

Patty's Wife

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All the kids on the block admired Patty, one of the best of the neighborhood men. Aside from being a nice guy, he was a bodybuilder, and we all wanted muscles like his when we grew up. We admired him even more when he married Carmen. She had dark eyes and black hair and an exceptionally curvy figure. Carman was the epitome of sex to our young minds, and my friend Johnny Dee and I were her biggest fans. Most of the guys we hung out with thought she was too old to be appealing. At about twenty-five, her advanced age didn't matter to Johnny and me. We'd cross the street if she were walking on the other side just so we could say hello. The sensual way she said, "Hi," along with her beautiful smile, would make our day. Sometimes we'd argue about which of us she really smiled at. More than a crush, you could say there was a fair amount of early adolescent lust involved in our feelings for Carman.

Ritchie, a close friend of Patty's, worked on the East River banana piers. He'd unload cargo, mainly bananas, arriving from Caribbean ports. When Ritchie finished work in the early afternoon, he'd often bring back a heavy brown paper bag with a few bunches of bananas in it to give to his friends. Sick of bananas, he'd never eat any himself. One afternoon as Johnny Dee and I walked up our street, we saw Richie turning the corner.

“Hey, fellas. I’m beat and don’t feel like climbing stairs. Be good guys and bring these bananas up to Patty’s wife for me.”

He gave us a half a buck each but didn’t have to. We would have tipped him for a chance to take those bananas up five flights and get to see Carmen. His request made our day. Within minutes, we were there knocking on her door.

“Who is it?”

“Carmen, it’s Robert and Johnny Dee. Ritchie sent us up with some bananas for you.”

“Just a minute. I don’t have any clothes on.”

Why couldn’t she have left it at, “Just a minute?” We looked at one another, realizing that right on the other side of a thin door was the woman we dreamed about, and she didn’t “have any clothes on.” Time passed while we stood paralyzed with our imaginations running wild. She finally came to the door in high heels, slacks, and a sweater with a lipstick-stained Viceroy held daintily between her fingers. Even fully dressed, she took our breath away. She thanked us for bringing her the bananas and offered us a tip. All we could do was grin, say, “No thanks,” and look stupid.

For the rest of the day, we speculated about what it would have been like if she had forgotten herself and just opened the door. That’s something we spoke about for years afterward but only between ourselves. We never mentioned it to any of our other friends because Carmen was our private fantasy and never to be shared.