Ancient Ties

Lois had first fallen in love as a very young child. Her mother and sister lived close to each other, and would visit each other often when Lois and her cousin Bruce were still small. Lois and Bruce would play house and Lois, being older, would tell him what to say and do. "We have to get engaged," she would tell him. "You have to get down on one knee and propose, and you have to give me a ring." "I don't have a ring," Bruce said. "Just use a twist tie," said Lois. Bruce did as Lois said. "Now we have to kiss," she said. They did.

Later Lois told her mother that she and Bruce had gotten engaged, and that she loved him and was going to marry him for real when she grew up. "You can't," her mother said. "You're first cousins. First cousins can't marry." "Why not," Lois asked? "Because you're too closely related. People can't get married if they're related." "So you and Daddy weren't cousins?" "No sweetie. We met in college. That's probably where you'll find a partner."
And her mother was right. It was where she met Larry, her first husband, whom she'd lived with for four years. They had dated during their senior year and then in April they'd gone to meet Lois's parents, who had taken to him immediately. Larry had had a talk alone with Lois's father in his study. "I want to marry your daughter," he said. "And how will you support her," her father asked? "I've got a dry cleaning job. I plan to open my own business soon. I already have customers who are waiting for me to get started. She won't want for anything."

Larry had been married before -- which he never told Lois or her parents. He'd gone to Vegas for a bachelor party, gotten drunk, and woke up the next morning with a strange woman in his bed whose name he learned was Gloria and who showed him their marriage license from Floyd's Tutti Fruitti Wedding Chapel and Ice Cream Stand with a smile. The license had the Great Seal of Nevada on it and Floyd and Gloria's signature, even his own. Somehow he'd even bought her a ring. Larry was horrified and mystified. Gloria seemed sweet enough but he had no idea who she was. He called his father, an attorney. "Did you have sex," his father asked. Larry couldn't remember. He asked Gloria. "Not yet sweetie, you were too wasted...but as soon as you get off that phone..." she said with a grin." "No," Larry told his dad, "we didn't." "Don't have sex," his father said. "You were drunk and you never had sex. We'll get an annulment. Everything's going to be fine."
At the wedding Lois's father walked her down the aisle and when he handed her off to Larry whispered "Take good care of her." The minister asked them each in turn if they took each other for the rest of their lives, in sickness and in health, till death parted them, and each said yes, clearly. Then Larry put the ring on her finger and the minister said "You may now kiss the bride," which he did, long and lingeringly till the guests all clapped.

For the first few years Lois and Larry got along well but then Larry's dry cleaning business ran into difficulties and he began taking out his frustrations on her, at first verbally, then physically. One night he hit her so hard it nearly cracked a rib. Lois finally called her mother. "Mom he hits all the time, for no reason. I don't know what to do. I'm afraid he'll really hurt me. He watches me constantly, always criticizes my clothes, my hair. Nothing I do is good enough for him." "Honey," her mother said, "Larry's a good man, otherwise, isn't he? He doesn't cheat on you, right? He doesn't drink any more. He loves kids -- he'll make a great dad. You don't want to get divorced like your cousin Ellen. When she left Ed she got nothing. Stay."
And so Lois did, for a time. Until she met Tim, man in a prayer group at her local church. Tim was older and very gentle and one night when they were the only ones to show up and the church was locked Tim suggested they go have coffee at Starbucks instead. Sitting at a corner table in the soft glow of the lamp, Lois could hold in her anguish no longer. "He hits me, Tim," she whispered through tears, "for no reason, for nothing. He hits me and he criticizes me and I'm afraid he's going to kill me. I tell my mother but she just says I should stay because I wouldn't get anything in a divorce. I don't know what to do." Tim looked thoughtful. "I do," he said.

The next day while Larry was at work Lois got a phone call. The caller said her name was Abby, and that she was a friend of Tim's. She said she could help her. She had a shelter, she said, for women like Lois. It would be safe, she said, and Larry would never find her. But she had to get her things together quickly. Abby would come by for her in an hour.
The shelter was a small white house in a nondescript part of town. There was a big kitchen and a living room, and Phyllis had a small room on the second floor. The curtains were always drawn, so people on the outside couldn't see in, and no one opened the door without looking through the peephole or without a phone in her hand ready to dial 911 if anything suspicious seemed likely. There was a fireplace in the living room, and over the mantle was a large cross with the words "Thou art my salvation," in a gothic script above it. In order to stay at the shelter, each resident had to take her vows: never to tell the location, never to answer the phone, never to open the shades, and never to leave their sanctuary without an escort. They all agreed. Abby made sure they did. She was clearly in charge and felt her mission was a calling from God.

While staying at the shelter Abby helped Lois get in touch with an attorney. He went over with her the grounds for divorce in the state: there had to be fault or abandonment -- even "constructive abandonment" -- no sex for a year or more. "Has anything like that happened," the attorney asked. "He hits me all the time," Lois said. "Did you call the police? Are there doctor's records, anything?" "No, Lois said, nothing, nothing like that." "Well you could still file but it would take at least a year and you couldn't be involved with anyone else or you'll lose everything." "Okay," Lois said. "Let me think about it."
Larry looked for her but soon lost interest. He found an attorney of his own who told him the same things. "If she ran off I can divorce her for abandoning me, right? She won't get anything, right?" "That's correct," his attorney said. "Good," said Larry. "Let's do it."

Life at the shelter was fine initially. The women shared their stories and compared notes. But over time Lois simply wanted companionship. She longed to talk to Tim again. Tim was married but she just needed to talk to someone. Her mother had given up on her when she told her she was leaving Larry, and her father didn't want to upset his wife. Besides, he was still paying off the bills from the wedding. It had cost so much he'd had to borrow some of it and he was still bitter about the experience. She talked with Abby about finding a place of her own. "Well," said Abby, "since your husband's filed for divorce he may not be so interested in hitting you anymore. Otherwise he might be found at fault. So ok. We'll look."
After a few days they found Lois a small studio with a kitchenette. Even though she had a college degree it was hard to find work but she finally got a job as a bank teller and it let her pay her expenses. She ran into Tim at the grocery store near her new place and asked him to come see it. She was very proud of it. "My, it looks just beautiful," Tim said. "You've done wonders." Lois smiled and squeezed his hand as they stood by the sofa, just looking around. "Thanks, Tim. I really value your opinion. And you've helped me so much. I've really missed you." Tim was tall and Lois wasn't. She stood on tiptoes to give him a thank you kiss. Then she heard him say "Lois I...." and felt his arms closing around her. "Don't," she whispered. "Don't. Just don't say anything."

Tim, principled man that he was, felt terrible. He confessed to his minister. "I've broken my vows," he said, weeping. The minister put a hand on his shoulder. "Have you told your wife Cathy?" "No," said Tim. "No not yet." "You need to confess," said the minister. "I know," Tim said. "I know."
And he did. But Cathy was different from her husband. She was not a warm person to begin with, and now she felt betrayed. "You son of a bitch," she screamed at him. "After all I've done. How could you! How could you?" Tim just lowered his head like a whipped dog. "Who is she," Cathy demanded. "I want to know who this home wrecker is." "Cathy it's not like that," Tim started to say, but Cathy cut him off. "Who the hell is she!" Tim told her. Well she's going to regret the day she forgot to put on her chastity belt. I'm going to sue her ass till Sunday."
ATHENS (AFP) — When a 40-year old British woman set off a metal detector alarm at Athens airport, bemused security staff found that it was caused by a chastity belt she was wearing, officials said Friday, confirming a press report. "It happened a few days before Christmas. The metal detector went off and after a further check we found out she was wearing a chastity belt," airport police official Dimitris Tzouvaras told AFP, confirming a report in the daily newspaper To Vima.

"The woman was allowed to fly on to London on the pilot's responsibility," Tzouvaras added.

According to the press report, the woman told police officers her husband had forced her to put on the belt to make sure she had no extra-marital affair during a brief visit to Greece.

Tzouvaras did not comment on that report.
Desperate to protect themselves from rape, many ethnic Chinese women in Indonesia only feel safe if they lock themselves into chastity belts before leaving home." An article written by Peter Henderson.

Lucy applies her make-up, fixes her hair carefully and selects her favourite dress from her wardrobe, ready for another Saturday night out on the town with a group of girlfriends.

Lucy, 26, believes she has very good reason to wear a chastity belt. "My best friend was raped and beaten. The belt, at least, gives me some reassurance that the same thing won't happen to me," she says. She's not alone.
Clitoridectomy

Making the cut
Martha Coventry (October-November, 2000)
Ms. Magazine, Pages 52-60.

The tale begins in England. It is 1858, and the Victorian Age is in full swing. A respected gynecologist named Isaac Baker Brown, who later served as president of the Medical Society of London, has an interesting theory about women: most of their diseases, he believes, can be attributed to overexcitement of the nervous system, and the pudic nerve, which runs into the clitoris, is particularly powerful. When aggravated by habitual stimulation, this nerve puts undue stress on the health of women. He lists what he calls the eight stages of progressive disease triggered by masturbation: First comes hysteria, followed by spinal irritation, hysterical epilepsy, cataleptic fits, epileptic fits, mania, and finally death.
Baker Brown wasn't alone in his focus on "excessive venereal indulgence." A cultural obsession with masturbation had been building since the end of the eighteenth century and would reach its zenith in Britain and the U. S. in the early 1900s. Various methods had been tried for decades to curb the habit in girls and women, including applying caustic substances to the clitoris and vulva to produce a chronic sore, but masturbation continued unabated. Its consequences, believed to be chiefly hysteria and epilepsy, were becoming nearly epidemic in some people's opinion. The cure Baker Brown offered was complete excision of the clitoris with scissors, packing the wound with lint, administering opium via the rectum, and strictly observing the patient. Within a month, the wound usually healed, and according to Baker Brown, intractable women became happy wives; rebellious teenage girls settled back into the bosom of their families; and married women formerly averse to sexual duties became pregnant.
Physicians had been recommending clitoridectomy for masturbation since the writings of ibn Sina, the tenth-century Persian scholar, but it never became a popular procedure. And they had been removing clitorises that were diseased or so large they interfered with intercourse for at least a century before Baker Brown. But what made Baker Brown he "inventor" of the medical clitoridectomy was his sterling reputation, the scale on which he carried out his surgeries, and the fact that he popularized his method in a book called *On the Curability of Certain Forms of Insanity, Epilepsy, Catalepsy, and Hysteria in Females.*
Eventually Baker Brown fell out of favor with a medical establishment that would have preferred more discretion about women's genitals. Before his fall from grace, Baker Brown influenced U. S. doctors, who were discussing his procedure in medical journals by 1866. It was used off and on for decades to stop masturbation, nymphomania, and hysteria. In 1894, a surgeon reported in the New England Medical and Surgical Journal that he had excised the clitoris of a 2-1/2 year-old to stop her from masturbating and slipping into insanity. He noted that after the operation, she had "grown stouter, more playful, and (had) ceased masturbating entirely." As late as 1937, Holt's Diseases of Infancy and Childhood, a respected medical-school text, stated that the author was "not averse to circumcision in girls or cauterization of the clitoris."

A couple years ago, I spoke with a 66-year-old woman in Michigan who had a secret to tell me: as a 12-year-old in 1944, her parents took her on a car ride that ended in a doctor's office. There, as she sat on the exam table, an attendant clamped an ether-soaked rag over her mouth from behind. When she woke up, her clitoris was gone. "They tried to keep me from masturbating," she said. Then, after a pause, added, "Didn't work."
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