

## PENIS. VAGINA. PENETRATION. THE END.

---

### BRIAN LOBEL

*“Sentimental survivorship stories be damned, I headed back to my college home of Ann Arbor, Michigan with but one item on my agenda: lose heterosexual virginity before ejaculations become retrograde and the threat of knocking up a woman becomes mere fantasy. I think my only possible rationale for trying to lose my virginity to a woman was that I was friends with Third Wave feminists and Second Wave lesbians, exclusively, in Ann Arbor and I really wanted to prove that I could have sex just like them.”*

Boy, girl, penis, vagina, penetration, the end. I was a queer virgin on a mission. I simply could not experience life without experiencing sex as most defined it – I just *couldn't*. But in order to remove the metastasized testicular cancer from my abdomen and finally enter the world of cancer survivorship and LiveStrong bracelets, one final hurdle was placed before me – the abdominal surgery which would potentially leave me with a life sans ejaculations.

Sentimental survivorship stories be damned, I headed back to my college home of Ann Arbor, Michigan with but one item on my agenda: lose heterosexual virginity before ejaculations become retrograde and the threat of knocking up a woman becomes mere fantasy. I think my only possible rationale for trying to lose my virginity to a woman was that I was friends with Third Wave feminists and Second Wave lesbians, exclusively, in Ann Arbor and I really wanted to prove that I could have sex just like them. Or as close as I could get. Regardless of the plan's logic, I arrived raring to go.

\*\*\*

Like the beginning of some stupid joke, I was a virgin on a crashing plane, looking in all directions for someone to do me one last wish. One dying wish... Oh, and I would also see some friends who were worried that I had died in the four months since leaving college, assuring them that I was alive and breathing after my chemotherapy. Admittedly, seeing those friends was not truly my week's primary goal. I never shared my cherry-popping agenda with anyone, though – anyone – for fear that I would lose my status as esteemed cancer patient and just be judged as an emaciated, hairless leach.

After I arrived back at my pre-cancer home, Ruth's Co-op, I began conceiving my plan. Which woman was the easiest? Most attractive? Most noteworthy? Was there anyone I actually cared about? I didn't care about caring, though... I didn't have time to care about caring - nor about attractiveness, cup size or reputation. I evaluated each of my potential lifesavers in an efficient, misogynistic and desperate cost-benefit analysis; how much money-slash-time-slash-emotional self would I be required to spend in order to have sex with any given woman.

I first turned to Raquelle Staffler, who had attempted to take my virginity four months earlier. Raquelle was my academic and artistic colleague at the University of Michigan, and, more importantly, the only other virgin I knew. We spent countless hours talking about our virginities on the steps of her Co-op, generally while smoking cloves or something similarly pretentious. (Please note that I didn't have cancer at this time, so my smoking wasn't offensive just yet.) We weren't prudes, just choosy, and figured that since we had waited long enough, it was best just to keep waiting. She was a fabulous, French-speaking Jewess with starlet hair who always threw elegant affairs, with good booze and a range of guests that included jocks, bookish-scientists and men comfortable enough with their masculinity that they wore butterfly wings on Halloween.

Four months before the pressures of boy, girl, penis, vagina, when she first heard of my diagnosis, Raquelle was quickly moved to action. On the eve of my departure from Ann Arbor, at the start of my cancer, I was packing at 2 AM, when I heard pebbles being thrown at my second story

window at Ruth's Co-op. At first I thought it might be my 8-day-gone right testicle, finding its way home like a faithful St. Bernard to my scrotum... And instead I saw her, Raquelle - the next best thing. I motioned her up and within seconds we were kissing, groping and feverishly dry humping. I fumbled with her shirt and black bra, grabbing and feeling around what was still a relatively uncharted area of the human body to me.

What Raquelle didn't know, however, was that for the past three days I had been making regular and somewhat painful trips to the area sperm bank before receiving a fertility-destroying dose of chemotherapy, and that getting my blood to even enter my shaft's erectile tissue, as she desired, was a near-impossible task... or maybe I just didn't really want to have sex with her. For the first time since my diagnosis, I pulled away and lowered my head, lips pursed. My cancer-face inspired immediate attention. She was powerless to its pathos. Raquelle quickly buttoned up her shirt, kissed my freshly shaven head, and wished me the best of luck.

Presuming a similar passion for my maidenhead, I figured that Raquelle, four months later, would be the easiest, breeziest - and that's exactly what I had time for. Boyfriend. Over coffee, she enthusiastically divulged that she now had a boyfriend... who? The guy with the butterfly wings. She had lost her virginity a few weeks earlier - and apparently, sex was amazing. Amazing. Yeah, I bet.

With no time to lose and less time to dwell, I quickly turned to Sandra. Beautiful, talented, intelligent, and she had a shady record that no one quite understood, which therefore meant that she could have been a major dl hooch, or a virgin like myself. Either one would work for my specific purposes. Lunch date, Cosi. We chatted for a while, but after a few minutes over matching Asian chicken salads, I realized that she was acting earnest as opposed to flirtatious as I had hoped -- I was an idiot to think that getting laid by a woman was that simple. I wallowed in my inability and lack of game with women and then tried to pass off the lunch as shop-talk about theater and art (which I of course didn't care about at all during this week-long jaunt in Ann Arbor). I was on a mission. A precious and now wasted 90 minutes

later, Sandra hugged me gently -- lest I break-- and after brief pecks on cheeks, we were on our way.

And then, somehow, my head became disconnected from my hands and I began typing the e-mail address that I had tried to erase from my bodily consciousness. The name I had sworn never to write or speak of again, after receiving an e-mail from him saying that he never wanted to speak again and that what had happened between us was never to be spoken of. Ever. I received this e-mail approximately 14 hours after my first experience with a man. This man. My former graduate student instructor, to be exact, , who I ended up instructing about many things one dark January night.

Immediately after he dropped me off a block from my freshman dorm during an ice storm, he wrote me an enthusiastic e-mail exclaiming how we should definitely hang out again... how this was weird but wonderful...and then, 14 hours later, his complete 180. I wasn't shocked. I mean, he was straight after all, and a former member of the Ukrainian secret service, so I wasn't going to fuck with him. I just decided that I hated him and that I never wanted to utter his name again. And, yet, here I was, almost a year to the day since that fateful night, typing him a casual, yet potent, e-mail.

Moments later I'm on a commuter bus and I am there, his apartment -- the same place as a year before. But this time during the day, right after he had taught one of his freshman honors seminars. We exchanged only a few words. He presented me with a meek apology about his disappearance because of how weirded out he was, and then that he had noticed that it had been months since he'd seen me on campus. I wanted to say that it had probably been four months, since it was roughly four months ago that I was diagnosed with cancer. I bit my lip, cancer's not appropriate at a time like this. This unexpected diversion was not, by the way, on my virginity-losing mission, especially because that journey was about sexual conquest, not apathetic reaffirmation of self-loathing.

I left all my clothes on except for my little white knitted cap, which would easily get hot and feel overwhelming atop my hairless head. He put his hand and forced my head where he wanted it to go - but he stopped for a

moment, only a brief moment, looked me in the eye and smiled. He told me how nice and smooth my head was. He told me “I always wanted to shave his head all the way with a razor, just like you, Brian.” I pulled my lips shut, lest I reveal the sobering secret to my beauty. “I’ve always wanted a shaved head. I just never had the balls to do it.” Again I bit my lip, cancer’s not appropriate at a time like this.

\*\*\*

Is it inappropriate to talk about the virginity of someone who’s dead? I’m pretty sure Lina would, in fact, mind and most likely be offended. She barely ever spoke -- she was shy about her heavy Russian accent, so she preferred spending time with her violin. I guess I’d never know whether she’d be offended or not. With her quiet brown hair, average build and closed-mouth smile, she rarely approached or was approached by others. To most, and often to me, she appeared unknowable.

Lina used to dance with me in Tzamarot, an Israeli folk dance troupe that was the center of my high school social life. It was rampantly queer (without knowing it), unabashedly Zionist (and proud of it), and every Wednesday from eight to nine-thirty. I don’t know why Lina was in the class – she hated dancing and the ridiculous girls in the class. But, it was our social life, a place where intermingling was expected and closely monitored.

I found her fascinating. Maybe it was her accent, or the fact that she was a brilliant violinist. I don’t know what it was, but Lina and I became fast friends. Fast friends? Well, acquaintances, really. We e-mailed and saw each other when I came home from Ann Arbor... and then one day she had cancer. A bad cancer.

My mother called me and told me. Since my mom wasn’t working, she had offered to drive Lina to and from treatments, which everyone knew would never help. I called once or twice – we weren’t best friends. I think I sent her a small stuffed animal that I later saw on her rack of small stuffed

animals, all gifts from other well-meaning clueless empathizers. This was months before my own cancer diagnosis, so I was still a newbie to cancer empathy.

When I finally got home from Ann Arbor so I could see her, her house smelled stale, full of death, and her neck...her neck was no longer there. The freak esophageal tumor bulged like a Seinfeld-ian joke, but it wasn’t funny. It was going to kill her. Seeing as how I was 19 and not a bereavement counselor, we just sat and talked about music, classes and her comfort. Thankfully, I’m arrogant enough to fill conversation with things about me, as she was “doing” very little. I visited her every few days for a few weeks, until one day the stale smell was almost overwhelming. A fog of death had preemptively set. It was a feeling my mother always tried to air out of her car by rolling down the windows after she would drop Lina home from the hospital – a palpable feeling of mortality.

I knew that this was it – so I decided to reach across the divide between life and death and I’m pretty sure I mis-kissed Lina on the lips. It was nothing, devoid of sexual energy, just a simple interpersonal connection;. As a drop of her sweat lingered on my upper lip, I realized that, more likely than not, based on what I knew of her, Lina was going to die without sex. Or maybe she had had sex. Maybe I just didn’t know about it because she’s discreet and we weren’t best friends. I hope she had had sex – or I guess I don’t really care if she had had, at least not in the way others later cared about me dying a virgin. If she cared or not, no one would ever know. Only survivors get to tell their stories.

Whether or not I died a virgin was the first thing to enter Raquelle’s mind – Raquelle who had come to make me come before I left Michigan to start my chemotherapy, afraid I would never come again. As if penetration were a proper part of my last rites. As if penetration were a proper part of everyone’s last rites.

Is it inappropriate to talk about the virginity of someone’s who dead? At the time, the last drop of sweat stayed on my upper lip – I couldn’t wipe her away. I just wanted to wait until Lina had evaporated and I was once

again free from her mortality. And Lina, the presumed virgin, died the next morning.

\*\*\*

Eight months after Lina's death. Five months after diagnosis. Four days to lose my virginity before I had my surgery. It didn't help that my week-long sojourn in Ann Arbor coincided with the week of V-Day, Eve Ensler's vagina-friendly national campaign to stop violence against women, which made me feel guilty about both being a queer man who still prowled for sex from a straight woman and, more importantly, for distracting my already-busy lesbian friends from their vaginal activism. They seemed all-too-happy to spend time with me, buy me cookies and cuddle me, but I knew their hearts and vaginas were elsewhere – maybe this really wasn't the week I'd get to bag an unassuming woman...

But this plane was going to crash, and in the ensuing fire, my virginity would look at me, laugh, and bring me face-to-face with all the wouldas, couldas and the shouldas. So I made my way to The University of Michigan's largest theater for their V-Day show stopping spectacular – the Vagina Monologues – hoping to find a woman empowered by her own sexuality.

My most favorite lesbian, Johanna, was playing the Angry Vagina (you know, the really dyke-y, man-hating one). I couldn't have been more proud. We all entered with rainbow shirts, large decoupage-d placards proclaiming “We love your Angry Vagina Joh!” and sat down to form a row of almost-exclusively lesbians. Robinette, Lara and I, we were all happy and in love with vaginas. We wanted them in our lives -- albeit for different reasons. They wanted to scream Vagina, CUNT and be empowered in their sex lives, and I wanted desperately to meet a woman, get her to fall in love (or at least lust) with me and have sex in the next 96 hours... The countdown to my surgery had begun. The women shouted CUNT! And I responded “Please?”

CUNT! “Please?” CUNT! “Please!” I looked around, CUNT! “Where?” Water water all around and not a drop to drink!

And then, between Vagina Workshop and The Little Coochie-Snorcher That Could, I saw him – Adam Rubin. The king of the Co-op-ers who I'd never met before but whose reputation preceded him. Beautiful, crunchy, crunchily beautiful. He had that suburban smile that shone perfectly through his perma-stubble. He sat down next to me in the middle of the third or fourth vagina monologue – apparently also a friend of the Ann Arbor lesbians. We rubbed forearms, I thought accidentally. He smiled and looked right at me. He smiled beautifully, but strangely. I had never seen that smile used before.

He kept his forearm pressed against mine, ribbed turtleneck on ribbed turtleneck, for an amount of time that belied his “straightness,” of which I had so oft heard. He was incredibly beautiful. Although I've since turned away from liking men who don't shower, the oil on Adam's face made him luminous in that theater against a sea of empowered women and reluctantly-present boyfriends. And he kept staring at me – looking and smiling, looking away, like a coy schoolgirl – and that smile, it was so foreign. His smile didn't communicate that he wanted to hang out sometime, it was a smile that said he wanted to take me home. He wanted to have sex with me.

Wait, stop. Boy, girl, penis, vagina, penetration, the end. The traditional definition of virginity had suddenly changed. It flipped, flopped, and broke apart, as perhaps it should have done much earlier in my life. I never said that I was straight – why had I wasted so much time begging to bone a broad? No time to reflect on that now, 96 hours left – full steam ahead. While the confessionals of empowered women repeated in the background, I was suddenly in another world – he wants to have sex with me tonight. Adam wants to have sex with me tonight.

A touch on the hand confirmed this and I began to smile back. Smile, turn away, just like he was doing. While we dutifully listened to retellings of war and rape in Afghanistan, our eyes continued to exchange clandestine moments – our dimples blew kisses at each other. Keep the forearms in

contact... perfect. The lights were mostly down and we shared this moment, just Adam and me, it was going to happen.

Maybe we'll even fall in love – that smile, the way he shyly looks away, he loves me. He loves me. I knew I felt it – It was such a beautiful feeling. I had never felt anything that strong... until a moment later when I was instantly bursting to pee. Ohhhh! I needed to pee! Because the chemotherapy I had recently taken left me a little short on the warning time in these kinds of moments, I unexpectedly popped up from my chair. I'm still a cancer patient at this point, prowling for sex at The Vagina Monologues, yes. – but a cancer patient, nonetheless. I squeezed my body in front of Adam's, Robinette's and Lara's and raced to the bathroom. My head spun around to see if Adam was looking, and I caught his eye just returning to the stage... This is it – I didn't know how it would fit in my journey or life story, but I did know that I would go home with Adam and have sex with him... the way he looked at me....

The instant I walked into the bathroom, I saw why he was looking at me,. I looked at myself in the mirror and there it was. There I was. An it. A cancer patient. 6'1, 120 pounds, with no hair and eyes severely sunken into my head. I was death. I was a walking symbol of death. I was mortality – and Adam was smiling nervously at mortality, not at a cute boy. Who would want this? And if anyone did want this, wouldn't I think that they were disgusting? The image of myself in the mirror would not let go – it suddenly became the image of the man on the crashing plane... swiftly going down without anyone to take his virginity. But there wasn't a convenient punch-line on such a grotesque and depressing sight.

That coy smile wasn't coy; it was fear. It was deep pity as shown behind a plate glass window, afraid that my mortality would leap the foot that separated us and spread to him too. I'm sure that he didn't know what it was that I had, but I'm sure he didn't want it. I wondered if he ran home and threw his clothes quickly into the wash, lest my mortality stain his carefree college life.

I couldn't stay for the rest of the Vagina Monologues. I left the bathroom, walked back to Ruth's Co-op and gave myself what I thought might be my last orgasm before I went to bed.

\*\*\*

Five weeks after my abdominal surgery and I still hadn't had an orgasm. I got worried the doctors may have been wrong. My surgeon had said that he didn't need to cut the nerve that facilitates ejaculation during the surgery, but maybe he was wrong. Maybe I had lost my chance forever. Maybe they thought I just wouldn't notice. Or they figured that no one but my-virgin-self would notice and therefore, the problem would be contained... My abdomen was bulbous, with what felt like a zipper of staples straight down the center. I sat on the recliner at my house, watching Seasons 1, 2 and 3 of *Sex and the City* on a loop – living vicariously through the sex lives of Carrie, Charlotte, Samantha and (my favorite), Miranda, none of whom ever appeared to lose their orgasms. And I did little else. I feared maybe the doctors were wrong. I had missed my chance, with Sandra, Raquelle, Adam, anyone and I would, assuredly, die sans penetrative sex with another person.

I was sleeping on my back, since showering had proved too difficult with the staples; I had gone 5 weeks without a proper shower; and I was in more of a haze than I was in actual sleep. And then, out of the blue, I see it: my classic wet dream image from adolescence, developing with Polaroid-like steadiness. There is a red-headed woman underwater with a front-clasp bikini. I looked closer, trying to make out her face. Was it Raquelle? No, no, no, Adam? No, Sandra? Rolando? Maybe it was one of my many lesbian gal-pals I loved and adored. Still no. Maybe it was my old babysitter, Heather, whose body and visage had originally inspired the original recurring dream.

I didn't know who it was, but I knew what would happen. Water all around, sunlight above, sand glistening in the distance... Maybe they were right, maybe I could do it, maybe I could do it, I could have penetrative sex... My dreaming eyes closed and re-opened, thereby taking in my muse. MIRANDA. Ohhhhhhhh..... Ahhhhhh.....Oh.... Ahhhh.... Oh... Ah... Ahhhhhh..... I'm not sure if that's the gayest person to get off to, or the straightest – but I do know that getting off to Cynthia Nixon officially makes me a lesbian.

For the first time, I didn't rush to wipe off my masturbated cum opting instead to lay in it, soaking in it, basking in all its glory: proud, hopeful... The virgin would not die in a ball of fire. I realized that, because I couldn't shower with my stitches, I wouldn't be able to wash the since-dried-cum on my abdomen for another few weeks. But I knew, positively, that there could and would be a future.

And there was a future. Six months later, on my first date with Nikki, it happened. Boy, girl, penis, vagina, penetration, the end. Well, it was better than that – actually kind of nice. As we lay on the floor - an awkward one-balled queer and a 26-year-old art historian/tattoo artist, I revealed to Nikki that I had just lost my virginity. Ahhh.... Conquest. Nikki quickly dressed, made me dress, apologized and sent me home. Hmm?

The next morning, I received a frantic phone call from her, begging me to join her at Espresso Royale, where Nikki had gotten us a table. Over our mochas, she leaned in with a face I had hitherto known as only the cancer-face, serious and well-intentioned and asked “Did I rape you last night?”

It was a serious question with a serious face attached to it and I smiled, “No Nikki, No. You did not rape me last night. You have no idea how long I waited for that to happen.” And she smiled, relieved that she hadn't ruined the life of a cancer survivor – and after that, it was all behind us. Or at least my virginity was behind us. Or my virginity was behind me. Err, mostly.

The End.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Brian Lobel is a writer/performer and theater director originally from Delmar, New York. His plays BALL and Other Funny Stories About Cancer and Festival of Lights Alive have been produced in Chicago (at the Bailwick Repertory Theatre and Live Bait Theater) as well as at over 50 theaters, universities and medical schools around the world. Brian is the recipient of the 2004 Hopwood Drama Award for BALL and a 2006 CAAP Grant from the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs to develop Other Funny Stories. You can find his website at <http://www.brianlobel.com>*