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"Natural Science"

"Someday your curiosity will be aroused, but I seriously doubt that I'll be alive to see that day," said Lindsey as they ambled through the invertebrates at the Museum of Natural History. She knew it was bad idea for a date, but she had designed it as a test, one that she was fully expecting (hoping? fearing?) he would fail with flying colors.

"What are you talking about?" Seth said. "I like stuff. Didn't we go skiing and stuff? And I know more about movies than you do."

"No, you know more about what's playing at the mall than I do. Have you ever seen any movie older than you are?"

"I've seen old movies," he countered. "The original *Star Wars* was kind of cool."

She winced to realize that *Star Wars* actually was older than he was.

In point of fact, Seth was 26, which wouldn't be a problem, Lindsey thought, except that she was 42. When she had first tried online dating after the separation from Jonathan, she hadn't specifically *looked* for younger men,

nor was she the type to lie about her age. Seth had made the initial contact, and what had attracted him to her profile was a mystery to her. The more she paced back and forth in her living room the night she received his initial e-mail, the more she convinced herself that what she needed was a complete change from Jonathan. Jonathan was intellectual; too intellectual for his own good, she often thought. Still, the conversations they had had over the years were some of the most stimulating—and often, well, *fun*—she had ever had. As an experimental physicist, though, he was dedicated to his research. He was barely outgoing and getting him to do anything outside the lab or office was getting more difficult the older he got. It had been her idea to separate, as at the time there didn't seem that there was much of their marriage left.

Seth was the complete opposite. He was not complicated, or even very deep. He spent the summer months as a lifeguard and the winter months as a ski instructor. He was young, outgoing, and—she had to admit—hunky. Exactly what she needed after 15 years of marriage. Someone *fun* to hang out with.

But hadn't Jonathan been fun? At one time, perhaps, and in his own way...

Anyway, over the three weeks that Lindsey and Seth had

been dating, it began to dawn on her that "uncomplicated" could be synonymous with "boring." Sure, he was fun to *be* with, but ultimately tedious to *talk* with.

They walked through the museum in silence for a while. They turned into the Hall of Ocean Life, her favorite place in the museum. She pointed out several of the creatures on display, trying to get him as excited about the exhibits as she was. She pointed out a coral reef diorama.

"Have you ever gone SCUBA diving?" she asked.

"No."

"Jonathan and I went once on our honeymoon on the Great Barrier Reef. As a grad student in marine biology at the time, I thought it was a dream vacation."

"Cool."

"Coral reefs are truly amazing. The remains of dead organisms build up to create this whole...ecosystem that supports this incredible amount of biodiversity." She was babbling, if only because his blank stare at the diorama was distracting.

"Cool."

"I would have thought that as a lifeguard you'd have *some* kind of affinity for the ocean."

"Some kind of what?"

"Attraction. For the ocean."

"Well, I like hanging at the beach. I surfed a few times, but I'm not like really into it. My buddy Kev has been to California and says if I tried it there I'd like it a whole lot more."

She could tell that he was bored out of his skull and his being bored out of his skull bored her out of *her* skull. If they had been in the Primitive Man exhibits, there would be a whole host of australopithecine, Cro-Magnon, and Neandertal skulls that would be bored out of themselves, too.

"Have you ever been to the Hayden Planetarium?" she asked. "When I was a kid, once a year my father would take me and my brother into the city to see a planetarium show. It was one of my favorite places. Every Christmas, they would have a special presentation where they attempted to explain the Star of Bethlehem. They also had one on the theories of how the universe was created. I guess it had an impact; I'm still an amateur astronomer to this day and my brother works for NASA. Not bad for two kids from Jersey."

"Cool."

There was a pause. She was growing increasingly frustrated by his monosyllabic comments. Oh, wait...it looked like he was about to say something.

"I think I might have gone to a laser show there in high

school, but I was pretty ripped at the time."

"Ah." She suddenly had visions of her breaking into a display case and clubbing him over the head with a coelacanth. She glanced at her watch. "Well, it's getting late. Maybe we should head out."

"If you want."

"Well, I could stay here for days, but this doesn't seem to be quite your cup of tea."

"It's okay. I'm just not big on museums."

She stopped.

"Well, Seth, tell me, what are you big on?"

"You've read my profile. I like skiing, swimming, golfing. And sex, of course."

She had to admit that that was perhaps the highlight of their relationship. Maybe the only part of it she really liked. But even that was getting boring.

"Your profile," he continued, "said the same kind of stuff. I knew you liked *this* kind of stuff, too, and that's cool."

"Well, I'm so glad you find it 'cool,' but it's like you have absolutely no curiosity about the world beyond your own life."

"Because I don't care about some dead fish in a display case?"

"It's not just that. I mean, it's hard to have a conversation with you. Okay, my babbling about marine biology probably isn't inherently interesting, but any time I try to discuss anything that doesn't involve...well, any time I try to discuss *anything*, all you say is 'cool.' Why do you even want to date me anyway?"

"I think you're fun to do stuff with and, well, I think you're hot."

She was of two minds as to how to take that. But she knew what she needed to do.

"Seth, I think we should stop seeing each other. You're a nice guy, fun to 'hang with,' as you say, and I'd be lying if I said I didn't find you attractive. The three weeks we've spent together have opened my eyes, and I think I have a better sense of what I want. You know, I married while still in college, Jonathan wasn't the first guy I dated, but he was the first I was ever serious about. Chalk this whole LoveConnections.com thing up to a kind of mid-life crisis, I guess. So, I hope you bear me no ill-will, and if you'd still like to remain friends, I'd certainly be amendable to that."

"That'd be cool."

She could detect no emotion or...anything. Was there even a mind at work in there someplace?

"So...you're not mad at me or upset?"

He shrugged. "No, it's kind of what I figured. I've gone out with a lot of women like you. I like older women, what can I say, they know what they're doing sexually. But it never lasts because all they really want is youth and excitement and someone outgoing, and all I want is to give that to them. After a few weeks, they realize what they really want is something more, which is what I don't want, so they break up with me. So don't sweat it. It's cool."

She looked at him. "What's going to happen when you're my age?"

"I assume it works both ways."

They stood in silence for a while. "Anyway," he said, "I'm gonna get a move on. If you want to do something at some point, give me a call or an IM."

And with that, he walked off without so much as a goodbye kiss. She stared blankly into space for a moment, then looked up. She was under the giant squid, the exact place where Jonathan had proposed to her. She smiled; how ironic. And with that thought, she took out her cellphone and hit a speed dial number.

"Jonathan? It's Lindsey. Listen, I've been...Jonathan, I miss you. Are you doing anything right now? I'd love...I need to see you....Really? Cool." She winced as she said

the word absently. "I'm under the giant squid." Who would have ever thought *that* could be a romantic line? "I'll see you soon."