

The blocky woman stuck out her hip between the man I was watching and the row of wooden baskets. He smiled and stepped back to give her room. She solidly established her squat body in front of the bushel of small sweet onions. He had already given way to a determined woman with a huge baby stroller, her clay face puffy beneath the eyes from lack of sleep. But he wasn't impatient; he simply let the moments stretch. Maybe he loved the push and shove of these women shoppers, their own barely discernible pungent smell a good companion for onions.

Still, you could tell he wanted his turn at the onions. I had been watching him for a while from my sideline seat on the curb. I waved a distant hello at a woman I'd met in the writing class and lazily swung my view around the farmer's market, a Saturday event that was partly about vegetables and mostly about Bloomington's social scene. It was in high style on the August morning I stood watching the onion shoppers. The market was full of the August harvest of Flamin' Fury and Redhaven peaches, Brandywine and Mortgage Lifter tomatoes, Red Knight and Early Sunburst bell peppers, Silver Queen and Ambrosia sweet corn, and Swedish Peanut Fingerling and Adirondack Blue potatoes.

Fiddle cases were open for shoppers' dollars; musicians leaned together intertwining bluegrass harmonies. My toes tapped as I hummed along to "The Banks of the Ohio": And only say that you'll be mine / In no others' arms entwine.

The lusty bounty of produce stimulated the display of university town eccentricities like peacocks fan their tails. There was the spectacle of footwear--sandals with purple polyester webbing, black ballerina flats printed with pairs of red cherries, and curry-colored cloth loafers. And the earring exhibition--dangling, layered metal shapes, tiny orbs of glass and stone, silver studs and loops in lips and ears and noses and belly buttons. The competitive collection of sisal woven bags, straw baskets from Africa, and canvas totes slung over shoulders--pink and lime polka dots, swirly geo-prints, and orange and green stripes.

The guy in the onion line caught my eye again as he shifted his gaze to a woman at the nearby egg stand. There a young man laughed lightly as he gave her change for a dozen pricey blue and green Ameraucana eggs. She was a willowy woman in orange print capris, low on the hips. Midnight blue Celtic-knot tattoos angled along her shoulder under the thin, black straps of her tank top. Wisps of maroon hair played along the long curve of her neck, her moist skin translucent, shimmering in the early morning light.

Necks, I love necks. I used to kid Jim, saying, "I don't really like you; I just love the way your neck smells. Every time I think about leaving you, all I have to do is smell your neck and all is good." I remembered running my nose along his clavicle to his neck, inhaling him, down the edge of his jaw, falling into a long, soft kiss.

More quickly than I would have thought, I had found myself drawn to the idea of finding another companion. It started unexpectedly the fall after Jim died. I missed being touched, having someone to pal around with, enjoying a familiar conversation style. I thought another guy would be the answer.