

**Beautiful
Otherness**

**By
Shirley Simmons**

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Beautiful Otherness

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Oth-er-ness

NOUN: The quality or state of being other or different.

SUNBATHING AND PROSECCO

Who am I? Most people only have to look toward home to find the answer to that question. Others have to sift through pieces of broken and scattered history. Sometimes the pieces they find can be painful and cling like wet clothing.

For me, there were many loose ends and pieces that didn't fit until I began to put them all together. I discovered my uniqueness through my history. I found out who I am and this is my story.

"What a life, Kennedy!" I breathed deeply, basking shamelessly in the golden sun as it kissed my perfectly bronzed skin.

I've always loved the outdoors, so now, whenever a free moment is afforded to me, you can find me at the beach, boating or at my latest hobby--playing tennis.

Reaching out for another sip of my Prosecco, I thought, "*Now this is life at one of its finest moments.*"

I was in the backyard of our Windermere, Florida home, the community of Who's Who, of the elite and the wealthy, with its share of sprawling mansions, docking piers and celebrity residents.

If you know anything about Florida summers, you know they can run from May to October, and some years until the end of November. But you were sure to have eight months of perfect boating weather. And every weekend during those months, nearby Bird Island filled with boaters eager to party.

My peace was mildly disturbed as more boats sailed in; their early arrival charged with the hope of getting a prime location.

There was a time when I was free to do whatever I wanted. Back in those days, I was selfish and spoiled and often only thought of myself. But now my time was always accounted for. This was the first Saturday morning I could remember that I did not have to attend a meeting or some other boring function. Today was all mine.

I had every intention of taking full advantage of the day. Sunbathing and Prosecco were the weapons of choice. I knew the day would pass quickly, and by early evening I would be preparing myself for tonight's gala. I was smiling. All the hard work and dedication I had put forth the last three years was bearing fruit.

Slipping back into the serenity of the lake house I began to wonder what my life could have been. As if on cue, I had an unconscious trigger--a 6x6 cell, cold metal bars, that pungent deathly smell of hopelessness, that dark, suffocating....

“Get yourself together, Kennedy!” I mentally pulled myself back to the present. This was going to be my night. I’m over all that. I’d had my closure and no trigger from the past was going to spoil this day for me.

Closing my eyes, I leaned back deep into the cushion of the pool lounge chair and exhaled a deep shaky breath.

I grew up in a small town where everybody knew everybody else’s business. With who I am--who I was—my failing would have been the topic of conversation for years. But I didn’t fail.

“Those fools would have loved to see me in prison just like Phillip,” I murmured aloud. Ironically, instead of having prison guards instructing my every move behind bars, I give security guards Christmas presents and they guard the gates of my secured Isleworth home.

“In Jesus name.”

Still, the past cuts deep. The simple thought of Phillip’s demons had tormented me on and off over many years. And right now, with all the excitement of the awards dinner, it was nearly bringing me to tears. But the Prosecco was doing its job. My mind drifted to some of my innermost thoughts, all the advice that I had received to get me to this very moment. Advice about life and how to succeed at it. Advice such as learn how to have fun in life because most people with high IQ’s generally find the world boring and tedious. Good stuff. And just one of the little bits of wisdom I’ve learned to live by.

The most interesting part of that advice is that my mother—the person who shared that with me--never had me tested, so I have no idea what my IQ really is. Maybe she just knew I would get bored with most things in life. She also told me to be open to experiences, knowing I could very well be the stupidest person in the room. And my favorite, which I can still hear my mother’s voice saying, is “Life is like shooting porn; it’s not how it starts or ends but it’s all the action in between that makes it worthwhile.”

Thinking about it, my mother’s wisdom had prepared me for almost every obstacle I had faced. For a woman with no education, she sure was astute. She was clever and spot on with her advice even if I did not take notice of it immediately. That porn reference was not hers. She was a straightforward good Christian through and through, who has never seen porn in her life, so the reference to her quote is ironically comical but true.

Uninhibited freedom was something that I had been fortunate to have most of my life even if I was blindly unaware of it. I had been free to do what I wanted even with parental parameters and restrictions. Back then I did not know any other way, and today I wouldn’t have it any other way.

I took another sip of the bubbly and casually took off my bikini top. Somehow my perky breasts have managed to defy gravity. I eased myself back down to get the full magic

effects of the sun and was soon back to tranquility, serenaded by the morning breeze. All the distracting thoughts had dissipated.

“Nothing will disturb this beautiful morning!”

My mind began running through thoughts of my acceptance speech for the Central Florida Woman of the Year Award. Receiving this prestigious award made me nervous. Was I deserving? Could fleeing from my past and leaving the place I was born be misconstrued as shame instead of perseverance? Does my compassion for the adopted, homeless, and underprivileged please my critics? This award was just another trophy I would be collecting to symbolize another achievement of this empire we had built, yet this one was special to me.

I never went into doing this work with the notion of receiving awards and accolades. When I started, I never dreamed of recognition. I just wanted to make a change in the way I was living and give scholarships to a couple of deserving kids.

Life was absolutely perfect. The hour quickly passed, with only the waves of the lake and the pool’s waterfall occasionally diverting me.

A Drab Café & Lounge music mix took my mind far away--away from all the frantic, overstretched parts of my life. My mind and body were in a place of bliss. As I floated in my thoughts, I pictured myself amongst the sand dunes and salty air of a secluded beach, sandpipers running back and forth avoiding the waves, my hair a beach mess.

“Mom!” I opened my eyes to see my beautiful daughter standing over me. “Mom, what shoes should I wear?” Kylie proclaimed holding a pair of sandals and a pair of Monica Chang heels.

“Well, there’s my precious daughter!” I glanced at her over my shoulder. “Take both pairs but wear your heels.”

“But I’m so tall with the heels. I feel like everyone is staring at me when I wear them.”

“Kylie, sweetheart, plenty of women would love to have your height. You act as if you’re six feet tall when you’re only five feet seven. Trust me, that’s a wonderful height for a beautiful young lady.”

“Are you sure, Mom? Besides, it is so frustrating being the tallest girl in the room.”

“Very sure, Kylie! When there is no need for you to have on the heels, change into your sandals.”

With a pause and a smile, Kylie swung her hair imitating me. “Well, I’m off to my Charmette Ivy meeting, and the next time you see me I’ll be addressed as President Kylie Davenport.” Kylie raised both perfectly manicured eyebrows as her lips formed into a smile. “By the way, where is Dad?”

“Finishing up his swim.” I pointed toward the lake.

Kylie curled her lips and frowned in disapproval. "I would never swim in that lake again. There are alligators in there, and things are always touching you." She rubbed the goosebumps from her arms. "I love you, Mom! By the way, you do know they can see you from the island." Kylie kissed me and began to dart off as she tossed a towel over me.

"Wait! Make sure you are home before four o'clock," I called after her. "The stylist and his team will be arriving to do our hair and makeup. I want us to be perfect this evening!"

Kylie was an only child like I was. Being raised as an only child, I always wanted several children of my own. I always thought I would have at least three. But life had other ideas. Greyson, my husband, and I tried several times, each time ending in miscarriages. It was my desire for Kylie to have siblings so that she would not have to feel like she was alone, like I sometimes used to.

Greyson and I tried to raise her with boundaries and faith. There was no way I could allow her to have the freedom that I was allowed at her age, and I would never tell her about Phillip. No child needs that baggage.

I removed the towel before falling back into the comfort of the lounge. "That child thinks she is the parent." I shook my head and laughed.

Reaching for the glass, I took another sip of Prosecco and began to adjust my swimsuit bottoms. Having double tan lines is so unlike a lady. Releasing every thought in my mind, I gave in to the calm summer morning.

"How is your morning, beautiful?" Greyson stood there tall and handsome in his orange and blue swim trunks, dripping wet and shaking the water from his hair, muscles glistening in the sun.

I opened my eyes and quickly took another swallow, then leaped to my feet, and with arms extended and my fingers dancing, I fell into his arms. "Honey, how was your swim?"

"It was a good swim. You're so dramatic," Greyson smiled.

I had been this way with Greyson ever since our first date. It was one of the things that he admired about me. I was dramatic and he was romantic, yet somehow it worked, and quite well.

"I got an early start and didn't want to wake you," said Greyson.

Kissing his chest, I looked up at him batting my eyes to get all his attention. "Kylie has already left for Charmette Ivy." I pulled Greyson toward me, my naked breasts smashing against his chest.

"You're so beautiful." He held me close. "You know that they can see you from the island, right Kennedy?"

“So I’ve been told. I’m certain I’m not the only woman to sunbathe topless on this lake,” I replied.

Greyson smiled slyly. “Kennedy, I’m certain that you’re the only one missing a top.

“What about Sarah, Bethany or Mary? No one thinks twice about them sunbathing topless so why should it matter if I do it? Besides, there are not a lot of boats on the lake this morning,” I waved my hand toward the lake, “and we paid a lot of money to live here. I think I have the right to do as I please.

“But enough about this lake and the people who live on it. Earlier I was thinking about my life, all the challenges and victories in it. And how it all led up to being here with you and getting this award tonight.”

Greyson lowered his head and kissed me on the neck, “Have I heard these stories before? Wait, do not answer that. I learn something new about you every time we talk about your life, so I would love to hear all about it, but first I’m off to take a shower.”

I grabbed the bottle of Prosecco, took his hand and followed him. “Well, I think that it’s great that we still communicate after all these years of marriage. It warms my heart.”

“So do I, babe. We both work really hard, and we work hard at our marriage. I am fine hearing repeat stories of your past. It is your past that made you the Kennedy I love. I never want to be one of those couples who stop talking and nurturing their marriage. We get to make the rules for how this marriage will work. Nothing frustrates me more than hearing married people giving bad advice about marriage and communication.

“Can’t do this! You must do that, or whatever senseless, ill-advised, unwanted nonsense they are pushing. You always hear them saying the key to marriage is communication. But I think people shouldn’t give limited advice; they should give examples to help others understand what they mean. Communication starts before the fighting; you communicate so that you don’t fight, and if you are fighting, you better pray that one of you doesn’t stop fighting, because if that happens... the marriage is over.

“I refuse to be one of those married guys who’s always out without his wife or always with his sidepiece because he is tired of talking or being around his wife. Nope, not going to be me. But don’t get me going on that subject. Besides, with you in my garden there are more peaceful skies. So, please tell your story.”

“Ok, hun, please don’t get started! Some of this you have heard but let me continue telling you all about it, ok?”

Just before stepping into the seclusion of our outdoor shower, I dropped my swimsuit bottoms.