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First published in Marion Zimmer Bradley's Fantasy Magazine #23, v6 #3, ed. Marion Zimmer Bradley, April 1994

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Dear Sid:

Sorry I haven't written for awhile, but a lot has been happening in my life lately. For one thing, I've changed jobs a couple of times. (Well, to be honest, I was *ordered* to change jobs. By my ex-bosses. Seems I keep oversleeping, which is something I never used to do. Let me tell you, buddy, middle age is a bitch.)

As you can see from the return address, I've moved into a new place. No pool or exercise room at this complex, but lately I've been too dragged out to swim or do the weights anyway, and the rent is half what I used to pay. The crazy thing is that in spite of leading a more sedentary life, I've managed to lose close to 30 pounds. You'd hardly recognize me these days.

Still, it's not all bad news. I've got a new girl. And *what* a girl! No more playing the field for *this* boy. I've found everything I ever wanted in one delicious French morsel. (Or maybe she's Belgian. Or Czech. Or even Russian. Who cares? All I know is that she's got an accent, and French sounds sexier, you know what I mean?)

Let me tell you about her, because she's changed my whole life. Her name is Michelle, and she's got the softest, whitest skin you've ever seen. We've got a lot in common, Michelle and me. I've always been a

party animal, but I can't hold a candle to her. She seems to come alive at night, and she can keep going until five or six every morning.

(Remember Janni, the last girl I wrote you about? I thought we really had something there, but it turned out that she was an [ugh!] Morning Person. That's probably why it didn't last. Total incompatibility.)

For all that she loves nightlife, Michelle's strangely unsophisticated in ways, too. Like the first time I took her out to dinner: I'd been boning up so I could impress her with my knowledge of the wine list, and just as I'm deciding between a cabernet and a chardonnay, she tells me she doesn't drink ... wine. (A European who doesn't drink wine? Who the hell ever heard of such a thing?)

So I offer to buy her a whiskey, or a Scotch, or even a beer, and it turns out she doesn't drink *anything*. I can't believe it, so I run down the list until I come to a Bloody Mary, and suddenly her eyes light up and she agrees to try one—but when it arrives she just looks at it, mutters something about tomato juice, and shoves it aside. (Well, at least she's not a lush like Judy. Remember Judy? The one who threw up all over the back seat of your Lincoln? By the way, did I ever send you a check to cover getting it shampooed?)

Anyway, this isn't to say that Michelle's not a lot of fun, or that she needs alcohol to overcome her inhibitions. In point of fact, she hasn't *got* any. Inhibitions, I mean. My back is *discovered* with scratches, and while I don't remember much about our romantic interludes—I still drink, even if she doesn't—let me tell you that this girl gives one dynamite hickey. I finally bought an Ascot to cover it, so I don't have to keep answering embarrassing questions at the office.

Still, when she needs to, she can also come up with those exquisite European manners. I took her over to Dick's house Tuesday night, and we visited Pat and Roger last weekend, and she refused to enter either place until they invited her in. I kind of like that. I'm sure the others wrote it off as shyness, but as I see it she was forcing the people around her to be just as well-mannered as she is—kind of like the way a good point guard makes all his teammates better.

By the way, have I mentioned yet that she's drop-dead gorgeous? Well, she is. You'd figure a girl who looks half as good as Michelle would have mirrors everywhere. I mean, hell, if I looked like Mel Gibson or Robert Redford, you can bet *I'd* never be far from one. But no one can say my Michelle is your typically vain female. Believe it or not, she hasn't got a mirror in her whole house. Not even in the bathroom. Now, is that old-fashioned modesty, or what?

Of course, nobody looks that good by accident, and she's really into watching her weight—and since we're spending so much time together, I seem to be watching mine as well. That might be my only regret about the whole thing: no more Italian food. Every time I offer to take her down to Tony's for a pizza or some veal scallopini, she makes a face and tells me that the smell of garlic makes her sick.

Still, it's not a total loss. Believe it or not, I'm actually broadening my gastronomic horizons. Yeah, old conservative me. Michelle's put me onto some exotic European dishes: chocolate-covered ants and fried grasshoppers. (One night I teased her that all she eats are bugs. You know what she answered? "Worms are nice, too." Said it with a perfectly straight face, too. How many girls have a sense of humor like that?)

Finally, there's an aura of Mystery about her, just like all those heroines in the 1940's B movies. I can't quite put my finger on it, but I have a feeling there's a tragedy somewhere in her past, and I think it has to do with someone she loved getting drowned. At any rate, while she'll join or meet me in some of the grubbiest areas of town, I can't get her to walk on any of the bridges that cross the river. It's like someone she knew must have fallen in once, and now she's got this subconscious fear of ever being over a body of water.

And I guess when you lose someone you care for, it makes you more compassionate toward the whole world in general. You want a crazy example? One night I hear bats flapping around in the eaves of her house, and I offer to call Joey Goldberg. (You remember little Joey, who used to be the water boy for the football team back in high school? Well, he's got his own company now. Exterminates every kind of pest short of I.R.S. auditors.) Anyway, she tells me bats have a right to live, too, and if I ever suggest killing one again, we're quits. How's that for a caring, 90's kind of girl? I mean, hell, she's so sensitive that we walk blocks out of our way just so we don't have to pass the Catholic cemetery over on Elm Street. I guess the sight of all those graves and crosses must depress her.

Well, I should probably close now and head off to bed. I'm getting a little pale—too much time in the office, I suppose—so I'm hitting the tanning parlor every morning before I go to work. Hasn't done much good yet, but I suppose these things take time.

Your pal,

Harvey

PS: Just out of curiosity, do you know if the FDA or anyone like that has ever looked into the tanning parlor business? There's probably no connection, but ever since I started going I seem to be so short of energy that I'm just dragging all the time.

PPS: Michelle called since I finished writing the last sentence. Says she's thirsty and wants to come over. Can you believe it? Three in the morning, and she's coming to my apartment for a drink. What a girl!

—End—

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