

## **She's Married**

by **Barbara Altamirano**

You could call it the first time I could have cheated on my husband. You could call it a bad idea. Or you could call it being a good friend. It's all a matter of perspective, I guess.

Carrie dragged me to the Halloween party that night. The party was thrown by Eric, her former boyfriend's roommate. What would I do at that kind of party? Although not a college party, Eric was single with mostly single guy friends. I feared a Jim Belushi style drunk-fest where Carrie would disappear with some guy and I'd be stuck in a corner, alone, drinking out of a stove pot because they'd run out of cups. I didn't want to go. I was married for God's sake.

I knew I'd be alone because I wasn't going to do something I'd regret. I might have married young, but I was devoted to my husband. But what would these bachelors do with me, the only married girl in a sea of drunks? All the usual alternatives would be out of the question.

Still, I went because of old habits—when Carrie said, “Jump,” I answered, “Yes, ma'am.” My husband was away for the weekend, conveniently, if I'd been someone who's vows meant nothing to them.

We knocked on the door and a nerd answered: Eric, our host, and let's just say the costume suited him way too well. Soon after arriving, a hideous monster shoved his horribly disfigured face just inches from my chest. I finally realized he was attempting to read the tag around my neck. The tags were the only part of our lame, last-minute costume. Carrie and I, along with a third friend, were the three stooges. However, the third one had to leave ridiculously early for some career test the next day, so we were down to two in short order.

We went with Eric to find the keg and get away from the monster. After several beers and chatting up a skeleton with Carrie in tow, I met the Arabian gas attendant, or the Sheik, as Carrie christened him.

He stepped next to me, a mysterious look on his face. “I have something for you in my pocket.”

Maybe it was the beers. Maybe it was the drinking straight out of a bottle of some unidentifiable liquid earlier in Eric’s room. Or maybe it was the stupidity of a woman married too young.

I reached my hand into his pocket, touching his bare leg.

“Ooo, I like you.”

I ran away to find Carrie, amazed at my stupidity. Some time later—time moves differently when you’re drunk, speeding up insanely at times and dragging at others—a bunch of us were sitting on a large sofa. The sheik announced that everyone in the general area was doing shots. A guy to my right crept toward me. He was the loudest chanter when it was my turn to drink. Then he was right next to me, our legs almost touching, and his arm along the back of the sofa. I realized his pants looked familiar, a strange red/orange combo that I’d seen somewhere before. Then it hit me. It was scary monster guy, minus the mask. It was tempting to make a joke about how he looked scarier without the mask, but unfortunately for me, he was cute.

Eric stood directly in front of me. His look said, “You want I take care of this guy?” This look was totally at odds with the whole nerd thing he had going on. I shook my head because A) I could handle it and B) maybe I enjoyed the attention even though I shouldn’t have and C) maybe there was no maybe.

Finally, Eric couldn’t stand it anymore, reaching a hand out to me that I took without thinking. Standing around soon after with Eric, Carrie somewhere in the vicinity, we chatted with the grim reaper and his girlfriend. Someone suddenly blasted Donna Summer and Carrie got her groove on. Carrie, the cool drunk. Me—the boring one.

Grim eyed my stiff and unmoving frame. “You’re a wet blanket.”

I might have responded, “Because I refuse to get my groove on to Donna Summer?” Or “I’m really more of a rock and roll girl.” Or even, “I don’t exactly see you getting down, Grim.”

But I'm a writer for a reason. I need time to process before I can come out with lame comebacks. I threw my drink at him instead.

His expression didn't change. "You're evil."

An evil wet blanket? No wonder I was so popular in high school. I wondered if there's a special place in hell for people who throw beer at the grim reaper.

Then the bomb dropped, detonated by my own best friend.

Carrie turned toward me, saying the words I'd meant to keep safely buried for the night. "Well, she's married."

I don't know why she said it or to whom. I only know the effect of those words. It was as if she'd said, "Well, she has leprosy." Or "Well, she hasn't bathed since last year."

Suddenly anyone within a few feet sprang away from me with an agility I wouldn't have thought possible of badly drunk people. Around Carrie there was now a circle of guys at least three deep.

Only Eric was still within earshot. I laughed without much humor. "It's like she's giving away Iron Maiden tickets."

Eric shrugged. "You're married."

I tried to clarify, at least in my own mind, what I'd meant. I was just commenting on the ridiculous scene. I wasn't, for God's sake, jealous.

Was I?

Anyway, the cat was out of the bag, might as well let the whole scene play out, like I'd always known it would. I wandered away, looking for a suitable corner. I found one and sat down, eyeing the only guy in my area. He was drinking out of a pot. Damn, he probably got the last one. Now, I couldn't even cry into my pot of beer.

Within a minute or two, Eric found me. "I'm not letting you sit in a corner." It was my, "Nobody puts baby in a corner" moment. Everyone should have at least one in their lifetime.

The poor guy was stuck with the married chick for the rest of the night, until I briefly chatted with an alligator. I assumed he was unaware of my eligibility-challenged state until he surprised me, saying, "You're the married one, right?"

There was really no getting away from that fact.

Carrie showed up with a guy who had no visible costume except for the knife. He was a serial killer. Carrie was going home with him. So, it seemed, was I.

I might have tried to talk some sense into her but A) the serial killer was smart, never giving me time to talk to her alone and B) Carrie and I had a long history of doing stupid things together and C) well, there really was no C.

I drove to his place, Carrie rode shotgun, serial killer, AKA Jake, in the back. A car shot in front of me and I caught a glimpse of a turban.

“Oh, did I tell you? Brian is Jake’s roommate.”

“And Brian is?” I feared I already knew this answer.

“The Sheik.”

So. I was going to an apartment with a guy dressed as a serial killer and a guy in whose pants I’d placed my hand. But if I’d had some preconceived idea of what would take place at said apartment, I would have been completely wrong.

Here’s what we did. Had milk and cookies. Really. Talked. Blew bubbles.

The Sheik said at one point, “That nerd was really protective of you guys.”

Thank God for nerds.

But now that we were out of his protection, Carrie went for alone time with Jake. Meanwhile, Brian struggled to entertain me. I felt bad for the guy. Clearly, he had no idea how to entertain a woman when you took sex out of the equation.

Two of Brian’s comments made strong impressions. One was when I caught him looking at me thoughtfully. “You’re a good friend.” His simple words touched me, helping me remember why I was there.

His second comment was actually a question. “What’s it like being married?”

Later I was reminded of the movie “Sex, Lies, and Videotape”. It’s about a young wife who is in a bad marriage—her husband is cheating on her with her sister. When this wife, played by Andie MacDowell, is asked that question, she struggles to find an answer, finally saying, “Well, we have the house.”

I’m not saying my marriage was like hers. Mine wasn’t and isn’t bad. My husband isn’t the cheating type and luckily, I don’t have a sister. Yet, I understand her confusion in answering such a deceptively simple question, especially to someone for whom the idea of marriage is so foreign.

Brian's question felt like an alien asking, "What's life like on your planet?" Like Andie MacDowell, I had no good answer. I knew no answer of mine would make him eager to join my world. In fact, I was tempted to go back to his.



**Barbara Altamirano** been a finalist in *Writer's Digest's* annual contest and her work has appeared in *The Christian Science Monitor*, *Indiana Voice Journal*, *Pittsburgh Parent*, *Wow-womenonwriting.com*, *Guideposts Magazine* and other publications.