

The End of Something

“Honey, why don’t we make love anymore?”

We are in bed. Dianna is reading a book about healing cancer, while I’m thumbing through a bird hunting magazine. Dianna lays her book on the end table and rolls over toward me. I lay down the magazine, too. She has my undivided attention now.

“I think we make love every day in some way,” I say.

“You know what I mean.”

“Sex.”

“Yes.”

I let out a big sigh. We have not had sex since the transplant. I have been thinking about this for quite a while, and nothing ever comes up making sense to me.

“Don’t you find me desirable anymore? Do you still love me?”

“Do you actually have to ask me that?” I’m looking her right in the eye. “I love you more now than I ever have.”

“Well?”

“I don’t have a way to explain it. It’s not that I don’t find you attractive or desirable. It’s just with everything that has happened to us, to you, I just...I don’t know what to say.”

“It’s because I’ve lost my breasts, isn’t it. You never touch them anymore.”

“Well, honey, we’ve discussed that already. You’ve admitted you don’t have any feeling there anymore. Why would I touch them? I don’t fondle doorknobs, either. But, anyway, your breasts have nothing to do with it.”

“Then, what?”

“The only way I can put it is, I love you very much, and more and more with each passing year. But expressing my love for you in a sexual way feels...I don’t know...just feels inappropriate somehow.”

“Like you will hurt me or something?”

“I guess so. No matter how much you love someone, if the person you love is wounded and bleeding, you don’t try to have sex with them. Feels... just doesn’t feel...right. You protect them. You care for them, not have sex with them. Something like that.”

“I’m not a cripple, you know. I’m not a piece of glass. I won’t break.”

“I know that, honey.”

“I’m a woman with womanly needs. I still desire *you* sexually. I would love to have sex with you like a normal human being.” She slides her arm under my arm. “I feel rejected. That hurts.”

“I realize that. I feel terrible about it. Don’t you think I haven’t thought about how much you’ve lost? You have lost your dream of having a child. Now your menstrual cycles have ended, reminding you that all you are going to get from now on is hot flashes instead of the child you so dearly wanted. You’ve lost your breasts, a part of you, you were always so proud of... and you have lost your hair twelve times. You...”

“Three times.”

I laugh. Then, so does she, a little.

“What I’m trying to say, maybe not very well, is I realize all these losses assail your femininity, of what it means to be a woman, ...and... not having sex with your partner is just another thing piled on top of all the rest. It’s the last thing you need to have happen in your life, right now. I know I can’t feel what you feel exactly..., but I do understand these are losses you deal with every day. That’s why it hurts me so much to be stuck like this, this way.”

“Then, I don’t understand why you would want to deprive me of this, too.”

My eyes are getting wet, and my heart is thick in my throat.

“Believe me, if I could do anything about it, I would. I just can’t. Men can’t fake it, you know.”

“I don’t want you to fake it.”

I put my arms around her and pull her close to me. I can’t stop the tears now.

“And so I don’t. I’m not faking my love for you, either. I would do anything I know how to do for you. I do what I can. I’m so sorry, honey.”

She starts to cry, softly, quietly, burying her head into my neck.

“So am I,” she whispers.

We fall into silence. There doesn’t seem to be anything else to say. I keep my arms around her, and she keeps her arm over me.

We fall asleep that way.

The Beginning of Something Else

The next morning, I get up, leaving Dianna still asleep, and go into the kitchen to make coffee. My back is facing the hallway to the bedroom. Suddenly I feel her arms around me as she lays her head sideways against my back.

“I know what love is, John.”

“You do?” I ask without turning toward her.

“Yes.”

“Look at me,” she says.

I turn around and look into her eyes. They look wet, but she’s smiling. “Love is the way you are with me,” she pauses, then, in a more perky tone of voice, “And the way I am with you, too.”

Now I can’t help it. I fall apart. She wraps her arms tight around me and I bury my head into her neck.

“It’s going to be okay,” she says.

“It *is* okay,” she says, then adds, “More than okay.”

After a minute, she steps back and looks at me with a smirk on her face. “Do you ever desire other women?”

I think about that minefield, but decide to go ahead anyway. “Of course. Once in awhile, I do. Some women are sexually attractive and, ...and don’t look wounded to me, I guess. Must be about a billion of ’em out there.”

She smiles, gives me a little kiss on the cheek, then walks over to the dining room window and looks out over the lake. Finally, she says quietly, without looking at me, “Maybe one day, honey, you’ll see we are all wounded.”

I stop pouring water into the coffeepot in midstream, about to enlist my skills in mental masturbation, when she darts away to a different flower.

“Oh, honey, I think it’s going to be a beautiful day today. In fact, I’m sure it is.” She comes across the room and peeks over the bar. “Oh. Are you making coffee for me?”

“Everything is for you,” I say with a smile.