

Antinous' Ring



Slow Train Wreck

by Matias Travieso-Diaz

The love that lasts longest is the love that is never returned.

W. Somerset Maugham

I had been following Berto's development over the years; the son of eighbors, I knew him since he was a baby. I never thought of him as a sexual object until one day, when he was sixteen, I asked him to help me move some furniture. When we finished, he was all sweaty and went to my bathroom to shower. I came over to bring him a towel and for the first time I saw him fully naked. He was breathtakingly beautiful; a nice, smallish penis, a perfectly round ass, a face that could have come out of a Botticelli canvas. As he reached for the towel, I noticed his long, slender fingers and, when our hands met, I was entranced by the softness of their touch.

Over the next five years an increasingly close friendship grew between us. I became sort of a surrogate father for him, and he started revealing the small misdemeanors of youth, as well as his insecurities, all rooted in a lack of self-confidence which I found charming.

I never demanded sex from him, although I made my attraction plain

through small things – a squeeze on the side here, a pat on the butt there. I concluded that he was not ready to open himself to me yet and decided to wait it out.

Years went by. Berto was now a senior in college and we kept in frequent touch, although much of our conversation dealt with his search for a job. I wrote to him: “Look, Berto, it seems that you’re not going to get your resume done in time to search for a job before graduation. Let me come down and help you put applications together.” He finally invited me to come to his school dormitory to spend a day on this task.

I, of course, had more than one purpose in mind in traveling to see him. I was hoping to move to the last step that would bring us together; this was the time to finally get Berto into bed.

So, on that fateful day, I got up early and drove the two hundred miles to his school. We met in his room and got to work on his job applications. Time went fast, soon it was lunchtime. We got a bottle of wine and ordered a pizza. Lunch over, I leaned over and kissed his mouth. He shied away. “What’s the matter?” I asked. “I don’t like that kind of thing.” I then put my hand on his thigh. He took it away. “I really don’t like it. I’m into women, not men.” I took a gulp of wine. “I think that some physical contact would bring us closer together,” I offered weakly. “I’m sorry, but anything beyond holding hands is very uncomfortable for me.” “Is that the way you want it; no contact?” I asked, giving up. “Yes.” The romance was over.

I spent the day after the calamity in a haze. There must be some mistake, this could not have happened. He will call and we will meet and everything will be fine again. I had a quick meal and went to bed early.

On the second day, I sat by a phone that I soon realized would not ring. I checked my emails every five minutes. I became an automaton, sitting by the phone and checking my mailbox innumerable times. I lingered by the phone until bedtime.

On the third day, I masturbated thinking of Berto. I had done this many times, but while on previous occasions I imagined us making tender love, this time I fantasized I was raping him. I beat my meat furiously, imagining his whimpering, his frightened babbling, which I ignored. He trembled, and then he cried. I started crying too, and my erection fizzled. I could not do it. I loved him too much to violate him, even in my mind.

On the fourth day, I decided to get busy. I became a whirling dervish; vacuumed the house, washed clothes, went grocery shopping, cleaned the car, worked on the yard, jogged, surfed for porn on the internet. At the end of the day, I was worn out. But as I lay in bed at night, I was awake, my mind playing Berto over like a song that stays, uninvited, in one's consciousness. Finally, exhaustion prevailed and I passed out.

The fifth day was "get back to work" day. I could no longer feign illness and being away had not helped matters. I sneaked into my office and tried to concentrate on mindless things. My productivity was low, but pretty high considering how I felt.

The day was finally over and I went home. This time I went directly for the bottle of scotch that I saved for special occasions. Later, I tossed out the empty bottle and crawled into bed, again not to sleep.

On the sixth day I could not get out of bed. Finally, I dragged myself to the kitchen and poured myself a large glass of tomato juice to help cure my hangover. I hate tomato juice, but I dutifully downed half the glass.

I sat at the computer with the other half glass in hand and, for the first time in six days, had the courage to look at my emails. Yikes! There WAS one message from Berto, two days old. It read:

Dear Jack: Sorry for cutting you off the other day, but you really got me scared. See, all my life people have thought I'm gay; I'm not. I like women and only women, though I have trouble connecting because girls don't seem to take me seriously. Anyhow, I have known for years that you had a crush on me but did not say anything because you were so nice to me and I didn't want to get you upset. I was hoping that you would not go any further but you did, which was too bad. I hope we can remain friends. You have done so much for me, and I appreciate it. As long as there's no physical stuff, we can work it out. Please let me know what you think.

Sincerely,

Berto.

I was shaking so badly when I finished the message that I knocked over the rest of the tomato juice. I went back to bed, agonizing: *What can I do now?* One side of me said: *You must get over this.* Another argued: *Old, you're old. You're forty, queens your age only belong in retirement homes. Who could possibly love you?*

I reached for the sleeping pills. But I was too cowardly to take my life.

On the seventh day, I managed to get out of bed. I showered, shaved, put on my favorite clothes, and went out cruising around the neighborhood. As I left the apartment, I recalled the ending of Fellini's *Nights of Cabiria*: the eternally

optimistic streetwalker steps away from her last disaster and walks alone on the road, crying. Then she smiles and nods at the camera, to assure us that everything will be alright. She hasn't given up hope.

And neither will I. Life can be full of disappointments, betrayals and losses. But I will persevere until I find true love. And I know I will succeed.

Born in Cuba, Matias Travieso-Diaz migrated to the United States as a young man. He became an engineer and lawyer and practiced for nearly fifty years. After retirement, he took up creative writing. Over two hundred and eighty of his short stories have been published or accepted for publication in anthologies, magazines, blogs, audio books, and podcasts. One of his four novels, an autobiography entitled "Cuban Transplant," and four anthologies of his stories have also been published.