

Coup de Shrimp

All through elementary school Michael had developed some very special feelings for a certain girl. Her name is Michelle. We will not mention her last name out of consideration for her. She was in many of his classes and just happened to be in his same ward. These feelings, yes, romantic feelings, began to intensify as Michael entered junior high. There were days when he thought his heart would burst – when he felt he would not be able to hold back his special feelings of love for the dream of his life.

As hard as it is to imagine, in high school things only got worse. Seeing her in the hallways at school created severe psychological and emotional stress. At times he would pound his head against his locker door, punishing himself for not approaching his boyhood beauty and at least trying to get to know her. But something always got in the way. Something deep down inside prevented him from a normal and healthy relationship with this magnificent specimen of a woman.

Sure, his dad worked with him and tried to coach him. But, his limited self-training as a psychiatrist and social worker could only go so far. Michael needed professional help and the family's meager income could not stand the burden of the immense therapy bills. However, his father's testing did uncover one important clue; he was teased by his peers unmercifully and called "shrimpie" on a regular basis. As soon as the debonair side of Michael suggested a move on the mystifying Michelle, the image heaped upon him by cruel and unfeeling bullies, beat him down to a state of absolute nothingness. Oh, how one does remember the intense and painful recollection of the sobbing as he would cry himself to sleep each night.

One night as Michael was sleeping; his loving parents walked into his bedroom. Michael was finally asleep; his pillow wet from the tragic tears of traumatic rejection. His dad jumped on his limp and languishing body, holding his arms out to the side of the bed. Quickly his mother duct taped his wrist to each bedpost. She then taped the feet to the end of the bed. Michael struggled, tossed, yanked and pulled. There was nothing he could do. His father, trained in all the martial arts was too much for him.

With his mother holding his head, Michael's father stood above him on the bed. Dangling from a piece of string was a raw, unshelled shrimp. "Michael", shouted his father with a commanding tone he had never heard before. "You're not a shrimp. You're a man." Slapping him in the face with the shrimp, he hissed at his poor, unsuspecting son, "Here's the shrimp boy. Eat the shrimp! Eat the shrimp! You want to be a man, then ya gotta eat the shrimp, boy. The only way is to eat the shrimp!" Over and over his dad said the same thing – "Eat the shrimp, boy!" Michael had never eaten shrimp, but knew instinctively that he hated shrimp. Yet, here were the two people he admired most in life torturing him with a raw, jumbo shrimp.

He could feel the slim of the shrimp accumulate on his face. The harder he fought to avoid the torture, the more his parents would slap the cold and hideous-looking shrimp at his cheeks, lips, nose and eyes. It was driving him insane. As he screamed out to vent

his rage his father dropped the shrimp directly into his mouth. He began to gag and spit. Then he heard the words of his father, "Eat the shrimp, boy! Eat the shrimp!" His body said "no" but his drive to overcome his shrimp-laden image was so much stronger. He began to clamp down on the slimy seafood and crunch his way through his fear and years of rejection. With each bite he reinforced that he was a man, he was someone that Michelle could grow to love and appreciate as a warm and sensitive type guy. He chewed the bottom dwelling critter over and over again. Then, he swallowed. He had done it! Oh, the joy! Oh, the thrill of accomplishment! He had tears streaming down his face. His mother held his sweaty little head in her arms and wept uncontrollably. His dad looked down on him with a giant grin and said, "You da man, baby!"

From that time on, Michael took on a new air about him. He was different and his friends could sense that something truly wonderful had happened in his life. And best of all, Michelle saw something in a young man that she had rarely paid attention to. Michael could feel her eyes penetrating him to the core. Now was the time to make his move – he decided tomorrow at lunch would be the right time.

That night her father called and explained that Michelle, who had never had problems talking to any boy, was terribly bashful about asking Michael out to the upcoming prom. Michael was dumbfounded. However, with his new found confidence he told Michelle's father he would be delighted to take her to the dance. The time was set and arrangements made to pick up the most beautiful girl in the school and take her to one of the finest restaurants in Colorado.

She was indescribably gorgeous. This was way past any dream Michael had ever had. The red sequins of her dress shimmered in the chandelier light of the five star restaurant. Her hair was done up on her head as if she was a Victorian princess. Her lips were full and ruby red. Her slender neck gracefully fell to... anyway, she was beautiful. This was a dream come true and nothing was going to ruin it.

About this time, the waiter brought out a large bowl of fresh shrimp still in the shell. Michael sat motionless as he focused on each of the crayfish-looking sea monsters. He lapsed back into time. He recalled every moment of his horrifying treatment in the depressing darkness of his room. He became oblivious to anything and anyone in the restaurant. Grabbing handfuls of raw shrimp and shoving them into his mouth, he yelled, "I am a man. I am not a shrimp! I eat the shrimp, therefore I am a man! Eat the shrimp Michael, eat the shrimp!"

Michelle was stricken with horror. Her date was mentally ill. It was not the same young man with whom she had entered the restaurant. She was more confused than a nursing baby in a topless bar. It was sickening and disgusting. She buried her head in her hands and bawled like a baby.

One hour later, Michelle's dad came to pick her up. He could hardly believe his eyes. Michael had shrimp all over his clothes and hanging out of his mouth. Michael's eyes were glassed over and he was delirious. A slight smile came over Michael's face as he

looked at Michelle. “Hey baby, would you like to kiss a real man?” She started to cry some more. Her dad turned Michael around and pushed him in the chest, sending him sprawling to the ground. “Don’t ever talk to my daughter again, shrimpie, or you’ll have me to deal with”.

Michael curled up in to the fetal position and began to whimper. All he wanted to do was sue his parents for practicing psychiatry without a license.