

A LAUREL'S FIRST-NIGHT FANTASIES

Theric Jepson

Possibility one, extrapolated from what Betty, second clarinet, said about what Tabitha, first clarinet, did last Saturday:

They enter the hotel room, both of them shaking as only virgins can shake. Somehow he manages to place the Do Not Disturb and deadbolt the door. He tries to kiss her lips but ends up sliding down her cheek and into her ear. She bites back and, in a sudden flurry of inability to manage buttons or zippers, they tear both his tux and her dress (embroidered illusion neckline, cap sleeves, veiled corset bodice of Chantilly lace, mikado belt, tulle ball-gown skirt). She yells Yes!, he yells Yes!: his skin the color of inside a loaf of ciabatta, hers the outside; he screams her name as she gasps his. They're a mass of confusion and, at the end, they look to each other. But instead of wondering aloud if they are still virgins, they just laugh and decide to order in baked Alaska before trying again. And again. And again.



Possibility two, suggested ironically by what Sofia said about her new boyfriend while weeping in the bathroom:

The first time she stands naked before him, she knows just what he sees. She's seen it often enough herself upon stepping out of the shower, having kept the water as cold as possible to preserve the mirror. She knows her curves and proportions. She's browsed enough *Cosmo* online to know

where she stands. And although she doesn't yet know his face, she knows that his eyes are damp and his lips tremble and that he is awed. Absolutely awed. He never knew—he never dared hope—he would be so lucky. She can hear the prayer on his lips, and its words are Thanks, God.



Possibility three, from Sister Zhao's lesson back in October:

She lies naked on the hotel bed weeping tears different from those shed earlier, after a kiss, over an altar. Her hair is long and black, no longer done up but spreading away from her head like the rays of a medieval sun, hiding the skin of her shoulders, their skin mottled in the shadows but still lines of latitude darker than her now husband's. He is not on the bed, but laughing nervously out of sight, on the floor outside the bathroom, flipping through images on his phone, occasionally calling out to her that he'll be ready soon, that this site always works, that he's super embarrassed, that he was sure the reality of her, his wife, would be enough, any second now, any second, sorry about this, I love you, this'll never happen again, so sorry, I swear I've repented, this is different, this time's for you, only for you, so embarrassing, you're beautiful, this should do it, okay, I'm coming back now, just one more, just a couple more, just—just—just—



Possibility four, from the only point she remembers Mrs. Helms making during those three awful hours of sixth-grade sex ed:

A moment of searing pain, then he's rolling off with a scratch and a sigh and a snore. She reaches down, but she hurts, *it* hurts. She can feel the trickle of blood, more like a nosebleed than anything else, puddling

below her. His body jerks. She turns away from him and stares into the patterns on the carpet as they swirl away into her future.



Possibility five, inspired by that one thing Mom whispered to Dad over ice cream when they thought she was in bed:

No, it wasn't what she expected. For all the passing thoughts and wondering moments and side-glances at other people's pants, she never imagined it would be—whatever it ended up being. But this part she had understood well enough to look forward to. His arm is around her shoulders, her head is on his chest, she can hear his lungs pumping life in and out, slower and slower as he squeezes her one last time before a half-second snort signals his slumber. She glances up through the line of black hair crossing her eyes and looks at his face. This close she can count his stubble, even in the light of the half-moon crossing ocean and sand to enter their window and color them blue. She smiles, closes her eyes, feels his body upon her cheek, and holds on with no intent to ever let go.