

Opening

By KR Randen

Her conversation with him went something along the lines of this:

I want to see other people. I can't do this long distance thing; there are too many things I want to see and do and feel and be, and I can't feel chained to you while I want to explore. I still love you, I still care for you. If you can handle my being with others, then that's wonderful. If not, I must go.

And that of course, was how she, and he, and the conversation, went.

Naturally it's not that easy. It didn't go just like that. That was the tidy summary she presented to everyone, the tidy wrapped up boxed and bowed version she explained to friends by e-mail, by telephone, by coffee. Two lumps.

Most people bought into it. Some believed her as she spoke with eyebrows raised, grinning, because they didn't want to interject. Her stories were vivid, lush, tangible. Exciting. Some were glad; they didn't like him anyway. They said. Some wanted nothing more than to have her shut up. Valid reasons, all of them. But everyone seemed to accept her decision, consumed her logic, fed her ego.

One of us was more skeptical. 15 months don't go by without any attachment. Experience sat on shoulder, murmuring adages, all clich's and reiterations, of how body and soul can't be shared then rejected, laundered, returned, and exchanged. Or shouldn't.

Skepticism sat still, behind a nodding head, behind a vacant stare, behind disbelief. As she spoke of a dwindled relationship, he thought of any opposition he might interject, and the proverbial horse led to water, not drinking. She continued on, repeating herself, hoping by virtue of repetition abstraction could congeal.

A week later, filled with unfaltering acting, impeccable verbal positioning, she had a showing, a gallery opening. Of sorts. It was an opening, at any rate. Private invitations, one guest of honour. Said Honoree sat behind the curtain, attendant for the unveiling. The velvet ropes

pulled, the curtain spread. There it was, she, her, female, assumedly our new object of affection. The elite applauded, smiled, how creative, how innovative, how utterly chic: *lesbianism*.

Unprecedented became the word de rigueur, conceived that night behind curious eyes, behind surprised society.

Skepticism stood, for the appearance of contributing to the standing ovation, hands clapping silently. Appearances were required by this suddenly rigid association, appearances were kept. A tired conscience escaped from Skeptical's smiling teeth.

The applause died down, and those assembled gathered around to awe and worship, to congratulate, to enjoy. Hors d'oeuvres were passed, champagne presented, bubbles burped. Skepticism trailed a waiter into the kitchen, across the tiles, past the chef, past discarded entrails, into the alley, into a cab.

Lunch dates were maintained but embellished with this new opening, as skepticism hovered around, revolving like the third wheel, watching, commenting, enjoying. Pretending. He watched the thrill of this newness, of a new toy, destined to be left by the wayside, and muttering what if what if what if. If. If what? Possibility carried newness and with it carried hope, the solitary refuge of Pandora.

Lunch dates ceased. Died, or rescheduled, depending on the point of view. Such magnificence subjected to such one-sided interpretation. One can't argue with taste. One argues with logic. Skepticism found no debate, and left Pandora to her box, inlaid with mother-of-pearl, hewn from ebony, and varnished to perfection.