

THE EDWARDS MASEN

My parents must have had sex once—I am here, after all, and I resemble both of them enough to convince me that I'm not the milkman's son. Still, I don't remember seeing a touch between them during my entire childhood. I think it was a business marriage, as much as anything. My father was becoming a high-powered lawyer in Chicago and remaining a bachelor into one's forties was considered suspect in such circles. Not only that, but a professional such as my father needed a cook, maid, hostess, and someone to bring to the occasional "wives' event."

So my father married later in life than most men of his era. I was never sure why. He wasn't a homosexual—at least I'm pretty sure he wasn't. One of the reasons my parents fought was that my father spent so much time and money on mistresses and at the local brothels. It was a different time then. As far as I could tell from a child's perspective of a father's world, all wealthy lawyers, judges, politicians, and other important men hired or kept women for activities that are better reserved for the marriage bed.

It was the old double standard at work—men chose one kind of woman to marry and another kind of woman to satisfy their sexual desires. It was a prevalent belief that if a woman enjoyed sex, her virtue was suspect. Indeed, it was considered virtuous for a woman to "put up with" sex to produce children and otherwise merely to endure it as one of her wifely obligations to her husband. I was allowed to observe my father and his cronies after dinners at our house when they indulged in cigars and bourbon in the smoking room while their wives retired to the sitting room to drink tea. I learned a lot about men and sex during those evenings, neither of which impressed me much.

Growing up at home with my mother, I served as her primary confidante. From time to time, she would complain bitterly about my father's "carousing," which was code for visiting prostitutes. My parents

slept in separate rooms when my father was home, but frequently, he stayed nights at "his club." These prestigious, men-only clubs dotted Chicago and it took a great deal of money and the support of at least two existing members to be allowed to join. It's where Chicago business was done in the old days and where rich men went to escape from their families.

The kind of separation that existed between upper-class men and their wives made family life—including anything to do with children—the woman's responsibility. In our final years together, my father began to take more of an interest in me and began inducting me into the masculine brotherhood. Once, I went with him to a house of prostitution and was frankly shocked and rather disgusted by the buying and selling of women. Neither party to such transactions seemed to be damaged by it particularly, but that wasn't what troubled me. I was alienated by the division between the animal acts of sex and the love between two people that I thought should be the cornerstone of a marriage. It didn't work that way in my father's circles. My mother implied that once he had impregnated her with me, he seemed to think his duties at home were finished.

I respected my father, but I didn't like him much. There wasn't much to like, actually. I only saw him infrequently and when he talked to me, I wasn't expected to answer unless he specifically asked me a question. He believed in the old tenet that children should be seen and not heard, which was not uncommon at that time. I think he expected me to train as a lawyer when I became a man, but my goal was to leave home as early as possible. The army was to be my means of escape. Soldiers were revered in those days of war.

It was my father's treatment of my mother that made me want to be a different kind of man. If I ever married, which I hadn't thought much about, I knew that I would only marry someone I loved and I would be faithful to her. I saw how it hurt my mother to find lip rouge on my father's collars or to be told he was going to the club when she knew full well that he was going out with his mistress. He didn't try to hide it, especially. Once I even saw one of his mistresses get into his carriage when I was on a late-night errand for my mother. From my perspective, it

seemed like the mistresses had all the fun and the wives had all the drudgery and that it all stemmed from a Puritanical view of women as either maidens or whores.

I never wanted a marriage like my parents' and perhaps that is one reason I never responded to the advances of Tanya or Rosalie or Jessica. The idea of sex without love was utterly unappealing. It reminded me of the Chicago brothels where women lounged about in scanty clothing designed to appeal to the baser instincts of men. Perhaps I had base instincts back then too, but I was so determined never to be like my father in that regard that they were well-buried.

I am glad to say that I did not turn out like my father. My wife is everything to me both emotionally and physically, and I feel wonderfully free with her. We love each other to the degree that whatever pleases her in the bedroom pleases me and vice versa. I do find that the longer we are together, the more "baser instincts" we discover in ourselves. We don't have a policy of "anything goes," but we do have a policy of anything is open for discussion. We talk about a lot of things we don't actually want to do too. Talking is fun.

When I think about the joyful, exciting, and utterly satisfying sex life I have with Bella, I rather feel sorry for my father and for other men who lived like he did. They got an inferior sort of sexual experience and their wives got their only fulfillment from their children.

Edward

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