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## Beyond Being Mom

finding the "ME" in "mommy"



by Elisa Roland

# AN AWKWARD INDULGENCE

It's easy to lose yourself when you become a mom. I swear I'm in here somewhere. So I listened to the articles that said taking time for yourself will make you a better mother. I threw away the guilt and carved out some hours in the day just for me. There were bumps and bruises along the narcissist path. Like what to do if tomato hornworms invade your new garden (ew!) or your hairdresser's husband turns out to be your masseuse (awkward!). Join me as I attempt to fill you in with pertinent info on where to get a fabulous haircut, what is proper massage etiquette, or how to compete in a triathlon without making a fool of yourself. I admit it may not make you a better mom, but it might make you a smarter woman.

I am not a swinger. My husband and I don't subscribe to open marriage. Yet every so often he lets a complete stranger rub my naked body from head to toe. Thankfully a massage doesn't break the sanctity of any marriage vows, although sometime it feels like falling in love all over again – with my old self. A good massage relaxes every limb, eases my mind and makes me feel great. It's fifty minutes of pure bliss where I am literally kneaded back into a human being. **But like discovering freezer burn on your ice cream, even a treat can be a disappointment.**

Unfortunately, I'm not one of those people who get a massage once a week or even once a month (one can dream) so I'm hardly a massage expert, but even I know when a massage experience is not a good one. And I don't mean that they didn't get all the kinks out of my back. It's more comparable to the dream where you show up to school in your underwear, awkward and embarrassing.

For several years I frequented a hair salon with a wonderful stylist, Vanessa. Her husband, Barry, was an aspiring actor who sometimes assisted at the salon. He was also a masseuse.

One crisp October weekend a friend organized a spa day in the city. How could I resist? Hours later I was at the spa relaxing in my obligatory plush robe and slippers. They called my name and I shuffled out to meet my masseuse. ....

"Barry?"

For a minute I thought the dimmed lights and flickering vanilla scented candles were playing with my eyes until Barry looked at me with that double take – I know you. Uh oh.

With millions of people in Manhattan, half of which are probably aspiring actors working as masseuses (or waiters), Barry ends up being my masseuse?

"I'll be your masseuse today," he says formally.

Maybe he doesn't recognize me?

"Unless you have a problem with that because, you know?"

He recognizes me all right. Why should I have a problem with that? It's just a massage after all.

"No. It's fine. How's Vanessa?" I try to sound nonchalant.

"Great."

Awkward silence as I follow him into a small room with even dimmer lights (thankfully), and soothing new age music.

I nod and I swear I see relief in his eyes that I'm not some kind of massage virgin.

"So you know the routine. I'll step out and you can disrobe." He points to a hook above a plush chair. "You can lay face down under the sheets."

I nod again. Maybe I should ask for a different masseuse? Maybe he should offer to swap with someone else? Maybe I'm being overly sensitive?

I've always wondered how my college roommate's OB/GYN was also her neighbor. She had no problem chitchatting with him in her driveway then seeing him from a whole other angle at his office. I still didn't get it.

Then Barry opens a drawer and pulls out something I've never been offered at a spa before or since – a pair of paper panties.

"You might want to put these on," he casually suggests.

"Oh. I have on my own." I do not do massage in the buff like some people I know. Thank goodness, because paper undies are just weird.

"Okay, then. I'll be back." Barry disappears.

I wanted to crawl under the table and die. There was no way out of this now. I think Elizabeth Arden frowns on customers running down Fifth Avenue in their robe and slippers.

In the end Barry gave me a decent massage, but the relaxing effects were wasted. I couldn't escape that this was Barry -- Vanessa's hubby. Maybe I'm a prude, but it was too familiar. Every time I've crashed into him since I've had to block out the image of him offering me those paper panties. Yuck.

My second bad massage experience occurred at a stately old hotel in Lake George. I was looking forward to my massage all week. An hour alone for myself during a family vacation. Again my masseuse greeted me in a dimly lit enclave (a sign). He introduced himself as Todd. Phew. I'd never seen him before in my life. The massage itself was unremarkable. I was grateful for the hour of me time before meeting the kids at the pool.

The next day while the kids got breakfast with the hubby I accompanied a friend on a hike to see some of the beauty of Lake George. She'd hired a tour guide to lead us to the mountaintop.

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Surprise! Todd. He was obviously a man of many talents. Would he show up next as our chef in the dining hall? Or perhaps as the activity director leading bingo?

Perhaps having Todd as a tour guide was not as awkward as being offered paper panties by your hairdresser's husband, but spending the morning hiking with a man I did not know, who yesterday had been massaging my every crevice, was uncomfortable. Todd never acknowledged that he was my masseuse from the day before. I guess after a few rubdowns all limbs tend to blend together. The hike was lovely. The views were beautiful. We even saw a porcupine. And I didn't say a word.

What is proper massage etiquette? After some research all I discovered is where a legit masseuse shouldn't be massaging. Nothing about what to do if you know your masseuse's wife or he's your mountaintop tour guide. I don't think I would have had any qualm if either of these episodes involved female masseuses. I guess I like the idea of a massage being anonymous. I don't want to think about the person rubbing my back; I just want to enjoy that feeling of disappearing into myself for an hour.

I have not stopped getting massages. I admit I'm a bit hesitant now to choose a male masseuse. I've read that most males choose a female masseuse and so do most women. Someone's got to give the guys a chance, right? Plus, I've had some great massages by men. Seriously, it's all about what you're comfortable with. A massage shouldn't make you feel awkward or embarrassed. I should've told Barry I'd rather have another masseuse. I should've bowed out of the hike with Todd. But whether my masseuse is named Chuck or Sarah, a massage is one indulgence I'm not giving up.

*Elisa Roland lives in Mountainside with her husband, three children, cat, fish, and ladybugs (they've taken over!). She worked for 12 years in advertising and is now pursuing her dream to publish a middle grade/young adult novel. She can be reached at [elisa.roland@verizon.net](mailto:elisa.roland@verizon.net).*

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