

## An Alleged Asexual's 20-Step Routine

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### 1. Ask yourself, "Why is it called *masturbation*?"

Swallow that curiosity. You have lived many lives within one, so be mature. You cannot be stuttering and flushing over *those* four syllables when others require your utmost attention.

You have healed enough to know it's not so much the act itself. Moreso the act of acknowledging how the *weird feeling* lives in the area of your body where desire should be. You try and try to exterminate it from that area, because you don't think that normal people get those wires crossed. But in the same way termites are programmed to eat through the barriers of a shelter, you are the way that you are. You can't let the weird feeling make a home there. It will eat right through the foundation.

You'll think about the word *masturbation* for a bit too long. You'll think about it, and how it feels on your tongue, and how you're more curious about it than interested in it. You want to study it. It is highly likely these thoughts will kill the precarious mood.

Don't let it. You cannot let it. We all know what happens when curiosity gets the best of the cat, so let the cat get your tongue.

You have things to do—not things to prove. And you need a place to work.

### 2. Protect the purity of the stuffed animals.

Turn them around. Hide them under the covers. You don't want them to look at you differently after. You know they are not sentient, but you tense at the sense of any eyes on you.

### 3. Cut the engine. Kick it for good measure.

This is an exchange between two rusty gears; can't crank one out with the engine sputtering. If it's smoking, kick it again. If it's hissing, you're as ready as you'll ever be.

DO NOT OVERKICK—I know it's hard to hold back. There's a lot of resentment there; the thing is a piece of shit. I know it's only 23 years old and stunted in adolescence, but most of the time it gets you where you need to go. Be thank-

ful it hasn't imploded yet.

4. Think about how, if you were doing this with someone, you would need safe words.

No crazy shit. Really. Nothing crazy. Just the basic, spur of the moment, extemporaneous, *yes I love this, no I'm not scared*—*Green, Wait, Red*. You can't speak more than one syllable during sex, and your mouth refuses to form the word Stop.

5. Glasses off.

You imagine too much with glasses on and nobody present to point them on. You need to be in your head enough to *focus*, but out of your head enough to *enjoy it*, without the worry that you *won't* enjoy it alone or with another person, and what does that say about you?

Tuck that question away for later—remind yourself that you have nothing to prove.

6. Imagine Fantasy Partner.

Fantasy Partner needs no introduction.

They know what to do. Ease into it. Work up to it. It's not a race, but this time *you're winning*.

7. Do the thing. On your back—never from the back. No.

Nobody is there, of course. And yes, you're ace, but you still need a face to fill your fantasies, so you have to pretend you're looking at one.

When you catch your mind wandering—like phantom hands or the cacophonous reverberations of ceramics and glass and precious artifacts shattering—Fantasy Partner would pause. They would push your glasses up your nose and ask, "*Alright?*" and you'd nod, or negate, because now that you've admitted to a partner that you can barely do sex, and you've hypothetically found a partner who cares more about *you* than *doing sex with you*, you're comfortable enough to tell the truth; you shake your head.

(You have to think about *having sex* as *doing sex* because *doing sex* is an objectively silly way to say *having sex*, and you always make situations silly so you don't do something incriminating, like cry, or freeze, or [flash back and] accidentally deck them. *Then* you would cry, because the empathy was not stolen

from your body, and sometimes people love you, even when you pretend you do not love them too.)

Fantasy Partner wouldn't view this commonplace as a nuisance, because Fantasy Partner would *give a fuck* about you, and whether or not you're stressed during sex—

—hey.

focus  
why does it *feel like that*  
UGH  
NIGHTMARE  
better things to do with my time  
oh fuck i have homework  
and now i'm cold this is taking too long  
nothing to prove  
i  
COLD  
word  
i'm thinking i'm  
sudden  
thinking im thinking i'm thinking *stop*  
im thinking im thinking im *thinking*  
why so cold nervous  
is it  
that  
it's fucking FREEZING  
but i can't do *this* under the blanket because then i won't be able to use the blanket as a blanket because the blanket will remind me of *this* and i *really* like this blanket but when i'm done with *this* i cannot think about *this* because the blanket is a bayonet to wield when that *weird feeling* comes after i do or don't or might have or couldn't—  
that *feeling*.  
that shameful . . . not-shame.

that *you should be able to enjoy your own pleasure*  
shame.

that *but it's okay if you don't*  
shame.  
that *you should bring that up in therapy*  
shame.  
that *get up and run*  
shame.  
that *if you don't fight it you can still deny it it's not like it's violent*  
shame.  
that *"Are you suuure?"*  
shame.  
that *stay still get through it*  
shame.  
that *oh. sandpaper*  
shame.  
that *you don't need to feel ashamed*  
shame.  
that *it's been eight years WHY are you still ashamed*  
shame.  
that *you need to give yourself a break*  
shame.  
that *why does it feel like it happened yesterday?*  
shame.  
that *why did i let that happen to me?*  
shame.  
that *do not think like that.*  
shame.  
that *do NOT think like that*  
shame.  
that *why are you blaming yourself?*  
shame.  
that *no—why are you blaming a fucking kid?*  
shame.  
that *you were just a kid*  
shame.  
that *you were just a FUCKING KID*  
shame.

8. shame.

it is buried under a plethora of names. it stems into branches of manageable feelings like guilt or embarrassment or rage or depression or anxiety or envy or burnout or fucking nothing at all, but at the end of the day, the tree is thriving and you water shame's gnarly roots with the tears you refuse to shed—and you've had eight years to realize that removing the stump is not a one-man job.

do you realize that?

can you please realize that?

## 9. Rejoice.

You did it. You got through it—you finished, one way or another.

Now, imagine someone there to take care of you after. They know what to do, because they asked, and they can read body language pretty well, and they listen to you. They treat your body like an altar, or some other cliché to convey that they respect you.

But you've never been holy.

You cursed the priest at your baptism. You were three. You were overwhelmed and overstimulated and he had to flick the holy water onto your face like you were the spawn of Satan. You've been damned from the start.

Once, you were reading a book and the love interests talked about *body worship* and you know that you would fuckin' *croak* if that was attempted. You can barely take a compliment—and not in the batting-eyelashes, hand waving, coy playing, *Oh no, stop, no way, way, but the, Worship seems like a ploy for someone to get their way, way.*

*Someone* who is not you. *Someone* whose definition of *worship* is the reason you navigate a warship on what should be a calm sea under clear skies—yet *there you are*, hypothetically, safewording *RED* during vanilla sex because the steering cable for the helm was snapped.

[You are a kid again. It happened. And you're smoking cigarette butts in the bathroom of the mother of the kid you're babysitting, and the frogs are screaming in your place, and you catch your own eye in the mirror, and you say *Oh*.

And the mirror splits down the middle just as your smile cracks your face in half. Shards clatter to the tile and expose the catastrophe behind the fourth wall. It is First Dead You, in that pink knit sweater, locked in the script between pale lines nobody will read between, hurling a bottomless hoard of cherished objects and art and virginity and sentimentalities—things that shatter into sharp points—against a wall you thought was impenetrable. You know that rage cannot be sated, but First Dead You is a stubborn, feral little fuck, foaming at the mouth. First Dead You knows that—now that the wall has shattered—Dead You Two will move in soon. First Dead You makes room.

They cannot wait to meet you, Dead You Two.

Oh, and you just have to laugh. It's so *funny* that It happened, because it has to be. It's so funny that you're a statistic now, and you *can't* stop laughing. You *can't* let yourself stop laughing.

So you laugh until tears sting your eyes, and it's all just *so fucking funny*, and you cry tears of laughter and then eventually you're just crying. And you make yourself look at yourself so you can really take it in, in this twisted way where you need to see what pain looks like on your face one last time before you lock it away. This is the first and last time you are allowed to feel sorry for yourself, and you savor this moment because you know that when you leave this purgatory, it will be official. You will have died again—and *bitch*, you are going to *suck it up* and *pretend*.

The kid you're babysitting wakes from their nap. They knock on the door, like the director yelling *CUT*.

You pretend to be an actor, wiping your face, smiling, laughing. You're being praised for your ability to switch on and off so seamlessly. You stay humble about it, but you know you're the best. A true professional, really. It's like It never happened. Because It was scripted. It isn't real, and you brought the Big Breakdown scene to life, and *nobody* can do it like you.

And later, you try to direct your own at-home exorcism, but your mouth doesn't foam like it did—no, it overflows. Cum.

And you don't try it again.]

10. Get in the fucking shower. Now.

Turning your skin into red leather has never worked; it never will. Still, blood sprints to the surface of your skin and starts snapping like pigs in an overcrowded slaughterhouse, but a self-inflicted brand feels better than the memory of a hick-ey, so you turn the lever to the left.

...

But *you're* probably in a better mood now. All those endorphins and shit.

Fantasy Partner probably covered you up. Carried you to the bathroom. Set you on the counter while they got the water warm for you. They wait for you to calm down before pouring water over your head, and they tilt your head back so it doesn't get in your eyes. They know you need to see, and that you've been on

*Naked and Afraid* one time too many.

They would massage shampoo into your hair, unhurried. Wash your body with the cleanest intentions and do everything to help you feel unsullied. They are very loving. Very thorough—doing that *body worship* thing.

Have you gotten comfortable with them praising you out loud?

Do you believe their reassurance that your body is anything but a dueling ground?

Maybe they don't need to speak. Maybe they just clean and kiss your skin and that says more than enough. They know you cannot speak; that you are in some *pleasant* headspace, because they are Fantasy Partner and they treat you with reverence that is not considered high maintenance.

They probably love your body because it is *yours*—not an asset of yours—but because it is *you*, even in instances where they drool and your fist *cannot* unfurl around the treat. They probably don't see sex as a treat, because they don't see it as something they can earn or win. It's just one form of intimacy, and it is not everything.

They would wipe their face and run laps until that energy is expelled.

They would come back to you. You wouldn't even have to call them.

11. Dry off with the Big Towel, like you did as a kid.

The fluffy one you wrap yourself in for comfort you refuse to need. It covers from shoulders to shins. You are safe again, hiding under a comforter to stop the bad guys from getting in.

12. Glasses on.

Kick the engine until it's running again. It could sound like a growl or a purr—it's temperamental. You should know not to take it personal.

13. Pretend that it's Fantasy Partner dealing with everything—refilling your water, freshening the air.

Whether the room feels stale or not doesn't matter. Sometimes a room holds a convoluted feeling like lungs hold back the suffocating breath of a sob or a panic attack or how shredded arms hold the rest of the body together, tightly, desperately, because you can't kill yourself or your sister will be sad, and sometimes,

after a bad time, rooms have *that smell*. Incense and weed and silenced or stifled words. Sometimes the room grips its own throat and grapples for a window—

and the toys. Fantasy Partner would deal with the toys. They know you don't like looking at them.

14. Put on music.

Drown out the ringing in your ears with soft strings and cello or some other mellow playlist that you've curated. You don't want to get spooked, so set your lights to a pretty tune. Orange and pink for a sunset. Blue and purple for a full moon.

15. Sit on the edge of the bed and have Towel Time with the cat.

Pet him while he sits on your lap and purrs louder than the music. Scratch between his ears, the base of his tail, he likes that. Let him groom you. Do not think about how his tongue feels like sandpaper. He would never harm you.

Catch him as he becomes so relaxed he starts to roll off of your lap. He will nip your hand because he thinks you pushed him.

Love him even in this dissociated state, when he feels movement and reacts before he realizes it is you he defends himself against. Remember that he was a stray for his formative years—he grew up surviving. These instincts do not disappear overnight, if at all. Love him with the knowledge that he might never grow out of this primal self-protection. Love him for trying.

Love him for asserting his boundaries at all. Love him for telling you what he needs, though he cannot speak.

I don't need a Fantasy Cat. He is perfect.

16. Don the Emotional Support Sweater and the Specific Boxers that Fit Just Right.

This is a reward for your hard work. Wearing your ESS and your SBTFJR gives you the same feeling of being wrapped in a bear hug. They are soft and warm and the ESS is big enough that you aren't squeezed and suffocating, but it will not tangle you in fabric when you are sleeping.

This, you can control. This is predictable.

You think this might be your favorite step of them all.

17. Resituate the stuffed animals so no one feels left out.

The weighted dragon goes on the right. Weighted dinosaur on the left. They had to be switched recently. I am a right-side sleeper, and the dragon was not getting enough love.

The Squishmallows go against the wall, but the squid goes next to my head. I sling an arm over the other dragon, tuck them into the crook of my elbow, and hold the hoof of the triceratops.

Do not think about how it would feel to be held with this much consideration.

18. Pull the covers up to your chin. Try to fall asleep before the bad thoughts get in.

Sometimes getting off knocks you right out. Sometimes, you lay down with your stuffed animals and your cat asleep on your foot, and your *feelings*, and you wonder if you would *want it* with the right person, or if you only crave *this* and synchronized breaths and your hearts kissing as they thump against one another when you lay chest-to-chest.

You don't know what you want. You haven't since Before.

19. Ponder some more on that <sup>weird feeling</sup> and on asexuality and if you've always been asexual, or if it's just him again, asking—kind of singing—teasing, “*Are you suuuure?*”

20. Write about it. Again.

Write about how you're not so sure of anything.