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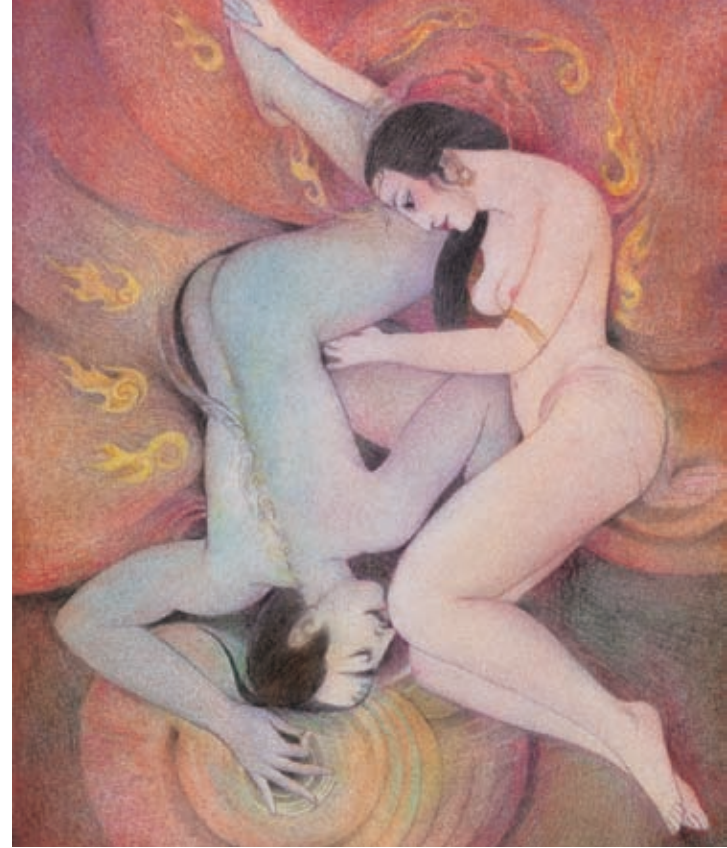
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Foreplay: Exalting the Appetizer

The Mess and Mystery of
Love and Vulnerability

BY CARRIE GROSSMAN

S*ex.* The little word is impregnated with so much meaning, from raunchy to sublime. It's easy to say and loaded with possibilities from tantric to transcendent, drunken to ecstatic. Much like an animal farm, it involves heavy petting, necking, birds, bees, and breeding. It also rhymes with *ex*.

These days, there's talk of making sex more mindful, long-lasting, and connected. It's not about orgasm, sexperts affirm, but rather tsunamis of bliss that blow both lovers open to the 69th dimension. Though these tsunamis sound lovely indeed, for the average lover, sex can be quite a messy affair. But it is precisely

this messiness that makes us crave it so.

Even without the flickering candles and *Kama Sutra* sheets, peacock feathers and fine wine, sex can reveal our true humanity, our trembling vulnerability in all its wild beauty. We may lay bare beside our beloved, but how many of us allow ourselves to be seen in the very center of our nakedness, complete with blemishes, longing hearts, and wet eyes? How many of us really undress for our consorts, inviting layers of protective armor to fall away with each garment?

To really expose ourselves to another pilgrim on the path of love is no easy task. In our fast-paced techno world, it's hard enough to slow down and relax for even a few moments, never mind to let someone see the tender ache that shimmers just beneath the surface of our "doing" self. We rarely take time to breathe space into our contracted body-mind, yet we expect to fall into unspoiled communion with our partner at day's end. Alas, like any delicate flower knows, a bud needs water, soil, and sun to blossom fully. Likewise, all of us lovers need to water the seeds of intimacy long before we conjugate so when the time comes to unfold our petals, we are ripe for the opening. Yes, we need to invest a bit more time *before we play*.

Foreplay. Another great word, rich and weighty. For some, it's simply what happens before "the happening." For others, it's a welcome way to ease into presence. Tantra teachers often reframe the term as "loveplay," which suggests we can take our time to relish the appetizer

instead of race toward the entree. Instead of relegating our play to a certain time and place, we can perpetually plant seeds of passion in the fertile garden of intimate connection. By doing so, we become ever-ripe fruits, ready to be devoured at any given moment.

How can we experience this exquisite deep-sea diving with our lover, this descent into tenderness that brightens our eyes with holy wonder? Is it enough to buy flowers, whisper sweet nonsense, and dim the lights? Is it enough to separate our loving from the rest of our daily activities? Perhaps what we need is a new worldview, one that acknowledges loveplay as a way of life, a way of life that unties long-held knots of closure and tempts us back to present time. Perhaps we must learn, again and again, how to make the ordinary extra-ordinary by bringing attentiveness and creative intention to our intimate worlds.

To begin, we can infuse even simple acts with delight. Much like our breath in meditation practice, we can learn to see our lover with fresh eyes. Despite what we may think, our predictable partners are actually endless mysteries embodied. Look for something different, perhaps a strand of hair falling over an eyelid or a glimmer of presence that wasn't there before. Notice, and enjoy.

Agree to meet in a local market as strangers. There, while fingering avocado or cantaloupe, find a way to woo one another as if for the first time. Or simply steal a smooch among the cereal boxes. At the same time, remember that kissing is not a pit stop on the copulation highway. No, no, no! It is a beautiful, scenic overlook where two lovebirds can linger for hours, completely content. Not in the market, of course, but in the bedroom, living room, dining room, shrine room, or any room, really.

In actual fact, the universe is our bedroom, and we can learn to extend the same delicious kindness that we share with our lover to all beings everywhere. As we do so, we discover what mystics have known for ages: *All* of creation is an embodiment of divine energy, not just our lover's body. Indeed, life is the loveplay and sex a perfect metaphor for the cosmic embrace — pure love in precious form. From our deepest yearning to our lover's little toes, the ineffable beckons us. Let us be grateful and heed the call, moment by messy moment. 🍌

Carrie Grossman, M.A., is a writer, registered yoga teacher, mind-body practitioner, and lover of Love. She earned her degrees in Religious Studies and then wandered the planet in search of what already exists within her. She joins Common Ground as an assistant editor. thelightinside.org

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