

Genius

by Teresa Cortez

It was entirely my fault, misreading signals. I have a clumsy imagination, mistook your gushing about my boobs as a soul connection. Then you said something about us being lovers in a past life, and I remembered Bobby Bubion from high school, his strategy for getting in my pants. He told me while grinding his Levis against mine how he wished we had a few kids sleeping down the hall, and my eyes rolled back in my head with visions of bridal extravaganzas. Pure genius.

But I didn't sleep with him, or you despite the "connection." You almost had me when you asked while gesturing toward hobos wrapped in blankets, "How does this make you feel?" The old *feel* trick. A man who *feels*. It got me right in the crotch.

You learned I was an obsessed painter when you took the art class at the community college. During break while sharing a bag of Cheetos you said you desperately needed to tell me something important, something huge, that I am your *favorite* painter, better than any of the other students, than Picasso or Van Gogh, better than your best friend Daryl who paints award winning ant farm landscapes and stick figure nudes. Yes, I was your favorite and you would hang with pride any one of my *Kittens Doing Human Things* painted in Crayola watercolors.

Then came the *real* trick, the jacked up version of Bobby Bubion's line the night you walked me to my car after class, "You have *no idea* how talented you are, what great things your destiny holds, but you will, and I want to be there to share it. You are *gifted*."

That did it. I was ready to mount you. But I didn't because the squeaky little voice spoke again, the one that tells me that I shouldn't wear combat boots to my part time job at the bank.

You mural painters are all alike. You know just what to say to a vulnerable woman, a forty-something with stretch marks and chin hair. I bought it all, and even wondered if the crush you had on me could be more than that, if maybe my name was tattooed somewhere on your spleen.

I'll never know because you stopped calling, stopped sending letters scented with Pabst Blue Ribbon. You stopped coming to class. Then I grew suspicious.

I wondered, for instance, why you had that extra cell phone, why you kept so many changes of clothes in your car and the fake mustache. I think you've moved, because the house you took me to with only a mattress on the floor and a picture of an elderly Vietnamese couple on the wall is completely empty now. You're not Vietnamese.

I really thought you loved me.

I found you on Facebook, quite by accident because I was looking for a Steve Reynolds who owes me \$20 for a *Gecko Sexting A Mermaid* painting and there you were, the same picture kept in my Hello Kitty wallet, only the name on your Facebook profile was Frank Reynolds, not David Bowers III. Your profile stated you were married, and then I saw the kids, two boys, one a dwarf in leg casts.

The deceit really hurt, so I put your photo in my mouth and chewed you into a gray wet pulp.

But again, I accept full responsibility. I should have listened harder to the little squeaky voice. I should have thought it odd that you always put on the mustache before you got out of my Smart car, that you always answered your phones in cryptic language, sometimes with a Scandinavian accent.

Sure I'm a little angry, but also relieved. I didn't sleep with you, and since you asked, no, I'm not interested in Amway.

