

---

LAURA SOLOMON

## SIXTY SHADES OF GAY

My lover Anita and I were sitting on our front porch, enjoying a gin and tonic and staring at the sky, when we saw a small speck moving across the face of the sun. I didn't think much of it at the time. But, later that evening, the two of us were watching the evening news when an article about the transit of Venus came on. There must have been some sort of problem with the reception. The voice of the announcer was barely discernible through the static.

The last transit of Venus was 243 years ago, in 1769, the same year that Captain Cook and his crew reached New Zealand. Theirs had been an epic journey. They had sailed around the world, discovered new races of humans and catalogued many thousands of different species. They had braved storms that had sprung up from nowhere and encountered strange creatures of the deep—giant squids, killer whales and great white sharks. Cook's mission had been to reach Tahiti before 1769 in order to build an astronomical observatory. England's Royal Academy, Cook's sponsor, hoped that he would be able to observe Venus gliding across the face of the sun and therefore measure the size of the solar system. Determining its size was one of the foremost problems confronting the 18<sup>th</sup> century scientific community. Unfortunately, the observations of the 1769 transit from 76 observatories around the globe, of which Cook's was one, weren't precise enough to determine the solar system's size. This feat wasn't achieved until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when astronomers used photography to aid them.

Anita flicked off the TV with the remote.

"How exciting," she said. "We have witnessed a special event. A rarity."

I poured us both another gin and we retired back to the porch.



The second, much larger speck didn't arrive until the following week. It was far more frightening than the first arrival. A luminous entity on the far horizon, it drew ever closer. It blocked out the sun. Birds fell from the sky; cattle in the field next to the house started lowing.

Anita and I walked outside and watched it descend.

"It's like *War of the Worlds*," hissed Anita.

Six spider-like legs descended. It came to land in the field next door to our house. It was eerily silent. Anita was terrified and ran inside, slamming the porch door behind her. I couldn't tear my eyes from the scene. A door was lowered from the side of the ship and two aliens strode down the gangplank, as bold as brass, bug eyes bulging from their bulbous heads. They made curious clacking noises. I expected some kind of greeting, something clichéd—*We come in peace*, or *Salutations, earthlings*. The silence seemed louder than sound.

I ran inside and grabbed a bottle of bubbly with which to greet our guests. As the first earthling to come face to face with these extra-terrestrial visitors, I wanted to make a good impression. I popped open the cork of the Veuve Cliquot and poured three glasses. It didn't occur to me that they might not like champers, or, more likely, not even know what it was. Nor did it cross my mind that it might not be part of their culture to greet arrivistes with drink. They didn't stop to sup; they walked straight past me. It was almost as if they didn't see me, as if I was invisible. Anita had locked the front door, but the aliens were oblivious to the bolts. They charged inside, pushing down the door as if it was made of air. I followed them into the house. Somehow they seemed to know where the food was kept. They went straight to the fridge and began their raid. They must've been starving on their intergalactic flight, because they started stuffing their faces with smoked salmon, camembert cheese and quince paste. They made themselves at home. Flicked on the TV (which was still static-riddled), put up the footrest of the La-Z-Boy armchair, helped themselves to Anita's cigarettes and started smoking, not bothering with the ashtray, just casually flicking ash onto the floor.

Even though they had been extremely rude to Anita and me, barging inside the house without asking, I still had to be polite back to them. If I pissed them off and they went postal and started killing off the country's inhabitants, I'd be in deep trouble. Anita, a fiction writer by trade, had been working on a new novel for the gay porn market entitled *Sixty Shades of Gay*. One of the aliens spied the manuscript on the table and grabbed it. He opened up the black bag he carried with him and took out what appeared to be some sort of hand-held alien-to-English translation device. He must've bought it somewhere on earth because it had a sticker reading *Babel* on the side. I doubt that the wider alien community would have been familiar with the Tower of Babel. He read the first page of the hand-written manuscript and started laughing hysterically, nudging his buddy. His friend grabbed a few pages of the script and cackled along. The first alien pushed the manuscript into his black bag and the two of them made for their spaceship having secured their bounty.

"Hey," shouted Anita. "That's my novel!"

Unconcerned, the aliens sped up the gangplank and into the safety of the ship. The gangplank receded, the spaceship's motor revved and the ship disappeared into the inky vastness of the solar system.

Anita slumped back onto the couch.

“Oh God,” she moaned. “All my hard work and talent. Eight months I’ve been working on that novel and now it’s gone. I knew I should’ve used my PC, but there’s just something about ink.”

Anita had always insisted on writing her books in longhand with her grandmother’s fountain pen; she said it was so much nicer using a nib than a good old biro.

“Never mind,” I said. “*Sixty Shades of Gay* is sure to be a hit amongst the gay alien community.”

“Oh great. My agent probably could have sold my masterpiece for a six figure sum and instead it’ll be used to entertain aliens. Good to know that somebody’s having a laugh.”

She took a cigarette from her pack and lit up.

“You’ll be famous throughout the solar system,” I said. “Who cares about Planet Earth? We’re just a tiny blip. Keep the bigger picture in mind. Conquering outer space is far more important than our puny old third rock from the sun.”

Nobody but us had seen the ship descend—our hick town was in the middle of nowhere, and our nearest neighbour was three miles away from our cattle ranch. There would’ve been mass hysteria if pictures of the alien craft had been released onto the internet and to the media. Anita wasn’t much consoled by the fact that she may have had a hit in the alien gay community. She sank into a deep depression from which she refused to budge. She lay in bed for three weeks, lamenting the loss of her manuscript.

During her convalescence, I tended to the cattle alone, feeding them bales of hay, shifting them from paddock to paddock when they had consumed all the grass in their current enclosure. At night I cooked meals for Anita and took them in to her. She ate them sitting upright in bed.

After three weeks she emerged from her cocoon. She showered, dressed and prepared herself to re-write the entire novel from scratch, this time giving a name to her formerly nameless hero—Clifford Forsyth.



NOTE: The following transcript has been translated from the Alverian.

He’d carried it off. He’d secured for himself the most precious possession in the entire universe.

With the valuable goods tucked safely under one arm and a megaphone in hand, Zador strode purposefully into the crowded bazaar, fully prepared to hustle.

“What fools,” he cackled. “Such a precious item to be so insufficiently guarded. I must secure the best possible deal.”

Already a small crowd was gathering. Somebody tried to steal the manuscript from under Zador’s arm, but he snatched it away. It would not be stolen. It would be sold for a hefty sum, enough to keep him fed, clothed and watered for the rest of his life. He needed to generate interest, an air of excitement. A feeling that he had in his possession an item of value that would not be selling cheap. He raised the megaphone to his lips.

“For sale to the highest bidder. A genuine 100% authentic super-duper quality earth manuscript, freshly err...acquired.”

Three fellow Alverians gathered around him along with a Brigian or two, nostrils quivering with excitement.

“I’d like to look at it,” said a young female Alverian.

“Only from a distance,” said Zador. He didn’t want anybody’s grubby fingers smudging the ink.

“Could you tell us a little bit about the plot?”

“Gay sex, gay sex and more gay sex,” said Zador, who had scribbled out Anita’s name and written his own on the cover. “Sure to be a hit throughout the solar system and possibly also on an extra-solar scale. Couldn’t have been written on this planet. It’s really out of this world.”

Already, his mind spun with the thought of all the money that could be generated from merchandising. Gay porn action figures, posters, coffee cups—the works.

A rather aloof-looking alien stood apart from the rest: Xorian, managing director of Uni-Solar Books, one of the most powerful publishing houses in the solar system. He wore a pin-striped grey suit teamed with a ruffled red shirt and paisley cravat. One dwarf alien stood either side of him. He did not approach Zador himself. Instead, he sent one of his minions to speak with him. He offered a hefty sum for the manuscript, and Zador snapped it up, holding out his wrist, microchip-side up, so Xorian could zap his cash card over it. The manuscript was his.

Once word got round Alveria that a precious piece of gay porn was about to be released onto the market, the government came down heavy. They were an oppressive bunch—staunch anti-homosexuals. They jailed anybody displaying homosexual tendencies. *Sixty Shades of Gay* was banned throughout the solar system, but the Gay Alverian Liberation Front had been gathering force for some time. This cherished manuscript was booty in their war against

oppression. The government could stop the manuscript from being released onto bookshelves, but they couldn't prevent it from hitting the solar-web, where it would spark a revolution. Gay Alverian Pride. Homosexual aliens, who had once been forced to cower indoors, could walk boldly down the street, shoulders back, heads held high, fluffy pink feather boas wrapped around their necks.

One of Xorian's minions typed up the novel and made it available for download. It was a huge hit amongst the gay alien community who related to its frankness. Zador's life was forever changed. He couldn't walk down the street without being mobbed by screaming fans. At first he enjoyed the attention, but after six months of complete strangers banging at his door and begging for an introduction, he longed for nothing more than to be left in peace, to be anonymous. They hounded him with questions. *How long had it taken him to write the novel? Was any of it based on fact, or was it all completely fictitious? Were there to be any sequels?*

The fans weren't satisfied with just the book. They wanted a piece of Zador, they wanted to touch him, to maul him. They wanted more words, sequels. Zador, who, to be perfectly frank, had only read the first third of the novel anyway, was unsure how to solve the problem of producing more work. It was his father, Tritan, who suggested he revisit Earth in order to capture for himself the woman who had produced the first tour de force.

Zador descended to Earth in the dead of night. Silver-tongued though he was, he knew he wouldn't be able to persuade Anita to go with him of her own volition. He peered in through the living-room window, pressed his nose up to the pane, his large eyes prominent in his forehead. She was sitting up at the dining table, reading. He could even see the title of the novel: *To The Lighthouse*. Her laptop sat in front of her on the table. The other biped, whom he assumed to be her partner, was nowhere in sight. Zador smashed the glass with his fists, which were steel-plated, like those of all Alverians. Anita screamed as Zador climbed over the sill and picked his way across the glass fragments. He gagged her with one hand and dragged her out through the front door to where the motor of his spaceship revved.

On Alveria, Anita became Zador's slave, forced to produce one thousand words a day. Zador became rich off her back, but Anita didn't get much out of it. When he'd milked her for all she was worth, when she was old and could no longer produce quality work, Zador, riddled with envy at her talent (even though he would have been nothing without her) hired a hit alien to zap her with a laser. *Sixty Shades of Gay* and its two sequels, *Sixty Shades Gayer* and *Sixty Shades Gayest* were widely read and enjoyed, even long after Zador's death.

