

Magic Moments

Short Story by Allison Fine

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Magic Moments

He began sending her emails to the head of the program—forwarding them onwards without telling her, then once, without thinking, she caught the program director’s email address on the Cc line. Oh Christ, she thought. How many of these emails have been going to Doug? She was an adjunct professor in the medical school—her specialty trauma surgery, busy mentoring a few of the first and second year medical students, bringing them along and hoping that this careful attention would get her at least an associate professorship, and hope against hope, full faculty member with tenure. That was further down the road, murmurs in the background, some little buzz about her gentle but firm teaching skills and her willingness to be available to hungry medical students, extending office hours, shouldering the burdens one has to shoulder in a new job in order to prove that yes, she will be a good member of the team, they need her, she is valuable, indispensable, but then Michio came into the picture. She’d never had a thing for Asian men, but this man was different. He was a poet, a novelist and guest writer in the graduate writing program. They probably should never have met but she attended a reading he gave in town and afterwards asked him to sign the book of poetry she just purchased. *Hyperspace*, the collection was titled

and inside were terse, exciting and disturbing poems that got inside of her, nothing anecdotal here, she was certainly in no position to judge, but she felt certain that there was a wildness in the subtext beneath this man's careful, disturbing, challenging imagery.

Her beauty was not an issue although she knew how much interest she stirred being a surgeon, a trauma surgeon, young (under forty) and gorgeous. The legs, long, the hair, dark red, naturally kinky curls cascading and tumbling around her face, layered in the fashionable way, her deep-set green eyes and the thick, dark eyebrows—it was an image of control, power and yet she had to constantly contend with the problem of self confidence. Where were the boundaries? she asked herself. Secretly, (she'd never admit this) checking her astrology daily, she was constantly reminded that Cancers were people of deep psychic ability, capable of getting into people's thoughts, feeling their experiences, empathetic, compassionate—well, she knew it all boiled down to being a narcissistic bitch who tended to take everything personally. Every minute feeling and emotion got blown up all out of proportion. But only in her mind! How she managed to hide this in her work, in her profession—perhaps it was a mastery of acting, or something deeper, not exactly faking it, but what? She was driven—she must accomplish the mission she had felt was hers since she declared to her clueless mother at age three that she wanted to be a doctor. Of course Mother supported this--- a doctor in the family, why not? And this gorgeous girl with the bad temper—well, let's put that energy to use somewhere!

The bad temper. That's what got her into trouble here.

Michio was married, his wife a lovely, quiet self-effacing Japanese girl who did all the cooking, Sarah thought, although the 'girl' was actually a woman of forty-two with a childlike face and tiny little teenaged sized arms and a butt like a ten year old boy, and also this child was a full professor in the Economics department, so that was simply a question of image versus reality. It started with one email she sent him—slight; innocuous, but with a certain kind of flirtatious subtext and an ambitious emoticon at the close :)? She couldn't remember. He answered back within minutes and there began the flippancy in a flurry of emails, cascading, (tumbling almost) back and forth, like reports from two firing guns, rat-a-tat something exploding, fissures of sound and sight making colored trails and smoke clouds in the air—they were sexually masturbating in their email while talking of poetry and neurology and her career and his book tour and then his wife sent her an email and that was that.

Why are you emailing my husband and what is your motive? I don't like it. I see the two of you emailing back and forth and this is how all this kind of thing starts. I just want you to know that we have been married twelve years and this kind of thing has occurred—I always nip it in the bud, and especially now that I have tenure and we are likely to be here for many years. Don't email my husband again or I will get aggressive. I have already confronted him and he agrees. You see, we have a social bond that goes beyond love or sex or any of all that.

Sakura Kaku

Oh, she felt shame like a curtain choking her, she wished she had gotten married when Jack wanted her and now he was in Whitefish, Montana working at Big Mountain ski resort, managing it, actually, with someone else, but what could she do? Being a doctor and a teacher was the central focus of her life! Men are desserts, not a main course, she told all her friends. But this—what was it?

Michio agreed to meet her at a designated place off campus—the little Italian place where no one knew who they were, but the meeting lasted only long enough for two glasses of wine and then to the backseat of her Subaru Legacy—his hands so powerful, his hips and penis thrusting into her making her want, want, want and then to have, have, have. It was so lovely to possess the unattainable. She could not exclude that possibility and the danger! It all made her lovely and warm, and he was ecstatic himself.

No more emails, he told her as they hastily put clothes back into their rightful places. But she did not listen and sent emails to his campus address, which he always loved and laughed at and responded to, which made her believe in it all. *I am getting away with this!* Until another email from Sakura came.

I am forwarding this to Doug Carver, head of your department. If you continue to email my husband I will do more damage.

All right. Sarah stopped the emails. Although not entirely. She could resist sending Michio one last email—a story she found on some Zen blog while cruising the blog-o-sphere:

“Yamaoka Tesshu, as a young student of Zen, visited one master after another. He called upon Dokuon of Shokoku. Desiring to show his attainment, he said: “The mind, Buddha, and sentient

beings, after all, do not exist. The true nature of phenomena is emptiness. There is no realization, no delusion, no sage, no mediocrity. There is no giving and nothing to be received." Dokuon, who was smoking quietly, said nothing. Suddenly he whacked Yamaoka with his bamboo pipe. This made the youth quite angry.

"If nothing exists," inquired Dokuon, "where did this anger come from?"

It received no answer.

But now Doug had the whole pile of them, the emails back and forth; even the last stolen story. Michio had been forwarding her emails to Doug all along! It was a joke. She had become the object of planned ridicule. As she went back over her deleted email she wondered how many of these emails had been forwarded to Doug—she didn't know because it was only a month in that she caught the Cc mistake. He'd probably forgotten. All the pseudo-dirty things they snapped back and forth, the stupid comments meant to be funny and when a faculty meeting came up, a tea actually at Charlie Boon's house, Sarah could see from the faces that everyone knew—she had become a comic story. Michio had played with her. She couldn't deny that sex with a married man meant she asked for trouble, but public humiliation was not the punishment! The days of stoning fallen women were over, weren't they?

One cold day in October she saw his slim body encased in a leather bomber jacket scurrying along the pathway next to the library. She was walking toward him, knowing they would have to pass one another on the path. She bent down to find a small stone, something small enough not to be life threatening. As they neared one another she caught his nasty little expression, he planned to

ignore her but just within a foot of his body she flung the little stone at him. It hit his shoulder and he brushed it off like a fly.

Oh fuck you! she said to him somewhere between a whisper and a shout.

He turned to smile at her. Do I know you? His quizzical look asked and drew his jacket closer to his body walking faster and faster on the pathway away from her. Even a brilliant mind and a great education could not save Sarah but she simply walked into the library and allowed the smell of old books to take her into another corner of her mind.

Gravity is an illusion, she thought, and if something as *heavy* as a falling stone is nothing more than the figment of mind and imagination, then surely this *love thing* is nothing more than twigs floating along the surface of a river and getting caught in the mud. Come winter it will all freeze over anyway and the twigs won't even know where they came from. That their place of origin was the great tree. However, the great tree is somewhere else and the twigs—well, aren't they dead? The murmured sound of people's voices hardly impinged on her consciousness, the weight of books in her arm comforted the tiny strands of thought she could brush away the few times that she noticed them. But most of her time was filled with the communion between mind and book and library and moment and every kid hates to reminisce anyway.