I'll probably put it off for a while by tidying up at home and watching some awful daytime TV. Then I'll do a couple of hours after lunch. I'm out with some friends this evening."

"Are you going anywhere special?" I asked.

"Just for a few drinks, nothing out of the ordinary."

"What is your job?" I realised I didn't really know anything about him really. It's amazing how you can say hello to someone for years, and make small talk about your surroundings, but not actually find out anything about them. I'm sure some people's entire friendship circles are made up of people they know nothing about. It's a very hassle-free way of engaging with people.

"I'm an accountant", he responded. "I work for a small firm, it's almost like working for myself. It means I can work from home a lot. As long as my customers are happy I can pretty much do what I like."

"Is it boring?" I wanted to know. Everyone thinks accountants are boring.

"Not really. It's interesting to see how people's businesses work, or don't work. I get to be involved in some pretty good projects, but without the pressures that come with being in business. I just do the numbers, I don't make that much difference to whether anyone succeeds or fails. That's down to the management and sales teams I suppose".

"Doesn't that ever seem a bit peripheral?" I pushed. "Don't you ever feel the need to be creative?"

“Not really,” he seemed genuinely not bothered. “As long as I can pay my bills and sleep at night I don’t worry. I’ve seen enough people so stressed out by business that I know it’s not for me. I’m happy with what I do. What about you? Does working at the gym get your creative juices flowing?”

I smiled. That was a very fair question. It seemed that we were actually developing a conversation that was interesting to me. What had happened hadn’t made things awkward between us. “It’s a stop gap job that I can’t seem to move on from.” I told him, my face scrunching slightly to demonstrate my displeasure. “I’d love to work in events, being creative and interacting with loads of interesting people, but I can’t seem to get a foothold.”

“You don’t seem like the type”, Craig said with a slightly confused look on his face. I think he could see from the reaction in my face that he may be on the verge of offending me, so he quickly continued, “you seem very quiet, I mean.”

“I wasn’t quiet when I was telling you to strip for me just now!” I stated in order to defend myself.

“Very true,” he nodded. “That was a surprise. Is that the real you?”

“I don’t know,” I dropped my guard and answered honestly. “Maybe I am quiet, maybe that’s why I am stuck working here.” The conversation seemed to be turning back towards the thoughts that had plagued me earlier. This was more productive than my initial wild, spiraling thoughts however. It seemed like I was able to articulate myself, maybe because I was having to explain things to someone else.

“Do you have a girlfriend?” I changed the subject anyway. I’d done enough thinking for now.

He hesitated slightly and then replied, “Sort of. We’ve been together for a couple of months. It’s going ok.” He definitely would have said no if I had been single. I could see the thoughts going through his mind. He wanted to keep his options open but didn’t want to seem desperate. He was talking in a very non-comital way about his girlfriend in order to seem available somehow. The conversation was becoming interesting again.

“Do you think she would mind you showering in front of me?” I flirted again.

“If she found out,” he nodded. “I don’t suspect she’ll ever know though, so she’ll never have the chance to mind. I wouldn’t want to hurt her.”

“Have you ever cheated on her?” I questioned.

“Maybe a snog here and there, but nothing more” he seemed to be speaking honestly. “We haven’t been together long.”

“Does that imply if you were together for longer you probably would?” I wanted to know. Men were very interesting when it came to this kind of thing.

“Maybe.” He nodded again. “It depends on the circumstance.” It was clear that he was thinking about the opportunity he might have to cheat with me. It looked like a difficult balance for him to strike. Trying to be a nice guy, at the same time as trying to make sure I knew he would happily jump into bed with me given the chance. He wasn’t doing a bad job of it.

“I have to go”. I picked up my bag. “Thanks for the chat, it’s been nice to get to know you a bit more.”

“Have a good afternoon”. He looked a little bit shocked that I had ended the conversation so abruptly. I had stood up and begun the automatic ritual of straightening out my top after standing. “It’s your turn to strip for me next time”, his face softened, and he smiled as he said it.

“Maybe” I replied, smiling back. “Enjoy your night out”. I touched him on the shoulder as I made my way past him and out towards the reception. I hadn’t wanted to keep going down the route the conversation was taking me. I knew that he was attracted to me, I knew that I was in control of what happened next, so I decided to put it on pause. I didn’t know

what, if anything, I wanted to happen next, so I left it. I could pick the conversation up again if ever I wanted to or take him up on his suggestion and strip for him I suppose.

I decided to go back home again. My mind had cleared so much, and I needed to apologise to Paul. I had been very unfair. During the walk home, I decided that I was going to apologise for being so confrontational, and I was definitely going to apologise for asking him if he was having an affair. I didn't even know why I'd said that. I was probably just trying to create a sub conscious excuse for my anger. Maybe I had needed a tangible reason for being so wound up. I bet the poor bloke didn't know what had hit him. Beyond apologising I needed to tell him that I was going to change things. I was probably going to let him know that I needed to do some more thinking before we discussed it in more detail.

## Chapter Three

When I got home, Paul wasn't in the office. I went into the kitchen, but he wasn't there either. I shouted his name up the stairs, there was no response. I went to the kitchen to pour a glass of water. I was wondering if he had gone out, but where would he have gone? I felt terrible. He had probably been feeling awful because of what had happened earlier and was trying to avoid me. As I sipped the water, I heard the TV playing, I followed the noise to the front room. Paul was on the sofa watching sport of some kind. He had a beer in his hand which was very unusual. It was lunchtime. He took his work really seriously, and he wasn't a daytime drinker. "Sorry", I said as I entered the room.

"What for?" Paul didn't move, or even look round. That wasn't very gracious, I thought.

"For accusing you of having an affair."

"You're accusing me now? I thought you were just asking." He was angry, it was going to be difficult to avoid an argument.

"I didn't mean it", I said. "I was confused and upset, and I wasn't thinking straight. Sorry."

He softened visibly, looked round at me and said "It's ok. Do you want a beer?"

"It's a bit early. Don't you have things to do?"

Paul ignored the question. It seemed that there were more important things on his mind. He sat forward in his seat. "We've been together for eight years Soph, how can we end up having the conversation we had this morning?" He was really upset, I could see in the depth of his concentration and the sound of his voice that he'd been really knocked. He was just staring ahead whilst he spoke, he looked like he was trying to piece things together. "All of a sudden you seemed not to trust me, and we seemed like two strangers arguing, not me and you," he continued. "How did that happen? Where did it come from?"

This must have been so out of the blue for him. Why was it possible to see it from his point of view in hindsight, but never in the moment, let alone in advance? "Let's start again," I proposed. "I'll explain myself better I promise. Let's just start at the beginning and keep communicating until it's all ok." He looked at me and nodded. I felt like that was the most grown up thing I'd ever said. I felt a flush of pride. I also wondered if I'd actually be able to do it.

"I was hurt when you said our sex was boring", I started. "It made me feel distant from you I suppose, and I probably felt undesired, and old, and all sorts of things."

"That's awful," he looked even more hurt than he had before. "I hate the thought that I made you feel like that. You're the most beautiful woman in the world, I tell you that all the time, don't I? I never want you to feel like that."

He does say those things, damn him. "Why is our sex boring then?"

"It's not. Stop saying that." I could sense anger creeping into his voice. "You can't just hear what you want to hear so that feeling bad seems acceptable. I said our routine is boring, I distinctly remember saying that our sex was great."

He did say that, god this was annoying. There should be a rule against remembering stuff. If I move on quickly enough perhaps, I won't have to admit that maybe a lot of this was entirely in my head. "What is boring about our routine then?" That ought to do it.

"We've been doing the same thing for months, maybe even years." His frustration was clear. "Our relationship is like a 1950's cartoon. We don't have kids, we can do whatever we want, yet we seem to have found a rut, a routine, where we go to work, come home, have dinner and go to bed tired. If we're not careful another eight years will go past in the blink of an eye."

"What do you want to do that's different?"

“I don’t want to do anything massively different. I love my job, and I love you. I just want things to be a bit more adventurous I suppose. I want to visit interesting places, meet interesting people, and, the reason for this conversation in the first place, have interesting and fun sex”.

“I want all of those things as well. What’s the problem?”

“The problem is that we don’t seem to do those things very often. Not together.” There was a pause. “I don’t mean the sex thing is done with anyone else,” he clarified and looked a bit panicked. He moved on quickly before I could pick him up on it. “I mean, I travel with work, and I meet interesting people through work, but you and I don’t do those things together, for fun.”

I was perched on the arm of the chair nearest the door, and I sat quietly for a moment, thinking about what he had said. On the face of it, it was true on. I racked my brains to think of a different way of seeing things. I couldn’t. I was aware that the silence was gaining momentum. I decided to pass this straight back and buy some time. “Why don’t we?” It seemed like an obvious question.

“I don’t know. Why does it happen to anyone?” He shrugged. “A relationship slipping into the predictable and stale is a pretty well-worn path isn’t it? We’re not the first Soph.”

“But it shouldn’t happen to us”, I could feel myself getting upset and it showed in the wobble in my voice. “We have never been that couple, we are great.”

“I bet everyone says that as well. You’re right though, we are great. Don’t worry, we can fix it. Don’t be upset”. He had picked up on the shake in my voice. “It’s probably a mixture of familiarity, and our age, and a lack of communication.”

That made sense and made me feel a bit better in some way. “What should we do about it?” I knew that the confident new me would sort this out, but that would take some time, I just needed to understand the now and make sure the next few days would be ok. Then, once I’d got things sorted, I would make everything ok.

“What do you want from the world Soph?” He looked straight at me now. “What do you want from your life? What do you want to experience?”

“I don’t know. The normal stuff.” I didn’t really want to go into it now. I needed to do more thinking before talking it through.

“There is no normal stuff Soph. Some people want to spend all of their time surfing and sky diving. Some people want to have children and devote themselves to that. Some people want to be rich. Some people want to save the whales. There are a million ways to go, and I don’t know what you want. I’m not sure you do.”

“Maybe I don’t.” I thought out loud. “What do you want?” Asking questions had worked so far, I wasn’t going to walk away from that strategy now.

“I want to create a beautiful and meaningful building. Just one. I want the work I’ve done over the past years, together with the work I’m doing now and, in the future, to culminate in something that I can be proud of. I’ve worked and learnt and absorbed, and I feel like I could develop my skills to the point where I could create something of value. I hope that I can put all of my collective growth and development into one building that will change the world in some small way, or at least change a few people’s lives. It might sound very self-important, or naive maybe, but it’s what I am aiming for in my career. Outside of that I want to spend time with you. I want us to be in love forever. I want to retire young and travel with you. I want to grow old and for us to drink wine together. That’s about it.”

He looked down at his beer as he finished talking. “That’s lovely,” was all I could think of to say. I want those things too. Not the building, or the growing old bit if I’m honest, but definitely the travelling and drinking wine.” I smiled at him.

“So, what do you want from your life in the short term? What does Sophie’s ideal next five years look like?” He paused and smiled at me. “You don’t have to try and come up with

an answer Soph, it's not something that you have to know tonight. I just think that unless you know what you want, you won't get it. Then you might end up with regrets, and I don't want that for you. When you know what you want, I will help you get it. I'd love to see you happy."

"Don't you think I'm happy?" I was concerned by the thought.

"Not happy like I think you could be. I don't think this morning came from a happy place! I don't think you've been happy at all this morning."

I looked down at my hands. He was right I suppose. This morning's inner turmoil had been horrible, and on top of that I felt really guilty about the Craig thing which was making my insides churn. I didn't say anything, I just sat, thinking.

Paul interrupted the silence. "I think you're fairly happy Soph. I just think there are areas where you probably want more. I know you're not happy that your career isn't taking off. I don't know if it's the career you really want, otherwise you'd probably be doing more to get somewhere with it. I know, because you raised it this morning, that you aren't happy with our love life."

"I'm not sure about the career", I responded. It seemed like the easier of the two issues that were on the table. "I need to think about that a bit. I know I don't want children, I haven't changed my mind about that, but I'm not sure I'm really a career woman either."

"You don't have to be one or the other!"

"What else could I be?" What other options were there?

"You could take up a hobby that really mattered to you, you could climb mount Everest. I don't know what it is Soph, but there has to be something that excites you in the world. You must have aspirations beyond what you do each day at the moment? It seems sometimes that you're a passenger in our relationship. I know that sounds terrible, and I don't mean it to. What I mean is that I don't want to take over and dominate our relationship. I don't want it to be all about what I want. I've always wanted a real partnership, you know that. Fifty fifty on everything. You need to bring something to us, a dream, or a goal. I don't want to feel alone or like I'm controlling you."

"You don't try and control me. I know that. I will think about it. What you say does make sense. I will need some time."

"There is plenty of time. No rush."

"I do want us to have sex more. I know that. I think about sex quite a lot, I think I'm quite a sexual person."

"Why don't you express that?" Paul asked.

"I do." I thought I did. "I ask if we can have sex quite a bit. You reject me."

"I don't think asking for sex counts as being sexually expressive. I meant more why don't you communicate what you want? You've always been quick to say what you don't want, but you've never really said what you do want. Is it the same as what you want from life, have you just not given it much thought, or is it that you want things, but aren't telling me?"

I pondered the question. "Probably a bit of both," I said after a few seconds of silence. "I suppose I don't have much experience."

"Do you watch porn, when I'm away I mean?"

I was surprised by his question. Buy some time Sophie, I thought. "What do you mean?" That'll have to do to stall a response.

"You just said you are a sexual person. When I'm not here what do you fantasise about? Do you watch porn?" He repeated the question. I hadn't really made any use of the time I'd bought, but at least the shock of the turn in the conversation had worn off slightly. This was brand new for us, we'd never even acknowledged that porn existed before. We'd never

acknowledged that we found other people attractive, even celebrities, we just didn't talk about sex in any way.

"No." I replied honestly. There was a silence which followed, a silence that I didn't know how to break. Changing the subject didn't seem to be an option at this point.

"What do you fantasise about then?" he continued. I liked it more when I was asking the questions. I felt prudish and shy and uncomfortable. This wasn't the new me at all.

"Don't worry", he seemed to read my mind. "Just say whatever you want. There is no right or wrong answer."

"Do you watch porn?" I'm going to get back to the asking questions approach.

"Of course," he answered with ease. "All men like porn. Men are visual, and I'm no different. It's probably why I'm an architect. I like the form of things, buildings, trees, landscapes. I love to see the form of an attractive naked woman. You know I love seeing your body."

"What about the sex?" I questioned. "Porn stars have sex, or do you just watch women on their own?"

"Watching attractive women having sex is great. I suppose the fantasy of porn is to see someone beautiful enjoying sex and being sexual. I haven't put too much thought to the why, but all men like porn, trust me. You avoided my question, what do you fantasise about?"

He seemed more at ease talking about this than I felt. His relaxed state was making me feel more confident about saying things. Maybe there was no wrong answer. "All sorts". I answered honestly without saying anything. I could see some frustration in his face, so I went on, "I think about you." I expected that was what he wanted to hear.

"Are you telling me you don't have any fantasies?" he pushed looking a little incredulous. "If you think about me, what exactly do you think about?"

"I like the feeling of being desired", I said. "I fantasise that you want me so much you rip my clothes off, as if we were strangers and you wanted to see my body for the first time."

"What else?" He pushed.

I felt a bit liberated by what I'd said. It was true, and it was something that I fantasised about. Sometimes it wasn't Paul though, sometimes it was a stranger and they really were seeing my body for the first time.

"Sometimes it's a stranger who desires me." I said. "Sometimes two or three men who all want me to be naked. The fantasy is almost always about them desiring me and lusting after me." I couldn't believe the words were coming out of my mouth. How would he react to that? Maybe he'd not expected something quite so outrageous. Was I a pervert?

"That seems pretty normal" he responded thoughtfully. "Everyone wants to be desired. I want to see you take your jeans off right now."

His face was serious. I felt a shiver of excitement at the thought of fulfilling the request. I stood up and moved into the middle of the room in front of where he sat. I unbuttoned my jeans and slid them down, flicking off my slip-on trainers as my jeans reached my ankles. "There you go", I acknowledged his request with open hands and a push of my hips to the right as I stood in front of him.

"Come here", he said with a smile. He undid his belt and unzipped his trousers as I moved towards him. I put one knee either side of him on the sofa and leant forward to kiss him as he pulled his trousers down around his thighs. As we kissed, he pulled my knickers aside. He was desperate to be inside me, I could feel it in his movements and his kiss. Normally he would want to see my tits, he loves my tits, but he needed me so much that he left my hoody zipped up. I felt desired and horny, it was good to be on top of him and be able to give him what he wanted. I reached back, moved his cock into position and slowly sat down onto him. I gasped with pleasure as he immediately began thrusting into me. Now he unzipped up my top and grabbed at my tits through my vest as he continued to fuck me. I

joined in with the motion and moved up and down on top of him, faster and harder. In only a few moments he gasped in pleasure and thrust deep into me as he orgasmed. His hands moved from my tits and pulled my hips down onto him as he shuddered to a stop underneath me. I leant forward on him, breathing heavily, grabbing his hair and kissing him.

I hadn't orgasmed, but I didn't care. I felt exactly what I wanted to feel, desired. He couldn't have stopped himself from orgasming even if he'd tried.

"That was fun" I breathed as I leant back a bit.

"It was," he was breathless as well. It was a long time since we'd had a daytime shag.

I climbed off him and nipped to the downstairs loo. I went back in, put my jeans on and sat down on the chair. He was still sat in the same place. He'd pulled his trousers back up, but not fastened his belt.

"Is that what you had in mind?" he asked.

"That was great," I answered. "We should do that more."

"It doesn't just happen Soph. We only had sex just now because we were talking about it and you were honest with me. You seemed sexual and interesting. I don't often see you like that. I like it."

"How do we do that more then?"

"Keep communicating Soph. Tell me what you like and don't like. Tell me about your fantasies. Don't worry about being judged, just be open and honest. Why don't you watch some porn whilst I'm away and see if it gives you some ideas?"

"Ok. I'll see how I feel." I nodded. It couldn't hurt I suppose. "What do you want?" I asked. This wasn't an attempt to avoid answering questions anymore, I genuinely wanted to know.

"I like the thought of sex outdoors" he said. "Maybe in the forest."

"That sounds pretty uncomfortable!" I spoke my thoughts.

"Typical." He seemed mildly narked by my response. "Women dream of Christopher Grey to turning up, to take complete control and shove a pineapple up their arse but won't have sex outdoors with their husbands because it's not comfortable. You're all impossible."

## Chapter 4

The day was dragging at the gym. I had been half-heartedly working through a teach yourself German App on my phone. It was a token gesture, trying to convince myself that I was developing my skills and preparing to launch my international career in events management. "I'm fluent in German and I have a working knowledge of all major European languages," I heard myself saying in a day dreamed world. Judging by the time it was taking this parrot to teach me colours and numbers, fluent German was a little way off. The Germans love porn, don't they? Is that just something the British say, or is it true? It had been two days since Paul and I had spoken. I felt so much better in some ways. I thought initially that it was the sex that had relaxed me, but I was starting to think that maybe it was the open conversation that had freed my mind a bit. Being able to talk openly about sex and porn and fantasies was very liberating. It was only a five-minute conversation, but it felt somehow very powerful to me. I suppose it had allowed me to feel less isolated in my head and much closer to Paul. You have to be in a strong relationship to talk about such things, don't you? Is talking about sex avoided by most couples? I knew one thing for sure, a new confident me was definitely the way to go. I was going to address things head on from now on.

I hadn't watched any porn yet. I had always thought porn was just for men. I wanted to have more conversations like that with Paul, that was for sure, but I wouldn't have a clue about how to start one. There had been a pattern in my life over the past few years which, if followed, would now involve me going into my own head until someone, namely Paul, brought me out of it again. Was I prepared to wait for another few months until another conversation happened to me? I decided no. Even though the thought of just closing up and waiting for the world to come to me was a very comfortable and tempting option, I was going to grab a hold of my life. By watching some porn I'd be able to tell Paul I'd done it, and that would definitely set off another open and intimate conversation. It felt good to have a plan. My plan. I was going to make this happen, maybe.

I picked up my phone. It was a warm sunny day outside, the gym was dead. I hadn't seen anyone in the reception area for at least fifteen minutes. If I could sneak ten minutes for my German speaking parrot, I'm sure I could glance at some porn without getting caught.

Porn, I typed into Google. Then I deleted it straight away. Google will know forever that I've been looking at porn, I thought. When I'm the Prime minister my internet history will be trawled through and I'll be exposed as a pervert. I put the phone back down on the desk. I looked up at the ceiling and tried to give myself a reality check. In the past Paul had tried to help me with indecision and worry by suggesting I look at myself through someone else's eyes. I tried to look at what I was doing now, as if someone else was doing it. I could then judge that imaginary person, and therefore figure out how I would be judged if I did it myself. "She's never going to be Prime minister" was my first thought. A public figure of any kind? No. She doesn't even want to be. If she was a public figure and I found out she'd looked at porn on her phone would I care? No, not in the slightest. I don't imagine anyone would. A flush of bravery swept through me and I typed porn back into Google and pressed enter.

A list of websites came up and I clicked on the second one. Not the first link, I thought. The first link will probably be too commercial. Not the fifth or sixth link, they'll probably be some sleazy back alley websites trying to get my credit card details. No, the second link in the list is the one for me. The site opened up and showed a series of pictures, with a little caption under each picture describing the porn. I felt a flutter of excitement as I looked over the naked bodies on my screen. What should I look at, do I just click on the top one? The first one was a picture of an Arab woman in a headscarf being fondled from behind with the

caption, "Arab women rounded up". I decided to move on. The picture looked awful, the opposite of sexy to me, and the premise seemed very odd indeed. There were young looking girls in several of the images, called "petite teens" and such like. I didn't like the look of that either. I wasn't a petite teen, and I didn't want a man that wanted a petite teen. That didn't interest me in the slightest. "Step mom is horny," why is this all so perverted? Here we go, "big titted Brit with casting agent", that looks interesting. I'm British and have big tits, this could be the porn for me. The image was of a pretty, blonde woman. She had her hair tied up and was sat on a couch wearing a pink blouse and black skirt with tights. She looked like she was going for a job interview. Had I just picked the first picture where no one was naked? Was I a prude? Oh well, I had to start somewhere, there is no point in rushing things. I clicked on the picture and the flutter of excitement that was bubbling within me flickered a little more. The scene opened up with the image that had advertised the clip. The woman was on the couch and there were subtitles on the bottom of the screen. I'd turned the volume right down on the phone, I didn't think that the sound was going to be too important, or appropriate in the gym reception. The subtitles were mostly someone off camera, I assume a man, asking the woman if she had ever thought about doing porn. She had apparently thought about it but never made the leap into actually doing it. The subtitles told her that she had made a good decision to come to a reputable company, and after a bit more chat she was asked if she would strip for the camera. The woman seemed keen to agree and smiled at the person behind the camera. She then got up and started to unbutton her blouse. The subtitles complimented her on her figure as she undid the buttons all of the way down and removed the blouse revealing a white bra. She flung her top onto the sofa behind her and moved towards the camera slightly. She was very sexual, her movements were deliberate, but graceful. She seemed so confident in revealing her body, like she was completely sure that everyone wanted to see her naked. Not a trace of doubt. I think that's what made her seem sexy. She slipped the straps of her bra down off her shoulders one by one and then turned around so that her back was to the camera. She looked back over her shoulder with a provocative glance as she unhooked her bra. There was no smiling now. I think this is where those odd words like smoldering and sultry are applied to women, mostly by men I thought. The woman's confidence was captivating. She tilted forward slightly as the bra fell into her hands and she threw it carelessly onto the sofa where the blouse lay. She looked back over her shoulder again and now there was a smile. A smile that said, I know you want me to turn around. She was swaying slightly, not dancing but moving subtly all of the time. She did turn around after a few seconds with her arm across her chest covering her tits. She smiled again, as if to say look, I've turned around, but you still can't see what you want to see. She was just showing just a little bit more of herself. The curve of her tits under her arm, and flesh pushed up above her arm and hand. She did have big boobs, I was intrigued to see what they looked like. Bloody hell, she'd even got me enthralled, I can't imagine how a man would feel to see this. She swayed more and moved ever so slightly closer to the camera as she took her arm away. Her tits fell into a natural position and looked magnificent. She was not thin, but not fat at all. Curvy and beautiful. Voluptuous, another one of those odd words which seemed to fit here. She lifted her hands to touch the back of her hair, exposing herself further. She then leant forward and moved from side to side so that her tits rocked gently in front of the camera. She smiled again as she straightened up, a knowing smile, knowing that her audience had got some of what they wanted from her. She turned around, facing away from the camera again and bent forward a few degrees, with a slightly arched back. The arch in her back made her bum almost point at the camera. She looked back over her shoulder once more and started to ease her skirt down over her hips. Inch by inch, one side then the other she slipped the material down so that the top of her knickers exposed a thong diving away into the curve of her arse cheeks under the skirt. Then, in one slow movement she bent forward from the waist

and slid her skirt down to her ankles revealing black stockings that ended half way up her thighs. Whilst looking back at the camera she caressed her legs and arse. After a few moments she stood up to reveal the curve of her bum framed by her knickers. The cheeks of her arse forming perfect curves over the top of each thigh. It was beautiful. The knowing smile was back. She knew that revealing the curves of her arse was as desired by her audience as the reveal of the curves of her breasts. She was now just wearing her knickers, stockings and a pair of heels and she turned around and presented her arms to the camera as if to say, there you go. She sat down, crossed her legs and put her arm across her chest again. It was as if she'd shown what she wanted to show, and now it was going away again. Complete control. Maybe she was building the audience up for another tease. I hadn't really been paying much attention to the subtleties, which had occasionally been popping up at the bottom of the screen as the woman had stripped. Now that she was sat down and covered up I concentrated on them a bit more. "Let's see if you're feeling horny", the subtitles said. At this point a man came into view from the chest down. The camera had been static throughout the performance, obviously on a tripod or something. The camera position was now moved slightly to a lower angle to focus on the couch where the woman sat. The subtitles had turned into a person. He stood to the left hand side of the woman who was still sat down. She looked up at him as he stood parallel to the couch and the camera. He undid his belt and dropped his trousers to the floor. He then immediately pulled his boxer shorts down, careful not to get his head into the camera shot. "Who was he?" I thought. He was probably married. He was very erect, almost bursting. The woman smiled the knowing smile again, understanding that her tease had produced the arousal that was now on display in front of her. She slid forward on the couch and stood up. Her top third of her disappeared from view as the camera shot remained focused on the couch. She had her arms up on the man's chest and I guessed they were kissing as a few seconds passed. Her hand then moved down over his chest and stomach and found its way onto his cock. You could see his legs buckle just slightly at the pleasure of being touched. The woman's knees bent, and she came back into view as she squatted down in front of the man. She stroked him gently and looked up at him. The well-rehearsed smile was there in force as she knew the man wanted her to take him in her mouth. She knew the audience were desperate to see it. She glanced at the camera before moving her head forward and plunging his cock softly between her lips.

"Sophie", I heard a voice above me. "Do you have a moment". Fuck, fuck, fuck. James, the shift manager, was standing at the reception desk. "Can you come with me? Terry will cover the desk."

Had he seen me? Was this going to be the most awkward conversation of my entire life. I put my phone in my pocket, I didn't want Terry picking that up and having a look whilst I was away. I stood up to follow as James walked towards the manager's office which was opposite reception at the front of the building.

He smiled as he sat down, and my heart beat eased slightly at the sight of the warmth in his face. I felt the heat in my own as I blushed uncontrollably. "Are you ok?" he asked. "You look concerned".

Concerned didn't even begin to cover it. "I was just wondering why you needed to see me?"

"Nothing to worry about", he smiled again. "I just wanted to quickly catch up with you to see if you can take on any more shifts? We've had one of the students go back to university, and rather than recruiting someone new I wanted to see if the current staff would take the extra hours."

He hadn't seen my phone. Thank God. If he had seen, then he was playing it amazingly well. I was so relieved. I was barely listening to anything he said, I was just so pleased to have avoided embarrassment, disciplinary procedures, the sack! I was happy, genuinely

happy at the luck I'd had. I told him that I'd need to speak to Paul about the extra shifts and made my escape. There was only ten minutes left on my shift and Terry said he'd hang on at reception until cover arrived if I wanted to get away. I smiled and grabbed the opportunity, glad to be out of the door and on my way home. Terry was a sort of caretaker at the gym, cleaning, tidying and occasionally fixing things. An older guy, always with a smile and a kind word. What he lacked in ambition he seemed to make up for in a calm, quiet, easy-going demeanor. He sometimes helped on reception, and today I was pleased to take up the offer of an early departure.

Thoughts of the porn clip came back to me as I walked home. I'd love to have the power over people that she had. I'm sure it would be ten times more intense for a man. I'm not gay, so it would probably be a hundred times more erotic. Imagine that power.

Paul was going to be in London for a couple more days, so when I got home, I had the place to myself. I poured a glass of white wine from an open bottle in the fridge and stood by the island in the kitchen with my phone. I opened the internet and resumed watching the video where I left off. The woman had moved from a squatting position onto her knees and proceeded to expertly suck the man for a few minutes, sometimes using her hands, sometimes just with her mouth. She appeared to be enjoying it. In what seemed to be a pretty short time for a porn star the man withdrew from her mouth and started to wank himself. She straightened up on her knees which brought her tits into line with his cock just in time for them to be completely covered with spunk. Although I wasn't as aroused by this as I had been by the rest of the video, it did strike me as a massive turn on that she was able to command such a reaction from the man. Within minutes of her alluring strip tease he was literally bursting at the site of her. I wanted to be able to do that.

I took my wine upstairs to the bedroom. I had a bit of a search through a couple of drawers and soon found a little flexible tripod that had been a freebee at an event that Paul had taken me to. I didn't know if it was for a phone or a camera, but as luck would have it the clamp held my phone pretty well, after I'd worked out how to tighten it. I wrapped the little metal legs of the stand around the handle of the wardrobe and stood back. I could see myself in the mirror on the front of the wardrobe, and the phone would film what I saw just to the right in the mirror. Perfect. I stepped back and pondered getting changed into something sexy, but the thought quickly disappeared. I didn't have anything particularly sexy, nice underwear was about as provocative as it got, and this wasn't for anyone else to see so it wasn't worth it. This was to see if I could do it. A test to see if I could have the power and control that the woman in the porn video possessed. I opened the camera on the phone and started to record. As I stepped back, I tried to mimic exactly the strip I'd seen earlier. I had trousers on instead of a skirt, but other than that I could do the same things that the woman had done. I glanced at myself a few times in the mirror as I went but couldn't see myself as much as I'd imagined when concentrating on undressing. Once I'd stripped to my knickers I went over to the phone and stopped the recording. I unclamped the legs from the wardrobe, sat on the bed and watched the results. It was good and bad news. The good thing was that my body looked lovely. I genuinely wouldn't change much, and it gave me a boost to think that I had a body that people would want to see. However, the strip was not sexy. I was wooden and clumsy. My face almost expressionless, demonstrating my obvious concentration. I didn't seem to have the allure and confidence of the woman in the clip. I looked foolish. I stopped watching pretty quickly, threw on some comfortable clothes that were lying on the bedroom floor from the night before, and went downstairs to get more wine. If I wasn't going to give up on the idea straight away, then this was going to need some serious practice.

Even though my strip was disappointing, I realised I was feeling very much more confident. Maybe it was the wine, but I felt liberated by my freedom of thought and the

desires that it seemed to be driving. I felt great. I thought of Paul, and suspected he'd probably be quite proud of me. I put the wine down on the counter and took my phone out of my pocket. I pulled up my t-shirt, and as I held the material up with one hand, I took a selfie with the other. I opened the image to see the result. My confidence rose even more as I saw myself. You could only see my arm and my tits, but it was a provocative image, and I loved how my body looked. The soft light from the kitchen, reflecting slightly from the brushed steel of the fridge beside me, made my tits look lovely. You could see my chin, but nothing that would show that it was me. I know it was only for Paul, but I wasn't confident enough to be sending naughty pictures with my face in them. I messaged it to him with a few kisses and a shocked emoji.

As I went up to bed a message came through from Paul. He was delighted with my picture and was so complimentary about my body. He asked for more. The thought of more taking more pictures sent a little shiver of excitement through me. I messaged back and told him I was going to bed but promised him more soon. As I lay in bed, I checked my other messages and set my alarm. My mind drifted back to stripping, and I wondered where people would go to post the kind of photos I'd taken online? I searched for "boobs selfies", I wasn't sure what else to write. A lot of the sites that came up seemed to be porn sites, I assumed that they would come up first on any search relating to sex of any kind. There was site called "Rate my boobs" which looked different, so I clicked on it. It was a pretty amateurish website, with thumbnails of even more amateurish photos. The pictures were of women, of all ages, and all shapes and sizes. Under each picture was a score out of ten. I clicked on one of the first images I saw of a blond woman with lovely tits, stood next to a balcony. The picture opened up to a larger size, with the caption underneath saying, "I want some attention". Below that was a rating out of ten. I assumed that the rating was voted for by blokes who'd been browsing through the site, giving a score out of ten for the boobs on display. She had received an 8.3, which I thought was harsh, although I suppose it was an average and she might not be everyone's cup of tea. At the bottom of the page were comments from men, and they adored her. Most of them just had a variation of "great tits", or "I'd love to fuck you", which, although unimaginative must have been good for her ego. Some of them were a bit more detailed, describing what they liked about her, "perfect nipples on nice natural full tits", wrote one guy. Almost as if he was critiquing a dish on a cooking show. Many men were asking if they could cum over her tits, and equally as many were sending her their e-mail addresses and asking her for more pics. She had replied to some of them, sometimes giving her e-mail address to them, sometimes telling them that she was available but expensive. She seemed to be in complete control. There were hundreds of comments.

I had a look through a few more profiles and found myself hooked on reading the comments. It was fascinating to see what men thought, and how they would try to stand out from the crowd to somehow elicit contact from the girl. One guy had cut and pasted the same comment into all of the profiles I saw, "You look amazing, I love your tits. Can you send more to me at..." and then he gave his e-mail address. The guys were desperate for these girls to interact with them. Did they believe anything would ever come of it? Did anything ever come of it? I opened my selfie again and looked for anything that might give it away as me. There was nothing in the background, no jewelry, no t-shirt logo visible. I gave myself a quick reality check. What are the chances of someone I know seeing this and taking the effort to work out it's me? Zero. There are women from all over the world on here. No one came to this site for any reason other than looking at tits. I decided to create an account. I called myself "Natural Boobs", which, judging from the comments seemed to be the most important thing to the rating public. I couldn't think of anything more inspiring than "Do you want to see more?" for my strap line. It would do. I decided the words weren't very important. I

uploaded my photo and clicked create, a message came up thanking me, letting me know that my photo would be verified and posted within a few days. I felt another little rush of excitement as I put the phone down and switched off the light.

## Chapter 5

I had taken the extra shifts at the gym without speaking to Paul about it, he wasn't due back for a few days and I didn't think it would matter much to him. It was a Friday, and I was in for a long late shift covering the afternoon and evening. The evenings were always busy, which made things more interesting. The busy periods encouraged time to move faster for me. The afternoons however were slow and boring. I'd been in for a couple of hours and it had just got to the slowest part of the day. It crossed my mind to watch some more porn, but the memory of my near miss last time soon removed those thoughts. I had watched a few more clips over the past couple of days. Most of them were odd, or boring, but a couple of them had turned me on. Wednesday had been a pretty intensely erotic day, although it had been interrupted with periods of the opposite of erotic, whatever that is. The argument with Paul, and the incident with Craig, followed by an evening of strip practice. It had been quite a roller coaster. Yesterday evening at home, I had found a clip that I really liked, and I pleased myself to an incredibly intense orgasm whilst watching it. It featured a beautiful girl who was sunbathing by a pool. Nearby there were two black men, supposedly from a basketball team I think, it was set in America. They got talking to the girl, and within a very short space of time they'd gone from flirting with her, to fucking her. In the pool, all around the pool and in the pool house. It seemed almost racist in its conception, but beyond that the sex was amazing to watch. Such beautiful actors. It was a fantasy similar to one that I'd had before, but this one seemed to play it out in a very erotic and sexy way. The girl got exactly what she wanted from the experience, but at the same time she was truly an object of desire and pleasure. I'm not sure I could tell Paul about that one.

In the absence of porn, I was learning how to introduce family members in German when Craig arrived at the gym. My heart sank unexpectedly when I saw him. Not because I didn't want to see him, I just feared for any awkwardness that there might be between us.

"Hello" he said, cheerily. "You look good."

That wasn't awkward at all, I was relieved and felt immediately relaxed. "Thank you, why aren't you at work?"

"I'm working from home today, some really boring reports, so I thought I'd break the day up with a work out."

"That sounds like a good idea" I smiled. I passed him a towel.

"They have towels in the special shower, I won't need that." He seemed to almost wink as he said it, but not quite. It was a suggestive smile rather than a wink, but the meaning was the same.

"You owe me a strip". He lowered his voice as he spoke and quickly looked over his shoulder to make sure we were alone as he said it.

I laughed. "Go and work out, don't get distracted."

He laughed as well, "see you in a bit" he tagged himself through the gate and disappeared into the gym.

For the next few minutes my mind was racing. Was he serious? Did I want to strip for him? What was I going to do? I quickly calmed myself down. This is the new confident me, I'll do exactly as I please.

I had expected to have a bit more time to think, but Craig returned from the gym much earlier than I expected. He had cut his work out quite short. Was that because of me I wondered?

"That was quick," I smiled.

"I'm not feeling it today," he made his excuse. "I had other things on my mind."

"Your boring reports?" I asked, genuinely.

“No, the shower I’m about to have”, he replied.

My stomach fluttered. I hadn’t thought it through properly, no decision had been made. Judging by Wednesday nights practice performances I wasn’t ready to strip for anyone, I wasn’t even close. “You can use the shower”, I smiled. That wasn’t committing to anything. I got up and moved out from behind reception to open the door for him.

We always got cover for the reception if there was someone around. Break times were usually covered by a manager or the caretaker. In the afternoons we used a sign saying back in ten minutes, which we put on the counter if we needed to nip away. I liked it because no one knew when the ten minutes started. Unless you were unlucky this could almost always give you fifteen- or twenty-minutes break without being caught out by a manager. I reached for the sign and placed it where it would be seen by anyone coming through the door. It could probably do my job for about seventy percent of my day I thought as I led Craig over towards the staff changing rooms. Without thinking too much I followed him inside and pulled the door shut behind me. I made sure the latch had caught behind us, meaning only staff who knew the code could come in. It might only be a bit of flirting I thought, but as the possibilities crossed my mind there was a slight thrill that ran through me at the thought of being caught in here with a customer. Perhaps that’s something I should put some thought to. Maybe I’m an exhibitionist.

“Let’s see it then” Craig said eagerly.

“Not so fast” I said calmly. “You start your shower.”

“That wasn’t the deal”, he looked disappointed.

“There is no deal.” I smiled. “No promises have been made. If you play your cards right you might get lucky, I’ll see how I feel.” This was going to be entirely on my terms. He wanted to see my body, his desire was almost tangible. I became aware in that moment that I held absolutely all of the cards. My confidence improved at the realisation, I could almost feel myself standing taller and relaxing into the moment.

He started to take his gym kit off without complaint. He didn’t seem as nervous as the last time. He was almost racing to get his clothes off in the thought that as soon as he’d finished, I might get started with my strip. He stood naked before me with an expectant look on his face. His body was tight from the exercise he’d just done, and he was starting to get an erection. I hadn’t really focused on his cock last time, it all seemed a bit of a blur, but this time things were clearer, and I looked. I liked what I saw. “Start your shower” I repeated. He moved into the shower area and turned on the water. He waited at the side for the water to warm up before getting underneath. His cock was bigger than I remembered. He was already significantly aroused, and more relaxed than last time. He was an impressive figure as he stood under the water and ran his hands through his short hair. He looked at me again, not sure of what to do or what was going to happen next. I leant against the wall of the shower entrance and pondered my next move.

“I think you should touch yourself,” I suggested.

“What?” Was the surprised response.

“You heard me.” I smiled. “I want to see you wank. If you turn me on I might give you something to look at.”

He didn’t move, he was rinsing himself under the water to get rid of any sweat from the gym, but he didn’t acknowledge the request. I slipped my hand under the back of my vest top and he lifted his head to watch. I unhooked my bra and brought one of my arms inside the top so that I could slip out of the bra and pull it out of the other side of the vest. It was a white bra, a little bit lacy, but it could not be called sexy lingerie. Not in any way. It was a bit of a tight fit, but I managed to squeeze it into the back pocket of my jeans. My tits flared my top and I leant back against the wall. I had done enough to arouse Craig and let him know he had a chance of seeing more. He was fully erect and began to touch himself slowly whilst his eyes

were focused on my tits pushing against the ribbed material of my white vest. It was exciting to watch. He was really turned on by me and I was fully clothed. The feeling of power increased, and my confidence grew with it. I felt sexy. I didn't even need to strip, and I had this guy gripped. His wanking got faster and I the fluttering in my stomach increased as I saw him become more urgent.

"Show me" he requested. I stepped towards him.

"Show me your tits", he pleaded. This was a real turn on. I could see how excited he was getting. I was only about half a meter outside of the shower area. I pulled my top up with one hand and covered my boobs with the other. His eyes were on stalks.

"Will you touch me" he asked.

"No, I want to see you do it." I smiled.

"Can I cum on your tits?" His arousal had caused him to lose his inhibitions and he was being very open about what he wanted. It really highlighted how much I was turning him on. It felt amazing.

"No, I have to go back to work". I stepped slightly closer, just out of reach of the water, and moved my arm away from my chest. "You can touch me if you're gentle."

He seemed now to be in a state of near ecstasy as he reached out and grabbed at my tits with his free left hand. Drops of water ran over my chest and nipples as he groped me. I gasped with pleasure at the feeling of being touched with such urgency. Within a few seconds he orgasmed, still holding my tits. I watched as spunk leapt from him and he gasped with pleasure. As his wanking came to a stop, he looked up at me. He let go of my chest and I looked down at my wet boobs.

"How was that?" I asked.

"You have amazing tits," he said, ignoring the question. Any tits are amazing when they're naked in front of you I thought. Men change completely the moment they orgasm. It's so odd to watch. All of the sexual feelings, aggression, desire, just seem to flood out of them along with their semen.

"Enjoy the rest of your shower," I suggested as I turned and moved out of the shower enclosure. I walked towards the counter and saw myself in the mirror, tits exposed and glistening with water droplets. I felt really horny. I picked up a towel, dried myself off quickly and put my bra back on. After a quick rearrange of my vest I tucked myself in and walked back out into reception with as calm a look on my face as I could muster.

It was quite a while before Craig emerged from the changing rooms. He looked a bit sheepish as he moved over towards the reception.

"Refreshed?" I wanted to take away any uncomfortable feelings from him. I'd enjoyed his show.

"I am, thanks." He nodded. "Back to the grindstone I suppose."

"It could be worse, you could be stuck in here" I offered.

"At least I'd be able to look at you all day."

I blushed a little. "You're kind. See you soon?" I said with a smile.

"You will. Have a good afternoon." He said as he turned and walked towards the door.

I sighed, not with relief, just with a release of the tension of the experience I suppose. It was unexpected, but such good fun. I felt sexy, and alive. I was definitely going to practice my stripping, I wanted to feel like this more.

I spent the rest of the shift thinking. It was easy to get lost in thought when there was no one around. I began to realise a few things about myself. I really wanted to enjoy more sexually experiences and become sexier and more confident as a result. I felt like one would follow the other. No one is automatically good at anything. Practice and experience are what leads to success in anything, why would sex be the only exception? I wanted to become the real me, and the real me would definitely be confident and sexy. I thought through the

realities of what that entailed. Being happily married meant that I couldn't just act single in order to widen experience. It would make a mockery of my marriage, and people would judge me. They would then judge Paul as well, at the same time as feeling sorry for him I suspected. It was obvious that any fun that I was going to have should be completely outside of my normal life. I promised myself two things. Firstly, I would tell Paul about everything that I wanted to do and experience, if he didn't like it, I wouldn't do it. Secondly, I would never let anybody who knew me and Paul know about my adventures. That meant no more flirting with people at the gym. I had felt all along that Craig was a mistake, but these thoughts clarified why. Craig probably thought that my marriage wasn't in a good place, and that upset me. It simply wasn't true. If I wanted to experiment and liberate my sexuality, I had to be confident enough to meet new people. I was not going to give the wrong impression of myself and my marriage to people who knew me.

I also had another, quite sobering thought. Being free to experiment sexually would mean Paul would have the same freedoms, that was only fair. I couldn't on one hand separate sex from love, but on the other tell him that he had to be faithful. I thought it through as if it was him wanting to experiment and I was being asked if it was ok to try new things. I put myself in that position and worked it through as honestly as I could. How would I feel? How would I react? How would it change my view of him? I was sure I could be happy with it, as long as he was honest with me. A lie would be devastating, just as it always is when someone cheats, but I think even worse in that situation, because there would be no reason at all to lie.

It was good to see it from another point of view. As usual it made things very clear. Therefore, I had my rules. Number one, we couldn't flirt with or experiment with anyone either of us knew, or that there was a reasonable chance that we might bump into in our normal lives. Second, it was just sex. No relationships, no double lives, just sex for fun. Thirdly, and most importantly, condoms are compulsory. I wasn't going to have my wonderful life and marriage damaged by a sexually transmitted infection. No amount of sexual experimentation and fulfilment was worth contracting HIV.

My thoughts drifted on as the afternoon whiled away. I wondered about how I had got myself into the place that had made me so upset, just a few days ago. It was clear that my communication skills, or lack of them, had led to the difficulties in my life. If I had been open and talked to Paul, I could have avoided all of the fights and fireworks going off in my head.

All my life my first instinct had always been to shy away from confrontation. Even if confrontation wasn't necessary, I think I always feared it, and therefore treated situations as if it was going to happen. This would lead me to defend against something that wasn't necessarily coming. My standard response was to go quiet to avoid a fight. I would then stew over the situation, and the injustice. My silence made sure I had no chance of getting my point across or getting what I wanted. My silence in essence made sure that I wasn't going to be happy. I would then bristle because I felt ignored and would want to face it, to make my point, to get what I wanted. By the time I had made myself angry enough I would explode into confrontation. It must have been very confusing from the outside. I was outwardly having one side of an argument that I'd only ever had in my head. My plan moving forward was to talk openly, remove the anger, and make the best choices for my life. I knew this would take some work and I wanted Paul to know that I was trying. I was sure that if he knew the problem I was having, he might be able to react less to my angry outbursts. It was a lot to ask, for someone not to defend when they are attacked, but if anyone could then Paul would be that person.

## Chapter 6

When Paul arrived home from work, I jumped on him almost before he was through the door. It was late in the evening. I'd got home slightly earlier and had been watching TV with a glass of wine whilst waiting for him. I dragged him into the kitchen, he dropped his bags as I kissed him and loosened his tie. Whilst he unbuttoned his shirt, I lifted the loose tie over his head and put it over mine. I lifted my white vest top to expose my tits, his tie falling between them. He was wide eyed as he threw off his shirt and grabbed my tits and kissed me. Pushing against me I could feel his excitement through his suit trousers. I turned around and pulled my shorts down around my thighs as I leant forward. I didn't want to wait, I wanted to be fucked right there, over the breakfast bar. It was intense and frantic. Paul fucked me harder than normal, slapping into me as I leant further forward and held the counter top. It was exhilarating, my tits brushed against the cold granite as I rocked forward each time Paul pushed into me. I was in extasy. The buildup of sexual tension through the last few days was releasing from me and I orgasmed in less than a minute. That speed of orgasm hardly ever happened to me, it felt incredible. Paul was going faster and harder as I relaxed, I looked back over my shoulder and smiled.

"I want you to cum on my tits", I requested. He didn't say anything, he pushed into me a couple more times, making me groan as he did, and then he pulled out. I turned around and dropped onto my knees in front of him. I kept my legs straight so that I was sat quite high up and my tits were at the right height for him. I held his thighs tightly in my hands as he grabbed his cock and exploded all over my chest. I loved seeing how turned on he was. Cum pooled on my tits and ran down over me and dripped onto my thighs. I leant back and looked down at my disheveled state. It was so exciting.

"That was unexpected", he breathed heavily. He seemed surprised by what had happened.

"Didn't you enjoy it?" I asked, already knowing the answer.

"Oh God yes," he replied. "I just didn't expect it."

I had stood up and leant back against the counter. I picked up my phone and smiled. I stretched out my arm, leant my head to one side, smiled and took a picture of my tits still covered in cum. I put the phone down and went to get the kitchen roll to clean up.

"Did you just take a picture?" Paul asked, confused.

"I did. I watched some porn whilst you were away. I think it made me a bit frisky. How was your trip?"

"I've completely forgotten all about it now, but it was fine thanks. What porn did you watch? Did you find things that you like?"

"I'll tell you about it shortly. Get changed and come down. There is some dinner in the fridge."

Paul was back downstairs in less than ten minutes, eating the same salad that I'd had a little earlier.

"I loved your picture. How come you didn't send more?" He asked.

"I suppose the right time to take some didn't arise. I picked up a selfie stick from Argos yesterday though, it'll make it a lot easier than trying to stretch my arms out. I put that picture of my tits on a website, do you want to see?"

"Wow!" Paul exclaimed. "What website? What has made you decide to be so adventurous?"

"I've been thinking a lot. It stemmed from our conversation the other day, and I've explored a lot of things in my head. I suppose it probably feels a bit out of the blue to you,

but I get so much time to think at the gym, I've really looked at my life over the past couple of days.

I opened the link to the rating site on my phone and passed it to Paul. He looked at it and gave a nod. "It's a good picture".

"Did you read the comments?" I asked.

He was silent for a few seconds as he scrolled down. "These guys really like your tits!" He carried on reading. "Is that why you asked me to cum on you? That seems to be what seventy percent of these guys want to do."

"It did turn me on reading them, it is a huge confidence boost to hear things like that written about you. They can only see my tits after all."

"They can see enough to be sure that you're beautiful and that you have a lovely body," Paul observed. "Will you post more?"

"I hadn't thought about it," I lied. "Probably at some point if you're happy with it?" I corrected the needless lie straight away.

"If it makes you as confident and sexy as this you should be doing it every day." Paul smiled.

I took the phone back and got up from the breakfast bar to top up our wine glasses. As I moved to sit back down, I decided to push on with the conversation. This was going well, and I was more relaxed than I had been in what felt like years. If I wasn't going to talk openly now, I probably never would.

"Whilst I was thinking, a few things occurred to me. General things I mean. Not specific to me, or to us."

"Go on." Said Paul, he was genuinely interested.

"People cheat all of the time. It's a standard thing in relationships. Everywhere you look it's there. In Films and TV show story lines, in books, in conversations with friends. It seems to be so...what's the word?" I paused for a second as I tried to think. I knew there was a word that was exactly what I wanted to say, but I just couldn't get to it.

"Pervasive?" Suggested Paul.

"That's not the one I was thinking of, but it works. The cheating is always with someone close by, usually someone at work. People seem to become tangled with the people close to them in order to try to achieve sexual fulfilment." My thoughts turned to Craig and why I'd done what I'd done. I think I'd made sense of it, and I wanted to see if I was right. "The trouble is that this gets confused with everything else that connects the two people, all other aspects of their relationship, and it very quickly isn't about sex anymore."

"I'd say that's undeniable," said Paul thoughtfully. "I can't imagine anyone being able to argue with that appraisal of western society. Where did those thoughts take you?"

"Well, it made me think about relationships. People always pretend that they don't fancy anyone else. It's the first lie. It's never articulated directly, but by the absence of admitting it, a lie is told. People would talk about finding someone attractive to almost anyone else close to them, and yet never to the person they're supposed to be closest to. Subconsciously everyone knows it's a lie, therefore lying becomes subconsciously accepted. It makes all the other lies easier, to protect someone. Does that make sense?"

"It does." Paul responded immediately. "I've never really thought about it in those terms, but everything you've said is true, and very interesting. It explains a lot."

I became more confident as Paul agreed with me. I hadn't been sure it would make sense out loud. I carried on. "The trouble is it always ends up in betrayal and divorce. Being a couple that stays together is rare these days. It's not the norm. I don't want us to go down that usual route. I don't want us to lie."

"I think that's brilliant," smiled Paul. "Who knew you were a philosopher? Ok, how does that affect us?"

“I’ll try and explain. Say you met a super beautiful porn star that you recognised in a pub, and she wanted to fuck you. Would you want to?”

“Er, yes, but..”

“No buts, that’s the honesty I’m talking about. You would want to fuck her. You’d be mad not to. However, because of me you would choose not to?”

“Correct.” Paul gave a definite nod, as if to demonstrate an exaggerated agreement that might not be true. It made me smile. I carried on.

“Choosing not to doesn’t mean you’d not want to. Still with me?”

“I see what you’re saying.” He nodded slightly, seeming to indicate that I should carry on.

“You see people that you would like to see undressed, and of course I do too. From time to time we will both fantasise about them, touching them and being touched. It might be someone in a magazine, or on the TV, or in the street. None of that means we want to spend any time with them. None of that means we don’t love each other. It is just how people are. The truth.”

“Ok. I understand. What does that mean though? Why are we talking about it? I mean, it’s interesting, and I can see what you’re saying. I just don’t know if it means anything practically. For us?”

“You asked me to be honest and tell you about my fantasies. I’ve been thinking about it a lot and I want to do that, but I needed to let you know that I’ve worked this out first. I’ve understood that whatever I tell you is just about sex, it doesn’t undermine or affect anything else about our relationship. I love you, and I can love you without constantly trying to protect you from the fact that I am sexual, and I have fantasies.”

“Ok, I understand.” He paused and relaxed. “I completely agree. You can speak openly about anything. We might never fulfil a fantasy, but at least if we communicate about it, we will understand each other better, and it’s already proved to be fun. There might be a fantasy that we would both enjoy, and if we don’t have the conversation we’ll never know. How daft would that be? In protecting each other we’d actually be depriving each other of something.”

I smiled. “Exactly. I looked up common female fantasies online. I found a top ten list from a magazine or something, do you want to go through them with me and see if there are any you like?”

“That sounds brilliant, I’ll get us some more wine.”

We moved from the kitchen to the sofa and I opened the list which I’d been careful to bookmark on my phone. I sat with my legs half crossed so I could face Paul and began to read.

“Ok, number ten. Drum roll please. Sex with a stranger.”

“You’ve already said you like the thought of that,” said Paul. “No surprise that it’s in the list. It seems like an easy one to fulfil.”

“At first glance it does, but it’s one of the things that got me thinking. In an imagination everything would go perfectly, the stranger would be handsome, gentle, an amazing lover. However, in reality, if you don’t know anything about them, and you’re not incredibly confident, it’s probably quite unlikely to work out. It made me think about the reason’s women go for someone at work. Someone they know, someone who they know they’ll be safe with. It might not be a fantasy, but it’s so much less likely to go wrong.”

“You’re probably right,” said Paul. “You think people would rather go for a vanilla relationship with someone they know rather than try and achieve a real fantasy. However exciting success in a real fantasy might be, a bad experience could be awful. Worse still dangerous. It’s not as straight forward as it sounds. What’s number nine?”

“Group sex. It’s a bit vague this one, it just says sex with groups of people. I’m not sure where you’d find them?” I was puzzled. Paul looked a bit puzzled as well, so I decided to press on.

“Number eight is domination.” I paused as I read. “I think it’s more about getting exactly what you want rather than any kind of kinky stuff. Being in control and giving the orders. That sounds like fun.”

“That depends what the orders are,” joked Paul. “That’s something we could do though.”

“Number seven is exhibitionism. I think I’m one of those. Putting that picture online really turned me on.”

“Is that what it means?” Paul asked.

“It seems to cover a few things” I replied. “Mostly being in porn pics or videos, but it mentions having sex in front of people as well.”

“What do you think?” Paul tried to gauge my interest.

“I’ll think about it. I definitely want to take some more naughty pictures. I think I’d enjoy that.”

“That’s an easy one then, we can tick that one off the list. At least we’ll do one out of ten.” He smiled.

“At least.” I smiled back. “Being dominated is at number six. I suppose that’s just the reverse of number eight.” I looked up and Paul nodded, so I carried on. “Number five is having sex with a woman.”

“Has that ever crossed your mind?” Paul asked.

“I don’t think so, but because I haven’t thought about it, I don’t really know. Let’s leave that one for a bit.” I moved on quickly. “Number four is being paid for sex”. A little shiver went through my spine as I read it. “That has an appeal because it’s a taboo I think!”

“An appeal to you?” questioned Paul.

“Maybe”, I answered honestly without thinking. “Maybe not sex, but perhaps getting paid for pictures or a video or something?”

“You don’t want to have stuff like that on the web Soph, that can always come back and haunt you.”

“Of course not, I didn’t mean just become a porn star. But getting paid for a few photos without my face in would feel good. Being desired enough that someone would pay. A couple of the guys who commented on my picture said they’d pay for more. That’s what made me think about it.”

“Fair enough, let’s think about it then,” Paul agreed.

“Number three is having a threesome with two men.”

“I don’t know about that one,” said Paul looking uncomfortable for the first time. “Is that a fantasy of yours?”

“Not specifically. I suppose it’s about being desired, having two people want you would be fun. Two people pleasuring you would be good as well. Would you like to sleep with two women?”

“It depends who they were. I think that might be a bit like the stranger fantasy, good in the imagination, but unless it was thought through carefully it could be rubbish in real life.”

“What if one of them was me?” I teased.

“That would be great, but I didn’t think you liked girls.”

“I said I’d put some thought to it. I’ll think about that one as well. Anyway, it was a threesome with two men that was on the list, I’ll think about that whilst I’m doing my thinking.” I really liked the idea of a threesome with two straight men focused on me. The thought of having a cock in my mouth and inside me at the same time was something I often fantasised about. I would tell Paul at some point, but not right now. After all, he didn’t need to be involved if he didn’t like it.

“Number two is fucking a man with a strap on!”

“That is out of the question,” stated Paul with a worried look on his face.

“No problem,” I laughed. “I have absolutely no desire to do that. I can’t believe it’s on the list.”

“And the winner is, rape fantasy? That’s shocking.”

“That is shocking, but it does say fantasy,” Paul noted. “It’s not actual rape.”

Something in my feminist core didn’t like it, but Paul was right, a fantasy was different to actual rape. “It should say role play then, not fantasy.”

“You’re probably right,” Paul agreed. “Let’s leave that one shall we”. He smiled.

“Yes, good plan. Well that was interesting. Which is your favourite?” I asked.

“They’re fantasies for women,” he replied. “I’m not supposed to pick.”

That was a good point. I had forgotten the confident new me for a second there.

Remembering my promise to myself I felt brave and decided to take the bull by the horns.

“Can I pick three to try?” I looked up at him.

“That depends on which ones.” Paul looked a little bit shocked by my request.

I pushed on. “Ok, I’d like to try number seven, by being in pictures or a movie, not necessarily to share with anyone.” Paul looked ok with that, but I carried on before he had a chance to speak. “Then number six. I’d like you to order me to do whatever you want.” This didn’t seem to fit with my new power and confidence, but I wanted to do something really involving Paul. It felt like if I was making the choice to be dominated then it was in my control and I still had power. It would be good to see what he would make me do. I’d find out a lot about him and what he liked.

“Ok, we can try that for sure,” Paul was still a bit hesitant I could tell.

“Excellent. Finally, erm....I think I’d like to try being with two men, but I’m not sure I’m brave enough. How about having sex with a stranger instead? To see if I can do it.” I had expected to wait longer than a few minutes to ask, but I felt good. I waited to see Paul’s response.

“I suppose we can think about it,” he said, still hesitant. I’d want to make sure you were safe.”

“It might not be something I want to do once I’ve thought about it more,” I suggested.

“Let’s leave that one until last and see how we feel.”

“Deal.” Paul seemed happy with the option to delay thinking about it until another time. I put the phone down and looked up at him.

“I’ve missed you these past few days. Why don’t we have some time away together somewhere. Even if it’s just a long weekend. Do you fancy getting away with me? We could have a sexy weekend, maybe even have sex outdoors. What do you think?”

“I think that’s a great idea. Where are you thinking?” He relaxed a bit and smiled.

“It depends how long you can get off work. We don’t want to spend too much of our time travelling.” I had excited fluttering in my stomach at the thought of a sexy trip.

“I think a long weekend is a good idea, I can do that pretty much at any time. Should we go somewhere hot?” Paul suggested.

“That sounds perfect. Sun, sea and sex. How about Spain? Cheap and cheerful!”

“Ideal. Let’s have a look for something.”

We sat with the laptop on the couch and spent an hour or so looking at package trips that we liked the look of. There was a reduced weekend package in a fortnights time which looked really good. It must have been a sale to try and fill the hotel, as it was a lot better value than many of the others. Big rooms, five-star rating, a pool, it looked lovely. We booked it and my stomach fluttered for about the hundredth time that week. Fluttering in my stomach hadn’t happened for so long that I think my body was making up for lost time. I thought I had grown too old for it.

## What happens next?

Sophie is going to take full advantage of her new-found confidence and freedom to express herself. Do you want to find out what happens on her trip to Spain? Are you interested to see how she incorporates her new-found sexuality into her life and career? How far will she push her experimentation? Will sex with a stranger satisfy her? Will she meet a girl she's attracted to? Will she be brave enough to fuck two people at once? You can contribute for part 2 at <http://www.kickstarter.com> and ensure the adventures of Sophie Valentine are realised as soon as possible.

The quicker I reach my target the sooner I can focus full time on writing. If I over achieve on my target, I'll be able to move straight on to the next book. Thanks for reading, and thanks for supporting me. Danielle x

## About the Author

My name is Danielle Aimie, I am 33 years old or I have lived 12,114 on planet earth at the time of writing this. It has always been my dream to be a writer and one I intend on realising before my next birthday, which is incidentally only 303 days away! I was born in France as the only child to Mollie and Patrice Aimie. My mother is English and my father French. Not long after I was born my parents decided to move back to England to give me a British education. I was educated at a very basic and rough comprehensive school in Ealing central London, a far cry from the French roots my father had been used to during his life. He found it very difficult to fit into London in the 80's as a poor French man with his family.

It was not long before my father left and moved back to France, leaving my mother as a single parent to raise me on her own.

We lived in a high rise flat in Ealing and as a child I was given a lot of freedom as my mother had three jobs. When my friends had to be back home for their dinner, I had no curfew, but often no dinner either. It made me quite a resourceful child! From an early age was mixing with lots of older children on the estate and possibly grew up quicker than I should have. It was here I learnt about the powers of being a girl, and what boys wanted. I saw many of my friends getting into drugs or getting pregnant. None of these appealed to me, I just wanted to go to school, write, learn as much as possible and travel. I was fascinated in my power as a girl and where this could get you, often when the men around me strutted round like they owned the place, I just smiled knowingly.

My mother died of a drug overdose when I was 16 just after I left school. It did not come as a total shock as I think I knew what she wasn't around that much as a child, I just didn't want to think about it too much. She at least had the grace to wait until I was 16 so I managed to avoid the care system. Given my upbringing I didn't believe in knights in shining armour, the only knights I knew about were pimps or drug dealers. My life was my own and I intended to live it.

I got my GCSE's without much effort and went on college whilst working on the local market café part time. Here I learned to write, and my creative freedom started to be explored.

I had an English lecture Mr Thornton, who was the first person to acknowledge that my writing was an alternative feminist perspective on sex. He gave me the confidence to apply to University where I gained a place to study English Language. My dream to become a writer started here. However, with no family support and working full time as a secretary and part time in a bar just to pay my rent, I seldom have the time to commit the what is required to write. This is where I am hoping that Kickstarter will be able to assist me. I have written the first 5 chapters of my first novel "Sophie Valentine" it is a modern-day feminist view on sex and erotic behaviors, but I need 6000 euros to buy me three months off work to complete the writing, get it edited and get published. Have a read of the first 5 chapters, see what you think, if you are interested in hearing what happens next, then pledge just three euros on [kickstarter](#). If I attain my 5000 euro goal, I get to complete the book and you get a copy of the full version before anyone else. (RRP 5.99 euros). Hopefully someday soon you will be able to say that you were involved in getting that author started.



## Connect with Danielle Aimie

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