
SUNDAY MORNING SHOPPING / *Rosa Maria DelVecchio*

BIKINI TESTER: FREE WEIGHT AND FORTUNE read a sign over a huge scale that reminded me of a 210-pound lollypop.

Marc's Deep Discount Store was made for Ph.D. candidates like me who are expected to survive on an academic year's stipend of \$3400.00. Of course, I don't. I make ends meet, as anyone but a refined English professor would put it, and every night for dinner, before closing, I eat a Big Mac, my one and only fringe benefit.

That's a lot of Big Macs absorbed into a body per year, not to mention the french fries and chocolate shakes. So I don't have to tell you that, as I entered Marc's last Sunday morning in my dark blue sundress that was not too tight on me three years ago, I passed up the free weight and fortune offer and chose not to embarrass myself before a group of teenage boys who were standing near the exit flipping through the bikini issue of *Scene*.

All I needed—I repeated to myself as I walked swiftly down the Maybelline aisle, with my purse clutched to my side by my right arm, my hands folded before me firmly gripping the plastic handles of a little green shopping basket that pressed into my stomach—was a box of Stayfree thin maxi-pads, \$2.69 minus my 75-cent coupon, and two blank videotapes for *Conan the Destroyer* and *Rocky IV* on cable this week.

Leggs, two for \$2.99. Good deal. Size A. Size B. Size...

So much for that.

Why a Size A needs to control her top is beyond me. What else did I need? That was all. I tried to go to the checkout....

Triple-layer Devil's Food with white icing! How seductive and only three dollars....Put it down, Audrey, a voice from within warned, and go to the checkout!

"May I help you, ma'am?" a male voice broke my trance. I didn't look up. What did he mean by "ma'am"? I was only twenty-nine. He should have said "miss." I would even settle for the "honey" that would have offended me sixty pounds ago.

"No, thank you," I mumbled in disappointment, placing the cake into my basket. I walked over to a boy with fluffy blonde locks, who was efficiently stamping prices onto cans of Ragu, and a tiny voice that resembled mine asked, "Where can I get a shopping cart please?"

At the checkout an hour later, I handed the cashier two crisp twenties. She returned \$5.23 and said, "Thank you. Come again." The teenage boys with their "girly" magazine were gone. A father who'd just entered the store was having a tug of war with his little girl over who

was going to get to push the shopping cart. Two little brothers in red cut-offs and scabby knees were chasing a purple ball that shot out of the 25-cent bubble gum machine and was now rolling on the floor toward their mother, whose husband was trying to pry a baby monster from her bosom. Three girls in halters and hot pants stood near the exit doors deeply engaged in secret giggles.

As I edged me and my two fat grocery bags around the three blonde beauties, I was overtaken by a sudden lurch in my chest and a burning sensation rose to my cheeks.

What a god! There, majestically taking advantage of Marc's free weight and fortune offer, stood a freshly tanned Adonis (no, really, I mean it) in a gripping black muscle shirt, hands on hips, waiting for the needle to whirl around and rest on?... 192 OH-MY-GOD pounds! of shameless masculine flesh.

Next came the sound of bags tearing and groceries crashing to the floor. I crouched down, quickly trying to refill the torn bags while Snickers, glazed donuts, Ho Ho's repeatedly fell through to the floor, the triple layers of my cake exposed on the floor for everyone to see.

"Here, miss," a male voice said, "let me help you. Too heavy for you, huh?"

Now you've heard enough stories like these that you don't need me to tell you that, when I looked up, I was struck by his deep blue eyes, his jet black curls, and two brand new grocery bags. And that I was melted by the muscles in his thighs as he knelt beside me in his tight blue jeans. And that he carried my groceries to my car.

"Thank you," I said.

"You're welcome," he smiled, in a manner I found most peculiar to my recent embarrassment.

"Can I offer you anything?" I asked out of courtesy, knowing no one ever accepts payment for such a favor.

"I don't eat junk food," he said, holding up the sum total of *his* Sunday morning shopping, a 97-cent liter of Diet Coke. "What else," he added, opening the car door for me, "can you offer me?"

"I meant," I answered, apologetically, "I mean, that I'd, I'd like to pay you, sir." I had to be formal. After all, he'd seen—indeed, even handled—all the "junk" from which my body was made. I had to pretend that I was intelligent enough not to assume someone like *Mr. Diet Coke* would come on to or even mildly flirt with a junk-food addict like me. Or maybe I thought to impress him with my modesty.

"Sir"? Yes, madam," he said, crossing his arms over his massive chest and looking down at me, "pay me." And I feared not that he was serious but that he wasn't. That he was being playful with me. That he was

challenging me to be the woman I'm in the habit of believing no bastard of a man allows me the freedom to be.

I lowered my head. My hair tangled around my fingers as I fished through my purse. He placed one hand on the roof of my car and held the door open with the other. I was trapped between the inside of the car and his magnificent physique. I found the wallet, pulled out my last bill until payday, and held it out to him without looking up. "Here you go. Thank you again."

"Honey, are you afraid of men?"

I didn't hear the question. Would he mind repeating it? For it sounded just like he'd said, "Nice weather we're having today, isn't it?"

He reached into my purse and pulled something out.

"Hey! What are you doing?" I got into the car and tried to pull the door shut. He was in my way. "Could you please take this money so I can get going?" He snatched the five from my hand and busied himself doing something on the roof of my car.

Then he dropped something into my lap. As my hands reached out to press down on the car horn the way a lady like me has been trained to be expected to do in this type of situation, he cuffed his hands around my wrists and made himself comfortable beside me on the edge of the seat. "No, no. Sit still," he said, pinning my arms back and resting his chest against me. "Look, look," he urged, indicating what he'd thrown into my lap.

Lipstick.

"What is it?"

"Do you think I'd try to rape you here?"

"I don't know, would you?" I asked, ignoring the couple that just pulled in the parking space beside me.

"Probably."

"Probably what?"

"Probably I would rape you. Well, not exactly 'rape.' But kind of like it, I guess."

"You're crazy! Why are you doing this?"

"Why don't you scream?"

"Why are you doing this?"

"I haven't done anything yet. You mean 'what am I waiting for', don't you? We're not exactly isolated."

"You, go straight to hell!"

"Hold still talk to me God damn you tell me!"

"Tell you what?"

"Don't be afraid of me. Answer me?"

"What? What do you want from me!"

"What do you want from me?"

"I don't know you!"

"I don't know you."

"I hate you!"

"Hate me."

He thrust the wrinkled five-dollar bill down the front of my dress, a gesture I received passively.

The lipstick rolled out of my lap, and then I understood and I laughed.

"My name is Audrey," I admitted, as he leaned over me licking the tears off my cheeks, "and don't use your teeth."

"Thank you" were his only parting words. Just as suddenly as he'd trapped me, he released me and got out of the car.

I watched him walk through the parking lot, swinging the bottle of Diet Coke at his side, while on the roof of my blue Tempo lingered, in the shade "Really Red," a phone number and the name ALEX printed above it, pertinent information that I discovered after returning home from shopping that Sunday morning.

I looked up to see if he'd claimed a car yet, but he was already out of the parking lot, walking carefree all the way to the main intersection, where finally Alex stopped, waiting for the light to change before crossing the street.