

THEME: Virgin

Virgin. It's the *only* type of cocktail that I consume these days. Not because I don't like alcohol or because I have a drinking problem—but because my liver prefers it that way. And *I* prefer to wake up early and do yoga and get outside, rather than wake up shutdown and hungover, complaining how, “I just can't drink the way I used to.”

That said, I am far from “pure” — which is the word many people use to judge me if they've met me anytime in the past 10 years since I stopped drinking. They think that my abstention from alcohol makes me a goody-two-shoes or that I need to learn how to “let loose.”

But, while I no longer drink, I am far from innocent.

And, perhaps there is no story that could better convince you of this than one steamy night in 2011, in Kanchinaburi, Thailand, when I **attempted** to take the virginity of a 32-year old British, Christian Virgin.

His name was James. We met while on a hike and it turns out we were staying at the same local guesthouse.

James shared with me over dinner one night that he had been raised a devout Christian, and that he was currently doubting all that he had been raised to believe all of those years—like the idea that he was born a sinner. And, he was now recognizing the amount of shame that had been ingrained in him from a very young age.

James' confession led to a great philosophical conversation, and we ended up spending the next three days exploring the town together.

One evening, after a day of shared activities, I wound up inviting James to my hotel room to partake in my own nightly ritual—watching American cartoons, dubbed into Thai with English subtitles.

While my invitation was innocent, I was experienced enough to know that inviting James back to my hotel room brought with it other *less* innocent possibilities.

Sure enough, the cartoon watching led to snuggling, and the snuggling led to making out.

After making out for a while, James broke away and said, “just so you know, this isn't something I've ever done before.” I laughed knowingly and asked, “oh, you mean, one night stands?” to

which he replied, “I mean, I have never done THIS.” After a handful of awkward and embarrassed attempts to explain, James finally confessed to me that at the age of 32, he still remained---a **Virgin**.

My mind was reeling trying to take this information in. I was incredulous. The idea of a 32-year old virgin to me was purely theoretical as far as *my* life was concerned. I myself was a half-jewish half-catholic once-agnostic now-Buddhist and—while I myself hadn’t lost my virginity until the age of 18, I *well* made up for it over the next 15 years.

My life couldn’t have been more different than James’—at least as it related to sex.

James’ confession felt to me more like a Christian spinoff of the movie “The 40-year-old Virgin” than an actual true story of a human person.

So, we paused our makeout sesh, and spent some time talking about how James had been saving himself for marriage all these years, with the belief that sex before marriage is a sin.

And—I asked James if he wanted help with his “problem.”

He said he thought so. He wasn’t sure. But, well, if I was willing to help him—he was willing to try.

The idea of being someone’s first—while this might intimidate some—to me felt like a gift and a challenge. I’m a caretaker type—very compassionate and giving—and this seemed the best possible way that I could give to another human being.

And, my ego *did* get a boost from the idea that I might take this 32-year-old Christian Virgin’s virginity.

Help him to break through a lifetime of shame and Christian ideals?

To be forever burned into his memory as his first?

And more importantly, hopefully the best? Challenge accepted.

And so, I spent the next few hours on a virginity-taking mission. I tried everything. At times I tried slow, sweet, gentle and caring. At others—fast, passionate steamy seduction. I used every trick in the book over the next few hours in our joined attempt to lose James’ virginity for him.

Alas. The burden of 32 years of shame, guilt and sin ran so deeply in James, that even my most tried and true moves didn't do the trick. His mind was willing, but his body was not cooperating.

I confess to feeling disappointed — perhaps even more so than James himself.

It was a blow to my sexual ego, a sense of personal failure that I could not succeed in popping this virgin's cherry, and worried what it meant about me. And, like all do-gooders, maybe I had too much invested in helping James, naively hoping to solve all of his problems with one steamy night of passion.

We lay there quietly, still cuddling, frustrated yet resigned to the facts and reality of our failed attempts. James shared that he probably had a long way to go in terms of “fixing what was broken” in him, and realized that it was going to take more than just one night to get to the bottom of it.

He thanked me many times, and shared how powerful the experience had been for him despite the outcome, and how grateful he was to be able to have trusted me with his virginity.

The next day we kept our plans to kayak along the river, but the carefree fun that we had shared in the days before that holy-unholy night was gone. The awkwardness was palpable, and neither of us knew how to act or what to say when we parted ways.

I did wonder about James after that from time to time, and often wondered if he had found a way to move through his shame, and if he had lost his virginity yet.

A year later, I got my answer.

James reached out to me on facebook to let me know that he had no choice but to unfriend me due to a poem that I had recently written and posted on my wall—a poem that he *thought* was about sex.

My poem *had* used some sensual language—but it wasn't about sex at all. But James thought it was, and not only that—he thought it was about our intimate encounter from the year before.

I started to try to explain to him that this poem wasn't about us, and not even about sex for that matter, but—some part of me knew my explanation would fall on deaf ears—and that one year later, James was still caught in a prison of guilt and shame.

Not only could James' shame not be changed in one night— it couldn't even be changed in one year. And perhaps maybe never.

And—it wasn't my responsibility to change it.

So, rather than try to explain, I simply thanked James for letting me know, and wished him well.

Perhaps James had judged me to be a woman of loose morals.

And, perhaps I had viewed James as a repressed virgin who needed to be saved from himself.

This *final* exchange with James made me realize that only *James* could save *himself*—whatever that might mean for *him*.

And, that despite all of the shame that James continued to wrestle with, there's really no shame in being a virgin.