

TWO MEN FOR LAURA
STANLEY DAVID GEDZELMAN
22 September 2015

Laura did not know whether or not she was attractive. In High School she had thought for some time that she was. Nothing much happened there. The boys seemed friendly and perhaps somewhat interested but she had a way of parrying any advance before it progressed beyond friendly for though she was drawn to men, she was simultaneously suspicious of them, strongly sensing their real desires.

In College she majored in civil engineering, somewhat unusual for a young lady, and though she was queen in the engineering school, she was queen among the nerds and found herself attracted to none. So she continued her parrying ways until she no longer could tell if she were even a desired object to real men.

And so, she arrived still virginal at Calpurnia Corp., a large civil engineering firm. The company had just won a major contract from a county several hundred miles downstate for beach reclamation. A major storm had devastated the beach, washing away not only the sand but the shoreline structures that had been a mainstay of the local economy.

Laura was assigned as a novice to work under Solomon, and living up to his name, she found him to be wise. He had only been on the job three years but given that he came with his Ph. D., appeared to have mastered the field. Not only was his knowledge encyclopedic, his genius at design was already legendary.

Solomon also had a nice look but was strictly hands off regarding Laura. He seemed to show no interest in her as a woman – only in her work. That was both a relief and an insult. In any case, it allowed her to concentrate exclusively on the project, and, coupled with the fact that Solomon was an excellent mentor, patient and understanding as well as incisive, her learning curve was steep.

Laura's open-air cubicle was an unfriendly setting. She felt she had no ownership. So, she almost always ate lunch in the company cafeteria. Solomon never did. He always brown bagged and stayed in his large office. But about two months after she had come on board, she saw him eating alone at one of the smaller tables in the cafeteria. His head was down and he was lost in a book. Laura decided to join him.

“May I join you?”

Solomon almost jumped out of his seat and then looked up. “Sure, Laura! You startled me. I am really in another world when I am concentrating.”

Laura already knew that. She had seen him almost jump out of his skin several times after entering his office without knocking and standing over his desk. Experience had taught her to knock softly at first and gradually louder before entering his office.

“What are you reading?” It was a thick book.

“*The Nation Comes of Age*. It is one of 8 volumes of American History. This volume deals with the period leading up to the Civil War. It’s so fascinating - a time of great growth, foment, and foreboding.”

Laura was dumbfounded. She had never even suspected that Solomon had any interest other than engineering.

“You like history?”

Solomon almost laughed out loud. “I *love* history, literature, philosophy - all the arts. I’m not just a narrow-minded engineer, you know.”

Laura also loved music, art, and literature, and even had aspirations as a writer of fiction. With these outside interests in common, Solomon began to join Laura at lunch with some frequency. Laura found Solomon to be fascinating, passionate in all things intellectual. Solomon clearly found Laura to be intriguing. But he never appeared to show the slightest interest in her as a woman. She found herself offended. “I am not just a mind!” She had found out that he was single and sought comfort in the thought that he might be gay. But she had seen how gay guys acted with her. Solomon was not like them – he was simply neutral. Then she joked, “Maybe I’ve not been jilted, he’s been gelded.” She had the rankling thought of setting him up but couldn’t seem to find anyone that might fit.

Meanwhile, work on the design of the beach reclamation project intensified. Deadlines kept cropping up and since the project was in the public domain every nitpicking detail had to go through multiple levels of approval. The whole process, including an enormous overtime effort and working weekends, took five months. When final approvals came through at noon on a Friday the entire staff celebrated briefly, then everyone went home early and exhausted and had the weekend off.

At the meeting Monday morning Laura found that Solomon was heading out to the beach immediately but that she would remain in the office until dredging to restore the beach was almost concluded. Then she would go on site to oversee the construction of the revetment.

With Solomon and almost half the engineers working on site, the office was too quiet. Laura had so much privacy in her open cubicle she didn’t like it and was overjoyed when her turn to head out into the field finally came.

On site, Solomon gave Laura a tour and then left her on her own. She was well prepared and quickly got up to speed. She worked with great skill to maximize efficiency of the operation and its interfacing with other aspects of the reclamation.

Late one Friday afternoon she noticed an unusually handsome, athletic man working some distance down the beach on the layout of the promenade. She almost gasped, then flushed, and her eyes briefly went dim. Except for one violent 24-hour virus, it was the only time she had ever come close to fainting. But she forced herself to turn back to her tasks and when she looked down the beach again he had disappeared.

Back in her room after work, Solomon called and told her that a number of the engineers and workers were going to the local pub and invited her to join them. She said she would think about it. But she knew she would go. There was a chance she would meet that handsome guy.

She was so eager to meet her mystery man that she gulped down a tiny dinner, rushed out and arrived early at the pub, where she quickly had a couple of margaritas. When she looked up bleary eyed there he was on the far side of the pub. The alcohol made her courageous – she walked straight toward him. There was no talk that she could later remember. They left together.

In the morning she woke up a new woman, with feelings she had never thought existed. She was alone – he had left some time in the night – but she did not feel one bit alone.

Saturday passed quietly. Laura lounged at the pool with several of the engineers. Solomon came by later, joined the group and was the same, affable, interesting, detached intellectual. She was surprised by his great body – it was the first time she had seen him in a bathing suit. What a pity it was wasted on such a sexless person. For the first time she found him really annoying.

No matter, in her room Saturday night she realized she was shaking like a cat whose purring had gone haywire. So, when her man of the night knocked on the door, she almost jumped him and dragged him in the room.

Sunday was a repeat of Saturday. By Monday morning she was utterly disheveled – a physical mess in a state of emotional chaos. Her experience had been so intense that music and literature, which she had always loved, took on new depths of meaning to her. For the first time she had some real insight into the creative process.

At lunch break that day, she couldn't stand it when Solomon brought up some literary topic. "What does he know of these things? What can he know of these things – the damned eunuch?" It was even more grating that Solomon seemed completely oblivious to her new passion. "Why isn't he jealous – why isn't he more attentive?"

By contrast, she barely had had two words with her man of the night. In a way she was glad that she didn't know him the way she knew Solomon. Even so, over the next few weekends little annoyances began to grow with him too as passion eased ever so little but no conversation filled the chinks. Why couldn't he – she didn't even know his name – combine his passion and physicality with the mind and gentleness of Solomon?

She thought of breaking it off but couldn't. Fortunately, an abrupt, temporary halt in the project brought it to a sudden end. She didn't even have the chance to say good-bye. She just left the field and returned to the office with all the other engineers.

Everything returned to the state it had been before the time on the beach. The taste of her nocturnal adventures retreated to a dream state. All that was left was work, Solomon, and the arts. Finally, one day at lunch in the cafeteria, Laura could take it no more and exploded at Solomon. "How can you talk and talk and have no feelings for me at all. I am a woman! I deserve to be treated like one! What are you?" If Solomon looked shocked, that was nothing compared to the other people in the cafeteria. The whole scene was very embarrassing and very silent for a moment. Then, Laura stood up, rammed Solomon's tray into his lap and raced out of the cafeteria.

Solomon ran after her. He finally caught her in the parking lot. He put his arms around her and lifted her off the ground. She clawed at him. Still holding her in the air tightly against him, he managed to lock her hands with his. "Why do you remain so blind to how much I love you?" Then he covered her mouth with his. It was electric. Why had she been so blind? It was a revelation. Solomon was her man of the night! Her two men had always been one.