

In Which M/M Lands on Her Feet

The hot air balloon crashes. What a richly ironic event! I have just been promoted to full professor (or is it fool professor?). After ten years at the big Pholly U., I, M/M, have just passed my last academic exam. I am the first woman to achieve that exalted status in my department. Ned Thornwipple, the one chaired professor in the department, prepared my dossier for the dean's committee. It seemed appropriate that the only present I could offer myself was a ride in a hot air balloon. I could not do it in December when the promotion decisions were announced. No matter. It is now June and the weather is perfect for this outing. After all, I had survived ten years surrounded by hot air, why not go up in it for a change? The hot air balloon crashes on a beach area. I walk away unscathed. My cat of two years, S. P.-T., accompanies me.

This is definitely a possible beginning. But, let us try another one. I, M/M, have just completed my Ph.D. from Pholly University. Sounds final, doesn't it? Great thesis, my advisor, Professor Ned Thornwipple, tells me. "Reading as a Marxist, Masturbating as a Woman" was the title I finally settled on. And that was after much mental (and need I add physical) masturbation. How that old twit Thornwipple could like this work remains a mystery to me. Thank God that is all over.

"M/M, you should think twice about being a scholar," he would tell me, sounding solicitous.

"M/M, you should be a librarian."

Why my future seemed so crucial to him I am beginning to understand only now. Here it is June and all that is ahead of me at this point is a summer of relaxation before I officially turn into that unpredictable creature, an Assistant Professor in the English department at Pholly. True, the university administration had sent out a very eloquent memo asking departments to refrain from hiring their own students. But a little incest never hurts, does it? Before beginning the drudgery, I decide to offer myself a little vacation: a solitary cruise on

a private yacht. No one knows my secret fantasy: living in an enormous house boat, with plenty of room for my library. Anchored in a marina but yet able to drift if the mood hits me. Could anything be more perfect? I guess I will settle now for a nice private cruise that will mentally prepare me for the new semester. The only being that I will permit to share my days and nights on this cruise is my cat of two years, S. P.-T.

These might have been the opening paragraphs of a nice autobiographical account by yours truly, M/M, either at the beginning of a possibly optimistic career or after ten years of a grueling academic life.

But no. Not because this is not all true. Nor because I did not go either on the cruise or up in the hot air balloon. No. Simply because it is now a year later and I have swallowed my adventure on the Islands of Ac-Ac. And what a stomach ache I have from this indigestible meal! If I do not vomit it, it will kill me. If it were to kill me, I would be simply a murder victim in yet another academic novel written by yet another woman academic. Of all the luck in the world. Why could not I have been born a man? Then I might have landed in an academic novel written by a male academic. There, there are no murders. My life would be but a series of love affairs, a series of sycophantic students. Hopping from international conference to international conference. I would be seducing my colleagues' wives. I would become the chairman (note the "man"—so beloved to authority figures—at the end of that word) of my department. My dream of becoming a dean and eventually a provost, and who knows even a university president, might have a chance of becoming a reality. But my literary physical plumbing has doomed me. Do not misunderstand me: I am at least grateful not to be in a murder novel.

Why me? Why the crash? Why the storm that comes up as soon as I set sail? Ah, were it not for these freak events, where would I be? Yet another professor sleepwalking through the myriad duties of a university life. My education would be lacking. But here I am alone after the accident.

This close call decides it once and for all: I prefer to be M/M the full professor. I do not believe in revenants and, let us face it, after my ten years at Pholly U., how can I pretend to be that innocent creature I might have once been?