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## I Find My Three Girls

This is the first summer after I moved to the UK. This is July, in London. I've been on Tinder for two months, and the casual hook-ups are fun, but they aren't quite what I want. I'm not ready for a relationship, though, so I decide to try something a little different. I take the Victoria line south to Pimlico. I'm early. There is a park overlooking the Thames and the tide is coming in. The sunshine is gorgeous. I read the directions again and find my way to Rohan's building. The lift is old, and I wait for it alongside an old man wearing a jumper, carrying a walking stick, and I wonder how many women the residents have seen waiting in this corridor, women who are paying Rohan for his services like I am.

He opens the door: bright blue eyes, shaved head, a small goatee. His accent is European, Lithuanian. He prepares me a cup of tea and talks me through the five hours we'll spend together. I'll shower. We'll do a few warm-up exercises involving easy movements. We'll do some bonding and trust-building exercises, he'll give me a full-body massage, and then, if I want it, he'll help bring me to orgasm.

I found Rohan through a friend in Nottingham. I told her about some of my past sexual experiences, my recent hysterectomy and the slow, painful recovery, the sense that something wasn't quite right. I once watched a film called *The Sessions* based on the life of Mark O'Brien, who was paralyzed after contracting polio as a child. With the help of a sex surrogate, he learned how, within his physical limitations, to have sex. Something resonated with me about the way he felt trapped inside his body, the way he needed help.

After the full-body massage, Rohan asks if I'd like to continue. I'm lying on the living room floor of his small flat. He tells me he's placed a plastic liner beneath my towel and blanket – it's okay, he says, whatever comes out of me. One of the hopes is that I'll have an ejaculatory orgasm. He says it will release negative energy, toxins, anything I've been

holding inside that I need to let go. He begins. He uses only his hands. After several minutes, he stops and says maybe we should take a break. But I am devastated. I feel like I've failed. I have been trying so hard.

Okay, he says, a little more.

Moments pass. I relax. I imagine, like I did when I was giving birth, that I am opening – a flower with my petals spreading, opening. And then he stops. I ask him – because I couldn't feel much – I ask him if everything is okay.

He says I did fine.

Part of the history I gave him during our chat earlier over tea was about the surgery a year ago. After the hysterectomy I couldn't pee for two solid weeks without a catheter. Something happened to my wiring – I couldn't feel much of anything, and it was like my brain and my pelvis had stopped talking to each other.

You are still healing, Rohan says. It takes time.

We eat a small feast on his living room floor, me half-covered in a beautiful red-and-orange scarf, him in white boxer briefs. He reminds me about my chakras, how this process clears and aligns them, beginning with my root chakra and moving all the way up to the top of my head. I feel like a queen. My body feels soft, as if I am glowing, literally giving off light. Each bit of dried fruit, each nut and seed, I roll across my tongue slowly, split apart between my teeth in alternating sweet and salty bites.

I take the train to Brighton that afternoon. I've booked two nights in a room in a house owned by a gay couple – a chef and a massage therapist. The next morning, while their cat lies curled up on my lap, they talk me through how to find a quiet part of the beach. Later, in the afternoon sunshine, I sleep off and on, eat a picnic lunch, float on my back on the rolling water. I watch the blue sky and the thin white clouds. I feel as if I'm part of that sky, this sea, the waves rising and falling.

Fast forward to autumn, October. I meet Callum at a ceilidh in Stroud. I pass him and his friend on the way to the water cooler in the bar. There's a bottle in my backpack, but I want a better look. Callum has big blue eyes and a beard – he's the one I ask to dance.

Our first date is in Stratford-upon-Avon. Over the next two months, we go for walks with his son, hike with his brother in Dartmoor, watch the solstice sunrise over Stonehenge. One evening, on the way to his house, I ask him a question. I ask if he likes oral sex. It's taken me all afternoon to get up my courage. In previous relationships, I've gone years without.

“Sure, I like it,” he says. He drives on a moment, then looks at me. “You mean, me going down on you?”

“Yes,” I say.

“Of course. Sure. Sorry,” he says.

That night, he lifts my hips to his chin. His beard brushes the inside of my legs, and his hands cup my backside. The years of wondering if something is wrong with me battle inside my head.

My stomach finally relaxes, then my thighs, my fists. I feel an orgasm welling inside me, and it doesn't stop. It's the first time. In a guy's mouth. Ever. Afterwards, my hand resting on his chest, I realise I didn't even know this was possible. How could I not know this?

Fast forward again, to winter, a year-and-a-half later. I've been in the UK now for two-and-a-half years. It's February, a dark, lonely time of year in the UK that manages to kick my arse each time it comes around. And magnifies whatever pain and emptiness I am feeling.

John, a psychic in Devon, tells me over the phone to imagine a blue ball of light, about the size of a tennis ball, hovering in front of me at chest height. "Let it circle round you," he says, "and then create another circle, a larger one, in front of you. If you were seeing it from overhead," he says, "it would look like you're standing in a figure of eight." The scene I imagine is sort of like one with Frodo in the film version of *The Lord of the Rings*, when he's alone and gets stabbed by a Nazgûl – the blue light of my tennis ball is like the blue-fire edge of that sword. And, like Frodo, I am in a between-world: somewhere not quite here, not quite there. But this blue light in my between-world is a healing light. It's powerful, but it's not poison – it's an antidote.

In reality though, I'm standing in my living room with my eyes closed, my mobile phone in my pocket, ear buds in my ears, and John is guiding me over the phone through a clearing of past relationships. The physiotherapist I see for my shoulder told me about John after I mentioned to her how tight my neck and throat feel at work, how my heart races and I feel dizzy. And I'm traveling soon to the States. As each day passes, I find it harder to breathe when I think about going on the plane. John says this session we're doing is like wringing me out – as if I'm a sponge that's soaked up the energy of others, and soon I'll be empty, free, just me.

"I want you to imagine – gently, but firmly – each person going into that far circle," he says. "There is no need to be angry or pushy. Just gently let them go." I picture my husbands, my boyfriends, my lovers. Then my family, my friends. "Each of your colleagues," John says, "let them go into the circle gently. You're cutting all past ties, contracts, and obligations so you can operate as an individual, free, and within your own power."

Next he talks me through the final steps of release, of standing alone in my own circle of light and slicing downward with an imagined blue sword through the connection point between my circle and the one that contains everyone else. I sleep afterwards, exhausted and empty.

I am, actually, ninety-nine percent atheist. I told John this during our first phone call. “Well, you might hear some words that sound odd, or at odds with your beliefs,” he said. “You’ll have to let me know if you want to proceed.” I did, of course. My physiotherapist said he’d done something powerful for her. I wanted, needed, something powerful for myself.

After the clearing of my first session, the chronic pain in my neck and shoulder flares and intensifies. I call John, and he says he thinks in a past life I have been hanged: a slow, painful death. The woman I offended in that past life had worked a deal with the executioner to prolong the moment of death, to make it as painful as possible. I tell John I have an appointment with my physiotherapist that afternoon. He works with his spirit guides to release me from the noose, and he puts a protective band of pink light around my neck, which he says will augment the work with the physiotherapist. And it feels true – she is able to go deeper into my muscles and fascia than in any previous session. My neck pain eases to the point that I only need two paracetamol a day.

We have a few more sessions – a story for another time, but for now, I need to tell you about the three girls.

John suggests we have a session to retrieve parts of myself he thinks are still lost. He received “information” from his spirit guides that something had happened in my past, and that my three-year-old, six-year-old, and nine-year-old selves had been frozen. He wants to go retrieve these three girls. “I’m too tired,” I say – it’s been a terrible week.

Then he tells me how the girls feel, what it's been like for them to be cut off from me. He tells me the steps we would take to recover them. The girls sound so sad, so lonely. Finally, I say okay.

It begins with visualising a house. We start in the attic, where there's a computer that symbolises my brain. We shut down the computer and begin moving to lower parts of the house. We're looking for the girls, and we find the nine-year-old first. She leads us to the six-year-old, who is on the roof looking at the stars. And the two of them lead us to the three-year-old, who is in a doghouse off the kitchen. The three-year-old doesn't speak, which is a signal to John that she's undergone the most damage. She won't talk to either of the other two girls but, eventually, she speaks through a doll that looks like a cross between a puppet and a child's love object. The doll gives us only the simplest of answers. *The boys hurt us*, it says. I realise there are tiny snakes inside the three-year-old, and a big snake, and lots of liquid. John tells me to visualise a cloth that soaks up all of the snakes and the liquid. Then I imagine a hole opening up in the ground, filled with magma. I throw the cloth into the hole, where it is incinerated. The hole closes, and the snakes are gone.

"She's healed," John says. "*You're* healed. Anything anyone ever left inside you is gone. Forever."