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An Abuse of Power?

by Garf Collins

Still half asleep Neil wondered where he was until, recognising the tiny blond hairs on the arm next to his face, he realised he was in Joanne's flat. With a surge of desire he reached around her slim body as he kissed her neck. She moved away.

“Not now Neil. I don't feel like it. I think my tummy is a bit upset.”

Neil was a professor of evolutionary biology and Joanne one of his students. She had often approached him with questions after a lecture. Invitations for coffee to discuss the topics further had soon developed into an intense relationship.

He cupped his hands around her breasts as he pulled her against him. She thrust his hands away and wriggled free of his embrace.

“Neil. I said no. I don't want it. I'm going to shower and get ready. I'll see you in the lecture theatre.”

As Neil walked back to his rooms he worried that Joanne had been quite cool of late. However, he decided that it was probably caused by anxiety about the fast approaching exams.

Neil's course was popular, not just with the biologists, so the lecture theatre was well occupied.

“Today's lecture is about the evolutionary purpose of love,” he announced. “Consider our development through primates to modern humans. A progressive increase in brain size allowed the increasing intelligence which created our growing success.

The birth canal couldn't accommodate this, so progeny had to be born earlier and nurtured for longer as the full facility of the brain developed..."

As he was talking, Neil scanned his audience for Joanne. Finally he saw her near the back. The boy sitting close to her seemed to be paying more attention to her than the lecture. Despite his concern he tried to concentrate on his theme.

"So for the benefit of the species what we now call love evolved in females. This was a mutual attachment that ensured the mother looked after the helpless new-born which in turn was bound to her. In some apes the female was not accessible to a male until she had weaned the infant. This resulted in infanticide. The evolution of male love allowed for protection for both the female and the baby. The genes endure so love is after all a selfish thing.

As he continued, Neil noticed Joanne and her companion slipping out. After finishing his lecture he phoned her many times before he got through. A sleepy voice answered.

"Joanne where are you. What's the matter are you ill?"

"Neil I'm sorry. I meant to tell you but I couldn't get the words out. I am with Anton now. We are in love and I can't see you any more."

"But Joanne you can't end it like this. I thought that WE were in love. Let's meet and talk it over."

"I'm so sorry Neil, I can't do that. My mind is made up. As you said in your lecture 'Love is after all a selfish thing.'

Neil was devastated but he could do nothing to change Joanne's mind. To avoid the pain of his lost love he concentrated even more on his course which continued to be very popular, not least because of his ability to link its more esoteric concepts to everyday ideas. But, after many months, during one of his lectures, his self protective cocoon began to be penetrated.

"Instinct is a marvellous thing. It can neither be explained nor ignored.' That quotation from an Agatha Christie novel sums up the belief of many people," Neil said as he started his lecture, "but I would define instinct as an innate pattern of behaviour in animals in response to certain stimuli. Humans are also animals so much of our innate response is determined by instincts built in by millions of years of evolution..."

As he spoke he looked around at the full lecture theatre. Rebecca was again sitting in the front row looking fixedly at him. She had been at all his recent lectures and often asked questions afterwards. Her face suggested something beyond academic interest. It was the slight smile she wore as if she knew something that he didn't.

"Take the mating instinct," he went on, "this cannot be explained by love. Civilisation has overlaid a primeval instinct with the notion of romantic love."

Neil noticed Rebecca again, sardonically smiling at him as he spoke. The fleeting thought of his failed relationship with Joanna made him resist a barely perceived fascination for Rebecca and banish any thought of meeting her outside the lecture theatre.

He continued his course over the following weeks with Rebecca always in the front row and often wanting further elaboration after the lectures. Finally, his resolve weakened to the point where he suggested they meet for coffee to discuss that day's topic further. After several such meetings Rebecca said, "Neil. I think we should stop playing this game. I can feel that you want us to get together. Why not come over to my flat tonight for a meal."

"I don't know about that Rebecca. Of course I want to but you know the rules."

"Well give me a ring if you do decide to come."

Neil couldn't get her out of his mind after that and nor could he prevent himself arriving at her flat that evening with a bottle of wine in hand.

The meal was good and they had a relaxed conversation about university matters. She was vivacious and, in her wry comment about his faculty, was very amusing. As they talked his reserve rapidly slipped away.

"A final glass of wine?" she said as they moved into the kitchen.

"That would be nice."

After pouring the wine, she turned, saying provocatively, "Well then you'll have to reach around me to get it."

As Neil did so he was overcome with the feel of her body made much closer as she leaned back against the counter with her arms around his back. With urgent desire he began to kiss her neck and then her throat. She pulled his face to hers and kissed him lustfully.

Leading him towards her bedroom she said mockingly, "Do you remember quoting 'Instinct is a marvellous thing. It can neither be explained nor ignored.' You're clearly unable to ignore *this* instinct but you'll have to explain it to me afterwards Professor."

A year later Neil was stuck on a train held up by an unexpected snowfall. The man opposite complained he was going to be late visiting his niece and then went on at length about how the rail company should have been better prepared. Eventually he asked, "Anyway what's your story? While we're stuck here, we might as well pass the time chatting, don't you think?"

Neil, slumping apathetically in his seat, looked out at the snow covered fields and thought that there was no escaping this earnest little man. He didn't feel like talking so he replied, "OK, but first tell me more about that niece you are going to visit."

“Well she’s had rather a hard time. She was studying at her university as a mature student. One of the lecturers set about grooming her. He would take her for coffee after lectures to explain the topics further as he put it. She was flattered so she went along with it. One evening he visited her flat and after talking his way in, he raped her. He made her keep quiet by saying he would ensure she failed her exams if she told and so prevailed upon her to maintain a sexual relationship. Finally, she could stand it no longer, and took the case to the university authorities. A successful campaign on #MeToo, and the organisation of a boycott of his courses by the students union, led to his immediate suspension. Sorry. I got carried away but such people ought to be horse whipped in my opinion.”

As he spoke Neil became more and more agitated and his apathetic state turned to one of anger. “That’s all very well but suppose the poor man is not guilty. I have experienced the injustice of such a situation. A bit like your story but I was entirely innocent. A student came to every one of my lectures at the university. She always wanted to talk about the details afterwards and as a result we became quite friendly. One evening she invited me to dinner at her flat and made it very clear that she wanted more than a handshake afterwards. We became involved. Admittedly the university frowns on staff/student relationships but she was a mature student of 25 who I assumed was capable of making up her own mind.”

“That sounded very nice for you. But what’s this injustice you referred to?”

“I began to think we would have a long term relationship but, as the summer approached, she started asking me more and more direct questions about the exams until it became apparent that she wanted me to give her the actual questions. I was astounded to have been taken in by such scheming so I immediately ended our affair.”

“Must have been very hard on you. How did she take it?”

“She made a complaint to the authorities and organised a campaign accusing me of rape and forcing her into a sexual relationship. I am suspended pending an enquiry. It has ruined my career.”

After this, Neil sat in silence for several minutes. A growing realisation of how parallel the two stories were coalesced into bitter suspicion. Eventually he asked, “What’s your niece’s name?”

“Rebecca.”