

~ New Lover Lust ~

by KG MacGregor

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The heart is just like any other muscle, you know. You work it; it's supposed to get stronger.

I use that line a lot in my job as a physical education teacher at a community college, especially when I have my students out running on the fitness trail. Every single time I say it, I think my heart ought to be the size of a basketball for the workout I've put it through.

My friends all say that I'm one of those people who's in love with falling in love. Six relationships in twelve years...all of them blistering hot when they started out. And I'm not just talking about the sex. I mean everything; the butterflies, the romance, and all the fascination that goes with getting to know somebody. My friends and I call that the New Lover Lust.

Everybody knows that the New Lover Lust eventually wears off, no matter how crazy you are about somebody. It's a natural progression. You just have to work a little harder because you can't rely on endorphins to smooth out your differences.

My problem is that I can't get past the easy part. I get to a certain point in a relationship with somebody, but instead of getting closer I start moving in the other direction. I stop caring about pleasing her. I lose interest in things like cuddling on the couch, and eventually in the sex. The first couple of times I went through this, things fell apart to a point where we were fighting about not being able to connect. But after I learned what to expect, I got so I'd just bug out whenever I recognized the symptoms. The lesbian community around here is pretty close-knit, and I wanted to at least be able to stay friends so we wouldn't be part of all that dyke drama.

Those kinds of relationships-the ones that burn really bright at first but flame out-really give your heart a workout.

One of my girlfriends from a few years ago accused me of giving up whenever the high wore off. But I always blamed it on arrested development. No, I'm not trying to make a joke or anything. I really think there was a time in my life when I was ready to learn all about love and commitment. I was twenty-four years old at the time and in grad school. I was with somebody who meant the world to me, somebody I thought I could have grown old with. And I had no doubt she felt the same way about me. And just when we were getting to that place where the New Lover Lust had worn off, where we were negotiating our life together and how we were going to make it all fit, we got the rug pulled out from under our feet.

That was twelve years ago and ever since, I haven't been able to get past a certain point with anyone else. I go all the way up to where the work starts and that's when I bail out.

I know it's been a long time and most people think I should have gotten over it by now. It still makes me angry to think about what happened. What bothered me the most, I think, was that Frances was able to let go so easily.

She'd say "Please don't cry, Shelley." Then she'd rush to my side and put her arm around me. I sometimes wondered if I was crying subconsciously just so she'd do that. It felt good to have her comfort me like that. I wanted to pull myself together and smile like she did. I just couldn't. And frankly, it pissed me off that she could.

I wanted to know how the hell she could be so rational about all of it. It was like she had an on/off switch or something. I told her we had to try harder to find a way to stay together.

Frances would just hug me real tight and kiss my cheek. She said we'd just be postponing it, that it was going to end sooner or later. And since we both had good jobs lined up, she said this was a good time to let go because we were going to need that part of our lives to fall back on so we could get through this.

I'd just landed a job at a community college near where my folks lived in Goshen, Massachusetts and Frances had been hired sight unseen as assistant manager of a fitness center that opened in her home town. Those were exactly the kinds of jobs we had set our sights on when we'd started the master's program two years earlier.

But right that minute with Frances holding me like that I didn't care about work anymore. I figured there wasn't any point in having a good job if it was all you had. Life was supposed to be about love. Loving Frances is what made me feel like that. Everything else I'd ever known was a distant second.

It was infuriating how calm she was about it, but she was like that most of the time anyway, pretty hard to rattle. I'd have given just about anything if she'd said just the tiniest thing to give me hope that things would work out for us. But she was pretty much resigned to it.

Frances was from England, a small town near Manchester. She was the first in her family to go to university, and it was always her dream to earn a master's degree in America. Like me, she'd jumped at the offer of a teaching assistantship at Syracuse.

Our sexual attraction wasn't exactly instantaneous, but I liked her the first time we met at the orientation for TAs. I was charmed to pieces by her accent, which I used to make fun of until she started doing it to me. We would take long walks across campus at night so we could talk. I liked having the chance to be alone with her and to talk about personal stuff. She was the most interesting person I'd ever met. After about a month or so, she told me she was a lesbian. She said she hoped I'd be okay with it and not let it come between us. I thought it was fascinating, and I couldn't believe she would worry that I wouldn't want to still be friends just because of something like that. She said some of her other friends back in England couldn't handle it. Their loss, I figured.

After another couple of weeks of me asking stupid questions-like what did two women do together-she said that she was falling in love with me. I remember feeling my insides knotting up with excitement, but I just sort of laughed and said I wasn't like that. My big denial phase lasted about a week. The first time she kissed me, all the pieces fell together.

The next year was probably the happiest time of my whole life.

That first semester when we met, I was in grad student housing with three other girls and Frances was living in the dorm. Both of us had paid up for the semester, but we had nowhere to go to be alone. Our first time together was in her dorm room one weekend when her roommate went home. The next ten times were late at night in my car in the lot behind the phys ed building. I can't believe we did things like that but we were so desperate to be together.

By November, we found a one-bedroom apartment near campus and moved in together. Frances came home with me to Goshen for Thanksgiving, and at Christmas I told my mom and dad that we were a couple. It was weird for them but they were pretty okay about it. They liked Frances a lot.

It was a lot of fun setting up our place together and getting used to being around each other all the time. We were taking a lot of the same courses so that meant going to class or to the library together every day and coming home with each other every night. I never got tired of being with her.

That first six months or so, we made love all the time. Not really, but it seemed like it. It slacked off a little, but it was still exciting...and always satisfying. We both grew more comfortable about stating our preferences about everyday stuff instead of always trying to guess what the other one wanted. We negotiated things, like all of the chores and what we were going to watch on TV-or the telly, as Frances called it. That's what I meant earlier when I said it was the one time in my life when I was willing to work through things. I really felt like I was learning what it meant to be a partner with somebody.

If that year was happiest time of my life, I can say without a doubt that the six months before Frances left were probably the most miserable. It started right after our second Christmas together, at the beginning of our last semester in the grad program. That's when we started looking into what it was going to take to get Frances a green card so she could stay in the States.

The university placement office told us there wasn't much they could do to help. They said her field was overcrowded already and her chances of getting a work permit were almost nil. The lady there suggested that we write to our U.S. representative; she said they had a certain number of allotments every year for granting residency to foreigners.

So we did that and even went to the congresswoman's office in Amherst, but her aide said the waiting list for immigrants was six years long, mostly families of people already working in America. She said our best bet was Frances finding an employer who was willing to sponsor her and swear that there weren't any qualified applicants that were U.S. citizens. But she couldn't even get an interview once they found out she didn't have a work permit.

She got the offer from the club back in England right about the time I landed the job at the community college. I'd been trying to get her to apply for an extension of her visa, but that was when she just threw in the towel. She said if she stayed in America another six months, the job

back home would be gone. She either had to accept it right then and make plans to go back to England, or she'd be going home anyway in six months to nothing.

I felt like the whole world was crashing down on our heads that day. We held each other and cried half the night. The next few days were awful, especially for me. Some days I'd just lose it and scream in frustration because nobody fucking cared that we loved each other and were being torn apart.

Frances started putting herself back together.

Over the next few weeks, I found myself getting angry at her because she didn't seem to care about us anymore. I was still crying my eyes out every day and she was just going along like it didn't bother her at all. It was like that all the way up until it was time for her to go.

On our last night together, I helped her get her things ready. She was laughing and joking and pulling out souvenirs and remembering where we were when she got them. I couldn't keep it in anymore. I started crying and throwing her stuff around the room. She grabbed my arms and yelled at me to stop it; she said I was torturing both of us. I asked her how she could be so goddamned cold and she said she was just being realistic. Then she pulled me up off the couch and whispered that she wanted me to quit crying...that she wanted to make love with me one more time before she had to go. And that she wanted to remember us being happy together and in love.

I had never wanted to tell her no before, but I considered it that night. Not because I was still mad at her or anything, but because I didn't think I could stand knowing it was the last time. But I had to be with her again.

We undressed each other and fell onto the bed. Her hands were everywhere, stroking my thighs and pulling my knees up. Her mouth was on my neck and my breasts and my stomach. Most times when we made love, I would just let go and get lost in all the sensations. But that last time, I tried to concentrate and take it all in. I wanted to memorize it.

She ran her hands over me for what seemed like hours. I was dripping wet when she finally touched me. Then she pulled her fingers away and put them in my mouth. I licked them and then grabbed her hand and pushed it down between my legs so she would touch me again. She stroked me up and down a few times and I took her wrist and led her inside.

As soon as she slipped her fingers in, she raised up so she could kneel between my legs. The first time she did that I couldn't imagine what in the world she was doing, but now I knew that she wanted to be able to see her fingers go in and out of me and watch me come at the same time. I always thought that was so hot.

And that night-our last time-I finally saw tears in her eyes and it nearly killed me. When I came I heard her say that she'd love me forever, no matter where we were.

She left the next day and it hurt so bad I thought I was literally going to die. My chest hurt. My

head pounded.

I ran up a phone bill of almost four hundred dollars that first month. We both got email accounts and tried to keep up with each other that way. I still called her as much as I could so I could hear her voice, but that grew less frequent over time. We started to talk more about our work and things we did with our friends, and less about our feelings for each other.

Frances had been gone about a year and a half when she told me about a girl she had started seeing, somebody named Margaret. That didn't hurt as much as I thought it would...maybe because I was already sleeping with somebody named Claire. I just hadn't told Frances about it. I guess I didn't want to give her the satisfaction of being right about us moving on with our lives. It wasn't like either one of us had a choice.

I finally had the chance to go to England six years ago with Diane, my third girlfriend since Frances. Frances took a couple of days off work and came down to London to meet us. It was weird at first-having Frances there but being with somebody else-but we all loosened up after a while and had a pretty good time. Frances looked wonderful and I would have left Diane on the spot to have her again just for a night.

Frances returned the favor a couple of years later when she brought a girlfriend to New York for a visit. I drove down and picked them up at JFK and took them to their hotel in midtown Manhattan. I stayed in the city for the weekend too and we saw a show and hung out at the museums and the nightclubs. I wondered if it had bothered Frances as much to see me with Diane as it bothered me to see her with Patsy. I didn't like that woman, and I didn't like seeing Frances fussing over her so much.

I think it was after that weekend that I started to realize how much Frances' leaving had impacted my life and my ability to make a relationship last. The two girls I dated after that were lame ducks and I knew it pretty much from the start, even though I went through all the same motions as before. I came to the conclusion that I had missed the one real chance to have a happy life and grow old with somebody. I was bitter that Frances and I hadn't deserved the same legal consideration as a man and a woman who fell in love. They could have gotten married and stayed together.

Things picked up again with Frances about a year ago when she called me to see how I was. We talked about our work a little, but she also asked if I was seeing someone or if I had my eye on someone. No, I said. We were on the phone for about an hour or so, and what really surprised me was that she called again a couple of weeks later, just to talk. Then we began emailing a lot more and sending pictures. I felt like Frances was my best friend again, that she was somebody I could talk to about anything. I was going to ask her if she'd ever had the kinds of problems I had with relationships fizzling out. I thought maybe I just needed some closure about us and she was the only one who could give it to me.

Before I could talk to her about it, she called to say that the company that owned her health club had bought up a chain in America, and they were offering her the chance to move to the States to oversee the whole region. She said it was a huge promotion, but she'd have to make a long-term

commitment to living here. Then she told me the region's headquarters was in Amherst, about a half hour from where I lived.

I could literally feel my heart jumping when she said that, but I calmed down and forced my head to take over. I asked if she thought it was the kind of job she wanted. She said it was okay, but that she had learned a long time ago that "okay" was good enough for a job. She said I'd been right all those years ago about work not being what was really important. She said what mattered was what kind of life you came home to at the end of the day.

I took that as an encouraging sign and offered to have her stay with me in Goshen until she got settled. I wasn't afraid of anything when it came to Frances, even if it meant making a fool of myself.

So I picked her up in Boston yesterday. We talked all the way back to my house about everything but us. That topic was hanging in the air the whole time but it was like neither of us wanted to bring it up. We ate as soon as we got home, then I built a fire and poured us each a Bailey's.

Frances looked like a million dollars and I was just about to blurt out something idiotic when she said she had a confession to make. She said she'd been thinking about leaving her job for a couple of years and she told her boss that she needed a change. Her company was buying up facilities all over Europe and he offered her something in Paris or Nice. But she'd done her own research and suggested they look into the Amherst chain.

Frances had been working for almost two years on getting back to America. Not just to America but to Amherst. I couldn't get up the nerve to ask her why, but I searched her face for a sign that she'd come back for me. Instead, all I saw was fatigue. I figured there would be another time to talk about it.

So I showed her into the guest room and got her some towels. Before I left she opened up her arms for a hug. We stood there for the longest time, both of us soaking up how good it felt to be together.

Sometime around two o'clock I felt Frances crawling into bed with me. I didn't even open my eyes, I just held out my arm for her to come close. She laid her head on my shoulder and put her arm around my waist. I started squeezing her gently and kissing the top of her head. Things heated up in no time and she began to rub my body, from my thighs up to my stomach; then she reached under my T-shirt and cupped my breast. I still didn't open my eyes. I was lying there trying to decide if it was real or not.

Then she started to kiss me and I pulled her closer and kissed her back. Twelve years just melted away and we made the sweetest love ever, with Frances whispering the whole time that she loved me and that she knew she always would.

I don't know what's going to happen with us but I feel optimistic about love for the first time since Frances left. I'm a little nervous about how we're going to work out the day-to-day stuff-if

we even make it that far. But if we last through the New Lover Lust, I think Frances is somebody I'll work hard to keep.

The End.

Thanks for reading. I welcome your comments at kgmacgregor@yahoo.com.

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