

4. Little Pervert

There are many things that make the human species distinctive, and Ted admired most of them. For example, humans invented brewing and distillation. They invented deep-sea fishing (and, later, fish farms) so that salmon could be available year round. No other species appears to understand the significance of the number pi, much less the distinction between countable and uncountable infinities. Humans invented motorcycles, and only one or two other species can ride them. Of course, some human accomplishments are less admirable. For example, humans also invented artificial banana flavor.

All of these things, except perhaps the artificial banana flavor, are important human species accomplishments. However, to Ted's way of thinking a more important and distinctive human feature is this: no other species uses more than one sexual position. Among bears, for example, the only sexual position used is the one in which the male bear mounts the female from behind. (Humans sometimes refer to this as "doggie style," but that term makes Ted very angry, since dogs are one of the least dignified of the species that use the Bear Position.) Similarly, all mosquitoes do it the same way as all other mosquitoes, as far as we know, anyway. Their way is somewhat eccentric ... very few other species, unless you count vampires as a species, drink blood as part of their mating behavior - but it is the only way mosquitoes know. This is rather different from the case with humans, who can have sex using any number of different positions. Whole books are written, and possibly sometimes even read, about these positions, and in fact it is claimed that one can use a different position every day (or night) for a year. Of course, this claim is somewhat suspect, like the claim that the Portuguese can eat bacalhau with a

different preparation every day of the year. It's technically true, but some of those preparations don't taste all that different from others. Similarly with the sexual positions. Still, it is true that most sexually active humans have in fact used more than one position during their lifetime, which is not true with bears, or at least most bears other than Ted.

Not only do humans use more than one sexual position, they can do it at any time of the year. That is not true for most other species, and certainly not for bears. Female bears screw with reckless abandon when they are in estrus, but they *will not do it at all* when they are not. In North America, female bears come into estrus approximately in June, and there is a three to five day period of intense sexual activity, followed by a year of no sex whatever. (Sort of like some unlucky humans' honeymoon and post-honeymoon experience.)

While the female bear is entirely in control of when and whether she does it, she is not at all in control of with whom she does it. During the relevant three to five days, the female bear feels compelled to back up to any male bear at all. And it would be very impolite, and in fact unheard of, for the male bear to decline her offer. So, from the point of view of the female bear, it's kind of like pot luck. Conversely, from the point of view of the male bear, the options are rather limited: hang around, and hope that when she is in the mood, there is no larger male bear around. No candy, no flowers, no live salmon are necessary, or helpful. Promises of eternal devotion, empathy for her ambitions in life, or offers of help with the housework are of no use. It's just a matter of being in the right place at the right time.

For a long time Ted did not fully appreciate that, with human females, things are more or less the other way around. The human female is entirely in control of with

whom she does it, but a certain amount of negotiation is expected about when and whether and how often. The reason Ted did not understand this is that his only observations were on Kristin, who did it every day, and would have opted for multiple times per day if Piotr had been up to the task. Kristin's ordinary daily sex act involved five or six positions and 10 or 20 (or 50 or 100 or 500) orgasms. Special Events called for more of each. Not only did she do it, she obviously thought it was fun, as opposed to some sort of biological imperative. Sex as fun is not part of a bear's world view, though Ted of course was open-minded about such things.

An interesting sidelight is that male bears have a bone, called a baculum, in their penis. This is not of any relevance to humans or this story whatsoever, except perhaps that it explains why an ursine version of Viagra has never been successfully marketed.

So, with all of that as background, you can imagine Ted's thoughts when he read in the newspaper about the three-legged female panda bear in China who kept toppling over when she attempted to mate. She had only one front leg and that was not enough to support her with a male panda draped all over her. Because pandas are endangered, the Chinese were trying to fit her with an artificial leg (thus taking the concept of sex aids to a new level) so that she could successfully copulate. But Ted, sophisticated bear that he was, thought that all she needed was to be taught a few different sexual positions. The spoon position, for example, does not require arms, or front legs, or if they are involved, one would be enough. Unfortunately he made the mistake of making this suggestion in writing (in an email) and of offering to be the one who would do the teaching. Ted was genuinely surprised when, instead of sincere thanks, he received a very angry response from the three-legged panda that accused him of being a *little pervert*. And he was truly

shocked to discover that the Chinese government had charged him as a sex offender. If he ever went to China, he would stand trial, and no doubt be found guilty. And the penalty in China for non-human sex offenders is being eaten.

If that seems like a somewhat unusual penalty, remember that the Chinese will eat almost anything. Certainly they routinely eat parts of animals, and kinds of animals, that Americans would not think of as particularly edible. For example, they eat snakes. They eat cats and dogs. In Canton especially it is easier to list what they will not eat than to list what they will. When Ted was in Shanghai, fortunately before the little pervert incident, he knows that Kristin and Piotr were offered fried grasshoppers and that Piotr tried them. So eating bears would not be at all out of the question in China (or in Alaska or Maine, Ted suspects). Quite reasonably, he took this threat seriously and he resolved not to go to China in the future, and also to be less quick in giving unsolicited advice, no matter how good the advice may be. Perhaps this latter recommendation is equally valid for all species.