

Darla

Sometimes I wonder why my Barbara stays when I am gone so much over the months and years.

It has always been my heart -- that "traveling star" part of my life. James Taylor has me pegged. If it was not for Barbie's gentle Southern patience, and the fact that for a woman pressing on 60, she still looks and acts young -- I may have still be on the road.

"I don't care about the road, Micheal," Barbie told me once, sitting on our couch, while looking at me with those "granny glasses" she needs to read with. "I want you home with me, healthy and safely."

I had an affair with a married woman once; before Barbie and I met. The affair was brief.

Darla was also a Southern gal -- tall, blonde and blue-eyed. Not the kind of gal I would even be attracted to, let alone "do something with". I bumped into Darla at a coffee shop -- I spilled her coffee accidentally trying to move up in the line. I offered to buy another cup of whatever she wanted and she bought the most expensive cup.

"I should pour this on you, sir...." she spoke, her voice rich with Southern air.

Darla was wearing a blue dress, the slits on the sides coming close to the bottom edge of where her thighs end and her bottom begins. I complimented her on the dress and that's how things started.

We met a couple more times before she revealed her personal life to me: three kids, all hellions and all teens in their last years of living at home. Hubby who no longer cares for the charming woman with the wavy blonde hair, who looks like she never had carried a child before. Work demands -- she worked for the Soil Conservation Service -- and was a naturalist.

She found a motel -- one of those "no-tell motels" -- and she stripped me before taking off her clothing and proceeded to "make up for lost time" as she told me.

Darla did things I never would imagine an older woman to do...until I met Barbie.

The affair ended almost as soon as it started. My work schedule, along with her guilt over the matter, and coupled with a need for her to "grow up," marked the end. She asked me not to call her anymore, not to contact her by mail. I understood and reluctantly agreed.

She called me a while after Barbie and I met. Barbara answered the phone when she called.

"Micheal's not here, honey. May I take a message for him and have him to call you back?"

"Yes." The voice on the other end sounded desperate.

"Is everything okay?" Barbara asked. She felt with her free hand a place to sit down.

"How well do you know Mike?" Darla asked.

"I trust him with my life, darling. He's my sweetheart."

"I don't know how long you've been seeing him, but until a few years ago, he and I were seeing each other behind my husband. My husband passed away today," Darla spoke. "I hope you understand that I loved him very much but I can't say that I'm not happy that he's gone..."

"Maybe I'm not the person you need to be talking with, with..." Barbara said, trying to get the woman's name.

"Darla."

"Darla," Barbie repeated.

"Is Mike gonna marry you??"

"I have every belief that he will...I'm not really pushing him, but the clocks' ticking in my life."

"I'm sorry. I know this sounds like I'm wanting to take him away from you... but I just wanted to know if I'm talking with his wife. He said that he wanted to get married again someday, but he wasn't sure."

Barbie looked around the house, and then spoke back into the mouthpiece, "I'll tell him that you called. I've really got to get off this phone."

"Please give him this phone number -- I don't think that Mike even knows it any more... I told him not to call me anymore and he never did." Darla gave Barbara the number, and then hung up.

I returned from a short trip to Somerset, and Barbara was sitting in the living room when I walked in. I looked around the room, and sensed that something was wrong.

"My spidey sense tells me that you're upset about something," I said. We had watched the Spiderman movie together the day before I took off.

"Micheal. Sit down here."

"Uh-oh..." I am thinking to myself.

"I am so jealous right now and I don't know why. Here I am, almost 55 years old, and I'm still acting like a little teenaged child!"

I looked at her eyes. There was no anger in them, just concern from what I could read.

"Why jealousy?" I moved closer to Barbara. She moved away.

"What's the deal??" I added as I moved back.

"Darla called." She watched for my reaction. I thought for a minute as I recalled who Darla was and then remembered her last conversation with me. Telling me not to contact her any more. That "she was already confused between her feelings for her husband and feelings for me" and "I don't need you to continue to remind me how bad he's been to me!"

"Okay" I finally spoke.

"She wants to see you."

"I don't think I want to see her, Barbara. I had an affair with her before we met, love, but it has been a long while since."

"I know. She sounds older. How old was she when you were with her?"

"I think 50 or so, Barbara. Look, I'm sorry that she called here and got you all upset..."

"Don't be. She wants to see you. Her husband is dead." Barbara handed

the phone number written on a paper napkin to me. I looked at the number and then placed it on the end table next to me.

"I'm sorry to hear that.

"So, are you going to call her??" Barbie looked at me for any cracks, any seams that I would somehow jump at the opportunity to see this -- this woman.

"I am going to call her and offer my condolences to her. She's got three kids...all teens...and I know that she's going to be hurting..."

"I'm hurting, Micheal!" Barbie stated. "I don't know why I'm hurting -- hell, you and me, we've been together for a while... I just, oh fudge!" She got up out of the chair and paced the floor.

"I need a cigarette!" she announced.

"You're not getting one from me, sweetie. Look," I said, walking over to her and holding her tentatively. She allowed me to hold her.

"Look, Darla was before we even met. Yes, I did love her enough... no, she got guilty about seeing me with her husband being around and she asked me not to call or see her any more... and I did just that. There's no sense in staying in touch with someone who doesn't want you anymore..." I continued to hold Barbie tight.

Barbara let out a deep sigh and moved away from me.

"Tell me, love. You know that the truth will set you free..." I smiled for the first time in the conversation.

"I have no right to be jealous of you. None. But I'll be damned if I'm gonna let some other Southern lassie -- or anyone else -- get what I deserve all of these years. You!" Barbie said.

She moved toward the kitchen and restarted the coffeepot. "Call her, Micheal. Go see her. But don't tell me any details about it because I don't want to know... and," she said after adding a little more water to the pot, "my arms will always welcome you home."

She then walked over and held me tight as she kissed my lips. I returned the tender kiss.

"You got pictures of this hussy??" Barbara winked at me before returning to the kitchen.

I followed her there and responded "No, she wasn't one for taking photos... Sorry." I then described her to the dark-haired Barbara.

"Sounds like you broke your mold of women you've dated. Why didn't you tell me about her?? She musta thought I was a... I didn't handle the call well, Mike."

"It was so brief, sweetie. We barely got to know each other before we did the bedroom scene and then she got a case of the guilts and told me that we were doing wrong and that she had no business being there with me..." Barbara checked the oven as I talked with her, the warm air from whatever was being baked in the oven overtaking my brain's ability to produce sounds of speech.

"What is that?? It smells good!"

"Sweet potato pies. Micheal, I can't be mad at you but you should have told me about this gal..." Barbara stated.

"Call her. Talk with her. Comfort her. You may be the only friend she has left in this world... but come back to me, please?"

I kissed Barbie on the nose. "I am so happy with you and your portacath!" I then touched her portacath through her top and her bra.