

Aficionadas - Part Two

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Two and a half years later Peter and Clara meet.

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Answers "Peter! My man!" The voice was low, in recognition of the library setting, and it was accompanied by hands tightly gripping Peter's shoulders from behind. A moment later, Jason sat in the chair across from Peter at a large table on the ground floor of the university library on a Monday afternoon. "Geez, Jason," Peter answered. "Hi. I haven't seen you since I don't know when." "End of fall term last year," Jason said. "Don't you remember? I went down to Oregon for spring semester last year?" "Yeah. Yeah, that's right," Peter answered. "I thought maybe you'd stayed down there. It's the end of September and this is the first I've seen of you." "I've seen you around," Jason said. "I've just always been on my way somewhere. Good to see you. So, you still with what's-her-name, uh...?" "Heidi." "Heidi, yeah, Heidi," Jason said. "Nah. She's in Hawaii. Decided to do a year in Hilo. You know, that go-to-another-school-on-in-state-tuition-if-you-want thing," said Peter. "Oh, that's a shame. I mean good deal and all, but you two had something going. You must miss her," Jason said. Peter caught Jason's eye with a level stare. "What? No?" "Jas, we were just freshman year fuck buddies." "Fuck buddies?" Jason said. "No shit? I saw you two together a lot last fall semester. I just thought you had something real going." "What? Being fuck buddies isn't real?" said Peter. Jason looked like he might hazard an answer and then thought better of it. Instead, he took a different tack. "I don't know, Peter," Jason said. "I always got the impression you two were a lot closer, or, well, maybe that's what Heidi wanted or something." "Oh, yeah, no doubt about it," Peter said. "Yeah, she definitely wanted the next level, or some kind of shit. But fuck buddies was fine with me." "I wouldn't think she'd put up with that," Jason said. "I mean, she was pretty smart. If she wanted a real relationship maybe she'd try it for a little while but when it didn't happen she'd dump you and move on. I mean, you know, sorry, but that's the way she seemed to me." "Oh, Jas," Peter said, "now you're asking the master for his secrets." Jason looked uncertain as to whether or not he necessarily wanted to be in on whatever mysteries Peter seemed anxious to share. Peter noticed his reticence. He got back in gear. This is just too cool to not share, Peter thought. "Okay. Want to hear a funny story?" Peter asked. "Sure. Yeah," Jason answered. "Okay. Heidi and me were lab partners back junior year at high school when we were seventeen. And near the end of the year, like in April, these notes from some girl started showing up...you know those drawers in the lab benches no one ever uses?" Jason nodded. "Well, in the drawer where I sat these notes started popping up every few days. Like, 'How

are you?' and 'You're cute,' and 'I like your ass,' and shit like that. I had no idea who they were from. The year ended and I still didn't know. Senior year went by and I graduated. Well, this time last year, beginning of freshman year, Heidi corners me and says the notes were from her! So, I'm thinking, geez, why would she tell me this shit unless she's looking for something, you know, personal?" Jason looked at Peter, noncommittal, wanting to find out where the story might go. "So, anyway, we get into this thing," said Peter, "and after a while I tell her that I'm really into her, but I'm really scared of a full relationship, but maybe we can just hook up for a while." "And she was cool with that?" Jason asked, skeptical. Peter laughed. "No, of course she wasn't. But I had been going with this girl, Melanie. We went to the junior prom and were together all through senior year, and Heidi knew that. So, I just made up some bullshit about how Melanie left me without a word, and how bad it hurt, and how I was scared of getting hurt again, blah, blah. So, Melanie's down the Lower 48 at school, so who's Heidi going to check the story with? It took her about a week to come around, but she finally caved. After that we hooked up all the time." "So, after a while why didn't she dump you?" Jason asked. "Ah," Peter said, coming to the genius part of his story, relishing the opportunity to reveal it to a member of the unwashed rabble. "If she wants a real relationship then getting and keeping some girl for your fuck buddy calls for a delicate touch, as I've illustrated. Every once in a while, like once a month or so, right around their period is the best time, you just drop a little bait. So, you might say something like, 'Gee, have you ever thought maybe we should kind of get closer? Take the next step?' And, you know, she doesn't want to seem like what she's doing is wrong, so she'll always say no. The period helps. You know how they get: emotional, weepy and shit. They don't want to deal with anything too heavy, so they say no. Heidi was always out of it then, anyway. Bad cramps every month. Nothing really helped much. So you let it go, but you've... How shall I say it? - dropped the chum in the water, and she'll keep circling." Peter smiled at Jason; satisfied, conspiratorial. I think I'd really like to go take a shower, Jason thought. Heidi is probably in Hawaii because she couldn't stand the sight of Peter anymore. But, who knows, maybe she'll come back with a great tan and all ready to let herself be deluded again. "Gee, Peter, you know, I don't think I could do that to someone," Jason said. "Hey, you do what you gotta do to keep the pipes cleaned out," Peter answered and shrugged. "So, you said Heidi was doing this note thing at the end of your junior year?" Jason said. "Why didn't she ever try to get together with you senior year?" "She probably was dying to," Peter said, "but, like I said, I was with this girl, Melanie, all senior year. I knew her from elementary and middle school and about the time the notes started we went to the junior prom together. Get this, she asked me! And we just kind of stayed together for the rest of high school." "So, were you having sex with Melanie all senior year?" Jason asked. He was almost afraid to hear the answer, but he had to admit there was some sort of morbid fascination at play. How often do you get to talk to someone who's honed being a scumbag down to a science? Jason thought. Peter hesitated for a moment before answering. Yeah, telling Jason they'd had sex all senior year would make him feel like his dick was ten inches longer, but they hadn't. In truth, Peter had been terrified to make a move; not just afraid of her reaction, or of rejection, but of getting into sex. God, if he'd only known then what he knew now. Well, the truth was good enough. "Not until after graduation. Then like six weeks before she left for college, wham!, we

were doing it." Peter said. "We were watching that Tom Cruise movie, you know, Risky Business , and it gets to the part where Tom's pitching the go-cash-in-your-savings-bonds-and-come-fuck-a-hooker idea to everyone. He's gassing up the car and there's this kid from his school. And Tom's telling him something like, 'You're going off to college next year. Man, you've gotta get the lay of the land. College women can smell inexperience. Like dog shit.' And I'm thinking, geez, good advice. But I guess Melanie was thinking the same thing because suddenly she's all over me. That last six weeks we must have done it like fifty times. Fucking every way you can imagine. She got this book. Well, not every way. Some of those positions are just nuts. Like, I can't imagine anyone actually doing Wheelbarrow, except maybe once just to say they tried it. Anyway, then she went off to college and I haven't heard from her since." Lucky girl , Jason thought. "That Melanie was a real hardbody." Peter continued. "She ran cross country all four years. Heidi wasn't like that so much, rounder, you know. But, geez, with Heidi the tits alone were worth the price of admission." "Yeah, I'm sure," Jason said. Macabre attraction aside, he was getting weary of the conversation and more than a little repulsed. "Hey, I really need to go and get some work done." He didn't, but it was a useful white lie. "Me too," Peter answered. He indicated a small stack of papers in front of him. "Creative Writing. We get these writings that people in the class do, and we read them and then do this critique thing on each of them. The class is in like three hours and I haven't even started." "Must be a lot of reading," Jason said. "Not really," Peter answered. "Most people do poems so, like, a page or two. Some people write stories that can get a little long, but mostly it's poems. This week it's four poems and this creative non-fiction thing that's just ten pages, so not so bad." Jason was actually enjoying talking to Peter, beginning to remind himself why they'd been friendly, now that the subject had turned away from manipulating and using people in a vile way. Jason felt comfortable enough to offer something vaguely roguish. "Wow, Creative Writing; must be a lot of good looking girls in a Creative Writing class." Peter looked at him with a stern eye. "Geez, Jas, is that all you can think about? That's fucking pathetic, man." Peter immediately started into some half-suppressed laughter. "See you around." Not if I see you first , Jason thought. * * * * * "So, that just leaves Clara. Last one for the night," the professor said. She looked at Clara, sitting to her right. "Could you pick a passage from your story to read please?" "Um, okay. My story is creative non-fiction. I thought I'd read the last part," said Clara. "In mid-August the time for Clara's move came. She tried calling Heidi to meet before she left, but the messages went unanswered. Their household packed and shipped, Clara and her mother, father, and younger brother drove onto the ferry. Clara stayed with her family while they picked up the stateroom key at the Purser's office, and she went with them to the room to arrange her things for the voyage to Bellingham. After a while the ferry's motors gunned, and Clara could feel the boat begin to move from the dock. She said she was going up on deck. "Clara went to the stern railing. The boat's wake, white and widening, trailed behind. Mount Stroller White, with Mount McGinnis like a younger sibling in front, the spikes of the Mendenhall Towers, and hulking Mount Bullard were flushed from the light of the setting sun. The lower reaches of Mendenhall Glacier wallowed in shadow. All of it was slowly receding. "Her questions began. Why couldn't she have managed to put things right with her friend? Was that really so hard? Was it that she was afraid of that extra stirring of emotion she'd begun to feel

toward Heidi? She thought she knew what it was, but why would that be so threatening since she was leaving? The thought of Heidi brought Peter to mind. Could that have turned into anything? Do you really have to lose your best friend over a boy? Clara knew the questions were ones she'd likely never learn the answers to. Her friend Heidi and maybe-it-could-have-been-something Peter were receding, just like the ruddy mountains. "Clara knew those questions would ask themselves again, though. The names would be different, but the questions would be the same. She wished she could have the answers to Heidi and Peter: those would help her find the answers the next time the questions arose. The M/V Columbia picked up speed, but the ferry terminal was not so far away yet that Clara couldn't recognize Heidi when she walked from the building and came to stand at the dock railing. Heidi raised her arm and waved it over her head. Clara pressed the ends of four fingers to her lips and threw the kiss to Heidi. She extended the hand above her head and slowly waved, tears wetting her cheeks." When Clara was finished reading the professor said, "Okay. Creative non-fiction. Clara's piece is called Questions . Discussion. So, let's start with what you think Clara did right." A student cleared his throat and the conversation on Clara's writing began. Clara hadn't shown up until after the mid-class break. She'd not wanted to have to deal with Peter during the break. Peter would have discovered when he read the story during the week that she was the note girl. Her interest from three years before hadn't died. It had lain dormant, in limbo, apparently never to be used or explored. She'd taken her senior high school year in Alabama and had done a year of college there. Then she knew she wanted to come back to Alaska. Her father had another year until he could retire, and her parents were moving back then. But Clara had wanted to come up right away. She wondered sometimes where Heidi had gone. Then the first evening of this Creative Writing class there was Peter! She'd had no idea he was going to school here, but there he was: older, more mature, exuding confidence. Melanie, apparently, was no longer in the picture. Clara's old wonderings quickly changed to a desire to find out. If her essay, revealing her identity as the note girl, and her musings about a relationship with Peter didn't do it, she figured nothing would. The class was finally over, everyone packed away their laptops, folders, and books. With her peripheral vision, Clara kept an eye on Peter's progress in that regard, sensing Peter similarly keeping an eye on her. She tried to time her departure for near, but before, his. When she thought the time was right she picked up her things, walked out the door and down the hall slowly. "Clara," Peter said as he emerged from the classroom. She stopped and turned, and Peter quickly closed the distance to her. "So, that was you a few years ago? With the notes in the drawer?" "Yeah, I sat on that stool two periods before you," Clara said, smiling, enjoying Peter's surprise. "Quite an essay. How did you know how Melanie and me ended up going to the prom?" Peter asked. "I knew Melanie some." "She knew about the notes?" Peter asked. Clara nodded. "Yeah, I told her. That's what got her thinking about you again and about going to the prom with you." Clara started laughing. "She thought it was hilarious when you started asking her at the prom what science she was in." "And all that stuff about how interested you were in me?" Peter asked. "Mmm," Clara said and shrugged. "You didn't have a problem with Melanie and me going out and being together?" Peter asked. Clara shrugged again. "When you two made plans to go to the prom we'd just started the notes. Then you guys were pretty committed, so I couldn't step on

Melanie's toes. But Heidi didn't know Melanie. Heidi was really interested and thought she might have a shot. I'm just sorry it all turned out so bad between us." Heidi sure got her shot . All last year , Peter thought. "All senior year Melanie never said anything about the notes or you," Peter said.

"Remember, I was gone by then to Alabama," Clara said, "but, no, I'm not surprised she didn't. Too many complications." Peter didn't want to get into how Clara could write about his thoughts. It was creative non-fiction, but he was unnerved at how close she'd come most of the time. Really, the only question left was who was telling the truth about writing the notes. Clara might still have made up that it was her. Or had Heidi been lying when she told him last year that it had been her? It was an interesting question, but one to which the answer didn't matter much. Heidi and Clara were both in on it, and both used the claim to get to him. Heidi had never mentioned Clara. He guessed because of their falling out. Over him! Wow! The thought warmed his heart. Maybe they'd actually had a real knock-down drag-out. Clara would never include that in a story for class. A real catfight? Over him? Cool! "Neat way to let me know; write about it for class!" Peter said. His mind began to focus, to get down to business. Like Heidi, Clara wouldn't have bothered unless she was interested in him, so he knew he was halfway home. Now he just needed to say what she wanted to hear. Reel her in. "Wow! It was hot. You were right. You really had me going. Then they just stopped. It drove me crazy." Clara giggled at her mental image of befuddled Peter. As they talked they also walked, and were soon on the library's middle floor. They found armchairs away from anyone else. When they were seated, Peter said, "So you weren't here on campus last year?" "No," Clara said. "My dad is Coast Guard. Well, you read the story. We moved to Alabama after junior year, so I did my senior year and then I went to college for a year down there. But I really wanted to come back here. So do my folks. Now my dad's got a year left until he can retire, and as soon as he does they're coming back up." Peter could see it, almost like he was reading dialogue and stage business directions from a play script. PETER: [After a beat] Well, I'm glad you did. Not enough good looking women at this school! (Peter breaks contact with Clara's eyes. His gaze drops down and back up her body, pausing on her chest for the most perfectly timed moment.) Try that with some feminist crazy and she'll piss her pants and go off on you , Peter thought. But, if a girl is interested, she wants the once-over and your eyes on her chest for that most perfectly timed moment . Peter's gaze returned to Clara's face. She was smiling demurely, and her color was high. * * * * * Peter and Clara saw a lot of each other. Their awkward touches became hand holding, the hand holding became arms around shoulders or waist. In private, their tentative kisses and touches graduated to hot, wet lip locks and intoxicating caresses. One night a couple weeks later, they found themselves at Peter's basement apartment. It was in his parents' house, on a side street a half mile off campus. His parents had decided to fix up the basement so he'd have some privacy. It had its own separate entry. That way after he'd left for wherever, they could rent it. That night on the couch, their making out had become heavier than ever before. Clara's top was open, her bra loose, and Peter was at her breasts like a famished four-month-old. Clara knew it was time. The bedroom door was ajar. The bed within was calling to her, louder every time Peter gathered her breasts together. She moaned and said, "Peter, God that feels so good." Peter moaned back. "You know.....oh yeah, do that some more, right there.....I think I'm really beginning to fall for

you." Peter's mouth left her breasts and he kissed his way up to her neck. He ran the tip of his tongue around the hollow of her throat and then very deliberately dragged it, the touch light and tantalizing, to the side of her neck. "I know, Clara," Peter whispered. "I feel the same way." Clara groaned and Peter brought his mouth back to hers. Between kisses Clara said, "I really want to find out where a relationship between us could go. I'd love to find out where a relationship between us could go." Peter pulled back. "Relationship? Clara, I, uh, I don't know I'm really ready for that." Peter's eyes were blinking, and Clara pulled back, too. "The idea kind of scares me. There was a girl," and Peter jotted a mental post-it that he'd have to come up with a name for her at some point that wasn't Heidi. "She's not here on campus anymore. But we were together all last year and I really fell for her. I mean I was so ready for love, and wanted to build something with her so, so much. But at the end of last year she just left. Not a word. Transferred, I guess. God, it hurt so bad." Peter had been looking down. Now he looked up into Clara's eyes and saw the wet track of a tear that had already rolled down her cheek. He'd hoped he was hitting the right vulnerability and emotional anguish chords, but, shit, this was easier than he'd ever imagined! "Peter, you don't have to be afraid of that," Clara assured him. "I'd never do something like that." "Maybe," Peter said, hesitant, fearful, timid. He lowered his chin and turned his head slightly away from Clara so he was looking at her a bit indirectly, "Maybe we could just, sort of, hook up for a while." Clara looked uncertain. The evening now wasn't progressing as she'd envisioned. "Hook up? You mean like just have sex and not really be trying to have, like, a relationship?" Peter nodded, "I'm just so scared of being hurt again." Clara had seen the evening's road ahead of her. It led from the couch, through that bedroom door, and into Peter's bed. Now she could see that there was actually a fork. One branch led to Peter's bed. The other, and she realized with a little shock that she was already on it, led to the door to the outside, her car, and back to her room. They kissed some more, talked, tried to find the right words, but within fifteen minutes, with more kisses and hugs, they were at the door. Then Clara was walking to her car, wondering what had happened. He just wants to get together to have sex, she thought. Still, how can I imagine the hurt he's experienced? Clara remembered the ache she'd felt in the elevated walkway, her tears finally under control and finally able to open her eyes, and Heidi was just... gone. Peter got into the shower. He'd known that fork was in the road, that they'd reach it this evening. He'd also known they'd end up on the branch that led to the door to the outside. He thought about how his thing with Heidi had started. After they'd reached this fork it had been seven days and five hours until Heidi talked herself into the idea that hooking up was just a pothole in the road to love. Clara's tear track came back to Peter. It wouldn't take that long with Clara. He was certain. * * * * * Three days and nineteen hours later, it was late afternoon on a Saturday, Peter answered his door. As soon as he saw she was wearing heels he knew she'd caved. They were just pumps. But heels on a Saturday afternoon at college? She also wore dark leggings and a knee-length trench coat. He knew the leggings were thigh-huggers, and that otherwise she was naked under the coat. He folded her in his arms, kissing her ear and cheek before reaching her mouth. "I've missed you the last few days," he murmured, and as their kisses became more passionate he felt her head nod in agreement. He let the kisses go on for a while then pulled away. "Hey, let me get some wine and we can sit down and talk." He went to

the kitchen area, rummaged around the cabinets, and produced two wine glasses. He kept his back to Clara, let her get her surprise ready. He was pouring wine when Clara said, "Peter?" He turned. She was standing in the living room and just letting her coat drop to the floor. He gasped. He would have done so for effect anyway, but her nude body was breathtaking, and the sound escaped involuntarily. No, she didn't have Heidi's tits, but Clara's were full, the swell of her hips utterly flawless, and the thigh-hugger leggings the perfect complement to her nakedness. The occasion presented one surprise to him. She had a fetching little triangular tuft of pubic hair above her vulva. Interesting. Heidi had always been a landing strip kind of girl. "I don't think there's anything we need to talk about," Clara said. * * * * * Author's note - Aficionadas is a story in three parts. A corrupted copy of Part One was originally posted. The correct version replaced it on Monday afternoon. So if you read Part One before Monday afternoon it might be a good idea to read the original version, as the omissions were significant. The version at the 'Continue Reading' link is to the correct version.