

CHAPTER 15

The 30-Second Fart



I'm not a fan of watching televised sports. I don't like the monotone and post-apocalyptic-sounding announcers, and I can't stand the synchronized oohs and ahs that fans make—it's just further proof that we're all a bunch of sheep. And yes, I know what you're thinking “but you'd like it if you watched the game at my place because we'll have beer and chili, and I make *the best jalapeño poppers*.” *OH! OH! OH! Stop the presses! Did you say chili and beer?!* Listen sweetheart, I don't need a sporting event to grant me permission to drink beer at 10 am on Sunday.

With that said, if someone is watching an NBA game, I'll sit down for a hot minute to watch the arms. When I see NBA arms, I feel things. I wouldn't call myself a man-izer by any stretch, but, if I were of the *Mad Men* era, I'd purposely surround myself with long, strong, male arms. I'd only hire “arms” to be my secretaries, and I'd sexually harass them in a non-threatening (non-power dynamic abusing, non-Spacey, non-Cosby, non-Weinstein-y, non-Lauer-y, non-Louis C.K., non...okay you get the point...) way. What I'm trying to say here is: I'm an Arm-y.

And, as it so happens, I have exquisitely sculpted basketball player arms to thank for the most supernatural experience of my life.

Picture it. A late night in Madison, Wisconsin, in the fall of 2004.

He wasn't that smart but I wasn't that sober, *and* he was six-foot-seven.

He looked like Screech from *Saved by the Bell*, only his hair was of a looser curl and he was built like a Goddammed rocket ship. I walked into his house party on a whim with a friend during my first week as a grad student at the University of Wisconsin. I struck up a conversation with him the same way I did with most men I took interest in—as if I worked for the CIA (cool, logical, and always with my shirt tucked in). He was looking nervously at a bleach blond who was eyeing both of us. In an act of desperation, Bleachy had taken off her pants for all the party to see. It was all very *Girls Gone Wisconsin*. Bleachy gave me a look, a big one. I turned to Screech-ship and gave him my official CIA report.

“What’s the deal there? She blew you, eh? Now she’s feeling regretful and wanting control back. So naturally, the pants had to go.”

He was stunned that I had been able to decode her disrobing. I was stunned he was stupid enough to admit to it. It became clear to me in that moment that he was *very* stupid. Ah, yes, but he was also *very* tall. As our conversation continued, I decided to rename him “Arms,” only because his real name was the same as another dumb jock I had dated in high school. I refused to date two dumb guys with the same dumb name; now *that* would be very dumb.

We started to . . . I guess you could call it “date,” though they were mostly group bar outings or movie rentals. Our hookups were only possible if alcohol joined in, and even then, they were terrible. On a good day, I’m five foot seven—a full foot shorter than Arms—and let’s just say that NBA players aren’t exactly known for their flexibility.

The only thing I found interesting about Arms was his height and the way he rounded vowels when he spoke in his traditional Midwestern accent. His favorite bar, as luck would have it, was called Johnny O's. If one says, "Johnny O's" in a Midwestern accent, it comes out like "Jaahhhh-KNEE-Ohhhhwwwws." Oftentimes, I'd lie and tell Arms I had a "bad cell signal" and thus needed him to repeat himself, holding the receiver away from my mouth as I giggled at his accent like an asshole. Also, *mildly* interesting and *mostly* uncool was Arms' temper. One time, I playfully pinched his nose and he flew off the handle, yelling at me in his thick Midwestern accent, which just sounded like he was that angry Aflac duck (see commercials on YouTube). I thought his severe reaction was a joke, but it wasn't. Not fifteen minutes after his outburst, he slapped my ass so hard I burped. No, this was not what I'd call a 'healthy' relationship.

Arms and I even encountered a little drama in our fake dating—I didn't like the fact that he was gifted a female stripper for his birthday. Oddly enough, I asked an ex-boyfriend for his input (the same dipshit you just read about in Chapter 15).

"Hey, do guys *actually* like strippers?" I asked, desperately.

"No," said the ex. "They smell terrible—over perfumed and cheap."

His response didn't help—for one, my ex wasn't so much a human as he was a piece of shit, and two, I ended up just feeling sorry for the stripper. I pictured her applying a perfume that her beloved grandmother had given her for Passover/Easter (in my imagining of things, she grew up happily celebrating both).

Though Arms and I made tentative plans to meet up after he watched the stripper, he never did call. In what I think was an attempt to apologize for his behavior, Arms invited me to dinner. I picked him up, because Arms didn't drive anything other than his f-ing scooter (I know what you're thinking, but he was 6' 7"!). We went to a local Wisconsin take-out noodle joint, brilliantly named Noodles. I placed

my order of “garlic, chicken, butter, cheese, butter cheese, and extra cheese” and he ordered his, “macaroni noodles with light olive oil.” You see, as a basketball player, he was training for the Big Ten; meanwhile, I was training for a big shit.

Back at my house we ate our meals, watching *The Ladykillers* (FML), just killing time to prove that we could. He went into the freezer to mix himself a glass of ice water (again, he’s in training) and found a ginger root that I stored in the freezer. He yelled dramatically in a thick Wisconsin accent.

“Oh my Gahhhd. You have a tree root growing in your freezer!” Arms exclaimed.

“Yes, I do,” I responded, just to see what I could get him to believe.

“But *why?*” he asked.

“I’m participating in a study to develop a new species of frozen tree, to be grown in a remote colony in Antarctica.”

“Ohhhhh. Wow.”

Arms’ inability to process sarcasm inspired a strong desire in me to binge eat any and all foods my body had difficulty digesting. I busted out Breyers coffee ice cream, and we each had a mug’s worth, and then I went back for more. It was simple: I would eat my boredom until I ate his arms.

Shortly after my third mug of ice cream, I noticed some rumbling in my tummy. I ignored it, because that’s what we do with gas in public; we tell it to go away, and it (usually) obeys. To coat my internal stew of garlic cheese noodles and coffee ice cream, I made some chai tea. Just as the caffeinated concoction inside me was beginning to talk (and possibly walk), Arms started to tell me about something serious.

“I have to tell you something scary,” he started. “My best friend who lives in Colorado—he nearly died last night.”

Oh no, I thought. Not the roommate—oh that's scary, yes, of course—but I need to fart. Otherwise I'm going to . . . *fart.* Arms ignored my neurotic arm and leg crossing and continued to vent.

"It was a bad drug trip. They found him lying there on his back and they rushed him to the hospital. . . ."

This continued to the tune of "Blah blah blah, go Paaaahhhckers (Packers), go Baaaahhhhdgers (Badgers), cheese curds, brats . . . Aflac." My mind was on one thing and one thing only: God. Yes, like most disgruntled white people, I'm agnostic, sometimes atheist, but, in this moment, I was Jesus Christ, on the cross, begging for God to prevent the superhuman pressure about to blow. I squirmed, I crossed my legs, I re-crossed them. I turned my body into the tightest pretzel you've ever seen. I tried to scare the excess air away by clearing my throat loudly—all the while nodding and consoling Arms as he blabbed *on and on* about his friend. I prayed to a deceased family friend; I asked her to cause some sudden distraction so I could get to the bathroom and detonate my asshole.

Just as I was about to pass out from holding my breath, I heard a little voice respond to my prayer. The voice came directly from my butt and it said: "*Eeeeeuuuuahhhh. Eeeeeuuuuahhhh.*"

At first, I thought it was a fever dream—there was no way I suddenly couldn't control my own body. But, as if an old white man had possessed me, I continued to release what would end up being an uncontrollable, melodic, multisyllabic, THIRTY-SECOND FART. With the first couple of high-pitched squeals, I immediately turned into a bright-red fire truck. I clutched my temples as the supernatural gas played a concerto of Beethoven-inspired high notes. Arms was completely, out-of-his-mind shocked by the duration of my fart and so he just giggled.

Hee hee hee, ho ho ho.

The worst part of the situation was that I couldn't move for fear of what might fall out of me. I was frozen solid — a petrified, red-faced farting deer—caught in headlights that were laughing at me.

The sounds progressed into what you might call a dolphin mating call: *eee, eee, eee, eee*. Then it changed into what I'd call the trombone, a sliding, deep, tonal masterpiece. It was the machine gun expulsion that actually startled Arms, with its violent and seemingly endless rounds of: *furt, furt, furt, furt, furt, furrrrrr, rur, rur, rur, rurt, furt, furt*. My asshole concerto ended on the chipmunk exhale: *haaaaaaaaaaaaa*, which sounded just like a city bus lowering me to the stop at Humiliation Street.

Somewhere around machine gun, Arms, looking genuinely petrified, asked “Are you okay?”

He was sure I wasn’t, because I could not respond. I’d never been more humiliated in my entire life, and I had *zero* strategy for how to recover. My only solution was to act gravely concerned about my own health. Amidst the most amazing fart production of my life, I wasn’t even laughing, I was acting *serious!*

To this day, that is one of my biggest life regrets—that I felt ashamed of this supernatural miracle.

I stood up after the thirty seconds and went to the bathroom. I can’t fathom the smell I left behind. While in the bathroom I sat on the toilet and felt like . . . shit. I realized that Arms was waiting in the living room, fully certain that I was now taking a *massivedump*.

A few deep breaths later, I emerged from the bathroom saying sadly, “I don’t know what’s wrong with me.” I drove Arms home and along the way we smelled a skunk. The irony was completely lost on him, but, being my witty self, I said of the smell: “It smells like a dog shit his pants.”

“Ummmm, dogs don’t wear pants,” Arms responded, missing the joke (again).

Neither of us laughed. He was right, after all. Indeed, *dogs don't wear pants.*

That was the last time we had a date. He called again, but I played defensive. I didn't like who I was around him. I felt like part of me was lost on him: my sarcasm for one, but mostly my best and brightest farts.

A year later, as luck would have it, I shared a shuttle bus with Arms from Chicago's O'Hare airport to Madison, after visiting my best friend in Phoenix. First of all, NO ONE returns from Phoenix looking good, but if you've spent a long weekend drinking your weight in margaritas, you look *extra not good*. There I was, on the year anniversary of farting uncontrollably for 30 seconds, smelling like stale tequila and taquitos, looking like I'd crawled directly out of Satan's anus, attempting to find an empty seat in the back of the bus without losing too much dignity. I kept my head down *until...wait a minute*. Arms was a fifth-year senior in college a year earlier, and here I was, an accomplished farter (who, fine, okay, *may* have left her wallet at the Prickly Cactus in AZ, and so she smelled like goat bile) but, hey — at least I wasn't in college for a sixth year!

The true tragedy in this story isn't the cruel irony that (of course) I *had* to use the toilet on the bus (which meant I was forced to walk by Arms) — it's that I can't ever re-create the miracle of what happened in those thirty seconds of fart. I know this because I've very earnestly tried to recreate it.

What I did take away from the experience, however, was a nice little litmus test for every guy I met after Arms. I told the "thirty-second fart story" on every first date. My dates' reactions, either disgusted or delighted, said a lot about the fate of our relationship. The experience also forced me to finally own up to the fact that I LOVE FART HUMOR. If anyone, friend or lover, can't appreciate the hilarity of God's great design, that our asses *actually talk*, I can't have them in my life. Farting is one of the most spectacular experiences human beings

can share together. Shoot, my “thirty-second fart” story has been used by several of my girlfriends on their dates, and others have retold it to their families around the Thanksgiving table. My thirty-second fart legacy is spreading joy and inspiration for those still stuck in those lame twenty-second fart clubs.

In closing, I’ll just say that our bodies often know better than we do, and if we’re lucky, they speak up for us. For most of my courtship with Arms, I was sitting on my words, holding in things I felt I needed to say, worrying I might sound vulnerable, uncool, or too smart. I wasted time pretending I could look past things that mattered to me just because he had (*really*) nice arms. But the truth is, and I think this is a great thing about being human, one way or another...shit just comes out.