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**TRUE LOVE
AND OTHER WILD FANTASIES**

Jillian Abbott

From her bedroom window Marjorie Wallace watched the moon drift behind a cloud. Outlined in gold, it looked like a giant wedding ring in the sky. Even the heavens mocked her. For a brief and glorious moment she forgot that Tony was dead and reached out for him, but found his side of the bed empty and cold.

Shed been numb for most of a year but now she began to thaw. It was a jungle for single women her age; she had no illusions in that regard, but she couldn't go on being miserable and alone. Her vulnerability infuriated her.

She reached under the bed and patted her hand about the dusty carpet. Where was that damn card? Olive Henley had handed it to her a few weeks after the funeral. She had been affronted, but hadn't been able to throw it out. Found it: a glossy business card with a picture of a man's flexed biceps and the caption 'Discreet Escorts for Ladies.' "Forgive me, Tony."

"You'll get a divorce," Andre, the escort said. "Maybe not now, but soon enough. I've seen it before. Women aren't men. A man can keep up an arrangement with a pro for years without affecting his home life."

He paused and examined her. His grin revealed shamelessly healthy gums and square teeth. A wide gap between the front two let her see his pink tongue moving. His cheeky, sensual mouth mesmerized her.

"I know you're trying to keep your marriage going by coming to me instead of having an affair, but it won't work for long. Even the modern woman wants more from sex than sex, and soon you'll be just as restless as ever. I dunno what's the matter with blokes nowadays. They'd rather lose everything than kiss their wife. Makes no sense at all."

"You seem to know a great deal about my husband and I, Mr. err... Andre. What makes you so sure I'll get a divorce? What makes you so sure my husband doesn't kiss me?"

He grinned.

"Well, you wouldn't be here if your old man took care of you, would you?"

"Is that right?"

"Yes, Missus, it is. Now the reason you wanted this meeting was to find out exactly what services I provide. Right?"

"You asked the question."

"I use me tongue."

Marjorie gulped. She pressed her finger tips onto her eyebrows, and watched him through her spread fingers. "Surely all professionals do," she said, opening her hands to let the words escape.

"No you're wrong about that. I specialize in married women. I've got a mate who specializes in lesbians, and I can tell you those dykes got no need for the sort of stuff a bloke can do with his tongue. Married women are generally getting plenty of stick, it's the icing on the cake they're missing. I use me tongue - above the waist and below." On the final few words he nodded, his mouth twisted into a salacious grin.

Large gold necklaces hung round his neck, several bracelets clung to his wrists, and a moonstone ring the size of a quail's egg adorned his right hand. She guessed he was in his mid thirties. He wore a sports jacket and a turtle-neck. His pumped-up chest looked like women's breasts under the fabric. It made her shudder. He was repugnant, yet irresistible. He must have read her thoughts. "Blimey, you're panting for it. Your old man's really neglecting you." He slid his hand onto her knee.

The sizzling sound of a branding iron on rump popped into her head. She could almost feel rising steam and smell burning flesh. "So it's all settled then. Monday 10 a.m."

How would she last that long?

The prospect of Olive Henley's dinner party loomed like a dark cloud at a Sunday school picnic. By the time Marjorie found herself ensconced at Olive's table consuming lapenade-cruised chicken breast (last Tuesday's Epicure: Recipe of the Week), her mood moved from gray to black. The guest of honor was Tiffany Johns, a supermodel who had recently joined the tennis club. Tiffany was guarded by Paul Sandon, whom Marjorie assumed was her boyfriend-cum-grandfather. Was it really over a year since Marjorie and Tony had had dinner at Olive's? They'd been the guests of honor back then. She hadn't wanted to go that evening either, but Tony had jollied her along. He said that Steve and Olive had raised conventionality to an art form and who

could possibly resist a private showing. As a widow, Marjorie was reduced to being a witness to Olive's social triumph. Olive's stream of requests: "Can you get the ice darling? Do watch the dips, it so hard to keep an eye out when one's hostessing," convinced Marjorie she had been invited to save hiring one extra maid. Unbearable.

Not entirely standard form, Paul Sandon had a comfortable face, the rough edges worn smooth by experience, which appealed to Marjorie despite her disapproval. There was a watery sadness about his blue eyes. Olive had alluded to his wife having been killed in a terrible accident three years ago. Despite his shameless displays of affection for Tiffany, Olive kept referring to poor, sad Paul, and tragic Tiffany. Tiffany's tragedy was obvious; Paul was thirty years her senior. Eyes aside, there was nothing either poor or sad about him. Perhaps excess kindness needed to be added to Olive's long list of faults. True, Marjorie had the bejeweled Andre, but she also had the grace to feel ashamed, and the good sense to keep him secret.

As the talk turned inevitably to the Australian Open, Olive's husband, Steve, winked lasciviously at Marjorie. She scowled at him. Paul must have seen this because when Steve left the table he rolled his eyes. Marjorie smiled despite her resolve to dislike him.

Flight won over fight and she excused herself and headed for the bathroom. When she got there, Steve was coming out. Instead of returning to the table, he pulled her into the room and shut the door. He wedged her up against the vanity basin, his mouthwash minty breath on her cheek.

"Excuse me!" she said, pushing him aside.

He squeezed her breast.

She slapped his hand away.

"It's a shame to see a beautiful woman like you go to waste. I've always had an eye on you, Mary. Don't tell me you can't use it." His hands were all over her.

"You're right," she whispered and leaned into him. She slid her knee between his legs, then jabbed it hard upwards.

She followed him down, tightening her grip on his collar. "Touch me again and you're a dead man."

"What's the matter with you, you psycho?"

"You think I'm a psycho? Let's ask Olive, shall we?"

"You wouldn't dare."

"Try me."

* * *

Andre was already up and in the shower. Three encounters with him and all she could think of was Tony. To her disgust Tony began to resemble Paul Sandon in her memory. She and Tony might have had a pedestrian love life by today's standards, but at least he didn't jump up and leave afterwards.

True, Andre tended to her lust. He kept the sexual wolf from the door, and spared her from becoming one of those tragic older women who hurl themselves at men without even realizing it. Marjorie was nothing if not practical. Sexual satisfaction served as a suit of armour in the battle of the sexes. Imagine that bathroom encounter with Steve had she still been lonely. The thought of taking him up made her shudder.

And yet, with each session with Andre the empty after-feeling grew sharper. But what was the alternative? Paul Sandon had Tiffany. It was so unfair.

Andre came out of the bathroom rubbing himself vigorously with a towel.

She leaned her head on her hand. "Maybe we should leave it for a week or two."

"Not happy?"

"No, it's great, really. It's just..."

"Old man's suspicious? Honestly love, what's wrong with blokes? I can't believe a guy'd neglect a bird like you. Believe me, I spend a lot of time keeping my wife happy."

Marjorie sat all the way up. "What? You're married?" Instinctively, she pulled the sheet over her naked body.

He laughed good-naturedly. "Course I am. Don't worry about it."

"But that means we're committing adultery?"

"Come again? You're the one cheating on your husband!"

"My husband's dead!"

"Ah ha. That's why you were panting for it. You should've told me. I give a discount to widows. It's the least I can do." He clicked his tongue. "And here I was thinking your hubby was either a fool or a bastard."

"He was neither. He was the best man I've ever known." With that Marjorie burst into tears. Andre moved towards her.

"Don't you touch me. Not ever. Never. You, you, ADULTERER."

At the opposite end of the court Olive and Steve Henley masqueraded as a happy couple. What if people knew Olive fulfilled her more exotic urges with 'Discreet Escorts for Ladies,' or that Steve

groped widows in their family bathroom?

Paul Sandon took his position on the court. He waved his new Yonex racket at Marjorie.

He and the Henleys must have hit it off. Sandon had been hovering around them everywhere Marjorie went lately. She knew him quite well, and the more she knew, the more bitter she felt.

"Steve tells me you've got a wicked backhand," Paul said.

Marjorie almost choked. "I'm sure he did."

She mimed several shots. Her eyes scanned the clubhouse, the other courts and the spectator seating.

"What, no Tiffany?"

"Not yet," he said happily, "But she'll be along soon. She's quite taken with you."

"How charming. Though I can't imagine why."

After touching his toes several times Steve began leaping in the air and circling his feet as if running. To Marjorie's horror Olive progressed from in-place jogging to stretching. With her back to Marjorie she bent down and bounced her hands towards her toes. Marjorie was confronted by the half moon of her panties - a pair specially made to match her skirt. Spiderous varicose veins marched in columns towards the panties. The tops of Olive's legs resembled lunar topography: there were troughs and valleys, plateaus and dried out stream beds.

Paul appeared unable to look away. Marjorie grinned; the sight was mesmerizing. Sensing her gaze, Paul winked. He sauntered across to her. "I've been invited to Olive's next pool-party and I hear she wears a bikini."

Marjorie was about to join him in a giggle at Olive's expense when she remembered her early resolve to dislike him. How dare he? Something inside her snapped. How dare this Peter Pan Complex, mid-life, make-a-fool-of-himself man ridicule Olive's appearance (however grim)? He who dates women half his age. Relatively speaking, Olive had aged well. When Tony was alive Marjorie would never have been sucked in by a Paul Sandon. Olive couldn't help her varicose veins. Paul's debauchery with Tiffany was a matter of self-control.

Knowing that a man who went for a girl like Tiffany would never go for a woman like Marjorie, hurt more than she could bear. Tiffanyising aside, she was drawn to Paul. He was intelligent, charming and witty. It was too much. She strode off the court.

Olive called to her, but Marjorie kept going. What she and Tony had was an aberration, a blip, something odd that was destined by its beauty to end tragically. Marjorie had been all for the sexual revolution in her youth, but all that idealism had grown old and ugly. People behaved like animals. Lone females raised their young and then fell prey to dangerous, marauding males, like Steve and Paul. She stumbled through the tennis club gate out into the park.

She sensed a presence behind her, then someone strong gripped her arm. She turned. It was Paul. Bitter tears flowed down her cheeks. She ordered herself to stop crying but it did no good.

"You needn't bother about a tearful widow."

"Hardly how I think of you, Marjorie."

"How do you think of me Paul? Or should the question be: do you think of me?"

"Are you blind?"

"No Paul, I'm not. Tiffany's no phantom."

She tried to pull away, but he held her arm. He looked confused. He rubbed his chin, then a knowing smile crept across his lips.

"Ah, Tiffany and me. Me and Tiffany?"

He sid his arm through hers and continued along a concrete path that ran through a stand of old sycamore trees. To avoid a struggle Marjorie fell in step.

"Do you remember a few years back a helicopter crashed in the Blue Mountains carrying a businessman and his sister?"

"What?"

"The businessman was Tiffany's father, and his sister was my wife."

Marjory turned towards him. "Oh Paul, I remember now, it was all over the news. I'm so sorry."

"So am I Marjorie. Shall we keep walking?"

Dappled light fell through the sycamore leaves and formed patterns on the ground. A fog seemed to be lifting inside Marjorie. She turned to Paul.

"So," he said squeezing her hand, "Do you think I'd have a chance with girls like Tiffany?"

"Not while I'm around."

THE END

NEW

Tarilika Desai

New doors to the
New mystery
Are opening up
At the arrival of each
New day!
New energy is added
In every atom
Of the air
Filling with freshness
And vigor.
New colors are beaming
In every inch
Of the sky
Making us wonder
With delight,
New beauty is blooming
In every bit.
Of Nature
Creating a land of
Romance and dream.
Let the new mystery
Thrill us forever,
Our life be enriched,
By the bliss of
This newness.