

DRANO

By Paul Lambrecht

Paul and Patty were going to be married after a relatively long courtship. They would be honeymooning at Niagara Falls, which was quaint, and they both knew it.

They were very much in love. Had been for years. Paul was a real estate novelist and worked in downtown Boston. Patty was a stay-at-home who assembled Chinese take-out containers for all the local noodle shops.

They never fought except for about the one topic which neither of them could wrap their heads around the curious position of the other. It was usually several months at a time before the topic reared its ugly head.

Paul believed that a real man was a capable commander, and Patty thought there was no real big difference between the sexes.

So Paul would goad her.

"So you'd be happy if we just sat around in our socks eating ice cream and chatting about those hags from *Sex in the City*?"

"Not only would I be happy, but maybe we'd achieve a higher level of intimacy, and you'd be happier, too."

Paul scoffed.

"I can't believe that." He went to the fridge to get a beer.

To Patty, this was a sign he was about to feel an emotion. So she braced herself. Depending on how long this went on and how many he poured into his mouth, she might have to hear about it. This was the Paul she hated, the pompous philosopher on sexual roles and politicking, but she was not about to back down. And it may have stirred her in the opposite direction, and forced her to concede legitimate differences in the realities of the

genders, if it weren't for the fact that Paul wasn't the man he made himself, and other men, out to be. In fact, on this matter he seemed extremely confused. And she had to wonder why.

Paul returned from the kitchen with his sweating half-empty beer bottle.

"Why are you attracted to me, then?"

At the moment, she wasn't but she sighed and told him anyway.

"Because you're smart and funny, and sometimes you're quite handsome."

Paul was puzzled. "Sometimes?"

"Yes, sometimes. When you put on a nice shirt and some nice pants."

This was another one of Paul's buttons.

"So now you don't like the way I dress?"

"It's fine. It's fine."

"Maybe you'd like a fancier guy," Paul said, but quickly realized he would have to defend against that possibility entering into the realm of actuality.

Patty thought she might.

But his mouth was puckered now with fear and regret. She realized his confidence was vulnerable. It was up to

her to preserve his fragile male ego, or else they'd catch holy hell for the next few days, maybe even longer.

Paul was proud of his being different, which made Patty wonder why he'd chosen her, or why what had happened had happened the way it did. Patty thought of herself as an ordinary girl. And of all the things in the world to fight about, why such self-conscious topics? Why the substance of their attraction, the ethereal unquestionable aspects of their relationship?

But he seemed to care heartily about it, and somehow it made him feel better, and sometimes led to a truly interesting place, or a calm place, or a safe and loving place. But not in a while. And that worried her with the nuptials fast approaching. It was a different Paul who had proposed to her, and satisfied her little girl's wishes. That Paul was true and strong and confident and loving. But this other Paul, like Jung's shadow, was a dark and menacing drain. If only she knew what to say to make the topic go away, but there was nothing. Because he'd be getting her goat with his analysis of her demeanor and behavior. That had the direct and desired effect of involving her, hook, line, and (draining) sinker.

(He was already getting a little fat. Not a good sign. Hopefully he'd slim down for the wedding.)

"What are you looking at?" he snapped, thinking she was staring at his beer.

Patty shook her head and looked up at him.

"I don't want to fight about this shit anymore."

"I happen to think it's an important topic. What's holding us together?"

"It's just so pointless. It's like that principle in science where the act of examining a particle changes it."

Paul waved this metaphor off.

Love wasn't supposed to be scrutinized in this way, thought Patty. It was just supposed to be there, animating their lives. He should put his mental focus elsewhere, not on dissecting their feelings for each other. Perhaps he was just really insecure.

"Look, I love you," she said. "Can't you just feel that?"

Paul could feel it. He just couldn't understand it. He could be a stubborn ass when it came to accepting certain feelings. This was supposed to be a good one.

He finished suckling off his beer. He looked at Patty foregrounded with her little mountains of take-out containers behind her in their tiny living room, and had to wonder if he was going to fuck all of this up somehow. By

being curious about his loved one's constancy, unable to trust, suspicious of happiness.

Where would he be without her?

The answer to this was simple. He had no fucking idea. What could he do to atone for these wandering heresies that so affronted and offended Patty?

He imagined he could put all his stupid questions and controlling opinions about these matters into one of these little Chinese take-out boxes, and drive down to the dock and drop it in the chop.

He smiled at Patty, and to her delight it appeared he was going to stop. She smiled back sweetly.

"I love you, too," he said.

It was a very clever exchange.

End.