

Unleash Your Inner Spader

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(JEFF enters his living room. He sits at the coffee table with a small shopping bag and pulls out a packaged hairbrush. He begins to open the packaging, but stops. He takes out a pair of scissors and carefully cuts the plastic open. Having cut the packaging enough to let the hairbrush through, he slides the brush—without touching it—onto the table. He uses the packaging to nudge the brush into position. He inspects it.)

JEFF:

That's good....

(JEFF checks his watch.)

Six-fifteen....

(He picks up a framed picture of his wife.)

Brenda, this will be good for us.... Brenda....

(JEFF begins to run his thumb over the picture, staring deeply at it...)

Brenda....

(His rubbing remains intense until he snaps out of it. JEFF shakes his head, puts the picture down, and takes a can of air freshener and vigorously sprays the frame. The blast sends the picture frame to the floor. JEFF stops spraying and picks it up. Upon doing so, though, he places his arm on the brush. He stops.)

I touched the brush. Jesus, damnit!

(Gritting his teeth, he sprays the brush, then uses the can to nudge it back into place. He calms himself.)

It's OK. This still works....

(JEFF takes the bag and packaging and discards them. He then positions himself on the couch, awaiting his wife. He repositions. And repositions.)

BRENDA:

(Off:)
Hello?

JEFF:

(Silently:)
Yes....

BRENDA:

(Entering:)
Jeff....

(JEFF rises from the couch. He greets BRENDA by putting his arm around her and kissing her deeply. She is taken aback.)

JEFF:

Hi.

BRENDA:

Hi....

JEFF:

Why don't you come over to the couch?

(BRENDA starts for the couch. JEFF gives her a swift spank. BRENDA bristles and gives JEFF a look.)

BRENDA:

What's gotten into you?

JEFF:

Let me show you.

(They sit. BRENDA sniffs the air.)

BRENDA:

Do you smell vanilla?

JEFF:

I want you to brush your hair.

BRENDA:

My hair? Why?

JEFF:

I want you to.

BRENDA:

Is it doing that thing in the back again? I hate it when it gets humid-

JEFF:

(Emphatic:)

Your hair is beautiful. I just want you to brush it.

BRENDA:

OK...

(She picks up the brush. JEFF lets out a deep breath. BRENDA pauses, but with the brush in her hand, JEFF nods at her. She proceeds, pushing the brush into her hair. JEFF doesn't take his eyes off of her.)

JEFF:

That's it.... Brush it all the way down...top to bottom....

(JEFF nods and watches, excited. BRENDA, increasingly worried, slows down. She looks at him.)

No, that's right. You're doing great, honey.

BRENDA:

(Back up to speed:)

Jeff....

JEFF:

Mmmm....

BRENDA:

Jeff, I can't do this....

JEFF:

Brenda!

(BRENDA stands and throws the hairbrush on the ground. JEFF quickly snatches it up, tosses it onto the table, and blasts it with the air freshener. He turns back to BRENDA.)

JEFF:

Brenda, honey; what's wrong?

BRENDA:

Nothing, Jeff; nothings wrong. It's just...really weird.
I'm sorry; that's not supposed to be insulting, but—Jeff....

JEFF:

Brenda?

BRENDA:

(*Snatching the air freshener:*)
This just isn't you.

(*Beat.*)

JEFF:

Did you ever think, Brenda, that me isn't what I wanted?
Huh? Maybe I didn't want me. Maybe it was time for
something else.

BRENDA:

I don't know if I understand....

JEFF:

You understand. We both have, for a long time, and I don't
blame you for not being able to put it into words. Brenda,
I've seen you do the same things I've been doing. You lie
awake in bed, wondering if it's always been this way.
Wondering if the man next to you has always had that much
ear hair. Wondering if it's the same in each ear. Then I
roll over and you know; yes it is. Brenda, you wonder if
our horizontal tutsi-frutsi has always been so plain
vanilla and I'm here to tell you it's not! I saw a movie
last weekend.

BRENDA:

Jeff....

JEFF:

White Palace. The story of a love affair: Susan Sarandon
and James Spader. Watching that movie, Brenda. That's
when it hit me. Sarandon's the older woman, but Spader
doesn't care. If there was every any concern, it's
evaporated. Now it's just two bodies in heat. Their ages,
they're just details. The love—the passion—comes first.

JEFF: (cont.)

Watch any James Spader movie, and you'll see it. He loves the way he wants to love. Brenda, I want to love you the way I want.

BRENDA:

Jeff, I'd love to.... But I don't think I've ever seen a James Spader movie.

(JEFF kisses her forehead.)

JEFF:

Sometimes you get up in the morning for work, and I stay half-asleep in bed. I see you at the mirror. You brush your hair. I see it and I can hear it. The motion. The look in your eyes. It's a beautiful thing to wake up to.

(Gently, he takes her wrist. He guides it to the brush on the table. BRENDA picks it up and resumes brushing. JEFF comes around and sits with his legs around her. He begins kissing her neck. BRENDA laughs, lightly.)

BRENDA:

I'm brushing my hair....

JEFF:

Mmmm Hmmm....

BRENDA:

This shouldn't be sexy.

JEFF:

No? Brenda: everything should be sexy. Spader has shown me. You pull a garbage can down to the street; it may be disgusting but it makes you beautiful. You angle your body just right to get it rolling and you break out into the faintest sweat. Then you come inside and wash your hands all the way up to the elbow. That's sexy.

BRENDA:

Me and the garbage?

JEFF:

Yes.

BRENDA:

Jeff, I don't know.

JEFF:

Brenda, it has to be sexy. Because taking out the trash is a part of who you are, a part I never should have neglected. These moments make up Brenda, the human being who I am so in love with. Brenda, this is the James Spader in me. And I see the Spader in you, too.

(JEFF pulls out a community college adult school catalog.)

Starting next week I'm taking classes again for Portuguese.

BRENDA:

Portugese...?

JEFF:

Brenda, I know you love the music of the language. You loved it in me. I couldn't tell you much more than "*A fonte da água está na biblioteca,*" [*"The water fountain is in the library,"*] but it made you smile. I want you to hear me in a foreign tongue.

BRENDA:

You'd speak Portuguese?

JEFF:

Three nights a week and whenever you want it.

(Beat.)

BRENDA:

Can we take it together?

JEFF:

Si...

(They kiss. Deeply. BRENDA breaks apart while JEFF stays in the moment.)

BRENDA:

Jeff....

JEFF:

Spank me....

BRENDA:

Jeff, no; I have to—

JEFF:

Just take your hand, Brenda, and—

(He spansk himself. BRENDA shakes him.)

BRENDA:

Jeff, no; listen. I need to say this. This kind of love, I know you haven't been giving it to me. But I've been getting it.

JEFF:

Brenda....

BRENDA:

I'm so sorry, Jeff.

JEFF:

Wow.... Brenda, this is hard for me to take. But it doesn't have to be wrong.

BRENDA:

Oh, Jeff. Are you jealous?

JEFF:

I am. I am, but not so horribly. This is about your pleasure. And if he does it for you... If she.... If they....

BRENDA:

It's "he," Jeff. And he does do it for me. A lot.

JEFF:

Wow.

BRENDA:

Sometimes backwards.

JEFF:

Brenda, I've been a bad husband.

BRENDA:

Uh huh....

JEFF:

It's far past the time you should be loved the right way. Not from love on the side, but from the love that you married for. Brenda, whatever this man—

BRENDA:

Clint.

JEFF:

What?

BRENDA:

His name is Clint.

JEFF:

Brenda, whatever Clint means to you, I don't care. But I want me to mean to you.

BRENDA:

Mean what?

JEFF:

I want to be your love.

BRENDA:

Jeff....

JEFF:

I want to be your lust.

BRENDA:

Oh, Jeff....

JEFF:

I want you to dress me up like Super Mario and throw vegetables at me! Brenda—

(They kiss furiously again. JEFF has his arms around BRENDA. While they kiss, he begins to pull a deflated inner tube from the couch. As they caress, he begins blowing it up. It begins to take the shape of a floating ring with an animal's head. BRENDA becomes aware and breaks the embrace. She looks at JEFF. He stops. Then he begins blowing again. Once it is inflated, JEFF presents the tube to BRENDA.)

JEFF:

Put it on.

(Enter CLINT. CLINT is dressed as a nineteenth century train engineer, complete with stripes and a tall hat. If this play was a James Spader movie, this would be the part played by Elias Koteas. He eyes the couple.)

CLINT:

Brenda.

BRENDA:

Clint!

JEFF:

(Standing, with tube:)
So, this is Clint? How'd you get in?

BRENDA:

He picks locks.

JEFF:

That's kinda hot.

BRENDA:

I know.

CLINT:

I'm a man of many talents, Mr. Bergen.

JEFF:

I've heard. What I've just discovered, you and Brenda have known all along. So let me ask you something: What do you find sexy?

CLINT:

You mean Brenda?

JEFF:

I mean what I mean. Just sexy.

CLINT:

What do I find sexy...?

JEFF:

Right.

CLINT:

(Flatly:)
Twins.

JEFF:

(Mock incredulity:)
Twins! That's wonderful; really.... Did you hear that, Brenda? Clint likes twins. Clint has a definition of human sexuality that stems from the study of beer commercials. Brenda, this is not what you want. Beneath this costume, and beneath that cryptic squint thing that he's doing, he's projecting nothing but the same stale machismo that women have fallen for time and time again.

BRENDA:

(To CLINT:)
I know twins.

CLINT:

Do you?

BRENDA:

Carla and Olivia. They're fraternal, if that's OK.

CLINT:

I think it's OK....

JEFF:

Hey! It's not OK! I can't believe this, Brenda. I really can't. Clint, you and Clint, together.... They sell that kind of stuff on the covers of paperback novels. Brenda, why Clint? Why not me? I'm kinky!

CLINT:

Mr. Bergen, I'm deeper than I look. Brenda and I are deeper than we look. We share a connection. Just a few months ago I saw Brenda's face in the high school yearbook.

JEFF:

You two went to high school together?

BRENDA:

Not exactly....

CLINT:

I bought the yearbook at somebody's garage sale. That picture was my first glimpse of your wife. She's flawless. I couldn't stop thinking about her. I wanted to see her take out the garbage.

(JEFF gives his wife a look.)

For weeks I kept Brenda's picture taped to the visor in my car. I pasted it to my forehead and just stared in the mirror. I used it as a bookmark. After a while, I had to find Brenda. I also ran out of paste.

JEFF:

(To BRENDA:)

Looks like he found you.

BRENDA:

Jeff, I don't know if I can describe what drew me to Clint. When I first saw him, he was holding my picture, wearing that exact outfit. Clint recreates famous train wrecks. He took me to one. He said it was for Harvey Whetland's Tropical Fruit Massacre of 1926.

CLINT:

Harvey was driving that train, high on plantains.

BRENDA:

So was Clint that night. He and I were in the engine, speeding dangerously on the abandoned track. We came to the curb and went skidding off the rails. Crates of produce toppled over, bruising me, cracking open. The train landed on its side. Clint came back from the engine to check on me. Then we made love among the kiwi and papaya.

JEFF:

(A recollection:)

We had fruit salad the next day.

BRENDA:

Do you understand now, Jeff?

JEFF:

I do, Brenda, I think I do.

(To CLINT:)

JEFF: (cont.)

There's more to you than you let on. You've been good to my wife. When she needed it, you were there. The last thing I want to do is get in the way of something that works. But Brenda, we work. Now, we do. And I would never ask you to shut Clint out, but now I'm confused and I want to know. What can you do with me?

BRENDA:

Jeff...that's a good question.

CLINT:

Can you roll your tongue?

JEFF:

What?

CLINT:

Can you roll your tongue?

JEFF:

Yes, yes I can roll my tongue. Why?

CLINT:

Show me.

JEFF:

Clint, I'm trying to—

(JEFF throws his hands up.)

OK....

(He sticks his tongue out and rolls it.)

See?

CLINT:

I see.

(JEFF sticks his tongue out at BRENDA.)

JEFF:

I can roll my tongue.

BRENDA:

Oh Jeff....

CLINT:

That's something I can't do, Mr. Bergen.

JEFF:

What? Seriously? I thought everybody could roll their tongue.

CLINT:

I can't.

JEFF:

Let me see; stick out your tongue.

BRENDA:

He can't, Jeff. I've seen him try.

(CLINT sticks out his tongue. He twitches it, but he cannot roll it. JEFF inspects his work.)

JEFF:

Aw, you're just sticking it out. You've got to pull up on the sides.

CLINT:

Ahhh Cahhh.

JEFF:

What?

CLINT:

(Replaces his tongue:)
I can't.

JEFF:

Why not?

CLINT:

I don't have the muscles.

JEFF:

The tongue is a muscle; what are you talking about?

BRENDA:

Jeff, some people can't roll their tongues.

JEFF:

Can you do it?

BRENDA:

I can do it.

JEFF:

All this time we've been together and I've never thought to ask.

(She rolls her tongue.)

CLINT:

Amazing.

JEFF:

OK, good. Just so we're all clear here, we've got two rollers and one non-roller.

CLINT:

Right.

JEFF:

But now, Clint, what does this have to do in any way with the way that Brenda and I—?

(BRENDA pulls JEFF to her and gives him a deep, open-mouth kiss. She retracts.)

Oh.

(BRENDA gives the same kiss to CLINT. JEFF watches.)

BRENDA:

It's completely different!

JEFF:

Wow.

BRENDA:

Let me show you again—

(She kisses JEFF, taking him into a dip. She releases him.)

JEFF:

Those, yes.... Those are different kinds of love.

(BRENDA kisses CLINT. Unseen by JEFF, their kiss grows deeper as he continues.)

Brenda, there's so much I don't know. But you're right. I don't need to worry what Clint can do for you or what I can't do. I just need to do. We need to do. Everything. And a lot more often.

(At this point BRENDA and CLINT's kiss has turned into a full-fledged makeout session, and they have tumbled behind the couch, unobservable. JEFF turns.)

Brenda—

(Seeing no one, he stops. CLINT rises from behind the couch. Although he still wears his cap, he is now shirtless and holding a turkey baster above his head while looking down, presumably at BRENDA. He sees JEFF and stops. They stare at each other.)

CLINT:

Well don't just stand there; grab a baster.

JEFF:

Brenda!

(BRENDA rises from the couch. Her blouse is undone and she is pouring honey from a bear-shaped squeeze bottle onto her chest.)

BRENDA:

Yes, Jeff?

JEFF:

This is what you want, isn't it?

(BRENDA looks from JEFF to CLINT to the bear.)

BRENDA:

Yes.

JEFF:

I don't know how to want this.

BRENDA:

Jeff, don't be upset.

JEFF:

I'm not, Brenda; I'm happy for you.

BRENDA:

You're not happy for yourself, Jeff. I can see that. Jeff, I want to know, are you comfortable with this?

(CLINT runs his finger across BRENDA's chest and licks off the honey.)

JEFF:

I am comfortable, yes. And I'm not. Don't get me wrong, Brenda. This is what I want, but it's difficult to match what you and Clint have. I'm new at this. I don't think I'm up to that level.

BRENDA:

Up to what level, Jeff? You were just saying that there's love in everything. You like hairbrushes. I like honeybears. Clint likes My Little Pony. How can you measure that all on one level? I don't measure your love in me against Clint's love in me. How could I? So don't try to.

JEFF:

Brenda, you're so right. I can't give up on this love.

BRENDA:

Good. Now get the garlic press.

JEFF:

A garlic press? What for?

(BRENDA and CLINT share a chuckle.)

BRENDA:

Come into the kitchen. We'll show you.

(They begin to exit. JEFF hesitates.)

JEFF:

And it's OK if I'm still not completely comfortable?

CLINT:

You'll do fine. Besides, it washes off.

(JEFF thinks.)

JEFF:

Can you give me five minutes?

(BRENDA goes to JEFF and kisses him, sweetly. She pulls away and JEFF is left with his eyes closed and his rolled tongue sticking out. His eyes snap open.)

BRENDA:

We'll set up. I love you, Jeff.

JEFF:

I love you, Brenda.

(BRENDA and CLINT exit.)

But how?

(He looks at the inflatable tube. Annoyed, he takes it off and prepares to toss it away. But he stops. JEFF looks at the tube's head and considers it. Finally he presses the tube against his body and begins to kiss it—deeply. He falls back onto the couch with the inner tube as the lights fade.)

THE END