



ADVICE

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She had a certain fluid grace in the way she carried herself, something about her that set her apart from the others.

When I first laid eyes on her (and you must forgive me for how clichéd this is going to sound), it was ‘like being struck by a bolt of lightning’. I felt instantly insane. My synapses crackled with electrical signals, and confused, opposing feelings swept through me with the force of a storm. This was doubly shocking because I was no longer used to these conflicting feelings. I’d largely forgotten about them, relegated them to some darker, quieter part of my mind.

You see, over the past few years, my life had become crushingly and inexplicably dull. I had almost come to the point where I was convinced I was no longer capable of feeling anything. The possibility of meeting someone was something I'd all but forgotten. Although I let my mind wander into the realms of fantasy from time to time, allowing myself the luxury of thinking about something that would almost certainly never happen, I had largely resigned myself to the inevitable loneliness that comes with surrender, and had become strangely comfortable with this outlook. A grim prognosis, perhaps, but one which I could live with nonetheless.

I'd grown used to the cruel boredom of my day-to-day reality and clung to it like a child would cling to a filthy blanket, fearful of any external interference that might upset the mind-numbing equilibrium I'd created for myself. I'd come to feel that a woman would only make my life more complicated, (and ultimately to recognise that I was far too lazy to deal with any complications in my life at this time anyway). So that first time I saw her, I was more surprised than anybody by the ferocity of my reaction.

I don't really know what it was about her. She had this overall mystique, this power. Something hard to explain, to pin down; but if pressed, if I had to, I'd say it was her suckers, hands down. Yeah definitely, it would have to be her suckers, no contest. They were so smooth and shapely, so soft. Textbook suckers they were. The way

they glistened, so soft and moist! So perfectly rounded and perfectly formed. But coming a close second were her eyes. Like bottomless magic pools they were. Drawing you in, intoxicating you, never letting you look away for even a moment, almost fatal in a sense, the intensity of them, the emotion held within them. Her long and slender tentacles, the wonderful, intoxicating hue of dark purple, the way her flesh glistened in the sunlight when she was near to the surface of the water. The way she moved. So fluid! One moment she was right there next to you, fluttering her eyelids, and the next she would be ten or twenty feet away, dancing in the water; then suddenly she would appear behind you and teasingly poke you in the back with one of those lovely slippery tentacles. She was totally lovely. Trying to describe her like this just isn't doing her justice at all! As usual in these matters, there is always a fly in the ointment. With something as perfect as she was, there were all the attendant problems, namely, the other octopusses. They all fancied her too, God damn them!

She drove them all nuts. I don't know if it was just me, or whether all the others felt the same, but I swear she was giving me the come-on. You know, the green light. The way she'd flutter those rubbery eyelids at me, and then entwine her tentacles all around each other and dance for me, sometimes poking me with one of her delicious glittering protrusions. I was convinced I was getting some kind of special treatment, (I mean she did it with the others too, but I was convinced she was going one step further with me). As if she were trying to force something to happen, to force me to make

the first move or something. It kept bugging me. I couldn't think about anything else. Thinking about it took up nearly all of my time as I became more and more anxious about it.

Every time I saw her with one of the other octopusses it made me mad. I wouldn't know where to turn, where to look. It was as if she were trying to deliberately infuriate me, to make me jealous. My feelings toward her began to get mixed up and confused, and I no longer knew what to think. I was in this kind of permanently jealous rage, and every time I saw her I became incensed. I tried to avoid her as best I could. It was just a way of protecting myself I suppose, because I couldn't handle the way she was making me feel, it was completely taking over my life. Some of the other octopusses warned me about her. She was dangerous they told me, a real femme fatale. They told me that she'd 'been around', but I never took heed of their warnings. I thought they just wanted her for themselves. After a while however (and with much stubbornness on my part), I slowly came to see that they were telling the truth. I was able to see through the green mists of my jealousy, and see her for what she really was: a manipulative bitch, playing us off against each other, getting some kind of kick out of it, getting off on some kind of power trip.

The problem was, though, I still fancied her despite all of this. It didn't change a damned thing! Every time I saw her, I got that same weird rush of excitement mixed with a sort of odd resentment, that rendered me helpless. She was just so damned sexy, she drove me wild! There was nothing I could do, I was under

her spell, and that was that. I was totally hooked! The only thing I could think of was to go and talk to my friend, Jim the squid.

Jim was sort of wise beyond his years. He was one of those guys who could see things clearly and put everything in perspective for you. Jim was the guy I'd go to when I needed some good, solid advice. He always came up with honest answers (sometimes brutally honest). They might not be the kind of answers you wanted to hear, but they were always the right answers, and after you'd mulled them over for a while and considered the options, you'd begin to realise that he was right. Talking to Jim always seemed to put my mind at rest somehow.

I gathered my thoughts, and tried to think about what I would say to him when I got there. He was a really nice guy, but he didn't like timewasters, didn't suffer fools gladly. He liked to get to the heart of the matter, solve the problem in question, and move on to sunnier topics of conversation as quickly as possible. Later that day, I went over to his rock, and swam around nervously until he came out.

'Hey Don, how've you been? It's been such a long time, come on in!' He said, sounding genuinely pleased to see me. We both squeezed through a small hole between two rocks (the entrance to Jim's place).

'Yeah Jim, I'm fine, yeah good?' I shifted uncomfortably. 'Look, I'm really sorry. I've been meaning to come over for a while now,

but I've been busy. No excuses really. I just thought it was about time we had a chat, and caught up with things you know, it's been a while.'

'Well Don, You don't have to make excuses on my behalf. You can visit me any time you like'.

He sounded sincere. I waited for him to continue.

'Listen, why don't we just get straight to the point, and stop messing around, because I don't want to be presumptuous or anything, but you seem a little anxious if you don't mind me saying, as if you've got something on your mind. You look a little bit freaked out if you don't mind me saying!' he said patiently, hovering in the currents of water.

'Of course Jim, you're right, you're absolutely right. There's no flies on you!' (Is it really that obvious, I thought to myself). 'I've got this problem. I've got this problem I've got to talk to you about. I thought that maybe you could shed some light on it.'

We both lit underwater cigarettes.

'Well, I'll see what I can do Don,' he said with a faint strain of reluctance in his voice, 'but I can't promise anything. It depends what it's about. It all depends Don. Remember what happened last time! I'm not so sure about this. Look, just go ahead and tell me what's troubling you, and I'll see what I can do, okay.'

'Well it's this girl, Jim, I'm hooked on this girl. She's driving me insane, turning me into some kind of an idiot. I'm not myself Jim. I can't control myself when I'm around her. I've never felt like this before. She's playing me off against the other octopusses, and it

hurts, Jim. Every time I see her I just lose it, I go into this blind jealous rage. She's turning me into a nervous wreck!

There was silence.

'I met her, well I say 'met', I first laid eyes on her a couple of months ago. The most beautiful thing I'd ever seen Jim. Dancing around in the water, up in the light, near the surface, in the opaque, shimmering water, glinting in the sunshine, her skin, Jim, perfect! I've never seen such lovely skin!'

Jim pulled on his cigarette and arched his eyebrows. He didn't say anything.

'I mean this wasn't part of the plan at all. I'd all but given up on meeting a woman. I just thought it would be one big inconvenience, because to be honest in the past it's just been one big hassle. Something that I could really do without.'

He didn't respond, he just kept smoking and listening.

'I've got used to my routine over the years, and it annoys me that she is able to just turn up and disrupt it so efficiently. Overnight, she's turned me into a walking teenage hard-on, dragging my salivating tongue along the ground, my eyes popping out of my skull like some crazed cartoon character. There isn't room in my mind for anything else but her. I'm losing perspective on things. I can't control the way I feel about her. It's as if my head is about to explode!'

Jim took a drag on his cigarette, a look of concern in his eyes now. He seemed a little uncomfortable, and remained silent. A

pregnant pause followed, a small, loaded silence, and so I continued.

‘So I came to you, Jim. I know you’re a level-headed kind of guy. I mean, am I going mad? Am I getting things totally out of perspective, because she’s leading me to believe that I’m in with a chance. I’ve spoken to some of the others, and they insist that she’s playing me for a fool, that she does the same thing with all the other octopusses. They say she’s been around, that she’s a heartbreaker, but there’s something about the way she is with me that’s different. I’m certain that she means it Jim. I think we could make it. I really do. I mean it's just me Jim! I’m a pretty straight-ahead guy aren’t I? What you see is what you get, right?’

Jim shifted suddenly in his chair, spluttering on his cigarette.

‘Why is it so unbelievable Jim, so inconceivable that she could be attracted to me? I used to do pretty well with the ladies, didn’t I? What do you think? Am I going to make a fool of myself? Should I pursue this, or should I just let it go, and go back to my previous life? The crushingly dull life that I was leading up to the point when I met her? I mean if you could only see those tentacles, Jim, you’d know what I mean. So Jim, what do you think, and do me a favour, give me an honest answer, don’t spare my feelings. I want your honest advice.’

The room was quiet again. He lit another cigarette with the one he’d just finished. The atmosphere seemed to have suddenly changed. It had become frostier somehow, and for some reason the look of concern Jim had worn previously was now a wild-eyed look

of fear. His frightened gaze darted around the room, desperately trying to avoid any eye contact with me. He looked down at his feet, sighing heavily, and scratched his forehead in bewilderment. He took another drag on his cigarette and began to speak in measured words.

‘Look Don, I don’t want to be rude or anything, you’re a friend. Don’t fly off the handle, promise me you won’t fly off the handle, Don, because I don’t think you’re going to like my advice one little bit. But I mean, come on Don,’ he was raising his voice now, ‘you must know. You know as well as I do. You’ve got to go back in, Don. It’s the only advice I can give you right now, and you know it’s the truth. There’s nothing I can do for you. You need help, Don. That’s all there is to it.’

This time it was me who was silent.

‘Listen to me Don. I’ve seen you like this before, remember? We’ve talked about this at length in the past, and the same thing happened. I’m sorry to have to say this, but you’ve got to go back and see the professionals. They’re the only ones who can help you. It’s beyond my power to do anything now, trust me!’

A few moments of silence followed. Suddenly, Jim was backing away from me towards the far corner of the room, pulling an armchair in front of him for a makeshift barrier as he retreated, looking even more frightened than he had a few moments ago.

‘Yeah, but wait a second Jim,’ I said. ‘There’s bubbles coming out of the corner of your mouth, I swear! Go and look in the mirror, see for yourself! I swear to God, Jim! Go and have a look,

see for yourself, you'll see. Just a quick look Jim, I swear! Then you'll see what I'm talking about. Honestly Jim, just have a quick look, just one quick look Jim, honestly. Go and look at the bubbles, Jim, go and look at your purple rubbery body, your huge glassy eyes, your tentacles. Your lovely tentacles, Jim. I've always admired your tentacles, I've always been slightly jealous of them to tell you the truth, ever since I've known you. Can't you see the bubbles Jim? Just go and look!

As quickly as he could, Jim walked over to the telephone and grabbed the receiver.

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