

2011

## Running In(to) the Family: 8 Short Stories About Sex Workers, Clients, Husbands, and Wives

Ummni Khan

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.wcl.american.edu/jgspl>

 Part of the [Family Law Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Khan, Ummni. "Running In(to) the Family: 8 Short Stories About Sex Workers, Clients, Husbands, and Wives." American University Journal of Gender Social Policy and Law 19, no. 2 (2011): 495-528.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Washington College of Law Journals & Law Reviews at Digital Commons @ American University Washington College of Law. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Gender, Social Policy & the Law by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ American University Washington College of Law. For more information, please contact [fbrown@wcl.american.edu](mailto:fbrown@wcl.american.edu).

# RUNNING IN(TO) THE FAMILY: 8 SHORT STORIES ABOUT SEX WORKERS, CLIENTS, HUSBANDS, AND WIVES

DR. UMMNI KHAN\*

Story #1: As if.....	495
Interlude: What's the Diff?.....	498
Story #2: Criminal Law to the Rescue.....	502
Story #3: Hearts of Gold.....	506
Story #4: Your Safety; Her Expense .....	511
Story #5: The Sex Worker Experience Part I .....	512
Story #6: The Sex Worker Experience Part II .....	515
Story #7: The Girlfriend Experience .....	519
Story #8: Accessory to the Crime .....	521
Epilogue: Same Diff .....	524

## STORY #1: AS IF

Last summer I was at this commitment celebration and had the most awkward argument about sex work. It was the night before the ceremony and my husband and I were enjoying a dinner cruise arranged for out-of-

---

\* Ummni Khan is an Assistant Professor at Carleton University. She earned her J.D. from Osgoode Hall Law School, her LL.M. from the University of Michigan Law School, and her S.J.D. from the University of Toronto, Faculty of Law. Her current research focuses on the discursive production of male clients of sex work in law, social science, and popular culture. The author would like to thank participants of the “Workshop on Comparative Family Law: What is the Global Family? Family Law in Decolonization, Modernization and Globalization” at the American University Washington College of Law (March 2009), participants of the “Carleton Feminist Workshop” (April 2010) at Carleton University, and participants of the “(Re)Presenting Sexual Subjectivity” Seminar (May 2010) at Keele University. In particular, Sandra Campbell, David Gurnham, Janet Halley, Rosie Harding, Lara Karaian, Duncan Kennedy, Val Newman, and Brian Smith provided invaluable encouragement and feedback.

town guests. The crowd was a delicious mélange of artsy types, academic nerds, and lefty professionals—some queer, some straight, but geek chic all the way. I met a lawyer and we began bonding over the fact that we both had taken a class with Catharine MacKinnon.

And as you probably know, when MacKinnon comes up, pornography usually follows closely at her heels.

It didn't take me long to figure out that my new acquaintance, let's call her "Mary," was an anti-porn feminist. She was perseverating over the money shot and how it was not "normal" sexuality. Now there's nothing that excites me more than an anti-porn feminist who is policing the border between "normal" and "not normal."

So I said, all innocent, "What's wrong with the money shot?"

She replied, "It's disgusting that men get off on ejaculating all over a woman's face. Obviously, it's degrading."

I responded, feeling sexy and provocative, "Why is it degrading? Are you saying that sperm only belongs in the vagina where it can do its procreative work?"

And she said, "Fuck you."

I'm not kidding. That's exactly what she said. Okay, I know I was being a bit of an asshole, but really? The *F* word?!

I felt badly. I noticed that people had slowly begun to mill closer to us. After all, who isn't interested in eavesdropping on a porn debate, no matter how banal? The sun was setting over the city skyline and this was two very dear friends' pre-commitment ceremony celebration. I wanted to make up with Mary. And smooth over the weirdness. So I kind of laughed, pretending that we were close enough to say "fuck you" to each other in jest, and changed the subject.

I thought sex work might be safer ground.

I asked her a question I had been asking many friends who are "against prostitution." I wanted to know (and still want to know) if their opposition was based on objections to the perceived conditions that surround sex work, or a belief that there is something inherently harmful about commodifying sex.

"The latter," she responded. "Prostitution reduces women into objects to be bought and sold, and this violates their dignity. So-called 'safe' working conditions or higher wages—which are virtually impossible given the patriarchal capitalist system—could never redeem the practice."

I wasn't about to debate the point. I was genuinely interested in trying to build a bridge to Mary. So instead of defending sex work, I sought to expand its definitional reach. I asked her if she had ever thought of marriage as a form of sex work. This, after all, is a radical feminist idea and I pegged Mary as a radical feminist. The argument goes something

like this: the patriarchal system discriminates against women in education and employment, keeps them relegated to the domestic sphere, indoctrinates them into believing that their value rests on being attractive to the male gaze, and ranks them according to their marital status. For these reasons, women cultivate their desirability and bargain their sexuality for capital in the form of diamond rings, a marital home, financial security, and social standing. I offered Mary a legal simile: “A wife is like being in-house counsel while a sex worker is like being a sole practitioner: one client as opposed to many, but you’re still doing the same kind of work.” Now remember, I threw this idea out while standing next to my husband (not my “partner” or my “lover” or my “significant other”), my legally-enshrined husband (who had been nice enough—or maybe naughty enough—to have continually replenished my wine glass throughout . . . which might explain my side of the conversation). Unlike our friends who were hosting the “commitment celebration” we were attending, I had actually capitulated to the hegemonic ritual of compulsory coupledness, lock, stock, and barrel. I was not holding myself beyond reproach when I suggested that marriage, particularly heterosexual marriage, could be cast as a form of sex work.

My willingness to self-recriminate did not impress Mary.

The conflation of marriage to sex work was “only something an elite academic would dream up. Marriage is about choosing someone to spend your life with because you are in love. Prostitution is about selling your body to anyone and everyone because you are poor, forced, or an addict. The power differential is obvious.”

“But what of the power differential between men and women?” I protested, getting in touch with my inner radical feminist. “Maybe some wives exercise more power than sex workers when they negotiate with their husbands, but they’re still usually economically subordinate to their men.” *I was really getting into it.* “Consider how many women stay with their husbands—whether they’re cruel, violent, belittling, or just bad in bed—because they can’t afford to leave.”

“Romantic love masks the unequal bargaining power between men and women,” my husband (what a sweetie!) slotted in.

“Your sophistry is not just misleading, it’s dangerous,” Mary retorted. “Sure there are abusive relationships in marriage, but that’s not an essential feature to the relationship. By analogizing marriage to prostitution, you implicitly legitimize prostitution. As if the give and take in a normal marriage has anything to do with the exploitation of women’s bodies in prostitution.”

INTERLUDE: WHAT'S THE DIFF?

When you begin a sentence with “as if,” you express both disgust at, and denial of, the idea you are about to describe. Mary’s “as if” communicated a censure of my proposed analogy between marriage and sex work. While she was willing to concede that marriage could be economically abusive and sexually violent, she distinguished the two upon formal grounds. The crux of marriage was affection and consent, and so the intent of marital sex—at least its promise—is union. The crux of prostitution was abuse and coercion, so the intent of commercial sex—its very premise—is alienation. Marriage is mutual; prostitution is exploitive. *As if they could possibly have anything to do with one another!* Yet the conjunction “as if” marks insecurity: once the unthinkable is articulated, it becomes effectively thinkable. The idea that gets to have the final say, the punch line of the sentence, is the idea that has been disavowed.

This creative-critical project explores the narrative effects of this unwitting punch line by positing that the binary between sex work and marital sex reflects interdependence through *différance*. Without wanting to partake in Derrida’s whole kettle of fish, I use the Derridian portmanteau “*différance*” to foreground that the notion of “marital sex” relies on both difference and deferral to convey meaning that is never fully and independently achieved.<sup>1</sup> In other words, sanctified marital sex takes a semantic “detour” through illicit sex in order to define itself. It is “sacred” because it is different from sex work, which is profane. It gains acceptability through a repudiation of sex work. But I posit that there is more happening here than a signification process through categorical opposition. Marital sex and sex work haunt one another, endanger one another, and even, in some circumstances, appropriate the social value and erotic currency of the other.

An example might help to clarify. Consider the parallel purchasing experiences in sex work and marriage in modern Western/Northern societies. In our cultural imaginary, a prospective client gives money to a prostitute for the temporary use of her body. A prospective husband offers a diamond ring to his beloved *for her hand* in marriage. The hand of course is a metaphor, but more accurately, it is a synecdoche. It is a figure of speech where a part is used to stand in for the whole, the hand being part

---

1. See JACQUES DERRIDA, *Différance*, in MARGINS OF PHILOSOPHY 1, 3-27 (Univ. of Chicago Press 1982) (1972). Derrida created the neologism *différance* by combining the terms “differ” and “defer” to suggest that the meaning of a word can never stand on its own without referencing other words. A word must always rely upon other words to establish its significance, and these other words must rely upon other words to establish their significance, and so on. Thus, meaning is continually deferred through time. A word must also rely on what it is not; it gains meaning by differentiating itself against other words and this differentiation process creates hierarchical binaries, where each side is semantically reliant upon its opposite.

of the whole body. As for the ring, this adornment is explicitly tied to cold hard cash. Since the 1940s, the diamond company De Beers has infiltrated the rituals of marital courtship in order to impose a monetary imperative.<sup>2</sup> To paraphrase an ad campaign for engagement rings I heard a few years ago: “Is two months’ salary too much to spend for something that will last a lifetime?”<sup>3</sup> But it is not just corporations telling men to fork out the cash. In her hit song “Single Ladies,” Beyoncé admonishes her ex for not coming through with the ring after three years of dating: “If you liked it then you should have put a ring on it.”<sup>4</sup> Note that there is nothing in the lyrics to indicate that her ex mistreated her while they were together.<sup>5</sup> He just didn’t buy her a ring. And part of the bargain is that if he liked “it,” then he is obliged to put a ring on “it.” It is not completely clear what the first “it” is referring to, but the lyrics suggest that “it” stands for her body, her dance moves, and/or her looks.<sup>6</sup> Thus, on some level, the song suggests that in a romantic dyad, in order for a man to respect a woman’s value, he must present her with a ring (at least after three years of being together). Seen in this light, the exchange of a ring for “it” or for “her hand” seems akin, if not completely identical, to prostitution.

And we all know this. Thus the monetary element must be disavowed, or the woman risks being labelled a “gold digger,” *i.e.*, someone “all too willing to trade sex for money.”<sup>7</sup> Put another way, the accusation of being a “gold digger” casts a woman as an unofficial prostitute. Beyoncé manages this threat to her integrity by stating in a later verse: “Don’t treat me to the things of the world / I’m not that kind of girl / Your love is what I prefer, what I deserve.”<sup>8</sup> The message is that the woman should only desire

---

2. See JANINE ROBERTS, *GLITTER AND GREED: THE SECRET WORLD OF THE DIAMOND EMPIRE 147-55* (2003) (explaining the history of the diamond engagement ring in America and the influence of advertising promoted by De Beers and other companies to popularize this invented “tradition”).

3. See Cele Otnes & Linda M. Scott, *Something Old, Something New: Exploring the Interaction Between Ritual and Advertising*, 25 J. ADVER., Spring 1996, at 33, 38 (noting that the De Beers advertising focus has shifted from communicating a need for a diamond engagement ring to dictating the amount one should pay for such a ring).

4. See BEYONCÉ, *Single Ladies (Put a Ring on It)*, on I AM . . . SASHA FIERCE (Columbia Records 2008) (singing about the societal expectation of the diamond engagement ring).

5. See *Beyoncé Knowles: Single Ladies Lyrics*, <http://www.metrolyrics.com/single-ladies-lyrics-beyonce-knowles.html> (last visited July 17, 2010) (providing the lyrics to Beyoncé Knowles’ hit-single, “Single Ladies”).

6. I extrapolate this because the lyrics tell the story of how the narrator has just broken up with someone and now that “someone” is regretting it as he watches her dance with another man.

7. See Kenon Breazeale, *In Spite of Women: “Esquire” Magazine and the Construction of the Male Consumer*, SIGNS, Autumn 1994, at 13-14 (describing the difference between the gold digger and the black domestic).

8. *Single Ladies Lyrics*, *supra* note 5.

“love,” not “the things of the world.” But paradoxically, the ring that never came—itsself presumably a thing of the world—would have signalled his love. Thus, romantic love and the intended permanence of a marriage remove the commercial flavor in the exchange. This whitewashing is achieved, in part, by constructing marriage as categorically non-commercial.

Returning to Derrida, we can say that the *différance* between acceptable sex and unacceptable sex hinges on a marriage/market distinction which, as Janet Halley points out, conforms to a distinctly modern sensibility. Halley explains that the mid-nineteenth century marked an “emergence of a *market* for labor and an ideology of domestic intimacy that could be articulated as the opposite of that market.”<sup>9</sup> Marriage and market were defined in opposition to one another. The marital home was constructed as a sentimentalized haven where the affection and love between husband and wife were deemed not just non-commodifiable, but also as incommensurable. Marital feelings, and the actions and gifts (like the ring) that flow from those feelings, were and are considered altruistic and exceptional. They have nothing to do with the rationality and self-interest that characterizes a transaction on the market.

This exceptional status of the marital home and its governing legal regime has been interrogated by a number of scholars. Most known to me, the Harvard Law School Program on Law and Social Thought’s “Up Against Family Law Exceptionalism Project” has collaborated with international scholars and universities to challenge the notion that the family and family law are unique and autonomous realms.<sup>10</sup> A central goal of the Project has been to dissipate the mystique of the family and take a long hard look at the distributive effects of family law. In this vein, the definition of family law expands beyond what is normally conceived of in the legal academy and profession. Rather than treating family law as an “exceptional legal zone” comprised solely of the laws that govern marriage, divorce, cohabitation, parentage, death, and inheritance, the Project seeks to rethink the family as an economic unit that interpenetrates a range of legal regimes, such as social security and welfare, taxation, employment,

---

9. Janet Halley, *Family Law in America: A Genealogy* 4 (unpublished manuscript) (on file with the *American University Journal of Gender, Social Policy & the Law*).

10. See FLE in *Colonization/Decolonization/Modernization*, Workshop at Dighton, Mass. (Sept. 14-15, 2007) (questioning the treatment of family law as a special domain); *Up Against Family Law Exceptionalism: FLE and the Economic Family*, Workshop at the University of Toronto Faculty of Law (Feb. 8-9, 2008) (analyzing the relationship between the market and the family); *A Workshop on Comparative Family Law: What is the Global Family?* *Family Law in Decolonization, Modernization and Globalization*, at the American University Washington College of Law (Mar. 20-21, 2009) (comparing the systems of family law in the United States, Canada, and worldwide).

and development. A related question considers how diverse socio-legal discourses that may, at first glance, seem unrelated or even antithetical to the family, can actually be seen to have contributed, explicitly or implicitly, to traditional perceptions of its distinctive and exceptional status. My project is situated in this third branch of inquiry.

Specifically, as my first autobiographical story “As If” indicated, I am interested in exploring how the cultural scripts of prostitution entrench the ideology of family exceptionalism. From my research, I have found that the construction of the family is deeply embedded in the legal regulation and cultural production of sex work. My data consists of sex worker accounts, pop culture, literature, media articles, online discussion boards, police statements, legal commentary, gender studies articles, and dozens of books that deal with prostitution/sex work. But for this paper, instead of doing a discourse analysis or a close reading of these texts, I have decided to craft my own set of short stories based on the major hegemonic themes I have identified in my research.

What follows are seven short stories that illustrate how sex work and the family impinge on one another in our cultural imaginary. Although my stories are original, the storylines are familiar. The tales trace the contrasting narratives that demonstrate the intersubjectivity of sex work and family, and highlight the *différance* between sex workers and wives, clients and husbands, and sex work and marital sex. The goal is to expose the underlying, but often unarticulated, assumptions of family exceptionalism, and to reveal how such narratives can underpin one’s positions on the legal and ontological status of sex work/prostitution. I am hoping that by laying out these narratives in a consecutive format, I open up space for dialogue on which stories we instinctively hold to be “myths” and which to be “true” when we stake out a position on sex work/prostitution.

Because I have focused on the hegemonic stock stories, there are certain important, even urgent, stories that I have not included in my collection. For example, none of my characters are male sex workers or female clients (at least not officially), none are identified as transgender, and none of the stories involve explicit same-sex desire.<sup>11</sup> These are under-theorized areas that have received little attention in the public debates on the meaning of sex work. In addition, the positive stories that highlight the mutuality,

---

11. See also *SEX WORK: WRITINGS BY WOMEN IN THE SEX INDUSTRY* (Frédérique Delacoste & Priscilla Alexander eds., 1987) (presenting a collection of writings by sex workers, which tend to lend support to one or more of the normative agendas explored in my stories): cf. *WORKING SEX: SEX WORKERS WRITE ABOUT A CHANGING INDUSTRY* (Annie Oakley ed., 2007) (detailing stories told by sex workers, including prostitutes, film stars, and phone sex operators, many of which are filled with pride and dignity for their work).



affection, and respect that can and do exist between sex workers and clients, according to both sides' accounts, are also missing.<sup>12</sup> "If you think these stories are so 'urgent,' then why don't you include them?" you might ask. As James Kincaid succinctly states, "reality comes to us in the form of stories."<sup>13</sup> Am I not entrenching the dominant view of reality by this exercise? My response is that the stories that drive our thinking, our policies, our laws, and our activism are often tacit. My task is to explicate these over-determined stories by giving them titles, characters, a linear plot, and normative undertones. I do not deny that these stories reflect possible realities, but I want to dislodge their power and their monopoly on the truth so that other accounts can compete or at least be intelligible.

I am mindful that storytelling is somewhat unconventional in a legal journal. Generally, the only type that is tolerated, and barely tolerated in most circumstances, is the autobiographical account used in critical race and feminist epistemologies to uphold the political and theoretical value of personal experience. The following stories do not fall under this category, but I am hoping that you will still find some use in them (or at least enjoy the break from academic discourse). Sex worker stories have a hold on us emotionally. If (and this is a big if) you *get into* the stories, pay attention to your emotions as you read each narrative. Which one rings true, which false? Which story turns you on, which pisses you off? Which story seems trite, misleading, or even dangerous? Which one resonates with your understanding of the power dynamics at play? This is an invitation to delve into the ways stories structure our sense-making. So sit back, pour yourself a drink, and see what you make of these tales . . .

#### STORY #2: CRIMINAL LAW TO THE RESCUE

When he weighed the options, four hundred dollars and eight hours of John School definitely beat jail time, a criminal record, and having his wife, Angie, find out. Nonetheless, Juan still begrudged the wasted time. It was an unseasonably warm Saturday for March, and he was about to sit through a lecture from some Feminazi in a stagnant windowless room. He

---

12. See, e.g., YAPPING OUT LOUD: CONTAGIOUS THOUGHTS FROM AN UNREPENTANT WHORE (V-Tape 2004) (demonstrating the tenderness that can exist between sex worker and client as well as a critique of anti-prostitution attitudes); TRICKS AND TREATS: SEX WORKERS WRITE ABOUT THEIR CLIENTS (Matt Bernstein Sycamore ed., 2000) (presenting an eclectic take on sex worker perspectives on their clients).

13. See JAMES R. KINCAID, *EROTIC INNOCENCE: THE CULTURE OF CHILD MOLESTING 3* (1998) (describing how American preoccupation with the sexual abuse of children generates enticing stories that reproduce and even eroticize the harm that is ostensibly being decried. Kincaid parses these cultural narratives in an effort to expose both the self-gratification implicated in their recirculation and to challenge their status as singular truth).

flipped open his cell and started texting his friend to firm up plans for that night.

A woman walked in, a surprisingly attractive woman. She dropped her briefcase on the desk and turned to the class with an open and kind face.

“Good morning, gentlemen. My name is Amber Jones. I’m a police officer with the 52nd Division and will be directing this workshop. The goal of the class is to reduce street level prostitution through education instead of punishment. Our motto is the carrot, not the stick. You’ve managed to avoid the stick by admitting your mistake. That’s the first step. Now we provide you with a safe environment to help you fully understand the harms of your actions.”

Juan immediately tensed up. What harms? he asked himself. These hookers sell their services like any other entrepreneurs. Hell, this lady cop should be thanking him for giving these poor women some business.

Amber raised her eyebrows skeptically at him as if she had read his mind and continued, “This is a non-judgmental space. This is a time for self-reflection.”

Juan reflected on the stupidity that had gotten him caught. Normally, he could tell the difference between a decoy and the real thing. But the undercover cop had been good. She didn’t rush over to his car, she didn’t put words in his mouth, and she looked genuinely interested, desperate even, for his business. He had noticed how gorgeous her hair was—not a wig, with a zigzag part down the middle. These touchable waves of ginger-brown fell well past sculpted shoulders. In retrospect, Juan realized that that was a dead giveaway—hair that nice—but he had ignored the signs because he was so fucking horny and she was so fucking hot. He just hoped he had lucked out and had stumbled on a newbie on her first time out. Now it seemed so obvious. And you don’t get that kind of muscle definition unless you work out at a gym. A luxury, Juan contemplated, that not a lot of hookers could afford.

“Sir in the back,” Amber’s voice penetrated his regretful musings. “What do you think?”

Juan realized he had no idea what they were talking about. When he stared back dumbly, Amber frowned.

“Where do men get the idea that prostitution is a victimless crime?” she repeated.

“Isn’t it a victimless crime?” Juan shot back rhetorically. “It’s about two adults making a deal.”

Juan expected her to go off on some tirade about how evil and perverted he was, but instead she said, “Good, that’s helpful. You get the idea from experiential knowledge. You experience this exchange of money for sex as consensual. After all, she’s putting herself out there on the street. She’s

actively pursuing clients.”

Juan nodded. “Exactly,” he replied.

“But things aren’t always as they seem,” Amber said compassionately, as if she too had once made such an error in judgment. “Our first workshop will be run by Jessica LaCroix. Jessie’s a former prostitute and she’s going to share with you what brought her to the streets, what kept her there, and how she escaped.” Amber opened the door and gestured for her invited speaker to enter.

Again Juan’s expectations were defied. He thought she’d be some washed up old hag with bad teeth and a bony body. Instead, she looked like a serious college kid who spent more time in the classroom than out on the streets.

“Thank you for taking the time to hear me speak,” Jessie began. “I’m going to tell you my story in the hopes that the next time you see a prostitute you’ll think of me. A human being, someone with hopes and dreams. Somebody’s daughter.”

As her story unfolded, Juan initially tried to disassociate. He looked past her at the chalkboard, he tried to guess the name of each fellow john, he even tried remembering his multiplication tables. But he couldn’t completely shut her words out. Bits of her story seeped in. Her sexually abusive uncle who was everyone’s favorite in the family. Her feelings of self blame, her decision to run away. The pimp who forced her to turn tricks, then beat her up afterwards because he was jealous.

“I finally escaped,” she said, “because I got busted. I was offered a diversion program, just like you.” She smiled empathetically, as if they were all in the same boat together. “My program was run by former prostitutes, so they knew how you got trapped. And they knew how to help you get out.” She looked gratefully at Amber; they clearly had a history. “Eventually I got back in touch with my Mom, and with the help of my counselor, I told her what happened. We’re now in family therapy.” She pulled out a textbook from her bag and showed it proudly to the group of men. “And I’m studying physiotherapy in school.”

Juan closed his eyes and tried to erase her look of courageous innocence. *Just six more hours to go*, he told himself.

The next speaker was a doctor who went over the health risks associated with prostitution. Juan felt confident that none of this information applied to him: he did, after all, always use a condom when he saw a hooker. But he learned some disturbing things. Condoms only lowered the risk, and certain diseases, like herpes or genital warts, could be transmitted through any skin-on-skin contact. He felt disgust and terror at the thought of catching these infections. He remembered from health class that there was still no cure for herpes, and the close-up picture of genital warts made him

sick. Trying to expel the image from his mind, he made a mental note to go for a complete check-up and sexual disease screening when he got out of there.

But if the doctor's session was a blow to Juan's sense of safety, the next presenter was the real kicker. She identified herself only as Mrs. Smith, the wife of a John and the mother of his two kids. She recounted how she noticed her husband's sudden late nights at the office every Thursday. She explained how she sensed her husband's growing distance. She confided that the sex between them became less frequent, and when it did occur, it felt degrading and anonymous. While she did not fill in the details, the image conjured up in Juan's head was doggie style, with the man's hand grabbing the woman's hair as he controlled the pace of penetration. It was what he always did with the hookers, but he would never dream of asking Angie to do it that way.

"I learned about my husband's activities because I was diagnosed with HIV," she said flatly. "It turned out that I had caught it from him because of his extracurricular sex life." She let a few seconds tick by as that information sunk in. "When he confessed, he claimed he always used protection when he saw prostitutes. Of course he now knows that condoms aren't 100% safe."

"We're trying to work it out with the help of professionals," she informed them by way of closing her narrative. "But my dream of a happy marriage, of seeing my kids' marriages . . . well, let's just say I take it day by day." She offered a shrewd smile that was strangely reminiscent of Jessie's innocent one; they were like two sides of the same coin.

Juan grimaced as the self-reproach he had been trying to suppress suddenly attacked his consciousness. He couldn't bear to think about any man, let alone himself, exploiting Jessie's vulnerability. He couldn't bear to think of Angie finding out about his infidelity as she was diagnosed with a deadly disease. He felt a surge of violence towards all the men in the classroom; he wanted to beat the crap out of all of them. Truth is, he wanted someone to beat the crap out of him.

Amber came back in the room and gave each man a searching look. "What you've discovered today may surprise you, anger you, or upset you. Probably a mix of all of these things. We do have a list of psychologists trained to work with men, and families if necessary, to help you process this information. We've found that cognitive behavioral therapy is especially effective for men trying to break these destructive sexual patterns. If you can change the way you think, you can change the way you act."

Her words had a soothing effect on Juan. He didn't have to be a victim of his wayward libido anymore. As the day closed he knew his journey had

actually just begun. He went to shake Amber's hand and asked for the list of psychologists. He couldn't quite find his voice but she nodded at him and said, "You're welcome."

He cancelled his plans with the buddies that night and went straight home. Outside of his house, he spied Angie through the window where she was frowning at a recipe in her Julia Child cookbook, a Mother's Day present from him and the kids. Her hair was piled messily on top of her head. Her natural unmade-up face and those voluptuous post-pregnancy curves sent darts of tenderness stabbing through his heart.

"*I'm so sorry,*" he whispered. Then he opened the door and walked into his marital home.

### STORY #3: HEARTS OF GOLD

Frankie was confident that under the dim streetlamp no one would notice the slight trace of a black eye. The foundation she had carefully dabbed on did a decent job of concealing the bruise, but what difference did it make? she asked herself. The johns weren't really interested in her face, just what was between her legs. And if they did notice that she had been roughed up a bit, some would probably get off on it. She felt familiar tears threatening to fill her eyes, but she easily blinked them back and swallowed the lump pressing against her throat. She was a master at emotional manipulation—her own, that is. She never cried when she was working. No matter what happened.

A dark blue limousine cruised slowly by her and then stopped. It was making a second drive by and Frankie identified it as a Rolls Royce. She made it her business to know about cars, the brands, the prices. She had a secret sliding scale, the more expensive the car, the more expensive her services. If she could nail this one, it was going to be a lucrative trick. But hopefully they didn't want to do anything kinky. That was something she had noticed in the three months she had worked the streets: richer ones seemed into that dominance shit and Frankie hated it, even more than she hated straight up penetration. She sauntered slowly to the car, knowing full well that the longer she drew out the negotiations, the higher her risk of getting busted. But it was important not to look too anxious. And she always needed time to assess if the potential john was some wack job who would hit her, rob her, or rape her. Usually she had good instincts.

A man in his sixties rolled down the back seat window and in a friendly voice said, "Hello darling, you free tonight? I mean for the whole night?" It was just after 5:00 p.m. and Frankie felt her hackles rising. If he wanted her for that long, he was going to be one of those BDSMers. She could handle being a dom, but not a submissive tonight. Not after being punched in the face.

“What did you have in mind?” she asked casually.

The man gave her a sheepish grin. “It’s my son’s 35th birthday and we’re throwing him a party at our place. He’s just gotten divorced last year and I think he could really use a pick-me-up.” His eyes traveled up and down her body as if he were assessing a race horse. “I’ve hired an escort, but there’s something about you that tugs at my heart—not to mention my loins. I think he’d fall for you.” The man turned towards his chauffeur and said, “I knew there was a reason we got lost, eh Alfonse?” He was utterly pleased by the serendipity of the moment. But then he turned seriously to Frankie and said, “But the catch is that you can’t tell him that I’m paying you. Just pretend to be a neighbor’s daughter visiting from out of town.”

What a relief! A simple one-nighter with an unsuspecting john. But Frankie schooled her face and said, “An undercover job, huh? That will cost extra.”

They worked out a price and Frankie got in the car. She was taken to a five-star hotel where she could shower and change into “something less garish.” Before she allowed herself to dive into the shopping bags scattered on the bed, she texted Darren to let him know that she had taken an overnight shift. He would be pleased that she had made such a big score. And he would expect her to cough it all up in the morning.

Ignoring a surge of bitterness that filled her mouth, Frankie surveyed the clothes wrapped in delicate tissue paper as if they were Christmas gifts waiting to be unwrapped. Finally giving into temptation, she greedily tore into the bags, snatching each item and rubbing the material against her cheek. With one outfit, she recognized the Prada label from Fashion TV and gasped in girly delight. It was the dress that seemed the classiest: a tight black polka dot number with an empire waist and a silk ribbon that tied just below her breasts. As she assessed the size and fit in the mirror, a ludicrous wish seized her imagination. What if this was a real romantic set up instead of a sleazy stunt? Shaking her head for even contemplating something so out of her reach, she hurried down to the hotel spa. An appointment had been made for her to complete the transformation from harlot to lady. They did her hair into a loose updo with a few stray curls grazing the nape of her neck. The makeup artist discreetly and without question concealed her black eye, using a spray foundation that created the illusion of immaculate skin. When she looked at herself in a full-length mirror, she didn’t recognize the woman staring back. It was like seeing a mirage after the exhaustion of street life. The little spark of pride at her appearance was soon extinguished as she remembered that this identity was only borrowed and would have to be returned the next day. More painful was the fact that this lady-like image was going to be violated tonight as she allowed yet another unknown man to push into her deadened body.

As had been instructed, she arrived a bit late to the party. When she first caught sight of him, her unbeknownst client, she felt a strange whoosh in her gut. His stature was impressive, intimidating. He stood well over six feet but the height was balanced by a chest broad enough to compete with Superman. His countenance was pure, unaffected nobility, which would normally have turned Frankie off. Yet the way he was interacting with the catering staff showed that he held no airs and felt no vanity. Mr. Englander, the man who had hired her, brought her to his son, Jonathan, and made the prevaricated introductions, “Francis is a model from Montreal. Just visiting for the night, isn’t that right?” She of course went along with it. As they shook hands, his strong fingers engulfed her tiny palm in the most protective way. Frankie was flabbergasted to realize, not that she found him attractive—he was, by any standards, a hunk—but that she was still capable of feeling attraction at all.

\* \* \*

Jonathan was momentarily speechless in the face of that haunting vulnerability. His trained medical gaze noticed the inflammation around one eye and squinting with concern he discerned the faint discoloration that had been expertly camouflaged by makeup. Finding his tongue, he smiled gently and offered to get her a drink. She agreed to “whatever was easiest” and he said he’d make her a Cosmo. “I worked as a bartender through med school,” he told her. When she looked quizzically at the opulent surroundings, he explained, “My father thought it’d be good for me to make my own pocket money.”

He pegged her to be shy, but she wasn’t quite so. She seemed to alternate between tacky flirtation and flustered awkwardness. When she touched his biceps and cooed, “Oh, you must be so strong. Do you work out?” it was as if she were reading a script from a B-grade porn magazine. But when he pointed out that her eyes flickered from deep green to electric blue under the pot lights, she automatically covered her face and whispered that she’d always thought of them as a dull grey. This was not false modesty; someone had beaten the confidence out of her, and she apparently tried to compensate with trite seductive lines.

By the end of the night, it was just the two of them drinking aperitifs in the library. She had ceased with the hyperbolic come-on tricks, but was amenable to staying for “one last drink.” He knew that the gentleman’s thing to do would be to offer to walk her home, but he’d be damned if he was going to escort her back to whomever had given her that shiner. She claimed that she was single, but she was lying, he could tell. Maybe she, too, was ending a terrible marriage, but in her case the ex was physically

and not just emotionally abusive.

Jonathan didn't know what came over him in that moment—he'd just met the woman for crying out loud—but he made a vow that he would not let any man hurt her again. He said, "Francis, I can't let you leave until I know that you'll be safe. Can you please tell me who hit you?"

Her hand automatically flew to the injured eye, but she protested, "No one. What are you talking about?"

He grabbed her hand away from her face, gently pulled her palm towards his mouth and began trailing kisses until he reached her inner wrist. He felt her pulse quicken and heard the sharp intake of her breath. "You don't have to tell me," he said, holding her hand now close to his chest. "I'll make up a bed for you in the guest room. And then we'll talk in the morning." He was trying to remember what he'd learned from his residency stint in Emergency when confronted with a victim of domestic violence: don't push them too fast.

But her distress seemed to be mounting. "You can't make up the guest room," she said in a whisper. She looked nervously towards the hallway where his father had disappeared an hour earlier, but not before giving Frankie a secret wink. "Don't you want to sleep with me?" she asked guilelessly.

Jonathan felt his whole body tense up in arousal, god she had no idea. "Yes, I want to sleep with you," he confessed. "But I don't want to take advantage of you." He couldn't stop himself from bringing her hand to his mouth, although he only allowed himself to indulge in a chivalrous kiss on the back. "I won't take advantage of your vulnerability," he said with conviction.

She yanked her hand back and covered her face, but that didn't stop the tears streaking down to her neck. "I'm not vulnerable," she choked out, "I'm a whore." She dropped her hands and she stared him in the face with watery eyes but an unflinching gaze. "If you don't fuck me, I won't get paid."

Jonathan's breath audibly seeped out of his lungs as he took in her words. "Wow, Dad made a joke about how I needed to get laid. I didn't think he'd go to these lengths."

\* \* \*

Frankie was scampering to her feet and moving towards the door. "I'm sorry," she managed, already feeling the fear uncoil in her stomach as she anticipated how Darren would react when she showed up empty handed. *It's okay*, she assured herself. She might be able to make up for the lost time with a couple more dates. It was only midnight. But the truth is the



pain of Darren's fists was nothing compared to the humiliation of exposing herself to Jonathan and seeing that look of disgust on his face. She needed to get out of Dodge. Pronto.

Before she touched the doorknob, Jonathan grabbed her and pulled her into his arms. She tried to resist, but his grip was immovable. He whispered that he didn't give a damn what had brought her there. He was not going to let her leave.

"I repulse you," she said matter of factly.

He shook his head. "My father is the culprit. But for once, his idiotic maneuverings resulted in something . . ." He gazed into her tempestuous blue-green eyes and said, "good."

They spent the night together without any more conversation. The tight grip she had so proudly kept on her emotions for three months completely unclenched and she cried noiselessly and continuously. He stroked her hair and whispered that it was going to be okay. It was over. In the morning he took her to breakfast at the Four Seasons to escape the curiosity of his parents. She told him about Darren, about her neglectful parents, about her life on the street. He took the information in with grim acceptance. Whenever she began to blame herself, he hushed her with kisses on her hands—that was the extent of intimacy he allowed himself to initiate—telling her that she was the victim. And she was a survivor.

A month later, she was living in a sunny apartment on the West Side. Jonathan helped her access social services to receive counseling and pulled strings to get her a job as a receptionist for a friend's law firm. They were in constant contact, but he repressed every masculine instinct to ravish her paradoxical innocence.

A month after that, he showed up at her place unannounced. It was then that Frankie realized it was time to let him off the hook.

"Jonathan, I'm feeling good. I'm earning a decent living, paying my own bills and working out shit with my shrink. You don't need to take care of me anymore." She was feeling guilty about his assistance. She knew he was a kind soul—that was why he'd gone into medicine: to help people. But she would make it now. And it was just about all she could do to keep her hands to herself whenever she saw him. She was stupidly in love with someone seriously out of her league.

"You don't understand, do you?" he said as he presented her with the dozen roses he was holding behind his back.

"What's to understand?" she answered, trying to steal herself against the seductive floral scent. "You've done your good Samaritan deed. Now get lost!" She grabbed the roses with mock exasperation. "You must have more exciting people to see than this charity case," she said, using the bouquet to point at herself.

“Francis,” he said seriously. “I have a question for you. Would you go out on a date with me?” he asked in a gruff voice.

“Yes,” she said. “Yes,” she repeated. “I’d love to,” she added gratuitously, in case he was in doubt. Then suddenly catching herself she blushed and said, “Oh, I mean, maybe . . . normal guys don’t like girls to be easy, do they?” she said more to herself than to him.

“If you think it was easy to resist those inviting lips and drop-dead gorgeous figure . . .” Jonathan’s eyes roamed her body from top to bottom. “Well then, you have a lot to learn about male urges.”

“In that case,” Frankie said, grabbing his tie to pull him down to her level, “What are we waiting for?”

#### STORY #4: YOUR SAFETY; HER EXPENSE

John wanted to take her. Where does she get the idea, showing that much leg after dark? He knew the university had a safe walk program; there was no excuse for her prancing around by her lonesome with that barely legal body. She clutched a pile of hardcover textbooks against her chest like a shield, but that made him all the more interested in what kind of tits she might be hiding. Small pert ones, the kind only young things can have; or large fat ones, developed before the rest of the body could catch up. John was in the grips of an overwhelming curiosity. The books seemed more like props to entice him than evidence that she was a student. *As if she understood one word of that.* John inconspicuously tilted his head to read the spine of one of the hefty tomes she was burdened with: *Principles of Environmental Geochemistry*. He shook his head in disbelief. If she was serious about studying, why would she dress like a bimbo? Especially when it was just above freezing.

The two of them were alone at the bus stop. John felt a testosterone rush at the thought of having his way. He imagined the sound of her startled cry. The look in her eyes when she would give up and allow it to happen. He could almost smell the combination of their sweat, his from arousal, hers from fear. But something stopped him. She was still a kid, someone’s kid. And he had kids of his own to worry about. He didn’t need the hassle of this. He had other options.

He decided to walk instead, leaving her alone at the periphery of campus. Maybe some other guy would come around to teach her a lesson. He had places to go and if he wanted to get home before the twins’ bedtime, he should make a move on it. It was a thirty-five minute walk. He set the iPod to his favorite folk playlist and began his journey with an optimistic step. He’d be home in plenty of time.

When he got there, John knew which one he wanted immediately. The most desperate looking: an Indian whore with bloodshot eyes. He handed

over the money, half now so she'd know he wasn't a cheat, half later so she'd put some enthusiasm into it. Her dilated eyes constricted at the sight of cash. "That's right honey, once I'm done with you, you can score some more crack or whatever shit you're on."

He wasn't violent or anything, but he fucked her good. He liked to imagine that she'd be sore tomorrow, that she'd complain to her girlfriends about this really rough john she'd had the night before. But all things considered, he seriously doubted she'd remember anything. He paid what he owed and then flung the change in his pockets at her feet. "Good job," he said and walked away. He thought he might have heard her mumble "asshole," but a quick glance back confirmed she was on her knees carefully picking up the coins.

Retracing his steps so that he could take the same route back to his neighborhood, he noticed how different things seemed. He walked by a college couple and noted that the boy had one hand around the girl's shoulders while he carried both their book bags. *Good for you*, he thought. Chivalry wasn't completely dead with the new generation. When he cut through an alley to get to his house, he passed a middle-aged woman walking her small dog. She wore tight jeans and a cropped leather jacket. *Mutton dressed as lamb*, he decided, laughing to himself. Still, he conceded, she had not let herself go. He turned back once to admire her ass, but kept up his stride so that he'd be home at the usual time.

When his wife opened the door—he always liked that, instead of him using his key—her usual gentle hug collapsed against his body. "They've got the flu," she blurted out. "Both of them. Why do they have to share everything?" He pulled her closer, tightening his own grip in reassurance. "Don't worry, I'll call Dr. Goldberg. He'll make a house call if I ask him to. I'll take care of it."

#### STORY #5: THE SEX WORKER EXPERIENCE PART I

The guys had run out of bachelor parties to attend. They had all gotten married. So this year they decided to do a three-day trip to Vegas for some male bonding and probably, Michelle realized, to escape their families for a little while. That was okay. Jean-Francois deserved a break. She was still feeling guilty because their two year old had gotten her hands, and her nails, on Jean-Francois's favorite U2 record. Michelle had forgotten to close the door to the den where her husband stored his cherished vinyl collection.

While he was gone, Michelle used eBay to replace the record and ordered expedited shipping so she would have it for Jean-Francois by the time he got back. With the babysitting help of her mother-in-law, she managed to plant the seeds for tomatoes and geraniums. And knowing

she'd be a little lonely on a Saturday night without him, she also scheduled the girls over for a book club meeting. They were going through the "chick-lit classics," which basically consisted of reading Jane Austen and the Brontë sisters.

That night they had a fervent debate over the moral character of Heathcliff.

"He's a pig," Annie pronounced. "He tortures women and is consumed with vengeance." Annie was Michelle's former coworker, but had recently gone on maternity leave.

Michelle protested, "He's consumed with passion. With love."

That began a whole new topic on what love is—a feeling or an action. It was a good time and Michelle got a little tipsy as she waxed romantic. "Heathcliff's love is like the very moors he wanders over. Stormy, powerful, and dangerous."

Annie snorted, "By today's standard, the man would be labeled a sociopathic wife-beater."

Jean-Francois returned late enough so that the baby was already asleep. Michelle gave him a big welcome hug and presented him with the "barely used" replacement record.

"Merci, Cherie." He gave her a distracted kiss on the cheek.

"Is it okay?" Michelle asked. "I checked for any major scratches, but it looks like it's in decent shape."

He suddenly seemed to catch some interest. "Why don't we play it?" he asked, walking over to their stereo system.

He lifted the needle so that it began with the song, "Party Girl."<sup>14</sup> As he looked at his wife, he noticed her "soccer mom" hair cut and her short, practical fingernails. He danced over to her, moving his shoulders in tune with the music, and began to sing along with the lyrics. "I think I know what she wants. I think I know what she wants," he crooned in sync with Bono's voice.

Michelle smiled, pleased that he liked the record.

"Let's do it," he said. She was feeling a little aroused too, after all that Heathcliff talk the night before. They started kissing, but it was different. He seemed totally focused on her and totally somewhere else at the same time. His kisses felt more like mini punches to her face.

"Whoa" she said, "It's only been four days." But it seemed like he hadn't heard her because he was hauling her to the ground.

"Suck me off," he ordered. The unfamiliar words smacked Michelle into frigid awareness. She thought he was tumbling them both to the floor, but in fact he was still standing up. He unzipped his jeans. When she realized

---

14. See U2, *Party Girl*, on UNDER A BLOOD RED SKY (Island Records 1983).

he wasn't joining her, she started to get up but he kept a firm hand on her shoulder. "Come on," he said. "Can we do it this way?" He pulled out his turgid penis and gently directed her face to it.

"My knees hurt," she told him.

"It won't take long," he said, using his fingers to coax her mouth open.

She let him. Tucking her teeth behind her lips she took it in her mouth and began as fast as she could to get it over with.

"Slow down, Cherie." He grasped her face on both sides and appropriated control of the movement. He then began to push in further, past the back of her tongue, but once she started to resist, he withdrew a little. "You're not used to it, I know. But any woman can. You just need to relax your throat," he said, offering her a few shallow thrusts in reconciliation. As promised, it didn't take long. Since there were no tissues around, she got ready to swallow the bitter fluid, but he pulled out of her instead. She expected his hold to relax, but instead his grip on her head tightened so she couldn't move as he sprayed her face and hair. After he finally let her go, he slumped against the wall and emitted a satisfied post-orgasmic groan.

Michelle quickly got herself to the kitchen sink. Her shoulders were hunched over and trembling as she turned the taps on. They had never, ever, done that before. Not like that. She dampened some paper towels and began viciously wiping her face and neck. She then gently touched her skin, but it still felt sticky.

"Eh, Cherie? You were awesome," she heard him say from the den.

Michelle suppressed the anger that was ignited by his compliment. He obviously had no idea that she did not enjoy herself. She should have spoken up.

"I'm going to the bathroom," she called out and went straight upstairs without stopping to see him. She tried to avoid the reflection in the mirror but still caught a glimpse of her disheveled hair splotched with his semen. Nausea attacked. She turned on the water, took the loofah sponge, and scrubbed at her skin under a scorching shower. When she realized that it was not going to make her feel clean, she finally turned the water off. She didn't spend five minutes slathering on body lotion like she usually did. Instead, she covered herself as quickly as possible: flannel pajamas and her robe fastened securely around her with the sash.

She figured he'd be asleep when she got out, but instead he was in bed reading. Usually he couldn't stay up three minutes after coming, but he had a strange alertness about him. She stood staring at him from the threshold between their ensuite and master bedroom.

Jean-Francois felt a bit like a jerk. He should have done more foreplay or something before he shoved himself in her mouth. But damn, that was

the best sex they had had in a long time. And the sight of that pearl necklace intensified the pleasure like you wouldn't believe. His weekend away had been a wake-up call to his libido. He didn't really cheat on Michelle, he figured, but obviously the guys had hit the strip joints. After all, they were in Vegas. Seeing those whores strutting their stuff was more intoxicating than the coke they had bought on their first night. Wherever they went, porn played non-stop on television screens. On the last night, the guys all pitched in to buy him a lap dance, figuring that since he was the first to get married, he was the one who needed it the most. The stripper they chose for him had a smoking body, just the way he liked it: firm breasts but a nice fleshy ass. When the song began, she straddled him and immediately started grinding her crotch against his pulsating cock. He was obviously wearing pants, and she a G-string, but it really felt like they were fucking. He slipped another twenty in her cleavage and she whispered in his ear that for eighty, she'd blow him in the back during a "private dance." He gladly paid her the money and the guys were hooting and egging him on as they disappeared into a booth. She sat him down on the bench and dropped to her knees.

"You're a nice guy," she said. "I'm going to give you something special." She positioned herself underneath him, leaned her head back and took him all the way in.

Afterwards he gave her another twenty and said, "How did you do that? I thought that was just a myth. A male fantasy." She pounced on the tip. He repeated his question.

Looking at him with dispassionate eyes she explained, "Anyone can do it. It just takes practice to quell the gag reflex."

#### STORY #6: THE SEX WORKER EXPERIENCE PART II

Aisha called it maintenance sex. It did the job—for *both* of them—and ensured their sex life was statistically successful. Two times a week was a hell of a lot more sex than most married couples after two kids and ten years of being together. And Johnny was a very equitable lover, always making sure she came before him. She felt a little guilty about feeling restless. After all, when she went out with the girls once a month, she was the only one out of the four who still had a libido, had sex regularly, *and* never had to fake an orgasm.

But she was feeling old. Past her prime. The springtime trousers she'd pulled out of storage didn't quite sit right this year. Her hips bulged a bit over the top so she couldn't wear any fitted tops or thin fabric over them. She decided to return them to storage and try them out next season. Before she closed the closet, she noticed her New Year's resolution list taped on the inside of the door. At the top was to get fitter, and now it seemed she'd

gone the opposite direction. She'd gained instead of lost.

Shaking off her sense of defeat, Aisha reasoned that it was not too late for 2010. There was time to get in shape for the summer. She should join one of those posh gyms that were cropping up all over the city. She could afford to blow the money, and Aisha knew it wouldn't be wasted. As a first-generation Canadian, she'd shed her parents' frugality, but not their commitment to getting the most value for their money. If she paid the exorbitant membership fees, she'd go every day.

As she sipped her fair trade latte, Aisha strolled down Rochester, the trendy street two blocks from her house. She had vaguely recalled a new gym in the neighborhood that specialized in spinning and yoga. After ten minutes, she spied it across the street. All-glass walls showcased the polished hardwood studio, the latest fitness equipment, and the yuppie, middle-aged bodies working themselves into a sweat. While waiting for the light to change, she noticed an advertisement for a strip club taped to a lamp post. This was perturbing. She squinted at it to see if it was located in her neighborhood. The poster was in fuchsia pink and advertised "a total fitness regime." Confused, she looked at the graphics that had signaled something sordid was going on. It was the silhouette of a woman with one leg wrapped around a pole, one arm holding onto the pole, while the other two limbs were stretched behind so that her body was pulled taught, like a bow. What the hell? She read the rest of the blurb: "Ladies! Want to create a Sleek Supple Bod? Pole Dancing offers a mind-body workout like no other. As a combined weight-resistant cardio exercise, every routine involves strength training, fat burning, and stretching. It's so much fun that you won't even notice how intense your workout is. Good for all fitness levels and ages. You'll be amazed what pole dancing will do for your body, your self-confidence, and your love life!"

Aisha never crossed the street.

The pole fitness studio was located in the more bohemian part of the city. She didn't tell Johnny. It was a drop-in class and so if she didn't like it, she wouldn't sign up for the six week commitment. She took the elevator down, nervously fidgeting with the hem of her new Lululemon top. *What kind of fitness studio would be located in the basement of a warehouse building?* she asked herself. Standing outside the door, she heard peals of girly laughter. *Just go in. What's the worst that could happen?*

The studio had ten poles each spotlighted by a muted Chinese lantern light. Towards the front of the studio was a raised stage and that was where all the giggling was coming from. A group of women wearing hot shorts and bikini bras were gabbing and eating sandwiches. Most were barefoot but a few had on spiked heels. On the main floor, another group

of women were standing around awkwardly looking at their poles. Aisha obviously belonged with the misfits. She claimed a pole and was trying to decide what to wear during the workout. At home, she donned sweatpants over her “skort”—a new kind of garment that combined a mini skirt layered over clingy shorts. The other students displayed a range of exposures: some wore modest shorts and T-shirts, while a few had on brazen high-cut leotards. Aisha decided to lose the sweatpants.

A woman from the stage said, “Okay girls, get ready to find your inner tantric goddess.” Aisha immediately got irritated. She hated when white women appropriated Tantra to make themselves seem more exotic. The other instructors disappeared and the woman who had just spoken leaped off the stage and landed next to her instructor pole with feline agility. A strange twinge nibbled between Aisha’s legs. “My name is Ginger and I’m going to lead this class.” Aisha suddenly didn’t feel irritation with Ginger at all. “What I want you to do,” Ginger said, “is first get to know your pole.” She caressed hers slowly, intimately. “Touch it, feel the cold steel against your hand. Hold it as hard as you can and rub it up and down.” Aisha watched and imitated. Her fingers didn’t quite reach around the pole and she felt her wrist muscles tense up as she grasped it tightly and stroked. “Now turn your back to the pole and glide your body up and down. Sensuously, slowly.” Aisha felt a languid relaxation come over her as she slid over her pole. “For this beginner drop-in class, we’re going to learn how to do the sexy walk, the merry-go-round, and the tick-tock.”

The sexy walk turned out to be simply grasping the pole with one hand as you leaned out and walked slowly around the pole on your tip-toes. As Aisha did this, making herself as tall as possible, her abdominal muscles contracted and a nice heat suffused her insides. It was easy, simple, but strangely naughty. Here she was parading around like she was some kind of hottie showing off her goods.

The merry-go-round, on the other hand, was a tough one. She felt more like a dead weight than a sex goddess. You were supposed to place your stronger arm high up on the pole, swing around, then use your other arm to grab the pole at shoulder height, kick out your outside leg and twirl around, allowing your body to gracefully fall.

Ginger said, “Trust your instinct; you’ll know when you should let yourself go.”

All the students were struggling. Aisha gave it one more try, but her lower arm felt like a strand of wet spaghetti and she found her torso banging against the pole.

Ginger said, “Don’t worry, it’ll come. Let’s try the tick-tock. Stand in front of your pole, grasping it with both hands and simply swing your hips from one side to the other as you lower your body down. Good workout on



the quads. You see? Tick on this side and tock on the other. Tick, tock.”

That was a definite hooker move. Aisha did not want to try that one. This class was about getting into shape, not learning how to become a tart. She did a half-hearted swing back and forth and experienced her hip muscles open up, just a bit. She spent most of her time seated at a desk and this movement felt totally unnatural.

Ginger said, “Smooth out the movement, undulate your hips. You are not a robot, you’re a sensuous woman.”

Aisha tried it slower and caught sight of herself in the mirror. She acknowledged her body’s classic hourglass shape: big butt, big boobs, and a relatively small waist. Why not enjoy an exercise that actually seemed to work with that? Soon she was thrusting her hips from side to side with abandon.

Ginger was walking around and assisting each student. She smiled at Aisha and said, “You’re a natural. As you lower yourself down, open your legs like a butterfly’s wings. We call this the peek-a-boo.” Aisha obeyed. As she dropped to the bottom and spread her legs past the point of comfort she had a sense power. And she finally noticed that she was totally turned on.

After class, she went straight to the mall.

When Johnny came home, he found all the lights out but a few candles flickering on the entrance table.

“Sweetie?” he called, “Is everything okay?”

She responded from somewhere on the main floor, “The kids are at a sleepover. It’s just the two of us.”

Johnny was excited about a low-key night with Aisha. “But what’s with the lights? Is there a blackout? The neighbors seem to have their electricity.”

“Don’t turn on the lights,” she cried out. “Just come in.”

With a bemused grin, he walked into the living room. Aisha was always up to something. This was probably one of her eco-conscious strategies to save electricity.

The coffee table had been cleared of all its junk and sitting in the middle was a bucket full of ice cooling an expensive bottle of champagne. “What’s going . . .” he stopped in mid sentence as Aisha teetered into the candle light.

She was wearing six-inch stilettos and a shiny black bustier with garters that attached to fishnets. The pose she struck belonged in a centerfold. Johnny was unsure how he felt about that; he liked to keep a mental division between his smut and his spouse. But then her sweet familiar smile superimposed over the pornographic image. After all, it was still his wife in that slutty get-up. And it was all for him.

Aisha demonstrated the routine she learned using the stairway banister. It began with the sexy walk, followed by a modified half twirl and ended with the tick-tock while Leonard Cohen purred through their speaker system. Johnny tried to let her finish the sequence but he felt his cock swell and his scrotum tighten in urgency. Before she had swayed her body all the way to the floor, he was hauling her into his arms and grabbing her hair back. He wanted to bite her on the neck like that TV vampire character Aisha was obsessed with. After all, she was fulfilling one of his fantasies; shouldn't he try to fulfill one of hers?

The next day, Aisha signed up for the six-week course and Johnny considered installing a pole in their rec room.

#### STORY #7: THE GIRLFRIEND EXPERIENCE

Looking at the photo album was only enjoyable for Jay if it was accompanied with a glass of Chardonnay cooled to fifty degrees Fahrenheit, but not colder. Otherwise, the pictures just depressed him. He had the perfect wine refrigerator, but had run out of white wine. He wasn't used to these Canadian legal restrictions where you could only buy wine at the government-regulated store called—wait for it—the Liquor Control Board of Ontario. Didn't that sound like an agency straight out of 1984?<sup>15</sup> Big Brother wanted to make sure you didn't drink too much, especially at 9:15 on a Saturday night.

Since he didn't have any white, he opened up an old red, one that he had been saving for a special occasion, hoping that the extravagancy of blowing two hundred dollars on his own taste buds would cheer him up. He took his first sip—too soon; really he should let it breathe for a little while, at least ten minutes—and considered the first photo as if he had never seen it before. Zen mind, beginner's mind. It was of her, of course. The whole photo album was of her. This one was of her sleeping, unconscious, dazzling. Her hair was a mess from the night before. Sex knots she called them, created because of the missionary-style sex they loved. As he pushed between her open legs, her whole body slid up and down and her hair would tangle into a bird's nest at the back of her head. She always scolded him the next day. "Look what your orgasm cost me!" she teased as she went about the tedious task of unknotting her long hair. Jay looked disgustingly at his glass of wine. It wasn't doing the job. He wasn't losing himself in the past; he was feeling intense regret.

It *was* an amazing opportunity. Research chair of criminology at an internationally-renowned university. But she wouldn't move with him.

---

15. See GEORGE ORWELL, 1984, 45 (1949) (describing a government organization called the FFCC that supplied cigarettes to citizens of a dystopian society).

Her career was just taking off as an upstart sommelier, and she didn't want to relocate to an entirely new country, even if it was only Canada, where she would be unknown and obviously unemployed.

Breaking up had seemed easy at the time. It was killing him now.

His current dating pool consisted of uptight feminist professors and nubile undergraduate students. While he didn't have anything against feminism—on the contrary, he identified as a “feminist ally,” the most a man could aspire to, he had learned—his colleagues just weren't his type. And he wasn't just referring to the lesbian ones. Even for the heterosexuals, there was a drab seriousness that clung to them. Their hair styles were practical and were pulled tight or draped over their heads in lanky professional threads. Not one cougar among them. His students, of course, were something else. The red head who always sat in the second row, just to the left of his podium, with adoring, downright worshipping eyes had begun to feature in his sex fantasies. She did outside reading and asked the most insightful questions with a beguiling smile that marked her as a true seductress. She looked like his ex; what she would have been like as a kid.

Jay shut the photo album with self-disgust. He couldn't take it anymore. What's the worst that could happen if he got together with a student? It was not *illegal* and if he waited until the grades were in, then it wasn't really unethical. He didn't even evaluate them. That was the T.A.'s job. But just as an image of the red head began to materialize in his living room, Jay shook his head to dispel the Pygmalion fantasy. He knew that it was a taboo thing, and more importantly, that it would lose him respect in the department. And let's face it: what happens if the novelty wears off for him but not for her? Hell hath no fury and all of that. The young woman could paint him as a lecherous professor exploiting his power and influence. It would ruin him.

He flipped on the television and surfed some channels. He stopped at a movie called *The Girlfriend Experience*, and by the cinematography, concluded it must be some kind of depressing romance-drama.<sup>16</sup> He was in the mood to wallow over his lonely heart, so he settled in. But as the film progressed, he found out that it was not really about people falling in love: it was actually about prostitution—or *sex work* as one of his colleagues insisted he call it. The plot featured this gorgeous deadpan lady selling the “girlfriend experience” to wealthy men, a service that included dinner conversation, kissing, foreplay, and cuddling—along, of course, with intercourse.

“Huh,” Jay mused. The movie blocked the memories much better than

---

16. *THE GIRLFRIEND EXPERIENCE* (Magnolia Pictures 2009).

the 1991 Chimney Rock cab he was chugging as unthinkingly as if it were American beer.

A week later, he was sitting at the highest-rated restaurant in the city. The woman seated opposite to him, “Tennyson,” was hanging on his every word. She didn’t have the self-confident nonchalance of Sasha Grey, the porn actress who played the dramatic lead in *The Girlfriend Experience*. Jay didn’t care. Her enthusiasm was endearing.

He explained to Tennyson, “When I made reservations, I instructed them to decant the wine for twenty minutes before the reservation time. The wine should be ready to drink now.” He gestured for her to try it.

She brought the glass to her nose, breathed deeply, and took a sip. “Hmm, it’s delicious.” She smiled. “Hints of vanilla,” she quickly added.

Jay grinned, not minding at all that she had no idea what she was talking about. It was fun to be the wine expert for once.

After dinner, he suggested a walk by the river that led from downtown to his condo in the West End. They enjoyed twenty minutes of animated conversation that consisted mostly of him explaining wine jargon, like the difference between a chewy wine and an earthy wine. When they stood outside of his home, he was struck by how the streetlamp made her auburn hair shimmer like it was moving. He asked her if she would like to taste an ice wine that he had recently acquired from an auction.

She was agreeable, and Jay temporarily forgot: it was her job to be agreeable.

#### STORY #8: ACCESSORY TO THE CRIME

To be fair, she really did seem exhausted.

Johann waited till he heard her breathing deepen, become long and steady. He knew he should just go to the bathroom, but he preferred being close to her. So he waited another ten minutes to be on the safe side. When he was convinced she was asleep, really asleep, he fumbled in the dark for the little bottle of lubricant he kept tucked between the mattress and the side table. The box of tissues did not have to be hidden, of course, so he plucked a few sheets and placed them by his side.

He closed his eyes and tried to imagine his wife, five years earlier maybe, before she had been promoted, before they had a kid, before they had decided to renovate their house in DIY fashion. In his fantasy, she was wearing that clingy grey nightgown he had bought her, accidentally one size too small, but it turned out he liked it that way. It outlined all of her curves, and if she wore panties underneath it, he liked that too. He remembered how she laughed when he insisted that panty lines were sexy. Where had that thing gone anyway? She now wore a baggy crew neck t-shirt to sleep and showered and dressed immediately upon waking.

Johann tossed to the side, frustrated at the intrusion of this piece of present-day reality. They hadn't had sex for two weeks. So they were due, maybe tomorrow night. That was about all she seemed to want it, or more accurately, to put up with it—once every two weeks. And when she did do it, she wanted it done as quickly as possible. Which was fairly easy because once he was in her, he came pretty fast. He used to be fairly good at making her come with his fingers, before, during, or after, but she now pushed his hand away most of the time. They hadn't had oral sex in years. Literally. Years. He missed it. Both ways; Hell, he wasn't a selfish lover. He loved how his face would get wetter and wetter the closer she got, and he knew when she was about to climax because she stopped moaning, she seemed to stop breathing even, for like ten seconds, and then a throaty whimper that possessed her whole body. He always felt like a million bucks after that. And obviously he loved it when she used to go down on him. I'm sorry, what man doesn't love that? She was pretty good at it too. She didn't deep throat—which was fine, because she knew how to use her hand to make sure his whole length was being encircled. She would only do it in the dark, but there was enough light from the streetlamp through their sheer window coverings, so he could see the top of her head, and her hair, and his cock disappearing and reappearing as she worked him.

He was now working himself, quickly and silently, his imagination substituting her saliva for the lubricant, her mouth for his hand. He was getting close, God—she was beautiful, sexy, into it—he missed that so much, her just being into it. He felt his excitement dip and began pumping his hand harder. Trying to recapture the thrill of the past and to forget the disappointment of the here and now. She moved in real life. The rhythm of her breathing began to shift and his hand froze. Was she waking up or just resettling? It didn't matter. His arousal had begun to recede like a tide that was going out. He would have to wait till the next day to try again. Or maybe she would be willing tomorrow? He carefully put the lubricant back in its hiding spot and tucked the two unused tissues back in their box. He fell asleep, and like most men, didn't remember his dreams in the morning.

She was tired again the following night and the night after that. She also had a headache. Despite the clichéd nature of the excuse, Johann found he was not disbelieving or annoyed. He fetched the Advil, not the aspirin which gave her a stomachache, and put the kettle on. In some ways, he was almost relieved. His fantasy life with her had begun to seem more exciting than their sporadic sex. He waited until she was in a dead sleep before he proceeded to give himself a nice shuddery orgasm.

The next day Johann took his laptop to work and during his lunch break went to his local café with Wi-Fi. Wedged into a corner with no one behind him, he found himself typing “Toronto massage parlor” in the Google search box as if his fingers had made up their own mind.

Immediately a series of websites jumped off the screen promising “sensual satisfaction,” “complete pampering,” and “adoring attendants.” Johann felt his cock stiffen before he even clicked on one of the sites. The business that caught his eye was called “Enticement” and advertised that it was an adult-only massage parlor. This surely was an indication that they offered more than a shoulder kneading? As he clicked on various tabs, he learned that aside from “relaxation massages” the services included deep tissue massage and exotic massage. *What did that mean?* Johann wondered. *A hand job? Dare he hope for a blow job?* On the side panel were a series of photos that presented the staff, all gorgeous buxom women clad in bikinis or body suits, their legs angled at an inviting 90 degrees. He checked the prices and found out that there was both a “door fee” to access the space and a “service fee” paid to the attendant. They accepted cash and all cards and promised discretion when billing. He made an online reservation for the most expensive service for the longest period of time: 60 minutes for the “VIP” treatment would cost him \$250.

Johann pushed down the guilt that seemed to be rising in his gut. *Was it really his fault?* he asked himself. If his wife would simply show an iota of interest, if she ever took the initiative and made a pass at him, if she could just wear one of those lingerie pieces she had received at her bachelorette party, then he would not be reduced to this: a man paying for the touch of a woman.

This is going to help me feel less resentment, Johann rationalized. I won’t have to bug her or beg her, and she won’t feel pressured or inadequate. That was what she had said the one time he tried to broach the subject. It was a Friday night, her parents were babysitting Jacob for the whole weekend, and it was early, maybe 7 o’clock. She was sitting on the couch, flipping through mail and he came behind and began gently squeezing her shoulders. Sighing in appreciation, she turned her neck so that he could reach the tightest spot. But when his hands began to wander down, when his fingers started to walk towards her shirt buttons, she yanked away.

“Not tonight, Johann. Please.” She twisted around to look at him. “I’ve had a hideous day at work and I am just *not* feeling it.”

Johann felt the rejection like an emasculating slap. He had taken the advice of that self-help book which he had surreptitiously flipped through at his local library: one way to rekindle the fires at home was through non-sexual touching, a massage, which could segue into something more intimate.

“You’re never in the mood,” he cut back, transferring his own sense of failure onto his wife.

“Can you please stop pressuring me?” she launched back. “I’m already

struggling with this new position and keeping the house going. I don't need another reason to feel inadequate."

How could you possibly respond to that? "I'm sorry," he said. "It's just that I . . ." He paused to find the most diplomatic words. "I feel like I just need more." The night ended with leftovers and a Quentin Tarantino movie—her concession to him.

Johann felt his resentment solidify into resolve as he cleared the history in his browser. She would not have to concede to him anymore. She could choose a rom-com to watch tonight and he would make sure to finish the retiling on the weekend. As he stood up to leave he felt a crick bite into his neck. But after his fingers instinctively pressed into the tender spot, the spasm of pain started to melt away.

#### EPILOGUE: SAME DIFF

In this paper, I have tried to role play the normative agenda of each narrative. I channeled the chosen political commitment to guide the creation of every scenario. It was not difficult. The overarching messages are so familiar that the moral at the end of the story seems almost predetermined once you set the stage.

At the risk of being pedantic, let me go through the issues and perspectives I hoped to bring to the table when I wrote each story. Of course, ideally the stories transcend simplistic and clichéd morals, despite any preconceived plans. And in fact, the characters did seem to hijack the writing process from me on a number of occasions. Stories have a funny way of undermining their own premise. If this happened, I hope it reflects a complexity that is latent, but extant, in the hegemonic scripts that order sex work and family life.

The first fictional story, "Criminal Law to the Rescue," is the hegemonic legal explanation of the destructive impact of sex work on the family. As the title suggests, the narrative shows how law imagines not just its good intentions, but its positive interventions. Prostitution is criminalized, in part, to protect the sanctity of the family, both the prostitute's and the john's. The story reflects a belief in the power of "the truth" to dispel the destructive and misled attitudes that are attributed to the clients of sex work. Law imagines the legal diversion program as non-punitive and restorative. Juan is redeemed in the end, as he finally accepts the harm of his actions.

In a similar anti-prostitution vein, "Hearts of Gold" is the romantic take on sex workers as damsels in distress.<sup>17</sup> The title makes reference to the

---

17. See RUSSELL CAMPBELL, *MARKED WOMEN: PROSTITUTES AND PROSTITUTION IN THE CINEMA* 319 (2006) (analyzing the prostitute love story theme in film).

“hooker with a heart of gold” figure, best exemplified in our modern consciousness by the film *Pretty Woman*.<sup>18</sup> In my story, both client and sex worker are undeniably good, and indeed, unlike the Hollywood flick, Jonathan is saved from the tarnish of any moral approbation because of his initial ignorance of the illicit arrangement. The story harnesses the eroticism invested in the storyline of a man rescuing a woman from both her abusive pimp and from depravity itself. This is a “best of both worlds” fantasy, as the taboo excitement derived from the sex work background is managed by ultimately converting the prostitute heroine into marriage material.

While the rescue romance in sex worker narratives generally seeks to entertain, “Your Safety; Her Expense” is meant to shame. Its basic premise is that sex workers bear the brunt of male sexual excess and violence, thereby directly benefitting non-prostituted women. What is surprising is that I found this perspective in the works of both Victorian male moralists as well as modern day feminists. In 1869, the historian William Lecky wrote of prostitutes: “Herself the supreme type of vice, she is ultimately the most efficient guardian of virtue.”<sup>19</sup> In other words, because men can get their extra- or pre-marital sexual needs met by prostitutes, they do not need to seduce or rape proper women. In 1998, Sherene Razack wrote that prostitutes absorb male sexual violence, sparing non-prostituted middle-class women from at least some of this harm.<sup>20</sup> Lecky naturalizes a surplus of male energy and desire to challenge the self-satisfied condemnation of prostitution. Razack highlights the complicity of non-prostituted bourgeois women with a legal system that overlooks male sexual violence towards prostitutes. Both perspectives conform to a catharsis thesis that sees prostitution, on some level, as an outlet for sexual excess, be it violent or simply something beyond what is provided in a marital relationship.

In contrast, “The Sex Worker Experience Part I,” narrativizes the opposite claim: the escalation thesis. Here we find a man whose perspective on women comes to be perverted through his interaction with sex workers. This is also a familiar radical feminist claim. I specifically delved into the issue of deep throat fellatio because the pornography film *Deep Throat* was an epicenter of anti-porn activism.<sup>21</sup> In addition to

---

18. *PRETTY WOMAN* (Touchstone Pictures 1990).

19. See WILLIAM EDWARD HARTPOLE LECKY, *HISTORY OF EUROPEAN MORALS: THE POSITION OF WOMEN* 283 (1955) (characterizing prostitutes as protectors of unchallenged purity by shouldering the sins of humanity).

20. See Sherene Razack, *Race, Space, and Prostitution: The Making of the Bourgeois Subject*, 10 *CAN. J. WOMEN & L.* 338, 363 (1998) (describing middle-class women as keepers of the purity of the home while prostitutes and domestic servants were at risk of sexual violence to “take up the slack”).

21. *DEEP THROAT* (Arrow Prod. 1972).



alleging that the star in the film, Linda Lovelace, suffered sexual violence in its making, anti-pornography activists also claimed that “throat rape” escalated after its release, thereby *proving* the consumption harms of pornography.<sup>22</sup> In my story, I wanted to stage how the client/husband spreads this almost contagious harm. At the strip club, he exploits the sex worker because of his economic power: she is obviously desperate for his money. He is then incited to repeat the performance at home despite his wife’s manifest resistance. Objectification begets objectification.

“The Sex Worker Experience Part II” provides a positive spin on objectification and the intersection between sex work and the marital bed (or living room!). Here, a woman who is feeling dissatisfied with herself and her sex life accesses the risqué currency of sex work by taking pole dancing classes. The story demonstrates something I call “outlaw envy,” which can arise within heterosexual married couples who find their sex lacking because of its hegemonic acceptability. I actually attended a drop-in pole dancing class as research for this story. To be honest, Aisha’s experience was not unlike my own. It was surprising. The room felt liminal, hovering between a bourgeois recreation site and a sleazy underground space. But the sleaze was sexy. The instructors were sexy. I got a sense of the incredible sexiness of sex work. But the point is that I think things like pole dancing, strip tease, and lap dancing classes, which are springing up all over major cities, indicate outlaw envy. Some might argue it also demonstrates the privileged status of non-sex workers who can appropriate outlaw activities without incurring any of the real risks of being a genuine outlaw.

Inverting this dynamic is “The Girlfriend Experience,” where a man seeks the intimacy and romance of a relationship within the bounds of sex work. This commercial exchange complicates the objectification theory by showing that a client of sex work may have desires that go beyond simply getting off. I find the contrast between a client accessing the simulacrum of a domestic relationship within the context of sex work and a wife accessing the simulacrum of sex work within the context of marriage to reveal a symbiosis between the two realms. There is envy and desire that crosses this divide.

Finally, “Accessory to the Crime” deals with a husband who initially has no desire to cross into the realm of adulterous sex. He wants desperately to find pleasure within the marital bounds, something he is unable to do. His self-justification for straying outside of the marital home is drawn from many of the studies I have read about clients. Those in marital or common-

---

22. See IN HARM’S WAY: THE PORNOGRAPHY CIVIL RIGHTS HEARINGS 215 (Catharine A. MacKinnon & Andrea Dworkin eds., 1997) (offering evidence obtained by Flora Calao through her work with sexual assault survivors).

law relationships often claim they are not getting enough sex, or the kind of sex they most desire, at home.<sup>23</sup> In some ways, this is a variation of the sexual excess theory elaborated above with regards to the story “Her Safety; Your Expense.” But in this story, the prospective client is not some creepy rapist type. Instead, he is a sweet guy who fantasizes about his own wife, such that the narrative point of view judges the wife as partially to blame. I didn’t mean to write him so sympathetically, but in the end, I think I really liked Johann. I felt sorry for him. Maybe that’s the role player in me. You may have thought he was a self-centered hypocrite.

But in any event, I hope after reading the stories, you have a wider lens with which to scrutinize the contrasting narratives that support family exceptionalism in relation to sex work. I have endeavored to provide some creative space to consider how marital sex relates to sex work through an economy of *différance* in our socio-legal imaginary. The status of marital sex is never so exceptional that it can only refer to itself. Or better put, the exceptional status of marital sex is an on-going process that can never come to completion. As my plots try to show, it is chained within a system of differences that continually invokes and gazes upon its opposite: illicit, explicitly purchased sexual services. Basically, it’s the same diff.<sup>24</sup>

This was my argument with Mary, referred to in my first story “As If”: marriage means one client for a wife, and prostitution means multiple clients for a sex worker, but—same diff!—each still involves a bargain whereby sexual services are traded for currency in our imaginary.<sup>25</sup> This infuriated her (although I think her reaction was linked to our original dispute over the meaning of the money shot). I wonder how you feel. In

---

23. See Hilary Kinnell, *Clients of Female Sex Workers: Men or Monsters?*, in *SEX WORK NOW* 212, 225-27 (Rosie Campbell & Maggie O’Neill eds., 2006) (summarizing a 1988 client survey questioning the reasons behind seeking commercial sex).

24. I like the term “same diff” because it carries a kind of bratty insistence in its oxymoronic logic. The attempt to differentiate marital sex from sex work ends up revealing a disconcerting sameness. Here “diff” stands in for *différance*, not difference. And as Derrida notes, “same” does not mean “identical.” “The same, precisely, is *différance* (with an *a*) as the displaced and equivocal passage of one different thing to another, from one term of an opposition to the other.” DERRIDA, *supra* note 1, at 17. It is interesting to note that those who police the boundaries of English usage have attempted to eradicate the concept. The Oxford Dictionary of American Usage and Style condemns the use of “same difference” stating: “[t]his phrase is an illogical [American English] casualism that is to be avoided not only in writing but in speech as well.” *Same Difference Definition*, THE OXFORD DICTIONARY OF AMERICAN USAGE AND STYLE (2010), available by subscription at <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t26.e1922>.

25. However, this does not mean that there are no wives, female common law partners, or girlfriends in heterosexual couples who enjoy sex for sex’s sake. I’d like to think I’m one of these women. Instead, it means that our modern socio-legal imaginary is haunted by the potential parallels between hegemonic conceptions of heterosexual courtship and sex work.

my introduction, I asked you to track your own emotions as you read the stories. While each story has an ending, often a pat ending, I hope that the exercise has foreclosed any closure on the topic. If nothing else, I hope one emotion that I incited was desire for more complex stories.