

THE GAYS OF OUR LIVES



BLANE BACHELOR

I suppose the fact that we met at Backstreet, the former debauchery-laden gay hotspot that was tragically razed for a high-rise, should have been an early warning sign.

So, too, should have his gifts of impossibly cute clothes, his obsession with fashion and his voluntarily attendance at gay clubs on more than a few occasions. But, like most women averting their eyes from evidence that their boyfriend is a strike away from being out of the closet, I focused instead on the positive things about our relationship. That he treated me so well. That we had a blast together (and, yes, the sex was great). And that he was a hot Brazilian seven years my junior, which admittedly was a constant ego boost.

But whatever pride I was still harboring from the latter collapsed when I read my ex's following sentence in a recent e-mail: "I have dated some boys." Those five words relegated me to a category of women I never imagined being a part of: those who have been with a gay man.

When Dina McGreevey, ex-wife of former New Jersey governor Jim McGreevey, stood by his side during a press conference in which he announced he was "a gay American"—a revelation he cemented in their marital bed while she was in the hospital after delivering their daughter—I wanted to smack that plastic smile off her face. And not just because she was supporting a man who had so outrageously disrespected her, but also because she apparently was clueless enough to marry a gay one in the first place. Same goes for the noxious Star Jones Reynolds, prancing around with a husband whose mustache is as thin as the veil over his homosexuality, and any number of ordinary women dating men who have too strong an opinion on home décor to be involved with anyone who menstruates. *Can't you see the signs? I've always wanted to scream. Do they have to wave a giant rainbow flag in your face?*

Now it seems I was too busy admiring my Brazilian's dark, intoxicating eyes to notice such a flag waving in my own face all along.

The news actually came from my best friend S., who's also gay, and who's kept in touch with my ex after they became friends while we were together. My ex dropped his announcement into an e-mail without much elaboration, and

S. broke the news to me as gently as possible. My first thought, however, was anything but gentle: Was he getting it on with guys while we were together?

As I digested the news, I grappled with other uncomfortable thoughts. Was I a sexual experiment for him, something to try on for size while he figured out which orientation he was most suited to? Was he imagining being with a man during our most intimate moments? Worst of all: Had I turned him gay?

Of course, I knew that wasn't possible, because—contrary to what many right-wing religious nutjobs have brainwashed themselves into believing—you can't choose your sexuality. But, as off-base as it was, the thought crept into my mind anyway because I think I'm the last woman he was involved with. It's not unlike the twinge of inadequacy that bubbles up upon hearing your most recent ex is getting engaged.

When I shared the news with a few friends, there were a few gasps, but more chuckles. I began to feel like Ross from "Friends": the brunt of one of the show's longest-running storylines as the unsuspecting spouse when his wife ran off with another woman. Great for a laugh—for everyone but you, that is. While people were cracking jokes and making me feel like a bigger fool than I already did, I was digging through every memory and wondering why I didn't think a little harder about his fascination with designer jeans or why he

voluntarily went to Blake's, a Midtown bar that's hardly a magnet for straight men.

I had questions for him, too. Was he trying to change his feelings for men by being with a woman? Was he with other men while we were together? Is he dating men now? Twice, I've sent them via e-mail; twice, I've gotten no direct responses, except for his assurance that he wasn't with anyone else while we were together. He also added "I don't think you'll understand how much I loved you."

Perhaps not. And I have to take comfort in knowing there were probably plenty of things he didn't understand, either: the recognition of his true self yearning to be validated; how to reconcile what he says was love for me with passion for men; how to grasp the gravity of it all. That's a maelstrom of emotions, hormones and self-discovery I can't imagine going through in a society that's still woefully judgmental of many relationships without one male, one female and 2.5 kids at their core.

So I've tried to let my hurt and my questions go, and even ease up on wanting to smack Star Jones. When her husband comes out of the closet, she'll be beating herself up enough anyway for ignoring the signs waving in front of her like a rainbow flag. Which I now know can be easier to do than you'd imagine. **SP**

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