

“U-Turns and Other Tricky Maneuvers”
by Tina Whittle

He opened the door before I even knocked and then just stood there on the other side of the threshold -- arms folded, eyes wary, rumped. Still tired, still as vulnerable as when I'd put him out under the portico. Still as vertiginously attractive.

“Hey,” I said.

He cocked his head. “Hey.”

And then he just stood there some more. And if he'd been any other man in the universe, I would have jumped him, wrapped my legs around his waist, and taken him down to the floor. But not this man. No, not this one.

I took a steadying breath. “Can I come in?”

“Oh. I'm sorry. Of course.”

He stepped back, and I stepped inside, very conscious of each footfall into his apartment. This was uncharted territory now, terra incognita. Black and white in stark relief, like a blueprint, with no room to maneuver. There was only one direction now, only one road ahead, and I'd put myself on it the second I'd made that U-turn.

The bedroom door was wide open behind him.

I dropped my tote bag in the corner. “So . . . here I am.”

He nodded, arms folded. “Here you are.”

“You called. I came.”

“Indeed.” He checked his watch. “Very quickly.”

“Indeed.”

He kept his arms crossed. I hadn't exactly been expecting him to sweep me off my feet, but I'd expected . . . something. Some hint of interest, some tiny spark I could fan to flame. But he seemed as placid as ever. Complacent even. I had to look close to see it, behind the wariness and weariness and post-drugging hangover. But it was definitely there.

Invitation. A certain yielding softness behind the barriers, behind the wall, locked up tight. But definitely there.

I took a step closer. He didn't budge. I reached up and took his hands in mine, then gently opened his arms. He let me do it without resistance, but he didn't make a single move in response, not even when I placed his palms flat against my hips and slipped my arms around his neck.

I smiled up at him. “See? Simple.”

“Simple,” he agreed. He still looked puzzled, though. “Tai?”

“Yes?”

“I want to make sure I know what's going on. Because I don't want to make a mistake, not this time, and I do. Sometimes.”

“What do you think is going on?”

He slipped his gaze sideways, considering. Finally he looked back at me, hesitation in his expression, maybe even a hint of a blush along those gorgeous cheekbones, which just about combusted me on the spot.

“I think you're seducing me,” he said. “Again.”

“You are absolutely right.” I smiled bigger. “I absolutely am. And I am going to keep seducing you until we end up in bed. If that’s okay with you.”

“Oh.” He relaxed a little. “That is absolutely okay with me.”

I stood on tiptoe and kissed him gently. His mouth was warm and tender-soft, tentative at first, but sure underneath. He could kiss, really kiss, like magic and satin and fireworks all rolled into one, and I knew I would have to be careful with this man, that this man could -- with the proper encouragement on my part -- totally rock my world off its axis. Slooowww, I told myself. Don’t rush. Make this last.

So I kissed him for a long time. It was a sweet kiss, fraught with significance and meaning. But in the back of my mind, somewhere behind the buzzing of arousal, I knew I was alone in that perspective, that Trey did not fraught things with meaning. For him, this kiss was not layered with symbolism or tethered to conditions. It was a kiss, itself alone, and somehow all the more profound for it.

He bent his head forward, letting me rub the back of his neck. I could feel him beginning to respond, and it was a tapestry of texture and sensation, memory and anticipation. I remembered every touch we’d shared, every single one — the mundane, the electric, the practically desperate — all at once. It was a sensory assault, and all I could do was kiss him and fall into it.

I led him backwards into the bedroom, exploring as I did so. Unbuttoning his shirt, tasting his mouth deeper, a little at a time. His hands moved up from my hips, then under my t-shirt to the bare skin at the small of my back, a light spare touch, his fingertips sending ripples up my spine.

I moved him to the edge of the bed, continuing to unbutton his shirt. The entire king-size creation lay in a snow-white swath, tucked in tight with hospital corners, as pristine as a nun’s handkerchief. I finished with the shirt and eased it off his shoulders. Despite my caution, he winced and sucked in a sharp breath.

I froze. “Oh god. Sorry about that.”

“It’s the trapezius. I pulled it.”

I felt the first pang of uncertainty. “Are you okay to do this?”

“The doctor said to avoid strenuous activity. We can do this without it being strenuous, can’t we?”

I wasn’t sure I could. My hormones felt like horses at the gate, chomping, snorting, waiting for the bell and the headlong rush. I ran a finger along the inside of his waistband and felt his stomach muscle contract.

“We can try,” I said.

I leaned into him, kissed him deeper, still tender, but more insistent. Hungrier, with an edge now. I eased him backwards, then down down down onto his back, onto that vast white expanse.

He complied — slowly, deliberately, never once breaking eye contact — and it was devastatingly erotic, an act of sexual submission so potent and powerful that I had to catch my breath. For the first time in my life, I was having a romantic encounter that wasn’t a storm and conquer mission. For the first time, it was a gift. Not a prize, not a coup. An offering. All of him, all for me.

The knowledge was exhilarating. I felt powerful, female, primordial. Like

an earth mother, a goddess.

I stood at the foot of the bed and pulled my shirt over my head, then unhooked my bra. He made no move to reach for me, just watched. His breathing had quickened, though, and his eyes sharpened as I peeled off the jeans, then the panties.

I leaned over and unbuttoned his trousers, which had a zipper as smooth as butter. Hooked my fingers into the silky fabric and pulled everything off in one tug, the whole Armani lot of it, gone in a puddle on the floor with my thrift-store jeans and t-shirt and not-quite-best panties, our two exteriors co-mingling together.

Naked.

What a word, naked, especially when it mixed with other words like craving and heady and delicious, all of them running through my head in some sexual thesaurus. I took a good long look at him, and he plain took my breath away.

I knelt at the end of the bed, wonderstruck. "I don't even know where to start."

He lifted his head, then let it flop back against the pillow. "I can't. You have to . . . if you could just . . . come here, please."

I felt it again, that delicate shudder of intimacy whenever he said "please" or "thank you" or held a door for me. I did as he asked, crawling across the top of the bed to lie on my side next to him. He rolled face to face with me, ran his hand along my jaw line, his eyes searching my features. I wondered for a second if he was reading me, verifying my truthfulness, but no. He was just looking, and looking deep. I kissed him, and he kissed me back, so delicately it almost broke my heart.

"I am weak and exhausted and in pain," he said quietly. "Also still drugged. A little."

"I know this already."

"I know you do. But I didn't want you to think . . . This isn't how I normally respond. I'm usually much more . . . I can't think of the word."

I started to say "aroused" but that wasn't it. He was aroused, all right, practically vibrating with arousal. My own body sang in harmony, our heartbeats entraining in that ancient clockwork, the call and response of blood and juices, muscle and skin.

"Aggressive?" I offered.

He shook his head. "Multi-syllabic, starts with 'c.'"

"Cognizant? Circumspect? Complicated?"

"No. Not that. Never mind. It's just that. . . I'm trying to tell you . . ."

I took a deep breath and summoned up every ounce of self-sacrifice I could muster, digging it out of my heart like wrenching a diamond from the walls of a mine.

I took his chin in hand and looked him in the eye. "Trey? Are you having second thoughts?"

He blinked, and that little wrinkle appeared between his eyes. "I don't understand."

“Fifteen minutes ago you said you wanted to be alone. So I drove off. Then ten minutes ago you called me and asked me if I meant it, about wanting to be with you. Which I did — I mean, do — so I drove back. Now, I’m happy to be here and all — omigod, am I — but you have to admit, that’s enough to kink up anybody’s certainty.”

“I still don’t know what you’re asking.”

I kept my voice patient and calm. “Why did you call me back?”

“Oh.” He tilted his head. “I missed you. I didn’t expect that. But I did.” He took my hand and laid it palm-down against his diaphragm. “It hurt here, like a bruise. That was how I knew. So I called you.”

And it was like he’d slipped his fingers right in the middle of my heart and squeezed. I felt a prickle of tears — oh hell, not waterworks, not now — so I reached down lower and took him in hand, finding a deep and delicious satisfaction in the way he exhaled, eyes closed.

“Capable,” he murmured, his voice a smoked whisper. “I’ll be more capable the second time.”

The second time. Which implied a third time. This wasn’t just an itch to scratch, a momentary tumble. This was the beginning of something.

“I missed you too,” I told him. “I have missed you since you walked away from my hotel door, since you walked out of my brother’s house after I held you at sword point, missed you every time I got out of the Ferrari and left you in it with the engine running.”

I ran my hand along the length of him, the velvet hardness of him, and I could feel — omigod, yes, I could — and I could imagine — yes, yes, I absolutely could — and then I got dizzy with it, how fantasy melted into reality, how this was happening, really actually happening, and it was almost too much. I pressed my whole body against him -- opening, pulsing, tender with the first flare of need.

“And I wanted you even before I missed you,” I said.

“I know. I wanted you too.”

More buzzy warm surges. “You did?”

“I did.”

“So in some alternate universe, on the night we met, we went into that room at the Ritz, and we lay like this on that big bed, and we had at each other with wild abandon?”

More confusion. “What?”

I shook my head. “Never mind.”

And then I kissed him some more. I could pretend that was exactly what we’d done. The present moment was so big that I could even time travel in it.

I rolled on top of him, not letting my mouth leave his, not for a second. He rolled with me, still a hand in my hair, still another running up my spine. He raked his fingernails lightly across my shoulder blades, and the resulting ripple of sensation rendered me speechless. Literally. My tongue quit working and my body flushed with chemical abandon, like a shot of vodka right into the system. The warmth spread and blossomed until I could feel my pulse between my legs.

That was when I remembered that somebody had better have some condoms, because I sure didn’t, and I did *not* want to run out to the store at that

moment. But I would, damn straight I would, like an Olympic sprinter I would.

“Trey? You do have condoms around here, don’t you? Please say yes.”

“In the nightstand.”

I rolled over and reached behind me. Somewhere in the back of my head, a little voice was muttering that they’d better not be French condoms, but the rest of me didn’t care. I grabbed one. Not French, not even Italian. Good old American Trojans. I guessed the GQ had no opinions about prophylactics.

I opened the condom and rolled it onto him, feeling the arch of his body, the submission and abandonment, the growing, singing, headlong desire that even his formidable willpower could not contain. I kissed him again, and again, and again.

“You are such a Boy Scout,” I whispered. “Always prepared.”

He tangled his fingers more roughly in my hair. “Do that some more. Please.”

“That?”

“Yes. That. Exactly . . . that.”

And so with aching easy slowness, for this first time, which was going to be this particular way, I explored every inch of him with my fingers and lips. I took my time, savored him. And he let me. Trey was exhausted, yes. Loopy and passive and discombobulated. But he was exquisitely attuned to sensation, that man. And he let me find his pleasure. He let me discover every erogenous zone. He let me plunder and explore and take him to the edge and back again. He murmured my name, he caught his breath, he said yes and yes again. He closed his eyes and lost himself, trusting me to find him, and I came and came again many times before I finally took him inside me.

And then it was urgent, like the roar of distant whitewater that I’d been hearing coming for miles and miles. And it was sweet, so damn sweet. Despite his utter exhaustion, he focused on me, watching the rhythms, watching my pleasure, watching it build and build. And he did not stop paying attention until I was calling his name and clutching at him, wild and heedless and totally out of my mind with him.

And somewhere in all that carnal surge, he hit the peak too. I know he did. But I was glad I’d had the time to watch him in pleasure before then, because by that time, I was lost in the me-me-me of it. But it was more than my body, my climax, my desire. I couldn’t stop thinking how he’d missed me, he really had, this man who was under me and inside me, who was holding me as if he’d never let go. This man, Trey Seaver. He’d missed me.

Me.

Afterward, Trey slept for ten hours straight. He slept solidly and deeply, without even a twitch. I lay down beside him, watching the rise and fall of his chest in wonderstruck fascination. Occasionally I would run my fingers along his mouth, or press them against the pulse in the hollow of his throat, dazzled by the subtle human machinery of his body. I dozed eventually, in and out of a soft muzzy sleep, then awoke around midnight to find him watching me in the glow of Buckhead, the mellow hazy light reaching into the darkened bedroom.

I smiled at him. "Hey you."

"Hey."

"How are you feeling?"

He reached out and ran a thumb across my lower lip. "Much more capable."