



The Weekly Man

Tina and Her Talking Nipple

Some people need to be taken down a peg or two, if not for their own good, then at least for the satisfaction of those of us who have to tolerate them.

Which brings us to Tina, who some would call beautiful, others would call stunning and still others would call breathtaking. But under the long blond hair, behind the deep blue eyes and under the surface of the perfect contours, Tina was a package of self-concern. In short, she was full of herself. She had a small red heart tattooed on her left thigh. Gracefully scripted white letters in the center of the heart spelled her favorite word:

Tina

Her relationships bombed quickly, with sex a one-act play starring Tina's premature orgasm followed immediately by curtain call. She treated her lovers like a mean-minded employer who laid staff off before it was time to pay benefits.

She had no girlfriends, self-absorption being one of those things that demands, well, self-absorption.

But these things sometimes come to a head and, for Tina, that head was the day her nipple started talking. It was the right nipple, the one she considered just a bit perkier than the other, the one she fondled most with her left hand when her right hand was between her legs in those quiet times of self-absorption.

She was in La Senza shopping for something that would look yummy in her mirror when she heard a squeaky female voice say, "You need to get something red. Yeah, something cherry red ... no ... fire engine red, red like strawberries and ketchup. Red."

She looked around. A young brunette rang in stockings for a heavysset woman watching the clerk's every move and every number ringing in on the cash register. Another clerk rearranged clothing at the back of the store. There was nobody within twenty feet. She shrugged and picked up a black thong that, one thread less, would have been lint.

“No, the red one,” said the voice. “You have lots of black. You need more red. Get the red one. Red. Red. Red.”

Not only could she hear the voice clearly, but as it spoke, her right nipple felt strange, as though it were shaking or twitching. She looked around again. There was nobody close, definitely nobody with a voice like that. Quickly, she scratched her right nipple with one of those wispy scratches, the kind that’s more likely to increase the itch but they don’t look like you’re scratching, and Tina didn’t want to be caught scratching her nipple.

“Thank you,” it said. “That felt good. Now, get the red one. The red.”

Tina jumped, looking left to right and behind her. Nobody was there. She was alone. “Where are you?” she said.

“I’m here,” said the voice.

“Where’s here?” said Tina cautiously, noticing again the movement around her nipple at exactly the same time she heard the voice. She looked down. Two perfectly rounded breasts molded Tina’s black turtleneck into a billboard for fantasy. “You got it,” squeaked the voice. “I’m right down here. Now, we have to make a fashion decision. You need to go with the red. Men like red thongs. Oh, pardon me—wrong motivator. *You* like red thongs. You’ll look great in a red thong. Think of all the quality mirror time. Maybe a photo opp. Go with the red, Tina, the red.”

And there it was again, movement under her sweater at exactly the same time she heard the voice. Her stomach tightened. She looked around again. No one was watching. She walked to the changing rooms, looked around, slipped in, ducked into the closest booth and locked the door. She lifted her sweater to reveal every man’s breast fantasy and every woman’s wish list. These were weapons grade bosoms, the kind to trigger wars and wooden horses. Tina stared at the right nipple. It was pink and erect, surrounded by rippled flesh, a masterpiece in balance and form.

The skin at the end of the nipple curled in and moved very much like the movement of lips when the mouth was talking. “Say... I’m not bad at all,” it squeaked. And Tina would have sworn that the nipple was actually pointing toward the mirror, as though it were looking at its reflection. “I’d look great under a red bra.”

Tina looked quickly at the walls surrounding her. “Who are you?” she said.

“Who do you think I am, Tina? I’m your nipple.”

“No you’re not. Nipples don’t talk.” She looked around the booth again, then examined her sweater closely. “Who are you? Who’s doing this? How are you doing this?”

Again the end of her nipple moved and the voice said, “I’m your nipple, Tina. And we’re going to have lots of fun together—shopping and going to movies and going on dates with boys and having sleepovers and taking long leisurely baths and going to the beach and...”

“Shut up!” said Tina. She closed her mouth quickly and listened, thinking *Did they hear me?* The last thing she needed was to have two La Senza clerks overhearing her talking to her nipples. Satisfied that no one had heard, she whispered, “Breasts don’t talk. Who’s doing this?”

“I’m not a breast. I’m just part of a breast. I’m your right nip...”

“Nipples don’t talk!” said Tina. *I must be dreaming.* She pinched the nipple.

“Ouch!”

There was something about the tone of the squeal and the movement at the end of her nipple as it enunciated the word that convinced Tina that her nipple was, yes, really was, talking.

“Why did you pinch me?” said her nipple.

She stared into the mirror with her sweater up over her breasts trying on this new reality like a piece of clothing she might decide was too loud, wrong for her eyes, or just not her. She decided

that it wasn't her. She wouldn't be buying it. No, she would put it back on the shelf and look for something else. Talking nipples weren't in season.

"What are you thinking about, Tina?" said her nipple. "Are you thinking about the red thong? I really like the red thong. It would look great on you. Why don't you just buy the red thong and we can maybe go to the food court and get something with tofu in it."

That was enough of that. She pulled her sweater down. She'd had her fill of talking nipples. She brushed by the clerk who'd been rearranging shelves at the back of the store, a too-skinny girl with eyes that were too wide, who was now eyeing the changing room, looking for the person with the squeaky voice she'd heard talking to the stuck-up blond.

Tina marched out of the store and into the early evening quiet of the mall. A sparse crowd of shoppers milled aimlessly, not buying, just looking and milling. Tina wasn't sure if this was a good thing, or if it would be better to have the commotion of a Saturday afternoon to drown out the voice from her chest.

"You should have bought the red thong," said the nipple. "Why didn't you buy the red thong? It was made for you. Are we going to the food court now? Can we get some frozen yogurt?"

A tall man with a red ball cap stared at Tina. Shit, she thought. "Can you please keep it down? People are staring."

"But people are always staring at you, Tina. You're so beautiful people can't stop from staring at you. I don't want to be anybody else's nipple. I'm a nipple on the most beautiful woman in the world and I can't tell you how proud that makes me feel, Tina. So...can we go to the food court now?"

Tina quickened her pace and walked out the main exit into the parking lot.

"Oh boy!" said the nipple. "We're going for a drive! I love going for drives. Where're we going? Can we go to the beach? Can we go swimming? I love swimming. Can we buy veggie dogs and smother them with organic mustard?"

This isn't happening to me, thought Tina. I'm having a bad dream. Somebody slipped drugs into me. I'm stressed out. I haven't been paying enough attention to myself.

"What're you thinking about, Tina? Are you thinking about all the fun we're going to have at the beach, running through the surf and building sand castles and looking for shells and..."

"Why are you doing this to me!" yelled Tina. Her eyes darted around the parking lot to make sure no one was listening. With the exception of a few dozen cars and vans, the parking lot was as empty as the mall. "I haven't done anything to deserve this. I gave at one of those Santa things."

"Oh, Tina, you're so funny when you want to be. So, are we going to the beach? There's still enough sun left for an hour or so and then we could go to a coffee shop or something, maybe get a veggie sub or..."

"How are you doing this?"

"Beg pardon?"

"Nipples don't talk. How are you doing it?"

The nipple was silent for a moment.

"What are you doing?" said Tina.

"Thinking," said the nipple.

"Thinking about what? Nipples don't think."

"You asked me how I was talking and I was trying to think about how I was talking but then you tell me I can't think. Well, Tina, you're right. I can't think. I can't think because you keep interrupting me so will you puuuulease give me a little space here."

“Don’t take that attitude with me,” said Tina. “You’re my nipple and I want you to stop talking. I want you to stop talking right now.”

She stood by her car—a white convertible Porsche with pink trim and pink interior—hand on the door latch, listening. She looked down at the surface of her sweater, at the bump of her right nipple. She waited a few moments before opening the door and slipping into the custom pink leather seat. She looked around. She loved her Porsche. It was so much like her—perfect. She never actually put the top down. That would be a hair disaster and it might trigger some sort of unfortunate makeup event—not that she used much makeup, perfection being a hard thing to improve upon. She turned the key. The engine hummed. She put the car in gear, eased up on the clutch, fed her baby some gas. She was in her Porsche. The voice was gone. Things were as they should be. She was the gorgeous blond in the white Porsche men would dream about for days after seeing her for just a flicker of a second as she breezed by like a hot dream. She relaxed into the soft leather of her seat as she eased into traffic and Kenny G oozed out of the sound system. Things were back to normal. She breathed easy.

“Got any Rock n’ Roll, Tina?”

She slammed on the breaks. A blue Punch Buggy almost rear-ended her, swerving to the side, horn blaring, and missing by inches. She slammed her hands down on the steering wheel. “Go away!” she yelled. “Just go away! Leave me alone! Why are you doing this to me?”

“Does this mean that we’re not going to the beach?” said her nipple.

“The beach! The beach!” Tina grabbed her right breast and squeezed. It hurt, but she didn’t notice. “We’re not going to the beach, you little shit. Forget the beach!” She shook her breast twice and noticed people on the sidewalk staring at the crazy beautiful blond lady shaking her breast and talking to it. She let go and screeched away, leaving the Punch Buggy driver swearing and checking the front of his car for dents.

“You really need to calm down, Tina,” said the nipple. “Have you ever heard of road rage? Do you want people to accuse you of road rage? And if you didn’t want to go to the beach, all you had to do was say so. I don’t think I feel like going to the beach now, anyway. Sun’s too low. Maybe we could go to that coffee shop now?”

“There’s no way I’m going anywhere public with you yakking your head off, or whatever it is...” She tossed her arms up. The car swerved. She grabbed the wheel angrily. “I’m talking to my tit!” she screamed. This time she didn’t bother to look around to see if anyone was watching her. She didn’t care.

Tina’s apartment was like her car, expensive and perfect. Mirrors strategically scattered through the white and pink furniture provided non-stop affirmation of her sense of self, backed up by elaborately framed pictures of Tina-this and Tina-that. Her apartment was a tribute to self-absorption where even the most confident men felt threatened, as though her pad would swallow them, chew them up and blow out pink spit balls. Being pigs, this didn’t stop them from wading through the pink fangs of emasculation and heading straight for the big round bed in her bedroom.

It was white. With pink pillows.

(By the way, Tina couldn’t really afford digs like hers, or the car. She had rich parents who doted on her, worshipped her, and spoiled her. They gave her money and credit cards. They stayed out of her life until she needed something. They were the perfect parents—for Tina.)

“Cool digs,” said the nipple. “You should...”

“You should shut up,” said Tina. “Do you have any idea how embarrassing this is? To have my own breast...”

“Nipple...”

“I said shut up! You’re so annoying. You’re like...like something sticky I can’t shake off my finger. You’re like...”

“What can’t you shake off your finger, Tina?”

“Nothing! It’s just a...” She stomped into the bedroom as she pulled her sweater off. It wasn’t a hard stomp, more like a well-placed stomp, a stomp with purpose and grace, a perfect stomp. She stood topless in front of her dresser mirror. She stared at her perfect body, the perfectly rounded shoulders, the perfectly wasp-like waistline, the perfectly indented bellybutton, the perfectly muscled arms, the neckline that streamed so perfectly out of the top of her body and into her perfectly sculpted jaw and, for a moment, she almost forgot that her nipple talked.

“It’s just a what, Tina?” A very short moment.

Suddenly, a thought occurred to her, something that might shed some light on the situation. “Why haven’t you spoken to me before?” she asked.

“Should I have?”

“You shouldn’t be speaking to me now. Why did you suddenly start?”

“Which question do you want me to answer first? Why I haven’t spoken before or why I suddenly started?”

“Just answer the question!”

“Which one, Tina?”

“Either one! Just answer me? Why did you suddenly start talking to me?”

“Oh, so that’s the question you want me to answer first, is it?”

“What?”

“Why I suddenly ...”

“Just answer the fucking question!” Tina slapped a finger to her mouth and stood, frozen, face astonished. She’d said the F word. The F word. Someone as perfect as Tina never used the F word—it wasn’t in her vocabulary. It was somebody else’s word. It was the word that men thought of when they drooled over her in their dirty little minds. It was something she heard in the movies or on television or on the streets or other public places, or on the radio, in rap music, but it was never something that passed through the finely crafted layers of lip gloss that accentuated the perfection of Tina’s mouth.

“You made me say the F word. You made me use the F word!”

“And you were really good at it, Tina. You should have heard yourself. You sounded really really forceful and, like, what’s the word for it. Oh yeah...pissed. You sounded so pissed, Tina. I was getting shivers in my...”

“I don’t use that word! Ever!”

“But you just...”

“You...just made me use it! I want you out of my life...now!”

“You want me to leave?”

“I want you to leave!”

Tina’s nipple thought about this for a moment. “OK.”

Tina cocked her head to the side. She narrowed her eyes. She stared down at her right nipple. She said, “You’ll leave?”

“If that’s what you want, Tina.”

“OK then. Just...leave.” She stood with her hands on her hips, tapping her index fingers against creamy flesh. It was about time to end this foolishness. This had not been a good evening. She hadn’t even bought anything at the mall, no shopping bags filled with clothing littered the foot of her bed. This had been a terrible night, all because of a talking nipple. She waited about a minute before saying, “Are you gone?”

“Do I look gone?” said her nipple.

“I mean...are you gone? You! Are you gone?”

“Tina?”

“What!”

“How do I leave?”

“I don’t know. How did you get here?”

“I don’t know. How did you get here?”

“I was born. I had a mother and father. They had sex. My mother got pregnant. Nine months later I was born. That’s how I got here. But you...you’re not even supposed to be here.”

“You’re not supposed to have a right nipple? That would look awfully silly, Tina.”

“Oh, you’re such a little brat! I am supposed to have a right nipple. I have a right nipple. But my right nipple isn’t supposed to talk. You’re not supposed to talk. You’re supposed to just sit there at the end of my right breast and make men pop their corks!”

“Is that really what you want to do to men, Tina, make them pop their corks?”

“That’s none of your business! That’s...”

“But if you want me to do that for you, then it is my business, isn’t it?”

Tina grabbed her breast again, hard. It hurt. She flinched. The pain made her angrier. She pulled it up toward her mouth. “No it’s not! It’s my business! My business! Not yours! Mine! Go away! I want you to go away and never come back.”

“You know, of course, they love you.”

“I want you to...” She loosened the grip on her breast. “What?”

“Your parents. They love you. They’ve always loved you, no matter how badly you’ve treated them.”

“What’s that got to do with anything?”

“You just said they’re how you got here.”

“So?”

“So, you should treat them a bit differently. You should...”

“Don’t tell me what I should do! I don’t need to be told what to do. You...you should get lost. You should stop talking...and...and tickling me at the end of my...”

“Is that what I do, Tina? I tickle you?”

“I’m not going there!” She threw her arms up, a movement that made the curves of her body shimmer and quake with just the right amount of tension to create the perfect balance between muscular insistence and sensual yielding. This, also, was something that would make men pop their corks. “I was at the mall. I was enjoying myself. I was looking at lingerie and...”

“You should have gotten the red thong, Tina. It would have looked great on you. You could be modeling it for yourself right now.”

“Forget the red thong! That’s it! I’m getting out of here!”

Tina stormed to her bathroom, stripping clothing angrily from her body and tossing it onto the plush white carpet, and what transpired between woman and nipple in the shower will remain forever in the shower. But, at this point, Tina was ready to try anything.

“Remember,” said Tina. “You promised.”

“I won’t forget, Tina. What you did to me in the shower was so...so...so really really cool. Was it legal?”

“Probably not. Now, you have to keep quiet. I mean it. No talking.”

Laser lights slashed the air around them. A continuous onslaught of blasting that was meant to pass as music shook the floor violently and nearly sucked the air out of Tina’s lungs. She stood majestically under the floodlight at the top of the short stairway leading to the main floor where people pretended they could hear others talking to them at tall skinny tables that barely held themselves up let alone a glass of beer or a Pina Colada, but were somehow packed with drinks. The dance floor writhed with a turbulent mash of flesh and designer synthetics. Tina glanced around casually, assuming her air of Beauty and the Boredom, bathing in the glow of attention that out-heated the floodlights. Just by standing there, she destroyed relationships. Women elbowed their men back to earth. Other women thought about dumping their men and crossing over.

“They’re all looking at you, Tina. You’re the star of the night, the center of atten...”

“Your promise?”

“Sorry.”

Tina stretched a devastatingly long leg wrapped in sheer black nylon onto the first step and let the rest of her body—which was also tightly wrapped in black—flow down the stairs after it. A tiny bald man sitting by himself and just about to sip from a Margarita in a wide-lipped plastic glass, squeezed so hard that he broke the glass and spilled green tequila and lime over his white shirt, but he didn’t notice. Men on the dance floor stepped on their partners’ toes. It seemed like Tina walked down those stairs forever. Two thousand corneas strained to keep up with what their irises were seeing in a thousand pairs of eyes. It was a big club. And right now it was full of Tina.

And Tina, of course, was full of herself.

She strode confidently across the floor to the bar and it seemed the music suddenly played for her even though it came from a CD in a tiny room at the top of the club where the disk jockey eyed Tina through the bullet-proof glass of a circular booth. He’d been watching her for months, dreaming about her, fantasizing about her, watching her dance and pick up men. He wanted to announce her name, to let everyone in the building know she was here, but that would bring attention to him. She might want to see him and then she would find out that the man behind the cool DJ voice that made women cream their panties weighed over three hundred pounds and had an extreme case of facial psoriasis.

He kept his peace.

Tina’s nipple didn’t. “They’re still looking.”

“Shhh” She tried to shush her nipple as quietly as possible, without drawing anyone’s attention, but that, of course, is a tall order for someone who just happens to be the center of attention wherever attention can be centered. Dozens of people in her path noticed her lips open to let the shush out. For some, it was just about the most erotic thing they’d ever seen, those perfectly rendered lips, full and sensual, reaching into the air as though to wrap around...

“Did that man over there just pop his cork?” said her nipple.

Fortunately, not only was the music loud enough to drown out the lack of substance in the conversations going on at the tables surrounding the dance floor, it was loud enough to blot out

the sound of Tina's nipple. But Tina heard it, and for just a brief moment it distracted her precise movement across the floor. She missed a step and nearly faltered. It wasn't a big movement, it was barely noticeable. Maybe half a dozen people noticed a change in the rhythm of her movement, and they were all men. In their minds, they were doing anything but judging her grace.

But Tina knew. Her nipple had just cramped her style. Her nipple had just detracted from the perfection that she had spent an entire lifetime cultivating. That little flea of a nipple was jeopardizing everything. She did something she never did. She changed direction, abruptly. Regular Tina-gazers in the club were dumbfounded.

She walked straight across the dance floor and into the women's washroom.

It was an upscale washroom, a washroom designed and maintained meticulously for a clientele that nightly snorted enough snow to finance small wars. The lighting was soft, the air smelled like wild cherries, the cushioned tile all but massaged the feet and the music was loud enough to puncture eyeballs. Tina walked directly into a stall painted tastefully in dark olive with light brown trim. Its tastefulness was lost on her.

She grabbed a thin black strip of material that barely made her dress legal and pulled it away from her nipple. "I'm getting really angry, you little bitch! You promised me that you would keep your mouth shut! I gave you a Triple X massage!"

Outside the stall, several women with white noses looked at each other, smiled and nodded knowingly.

"I'm sorry, Tina. I couldn't help it. You're so beautiful and you looked so striking in the spotlight. Everybody was looking at you. Everybody was drooling over you. They all wanted to have sex with you. They..."

More heads lifted up from the long white lines and turned toward Tina's stall. "Who does she have in there?" whispered a busty brunette with dilated eyes. A pink-haired woman with bits of powder dripping from her nose shrugged her shoulders.

"Will you please shut up! Why are you doing this to me? Why don't you go and make somebody else's life miserable?"

"Oh Tina, you know I can't do that. I'm a part of you. I belong to you. And I'm so happy to be a part of you, Tina. In fact, I'm going to tell the whole world..."

"No!"

"I'm Tina's right nipple! I'm Tina's right nipple! Everybo..."

"Shut up, you little bitch!" She pinched her nipple hard.

"Mmff!" said the nipple.

Outside the stall, a crowd was growing.

Tina's face twisted in pain. It was her nipple, mouthy or not, that she was squeezing and she was feeling the pain. But she squeezed harder. It was time to leave.

She waded through a dozen women gathered around her stall, all looking innocent and otherwise occupied when she opened the door after releasing the grip on her nipple and flipping the thread of material over it. She felt her nipple taking a deep breath, getting ready to say something. She pushed through the crowd. When she was out the door, the crowd peered into the stall to see the bitch who thought she was Tina's right nipple.

“Where are we going, Tina? You’re driving way over the speed limit, you know. You could get a ticket, Tina. Why are you so quiet? And why did we leave the club so soon? We didn’t even get to dance once. There were lots of really good looking boys there, Tina. We could have gotten lucky tonight. Some of them were losers, but some of them looked really promising... Tina? Tina? Where are we going? Speak to me Tina.”

“Mom?”

“Tina?” The middle-aged woman standing in the door of the big white house with the massive pillars out front was well tanned and a looker in spite of the lines around her eyes and mouth, though not as much a looker as Tina, but then, who was? “Is there something wrong, dear?”

Tina walked past her into a magnificent hall with a mahogany-balustraded staircase that fanned majestically to left and right. Her mother used the right; her father, the left. Tina used whichever she pleased. Her mother said, “What is it, darling?”

Tina’s nipple said, “Tina’s having a bad day, Mom.”

Tina’s mother thought a moment. “Is there something wrong with your throat, dear? You sound strange.”

“No, Mom,” said Tina. “There’s nothing wrong with my throat. My throat’s fine. It’s my nipple that’s all screwed up.”

A well-tanned middle-aged man with a salt and pepper moustache walked into the hall with a pipe in his hand. “Tina! What brings you here?”

“It’s her nipple, John,” said Tina’s mother. She looked at Tina. “Which one did you say it was, dear?”

Tina stamped her foot, just like she’d done all her life at her parents’ place. “It won’t shut up!” she said. “It just keeps talking and talking.”

Tina’s father pressed the mouthpiece of his pipe against his lower lip. There was no smoke surrounding it. In fact, there was no tobacco in it. There never was. He didn’t smoke, but he did like his pipe. With a voice steeped in the wisdom of fatherhood, he said, “Have you been taking your vitamins, dear?”

Tina thought a moment. Her father was generally wise about things related to vitamins. After all, he never actually smoked that pipe. But she wasn’t one to think long. She stamped her foot again. “It’s nothing to do with vitamins. Why does everything with you have to be about vitamins? It’s my little brat nipple.” She glared at her mother. “The right nipple. It won’t stop talking. It’s embarrassing. Do we have some kind of family curse?”

Her mother shook her head slowly as she thought and said, “No, Tina, dear. At least, not recently.” She looked at her husband. “John?”

He shook his head. “No. I don’t think it would be that, dear. She’s much too young.”

Her mother tightened up like someone with an idea freshly stuffed into her brain. “And you have been taking your vitamin pills, dear?”

“Yes, Mom, I’ve been taking my vitamins! Will you and Dad stop with the vitamins! I don’t need vitamins. I need for my tit to stop talking!”

“Now, Tina,” said her father. Her mother looked mildly shocked but didn’t say anything. “You really shouldn’t talk that way in front of your mother.”

“He’s right, Tina,” said her nipple. “That’s no way to talk in front of your mother.”

“Listen to your nipple,” said her father, nodding agreement. He put the pipe to his mouth and chewed on the mouthpiece as he thought. His chewing was slow and relaxed, the kind of chewing almost certainly to be followed by fatherly advice, possibly with a reference to vitamins.

“Your Dad sure does look dignified when he chews on his pipe, doesn’t he, Tina?”

“Will you please shut up!” yelled Tina.

“Now, Tina, you really shouldn’t be so harsh with your nipple,” said her father, who liked that somebody had finally noticed that he looked dignified with his pipe. “Remember...how you treat your nipple is how you treat yourself.”

Tina stared at her father. She couldn’t believe what she was hearing. “In case you haven’t noticed, my nipple isn’t supposed to talk. Nipples don’t talk. They don’t talk, Dad. They don’t talk!”

“I think your father understands, dear,” said her mother. “Would you like some pink lemonade, Tina?”

“That sounds really yummy,” said Tina’s nipple. “Some pink lemonade would...”

“I don’t want any pink lemonade! I don’t want anything except for my pestering little nipple to shut up!”

“A cookie, dear?”

“OOOOOOOOOH!” said Tina. She threw her arms up and stormed out of her parents’ house. As she left, they looked at each other and nodded their heads significantly.

Tearing down the street fast enough to leave a wake of dust devils, Tina banged her hands on the leather-bound steering wheel. Just the tiniest ripple of inelegance crept into the movement of her hands descending onto the wheel. Tina noticed this. It fueled her anger.

“You should try to relax when you’re driving,” said her nipple. “You don’t want to have an accident, Tina.”

Tina ignored her nipple. She was thinking. There had to be something she could do. There had to be somewhere to go. There had to be somebody she could talk to. A specialist. Somebody who knew about nipples. And then she had it...the Natural Wellness Mall. An entire mall devoted to mental, physical and spiritual health from massage to transcendental meditation. Two blocks of certified naturalpaths, certified shamans and those who were just plain certifiable.

It would have taken a cabbie looking for a hundred buck tip an hour to get there. It took Tina thirty-five minutes. On the way, she learned something new. Nipples could scream.

The main entrance to the Natural Wellness Mall was a polyethylene tribute to everything wrong with what people think is right about wellness. It was late but the mall was open all night. Annoying sitar music crinkled the air as a plastic waterfall sprinkled chlorinated water into a pool of scum-coated water lilies. The lilies, of course, were plastic. *Yes, thought Tina, if there’s anybody on the planet who can help me, that person will be here.*

She ran a long perfectly manicured nail down a neon list of live-forever-in-peace-and-harmony service providers. She ran her nail past Steel Penis Qi Gong, Transcendental Whale Sex, Five

Finger Stab To Wellness Dance, Intermediate God Walking, and then, there it was, Talking Nipple Exorcism.

Talking Nipple Exorcism. South Wing. Fifth Floor. Room Seven. Finally, somebody who would understand her and maybe even help her.

Her nipple had been quiet for a while now, still in shock from the ride to the mall.

The withered little woman sitting across from her must have been at least a hundred years old, maybe two hundred. Tina was certain that if she were to touch the yellowed skin attached to the protruding bones it would crumble into dust. Bits of scraggly white hair jutted out of her head. She smelled like fish and incense. Her eyes were hidden under a protruding brow and mounds of wrinkles.

The room was windowless. Dark rugs with Eastern themes hung from the walls. They smelled just like the old woman, maybe less fishier. The old woman's voice crackled like something crawling out of a time before time. "Have you been taking your vitamins?"

Tina thought for a moment. *Did she really ask me that?* When she was sure that it was really what the old woman had said, she leaned across the table, stared murderously into the old woman's eye pits and said, "Mention vitamins again and I'll dig my fingernails into those two holes you call eyes."

"Now, Tina, that's no way to treat your elders," said her nipple.

Spots of yellowy white appeared in the old woman's eye sockets. Her mouth opened around cracked brown teeth. "It talked!"

"Of course it talked," said Tina. "Why else would I be here? Can you get rid of it?"

"Get rid of your nipple?"

"No, smelly old lady... I want to keep my nipple. I just want it to stop talking. Can you make it stop talking?"

"It really talked."

"Yes, it really talked. Why are you so surprised? You're supposed to get rid of it. You do this all the time, don't you?"

The old woman's head bent slightly toward the table. Her withered lips clenched and unclenched and clenched again like they wanted to say something but were on a tight chain from the brain. She coughed a cough that could have originated in the center of a desert that had not seen rain since the dawn of time. Her wrinkled head raised slowly and Tina could see two embers of light in the recesses of her eyes. It chilled her. The old woman spoke. "Well, dear, I know the theory."

"The theory?" said Tina.

"There's a theory about me?" said her nipple.

"I'm not sure there's ever been a talking nipple to exorcise," said the old woman.

"Then why have a studio for Talking Nipple Exorcism?" said Tina.

"Well, we like to be prepared for anything."

"So, you don't know if it works or not," said Tina.

"In theory, it does."

"In theory, it does," said Tina sarcastically. "This is no damned theory, old woman! My nipple's talking and I want it to stop! Can you make it stop?"

Calmly, the old woman looked Tina in the eye and said, "There's only one way to find out..."

Tina hung at the end of her words for a moment, but the old woman seemed to be zoned out.

“I’d like to get this done sometime in this century,” said Tina.

“That’s not a very nice tone to...” said her nipple.

“Shut up! You’re the one who’s making me crazy this way.” She leaned forward, her face less than a foot away from the old woman. The smell of fish overcame the smell of incense and there was something else in there...the staleness of age? “I want you to do the exorcism. I want you to do it right now. Right now!”

A ripple spread across the wrinkles in the old woman’s face. Still sitting, she pushed away from Tina. “It needs preparation,” she said. “It takes careful planning. You need to approach this with an attitude of...”

“Right now!”

“Maybe you should listen to her, Tina. These things...”

“Shut up! You have no say in this.”

“Easy for you to say...you’re not the one being exorcised.”

“I’ll pay you double,” said Tina.

The old woman’s lips twisted into a crinkled smile. “Did I mention the Quick Start Talking Nipple Exorcism?” She stood up slowly, bones cracking and snapping. The smell of fish grew stronger. “Follow me.”

She led Tina through a curtain of black beads into another room hung with rugs, these ones showing strange animals with horns and scales and large teeth. Tina felt her nipple tremble.

“You better be worried, you little bitch. I’m going to shut you up for good.”

“Does this mean we’re not going to be buddies, Tina?”

Smiling cruelly, Tina ignored the question.

“No beaches?” said her nipple.

Silence.

“No yogurt and veggie dogs?”

Determined silence.

“No...”

“No talking tit!” yelled Tina. “Can we do this now?”

“Please,” said the old woman, gesturing to a mottled green sofa. “Lie down.”

Tina eyed the filthy piece of furniture. She didn’t want germs contaminating her dress, and something that looked like that had to be a germ factory.

“You’re not really going to lie on that?” said her nipple.

Tina walked to the sofa and lay down. It was surprisingly comfortable even though it smelled like incense and fish. The old woman sat on a rickety wooden chair by Tina’s feet. She closed her eyes and breathed loudly and deeply for several breaths.

“Is she going into a trance, Tina?”

Tina ignored the nipple. The old woman drew in a deep breath and let it out long and slow as she opened her eyes. “Pull down the top of your dress.”

“What?” said Tina.

“The nipple must be visible.”

“I’m not...”

“Do you want to be rid of this curse?” said the old woman.

Reluctantly, Tina pulled down the top of her dress. She was braless. Two perfectly balanced breasts, complete with perky upswings—the kind that make men pop their corks—stared at the astonished old woman. One of the nipples stretched out from the redness of its breast ring, its tip

folded and moving unnaturally. “Tina sure does have beautiful breasts, doesn’t she?” said the nipple.

The old woman clutched her chest. What little color she had drained from her face. Her eyes widened and froze. Her body slumped into her chair like a sack of potatoes. She looked like she was about to say something, but she would never get the words out.

She was dead.

She lay on her bed naked. Except for her right breast. It was covered haphazardly with duct tape. Bits of loose cotton peeped through the swatches of tape. It was going to hurt like hell when she took it off. She wondered if she would have to go through her whole life with her breast taped. She could feel that nasty little vermin twitching and turning under the tape, its voice muffled. She was exhausted.

She might have been into a little self-absorption before sleep. It was a good way to relieve stress. But not tonight. Tonight she felt like a stranger inside her own body. She felt detached from herself, at odds with the perfection that had suffused her life for twenty-two years.

The muffled voice seemed far away as she lost conscious and fell into a deep sleep.

“Time to wake up, Tina!”

She bolted upright, eyes round, staring straight ahead. The tape was off her breast, bunched up under her right arm. “Mom?” she said, and then remembered. Her nipple. It was talking. Driving her crazy. Spoiling her life. Talking. Her nipple. Her nipple had scared the old woman at the Natural Wellness Mall to death and then Tina had just gotten up off the smelly old couch and walked out without even calling the police. Somebody would find her. Somebody else would call the police. She’d left the Mall and driven around for hours, trying to ignore her nipple. It kept talking and talking. She’d come home and taped her breast. And now the damn thing was free again. And talking.

“It’s Friday, Tina. What’re are we going to do special today? It’s sunny out. We could go to the beach. Maybe shopping? Maybe we could take cabs today, Tina. I don’t want to complain about your driving, but...”

She slapped her breast hard enough that both she and her nipple ouches in unison.

“You have to stop doing things like that,” said her nipple. “Remember what your father said...how you treat your nipple is how you treat yourself. Maybe you should. ...”

Tina grabbed the balled up tape and pushed it into her breast.

“Umph!” said her nipple.

“There’s got to be some way to get rid of you,” said Tina.

“Umph!”

“I can’t go through the rest of my life with you yakking and yakking.” A sense of dread crept through her belly at the thought. If her nipple could talk now, then why couldn’t it talk forever? Who put time limits on the impossible? And how could she get away from herself? She couldn’t. She was stuck with this. But there had to be something she could do. There had to be a way back to the way things were. Nipples weren’t supposed to talk. There had to be a way to undo this.

What was it? Pressing the tape and cotton against her breast, she swung out of bed and shuffled to the washroom.

Shuffled.

“Do you think you could turn the hot down just a little, Tina? I’m not sure if a shower this hot is really good for your skin. Don’t you think it might dry your skin out, or maybe you’ll sweat too much and have an episode or something? Are you going to finish off with a cold shower, Tina? That’s really good for the pores, you know. Closes them up so that dirt and stuff can’t get in and...”

“I really love driving in your car, Tina. Everything is so...pink and white. It makes me feel so omphy inside. Does it make you feel omphy inside too, Tina? Are we going to get something healthy to eat today? I like eating healthy food, stuff that’s low in saturated fats and has lots and lots of fiber. Fiber is one of the most important things you can eat, you know, especially in the morning. Which reminds me...you haven’t had breakfast yet and that’s the most important meal of the day, Tina. Where are we going, Tina?”

“Don’t you just love the sound of the waves breaking on the beach, Tina? I love the beach—all the sand, the sun, the water, the boys, the smell of hotdogs and veggie fries, the...”

How the hell can it see? thought Tina. *How can it smell? How does it know anything? How can I kill it?*

“Whatcha thinking about, Tina?”

Let’s see what the little bitch has to say about this, thought Tina.

He wasn’t anywhere near Tina’s standards, but he would do. She’d picked him up in front of the post office with a simple “You. Come with me.” And what man could resist Tina? He was somewhere in his early twenties, hair shaved almost to the scalp, skinny body heavily tattooed, he was nowhere near Tina’s type but he would do.

“Tina,” whispered her nipple, “you’ve got to be joking.”

His name was Bob. He had the predictably threatened look as he took in the huge white bed and the pink pillows, but to his credit, he’d made it through the mirrors and pink in the livingroom. The corners of his mouth shook.

“Take your clothes off,” said Tina.

Bob looked at her, his eyes full of questions like, “Did she really say that? Does she really mean it?”

Tina helped him, not out of sympathy, but to just get this over with. “Bob. Take your clothes off.”

He pulled his shirt off. Ooph, nice six-pack, thought Tina. Shame about the rest of him. He pulled his pants down and stepped out of them.

“Tina,” said her nipple loudly, “You can do a lot better than that. Why don’t you go back to that club we were in last night? There were some really good-looking boys there and I’ll bet they all have better equipment than Bob.”

Bob stared at Tina’s right nipple, noticing with horror the writhing and twisting as it talked. It was like something being tossed around in the wind of its own voice. Less than a minute later, he was outside, running down the street, clothes in hand, wearing nothing but running shoes and tattoos.

“Can you turn pure white as fast as he did, Tina?”

“Does this mean that we’re friends, Tina?”

Seagulls squawked in the sky, bombing the rocks with globs of luminescent slime. A particularly large package splattered into an outcropping of rock to Tina’s left. “That’s you,” said Tina.

“So...we’re not friends? Is that what you mean, Tina? We’re not friends?”

“Is there anything I can do to make you go away?”

“I think we covered that ground, Tina.”

“Yes, we did, didn’t we.”

“This is a beautiful spot, Tina.”

Waves crashed into seaweed-wrapped rocks and filled the air with the smell of salt and fish. Behind Tina, a wind-eroded cliff soared a hundred feet over seagulls cracking into the shells of terrified King Crabs.

“Are you going to be with me forever?” asked Tina.

Her nipple didn’t answer.

“It’s a fair question,” said Tina. “I think I deserve an answer.”

“Can we be friends?”

“Never.”

“It’ll make it easier.”

“You make me a freak.”

“A freak is just someone who’s different than everybody else, Tina. You’ve been different than everybody else all your life. You’re perfect. Everybody else is less than perfect.”

“I’m not perfect with you yapping incessantly.”

“But you’re so beautiful, Tina. Every woman who sees you wants your body, your hair, your perfect lips. Every man who sees you fantasizes you forever, even when he’s with another

woman. You're the standard, Tina, you're the one everybody else looks to when they want to know how much their own lives can be improved. You're the measure of human desire, Tina."

"You're full of shit, you little brat," said Tina.

"On the other hand," said her nipple, "there is just one little thing wrong with your perfection..."

After what Tina thought was a longer than necessary pause, she prompted, "Yes?"

"There is one little thing about you."

Another long pause. "What, for crying out loud?"

"You're just too full of yourself, Tina."

She thought a moment. "That's it? I'm full of myself? That's all?"

"Well, Tina," said her nipple. "Some people think that's a pretty big fault. I think there might even be something about it in the bible, Deadly Sins and all..."

"Do you have any idea how hard it is to be perfect?" said Tina angrily. "The attention it takes to detail? The focus? Every inch of my body needs to be coordinated with every other inch of my body. I need hours of quiet and intense focus just to go to the mall for an hour, even if I hardly touch my face with makeup. Everything I say has to be faultlessly coordinated with my image. It makes it hard to be a sparkling conversationalist. It makes it hard to be somebody's buddy, to go out on the town on a bitch bash. I need to have everything around me focused on me so that I don't make any mistakes. And now you're ruining it all. I can't focus on me with you yakking all day and embarrassing me in front of everybody. I hate you."

"Remember what your father said, Tina?"

"What? About vitamins?"

"No, not vitamins," said her nipple. "The other thing. Let's take it a step further...how you feel about your nipple is how you feel about yourself."

And with that, Tina's nipple stopped talking forever.

Well, with the exception of unfinished business. It happened while she was shopping.

"That's right, Tina, the red one."