
DRUGS FOR ELLEN by
**PAULINA BORSOOK**

In every society, there are a few drugs that are sanctioned (in our own, it's historically been alcohol, caffeine, and tobacco) --- and the rest that are shunned. And so it is, I think, with how you are to give up your virginity. In some places with guys it's supposed to be with prostitutes and with women to their bridegrooms on their wedding night; in others, sexplay has been a part of childhood, and holding out for someone, anyone would seem as barbarous as the in-effect month-long gangbang carried out by new husbands with their friends, a tableau vivant traditionally enacted with newly-acquired wives on certain Micronesian islands.

So in our own, it's supposed to be that you first go to bed with your long-time boyfriend, preferably the captain of the football team (though in my case, the putative candidate sent me his lacrosse and soccer medals in the mail --- and as desperately painfully ardently entangled as we were, i could not give into him to that final degree). Or the man you married (he came much, much later). Or the experience is supposed to be a painful disaster. Or comic. Or causing of pregnancy. Unsatisfying awkward embarrassing; a giving into impulse; a being coerced by a horny teenager or seduced by an older man; a Virginia Reel with the guy you spotted in your freshman dorm. Your brother's

roommate, your partner from the debate team, someone you met while youth-hosteling around Europe. A TA. A professor. A heavy in the Movement.

You're supposed to be able to laugh about it, or recount it with sentimentality, fit it into acceptable kinds of reminiscence. If it was about love, you are supposed to be able to discuss your long courtship before, how your relationship turned out after. If it was not, you are supposed to be able to speak of it now with rue.

But the champion of my first time was all wrong, by the rules of engagement of the playgroup I travel in. He was the wrong kind of drug, and as such I seldom mention him -- - just as it's fine to be a recovering anything, and have a 12-step program to back it up -- - but it's not fine to simply chew on your tail, and thrash around, and shake your head and shiver a bit when asked about your demons, to say "it's complicated..."

I have gone for years without thinking about him, maybe because I know of no sanctioned mode of discourse for talking about him. Maybe the time has come to talk about him because -stupidly, dimly- I realize maybe the crazy logic of my love life did indeed begin with him: a long line of wildly inappropriate guys, where -I- chose -them-, the sex was celestial, the linkage was mystical --- and it could not last. It's not that he made me; it's that he was my morning star. Weird to think of him so many burned-out cases later, and how the unconscious is a wonderful thing, and locks on to the patterns it's programmed to recognize.

In speciation, there's the notion of lock-and-key sexuality: the genitalia of one insect species will simply not fit properly with that of another. Each lock works with only one key, none other

will do. And so it does seem to be with the enzyme and substrate --- not, necessarily, of who I've gone to bed with --- but with that lesser group of those I've made love with. There is some neuronal tangle of fit, a torture of pheromones and perhaps electrical impulses, things of the amphibian brain that I do not understand, any more than I understand why I generally like sleek animals such as Borzois but make exceptions for horses with noble chests and thick stocky necks such as Percherons and generally don't like the color yellow except for in certain flowers and how to me, bananas smell like death tastes. Past life, intra-uterine conditioning, alien transmissions: I don't understand where this pattern language comes from, can only record that it exists.

So I had been holding out for him: boy-crazy sex-fiend that seems to be my genetic endowment phenotypically expressing itself even before puberty, I hadn't known what I was waiting for. I had loved before him, thrown myself into a guy's arms with total alacrity, had moments so enmeshed and so bittersweet with crazed adolescent longings that I couldn't really understand, much less meet --- that even now, my teeth hurt to think on it. The music of then can still bring tears to my eyes. But a technical virgin I remained, though my heart had been broken, as objective a metric as you could ask for of how serious my intent had been.

As for he with whom I could finally do the do, I met him on the street, when traveling with a schoolfriend, in the hippie part of the foreign city where she and I were larking around. In the instant of glancing over at him, I was stunned. He was simply sitting against a wall; physically modest and quietly appealing, 5'9" if that. If you had to pick an icon of that moment, think Steven Stills crossed with Charles Manson. The Stills douceur with the Manson charisma --- but no menace. I like my outlaws to

be beautiful losers, not thugs.

He smiled, cocked his head to signal me to come sit by him --- and I did, I did, I immediately nestled in the crook of his arm. And for the first time in my life, I felt safe. At home. At ease. Released from the existential burden of having been thrust into world.

I can't remember what words we used; I don't believe there was much to say. But we walked and talked, and the friend I was traveling with serenaded us (because she so felt the rightness of it; she died only a few years later in a car crash. There are no witnesses now), and I went back to find him the next day. More of the same: joy and calm at being by his side. Serenity and the exuberance of life. I can't remember much, except for the lightness of being. And surprisingly, a kind of chasteness --- nothing beyond kissing on street corners.

I knew he was the one. When I returned to the place of captivity where I was growing up, everyone --- mother, friends, the boyfriend I acquired later on that summer (a fine figure: former cat burglar, former Jesuit in training, at that moment an ethologist in training; rock and roll drummer, Free Clinic volunteer; reader of William Burroughs, Thomas Pynchon, R.D. Laing, and Richard Farina; fucker of faculty wives) --- all commented that I seemed in possession of a secret, slightly elsewhere.

The one whose Zippo lighter I still have in a box somewhere was with me; my thoughts were always with him. When I went outside at night, I looked for Venus, the first star at night, for we had looked at her together.

And I couldn't make the leap for Archangel Michael, the elegant dreamboat with the platinum hair, the guy straight out of "Magister Ludi". My own Saint Augustine of the coathanger shoulders. Long fingers, smooth rap, glory and conflicts and all.

So I chose to go after the one I was supposed to be with, running away from home to find him. When through relying on that slave's-underground of the late 60s, and the pulling of my waif act (random guys wanted to help), I was lead to him (remember, it was an era of crashpads and no email), I sat with him and grinned as he held my hand in the living room/kitchen of the commune where he hung around. One of the flat-mates serenaded us on his Gibson guitar (he, too, would die not so many years later, of Lou Gehrig's disease), singing that Dylan love song covered by The Band and Joan Baez, the one about coming home to your baby, with the refrain 'down in the easy chair'. It was a cinematic moment, as Hollywood doesn't know how to make any more.

And we went to bed, and it was what I had wanted my entire life. We fit and there was no fear/no pain, telepathic and just right: it was what I had always been meant to be doing, something at last that gave easy access to the unconscious, that urge for transcendent loss of self I knew I'd always had, but that no one I knew in my every day life would have believed, given how many books I read. I had found my place in the middle of the world, the circumstance where self-consciousness and irony fled, the thing that was closest to my core, most grounding, most elemental, a release from the prisonhouse of words and clumsiness. Without knowing beforehand that I had done so, I had chosen the man who would deliver me unto my True Self --- I had picked rightly.

It turns out he had slept with hundreds of women, yet I did rank with those he loved; obviously he had a genius for loving, for now, looking back after so many others to compare with, he still counts as Being Correct. Present. Expressive. Communicative. Responsive. Knowing who he was with, and why he was there.

It was the 60s, there was no AIDS, no herpes. Anything we caught (in those days it was the delightfully old-fashionedly name Venereal Diseases, not STDs. More sanitization of the messiness of sex...) could be cured. Not that I came away with anything more than memories.

I felt at one with the cosmos, in step with the rhythm of the universe, myself expanded and enlarged --- and I discovered that I only wanted more, infinitely more: not for the physiology of it, but for the psychic release. I knew I had chosen properly, for none of the guys I had messed around with before had somehow given me to feel - yes, I can do this. Yes, I find no resistance here. Yes, I can slip into this and under this man's skin and it's All Right.

Of course, to anyone outside it was utterly wrong. We slept together only once or twice more: he would fondly pat me on the knee and shake his head 'ah, I wish I had met you when I was younger' (remember he was 23), for he now only wanted to have sex to make babies --- and he already had something of a main squeeze, a gorgeous charismatic half-Chinese/half-Jewish woman, who I think had borne his child when he had been in jail for about a year for dealing speed. I met her a few days later.

It all seemed to figure to me: she was amazing, and I was 15, just coming into my own. It sounds infinitely squalid by today's

standards of safe sex and appropriateness.

But it wasn't.

I loved him, I knew he loved me --- whatever that meant to me, it meant to him, which is why I chose him --- there's a reason the Biblical term to have sex is 'to know'. And he knew me in intrapsychic strands and currents in which I needed to be known, which are about the preconscious and the intuitive, brain functions both higher and lower than what goes on in couples' counseling or gets listed in personal ads: never mind his sixth-grade education, the poor Maritime background, the loucheness. But then, streetfreaks weren't unseemly nor necessarily displaced from the mental healthcare system or choosing a lifestyle of criminality. It was simply other times, other mores --- that was in another country, and besides the wench, the bloke, is dead...

I may seldom think of him now because I have, for the most part, left being off being an adventurer. For in that time, what I cared for was finding the moments of perfection and moving on, confident there would be others. Settling down, hanging on, endurance over time: these made no sense, not when there were so much bliss to be had, other amazing encounters to happen on, for look at what I had found and made! And for that reason, I guess I have never filed him in the box of 'relationship failure' or 'why did I pick someone that things couldn't work with' or any of the other tropes I have come to harangue myself with, as pain of love lost/destroyed and the exhaustion of serial monogamy have overtaken me with age. He was fine for then, though from here, he looks to be the first of series, of selecting for the ecstatic over the practical, the self lost in the Divine over that which is sensible.

And as much as I do jabber on, and make all my guys confront the stuff they don't want to look at, with him there was none of what we used to call an Analysis (in the Marxist denotation): he was what I am always craving, the man where I don't have to explain, who brings out the girl, who expects her to be there, and gives her all the room she wants. All this within the confines of a bed. Talking has nothing to do with this.

So, John, this is for you. It's not been right that I have spoken of you so little for 20 years (it was starting about 20 years ago -- a little less than 10 years after we came together -- - that with the direction my life was heading, you wouldn't have been explicable to those who were beginning to colonize it), not allowed you to factor into my exhumations of psychosexual style, neurotic structure. You don't and you didn't fit into what is culturally allowable: I don't know that I ever got off so scot-free again for loving someone whom I couldn't really possess, for being compelled by a haunting sexual beauty I couldn't explain.

What you were, was something entirely -personal-, allied to how I have never have had the words to explain to most of my intimates what my gooey mushy woowoo side is about. But you understood it, instinctively: it was, I conjecture, all of me you were interested in. But that's like saying all you were interested in was my soul. What there was between us, made only sense to me --- but it did, through my ankles, up through my brows.

And after you, a kind of existential relativism slipped into my affairs: well, I thought, it can never be for those reasons of hermetic union ever again, so I might as well find some other, lesser, more profane and quotidian reasons to go to bed with

someone --- for go to bed, I must. To love again. And I did, and I have, and I would never diminish those sweet moments and true-heart bonds since. With other guys, it's been as much about telling our stories, and attempts at dailyness, and trying to find some way to reconcile the mundane and the sacred, the parts that don't fit with the parts that do. Alas, I could only have had intimations (like Jan Hus, and Wycliffe, of the Reformation to come), based on the boyfriends I'd had up until you and how it was with them and what I wanted from them (how soon can we jackknife into a safe place to make out?) and what I wasn't good at (being a friendly presentable girlfriend) that I would be far better at the communion of bed --- than I ever would be at what went on elsewhere: domestic partner. yokemate. wife.

So you were the first, for the kind of reason the heart knows and the head can't. And almost 30 years later, when only now do I have the distance from us to rip open the sutures and be fairly confident I won't bleed to death, you are serving the function that has become more than a little spooky: muse. Lost love opens up the writer's veins...

Wherever you are, if you still live, here's this.

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[BACK TO FRONT PAGE](#)