

My Clear Conscience Coach

“Stop dinking around and tell me what she said!”

I lagged behind Ben, my irritation splitting atoms as we shouldered through milling crowds at the Eco Expo Extravaganza. This was the last place I wanted to be, or expected to be, since the plan was to go to Nubio’s for lunch where he was going to tell me what Michelle wouldn’t tell me.

“Just making a quick delivery,” Ben said. “Relax. Only take a minute.”

I considered waiting in his hybrid. If I had, it would’ve obliterated destiny.

“Should never have set you up with her,” Ben said before plowing into a salesman wielding a negative ion tower.

I’d just broken up with Michelle, or rather she with me. I thought we had something special. Not the love-at-first sight attraction Ben claims velcroed him and Cherise, but something that ramps up gradually, marinates for a few months of dating before it moves front burner. But the flame was doused before it raised a sizzle. After only six weeks of seeing each other, Michelle said, “I need to be done with this.” As if our budding relationship was equivalent to enduring a traffic jam.

“I need to be done this.” It haunted me. I kept hounding Ben as we muscled our way through hordes of shuffling sandals.

“She met somebody, right?”

“Here you go, Josh,” he said as we passed a display of natural skin products. “Rub some volcanic ash on your face, guaranteed to remove acne. Just ask the people of Pompeii.”

“Lay it on me, man, what’d Michelle say?”

“Here?”

“Yeah, here. I want it now, this is torture.”

“Alright, already.” He pulled up in front of an aura photography booth. “Michelle said you were a controlling, close-minded, insensitive pig. Happy now?”

I let it in, chewing each word. Controlling, sure, one could take my get-things-done style as controlling. As for close-minded, that’s actually a desirable trait. I’m not some gullible flake that’s easily sold. And insensitive? Excuse me, but am I not feeling heartbroken that she dumped me? “Ben? Hey?”

I caught up with him at his girlfriend Cherise’s exhibit, *Feng Shui the World*. Ben gave her a nibble on the ear and handed her the sheaf of brochures he carried.

“Thanks babe,” she said. “Hi Josh.”

“Hey Cherise,” I said, avoiding eye contact. I knew she thought Michelle was above my pay grade.

“Still waiting for that invite to check out the chi of your place.”

“Yeah,” I nodded and looked away murmuring, “No freakin’ way.” I didn’t want my loft feng-shuied. As for my love life—bring it. Point the chi at finding the ‘Irrefutable One.’ I’d pay to feng that shui big time.

And right then, like movie magic, the plodding throng of people parted for a slow-motion moment and I spotted *her* across the way. She

was standing in a booth under a royal blue banner that read: *Be Light. Be Clear. Be Free.* Butter blond hair. Slim yet substantial in a crisp white blouse and khaki shorts. She must have felt the high beams of my attention bake her face because she pivoted and fed a smile my way.

Within seconds we were thick in conversation. An easy jump start given the educate-me-on-what-you're-selling scene.

"So what exactly does a Clear Conscience Coach do?" I asked, slow and smooth, masking the sparks my body shot off.

"I bring insight and healing to people's tormented lives," she said in fluid English tinted with a Swedish accent.

"Tell me more."

"Look around, everywhere people are cracking under the heavy burden of their conscience. It's become critically obese," she said.

"Their conscience is fat?"

"What do you think is behind the epidemic of migraines, depression, eating disorders, hyper-tension, insomnia..."

"Our conscience?"

"It's like a sponge. It absorbs everything your higher self perceives on a vibe level." She handed me her card. Not a ring on either hand. "So, I help people take the weight off their minds with a conscience diet."

My lips wow-parted as I locked on her goddess blues. Her skin milky smooth, void of makeup, the 'I'm complete as is' kind. I wanted to take her in my arms right there under the anemic fluorescents. Goodbye Michelle. Hello...

"Sonia."

"I'm Josh and I'm interested." I glanced at the card, then bobbed back to her face, late 20's, early 30's, my range, not that it mattered, love overcomes years. "So, how does this work, Sonia?"

She asked me to choose the clarity of conscience I was seeking.

"One session for Pearl, two sessions for Crystal, and three for Innerfinity."

"Sign me up for three," I said. "Let's go all the way."

Not that I knew what was involved, only that I wanted to get involved.

"You're in for a rocket-launch liberation," she said, gently touching my upper arm which I instantly flexed.

"And there won't be that heavy first date thing hanging over us," I said to Ben across the table at Nubio's. 'Consulting, it's the new dating.'

"You're not listening." Ben whirled a fork of pasta almonidine against the raised rim of his plate. "The woman ruins people's lives."

"You don't know that, you said..."

"I said one of her clients told Cherise that what's-her-name..."

"Sonia."

"Yeah, that Sonia planted things in her brain. Things that put her in a paranoid state of suicidal despair."

"*One* person."

"Yeah. One's enough. She's a witch, man, a Norwegian..."

"Swedish."

"Whatever. Don't do it."

My loft had never been cleaner. I even added some features to charm Sonia's holistic sensibilities. She arrived on a mountain bike looking fresh and pert, hair raked back, silk sleeves rolled up, all business.

"This first session is about what surrounds you," she said. "Your home, your workplace, the clothing you wear, even the soap and shampoo you put on your body."

My expectation of some sort of self-hypnosis therapy was swiftly quashed when she checked the label behind the collar of my shirt.

"Let's start with the shirt you're wearing. Did you know it was made in wretched sweatshop conditions?" Before I could answer she added, "How do you feel about that— upset, angry, sad?"

"Hadn't really thought about it."

"Please forgive my bluntness, I'm passionate about these things, so don't take what I say personally. It's all in the best interest of your higher self."

"No worries. It's not like I love the shirt," I said, unbuttoning it. "And my higher self is fine with me naked."

"Nice shelter," she said, scanning the spacious loft. "And so quiet for being downtown."

"That it is." I tossed the shirt on the sofa and noticed a photo of me and Michelle on the bookshelf I'd overlooked. I sauntered leisurely to it, laid the picture face down, and stepped over to my new negative ion tower.

"And how do you like the vibes?"

Seeing the tower, she cooled. “Well, Josh, please understand that anything you plug into an electrical socket not only sucks life force out of the earth by draining non-replenishable resources vital to the planet’s aliveness, it also ...”

I tuned out the rest of her oration on the horrors of coal plants, fracking, and nuclear waste as the realization sunk in that I’d signed up for an item-by-item material inventory of my life with all its unethical baggage described in cringing detail.

“Can I get you something to drink?” I said. “Some tea, or how ‘bout a glass of wine?”

“Thanks, no,” Sonia said. “But you can take me to your closet.”

I pulled the plug on the negative ion tower en route to my bedroom. She slid open the pocket door to the walk-in closet. I stood behind her, bare-chested, as she eyeballed the clothes.

“I see you like denims.” She lifted a pant leg up to my nose. “Stitched by child labor in China.”

“Sure you don’t want something to drink?”

Sonia ignored the question. “How does that make you feel?”

“Umm, well...” I glanced down at the pair I was wearing. “They do a damn good sewing job.”

She lifted a finger to my face. “Big ah-ha coming. You ready?”

“Hit me.”

“Although our brains may not be aware of what goes into a product, our higher self senses everything—the sweltering air of the workplace, the dust being breathed, the strained fingers of girls

feverishly grinding away for pathetic wages. And our conscience absorbs all of that, from the origin to the consequences.”

“And what if you don’t have a conscience?”

“Then you’re either trapped in your reptile brain or you’re evil. Are you evil, Josh?”

“Me? I’m a realist. Seize what you can and carry a bat to beat back the rats.”

“I see.”

She stepped out of the closet and circled the bedroom remarking about the feathers plucked for the comforter, the tropical hardwood headboard, the plastic used to make the plasma TV. I stopped listening and simply watched her gracefully glide around the room savoring a paradise on legs. Play along, I coached myself. Nod thoughtfully like you’re intrigued as you get to know her.

She walked into the adjoining bathroom where she opened the cabinet, pulled a couple jars out and palmed one in her hand, reading the label.

“It’s volcanic ash,” I said. “Makes your face glow in the dark. Here, let me...”

She waved me off, set the jar of ash down on the sink next to the aspirin and plucked a tube of toothpaste off the shelf.

“Okay, Jack, let’s do a little visualization. You game?”

“Absolutely.”

“Can you be a rabbit for a moment? Sure you can. Shut your eyes and imagine you’re a bunny.”

“Are you going to be one, too?”

“Come on, close your eyes and imagine your fluffy white body tightly restrained in a modernized pillory as lab technicians apply a mixture of burning chemicals to your eyes. Can you feel that Josh, feel yourself pinned-in, shaking in fear?”

Sonia began sniffing and choked up. I opened my eyes to find her weeping.

“Now, now,” I said and gently wrapped my bare arms around her. She smelled like roses.

After quivering a couple seconds, she calmed. “I’m sorry,” she straightened up. “When you think of the pain so many animals suffer everyday just so our teeth can be whiter and our hair has bounce.”

“Well then, let’s just do this.” I lifted the waste basket from the floor and swept everything off the shelves into it.

“Ah, the realist has a conscience afterall,” she said, wiping her eyes.

I picked up the jar of volcanic ash and the bottle of aspirin she’d set on the sink and put them back in the cabinet. As I did, I caught our reflection in the wall mirror, her face next to mine, watching me as I shut the cabinet door. The words, ‘Move in with me today,’ butted against the back of my lips, aching to come out.

“Did you know...” she started and stopped.

“What? What is it, the ash?”

“No-no, that’s okay, we’ll get to it next session when we look at what you allow *inside* your body.”

“Then it’s the aspirin.”

“If you must know, Bayer has a dark past. We’re going back to when they were part of a German company working with the Nazis making experimental chemicals tested on concentration camp inmates.”

My body caved under the weight of that one. The old headache standby of the American family associated with the holocaust was tough even for me to swallow.

“No wonder they created aspirin.” I plucked the bottle off the shelf and plopped it in the waste basket. “Something to numb the guilt.”

The rest of her walk-through sped by in a blur of blah-blah. Sonia’s scope of knowledge about manmade products became so overwhelming I could feel synapses in my brain shorting out. Before I knew it, she was rolling her bike down the hall to the freight elevator and I was kicking myself for not taking the time to find out what she liked to do, her favorite foods, and more to the point, if she was seeing anyone.

From the third story window I watched her peddle off down Third Street. Then I headed for the bathroom, dug the Bayer aspirin out of the waste basket and washed three down with Perrier to kill the headache waging a ground war behind my eyes.

“You never see these at garage sales. This is like the premier of treadmills,” Ben grunted as we hefted it into the U-haul truck.

“It’s the electricity, Ben. The less you use the less you suck.”

As we climbed into the truck and maneuvered the treadmill away from the cargo door, Ben asked, “How much does she charge to tell you to throw your stuff away?”

"I'm not throwing it away. I'm just stashing it in a storage unit for a while."

"I got that. So how much are you paying her to *pretend* like you're taking her advice?"

"Money's not a thing for Sonia. She only asks for donations based on what you feel her guidance is worth."

"That's bullshit, everybody's got a price."

"She's an angel on a mission, why can't you accept that."

"Hang on," Ben pulled his smartphone out of his pocket. "I need to get this." He hopped down out of the truck and paced at the curb.

I looked at the stuff I was storing. Things I once dreamed of owning: the mega screen Samsung, my Stratocaster electric guitar, the Miele espresso maker, to name a few. I already wanted them back, but I wanted to see if there really was something to Sonia's conscience diet.

Ben came back. "Cherise wants to know if you're moving into a bat cave and becoming a breatharian."

I didn't ask him what that was. I pointed to the negative ion tower next to the curb. "You're taking the tower, right?"

"Yeah, I think Cherise will dig it."

"FYI, did you know that smartphone in your hand is made with polyvinyl chloride?"

"Don't go there, Josh."

"No, listen Ben, the production of polyvinyl chloride, aka poison plastic, spews dioxins into the environment. They even make kids toys out of the stuff and get away with it."

"Do the words, 'fuck the shut up', mean anything to you?"

“You can’t incinerate it ‘cause it cancers up the air, you can’t landfill it ‘cause it leaches toxins into the groundwater.”

Ben set his smartphone on the tailgate, put his hands over his ears and made blubbering sounds through his lips.

“And did I mention phthalate, which is said to cause birth-defects. There’s some of that in your phone cords.”

“No wonder the woman’s single, she’s like Erin Brockovich on steroids.”

“She’s single?”

Ben tapped his temples. “Anyone who overloads your brain to watch it explode has gotta be.”

My jaw tightened. I slid off the back of the truck onto the street and squared off with him. “So, showing people how they contribute to hidden crimes and birth defects, that’s a problem for you?”

Ben recoiled. “What just happened? Now you’re all defensive. I thought you just wanted to get her in the sack, which at this rate is what your bed’s going to be.”

“You’re threatened by her.”

“As any person in their right mind is when they encounter the devil.”

“That’s it,” I said, my blood hot. “Take the tower and go.”

“What, you think the devil’s some red goat of a guy waving a pitchfork, no, he’s a foxy-hot chick who corkscrews your mind.”

“Get the hell out of here!”

“Okay, I’ll go, but you do know there are watchdog groups out there that don’t need some self-proclaimed moral savior waving her

torch around. We're talking highly organized, well-funded non-profits who see to it that these 'hidden crimes' you speak of don't go viral."

"Oh, really."

"Yes, really."

"See that shirt you're wearing?" I clutched the cotton fabric of his shirt.

"Don't touch me," he said.

"This shirt was made by..."

"I said don't..." Ben jerked back and when he did the shirt tore away in my fingers.

"What the...!" Ben flinched like he'd been bitten. He grabbed the collar of my Fair Trade polo and ripped it right down the front.

That set me off. I lunged at him like a rabid dog, clawing and shredding more of his shirt. He shoved me in the chest. My back slammed against the Uhaul truck. Then he took a swing at me. Unbelievable. My best friend from Valley High throwing a fist at my face. I dodged the punch, looped my arm around his neck and muscled him to his knees in a headlock.

"You done?" I said, seeing a dog-walker freeze at the corner and glare at us.

He squirmed and flailed, not giving in. I tightened my choke hold. Worms of snot snorted out his nose.

"You done bashing Sonia?!"

He slackened his arms, bluffing surrender. He stood and tried to scissor my legs out from under me, but I used his momentum against

him and let go my grip. He faltered, lost his balance and hit the sidewalk with a loud crack that shocked the air.

“Now you did it!” he railed.

“Did what?”

Ben grumbled to his feet, his face flared red. He kicked aside the busted negative ion tower, scooped up his phone and stormed away without looking back, his shirt in ribbons.

Returning from the Rent-A-Storage two hours later my adrenalin hadn't mellowed. I paced the loft seething. With my toys locked away, I had nothing to rescue me, no diversions to take my mind off the brawl. Why would Ben throw a punch at me? Why would he call Sonia the devil? Only one reason— because he's jealous of me finding the 'Irrefutable One'.

Years back Ben and I came up with three kinds of desirable, life-long companions: the 'Unconditional One' who loves you warts and all, the 'Magnetic One,' whose personality and interests harmonically mirror yours, and the 'Irrefutable One', or I.O., the single person you're willing to transform your life to be with— a metamorphosis that scares the crap out of most people because it's unknown who they'll become on the other side of it.

There was no denying I'd found the I.O. alright, but to keep her I needed to be at her level. Get dialed in on the dirty little secrets of big business so I could talk her talk.

The next morning, I started investigating companies and their manufacturing practices. I didn't get far before the scum of human greed

began to surface in print and insomnia entered my life. I'd lay awake sweating, my brain shuttling images of animal atrocities, slave labor, and floating trash islands.

One sleepless night I went out brooding the neon streets, wondering if everything people did, consciously or not, was linked to some barbaric act.

Back at the loft, I left a message on Sonia's phone to please call me. I needed an understanding ear. Later, when the phone rang, I thought it was her, but it was Ben attempting to apologize.

"I should never have said what I did. Cherise's right. It's a karmic thing you need to work on with that woman and I should give you space to see it through for yourself."

"See what?"

"We all have blind attractions, Josh."

"You're saying I'm blind."

"No, I'm, y'know, there are lessons to learn from the choices we make."

"You mean like the company you keep."

"You got it."

"Like how you chose to work for 3M."

"Whoa, where you taking this?"

"I've been doing some digging, Ben. Did you know that folks at 3M would sneak out at night and unload highly toxic chemicals into the Mississippi River? Just tip their dump trucks and let the Scotch-Brite fly."

“That was a long time ago and if your fanaticism was more thorough, you’d know they’re cleaning all that up and... let me finish!... you’re no one to lecture me about jobs, mister technical writer for missile guidance systems. Did you tell your ‘angel’ about Honeywell and its work on weapons of mass destruction?”

“No, and it doesn’t matter ‘cause I’m going to quit.”

“Are you crazy? You’d burn a near six figure salary to impress that woman?”

“No, this is all me.”

“No way. She’s voodooed you, dude.”

“Listen to you. Of all people, I never suspected you would try to keep me from the ‘Irrefutable One.’”

“Oh, so now *she’s* the ‘I. O.’”

“What do you mean ‘now’?”

“That’s what you called Michelle.”

“I never.”

“More than once. But that was before you entered the seventh circle of hell. Gotta go. Call me when you stick your self-righteousness in that storage unit.”

“I never said Michelle was the I.O.!” I kept talking even though Ben had hung up. The memory didn’t take long in coming. He was right. After a couple dates I truly believed Michelle was the one I’d turn over my world to live with.

“So be it.” I said, accepting the paradox like a zen koan. “Then there must be two Irrefutable Ones.”

The morning of the second session I felt prepped and ready. Knowing Sonia would be rifling through the kitchen looking at what I ate, I tossed out the white flour, bacon and chips, and bought the most organic food I could find. No bovine growth hormones in my beef. No genetically or pesticide-modified corn grown from Monsanto seeds, the company that gave us Agent Orange.

"I see you've been shedding some weight," Sonia said as she walked her bicycle into the loft. "And do you feel better?"

"No, to be honest, I'm a wreck," I said.

"Good. I feel I'd failed if you weren't. It's a detox process. The poisons come out first."

She stepped around the kitchen island and opened up the fridge.

"This session we're looking at what goes into your body, the food you eat, what you drink, and the vitamins and drugs you consume.

I pulled up a stool. "I love to cook," I said. "Maybe sometime I can have you over."

"Here we go." Sonia pulled out a packet of chicken breasts and pointed at the label. "Do you know that 'free range' means absolutely nothing. It's an eco-friendly hoax, totally unregulated. No one knows if the chicken comes out of its cage or not."

I slumped over. I hadn't researched that. "Do I need to imagine myself a chicken now?"

"It's all calculated, Josh. The corporate lawyer's wordsmith the legal swill and the marketing geniuses spin it into happy fog."

"Are any chickens edible for my conscience?"

"There are some that are pastured and roam around in the sun."

“Pastured, good, I make a mean Bang Bang Chicken. Maybe I can...”

“But just know they’re putting all kinds of animal byproducts in cow and chicken feed these days— blood, bones, tissue. It’s like vegan cannibalism.”

I let her words wash over me in waves of white noise. I didn’t want to hear anymore. I just wanted her. But I couldn’t see how to wedge my personal desires into the session organically.

Finally, I groaned and interrupted, “God, is everything we do like six degrees of degradation?”

“You’re seeing it now, Josh,” she clapped her hands.

“Yeah, and I’m thinking the only way my conscience will ever be free and clear is dead.”

Sonia didn’t miss a beat. “That all depends on what’s done with your body.”

I gulped.

“As it turns out cremation pumps heavy metals into the atmosphere. And if you go the burial route with embalming, there’s the sticky issue of the fluids. They contain formaldehyde as well as other nasty additives that leak into the earth.”

I felt the wind knocked out of me. Dead or alive, there was no escape. I gave her a disheartened look and said, “Okay, when my time comes, drop me out in the wild to be devoured by wolves.”

The rest of the session went by in a walloping avalanche of multi-syllabic food additives and their effects on the liver, the kidneys,

pancreas and immune system. After each label she asked, “How does that make you feel?” My repeated answer was, “Rotten, thanks.”

“Your feelings are valid, Josh. Just know it gets better. Trust me. You’re on your way. We’ll work on what you put in your mind next week at the last session.”

That said, she gave me a kiss on the cheek and left.

The kiss was a nice spark. No sizzle from Sonia yet, but definitely her pilot light was on. I just needed to move her out of professional mode. Then turn up the jets. Next time I’ll ask her to stay for lunch, or take her out somewhere. Just need to find a place that’s higher-self approved.

As I went into the kitchen to see what, if anything, Sonia left in the refrigerator, I noticed she’d forgotten her notebook on the counter. Although tempted to open it, instead I raced after her on my new mountain bike. I pumped hard to catch up and was about to shout her name when curiosity crept in. What if she left the notebook on purpose, like she wanted me to follow her? And why not see where she’s going?

I slackened my pace and kept a block distance between us. She skirted downtown, sped under the highway, and cruised around Cedar Lake into a residential neighborhood. I hung back behind a tree as she wheeled into the driveway of a 1950’s ranch house with two cars in the driveway and a Chemlawn truck parked out front.

The house looked neglected, paint flaking, sidewalk cracked, porch light left on in the day. Her next appointment, I concluded. The moment I stepped onto the Astroturfed porch a dog began barking ferociously.

“Raider, cool it!” came a man’s coarse voice.

The front door opened and a large, lumber-necked guy appeared behind the screen. He wore a green short-sleeved shirt with a logo above the pocket and held a sandwich in his hand.

“Yeah?” he said.

“Sonia here?”

The man cracked the screen to get a better look at me. The black dog at his side bared its teeth.

“What’s this about?”

“Josh?” Sonia called out from somewhere inside.

“Hey, Sonia.”

“Its okay, Bart, he’s a client.”

The man took a bite of his meatball sandwich and disappeared. I squinted through the screen at Sonia somewhere in the shadows.

“What are you doing here?” she asked curtly.

“You left your book.” I held it up for her to see.

She opened the screen door and came out onto the porch. “You could have called. You didn’t have to follow me all the way home.”

”Y-you live here?”

“Yes, why?”

“Uh, nothing, just confused, that’s all.” But it wasn’t all. I felt stung, deceived.

The dog started barking again.

“Raider, chill!” Bart hollered as he came outside. He looked at me then at Sonia. “Everything cool here?”

“Its fine, love. Just forgot my schedule book at his place.”

“I gotta get back.” Bart gave her a smooch on the cheek. “I’ll pick us up some pizza after work.” He brushed past me, stuffing the last of the sandwich in his mouth.

“So, what’s your confusion?” Sonia asked.

I didn’t answer at first. I watched Bart drive off in the Chemlawn truck as a voice ranted in my head, ‘She’s a hypocrite who likes the bodyguard type and I’ve just been enshrined in the Hall of Fools.’

“You were expecting something a certain way.” Sonia observed.

“Yeah, I expected you to be the kind that leads by example. Y’know, walks the talk. And what I see are gas guzzler cars, you got outside lights burning in the day, a bug zapper out here sucking life out of the planet and your boyfriend or husband whoever dispenses poison for a living.”

“Your perfection pictures are being highlighted. All part of the journey, Josh.”

“My perfection? You put out a holier than thou vibe and you live with Mr. Roundup?”

“Did you hire me for the person I live with or to be your conscience coach? Your coach, right?”

“Be a dandelion for a moment, Sonia. How do you feel— angry, sad?”

“He supports me, unconditionally. I’ll give him his timing. It’s a process. I can live with it. Evidently you can’t.”

“No, I can’t. Here’s your fucking book.”

Sonia took the notebook and enclosed her hand around mine.

“Josh, judging others is what weighs on our conscience the most. And that’s third session material, where we work on mindful acceptance, taking life as it is, a puzzle of contradictions.”

“There’s not going to be another session. I need to be done with this!”

I almost walked away right there, defeated, pissed and miserable, but I couldn’t leave without telling her. “Did you know I put my stuff in storage just to impress you? And the funny thing is, after a few days, I didn’t miss any of it. I actually feel a lot freer without it.”

“See...”

“No, Sonia, you need to see. I didn’t hire you as a coach. I hired you because I wanted you.”

“You wanted me?”

“Yes. I wanted you bad.”

“Ah, there’s your problem,” she said.

“What?”

“Stop wanting.”

My mind buckled. I didn’t know how to respond to that.

I did see Sonia a year and a half later when she passed by my booth at the Mind-Body-Spirit Expo. Seeing me, she pressed her hands together and dipped her head namaste-style.

Michelle also happened by the booth and did a double-take.

“Josh, is that really you?”

“Hey, Michelle.” I’d forgotten her sweet, wholesome face.

“What are you doing here?”

“What I’m here to do.” I gestured to the banner on the back wall of my booth: *Want For Nothing and Have It All*. “I help people help themselves through wantlessness.”

“You’re joking.” She looked bewildered. “I’m sorry, I’m just a bit stunned. The last time I saw you, you were...”

“Hooked on want.”

“You look different, that’s for sure. More at ease.”

“Wanting restricts us, Michelle. It’s an addiction. There’s always something we think is lacking in our lives, or we’re told there is, so we’re never enough, never full-tank complete.”

“Hold that thought.” She turned to a waiting friend, “Be right there!”

“If you have a minute, I can show you what I mean.”

“I’d love to but there’s a tuning fork demonstration I want to see. Oh,” she chuckled and covered her mouth. “I just said it, didn’t I.”

“It’s hard-wired. But when we unwanted, we’re more open to receive the deeper stuff.”

“Yeah? So, what deeper stuff have you received?”

“Innerfinity.”

“Inner... finity?”

“Here, close your eyes for a second.”

I had Michelle set her palms on mine, to shut off all the sounds around her, and picture something she wanted dearly.

“I got it,” she said.

“Good, now give it away as effortlessly as you would exhale.”

People stared at us as they passed the booth.

“This is hard,” she said.

“Dare yourself to be full-tank complete without it.”

After a few seconds Michelle’s shoulders sighed. A smile perked the corners of her lips. Her lashes lifted. Her hazel eyes swelled. She looked at me with a flash of bright surprise.

A little sizzle there.

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