

Why, Oh Why . . . ?

If only, if only, if only - these words echoed ruefully in my brain as I watched the 747 disappear into the low scud that covered the airfield.

They - the ubiquitous, indefinable, irritating they - say that it's better to arrive at your death bed regretting what you did rather than regretting what you didn't do. I hate to admit it, but I think they are right.

Perhaps it was fear, stark naked fear, perhaps a sense of misguided loyalty that held me back.

What lay behind this fear? The fear of rejection? The fear of failure? The fear of her regarding me as just another testosterone driven male? Perhaps I had too much respect for her, saw her as someone untouchable? Who knows?

I'd long since outgrown the indoctrinating religious myths of hell and damnation, yet a part of me felt that I ought to honour the vows I'd made in front of a church full of friends and family.

Frequently the opportunity was right there, and I was on the brink of making a move. But, to my eternal regret, I always backed away. Many a night when my hormones were still tingling as the result of some interaction we'd had that day, I would, like a sex starved teenager, let my imagination run riot in the safe, secure confines of my mind.

However, my old bogeys were always with me: the beliefs that unrequited love is the best, that sex always mars a relationship and that fulfilment never lives up to anticipation. Perhaps these were formed by Great Expectations, a standard 6 setwork, which I loathed with a passion.

Then there was the fact that I had a daughter her age. Yet, when we were together it seemed as though we were the same age.

I was attracted to her from the moment we met. She was my idea of the perfect woman; in her petite, elfin-like figure; in her sparkling intellect; in her bubbly personality; in her wicked sense of humour.

Having been selected as my programmer she would come to write all the complex programs for the contorted reports that we had to create. As a result we worked closely and were together for at least eight hours every day, five days a week. In addition, every

morning and afternoon we slipped out to the corner café for coffee, while most lunch times we enjoyed a salad together. These interludes were made more enjoyable by the fact that we had none of the baggage that long term relationships invariably acquire. We were still in the process of learning about each other.

When you spend that amount of time working closely with someone of the opposite sex, it is not surprising that an attraction is formed. After all you only see them at their best. Moreover, a computer development environment has a lot of waiting time, time when you inevitably begin to probe into each other's minds.

She had an amazingly broad range of knowledge and interests for someone so young and our conversations ranged from ballet through literature to alien life and on to philosophy.

By the end of the two years we knew almost everything about each other's lives, likes and dislikes – that is, everything we wanted each other to know. I knew that one never knows everything about another person, no matter how close they are. Even after twenty five years of marriage there were many nooks and crannies of my wife's life and thoughts I was totally ignorant of.

We, for instance, knew intimate details such as the fact that I'd had a vasectomy and that she was on the pill – *for hormonal purposes*, she said. For some obscure, naïve reason, I obviously never read her signals, never took cognisance of them.

A short while after we had begun working together she had had a small operation and I took her a Victorian posy to cheer her up. From that moment on this started an exchange of blooms on every significant day; secretary's day, birthdays, or whatever day took our fancy. Gradually the blooms became red roses. Somehow the significance of "red rose" was totally lost on me. I seem to recall that, on one particular secretary's day, all the ladies received a red rose and I just followed suit from then on – as did she.

She was an excellent programmer, ambitious, and I wanted the best for her. I taught her as much as I could while encouraging her to spread her wings overseas. There her skills were not only in demand, but she could command a much higher price and be exposed to more leading edge environments. For example, in London, where a secretary might earn eight to ten pounds an hour, someone with her skills and ability could earn up to fifty pounds an hour. I arranged for an interview with a London firm and they accepted her with alacrity.

I was flattered, and secretly thrilled, when, as her departure date neared, that she asked me to take her to the airport.

While we drove along she said, "Harry I'll never be able to thank you enough for what you've taught me about my career, about life in general and for encouraging me to go to London as well as lining up a job for me."

"You deserve it, and more," I smiled.

We drove on in an unaccustomed silence.

Just as I switched off the engine in the parking garage she placed a hand on my leg and slowly, seductively, ran it up and down my inner thigh. It instantly aroused an intense lust, sending shivers running through me and weakening my knees.

Desperately trying not to show my reactions to her touch I turned and, looking into her twinkling eyes, heard these words, as though they were coming from far away, through a long tunnel, "You know, you adorable, silly twit, the only thing that was missing from our relationship was sex . . ."

Ray Hattingh