

Insatiable

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WARNING: THIS EXTRACT IS NOT SUITABLE FOR YOUNGER READERS

My 1,200-Metre Marathon

Encounters may be brief, but no two are ever the same . . .

I lost my virginity on 17th July 1984, at 02.46.50 in the morning. When you're fifteen, you never forget a moment like that.

It happened when I was on holiday at the house of my friend Emma's grandmother, in a mountain village in France.

I immediately fell in love with the place and its smell of eternity, and with the group of boys we went around with. But only one of them really caught my eye: Edouard.

The grandmother's house had a beautiful garden and was right next to a stream that brought a cool breeze to the summer heat. Opposite the house was a field full of grass at least a metre tall, typical of somewhere where it rains a lot. Emma and I spent whole afternoons hidden there, lying on our backs chatting about the boys, and flattening the grass with our heavy, pubescent bodies. At night, we would climb over the garden wall to meet up with the boys again and flirt.

I never told Emma what had happened. One night, Edouard took me to his place. I remember I didn't feel a thing, apart from a sense of shame that I had not bled at all, as well as the strange sensation that I had wet the bed. I left his house under cover of the noise of the lavatory chain, which I pulled to hide the sound of my footsteps on the stairs.

Eleven years later I saw Edouard again, at a conference organized in a Paris hotel. We locked ourselves in the men's bathroom, trying to rediscover the impulse we had felt more than a decade earlier, either from a fear of growing up, or simple nostalgia. But it wasn't the same, and once again the sound of a flushing toilet heralded my disappearance - this time for ever - from his life.

After that first time, I began to feel guilty, and tried to overcome or at least mitigate my feelings of guilt by repeating the experience as often as I could until I reached adulthood. It was not so much that I had abnormally precocious desires, more that I wanted to experiment, out of a sense of pure curiosity.

At first, I put these impulses down to the fact that Mother Nature had endowed me with a special sensibility, which I responded to through my body. This lasted until I enrolled at university at the end of the Eighties.

While I was studying, I was more concerned with my career than with boys. I wanted to be a diplomat, but in the end I changed to Business Administration and Applied Foreign Languages, and graduated without much effort.

My family had taught me good manners, the art of behaving properly, and this, combined with a fairly traditional education and difficulties in communicating, meant I increasingly kept my feelings to myself. A wellbrought-up girl like me could never tell her parents she had started her love life so soon.

My sexual life reawakened in my last year at university. I realized I had something special about me which attracted men. I was a witch, and set about discovering enchanting Merlins all over the city: men with some spark to them, lovers, especially those whose veins I could see beneath the skin: I thought that was really sexy. Men whose pulse I could feel at their wrists. Men who could hear a pen scraping on paper, who got emotional at the size of an ink blot on a white sheet of paper. Men who like me could see the particles that made up the air around us, who could see its different colours. People for whom the smell of a blocked toilet in a discotheque at four in the morning made them reflect on the fragility of human existence.

People who made me feel alive.

I know deep down that this search of mine was the symptom of a terrible sickness: silence, solitude, lack of communication. That's why I decided to write down my experiences in a diary. That was the only way I had to explain myself and communicate. I had already tried the most natural way, that is by talking, but I was always very clumsy, because the words came out without me being able to control them. I found it impossible to state my ideas, which was no way for a diplomat to embark on her career.

My real communication began with my body, the sway of my hips, the way I looked at people. Whenever I got a 'yes' for moistening my lips with my tongue, or for a gaze at someone, or a 'no' for holding my hands across my lap, I began to understand.

Some men like women to talk while they're making love. I've never been able to do that properly, and it's brought me many disappointments. Several men vanished after our first date, even though they admitted I was a good lover; according to them, they needed more communication.

'What do you know about communication?' I would retort, pushing them out and slamming the door in their face.

I began to realize that people needed to put a name to things, to simplify them by using words. This gave them the mistaken impression they were understanding them. I, on the other hand, started to communicate less and less through words, and increasingly with my body.

If you want to define me with a word, go right ahead, I couldn't care less. But you should know that in reality I am a nymph. A Nereid, a dryad. A nymph, nothing more.