Things I Should Have Done - #4

by Cherise Wolas

I should have created a first-date questionnaire heartaches ago. My critical queries in unequivocal black would seek, in advance, answers aforethought. I thought often about Max, Evan, Robert, and Henry, and what I could have and should have avoided.

With Max: lengthy instructional tutorials about what to do with my parts.

With Evan: an argumentative year about my degree of relationship committal. I thought his move-in indicated my serious intent. Evan did not.

"It took three months before you allowed my clothes into our bedroom closet." When he said the word *our*, his pianist fingers punctuated, quote-marking the air. I said, "For the last nine months you have been fully ensconced in my closets and drawers."

"That *my* you just uttered, that *my* is the trouble right there."

He said, "You still think of the apartment as yours."

He was right.

I did.

And it was.

With Robert: a pregnant discussion about why would I *not* desire a child half made from his sperm.

Only dating four weeks when I laid myself bare, I had been forthright. Divorced with three, his youngest just days from legal maturity, I knew Robert soon would be child-support free. That night he clinked his glass to mine and said, "Happy one month anniversary to us," I said, anniversary or not, what I intended to say.

"If we become serious, a child, just one, has to be part of our picture." I went on and said I *would* understand, we *could* remain friends, have a drink fully clothed, if further fathering was a no-go.

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I said, “No guilt. No acrimony. We can kiss and part and continue our search for our soul-mates.”

Robert said “Kiss and part, no, never.”

He kissed my palms, it was prior to a mutual exchange of *I love you*, and he said “Having a child with you would be magical. And, selfishly, I want a do-over, be the parent I should have been before.”

The sex that night was tremendous.

Months later, when my womb wobbled and proved problematic and I said no to hormones, we researched adoption. Robert was game.

We went to a hotel, to a baby fair announced on the radio. The ballroom was crammed. Couples with tightly clasped hands and upside-down crescent-moon smiles wandered the aisles and toe-tested the booths shilling adoptions, domestic and foreign, IVF, implantation, and more. We attended a lecture, talked to adopters back for round two. “The baby is yours the minute you hold that bundle of joy.”

Romantic and randy, we left holding hands. We toasted our adoption decision with champagne. Afterwards, a tad tipsy, we took a final turn around the baby ballroom. That last cockily satisfied saunter did us in. The surrogacy booth beckoned to Robert: his sperm, fertilizing another's egg, carried by a third-party womb.

“Why won't you consider this,” he demanded later that night. “I wish it could be your egg, but, at least, we'll have my sperm.”

I said, “It costs something like a hundred thousand.” Money wasn't his issue.

I said, “If you didn't have three pre-existing children, of course I would consider it. But you already have fruit from your loins. For me, it's critical that we stand likewise related, either both, or neither, to an eventual child.”

And, because it was true, I added, “A kid that's half yours and half some other woman's, isn't what I had in mind.”

He could not let it go. He should have let it go. I said let it go. Or I should have said let it go. I cannot recall if I uttered those words, or not, but even if I said “Let it go,” letting go was not Robert's nature.

He pressed me mercilessly and for such a long time that I finally said what I never would have said had he let the subject alone.

I said, “Robert, I don't believe your sperm possesses those indefinable qualities that would make a child remarkable. I'd rather chance the unknown.”

With Henry: a late stage admission about his predilection for cross-dressing. Divulged over drinks at a trendy bistro, he tried to lessen the blow.

He said, “Since coupled with you, my urge has vanished, the pressure stemmed in some way.”

“But in fairness,” he said, “With the full disclosure our love requires, I cannot promise never to dip into your things.”

The admission and Henry's timing thereof came as a shock. His forthrightness followed celebratory sips of Bordeaux and an intricate discussion about engagement rings.

Before his disclosure, Henry had recounted in exacting detail his browsing at places out of his price range and learning online about cuts, clarity, carats, and cost. The 4-Cs of the sparklers had excited and confused him. He wanted my input.

“I want you to be deliriously happy with the rock that you wear.”

We sipped the Bordeaux, then with his hands wrapped around mine, he explained his love of wearing stilettos, how soft the swish of silky dresses felt against his sinewy skin, the rush he got clasping delicate bras around his broad back.

Afterwards, I imagined him slipping on engagement rings that caught his eye. Intended for me, I could imagine him admiring the way his hand looked with such a sparkler attached, thinking about the way the light caught the glint from the rock and catapulted rays into his eyes.

In the shower I think about my questionnaire. With Jonathan, at eight, I have another first date. I wonder about Jonathan's reaction if I placed the first-date questionnaire in front of him and asked for its thoughtful completion, prior to the ordering of cocktails and the initial exchange of false information.

Although intended for me, the questionnaire could and should do double-duty. My advance culling, cutting, and discarding of Jonathan, if he proved inappropriate, would save us both from the heartache of falling in love. From its birth, we could learn and should learn if our potential love's destiny was to die.