

HOW TO TOUCH A NAKED MAN  
A NOVEL

By Michelle Stacey

*First of all—do we really need to say this?—just do it, as often and as enthusiastically as possible. But yes, there is a good way to touch a naked man...and then there is a mind-blowing, take-the-top-of-his-head-off, he'll-never-leave-you way to touch a naked man. If you've ever wondered whether your guy has a G-Spot, here's your answer, and it's not just a simple Yes: We're talking the A-Spot, B-Spot, C-Spot-and-beyond method of charting his bod, from that super-sensitive corner behind his earlobes, to the X-rated caress that will really curl his toes. We promise. We'll even give you back the bucks you spent on this magazine if this advice doesn't make you pretty much the hottest chick on the planet. So read on...and say hello to your new life as a man magnet.*

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*Sex is the most fun you can have without laughing.*

*Woody Allen*

## CHAPTER ONE

***TIP #547: Cheat-proof his love.*** *If there's anything that will make your guy run for the hills, it's feeling pressured or boxed in. Be sure to remove these words and phrases from your vocabulary: engaged, being exclusive, next year's vacation plans. And add these: velvet handcuffs, blow-job, lap dance.*

Amelia Belgrave sat on a barstool at the Campbell Apartment, an anachronistic room hidden in a corner of the cavernous, star-capped vault that is Grand Central Terminal, looking for all the world like a latter-day Holly Golightly—though minus the cigarette-holder, and with an oversized martini in place of a glass of champagne. The room itself belonged not to the 1960s but to the Robber Baron era of the Great Railroads: the former private office of mogul John W. Campbell, it featured immense leaded-glass windows, a massive stone fireplace holding a huge cast-iron safe, intricate Arts & Crafts woodwork, and a lofty cathedral ceiling. A monument to new money turned old money. And now to even newer money, stocked as it regularly was with loud-talking, roving-eyed junior banking types, Amelia thought irritably, her gaze brushing the crowd and then moving on.

She was slender, stylishly dressed in a form-fitting LBD (Little Black Dress in women's-magazine-speak, which had recently become Amelia's second language),

pretty in that smart-girl-not-perfect way. Marred only by the vertical frown creasing her forehead. Amelia hadn't noticed the small frisson of male appreciation that had rippled down the length of wooden bar-rail when she settled onto her stool. No, she was far too busy enumerating the slings and arrows of that particular day, and trying to pinpoint exactly which one had inflicted the most damage.

Was it when Viv, the editor-in-chief, had slid her eyes right past Amelia in the monthly Ideas Meeting, toggling between eye contact with the editors on either side as if Amelia were simply an empty, slightly inconvenient, chair? "Who left *that* there?" Viv's exasperated gaze seemed to sigh.

Or, perhaps, a few hours later when Amelia was called in to Gwen's office. Gwen was the lumpen, sluggish managing editor, whose twin purposes in life seemed to be nodding like a bobblehead at Viv's pronouncements, and carrying out Viv's dirty work while fixing her victim with a glassy stare. Today that involved informing Amelia that her edited copy was not "striking the right note lately." That Amelia seemed somehow "out of touch," in an amorphous way that was apparently impossible for Gwen to pinpoint, but that was clearly a *very big deal*. A potentially job-breaking kind of deal.

No, there really was no comparison. The arrow that struck deepest was more elemental. For girls, Amelia reflected, love would always trump work in the pain department. And today, after the dreadful meeting and the mortifying skewering of her editorial abilities, there had come that two-sentence email from Josh. How did I ever live with someone named *Josh*, she suddenly asked herself with the irrelevance brought on by half a giant martini deposited into an empty stomach. It's really so faux-sensitive, so over-used, so '70s, so *Biblical*.

Josh had written to say that he had a few more of her boxes. That she could come collect them at the apartment, or he could arrange for them to be delivered to her new place. It was all perfectly polite, perfectly civilized, the way grown-ups break up—and that was the agony of it. He didn't care enough to be angry. As they say, the opposite of love is indifference. And the fact that he could possibly be indifferent, when she could still recall viscerally the times when her least glance at another handsome face made him rabid...well, that fact made her furious. Livid. And dejected beyond measure. How could all of that mutual fire, which fed on itself, back and forth between them, sustained by the oxygen of their *mutual* jealousy, possessiveness, obsession—how could that be transformed, virtually overnight, to a pathetic little Dickensian blaze that she tended all by herself, cold hands to the flame?

Perhaps worst of all, she could not get drunk tonight. In fact, right this very moment she had to stop thinking about the Josh heartbreak, or the job heartbreak called *Chick* magazine (there would be plenty of empty hours later to explore the similarities between those two debacles). It was time to focus on the job at hand, this very evening; which, the way things were going, might soon be the only job she had. This one was freelance, a little odd-job that her lovable-space-cadet college friend Jamie had told her about. Freelance and bizarre, maybe even bordering on illegal—or at the very least immoral.

Suddenly someone dragged a chair across the floor of the bar, producing a sound that the echo chamber of Grand Central transformed into the roar of a lion—but a particular kind of lion, one of those big cats that pad back and forth behind the bars of a tiny cell in an old-school zoo. The type of zoo that puts up grand statues of lions and

tigers to preside over the entrance to marble lion-houses that look like chateaus, while inside their roars bounce off the cold floors and ceilings. And am I, Amelia wondered, the hunted and caged, or the hunter...huntress?

There was some satisfaction in knowing that right then, she could safely answer the latter. Amelia's freelance assignment at that particular bar at that moment was, in fact, to be a love detective. Or would love spy be more accurate, she wondered idly. Double agent, really. Jamie had made it sound fun—light-hearted, even. "I found this great way to make some extra bucks—it is so freakin' easy!" she had crowed to Amelia one day. Jamie was always looking for a way to make extra bucks, but never through actual "jobs." How could she get a *job*, she explained, eyebrows raised to her hairline, when Amelia occasionally suggested she might want to consider a steady income. She'd be tied down from nine to five (or nine to nine more likely, Amelia would interject), which wouldn't exactly be conducive to her just-about-to-take-off-any-minute acting career.

"But for this gig, they actually pay you to just sit in a bar and look sexy," Jamie went on. "Shit, I do that just for the hell of it." Jamie had heard about it from a friend in acting class (another girl who doesn't like having a "job," Amelia thought). The work was for a "private investigation" firm—Amelia immediately pictured a Raymond Chandler/Sam Spade type, fedora pulled low over his eyes, raincoat-belt tied, unfiltered cigarette hanging from his lips, the smoke making his eyes squint. But this firm had a specialty that was even more tawdry than your standard missing-person or corporate theft case: It catered to women who were so paranoid about their guy straying that they were willing to hire someone to be a decoy, just to see if their S.O.—Significant Other—was hitting up random girls in bars.

“Yeah, pathetic, right?” Jamie had said when she saw the incredulous look on Amelia’s face. No kidding! thought Amelia. Especially since the first question to cross my mind was whether I should have done something like that with Josh. Would that have helped? Would that have at least given her a little warning, a little head’s-up before her world came crashing down courtesy of one undeleted email? Maybe helped her retain one tiny, infinitesimal iota (I think that’s redundant, Amelia’s editor-brain interjected) of pride, of self-possession, when the truth came out?

When Jamie had told her about the detective work, Amelia had immediately seen irony with a capital “I.” What better way to recover from a cheater than to *catch* cheaters? What fabulous revenge—not against Josh, unfortunately, who in the space of one sad, rainy month had drifted far beyond her reach, either to tempt back or to torment. More like revenge against the whole self-involved, heart-crushing, casually careless species of twentysomething single men. Those guys raised on increasingly surreal video games and the assumptions of success—both at work and with women—that comes with access to your parents’ second-string Beemer at age 16 (soon to be your own Beemer, once you survived a few months without dinging it). Hell, those guys didn’t deserve the love and trust of the kind of girl who wasn’t willing to live a life of checking hidden pockets of wallets and sniffing shirt collars for unfamiliar perfume. Girls who had better things to do than mope around like one of those catatonic betrayed wives out of “Mad Men.”

So Amelia and Jamie had met up one evening when Amelia could escape the offices without suspicious glances from Gwen’s minions, and tottered over on impractical heels (“We have to look sexy,” Jamie explained) to a bland skyscraper on Sixth Avenue in the 50s. The express elevator whisked them to the 43<sup>rd</sup> floor, where an overly made-

up bottle blonde in stiletto heels led them to a windowless conference room. There, a similarly Sephora'd but slightly older woman named Yvonne put them through the paces of this strange underworld (underhanded? Amelia couldn't help wondering) assignment they were about to carry out.

"You have to be careful to not seem to come on to him in any way," Yvonne explained. "We have to be totally fair, and it's not fair if you're setting some kind of trap." There are ethics here? Amelia thought. What a topsy-turvy world we live in. "The bottom line," Yvonne summed up, "is that it has to be *his* idea, not yours." No strolling back and forth with swinging hips, no sly come-hither glances across a crowded bar. And yet, Yvonne then proceeded to give them each a "portfolio" that struck Amelia as pretty much the definition of "unfair advantage."

Amelia opened hers and started reading all about a handsome young trader on the energy desk at Goldman, one Greg Kirby. Greg, apparently, had a weakness for blondes. How original! Amelia snorted inwardly. Leggy blondes with Ivory Tower college degrees in things like history and anthropology and literature, who liked racquet sports and trips to the Caribbean. Favorite bars: Pastis when downtown, the Flatiron Lounge in Chelsea, the Monkey Bar or Campbell Apartment at Grand Central for Midtown...Gee, can we get any more original here? Amelia asked silently. How unimaginative *is* this guy, anyway? Did he set out to become a walking Ivy League Junior-Hard-on Cliché, or did it just happen? She looked up and caught Jamie's eye over her own portfolio (all about Tommy), and her look seemed to signal: Calm down, give it a chance, this is still a good idea. Well, he wasn't unattractive, anyway—or so it seemed from the blurry, cellphone-generated photo of a generic-looking WASPy type in a suit.

The portfolio information, Yvonne explained, came from the “client” (aka girlfriend/wife), and was intended to help the “operative” (aka Amelia/Jamie) be the “kind of target” that the “subject” (Greg/ Tommy) was naturally attracted to. No use putting a target out there who was so *not* his type that he wouldn’t look twice. Nope, if these women were going to fork over hundreds of dollars to find out how bad their bad-boys really were, at the very least the boys in question had to be confronted with the kind of hot girl they *would* hit on—if they were the type to hit on women other than their S.O.

Which is how and why Amelia was now sitting, increasingly grumpily, at the Campbell Apartment waiting to see if Greg Kirby would arrive with an entourage of other hot (or not-so-hot) traders, as he had told his girlfriend he would. And once there, whether he would drink with his friends and then depart for the uptown Lexington #6 train back to his apartment, or whether he would look around with hungry eyes and pounce on anything with a purse. Or maybe just one girl with a purse. Maybe just Amelia, the blonde, leggy, lit major in the form-fitting black dress. With just a hint of what could be a Caribbean tan—except it was really from a bottle of L’Oreal Ultimate Bronze self-tanner, since actually getting UV rays was practically grounds for firing at *Chick* (“Beauty Enemy #1: The Sun!! How to Outsmart Wrinkles Before They Add 10 Years to Your Age”).

She started wondering idly...did the newly cynical Amelia, sheltered in a carapace built from heartbreak, hope that this Greg Kirby would end up proving that, yes, men really *were* all dogs? (A theory that also, conveniently, would imply that Josh’s perfidy was not a commentary on her lovableness, but simply the Way of All Men, an inherent and Y-chromosome-transmitted flaw having nothing to do with Amelia’s irresistibility or lack thereof.) Or did the Inner Child Amelia—still the romantic 16-year-old, devouring

Harlequin Romances and Regency-era bodice-rippers—surreptitiously hope he turned out to be a good boy? That he would throw back a beer or two and then—demonstrating that at least *some* of the men in this world (even a few New York men) were Worthy—happily head out. Out of her life, never knowing how close he came to losing his girlfriend. And never knowing he had helped, just a teeny bit, to restore Amelia's trust—the trust of a woman he would never meet—in the future of love.

Then suddenly, there he was. Shit, he's better-looking in person! Amelia thought before she could censor herself. He was walking up the wide staircase from the main floor of Grand Central towards the bar, a wingman on either side (whom he effortlessly eclipsed, she noticed). He was most emphatically not her type, but even so she had to acknowledge some indefinable element of charm. Greg Kirby was tall and lanky, with sandy hair that flopped over his high forehead in a slight curve, and eyes that at a distance looked tawny, perhaps hazel. He had the look of someone whose family had been on this continent for a very long time, but not necessarily in an upper-crust venue—not one of those Dutch-named aristo families you'd read about in an Edith Wharton novel, but more like a longstanding Hawthorne-type farm family from the wilds of Maine or New Hampshire. He was wearing a suit and tie, but didn't look like he lived in it. It could easily be replaced by a flannel shirt and jeans.

Nothing about that look was particularly resonant for Amelia. She had almost always been firmly in the looks-like-he-was-born-somewhere-else camp: Jewish boys whose grandparents hailed from Russia (that was Josh), swarthy Latin types who looked like they belonged on the back of a Vespa (Giancarlo was the best), even one insatiable half-German, one-quarter Jamaican stock-broker who was the envy of her friends (darling

Marcus). And yet, there was no doubt about it—right now, and for the first time in a long while, Amelia was finding someone attractive. Someone who wasn't Josh, who looked like the opposite of Josh. That alone was cause for celebration, she thought as she stared back down into the depths of her martini.

And then she suddenly encountered the truly ridiculous dichotomy of her ridiculous freelance assignment. In a normal world, she'd want to sense Greg Kirby's presence behind her, leaning in and past her to order a drink, and then hear his voice. "Sorry," he'd say, casually. "Am I crowding you?" Or he might say, "Best place in town to miss a train, don't you think?" Or, "Is this seat taken?"

But this wasn't a normal world Amelia had signed on for, this was a sneaky-undercover-assignment world. So she suddenly yearned powerfully for him to be a straight arrow, to be so astonishingly unaware of the way her tight dress hugged her waist and the luscious curl she had coaxed into her hair in the locker room of the corporate gym after lunch that he would look right past her. He was that good a guy—he didn't see the delicious fruit in front of him as long as he was committed to someone else. Then she could go home to her tiny one-bedroom Chelsea apartment, make herself a grilled-cheese-and-bacon sandwich, and go to sleep thinking that someday Greg Kirby or his clone would come to his senses, break up with his nameless but deep-pocketed and suspicious girlfriend, and realize that the potential love of his Maine-farmboy-life had sat right in front of him at the Campbell Apartment a few months before.

But—hmmm—how would he then locate this elusive love-of-his-future-life whom he'd glimpsed for a few seconds at a commuter-railway bar on a random Thursday night? Fantasies were never as easily carried out as one hoped, Amelia mused. She

remembered, with an inner giggle, the way a former boyfriend had described his one foray into threesomes. “Well, it was fine—interesting even,” he’d said. “But, you know, it’s one of those things where you end up wishing you’d had some time to practice. Like, okay, now what am I supposed to do next? What am I *allowed* to do? Uh, if she’s the college ex-girlfriend of my bisexual current girlfriend...do I get to screw her? Right now? Or just do other stuff? What’s my role here?” Reality was so terribly inconvenient—so terribly *real*. No gauzy soft-focus shots.

“What’s so funny?” It was said in a charming way—okay, a flirtatious way. Amelia turned around.

Jesus H. It was Greg. She couldn’t help but smile; his tone was so jaunty. “Nothing really. I mean...just something a friend said a while back.”

“What was it? Looks like it was pretty clever.” He was smiling too. Damn him.

“Oh, I don’t think I could say in mixed company.” Her natural girl-instincts were kicking in. Wait, was she supposed to flirt back? Amelia felt a flicker of panic. What the hell was she supposed to do when the guy actually chatted her up? What did Yvonne Sephora say to do when that happened?

“But I’m not mixed,” he said immediately. The bartender arrived. “Grey Goose on the rocks, please,” Greg said to him. “See?” He smiled down at Amelia. “No mixers.”

“Me neither,” she responded, tilting her head toward her straight-up martini. “Just gin, and a glance at the vermouth bottle.”

His friends claimed his attention, and he turned away—reluctantly, she was pleased to notice. But wait! she lectured herself. Don’t be glad that he wants to flirt. No wonder his girlfriend is paranoid! He’s tall, he’s cute, and he comes on to random women

in bars. Or maybe it's the spell cast by the LBD and the blonde hair, artfully combined. Whatever. She's doing a job, and apparently doing it well. All she has to do is sit here, looking as normal as is possible for someone whose heart was fairly recently torn from her body, twisted into a pretzel, and sloppily thrust back in. How's that for a gruesome image, Amelia grimaced inwardly.

Or maybe outwardly, because Greg was talking to her again. "Not so funny anymore?" he asked, turning away from his wingmen, who were ordering their own drinks and doing a fairly blatant visual sweep of the bar. She must have looked startled, because he said, "Has anyone ever told you that you have a very expressive face?" That seemed like a rather intimate comment to make to a stranger, but against her will Amelia found herself responding to it. She liked it when people said what they thought, crossed boundaries, cut to the chase.

"Yes," she admitted. "Unfortunately. Apparently people can read me like a book. Drives me crazy. Although..." she lingered, appeared to think. "Maybe I'm just a helluva good actress, and I know how to lead people in the opposite direction from what I'm really thinking?" This was unintentionally and unexpectedly so close to the truth that she felt some heat rise in her face.

"Are you?" he countered. "A good actress?" There he goes again, she thought, being direct in a way that made her almost reflexively honest. And on closer inspection, his eyes were hazel with flashes of green. She punted.

"No. I'm an editor, actually." She saw the green flash a little brighter. The only phrase that got more of a reaction was "I'm a writer." Especially among the Wall Street set. Amelia's experience was that many of them, male and female alike (of course, most

of them *were* male) were frustrated literature or history or classics majors who had studied things like The Early British Novel or 19<sup>th</sup> Century Russian Lit as undergrads and thereafter—while they were socking away their various millions—felt perpetually annoyed that no one thought they knew squat about Culture.

Sure enough. “Really?” Greg said. “Where?”

Should she drop the C-bomb? Why not? “*Chick* magazine.”

He beat her to it—after blinking a couple of times. “No, I’m not thinking what you think I’m thinking,” he laughed. “Never mind—yes, I am.” He was extremely cute when he laughed, Amelia thought crossly. Expensive orthodonty, no doubt, in addition to the teenage Beemer. She waited for the usual suggestive comments: “So I guess you’re some kind of expert?”...or, “What kind of, uh, experience do you need to score a job there?”...or, “I’ve got a couple of great story ideas for you.” Greg skirted them all.

“Must be fun working at such a successful magazine.”

“Yeah, one of the last standing—if you don’t mind that the reason it’s still standing is coverlines like ‘His Burning Sex Need’ and ‘The Hundred Best Orgasm Tricks in History,’” Amelia said dryly. “I don’t know if fun is the word...but it *is* funny. You should be a fly on the wall at some of our editorial meetings. It’s pretty ridiculous what we end up talking about.”

“I should! I could dine out on those stories for a month.”

What an old-fashioned expression, Amelia thought. Probably an English major. “I never run out of cocktail banter,” she admitted. “But it’s actually a pretty weird place to work—lots of nasty office politics.” The moment the words came out she was flooded

with doubt: Was she supposed to be truthful? Was she even supposed to use her real name?

“Is there any place that isn’t?” Greg responded. “By the way, I’m Greg.” He put out his hand, mock-formally.

Too late; she couldn’t think fast enough for a pseudonym. “Amelia.” She shook it. His hand was warm and smooth. He kept hers one beat longer than necessary. Her first name was unusual enough that all he’d have to do was glance at the *Chick* masthead to get the whole story: Amelia Belgrave, Senior Articles Editor. Oh well. His friends claimed him and he turned away again. Before she had time to ponder her next move he had swung back with an annoyed look.

“Well, we have to go—there’s a business dinner we’ve been avoiding,” he said. “And we were just getting started. Can I give you my card? No, better—can you give me yours? I’d love to hear more about the magazine game sometime.”

And that, thought Amelia, is how the gods remind you that resistance is futile: you’re just screwed. She knew she’d play the what-if game later, to no avail: What if she hadn’t signed up with Yvonne? What if she met him without knowing he had a jealous girlfriend? What if he’d been about to end it anyway, and went ahead and dumped her before calling Amelia for a date? She’d never have known that he prowled. But then he wouldn’t be a “cheater” per se...there’s always some kind of overlap, endings are messy...Yeah, right, except she didn’t usually sit alone trolling at bars, so she would never have met him. And he must be a habitual maybe even egregious philanderer, or his girlfriend would never have gone so far as to enlist Yvonne’s troops. Damn.

“Sure, why not?” Amelia said casually, digging out a *Chick* business card—one of the job’s best perks, since it meant “media discounts” at spas and hairdressers, rock-star entrance to packed nightclubs, and pretty much any man’s attention...at least for a few minutes. This was exactly what the client was desperate enough to pay for: confirmation that Greg was acting like a single guy. A horny single guy. Was this the only way the poor woman could get herself to leave him—buying rock-solid proof that he was in fact the world-class dick she’d spent sleepless nights worrying that he was?

“Hey thanks,” he said, glancing down at the pink-edged *Chick* card. “Nice!” he commented, and looked back up at her, not bothering to brush aside the lock of sandy hair that kept flopping over his forehead. Did you practice that look in front of the mirror? Amelia wondered, suddenly furious at the world. The young Hugh Grant crossed with the young George Clooney? How old is *that* idea? She forced a smile.

“See ya sometime,” Amelia said, and turned back to her drink, not watching him head for the Vanderbilt Street exit, not much caring if she seemed rude. She couldn’t quite remember how far this whole charade was supposed to go. If he called, was she to say yes? Christ, I’m not a call girl! she fumed.

Her iPhone buzzed loudly on the bar beside her drink: incoming email. She picked it up: “VIV!” the little screen shouted. Editor-in-chief From Hell. Viv in the evening, after a drink or two, was horrific. Viv toted home reams of work and slashed her way through it in the early evening—Amelia pictured her on the couch in the living room of her Upper East Side townhouse, ice melting in a glass of whiskey on the side table. Why whiskey? She’d actually never seen what Viv drank, just the results. But Viv liked to cultivate a hard-boiled image, so whiskey it was. Then she would get out her trademark red pen

and start writing comments on manuscripts. The later it got, the sloppier and nastier everything became.

“What?” she’d scribble in the margins. (Was she the only editor left in New York who wrote comments on hard copy rather than doing everything onscreen?) “I have no idea what she’s talking about here. Clarify!” The last word underlined heavily. A few pages later: “Remind me why we assigned this to *her*? She’s clearly an idiot.” And so on.

Then Viv would bring the iPhone out, and pithy little phrases would start lofting over Manhattan toward their targets. Here was tonight’s, for Amelia: “Did you talk to the art dept about that chart for the STD piece? I can’t be keeping track of that stuff, that’s your responsibility! Let me know pls.”

If Viv didn’t get a response within a few minutes, she shifted you over to the “doesn’t care if she still works here or not” category—as she had made clear in many homilies about anonymous former staffers who never could quite realize that their work didn’t stop when they walked out of the Barnes Building at six or seven. Amelia tapped out, “Yes, talked to Jack in Art. He thought you didn’t want a chart on that? Should I tell him to design one now?” Send.

She sipped the now-lukewarm martini and waited. Buzz. “He should have asked me! He makes assumptions.”

That’s it? What the hell is the answer? Chart: yes or no? Amelia’s stomach clenched. What was the appropriate response to this nonresponse? A response that would convey only helpfulness, only eagerness, only responsibility.

“Yes,” she wrote. “So I will tell him to do the chart.”

Another sip, then an answering buzz. “We will talk tomorrow.” Great. Tomorrow would start off with a bang. An early meeting with Jack and Viv in which Amelia and Jack would get their asses handed to them for not understanding—something.

Just in case I might have forgotten, Amelia thought as she polished off her drink and pushed back her barstool, that my life sucks.