

KISSING A DEAD MAN

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BY APRIL DIAMOND

CHAPTER 1

Kissing a dead man may seem like a strange experience, especially if he doesn't know he's dead. It doesn't even seem strange to me at the time; actually, it is wonderful to finally kiss him, and let him know he's truly loved. He is aware that he is dying, but he doesn't realize he's already dead. Actually, he has been dead for nearly 12 years. Yet he continues to meet me regularly, if not often, and finally, we are holding each other and kissing for the first time since he died. I feel his arms around me, and I have my arms around him. He is letting me kiss him for a long and beautiful kiss. He doesn't feel cold, as I expected, but he feels warm; although so thin, which is why I think he is wearing white jeans and a white T-shirt (with a black collar and some writing on it, but I'm not paying much attention to his clothes), to cover his thinness. I can wrap my arms entirely around him. I have been waiting so long for this moment, knowing that we don't have much time together. Each time we meet could be our last. For he is dead.

When I first went to visit Freddie, a year or so ago, after loving him for more than 20 years, I was cautious - not because he died of A.I.D.S. - I know a dead man can't give a living person A.I.D.S. - but because I wasn't sure how he would react to me. I was relieved to discover that he approved of my being with him. He was lonely and basically abandoned by this time, so he accepted my presence and my touch. I began by ministering to him. I sat at his feet, not speaking, but just washing his feet and rubbing them with lotion, feeling his life through his feet, transmitting my care through my fingers. That first time he allowed me to approach him, he was alone and sitting in a wheelchair. He didn't want his friends to see him in such a weakened state, but I wasn't a friend, I was merely a visitor who loved him, who had loved him for a very long time. We didn't speak. Were words necessary at that point? My actions were speaking my love, my touch tender, although I knew I had something important to tell him, to ask him. If I had really thought about his situation and his impending death, tears would have begun to flow. I kept my focus on the fact that I was finally able to be spending time with him.

Although he was silent and frail, the vibrancy and life were still in his eyes. As he sat in the wheelchair, gazing and not seeing me, I glanced up at him, not wanting him to think I was staring at him. I could have stared at him, after loving him for so long, and finally having the opportunity to spend time

with him, close to him, entering into his private world. His dark eyes looked beyond me, through me, to another time, another place. I wanted to let him know how important he had been in my life for so long, yet I didn't want him to think I loved who he was: a famous, articulate, brilliant artist and musician. I wanted him to know I love who he is: a caring person, a soul who is loved by God. I couldn't speak.

During this year, he has allowed me to act as a nurse, sharing kindness and human touch, something people are afraid to do with a person who has A.I.D.S. Each time we meet, I can see that he is not what he used to be. He is fragile, yet still loving, accepting of kindness, almost hungering for godly love and friendship. I have let him know I am not afraid of his disease, but that I care for him. I may be shy with words, especially around him, and he doesn't speak much, but we enjoy each other's company, a human bond beyond words, beyond worlds. I had so much to tell him, but thousands of miles to travel before I awakened. Not a word was spoken that first evening.

The final years of his life, while he was still alive, I didn't know Freddie had A.I.D.S. I didn't know he was dying, I wasn't paying attention to what was happening in his life at that time. I read about his death in a magazine and I was very surprised. When we had met for the first time ten years earlier, we exchanged only a few words. In those few moments, I had no opportunity to convey my gratitude, my feelings about him, my extreme pleasure in the moment. I already loved him, I had fallen under his spell the first time I saw him, the first time he looked into my eyes and sang to me with his dynamic voice. Our meeting changed my life, my goals, and my entire attitude, but I made no impression on him, I was just one of the millions who adored him. He inspired my art and my writing. He inspired me to keep my weight down, to stay on my exercise program. The words of his songs lived inside of me and dictated my every emotion. I experienced the highest extremes of joy and the deepest feelings of love, planted in my mind and heart by him.

Over the course of a few years, because of Freddie, I broke up with three different boyfriends who just couldn't measure up to his standard of perfection, my perception of his perfection, anyway. I knew he was just a man, but he was so graceful, so elegant, every move perfectly planned and executed. He had taken me captive. I knew I could never get married - how could I marry anybody else, or even wholeheartedly give my love to a man when I was so much in love with my image of Freddie?