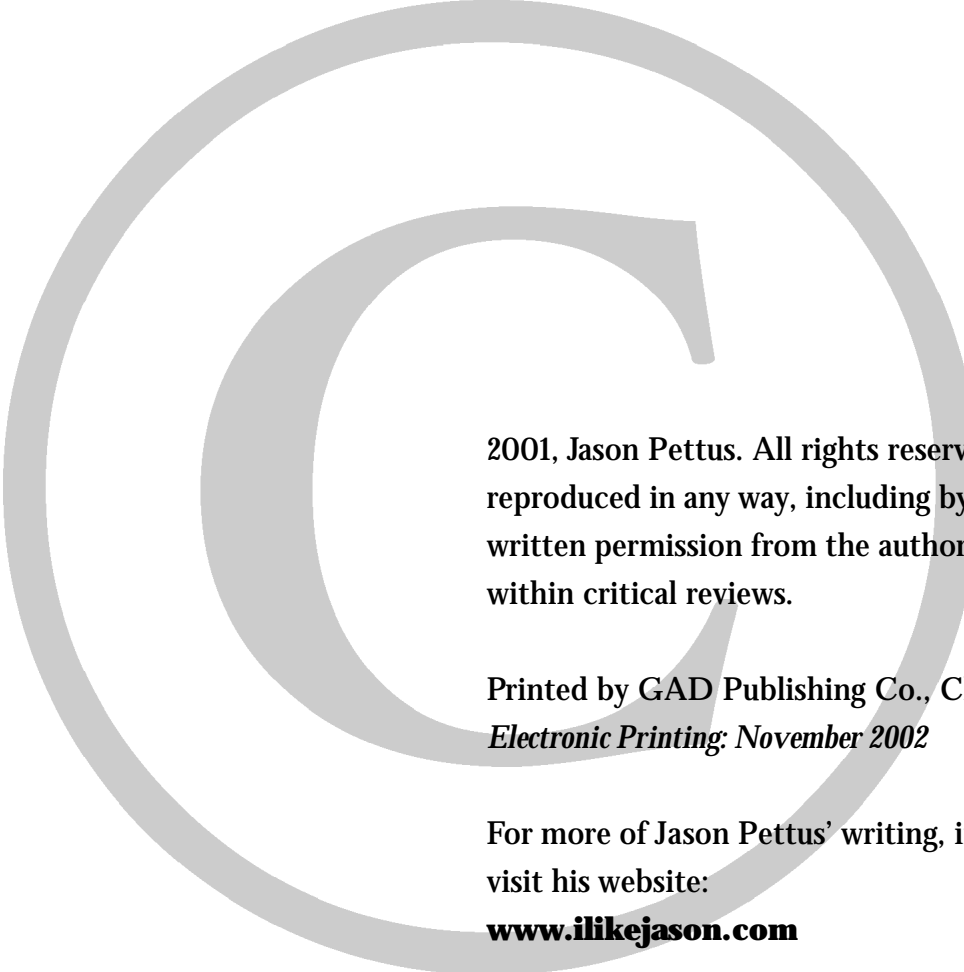


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CELIBATE

**A SOLO PERFORMANCE
BY JASON PETTUS**



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www.ilikejason.com

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I've stopped having sex. Or, I mean, I stopped having sex awhile ago, but I'm finally now doing it by choice. Or, not doing it by choice. Whatever. Why did I decide to stop having sex? Oh, there's all kinds of reasons why. Why do birds sing in the morning, even the day after a forest fire? Why can you never get a cab when you most need one? Why is there evil in the world? Why is there good? One day I just woke up and decided that I would be happier not having sex, and that was that. And have I been happier? Yeah, I think I have. Or, at least I feel like I'm learning to interact with the world in a different way. You know, I haven't consciously gone without sex since I was 19 years old, thirteen years ago. I've learned a lot since then. We all learn a lot in that thirteen-year period. Consciously not having sex has taught me some things about myself I didn't realize.

I thought tonight I would share some of them
with you.

For Andrea Meenahan

LESSON 1.

I LEARNED THAT I WAS INTO PORN JUST A LITTLE TOO MUCH.

Too much porn? Too much porn? The idea of owning too much porn is like the idea of a perpetual-motion machine - I suppose it's possible in theory, but it's yet to be proven to me. I want my porn and I want it now. I want depictions of frank and explicit sexuality among consenting adults. I want video porn, magazine porn, literary porn, CD-ROM porn, DVD porn, spoken-word porn and oil painting porn. I want to see people fuck. I don't want no softcore, HBO-at-midnight tits-and-ass bullshit. I don't want no delicate, leave-it-to-the-imagination, let's-be-careful-not-to-offend-anyone erotica bullshit. I want a penis and I want a vagina, and I want to see them come together. I want to see fingers and anuses. I want to see tongues and clitori. I want to see breasts and then I want to see some more breasts. I want hardcore, old-skool, money-making disco-breaking sex.

I will go to the store to get porn. I will go on the internet to get porn. I will get a satellite dish to get porn. I will borrow porn. I will steal porn. I will lock myself in a dark little cubicle in the middle of a public retail space, feed token after token in a slot in a wall connected to a TV to get porn. Are people fucking? Wrap it up; I'll take it. Can I masturbate to it? Wrap it up; I'll take it.

If I can't find porn, I will make porn, out of anything that is available. Underwear models? That's porn. Swimsuit issues? That's porn too. Perfume ads in fashion magazines? Whaddya know, that's porn as well. I can jerk off to music videos. I can jerk off to sitcoms from the 1970s. I can jerk off to Japanese comic books. I have jerked off to Japanese comic books.

I want porn, and I want it now. I want the filthiest, most depraved acts ever committed to long-term storage devices. I want to see a guy fuck a woman. I want to see a guy fuck two women. I want to see two guys fuck the same woman at once. I want to see two women go down on each other while a guy fucks one of them. I want to see two guys go down on each other while a woman fucks one of them with a strap-on. I want straight sex. I want group sex. I want gay sex and I want lesbian sex. I want dwarf sex, amputee sex and hermaphrodite sex. Keep your home videos of drunk sorority girls in New Orleans flashing their tits - I want to see two people in leather and ball gags beat the shit out of each other and then fuck. I want to jerk off to people pissing on each other. I want to jerk off to people being photographed without their knowledge. I want porn that will make my friends squeamish. I want porn that will make my PORN friends squeamish.

Do I have money in my pocket? Then I've got porn. Who needs to pay rent? I've got porn. Who needs to buy food? I've got porn. Am I out of money? I've got the web. I've got mass emailing lists. I've got 5,233 photographs on my hard drive, 2.4 gigabytes of memory. Too much porn? Fuck you - I've lost more porn than you'll ever own. I get porn from my parents for Christmas. I had to buy a special bag just to store all the porn I own. I own porn I've bought from guys on sidewalks on the condition that I didn't say where I got it. Why, if you took all the porn currently in my possession and added up its retail value, you would arrive at approximately \$12,400.

\$12,400.

Fuck.

I could go to Europe with that kind of money.

I could go to Europe six times with that kind of money.

I want to...uh, go outside. I want to feel the sun on my face. I want to go visit my friends. I want to throw this poem away and forget that I ever wrote it. I want to remember a time when porn meant three Playboys from 1974 stuck between the mattresses of my teenage bed, to be gingerly opened in the middle of the night without waking the dog.

I want to go to Europe. Six times.

I think...I own enough porn.

LESSON 2.

I LEARNED THAT A LOT OF OTHER PEOPLE WOULD LIKE TO GIVE UP SEX AS WELL.

Man: You know, I've heard this a lot recently.

Woman: I admire you so much for giving up sex. It takes a really strong person to do that.

Man: And I say, "Well, you know what Luscious Jackson has to say about it."

Woman: No, what?

Man: It takes a strong man to stand by a strong woman.

Woman: Right on, motherfucker!

Man: But that's not what I'm really thinking. What I'm really thinking is...

Woman: I admire you so much for giving up sex. It takes a really strong person to do that.

Man: Strong? I'm not strong. You misunderstand. This comes from a point of weakness.

Woman: What do you mean?

Man: You know how sex is a normal part of someone's everyday life?

Woman: Yeah.

Man: Well, sex had become like its own person to me. It had become as distinct and as large a part of my life as a friend. Or, I take that back. Like a girlfriend. The entire concept of sex became my new girlfriend.

Woman: That's...odd.

Man: Yeah, it is. And sometimes sex would talk to me like this...

Woman: (*Singing seductively*) Bali Hi...will tempt you...Bali Hi...

Man: And sometimes she would talk to me like this...

Woman: (*Gangster-style*) All right, muthafucka, get on that floor and let's get to it!

Man: Sex...did not always talk to me like this. When I was 14, when I discovered sex for the first time, she came to me much like a genie out of a bottle.

Woman: (*I Dream of Jeannie style, shaking off invisible water*) Oh, my, where am I? (*Notices other performer*) Oh, hello. Who are you?

Man: I'm Jason.

Woman: I'm Sex.

Man: Nice to meet you.

Woman: Well...(suddenly exhales) Whew! That was fun, wasn't it?

Man: Yeah, that's for sure.

Woman: Let's do that again...(suddenly serious) as soon and as possible and as many times as

we can until we die.

Man: Which is exactly how a fourteen year old's relationship with sex should be. And me and Sex got along exactly as we should of over the years -- 16...

Woman: I need it I need it I need it.

Man: 17...

Woman: I want it I want it I want it

Man: 18...

Woman: I'm about to have it, I'm about to have it, I'm about to have it

Man: You meet Sex's younger cousin, Second Base...

Woman: (*Squeaky, high-pitched voice*) Hi! You just touched my boobies!

Man: And then you turn 19...

Woman: I got it! I got it! (*Starts running around edge of stage facing crowd*) Hallelujah, shout it to the heavens, I got it! (*Comes back to mic*)

Man: And you suddenly have a mate.

Woman: I can have it anytime I want it. And I want it right now.

Man: Which is exactly how a 21-year-old's relationship with Sex should be.

Woman: You know, I admire you so much for giving up sex. It takes a really...

Man: Strong guy? You should've seen how strong a guy I was after my first breakup. My relationship with Sex was changing every day. First it was...

Woman: Come back! Come back!

Man: Then it was...

Woman: Fuck you! I'm glad you're gone.

Man: Then...

Woman: (*Calmly*) I'm all alone.

Man: (*Snaps fingers*)

Woman: I'm all alone. Hey, Jason!

Man: Yeah?

Woman: Let's go have sex with somebody else!

Man: And life continues on and on like that through your adult years. But something...

Woman: I admire you so much...

Man: Something went wrong. I don't know what happened, but things got really backwards in my head. Sex and I suddenly had not that great of a relationship. It was...

Woman: You need me.

Man: And I wasn't sure if I did.

Woman: Of course you do! What kind of silly talk is that? (*Pause*) Silly talk! (*Suddenly com - passionate*) Of course you need me. (*Walks over to other performer, puts arm around him, and speaks next line slowly in his microphone*) I make all the pain go away. (*Slaps other performer on ass and goes back to own mic*)

Man: And I listened to her! Augh! She'd say the stupidest things sometimes! It used to drive me crazy! Anytime she was upset, it was like...

Woman: (*Aggressive stance throughout*) Fuck me.

Man: Or if she was drunk, it was like...

Woman: FUCK me.

Man: Or if she was bored, it was like...

Woman: FUCK me.

Man: Anytime I needed to feel better, anytime I had to forget about my everyday woes, anytime I needed a quick fix, it was...

Woman: Fuck me.

Man: It started to reflect in my relationships.

Woman: It takes a really strong person to...

Man: Sex and I...became enemies.

Woman: I hate you. (*Long pause*) I really mean that.

Man: I formed a combative relationship with my girlfriend.

Woman: No, wait, I love you. (*Pause*) But I'm going to turn on you when you least expect it.

Man: I didn't want to date her anymore, but I wasn't about to break up with her.

Woman: And I'm going to turn on you in the most public place possible.

Man: To tell you the truth...(*Whispering*) She scared the hell out of me.

Woman: And I'm going to turn on you in the most humiliating way ever known.

Man: I couldn't get past Sex. I kept wanting to meet these women on the other side of Her, perfectly nice women, they seemed to me, but She kept getting in the way.

Woman: I'm the only one you need!

Man: But that just wasn't true.

Woman: (*Scornfully*) Wasn't true! I'm the only one you've ever loved, the only one you've ever cared about.

Man: This is not how a 30-year-old's relationship with Sex should be! Something had gotten backwards. So I said goodbye.

Woman: You said goodbye?

Man: I said goodbye. (*Long pause*) For now. So when you say...

Woman: I admire you so much for giving up sex. It takes a really strong person to do that.

Man: I say, "Oh, well, it's not that big a deal." Because the truth is just too long and too weird.

Woman: Wow. That's a fascinating story. You should write that into a poem.

Man: Nah. I hate that navel-gazing shit.

LESSON 3.

I LEARNED TO STOP BRAGGING ABOUT SEXUAL CONQUESTS.

Man 2: (*Enters stage with two beers, hands one to Man 1*) Here you go.

Man 1: Thanks. So where was I?

Man 2: You were in their car, getting stoned.

Man 1: Oh yeah. So I'm their car, getting stoned, right?

Man 2: Right.

Man 1: And these women, I swear to God, these women...

Man 2: Whaddya gonna do?

Man 1: These women were getting high and kissing each other at the same time.

Man 2: What do you mean?

Man 1: Like, one of them would take a toke, then she'd bend over to the other one and blow the smoke in her mouth while she was kissing her.

Man 2: You're kidding me.

Man 1: No, I'm not kidding you.

Man 2: So what'd you do?

Man 1: What do you think I did? I sat there, dumbfounded, staring at them.

Man 2: You're not a porn star.

Man 1: I'm not a porn star. I don't see shit like this every day.

Man 2: They were kissing each other.

Man 1: Yeah.

Man 2: And blowing smoke into each other's mouths.

Man 1: Yeah. So then we get back to my place...

Man 2: You'd cleaned your apartment, I hope.

Man 1: Well, kinda. But that's part of the story, actually. We get back to my place and I say,

Man 2: "Would you two like to come up?"

Man 1: "Would you two like to come up," right. They're not going to come up, I know that already, but I figure it wouldn't hurt to ask.

Man 2: Right. So...

Man 1: So they came up.

Man 2: You're kidding me.

Man 1: No, I'm not kidding you.

Man 2: They came up?

Man 1: They came up.

Man 2: So then what?

Man 1: So we're up in my apartment, and I'm playing some music...

Man 2: Sleater-Kinney.

Man 1: Of course. And I've got this bottle of Jim Beam left over from that party...

Man 2: The one at Bobby's place?

Man 1: The one at Bobby's place.
Man 2: That was such a great fuckin' party!
Man 1: I know!
Man 2: Some chick made out with me at that party.
Man 1: Who?
Man 2: (*Shrugs*) I dunno. Some theatre major at DePaul.
Man 1: Anyway, we're in my apartment, we're smoking even more pot, we're listening to Sleater-Kinney, and we're drinking bourbon and cokes.
Man 2: But you had just been doing shots at the bar like, an hour before that.
Man 1: I know!
Man 2: You got a charmed life, Pettus.
Man 1: Anyway, right, my apartment's kind of a mess...
Man 2: There's a surprise.
Man 1: And my porn isn't completely covered up, right? Like, I threw a blanket over my tapes at the last second but a couple of them are sticking out so you can see them.
Man 2: And they saw them.
Man 1: And they saw them.
Man 2: And they got all pissed off and left.
Man 1: Oh no no no no no.
Man 2: (*Pause*) Yeah?
Man 1: They got them out.
Man 2: They didn't.
Man 1: They did.
Man 2: They didn't!
Man 1: They did!
Man 2: They didn't get out the tapes.
Man 1: They did get out the tapes. So the one, the taller one...
Man 2: The blonde one.
Man 1: The blonde one, right, she says all high-like, "Heeey, whaddya got here?"
Man 2: And what'd you say?
Man 1: I said, "It's porn."
Man 2: What else could you say?
Man 1: What else could I say?
Man 2: So what'd she say?
Man 1: She says, (*Dramatic pause*) "Let's watch it."
Man 2: "Let's watch it?"
Man 1: "Let's watch it."
Man 2: You're kidding me.
Man 1: I am not kidding you.
Man 2: You are fucking kidding me!
Man 1: Listen to me – I am as serious as an evening of feminist poetry.
Man 2: "Let's watch it."
Man 1: "Let's watch it."
Man 2: So what'd the other woman say?
Man 1: She said, "That sounds cool."

Man 2: "That sounds cool?"
Man 1: "That sounds cool."
Man 2: (*Puts hand over eyes and shakes head*) All right, all right, all right. You didn't actually go along with this, did you?
Man 1: Of course I did. Are you kidding me?
Man 2: (*Pause*) Yeah, you're right, stupid question. So then what?
Man 1: So we're watching this tape...
Man 2: Smoking pot...
Man 1: Drinking bourbon...
Man 2: And listening to Sleater-Kinney.
Man 1: PJ Harvey.
Man 2: PJ Harvey?
Man 1: I don't know, it seemed appropriate. And then...
Man 2: And then?
Man 1: And then a threeway comes on the screen.
Man 2: No it didn't.
Man 1: Yes it did.
Man 2: No it didn't!
Man 1: Yes it did! And the tall one...
Man 2: The blonde...
Man 1: Right, the blonde, she says, "Now there's something I've never tried before."
Man 2: Okay, hold on a minute. Hold on just a goddamn minute. This woman actually suggested having a threeway?
Man 1: Yeah.
Man 2: Smoking.
Man 1: Yeah.
Man 2: Drinking.
Man 1: Yeah.
Man 2: PJ Harvey.
Man 1: Yeah, yeah, yeah.
Man 2: So what'd you do?
Man 1: What do you think I did? I stayed absolutely quiet and waited to see what the other woman had to say.
Man 2: And what'd she have to say?
Man 1: God help me, Shappy...
Man 2: What?
Man 1: These women, Shappy, these women are going to kill me.
Man 2: What? What'd she say?
Man 1: (*Pause*) She was into it too.
Man 2: Okay, that's it.
Man 1: I'm serious.
Man 2: That's it. That's it! I don't want to hear any more of this story!
Man 1: All right.
Man 2: (*Long pause*) They were both into the threeway.
Man 1: Yeah.

Man 2: And the drinking.
Man 1: Yeah.
Man 2: And the smoking.
Man 1: Yeah.
Man 2: And the PJ Harvey.
Man 1: Ben Folds Five. We had switched CDs by then.
Man 2: *(Pause)* Amazing. So did you...
Man 1: *(Pause)* Did I what?
Man 2: You know.
Man 1: What do you think?
Man 2: *(Long pause)* Don't tell me. I don't want to know. Seriously, don't tell me. *(Another long pause)* Okay, tell me.
Man 1: *(Long pause)* Yeah, I did.
Man 2: Jesus fuckin' Christ! *(Walks off stage, points to Man 1 and yells)* Jesus fuckin' Christ, Pettus!
Man 1: Whatever.
Man 2: You're my hero! You're my Charles fuckin' Lindbergh!
Man 1: Okay, okay, settle down.
Man 2: *(Walks back to mic)* Amazing. Absolutely amazing.
Man 1: Hey, I had almost nothing to do with it.
Man 2: Is that a true story?
Man 1: Sure it's true.
Man 2: The whole thing?
Man 1: The whole thing.
Man 2: Absolutely true?
Man 1: Yes. *(Long pause)* No.
Man 2: What's the true part?
Man 1: Everything up to the porn tape is true.
Man 2: And everything else...
Man 1: Isn't.
Man 2: Why do you do this, Pettus?
Man 1: I don't know. *(Long pause)* I'm lonely, Shappy.
Man 2: *(Pause)* I know, Pettus. I know. *(Pause)* You want another beer?
Man 1: Yeah, sure. Thanks.
Man 2: *(Walks off stage)*

LESSON 4.

I LEARNED THAT YOU CAN STOP HAVING SEX AND STILL DATE.

My new girlfriend will not have sex with me.

I have the best girlfriend in the whole fucking world!

My new girlfriend and I are trying something that neither of us have done since we lost our virginities – we are consciously choosing to not have sex until we feel that the time is right. The act of intercourse, to us, has become its own organic process – much like getting a group of friends together to all see a movie. No one individual is in charge of it, no one individual can make the entire thing happen, no one individual can precisely guess at which moment in time it will all come together. One minute you're standing outside the movie theatre, smoking a cigarette and glancing nervously at your watch, the next minute, BOOM, all your friends are there and you can finally go in and see the movie. This is what sex is like between me and my new girlfriend.

It was a little odd at first. I mean, there we were, after our second or third date, everything going beautifully. She likes me, I like her, we're laughing, we're talking, we're kissing, everything is going beautifully. And there we are, standing outside my building, and I can tell she's wondering when I'm finally going to invite her back up to my place. And what am I supposed to say? I'm sorry. It's not you, it's me. I've got problems. I've got baggage. I've got issues. I've got a whole goddamn subscription, I've got so many issues. I like you, but I don't want to fuck you. I'm attracted to you, but I don't want to fuck you. I want to fuck you, but I don't want to fuck you.

My new girlfriend is pretty cool. She's tough and smart and quiet, which is the exact goddamn opposite of me. My new girlfriend is like a bamboo reed in the middle of a Japanese lake – she bends with the current, flexing herself to accommodate changing conditions, yet always returns to a rigid, strong posture after the wind dies down. My new girlfriend is like a plate of homemade cookies, ten seconds after your mom takes them out of the oven – they burn the hell out of your fingers, but oh, it is so good to put them in your mouth.

You shouldn't get me wrong – I WANT to have sex with my new girlfriend. There's nothing I'd love more than to suddenly rip her clothes off one night, take the phone off the hook and magically create that terrible beast with two backs. I lust after my new girlfriend, that's not the issue at all. The issue is whether I control my lust or whether my lust controls me.

Dating without sex is a difficult thing. Or, I don't mean generally difficult, but it's impossible for me to figure out whether my new girlfriend likes me or not. I mean, really, think about it. I've spent the last thirteen years of my life determining whether women like me or not based on whether they want to fuck me or not. Remove that part of the equation and I'm left floundering. There, she just kissed me. Does that mean she likes me? Ooh, she just held my hand when no one was looking. Does that mean she likes me? She just called me at two in the morning, drunk off her ass. Wait, does that mean she likes me? It's fuckin' hard, I'm telling you!

I do know this, though – I like her. It's not often that you find a woman who will listen to all this bullshit you've just heard over the last half-hour and still want to go home with you. My new girlfriend, she understands me. And fuck almighty, it is difficult to find that in another human being. She gets it, you know? She gets it, she gets me, she gets my writing, and God help her, she gets why I do a confessional journal on the web. She understands my anger and she understands my fear. She understands why I lay awake at night, staring up at the ceiling. She understands why I flinch when people try to touch me. She gets it, and I'm not about to fuck that all up by having sex with her too soon.

So when are my new girlfriend and I going to have sex? As my friend Andy Muenks said in third grade, "None of your beeswax." To tell you the truth, even we don't know when we're going to have sex. With any luck, we won't break up before it happens, but you never know, I guess. I'm not a fortune-teller, but I do know what I want. And what I want, what I want right this second, not tomorrow, not ten years from now, not at any other point except right this second, what I want is to take my baby in my arms, give her a big ol' kiss, and thank her – thank her so much – for not having sex with me.

CELIBATE was first performed in March 2001 at the Chicago nightclub Subterranean. It was commissioned by Krytal Ashe as part of the weekly spoken-word show “Mental Graffiti.” It was originally performed with the assistance of Mia Fiorella and Shappy Seasholtz.

JASON PETTUS is the author of three novels and, to date, over forty self-published books of short work. His performance credits include National Public Radio, the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art, and the National Poetry Slam, where he placed second in 1997. His other long-form performance projects include *Jasonettes*, *The Heatseeker*, and *Notes From My Grandmother's Funeral*. He lives in Chicago.

END