

Like Counting Raindrops

by Randall Stickrod

When I glance at the bedside clock I realize that we have been making love in one way or another for nearly three hours now. I am filled with a certain secret smugness that I am still going strong. It has been a long time since I've done anything quite like this. I am at a stage of life that I refer to as "ridiculously old" and the threat of diminishing virility troubles me as much as my mortality does. But not today, thank the gods.

It is not exactly clear to me how we got here. But we are indisputably here, and here is a hotel room in the early afternoon of a perfect autumn day. And yes, gentle reader, let me confess that I am married, but not to the woman who I am now coupling with in a heated frenzy. I have no defense for this infidelity, though for the record I want it noted that I have never sought casual "sport sex." I love sex, but I insist on context, deeper context than merely attraction and opportunity.

What I am really marveling at is the stunning sexual precocity of the woman who is now lying sprawled across me, gleaming with sweat, the fine reddish hair at the back of her neck distinctly wet. I ask her in an awe-struck whisper, "How many orgasms did you have?" I wouldn't normally ask what I consider sort of a gauche question, but something extraordinary has been going on here.

She closes her eyes and there is a long pause. "That's like asking me to count raindrops," she says. I am speechless. I'm certain that what she just said was unrehearsed and spontaneous, and there seems to me so much information in those seven words I'm not sure I can process it all. So I say nothing as I lie there stroking her freckled back and smelling her hair.

She is 54, a professional with two degrees, teenage children and an affinity for the arts. For the last 26 years she has been married to a man who has never told her he loved her. She's certain that he does, "in his own way," that it's simply a flaw in his wiring, some defect that's quite beyond his control that he can't manage to find the words for it. She hasn't quite connected that fact to the other fact, that they haven't had sex in something like three years. And he is a perfectly healthy and active guy otherwise, I'm made to understand. None of this makes sense to me.

I tell her she has a gift, this orgasmic precocity, that I've never seen anything quite like it. She seems surprised. She says that she has always come quickly and sometimes often, though today, she admits, seems more than exceptional. She admits to a short-lived love affair some years back, with a man who she experienced her first real sexual blossoming with, but it was very brief. We stop talking at this point and get back to the order of the day, which seems to be testing the structural integrity of a king size bed.

Weeks later she emails me with a link to an article she stumbled on about the vagus nerve. I'd never heard of it and neither had she. Apparently the vagus nerve is sort of a meta- nerve that transits much of the longitudinal axis of the body. It also just happens to have come front and center in some recent research on female orgasm, and has been accountable for orgasm in women with severe spinal damage and all the other conventional pathways out of commission. "Vagus" is from the Latin for 'wanderer' because of the way it meanders through the body. Apparently it meanders differently for some than for others. It seems likely from this article that she has the blessing of a particularly friendly vagus nerve. Or maybe it's something else. No matter; what she has is a gift, a gift that she has only opened a few times. She puts on a brave voice in a later email as she says, "It occurs to me that at my age and in my situation, I might not even have sex again. Ever." There is a profound sadness to this blurting out that's like a punch in the gut.

I am in no position to do much about it (not to mention a very long way away). I try to comprehend the injustice of having a talent that exceptional and such a dismal outlook for using it. Where does this kind of unfairness come from? She feels powerless about her options for her loveless marriage, a big tangle of “if”s. *If* she more money, *if* her kids were through school, *if* she had somewhere to go, *if* she could conjure up a whole new career. She is torn with guilt about this fling with me, but feels empowered from it as well. The moral divide here is a thorny one, to say the least.

As for myself, I have no real justifications for my own behavior. I am no aging roué, seeking casual thrills. There are not the kind of deficiencies in my marriage that lead people to easy justifications for affairs. So why am I here? Why do I feel so little guilt? What to do?

