

Trinkets

—*Sarabeth Mull*

DID YOU FEEL IT? DO YOU ALREADY KNOW WHEN you touch me? Can you read it on my face? Can you sense it in my fingertips? That sense of longing. The hope for yesterday. The outlook for tomorrow. Can you see through me with just a touch? I am deceiving you as we touch. I am already cheating on you, and making a fool of you, and you have no idea... Or do you?

He touched my wrist. He touched it, and he has not a clue, but that wrist belongs to someone else. To Steven. That wrist belongs to my Steven. No matter. I am here. I am here with David. David is my choice today. Does David know that I am making a fool of him? That with each look or smile or laugh or touch that I am deceiving him? He doesn't know. He couldn't know. Damn it. He must know. I hate him for not knowing. I hate him for being too stupid to see that I am deceiving him. Maybe he is deceiving me? Maybe he DOES see it. Maybe he DOES know my betrayal, but his betrayal is MORE than mine. So he keeps his thoughts to himself, so that way I won't have those thoughts either. I won't be able to accuse him. He is sneaky and deceitful, and I shouldn't be with him. I should be with James. James was the one that gave me the earrings. I'm wearing them now.

Do you know that, David? The ears you whisper into at night before going to bed already belong to James. They belong to him. He was there long before you were, and he'll still be there long after you are gone. Your impact on my life is still unknown. Maybe you will get to have a toe, I may be able to spare a toe for you, but really, one can never tell. Sometimes, a mark is never left. A part is never owned. Sometimes, it's just a person passing through and then it's

gone.

What about Adam?

Adam liked to travel. He lived all over the United States and in many places all over the world. It was hard to contain him. Yet, I did. Somehow, I was able to keep him with me for a year and a half. How this was possible, I will never know. He had spark and spirit and could speak many languages. He was born on May 15, 1973. I loved him for many things, but mostly I loved him for taking the time to love me. I also hated him for taking the time to love me. I knew that I could not keep him grounded. I knew that soon he would want to fly again, and move to a place far away across the earth. So, I pushed him away. I didn't want to hold him back, so I made him leave. In hindsight, I should not have done this. He was a grown man, capable of making his own decisions. He wanted me. He WANTED me. I was not a burden, yet I alone decided that I was. I convinced myself that he was going to leave, and when he DID leave, I told myself and him that I had been right all along. I knew he would go, and now he had. A part of him is left behind. Here it is on my finger. It is a ring made out of a coin from Egypt. The coin is of no special sentiment. It was just the money he carried in his pocket while

he was there. But, when he met me, he noticed my appreciation of foreign coins; so he took it to a jeweler and had it made into a ring for me to wear. He didn't ask for it back when he left. He just left, to God knows where. Now, the ring stays behind as a reminder of his love. Of my love. Of the love that I could never quite grasp or understand. Adam owns this finger. And YOU, David, will never be able to have that.

I am cold hearted. I carry my secrets where everyone can see. If they only knew how to look. No one knows where to look for my secrets, and I suppose that is the best secret of all. The trick I play on the rest of the world. The trick I am playing on you, David. Poor, ignorant, gullible David. I haven't quite figured out your purpose in my life, and so far you have shown me nothing of interest. Yet here you are, filling in my time, and being there only when I have no one else to talk to.

David crawls into bed beside me. I know what he wants. I want none of that. I've already done that today. With James. James who owns my ears.

Who is James?

James was a bank manager. He wore a three-piece suit every day, even if he wasn't working. Even in the summer. He was professional. He was

tall. He was intuitive. He saw right through me the first time we spoke on the phone. He was born on May 5, 1973. He was married. And since he did not care about that, neither did I. I spoke with him on the phone for a year before I ever slept with him. And after that I was hooked. He was my father. He was my brother. He was my child. He was my boyfriend. He was my husband. He was my lover. Somehow, he encapsulated all of these things. Yet, there was a purposeful distance. I never told him I loved him. He dominated me. He took me places no one can ever begin to dream to go. Explaining them would only diminish their impact. Right before Christmas, we fought. The end all be all of fights. I assumed it was over. And then the package came. In it was a writing pen, chocolates and the earrings. The earrings that I still wear. The earrings that I will never take off. The earrings that James bit onto this morning to pinch my ears in the heat of passion. This morning, before you were here, David. My betrayal still exists with James. He is here. He was here. He has owned and still owns these ears. He will never let go, because I will not let him. I am his escape and he is mine. If you are with me, you have to take him too.

I am disgusted with myself. I live everyday with this guilt. But, if I did not have this guilt, what else would I have? I need to feel something, anything, even if it is guilt, to remember that I am still alive. For the moment that I stop feeling, that is the moment that I will cease to live.

A comment was made tonight. David told me that he saw someone wearing my bracelet. This is an impossibility, not because my bracelet is one of a kind, it isn't. It is impossible because no other bracelet in the history of the world has been owned by the same two people as mine. I wear the bracelet every day, and it owns me as much as I own it. There are many pictures of me, but none that exist with the bracelet in them. I am very conscious of this. And that is because this bracelet belongs to Mary. I stole it from her.

Mary and I started talking to one another in March. It never felt odd or out of the ordinary. We had a connection that one could not deny. Mary was born on November 17, 1969. She was married to a man named Todd. He did not fulfill her. She was an excellent lover. She was able to satisfy me in ways no man ever could. Mary was an airline pilot, which meant that she would come into town for

a few days, and then be gone again. She didn't consider what we did cheating, since it wasn't with another man. I would lay in her hotel room with her for hours, talking about things I did not know, acting as if I was more worldly than I actually am. She would fall asleep inside of my embrace. Her warmth comforted me like a soft blanket. Every so often, her breathing would slow to an almost non-existent pace. Then, suddenly, she would jump awake, gasping for breath. Sometimes I wondered if I was there only to make sure that the gasp happened. To make sure that she did not, in fact, stop breathing altogether in the middle of the night. No matter. I used her for my own selfish comfort as well. I am still not sure if I loved her; ours was a confusing courtship. The last time we stayed together, she had to rush out the door to catch an early flight in the morning. She left her bracelet. Now my bracelet. I know she did not mean to leave it, but I never told her that I found it. She never asked me if I did. Two weeks later it was discovered that her husband had cancer. I never saw Mary again. But, yet, here she is. She exists with me always. Mary holds my hand every day, and the smoothness of the silver on the bracelet reminds me of her soft touch, that could never be

replicated by you, David.

David likes to smell my hair. He likes to touch it too. To run his fingers through it. Every now and again, his fingertips get tangled in between where my hair ends and my necklace begins. When I feel this slight pull, I realize that I'm still wearing it. And that leads me to Anas.

To put it simply, Anas was from Morocco. He is Muslim. And though he does not practice daily, he does adhere to the celebration and fasting of the Muslim holiday of Ramadan. I met him during Ramadan. I found while fasting for this holiday, that as long as you are good during the daylight hours, at night you are given free rein to do as you please. Our courtship involved cussing, smoking, drinking and fucking, but only after 7pm, and before 7am. My connection with Anas, who was born on August 25, 1978, was purely superficial. He took me to fancy restaurants, where we ate like kings. He took me to nightclubs where we were the VIP's and we were waited on hand and foot. The liquor would flow freely. The music would play loudly. We would dance wildly. And his friends. His FRIENDS. They would be doing the same thing. We would all be together in a group. All there for the same reason. To have fun. They had money, which meant

we had money. Though I was suspicious of where the money was coming from, since none of them ever seemed to work. Without asking, my question was answered. Anas and his friends enjoyed a very particular fine white powder. They enjoyed it for work and for play. And the moment I realized this, I was done with him. I never loved him, but I knew he loved me. He told me he did every day. I never answered back, and he never realized that I did not answer. Anas had a coin that he had brought back from his last trip home to Morocco. He had noticed my ring, the one from Adam, and he had a necklace made for me. He did truly love me, and though I did not love him, I was sorry to see him go. He earned the spot he has around my neck.

David, David, David. Do you really think that I could ever make room for you? That there is a part of you that is as important to me as this ring? As this bracelet? As these earrings? As this necklace? There is no part of you that I want or care about as much as I do these things. These things make up who I am. They are as much a part of me as who my parents are. In fact, they are more a part of me because they were my choice. All of my life, all of my memories, are wrapped around these trin-

kets. Yet, I would trade in each of these things to have Steven back. My Steven. My lifeline.

Steven and I met in the most usual of ways. He called my place of business asking to speak with a co-worker. That person was busy, so he decided to talk to me until they were free. After a few days, he was calling just to talk to me. After a week, he had my personal number. After a month, he had my trust. He was born on April 18, 1957. We would call one another every night at 11pm, without fail. We started off talking about our day. Then it grew toward family. Life choices. Mistakes made. Greatnesses achieved. Lessons learned, and shared. By midnight I would be standing on my front porch, even in the dead of winter, smoking a cigarette and laughing harder than I ever had before. By 1am, his voice would be so slurred by the bourbon that I could barely understand him anymore. And by 2am, I would have finally convinced him that it was time to go to bed. This was our ritual. Our comfort zone. He had no family. I had no want for my own. We shared each other's company through cell phones. And I enjoyed it that way. As close as can be without ever involving that messy face to face communication. He told me he loved me at the end of every

conversation. And I told him I loved him right back. Because I did. Christmas came. And with that holiday, my Steven came as well. He showed up at my place of business, unexpectedly. He had not been drinking, which meant that he was shaking uncontrollably. I looked at him for the first time, and stared directly into his eyes. They were a haze of grey and blue, and each time he blinked, I could feel my heart skip a beat. He couldn't hold my stare. He was taken. Crippled by the intensity of my presence. He had not been expecting a woman like me. Even with our nightly conversations, he had not realized the power that I held. At least, that's what he told me. I had no clue that this power existed. In fact, I still don't think it does. When we walked outside and he kissed me, I was taken aback. This, I was not ready for. I was connected to this man, inside and out, but I didn't want him to be like the others. I wanted him to know me. The real me. Not the throw away sexual side. Men had used up that part of me in the past, and where had it gotten me? I thought Steven was different. I thought he didn't care about moving forward. I was happy with our relationship as it was. With no complications. With no distractions. Just pure emotion. He obviously wanted more, and

I was not ready to give it. I busied myself with work. The phone calls grew further apart. Steven was ordered to go to rehab for his drinking on the job. On the day he was to leave, he gave me his watch to hold onto. I was to keep it until he returned. I was unable to speak to him while he was gone. A month later he was home. He called me, begging me to come over, and bring some liquor with me. I refused. And a month after that he was dead. Steven, my Steven, was gone forever. He died on May 3, 2009. I have his watch, my watch. It rests on my wrist where his hand should be. It never keeps the time. And when it dies, as it tends to do daily, I am reminded of his death. And what I could have done to stop it. What I did not do. I was selfish, and I allowed Steven, my Steven to die. I wear this watch because I need to be reminded of my selfishness, and my cold-heartedness. I wear it as a warning to myself to treat others with kindness, for you never know when they will be gone. Steven owns this wrist. He will never, ever let go. I will never let him. And you, David, will never be able to become what Steven, my Steven, was to me.

I toss and turn tonight. I let David lay beside me. But that is all. I cannot overcome the thought that I am not his. He

is not mine. He cannot be who everyone else was to me. Is he willing to share me? Can he? Would he? Does he want to live with the knowledge that every day he is surrounded by my past? He would ask me to let go of it. Of myself. He would make me cut off my finger. He would mutilate my wrists. Burn off my ears. Mar my neck. Could I live without these things? I am making his decisions for him.

What if I am his Adam, and he only loves me because he thinks I love him? Let's say I am his James, and he sees me like his mother, and his sister, and his child, and his girlfriend, and his wife and his lover. Maybe I encapsulate all of these things for him. Suppose I am his Mary, and I am the best lover that HE

has ever had? Perhaps I am his Anas, and I am the one who is showing him a life he never knew existed. Worst of all, what if I am his Steven? Maybe I am the one he runs to for comfort. Maybe I am his best friend. Maybe I am the only one he can trust with every ounce of his being and be able to cling to when his life is falling apart at the seams.

If these instances are true, it may be possible that I need to rethink my relationship with David. What if David could be the glue that holds all of the pieces of me together? David was born on July 29, 1980.

I am here. I am here with David. David is my choice today.



—Sheree Whitlock, "Painted Pony"