

Kristin Gullicks

THE COLD SHOULDER AND OTHER TREATMENTS _____

Elise is currently not speaking to her clit. Elise realizes that her passive aggressive use of the silent treatment is childish. This bothers her until she chooses not to worry about it. Instead, she crosses her legs very tightly thinking, “Take that, bitch,” smiling from her receptionist’s desk.

Elise’s friend Joan, who is not really her friend, is always reading *Cosmo*. She sits at the desk across from Elise. Once a month Joan interrogates her about the inadequacies of her past, present and future relationships with men. Elise’s most recent endeavor was a fish-lipped man named Phil:

SWM, 38ish, “stocky”, balding, manager-type who enjoys moonlit walks and candlelight dinners, romantic evenings on the beach and the occasional slap on the ass **SEEKS SWF**, young(er), slim, attractive, blonde (brunette if shiny), blue-eyed (will negotiate green), tall (but not taller than), employed (doesn’t make more than), intelligent (but not smarter than) for fucking and possible friendship. Personality a plus.

There were three things Elise did not like about Phil: the way he picked his nose in public, his refusal to perform oral sex because of the smell, and his disinterest in bringing her to orgasm. The rest of his flaws she tolerated, finding them almost (but not quite) endearing. They dated for five and a half months before Phil flashed her the “it’s me, not you” finger. Elise blames her clit but sometimes wonders what she could have done differently.

Last month, Elise was a masochistic enabler. This month, Joan likes to point out that according to *Cosmo*, Elise might be a lesbian.

Elise likes to lose herself in mirrors, her eyes, her nose, her mouth. She is fascinated by the reflections of reflections of reflections. Elise never knows what it is she sees, only what *Cosmo* tells her she is supposed to see. Her nose that is too long, but with the proper shading technique can be shadowed into submission. Her forehead that is too wide, but with the proper hair style can be hidden under a starchy wave. Her eyes that are too small, but with deftly applied eye-liner — the outside of the rim, not the inside — can intrigue any man with their defined mystery. And then her lips that are too thin, but with just the right color and a dab of gloss, can produce a pout that will have the men drooling — and Elise sighing for something more.

Once and only once, did Elise look at her clit in the mirror (a *Cosmo* suggestion). It was rather uneventful, uninspiring and quite disappointing, so she didn't do it again.

Elise likes men to carry heavy things for her. She's not sure how that fits into the whole feminist scheme of things. Elise acknowledges that she really should be self-sufficient, but she doesn't understand why her having ovaries and a uterus means she should carry heavy things when a) she doesn't want to and b) men will carry them for her. She's sure her clit has something to do with the conspiracy.

Elise remembers putting on nylons for Church (The time is BC — Before *Cosmo*):

She hates them, the way they scratch and ride her crotch, but Elise wants to look nice, and nice girls wear nylons. The thought of hot synthetic mesh slowly suffocating her clit upsets Elise (and her clit) but

propriety and the Bible (Elise assumes, though she's not sure) require it.

Scrunching each leg of nylon into a ring, one after the other, Elise wonders if God would be offended if she sat naked on a pew. The words naked and pew make her laugh. The thought of rubbing her naked body over the smooth wood surface of the bench does not. It intrigues Elise.

Elise considers nakedness in church:

Elise would wash herself in the baptismal font, spread herself on the altar, press her body against the huge stained-glass apostles and roll around in the Communion wafers — the ones that feel and taste like Styrofoam, welding to the roof of a mouth because the thimble-full of wine (one finger for grape juice) — the blood of Christ — isn't enough to dislodge it. All of this would be done in biblical nakedness, like Eve before Adam, the apple, the curse, before everyone was busy trying to *know* everyone else.

Elise thinks of herself as Joan of Arc, but then decides Joan — both of Arc and of 51st and Maple — wouldn't dare be naked in Church. Then again, Elise wouldn't normally either. However, Elise concludes she would not be truly naked. Her clit would still be covered (as always) due to the discrete (and discerning?) nature of female genitalia. This being the case, the eyes of Baby Jesus would remain pure, the old men would not blush and Elise is quite sure the pastor would still bless her because he's Protestant. Elise finds that Protestants (as opposed to Catholics) tend to be more relaxed about these sorts of things — rolling around naked on top of the figurative body of Christ.

Elise hikes the nylons up over her hips and adjusts the crotch. She has a hard time believing Jesus died on the cross to save herself from her clit.

Elise smiles at all the men (Kevin, Rob, Sam, etc.) who pass by her receptionist's desk — she's been told it's company policy to do so (smile that is). They wink, wave, offer her pats on the ass and quickies in the Xerox room. Elise continues to smile, laughs, thanks them for the offer and silently curses her clit, the cause of the attention. Later, when their wives call the office, she suggests they read *Cosmo*, hoping they'll take the "Is He a Cheater?" quiz.

The wives assume Elise is a lesbian because her hair and her nails are rather short. Unaware that lesbians have access to *Cosmo*, they are somewhat surprised by her recommendation. However, since they already have lifetime subscriptions, they thank Elise for her thoughtful suggestion.

Elise is still not speaking to her clit. Her clit is still not speaking to her, or anyone for that matter. Resisting the temptation to confront her clit, Elise calls Joan to discuss a re-occurring dream:

"I'm standing in the middle of the street, like in a Western. From out of nowhere, a man saunters — and I say saunters because he didn't walk, it was more of a John Wayne waddle. When he finally manages to Duke his way up to me I start to feel like Clint Eastwood with tits. He jerks his head in this slow, cowboy way and says, 'Hey you, I called you a bitch. What are you gonna do about it, bitch?'

I lower my lashes and grind the heel of my stiletto and say, 'Bitch, huh?'

So he says, 'Yeah, that's right.'

Before I know it, I'm beating the shit out of him — elbowing him in the ribs, kneeling him in the balls. When he finally falls to the ground moaning and stuff, I place my shoe, heel first, on his chest. I reach down and rip the tie from his neck, wrapping it around my head Rambo

style. Then, with my red lipstick, I write BITCH across his forehead.”

“Yeah, Elise, that’s really weird. I gotta go.”

Elise decides to have a chicken pot pie for dinner. Between bites of tasty, flaky crust, Elise discusses with her cat, Fido, Joan’s inability to fulfill a man. Elise speculates (according to rumors in the office) it is due to the intense frigidity of Joan’s crotch, a common side-effect of *Cosmo*. Elise purposely leaves her clit out of the conversation.

Elise has just bought new moisturizer. *Cosmo* promises it will have her radiating, illuminating, gyrating, gravitating, deviating and manipulating in less than a week. Elise is surprised it is only for her face. She smooths it on and waits for results.

Inspired by her dream, Elise decides to send the wives (Karen, Rita, Sharon, etc.) anonymous letters:

Dear beloved wife of (fill in the blank with coordinating bastard),

Your husband is a pig. Thought you should know.

Enclosed is a Xerox of his dick.

Sincerely,

Mary Magdalene

Elise reconsiders the closing. She’s not sure she likes the reformed prostitute reference. She resents the implication that it is the prostitute who needs reforming and not the man who pays her. Elise decides on:

Sincerely,

A Concerned Clit

She folds the letters and slips them into envelopes along with black and white copies of Phil's dick (a framed Christmas present). Elise assumes one Xeroxed dick must look like another and licks the glue.

Elise has successfully ignored her clit for a month and now wonders if maybe she was being too harsh, too unreasonable, expecting too much from something so small. She still has yet to radiate, illuminate, gyrate, gravitate, deviate or manipulate like *Cosmo* promised. Elise considers rubbing some moisturizer on her clit, thinking maybe she misread the label. She thinks about it for a moment, but then decides against it, not sure she really wants those kinds of results.

Elise sighs and opens the small, blue metal door. Looking at the letters, Elise whispers, "Truce," and drops them in one at a time. ❖