

## Casanova, Baby!

They rolled around amorously for several minutes, coming heart-stoppingly close to apparent coital satisfaction without realising their desires. Instead, they stared into each other's eyes, bodies intertwined, as if they were characters in some great love story. As he gently kissed her cheek, then neck, he disappeared underneath the sheets, intermittently pressing his lips to her décolletage all the way down. It appeared magical, too good to be—

"Cut. That's quite enough there, Fab," shouted the director. The set erupted with a flurry of activity in preparation for the next scene.

Fab's head popped up from underneath the sheets. He ran his hand through his just-dirty-enough blonde hair and looked down at his female colleague who was simultaneously elated and disappointed.

"Nice job," she said demurely. She was embarrassed she had nothing more poignant to say.

"Thanks but it's easy with talent like yours. A talent only surpassed by your beauty," he was trying to make her blush. He was always trying to make them blush.

She giggled furtively, trying not to alert the crew of their flirtations. And yes. There it was, her cheeks relented to their ruddy impulse. The young lady's pleasantly paedomorphic, symmetrical face had betrayed the air of professionalism she was straining to maintain.

He was too suave for his own good. Women had always blushed in his presence. Men — the ones that didn't also blush, that is— respected him for his exploits only a modicum more than they reviled and envied him for how easily and often those exploits came to him. He was the epitome of irresistibility. It must have been some gestalt combination of his ocean blue eyes, his chiselled features and the way his words hung in the air, bestowing him with a gentleman's

gravitas. These traits garnered him immediate success in the entertainment industry. Even his name, Fabien DeMoore, oozed marketability. And it wasn't even a pseudonym, it was his actual name. When he had been discovered several years earlier he didn't need to think of a new name, his was already perfect. It was a name that practically cried out for a trademark; it straddled the precarious boundary between realistic and pornographic. It was exotic— but more importantly, not too exotic— and it even had a fanciful rhythm, an inherent geniality.

"Well," he was still staring deeply into her eyes, "We should probably get ready for the next scene but I'd love to continue this conversation later this evening."

And that was it. The young lady's cheeks exploded in a sanguine expression of excitement and nervousness. But, she remembered what her friends told her before she left that prairie hamlet in search of big screen fame and chose to respond with a coquette, "That would be lovely. But just a conversation." She added that last part with feigned sternness.

"Of course," he said with feigned reassurance.

They both rolled out of the real bed in the fake bedroom contentedly. The catered lunch was already set out on the wall opposite the set so they both meandered over to survey its offerings. The young, neophyte actress walked straight to the coffee dispenser and proceeded to fill her cup halfway with coffee and then topped it to the brim with milk.

"Some coffee with that milk?" he joked. He could even make a line that cliché sound original.

"Oh, I just love milk. The stuff you have out here can't compare to the fresh stuff I used to get out on the farm."

He flashed a smile from a few feet down the buffet line. She mistook his grin as sincerity but really he just found her quaintness and naiveté amusing. She left, milk and coffee in hand,

full of excitement. He admired her nubile form as it sauntered away, her dark hair, just past shoulder length, resonating with the undulations of her hips.

Fabien remained, he stood transfixed over the basket of croissants, his lower lip began to quiver. All he could do from unleashing a caterwaul of babbling, bumbling emotion was clench his fingertips into his palm until he could feel them piercing skin. His eyes squinted and lubricated themselves with lachrymose aspiration. Luckily, his evening's dalliance had already left, otherwise she might have witnessed this strange behaviour. But with his luck she probably would have just considered it endearing or some such hokum. Who knows?

Finally, he summoned the fortitude to pull himself away from the basket of maddening baked delicacies. It was not without repercussion. The rest of his performances that day lacked their usual effortlessness and his perfect complexion had developed an almost imperceptible saturnine hue. Suffice it to say, the dashing lothario was relieved to finish early that day.

Fabien had almost shaken the day's confounding occurrence when he parked his convertible at the address his ingénue had given him earlier. He strategically parked in full view of the building's facade so that she could witness his arrival from whichever window she invariably watched from in callow anticipation. In one calculated, elegant move he rose from the 1960's European convertible— classic and not overstated— as he swung his sport coat over its complementary shoulder with one arm and swept his free hand through that perfectly dirty hair. Romance had always been performance art to Fabien. While other men thought it necessary to pay for to gain a lady's favour, Fabien felt that all he needed was a strong motion of hand through hair.

Most men read volumes on the tricks that came instinctively to him; so instinctively, in fact, they never seemed like tricks at all which made them all the more effective— and

dangerous. Even Fabien had convinced himself with this sophistry. He believed that he was doing no harm, that he was endowed with moral impunity. A favour to women.

He rang her apartment. Almost presciently, the door buzzed, conveying its eagerness to open. The building itself was on the border of upper-class urbanity. Clearly, this young woman had been doing well for herself. Just not Fabien well.

When he took women to his condominium— because that's how you say apartment in rich—they were often enchanted by its ornate yet somehow subdued decor. It was modern, minimalist, fair-trade philanthropist, all in one gigantic, yet tastefully so, package. Alas, few women were ever invited back to his condominium; Fabien found their presence an encumbrance to his morning.

He was standing at her door now. She was standing pre-emptively behind it, quietly calculating the appropriate amount of time it would take one to answer the door if one wasn't already standing directly in front of it like an over-eager adolescent. Twenty-one seconds.

"Hello, my darling."

"Hello, Mister— Um. I mean, Fabien," her knees already softened by the performance outside.

She was iridescent, glowing with excitement. Fabien swooped into the apartment. He grasped her left hand gently with his right and laid his left on her lower back, spinning her in an impromptu ballroom dance.

"I want to take you dancing!" he professed as he removed his hand from her back and propelled her forward. He lifted the hand he still clutched gingerly and bowed chivalrously before releasing it. Her head began to swell with girlhood recollections of storybook romances.

He surveyed the apartment for the bedroom door. He had no intention of going dancing, at least not the vertical sort.

"My only reticence being that I don't want to share your beauty with all those gawking eyes," he said shrewdly, dancing her slyly towards the bedroom door.

And that was that, into the bedroom they waltzed.

The next morning, she slept contentedly, exhausted from the evening's activities. He quickly collected his vestments strewn about the floor, atop furniture, dangling from the chandelier and shot out of the apartment. The woman he left lying in bed was only on set for the one day. He never planned to see her again.

Outside the building Fabien had just escaped the sun was beginning its ascent. He mounted a pair of oversize sunglasses on the bridge of his unblemished nose and a baseball cap over his trademark flaxen hair. He kept these implements in his glove-box for times he wished to roam unrecognized. He drove the narrow residential streets searching for a suitable coffee shop. His mind began to wander, as minds often do during leisurely, compunction-free drives. He thought back to a period of his life when women didn't throw themselves at him. When his power over them had yet to develop. *Thank God*, he thought. *For middle school*.

When he found an acceptable-looking cafe he checked his disguise in the rear-view mirror. It truly pained him to hide such a face and he honestly thought the rest of the world sympathised.

Inside, a line had yet to form. Fabien walked up to the barista and ordered his morning coffee.

"Would you like milk or sugar in that?" she asked dutifully.

"Excuse me?" he was incomprehensibly stupefied by this simple question.

"Milk or—"

"Is it..." his lower lip began trembling uncontrollably again, "Farm fresh?"

"Um, I don't know. I guess I could—"

"Because she loved farm fresh...milk," he moaned, now sobbing uncontrollably. The large sunglasses began to fog perceptibly with the moisture arising from his tear ducts. The condensation collected and began to leak from the bottom half of the rims, rejoining the tears already streaming down his cheeks.

"Oh God!" he wailed. "She absolutely loved farm fresh milk!" his arms were now flailing in a fit of histrionics he hadn't displayed since his soap opera days. The major difference now was that he wasn't acting. He was circling the small coffee shop in a frenzy, arms thrashing in a very uncharacteristic, uncontrolled manner. "That beautiful, wondrous soul! Oh God how she loved farm fresh milk that— Uh... that girl from a farm!" By this time his glasses had been thrown across the room and his hat lay somewhere on the ground.

Among the crowd gathering in the small cafe hesitant thoughts evolved into whispers before erupting into full blown, vociferous outbursts: *Is that? No, it can't be. Yes it is! I'm sure of it! He's gone mad!*

The bemused congregation watched with fascination and apprehension. Mr. DeMoore was not a slight man and many feared he may be having a violent mental breakdown; the ones who had pointed their camera-phones at the hysterics not-so-secretly hoped for it.

A middle-aged woman wrestled her way through the crowd, swatting at raised cameras and cellular phones as she passed. She walked confidently up to Fabien and grasped his forearms tightly.

"Mr. DeMoore," he was still prancing-in-place but she maintained her solid grip. She was convinced that he was rehearsing an upcoming role, that he had full control of himself and as long as she made her presence known he wouldn't fling her across the room with a mad swipe of his frenetic arms. She was egregiously incorrect but would never know, for the next words she uttered instantly returned Fabien to a docile state: "I do appreciate a man with such conviction." He looked at her momentarily before his right eyebrow began to raise in choreographed concert with the corners of his lips.

## **Part 2**

The middle-aged woman was lying in bed now. Her voluptuous figure silhouetted against the expansive, ceiling to floor window in the background. The shades were open and it was barely noon. Exhibitionism, no doubt, but an impressive image nonetheless. Fabien stood, in awe, only a few ballroom glides away from the king-sized bed. She ran her hand across the sheets as she looked at him.

"Oh I love satin. Even on a torrid day like this, it's so and cool and inviting, don't you think?" Her hand ceased its fondling of the bed-wear and began to proposition Fabien by coiling its index finger slowly backwards. Invitation duly accepted.

By the time Fabien awoke it was nearly dark. He absconded with what articles of clothing he could find. When he finally arrived at home he fell onto his art deco sofa with all the weight of the day's events. He tried to make sense of it but could only think of milk when trying to determine how he ended up in that curvaceous lady's bed. Having a breadth of evidence to support his conclusion, he ascribed it to his legendary charm. He was impressed that even in a pre-caffeine, semi-conscious state he could seduce a woman. He realised, thought that he had

missed work attempted to contrive a believable explanation to use the next morning.

Unbeknownst to him, many of his colleagues would have seen his alleged breakdown by then, cinéma vérité. He resolved to excuse his absence with a casual smile and hand through hair. Satisfied with himself, he prepared for bed.

He had a ritual. While some may elect to perform their evening prayers at this hour, Fabien instead would palpate his face, examining it for any defects or signs of age. He kept a diarised notebook in the en-suite bathroom of all his discoveries. If any imperfection became too noticeable it was swiftly "taken care of." He jotted down a reminder to go tanning, he was afflicted with a sudden, inexplicable paleness.

After a thorough examination he walked into the darkened bedroom. Although he had a precise knowledge of the placement of all furniture he lumbered slowly in the dark, searching for the bed, robbed of his certainty by the night. When he finally sensed he was close, he outstretched his hand to confirm his intuition. There it was. It was cool to the touch. Satin.

And action! A deluge of tears and over-acted cries sprung forth. "Oh God! My dear Miss— Uh... Satin lady! How you loved satin!" When he ran out of ways in which to expound on his erstwhile paramour's affection for satin, he began to recite out-of-context lines from what little poetry he could recall: Shakespeare, Jonson, Neruda, Barry White. His wailings went on for hours. On the other side of his bedroom wall, his neighbours sat awake, exasperated. Through the thick concrete wall Fabien's howling was indistinguishable from what they were usually subjected to. Even though he rarely brought women home, it was still an impressive amount by most standards. And the length of this current session was extremely impressive. And it would continue in both intensity and volume for hours more.



"Dammit, if you don't call the police, Dan, I'll run into that apartment myself! Maybe I'll join in!"

"Okay, Helen. Okay."

When the police did arrive they knocked respectfully. They were both men in their twenties. They joked about the situation. After getting the call the slim margin of respect they had for Fabien increased tenfold.

"Boy, I wish I could go like that," mused one.

Boy, were they disappointed. When they were finally forced to barge into the massive condominium, they traipsed into the bedroom with trepid anxiousness. Both covered their eyes respectfully with their hands—palms splayed, of course— as they approached the bedroom, shouting intermittently to warn Fabien of their presence. When they were close enough they discerned that he wasn't, in fact, wailing in ecstasy but in exaggerated sorrow, or at least something like it. What an image they must have been greeted with: their libidinous idol sitting up in his bed, naked (because that's the only way Fabien slept), eyes redder than a woman's cheeks and throat hoarser than Louis Armstrong's. But still, he continued to bawl uncontrollably. With no one to console, comfort or commit him, Fabien's blubbers had adopted a sound more reminiscent of a trumpet half-submerged in water played by a tone-deaf rooster. The officers, when confronted with the imperative to either console or commit, opted for the latter.

### **Part 3**

For all intents and purposes where Fabien now found himself was a mental health facility, an asylum. Luckily, his prominence and wealth enabled him to check, albeit

involuntarily, into the "Hilltop Rehabilitation and Mental Wellness Centre." Because that's how you say asylum in rich.

"I've never seen a happier guy so sad," commented one of the psychiatrists. A group of high- priced mental health professionals were now observing Fabien through the one-way glass of the hospital.

"Is that your professional opinion, Doctor?" scoffed another.

"He's severely dehydrated. I've never seen anything like it. I didn't think it was even possible." The third doctor was referring to Fabien's current state of hypohydration. He had cried himself dry. Despite this, Fabien's mind was still attempting to extract the very last drops of its body's available water through its tear ducts. "I can't imagine what reason he would have to be so depressed. He's Fabien DeMoore for Christ's sake."

"Maybe it's not depression at all," speculated yet another eminent psychiatrist, "it could be a type of hysteria, brought on by some latent, obviously significant, trauma."

The doctor may have been accurate, maybe it was just hysteria. Maybe it was some kind of inexplicable prestidigitation. Who knows? Fabien had immense talent for only pretending to be sentimental, perhaps he could pretend no longer. The endless schmaltz he had promulgated throughout his career never appeared to encumber his almost-nightly trysts, and their abrupt ends, in the past. Before the onset of his condition— one so novel, by the way, they would surely name it after him— he seemed perfectly content with his lecherousness. One might even conjecture that Fabien had succeeded in atrophying whichever lobe of the brain it was that triggered that pesky remorse the rest of must tolerate. But now he convulsed in a padded room, unable to produce tears despite his mind's diligent efforts, still trying to recall the name of a woman whose name he never learned. It seemed hopeless now, Fabien could surely not endure

many more hours of these mad mournful fits. Then, as often happens in a fallen hero's time of need, appeared a woman.

"I'd like to see him," she said politely to the unanimously perplexed group of doctors. She spoke with a nuanced French accent and possessed all the requisite physical characteristics to spend an evening with Mr. DeMoore. And she, in fact, had.

"That's quite impossible, he's in a very fragile—"

The vaguely-French bombshell flashed her identification. She was a doctor herself.

"Dammit Robbins! Just let her in, she can't possibly make it any worse!" one of the doctors interrupted with what may have been construed as poor medical advice but sound logic. "May I ask, Madame," he turned to her now, giddied by her aura, "will you allay his guilt? Or, regress him to a state of infancy by portraying his mother?"

"No, no. I have a far more effective treatment."

Her entry into the luxury-padded suite went practically unnoticed. Fabien's intractable bawling persisted although his energy was noticeably diminished; to some less compassionate observers it may have even seemed comical. Fabien didn't recognise her. His arms were so exhausted that he was now just swaying his shoulders. If in front of a microphone may even resemble a crooner from the mid-twentieth century; that is, if it weren't for all the cacophonous sobbing. She grasped his shoulders tightly to steady him.

"Fabien, remember me? We shared, among other things, a croissant in bed one night?"

"Croissant? Did you say croissant? Oh how she loved croissants!" she had triggered another outburst of hysteria. The doctors behind the spurious mirror became nervous. "I can picture her now! Oh, how beautiful she was! And her name, her name! It was— Um. I know it! I feel it! It started with...Doctor! Yes! Doctor Croissant!"

He still didn't recognize her, but he deserved some credit for remembering her profession. Her name, by the way, was Nicolette.

"Fabien!" she shouted, struggling to contain his reinvigorated hysteria. "It is I, Dr. Croissant! I have come here to relieve you. During the night we spent together I hypnotised you. I forced you to bemoan all the women you left behind. I say now, 'Casbah!' you are free!"

Abruptly, Fabien finally sat silent. He looked up at her, confused, not knowing exactly how he came to be in a room with a mattress for its six sides.

"Who are you?" he asked authentically. But he quickly regained his wits, raised his right eyebrow, smiled and said in a brooding voice with outstretched hand, "Hh-Hm. I'm Fabien DeMoore."

She left his hand hanging in the air, shook her head and left. The doctors, hiding behind a reflection, were aghast. She had done it!

"You've cured him! Whatever did you say to him?" they asked in unrehearsed unison as she walked out of the room.

"Did you free him from his crushing guilt?"

"Did you say it wasn't his fault?"

"Did you tell him his father did love him?" They enquired in rapid succession, until one finally shouted out:

"Let her talk!"

"No, I told him no lies. I told him a story instead. I told him the story he's been repeating to himself for years. It brings him comfort. The fact he fools himself into believing it affords him some avoidance of his conscience. But it's just a story, stories end. Life is ineluctable. "

"So he's cured?"

"Not by a long shot. He's a grade-A, no-joke sociopath with a side of crippling narcissism. You should keep him locked up here indefinitely. He's not fit to be released into this world."

"But he's not crying anymore."

Nicolette shook her head for the second time in as many minutes and began her walk down the long hospital corridor, leaving a gaggle of bewildered doctors in her wake.

"We can't keep him here, he seems completely fine," one finally concluded.

"I concur. But one recommendation: if he truly is nuts maybe we should prescribe that he switch to daytime television."