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fiction by  
Stephen-Paul Martin

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**fiction by**

**STEPHEN-PAUL MARTIN**

*Obscure Publications*

2002

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"Watch Out for Obscure Publications"

*for Brin,  
with passionate love*

I was letting myself relax, erasing what I was thinking, sitting in the sunny grass of a city park near a cliff by the sea. She sat on a bench about fifteen feet away and opened a book. When I saw the title, *Moby-Dick*, I knew I'd have to start a conversation. It's one of my favorite novels, and I suspect that most people who share my enthusiasm like the book for the same reason, fascinated by the intensity of Ahab's rage at the violence of the universe, even if they're pleased when *Moby-Dick* finally sinks the ship. Most people read it only if it's been assigned for a class. But something about the way she was very slowly turning the pages, carefully tasting words and laughing silently from time to time, told me she was reading it by choice, as a matter of passion.

I'm not the type who can easily talk to someone I've never met before. The mere thought of a pick-up line makes me nervous, and the possibility of rejection terrifies me. But I knew she somehow knew I liked her way of turning pages, her way of shaping each word with her lips. I knew she knew I liked her lips. The ocean breeze was lovely. I told myself to take the risk.

I caught her eye when she looked in my direction. I told her a cliff by the sea was the perfect place to be reading Melville. Her eyes went back to the page. Her lips went back to shaping words. I heard the ocean crashing on the cliffs a hundred feet below. She looked up and stared at the haze where the sea became the afternoon sky. She said: Is there really a perfect place to read Melville?

I studied the mild irony on her face, thought I felt the same irony appearing on my face. I wasn't sure what it meant in either case.

She said: Wouldn't it be more accurate to say that it's impossible to read Melville? Doesn't *Moby-Dick* make reading obsolete?

I smiled: If reading is obsolete, what name should we use for what you're doing now—or rather, what you *were* doing before I so rudely interrupted?

Her tone was confrontational: Does everything need a name? Why do we assume that the presence of a name is better than its absence? And no, that's not your cue to ask me what my name is.

I played at looking hurt: You're not going to tell me?

She sounded strict: First answer the question. Does everything need a name?

I felt the strength of her mind, even though she was only playing. I silently told myself that she was probably a graduate student in some kind of cultural studies program. I said: No. But what you're doing already has a name. Should we simply get rid of it?



And if we do, what sort of epistemological gap are we creating?

She smiled: Epistemological?

I told myself that she thought I was probably a graduate student in some kind of cultural studies program. She went to the edge of the cliff and dropped her novel into the sea, walked over to me briskly, bent down and kissed me, softly at first, then with increasing strength, until she had me pinned to the ground, her tongue between my teeth. I was so shocked that at first I tried to resist, but she was clearly stronger than I was, and besides, I could feel myself getting large and hard. It wasn't just an erection. It was also an expansion, as if the seams of the moment were stretching to the bursting point, and she and I were in a small dark room in the desert, miles from human interference, and she was fucking me, alternately filling my mouth with her tongue and licking my nipples, crushing me with her arms and chest and shoulders, working my dick so fiercely that it seemed like the penis was hers. The feeling of being squashed into the carpet was painfully thrilling, something like being voluntarily raped, if such a concept can even be imagined, and obviously it can be, because it's right here, right now, wedged brazenly in that brief space which opens when something that can't exist refuses not to, an interval so electric that past and future tense disappear.

She stands and takes my hands and pulls me up and meets my eyes and says: Call me Stephanie. If you've got a name—even a fictitious name—prepare to reveal it now.

For a split second I'm not sure what to call myself, and when I tell her my name I get the feeling she doesn't believe me, leading me to wonder if the name Stephanie is fake. I'm alarmed that we seem to distrust each other so quickly, but it doesn't change the fact that we're falling in love at the speed of light. I want to be her girlfriend, she wants to be my boyfriend, a situation that's on the verge of erasing itself, but the word *erasing* quickly becomes unstable, collapsing into a story whose main character is so vividly rendered that he becomes autonomous, writing a story in which a female author becomes a man she falls in love with, and within a few weeks decides to leave her husband, except that he too is so vividly rendered, so autonomous, that he acts like he was never married in the first place and doesn't know the man who claims to be his wife, doesn't know the place that seems to be his home, but the word *home* quickly becomes unstable, collapsing into a story in which an intoxicated medical student who's never performed an abortion decides that he's qualified to perform one simply because he's read the appropriate pages in a textbook, and even though he follows the book precisely the patient bleeds to death, but with her final breath she tells the student that she's always been desperately in love with him, that she wanted an abortion only because the baby wasn't his, but the word *baby* quickly becomes unstable, collapsing into a story about a very shy teenage boy who goes to a party where people strip and come up with clever names for their genitals, and when he tries to leave, the toughest teenage guy in town blocks the doorway, making the shy boy

shake with fear, and the girls all think his anxiety is hilarious, but on the basis of this one humiliating evening, the boy resolves to become President of the United States when he grows up, and he succeeds, but the word *become* quickly becomes unstable, collapsing into a story about a man whose dick has been frozen by a manic-depressive enchanter, so now the man spends most of his free time scrambling words and parts of words, trying to find the one combination of syllables that can break the spell, a cure he got from the enchanter himself, who insisted that he cast the spell for the sole purpose of amusing himself, the pleasure he got from going into a trance of cryptic syllables, but the word *pleasure* quickly becomes unstable, collapsing into a story about new lovers going crazy, turning their bodies into ferocious instruments of passion, comparing their sexual ecstasies to those of the Olympian gods, but Zeus and Hera get jealous, lightning darts from a cloudless sky and the lovers get fried, charred in their passionate bed, a moral warning, a sign that mortal beings need to know their limitations, need to be suspicious when their ecstasies become extreme, but the word *extreme* quickly becomes unstable, collapsing into a story about humans abducting shapeless diaphanous beings from a distant planet, performing bizarre and pointless medical experiments on their genitals, discovering in the process that the earth has long been inhabited by extraterrestrials, by a secret and sinister culture that's taken the form of human language, surviving only because humans rely on words in so many ways, but the word *surviving* quickly becomes unstable, collapsing into a

story in which the characters lie nonstop, but one of them finally decides to tell a true story, a convoluted narrative in which the characters have been lying so long that they no longer know how to tell the truth, or find it so unpleasant that they'd rather just keep making things up, and the character who tells this tale has no intention of deceiving anyone, but finds herself so stuck in the habit of fabrication that the story sounds absurdly false to readers, most of whom read it several times, concluding that truth and falsehood can both be classified as performances, different ways of building an artifice whose ultimate goal is persuasion, and Stephanie talks like someone who knows that her ultimate goal is persuasion.

She backs me up against a massive palm tree, pressing her chest against my chest, her crotch against my crotch.

She says: Think of what I'm telling you as a prelude to a non-ironic love story.

I say: Are we the main characters?

She says: We create each other through the passion we create. We're not who we thought we were before the passion began.

I say: But you would agree that we're not *completely* new people?

She nods: Not *completely*.

I say: And you would agree that the feelings we exchange are *completely* authentic?

She says: They're what we truly think of each other as we share them. But much of what we say feels improvised, because the selves that speak are not selves

we would have *completely* understood before the passion began. There's a girl we both become, the girl you've secretly always wanted to be, the girl you've always *been* without fully knowing it. But we develop different versions of what she thinks and feels and looks like. She's part of you at first, but I imagine her so intensely that I can't get her out of my head. Soon I have no choice; she's not a visitor anymore. She's part of that blend of energies I've learned to call my self, a new name for a girl I've been dreaming about for years.

I say: What happens next?

She says: You really want me to make that decision for both of us?

I say: Decisions terrify me. It was only with tremendous difficulty that I got myself to speak to you about Melville.

She says: So you're putting me in charge?

I say: Let's just say that I'm letting you lead me, as if we were waltzing across a nineteenth-century dance floor. I'll follow your steps, but of course the dance will be a shared experience, not something you've invented entirely on your own.

She says: Why call it a waltz? Aren't we inventing the dance? And if we're inventing the dance together, can we really talk about either one of us leading?

I'm falling in love with Stephanie's lips and eyes, the strength of her shoulders and arms, her carefully sculpted waist and thighs, her ass like two flexed biceps big and sharply defined from years in a gym, her way of using words as tools of power, as if she had a black belt in seduction.

I say: The way you talk, you seem to know exactly what's going on here, like you're nowhere near as surprised as I am.

She says: Let's just say I've always known I'd meet you, and everything would happen just like this. But answer the question: Can we really talk about either one of us leading?

I say: The notion that someone has to lead and someone has to follow is built into our culture. In fact, it's built into our language. But it may have no meaning outside our language, assuming we can truly experience anything without language.

She says: I think you're getting carried away by language.

I say: I think we're *both* getting carried away by language. That's what falling in love is all about. But if we're getting carried away, where is language taking us? And if we agree that language is better without a destination, are we both still willing to go there?

She says: How many times have you been told that you're too smart for your own good? People always told me that when I was younger.

I say: They don't anymore?

The look in her face is like a book that everyone should memorize, but the word *face* quickly becomes unstable, collapsing into a secret moment stolen from the gods, situating itself in the heat of a small dark room in the desert, Stephanie becoming every beautiful moment I've ever known, bulging arm and shoulder muscles rock hard in my adoring hands, filling my mouth with a scream of pleasure so huge I can't release

it, a scream that could shatter the stars or take the form of an angel to wrestle with, and Stephanie smiles at the muscle power she's built from lifting weights, the power that makes me feel so ecstatically safe when she pins my arms down. It's suddenly clear that this is the moment I've waited half a century for, a moment I've assumed would only exist in erotic dreaming. We're kissing each other so forcefully, so gracefully, that the room disappears, and everything that's not the room disappears, and only our bodies remain, suspended in the atmosphere of passion they're creating, but the word *passion* quickly becomes unstable, and its instability takes the form of a breeze on a cliff by the sea, stabilizing itself in the blue-green depth of Stephanie's eyes, redefining itself in the shine of her teeth and slightly parted lips.

She says: Tell me what you want.

I say: Isn't it obvious?

She says: Yes and no.

I say: I hate answers like that.

She says: It's not an answer.

I say: Then what is it?

She says: I'm testing you.

I say: Am I passing?

She says: Passing for what?

I say: For what you want.

She says: Tell me what I want.

I say: You want me.

She says: You want me.

I give her what can only be described as the longest kiss in the history of passion. She's got my body pinned against the tree. Her strength is overwhelming. She

pulls her face away, simulating a wicked smile, and when I try to kiss her again she keeps her mouth just out of reach, using the strength in her arms to pin me firmly to the tree, very slowly licking her lips, penetrating my eyes with a commanding look, a mock invitation: *If you really think you're strong enough to kiss me, be my guest. But we both know I can keep you pinned against this tree as long as I want.* I want to sigh and melt in her arms, pleading for another kiss, knowing she'll deny it, a refusal far more delicious than any surrender could possibly be.

It's not just a sexy moment. It's a moment of self-definition. Suddenly I know myself in a way I've often imagined, but now I can *be* that self, and someone else really wants me to be that self. I'm a sexy girl who wants nothing more than to faint in a powerful girl's embrace. It's more than a thought. For the first time in my life, my body feels like home. Something tells me the change is far too sudden, too dramatic. Something tells me I'm being extremely neurotic, even psychotic, but the word *psychotic* quickly becomes unstable, collapsing into a story that develops like a series of doors, focusing on the girl I've become, who thinks her name is Loretta. Behind the first door there's a woman whose perfect teeth are murder weapons. She's putting a ring on Loretta's finger, promising devotion. Loretta tries to protect herself with words, but she's choked with emotion, remembering when she was fifteen, in love with her English teacher, who told her that her body looked like it might have been forty years old. Behind the second door there's a beautiful boy with delicious nipples. He makes Loretta drink a poisonous potion



he's concocted. His cock is in the word *concocted*, then it's in her mouth, pronouncing itself, inseminating every cell of her body. Behind the third door, my mother unscrews the upper third of Loretta's head. Her hands are quick and skillful. There's hardly any pain at all. The windows in the background face a garden of roses and hamburger meat. The space beyond the garden is a gigantic open mouth, or a massive aquarium filled with teeth and eyeballs, or a wall of skulls. Behind the fourth door Loretta finds herself with an erection, a big surprise that quickly becomes the most beautiful thing she's ever felt, especially when she reaches down to play with herself but can't, stopped by the muscular girl she's with, who pins her hand to the mattress, challenging her to free herself and play with her dick, knowing she can't, smiling to see Loretta strain with all her strength and finally submit, and Loretta's thrilled by the size of her girlfriend's arm and shoulder muscles. Behind the fifth door, Loretta meets a man whose leg is the bone of a whale. He looks like someone harboring a violent grudge against nature, against the gods, their vast inscrutable system of limitations. He pulls Loretta close because he wants to gaze into a human eye. He says that a human eye is a magical mirror more profound than God, more beautiful than the sea or sky or memories of a distant home. She wants to tell him he needs to learn how to cry instead of just raging, but she knows that his heart is buried at the bottom of the sea. Behind the sixth door, Loretta meets herself in Stephanie's body. Stephanie remembers being four years old in her father's house, being shocked to

suddenly find a blond little girl in her bedroom, someone she'd never seen before, staring out the window, turning without warning to look blankly into young Stephanie's eyes, shattering into more than a thousand pieces, quickly becoming the sound of a broom on dusty broad oak floorboards. Behind the seventh door Loretta's eyes make love to Stephanie's eyes, passion becoming tenderness bringing parts of me back from a living death, from a hopelessness I can't completely fathom until it's gone, leaving an empty space that the light from Stephanie's eyes begins to fill, eyes alive with tears that she's been holding back since the day she was born. My hands massaging her arms and shoulders reach up now to cup her face. I've never seen anything even half as beautiful. I can't speak. Her moistened face is everything and everywhere at once. I'm finally facing a face I can only worship and adore. I want to pluck my eyes out and never see anything else again. She takes my moistening face in her hands. The moment keeps getting larger, as if to permit a thousand words for tenderness to come into the world, make it safe enough to feel that love can last forever, as if I were nothing more than a singing head on a river of passion. But all the metaphors fail, crash like sunlit waves on jagged rocks, a hundred feet below a city park on a breezy afternoon, the feeling of Stephanie's muscular physique pressing into my body, promising to protect me from the violence of the world.

Using all my strength I finally manage to free my hands, grabbing Stephanie's wrists and trying to force them behind her back. But she quickly rips them free,

grips my wrists and expands her chest, biting my mouth and firmly forcing my struggling arms back into the tree, squashing them against the rough bark, making me gasp with pain. But it's not just pain; it's also pleasure so intense it's mixed with fear, and the word *fear* quickly becomes unstable, collapsing into a story set in a park overlooking a city, naked bodies underneath a tree of midnight stars. Stephanie sits on my chest, carefully maintaining a silence that's not openly hostile, not even defensive, but clearly indicates discomfort of some kind, encased in calculated ambiguity. I'm trying to find her eyes in the dark, trying to find words to respond to what she's not quite saying. But the pressure to say the right thing makes it hard to say much of anything, so I tell her I'm scared and need to be reassured that I haven't said anything wrong. She looks up at the stars, then looks at me with troubled eyes and tells me that she loves me even though she's feeling sad. There's something unconvincing in her voice, something I want to penetrate with questions. But she gets up and walks about fifteen feet away, lighting a Lucky Strike, making it clear that she doesn't want any questions.

I stand and straighten out my pants and shirt, try to ignore the tension in my body. But the struggle to do so feeds back into itself, amplifies itself until it becomes an unbearable noise, a sound so offensive that all I can do is try to make it become something else. Suddenly it's a gap in time, a secret abyss where the bottom falls away from the top at the speed of light, and part of me isn't here beneath the tree of stars anymore. Part of me is warm in mid-day sunlight, cool in ocean breeze, loving

the sound of waves on jagged rocks a hundred feet below. Stephanie sits on a bench nearby with *Moby-Dick* in her lap. Just from the way she reads, the way she forms each word with her lips, I can tell she's in love with language, that she's not just reading the book for a class. I imagine the start of a story based on a pick-up line about Melville, a story whose ultimate goal is to make the prison of gender obsolete. But when our eyes briefly meet, she doesn't look like who I thought she was. She doesn't look like anyone I can even begin to talk to. She shuts the book and walks away. I stare at her back and fake a smile. I know our eyes met perfectly at some point in the recent past, but apparently that was only one possibility. Apparently what's just happened was equally possible. But the word *apparently* quickly becomes unstable, collapsing into a tree of midnight stars and painful silence.

I finally speak to the cigarette smoke she's immersed in: I better leave in a few minutes. If I stay out any longer my fiancée might get suspicious. But I hate parting when we're not feeling fully connected.

She says: I know. But I don't know what I can say at this point to make you feel more secure. I just don't feel safe with you right now.

I say: What don't you feel safe about?

She says: Our situation.

I say: You mean—

She says: I mean, when are you going to let me leave my husband at my own pace? When are you going to stop rushing me? It's not easy, you know? I mean, he's a beautiful man who's done everything right,

and I trust him more than anyone else in the world. The only thing he's guilty of is not being you.

I want to say that I have no intention of rushing her, that I fully respect the pain of the decision she's trying to make, that I'm willing to wait as long as she needs me to wait, that in fact the waiting is good because it gives us time to learn how to care for each other. But since I've said more or less the same thing several times in the past three months, I decide I better not say it again.

Instead, I try to take her hand, but she pulls it away, so to fill the difficult silence I quickly say: I have no intention of rushing you, and I fully respect the pain of the decision you're trying to make. I'm willing to wait as long as you need me to wait. In fact, I'm not disturbed by the time we're taking. It's actually good because it gives us time to learn—

She says: You've said more or less the same thing several times in the past three months, and I know what you're really thinking. Your eyes keep telling me: *If you're really going to leave why don't you leave? How long am I supposed to believe what you say you're going to do if you're not doing it?*

I glance up at the sky and see Orion, thinking that in a work of fiction Orion might be symbolic, somehow making sense of the rage and fear beneath our language. But I know Orion means nothing outside of a story someone else made up. I know I'd rather look up and face the night without a mythic script, meet Loretta's eyes in the drift of unconstellated starlight.

She says: Two days ago, you said you'd never leave me just because I might need time to sort through my feelings in the process of moving out. But now—

I say: I'm not saying I'm even *thinking* of leaving you. But don't ask me not to feel sad and frustrated when all I really want right now is to know I'll be with you for the rest of my life, and every day that you stay in your marriage drives me crazy because I feel like a fool waiting for something I badly want but might not ever get. Do you know how painful that is? How humiliating? It's the most difficult thing I've ever gone through.

She says: And what happens when I'm fully available? Do you get scared and run away? Are you overcome with guilt about breaking up my marriage, badly hurting my husband and your fiancée in the process?

I say: I'm more afraid that we'll wake up one day and find our passion collapsing into a story, as if it had no reality outside the words we've been using to describe it.

She says: Promise me one thing: If we ever reach a point where things are totally insane and there's nothing to do but split up, can we at least agree never to pretend that our passion hasn't been savage and lovely?

I want to say something witty about the irony of meeting the boygirl of your dreams, knowing beyond all doubt that the person is perfect, except that you're not dreaming anymore, and things are more complex when you're awake. But irony would be out of place in a world that can only exist in a non-ironic love story, so

instead I say that the look in her eyes is like a fire on the ocean floor, and suddenly she's kissing me so hard I can barely stand it, using her powerful arms to force me slowly down to my knees, dropping her pants, pressing my face between her moist and muscular thighs, but the word *powerful* quickly becomes unstable, collapsing into a story about lovers climbing a mountain, planning to make love when they reach the summit, a place with a view of the ocean, mountains, and desert, but upon arriving they quickly become enraged, since the peak is already occupied by people drinking beer, talking on cell phones, blathering loudly about the Super Bowl and their favorite daytime talk shows, and the lovers try to be nice at first but one of them finally pulls out a gun, but the word *finally* quickly becomes unstable, collapsing into a story about an Armageddon cult, men and women preparing for the final confrontation, but when it begins with bright steam twisting down from a crack in the midnight sky, the members of the cult are suddenly horrified, awakening to the fact that they've been wrong about the crucial thing, having always thought that they were preparing to fight against evil, when the one who's leading them into battle now is the Prince of Darkness, but the word *battle* quickly becomes unstable, collapsing into a story about a woman who's on death row because she beat a man to death when he tried to rape her in a city park, a narrative that doesn't really focus on the rape-and-murder scene, but rather on the sound of night wind in the treetops during the rape-and-murder scene, avoiding what seems like it should have been the climactic event, making the very notion of a climactic

event obsolete, but the word *avoiding* quickly becomes unstable, collapsing into a story about a young girl asleep in an empty closet, comforting herself by curling up in the lingering smell of her father's pants and shirts and shoes, the most immediate way she can still feel close to him now that he's run off with the man of his dreams, having promised her so gently that he'd only be gone for a month or two, or at most one year, knowing he'd be gone for good, knowing that he'd never been at home with being a father, but the word *knowing* quickly becomes unstable, collapsing into a story in which a whale destroys a whaling ship, and the only one who survives is kept afloat on an empty coffin, living to tell a tale about the captain's revenge against nature, the monomaniacal thrust of the captain's ego becoming a broken harpoon, but the word *broken* quickly becomes unstable, collapsing into my narrating voice, the sound of tires on pavement. I'm riding with the top down through a night of desert hills, warmly wrapped in a blanket wrapped in Stephanie's warm conversation, not connecting the stars with mythic or astrological narratives, not even wondering about the implications of the narrative we're designing, the limits we're constructing around our passion, since after all a narrative is a way of setting limits—excluding certain things, including others—though it should in theory be possible to make stories that erase their own boundaries, absorbing what they weren't at first including, a practice that would suggest an alternative mode of human awareness, going beyond the fact that as we construct



what we experience, we focus on what seems important and filter out everything else.

Something is happening here that doesn't conform to conventional patterns, but the word *conventional* quickly becomes unstable, collapsing into a story that's not collapsing into a story, a woman performing a sacrifice, giving her anger to the gods, learning to cry instead of reacting with rage whenever she gets upset, whenever she doesn't have complete control of a situation, and she lets her face grow moist with tears even though it leaves her exhausted, not sure where she is or who she is or what she might become, becoming part of a story that's erasing what it seems to be, replacing what it seems to be with what it is and what it's not, sustaining itself with seemingly random images and events, things that don't appear to belong within its narrative limits. I don't know why they're here and not somewhere else, but if they were somewhere else I'd probably wonder why they weren't here, but the word *here* quickly becomes unstable, and again I'm warm in the midday sunlight, cool in the ocean breeze, and Stephanie's got me pinned against the rough bark of a royal palm, fucking me with her mouth, making me feel like the sexiest girl on the planet. It's been a long time since I felt like anything more than a very incomplete man, locked away from the world by a deadly spell I somehow put on myself, even if the incantation seemed to come from an outside source, making me believe I was part of a story based on someone else, a character who made my part in the narrative seem minor, a story I was nonetheless compelled to keep telling myself, as if

there were nothing outside the delusional shape it imposed on the world.

Now the voice propelling that story can't quite say what happens next. It stops, expecting everything else to stop, but things keep going, unable to resist the motion of now becoming then, or then turning into again, or here dissolving into when, decomposing into a sparsely furnished room in the desert, whispered loving words in the dark of closed venetian blinds. We're out in the middle of nowhere because we don't want people around. We just want to fuck and sweat our way into each other's bodies forever. That's what we've been doing for more than a week, and it keeps getting better.

Stephanie's on the bed with a smile that spreads the length of her body. She props her torso up with her arms and slowly licks her lips. I sweetly tuck myself beneath her chest and stroke her face. She tells me I look like the happiest girl in the world. It's a hundred degrees in the shade. I can't remember ever loving heat as much as this. Every once in a while we hear a passing car in the distance, a very non-threatening sound that only makes the silence more profound, a dot on a page that shows how perfectly blank the rest of it is. I put my arms around Stephanie's neck and rub my tits against her chest, offering my thirsting mouth, begging for a kiss. I know Loretta loves to beg for a kiss she doesn't get at first, gripping Stephanie's hard and shining arm and shoulder muscles. Then Stephanie's tongue is thrusting fiercely into Loretta's moistening mouth, making her squeal with ecstasy, making her madly beg for more, and the sound of my cute girl voice

is penetrating Stephanie's helpless ear. She's guiding Loretta's penis into her moistening vagina. She's gasping. Soon she's coming and coming, coming again and again and again, erasing all separation, writing herself on the page of my body.

Neither of us ever wanted children. We'd always assumed that the stories we wrote would function as our offspring. But here on a scorching plain of sand and rocks and scrub vegetation, Stephanie can't stop smiling. Language melts in her mouth. She's thrilled to be filled with what my dick has just given her, the feeling of my life growing and glowing in her body, a new constellation carefully swimming into position, placing itself in what was once a missing part of the sky. I've never seen her so happy, so free of the skeptical limits both of us use to contain our emotions. Is it possible to feel better than this? Or would a more ecstatic state be punished by the gods? Perhaps it would, but I couldn't care less. Let the gods do all the jealous damage they want. No matter how violent they get, we've had our moment of absolute bliss. These words are proof. They grip the page, and nothing can erase them.

This edition is limited to  
60 copies.

This is Number 6.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe-Paul" followed by a stylized flourish.



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