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VCR Love

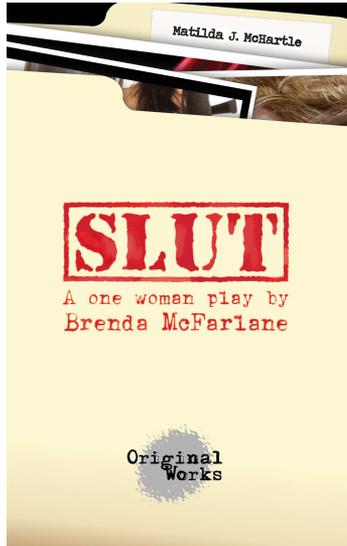
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SLUT

By Brenda McFarlane

1 Female

Synopsis: Matilda McHartle would describe herself as a perfectly ordinary person and her behavior as completely normal for a single woman in her thirties. She'd admit to being a little quirky for an accountant but she'd never guess what other people might call her if they knew the details of her sex life... that is until she is arrested for running a brothel and taken downtown for formal questioning.

VCR LOVE

by David Lawson

VCR Love was first performed by the author on June 23rd, 2011, at Simple Studios at 134 W 29th Street, 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10001. It was subsequently performed at: The Parkside Lounge (NYC, January 2012), The Brick Theater (NYC, February 2012), Dixon Place (NYC, March 2012), the Northside Social (Arlington, VA, May 2012) and The Trestle Inn (Philadelphia, May 2012).

VCR Love

Charles Bukowski once wrote, “There is hardly anything as beautiful as a woman in a long dress.”

That “a century back a man could be driven mad by a well-turned ankle,” because “one could imagine that the rest would be magical indeed.”

But nobody gets off on just a well-turned ankle anymore. And as a preteen in the mid-1990s, it wasn't well-turned ankles that turned me on, but the advantages of being a latchkey kid: getting to the mail before my parents could. Stealing dad's Sports Illustrated swimsuit edition, mom's Victoria's Secret catalog. I always wondered if my mom ever thought, “I haven't gotten a Victoria's Secret catalog in *forever*.”

I treasured every photo of a scantily clad woman I could find. Because before the internet, it really was a more innocent time for me. I could still imagine, like Bukowski said, that the rest, the rest I wasn't seeing, would be magical indeed.

I first started thinking about “girls and boys” when I was an LD kid. Learning disabled. ADHD they said. But I wasn't ADD, I just didn't like arithmetic. I wasn't

hyperactive, I just needed an audience. But as an “LD kid” I had a lot of classes with kids who were deaf and blind. In those classes I started wondering things about “girls and boys” that my friends in those “mainstream” classes weren’t thinking about. Little eleven-year-old me wondered: Would my deaf classmates make any noise when they’re having sex?

I also wondered how my blind classmates got turned on. What was their equivalent of stealing dad’s swimsuit issue, mom’s Victoria’s Secret catalog? For some reason, this question really stuck deep in my head: “What would that be like? Porn for the blind?”

Just recently I finally found the answer. Lisa J. Murphy, a Canadian artist, released this book called The Tactile Mind. The book contains raised images similar to Braille, yet they’re meant to sexually stimulate the person perusing the book.

I found a copy of The Tactile Mind. I closed my eyes, gave it a touch. And, I gotta say, I started getting a little hot right there in the bookstore. As I was experiencing this book in my hands, a book unlike anything that had ever come before it, porn for the blind, I started thinking about how much pornography has changed in the past quarter of a century.

How a kid born in the mid-'80s like me, saw a person naked for the first time in a completely different way than any other generation had.

It's 2 AM. I can't sleep. I'm 11 years old. My dad has rented a VHS tape from Blockbuster Video. *National Lampoon's Animal House*. I go down to our family's beloved VCR and start watching the movie from the start to try to cure my insomnia.

But it does not cure my insomnia. If anything, it wakes me up to a glorious realization. Because 39 minutes...and 14 seconds...into that movie Mary Louise Weller is undressing in front of John Belushi. And I am: scared. Confused. Amazed. But more than anything else: I am oh so delighted.

I didn't even know what was under there. Honestly. I didn't. Sure, I had thought about it a little bit. But right now, I am thinking about *nothing* else but what is under there. And something about watching this feels so wrong. But I thought about that Luther Ingram song I'd heard my dad play before: "If loving you is wrong I don't want to be right." And I'm sitting there, rewinding and rewinding and rewinding. I was thinking, "Ms. VCR, if loving you is wrong, I don't wanna be right."

It was the first time I ever saw a naked woman.

In the coming weeks, on Friday night visits to Blockbuster Video, I would desperately try to replicate that experience by getting my mother to rent movies that I *knew* had a little bit of skin in them. I'd run up to my mom with my pick for the weekend, but was always met with skepticism:

“David, why do you want to rent *Basic Instinct*?”

Summer of 1997. I'm still eleven years old and we still don't have the internet at home. I spend damn near my entire summer in my basement watching MTV. I got a blank VHS tape in our family's beloved VCR and I have one finger on Play, the other on Record. I am waiting for MTV to show me the good stuff. The stuff I am falling in love with.

Mariah Carey.

Mariah in a slinky black dress. Mariah, in a flesh-colored bathing suit. Riding a Wave-Runner, dancing on a boat with a bunch of random sailor dudes. I'm watching this and it is just like honey, when her love comes over me.

Just a few minutes later on MTV...it's The Spice Girls. They're in the desert and they are badass techno warriors running around in leather and tiger print and Baby Spice is wearing surgical gloves for some reason. These girls are giving me everything. All that joy can bring, yes I swear. And I am sitting there and I'm thinking "Girls...all that I want from you is a promise you will be there." Sure enough, the VHS tape in that VCR is a promise that yes...these girls will be there.

And they were good, Mariah and the Spice Girls. But they had nothing on the Holy Grail of music videos for me back then:

Fiona.

Fiona Apple. Fiona in the closet in pigtails. In the swimming pool in that purple little number. Fiona in the kitchen, taking shit off and looking so pissed off about it. It is the angstiest striptease in the history of stripteases. Watching this video I still feel kinda guilty. I feel like I need to be redeemed, from the one I sinned against. But let me tell you all: At age 11, Fiona and all the women in these videos, they were all I'd ever known of love.

Back then I had to sit there all day long, for hours and hours and hours on end, watching the *fucking* video for “MMMBop” over and over. Until finally one of the videos I had been waiting for would come on and I’d hit Play and Record at the same time and I would watch, knowing I was getting all of this to keep forever. I could finally watch these videos whenever I wanted, not just when MTV wanted me to watch them.

I had to wait all day for it. I had to work for it back then. It was that waiting and that working that made it so good, so special. But nowadays, you could just go to YouTube and get it instantly. No wait. No work.

Things have changed.

That summer watching MTV taught me a lot of things about “girls and boys,” but not nearly as much as what I saw on the news the very next year at age 12. Because at 7 o’clock, on network television, I was hearing about Oval Office blowjobs, cum stains on blue dresses, Tom Brokaw asking Paula Jones, “Now Ms. Jones, does the President’s penis lean to the left or to the right?” In retrospect all of that Clinton/Lewinsky stuff was way raunchier than anything they were showing me on MTV.

Pretty soon I was 13, and taping MTV and hearing about the president's dick didn't seem too interesting anymore. Because around that time I started hanging out with two kids down the block: Ben and Keith. Ben I knew because we were both raised Jewish and did the same Jew-y shit growing up. Keith I knew because we were both LD kids. We would always hang out at Ben's house because Ben had the internet, which I still didn't have at home. So with Ben's internet connection we would pollute our young, impressionable little minds.

One of the first things I ever loved about the internet was that for some odd reason whitehouse.com was a hardcore pornography site. One day at the school library this kid Mikey walked up to me and asked:

“Hey David, who was the 7th president of the United States?”

I said: “I don't know, Mikey. Go look it up at whitehouse.com.”

“Okay David, I will... www.whitehouse.com...OH MY GOD! NAKED WOMEN!!!”

Thus, I was solely responsible for my school district investing in web filtering software.

At Ben's house not only were we polluting our young, impressionable little minds, but we were also learning about the virtues of patience. Because Ben had a 56k modem and, I'm sure you all remember, things took a little longer in those dusty old days of dial-up. Loading videos or anything with sound took way too long. So we would load images instead. Looking at images of women on 56k was kind of like watching a striptease being given by an invisible woman who makes herself more and more visible as time goes on.

They always start from the top of the head. Loading, loading. About a minute in you would be at the eyes. Loading, loading. At two minutes you'd have the whole face. And I swear, for some reason it would always seem to sloooow down right around the shoulders. But eventually, the full image would load and everything would be fine as wine at Ben's house. Because after years of Victoria's Secret catalogs and taping MTV, I was finally seeing *everything*.

I am fascinated by that urge to see *everything*. Because the mere suggestion of nudity can never be enough.

Every now and then at Ben's we would try downloading movies on his 56k modem. It was quite an ordeal.

It took about two hours to download two minutes of video. Among those first video downloads was a specific type of porn that has become a very modern, very *zeitgeist* trend (I'll take any excuse to use that word in a sentence). We downloaded celebrity sex tapes.

The celebrity sex tape proves that the mere suggestion of nudity is never enough. In fact, it proves that even nudity itself isn't enough anymore. People are like: "Oooh, yeah, I saw her in a bikini on *Baywatch*, ya know, who didn't. Yeah, yeah, saw her naked in *Playboy*, whatever. Wait wait wait...you have a video of her fucking the Mötley Crüe guy on a sailboat? Download that shit right now!"

To all the women here tonight, I just want to apologize. More specifically I want to apologize for the celebrity sex tape phenomenon. Because most of you have been left out of the sex tape phenomenon. Sex tapes starring women usually feature some pretty good-looking women: Paris Hilton, Kim Kardashian, Pamela Anderson. But ladies, what *guys* have done sex tapes? Verne Troyer. Fred Durst. The guy who was Screech on *Saved by the Bell*. Slim pickins...

There were times when Ben and Keith didn't want to wait two hours to watch two minutes of a video. So we found quicker ways to get our porn fix. Sometimes we

would call 1-800 phone sex numbers. We would listen to the sales pitch and when they got to the whole “two dollars a minute” spiel we would hang up. We called 1-800-HOT-GIRL, 1-800-HOT-SEXY, 1-800-WET-TITS. Any perverted 7-digit phrase we could think up, we called it.

One day we realized that we had never once thought to call 1-800-BOOBIES. So we did. But on the other end of the line we heard:

“Tom’s Tow Truck, how can I help you?”

“What?”

“Tom’s Tow Truck, how can I help you?”

“Um sir... your... your phone number is 1-800-BOOBIES.”

No joke, this is what the guy actually said next:

“Oh. I’m guessin’ you ain’t callin’ about having a car towed now are you?”

Another thing we would do was set Ben’s cable box to channel 88, the porno channel. A channel Ben’s family did not subscribe to. However, Keith realized if you set

the cable box to channel 88 and raised an open palm really high in the air and hit the cable box as hard as you could...

...BAM! FREE PORN!!!

Well... kinda. It was all scrambled and the color hue was completely off. Everyone had this bright blue naked flesh, pulsating purple nipples, lusty atomic green eyes. It was really something.

Ben also had a DVD player at his house, which was hot shit to me. This was the late '90s. I thought DVD players were something only top secret government scientists working fifty feet underground at the Pentagon had. Every now and then on weekends Ben's mom would drive us to Fair Oaks Mall and we would steal porn DVDs.

Our most notable heist was stealing a DVD called *Naked Yoga*. After we first heard about it our imaginations went wild at what *Naked Yoga* could possibly be like. There were gonna be naked women in weird positions and we couldn't wait to see it.

We get to the mall, go into the f.y.e. store, and everyone gets into their typical DVD heist positions. Keith

is talking to the cashier, asking as many annoying questions as possible to distract him (which he was really good at). Ben is looking through the aisles for whatever DVD we were looking to steal that week. And me? I am on the other side of the anti-theft security device in the front of the store...and I am waiting.

So just when Ben is positive that Keith has adequately distracted the cashier, he grabs the DVD, walks towards the front of the store and **THROWS IT** over the anti-theft security device.

As that DVD was flying at me, something happened. Maybe it was that pleasant green and white typeset on the *Naked Yoga* DVD cover. Maybe it was the photo of that woman on the cover staring out seductively (in full lotus). Or maybe my elementary school teachers were right and I really was an ADD kid. Because for some reason, I lost focus for half a second and... **BAM**...the DVD hits me square in the head, knocking me to the ground.

I get up slowly. I see Ben mouthing “**WHAT THE FUCK**” at me. I pick up the DVD and calmly head to our meetup spot in front of Panda Express. Where better to end a porn heist than Panda Express.

Soon after, Ben's mom picks us up in that blue minivan. She has no clue that we are squirming in our seats with the excitement of seeing what *Naked Yoga* is all about. We finally get to Ben's, throw open those minivan doors, run up the stairs to Ben's room, we pop in that *Naked Yoga* DVD and ...it... is...

...the most boring shit I have ever seen. I mean they're naked and they're women. But you know... downward dog, cobra, folded leaf... not sexy. Not sexy at all. In fact, *Naked Yoga* would go down as the second most disappointing cinematic experience of my teenage years, and the only one not starring Jar Jar Binks.

Like I said before, Keith was an LD kid. But he was a little different because he had a terminal illness. Which when you're 13 is hard to wrap your head around. One day Keith was asked by the Make-A-Wish Foundation if he wanted anything. When they ask you that, they mean *anything*. So, with the possibility of getting anything he wanted, Keith asked for a weekend, hanging out poolside, with all the girls at the Playboy Mansion. I was moved, emotionally, that our many porn-related adventures had influenced his one shot at having anything he wanted. Unfortunately the Make-A-Wish Foundation said that they couldn't

condone his request...something about losing their non-profit status...and got him a new TV instead. If only they knew what we watched on it.

I want you to know this: Me, Ben and Keith? We knew what we were doing was wrong. We knew stealing was wrong, but we stole DVDs anyway. We knew lying was wrong, but if a website said “Do not click here unless you are 18,” we clicked anyway. We did these things because it was a more desperate time. Because 13-year-old kids today don’t have to steal DVDs to see porn videos, they don’t have to lie to a website. No website today is naïve enough to ask if you’re actually 18.

It was pornography that made all these “wrong” things feel right. We stole but we weren’t thieves. We lied but we weren’t liars. We were just thirteen, and we really wanted to see some naked people.

Lots of folks (a la, our parents) probably thought us watching pornography at that age was “wrong.” But I don’t think so. I think me, Ben and Keith warped our young, impressionable minds in the best of ways. I loved warping my mind with those guys. I loved it so much.

Then on a glorious mid-October evening my dad comes home from work holding a bunch of wires and what looks like a small plastic box. The second I see him standing in the doorway I knew the day had finally come. We were joining the ranks of “The Connected.” This house would no longer be a stranger to the joys of the information superhighway. The internet had arrived.

From the moment the internet arrived at my home to this moment right here, right now, I have had a front seat, in fact all of us have had a front row seat, to the rise of a new kind of *amateur* pornography.

It’s something I like to call “the pornification of communication.”

It all started in those chat rooms.

In middle school I had this really hot online girlfriend. She sent me her picture and everything. I was smitten. I walked through the halls of Robert Frost Middle School thinking “Fuuuuuck all these people. Cuz there’s a hot girl out there in Internet Land who looooooves me.” I ran home every day after school to chat with her and it was blissful.

Yet one night I was watching that show *All That* on Nickelodeon (which always seems to get a laugh, leading me to believe I could stand up onstage all night and just yell out the names of old Nickelodeon shows all night. *Roundhouse* in particular). I was watching *All That* and I realized: “Wait a second. My online girlfriend, she didn’t send me an actual picture of her, she just sent me a picture of Amanda Bynes, one of the cast members on *All That*.” My online girlfriend had lied to me.

But see, that’s how it worked. In chat rooms you could be anyone. People used to ask that question, I’m sure you remember: A/S/L? Age? Sex? Location? I didn’t want to say “13, male, Virginia.” So instead I would say “26...female...Hollywood.”

This was incredibly common. I’m sure some people in this room right now would pretend to be a member of the opposite sex online to fulfill some odd teenage power fantasy. Because, I can tell you, I did.

I had a good friend who really got off on this. He would pretend to be some hot girl “cybering,” as they called it back then, and then right at the very climax of digital passion he would love to say: “BTW I’m a GUY! LOL MOTHERFUCKER!!!” He loved this.