

Love Story #23

I am insane! Perpetually pushed by passion into unprecedented, indescribable ecstasies. Mad for love, I am. Reckless emotions embodied in, but irreducible to, lust. Lust and language, inevitably adequate, make me daft. Crazy!

If I describe my fondness in mere physicalities, can I not fail? It is the fool who seeks to confirm with his body what he knows with his soul. How can the tongue triumph? I am speechless. Is it not foolish to suppose that my feelings are captured in my Love's fleshy pink lips, the slight grace of motion in her hand, or the way she crosses her legs on a cool summer morning? (Saliva runs down my chin and drips on my lapel.) Is it love stirring in my loins? Is it love that courses through the veins of my erect penis? Is it love that runs out my eyes and down my face, the taste of salt on my lips? This goose-fleshiness, this moistness of my mouth, is it love?

I remember the instance when my retinas were first licked by my Love's blessed image. I remember the line of her calf, how it flowed into the strap of her Highness's high-heel as her legs strode, long and luscious. How my soul groaned with guttural ecstasy! I could almost feel the sinewy texture of her Achilles tendon between my teeth.

Glorious images flashing before my pre-pubescent eyes in exotic, dream-like technicolor shades; her platinum hair a shade of green, her teeth slightly blue, she had, for me, an other-worldliness appeal. As she pushed the green locks of her sixties flip hairdo behind an ear as sweet as truffles, I imagined her and erotica monster, too perfect for this planet.

It was love even then, though I did not know it at the time. As I stared silently at the television, my face aglow in iridescent light, my Love speaking her lines, my hands trembled. Her words floating away, the sound of her voice bathed me like a child in the womb. The film was one of a dozen-odd B-movies she made, a sci-fi thriller called *Ravenpeople*.

The movie, though not one of her greatest efforts, has remained precious to me as a dramatic epiphany that has changed my life. For the better or worse is a matter for discourse, for you must consider me daft for feeling as I do. I admit that even I have wondered where I would be had I never known my Love. Perhaps I would have lived in the suburbs, like my father, instead of cold-water flats with dingey walls and swinging bulbs of light. Perhaps my home would echo with merry sounds of children instead of the scratching of rats, the dripping of faucets, and the vices of neighbors.

But I cannot reduce this gift I've received to a curse. I have suffered for my Love, but suffering is divine. Suffering has made my love all the more sweet, all the more real. My dismalness is the tangible object of my love. I could never trade this life of pain and periodic passion for a life of stable mediocrity. I cannot trade life for death, vitality for stagnation. My love can only live in this instability; true love exists only in dynamic decadence. It is a heavy cross I bear, but the pain is sweet.

I was twelve when I saw Ravenpeople. It would be some years later before I would again know such intensity of emotion. My passion was lying still on some unconscious level until it could rear its beautiful head at some later, more affectable time.

Normalness is a state of being, a result of the absence of a reason to be any other way, a lack of an inspiring force. The normal look to each other for patterns of behavior. (The mad need only look inward.) Normalness is a void. I grew up in a healthy void of normalcy.

At 16, I was thin and good-looking, with none of the dark circles you now see under my eyes. I was intelligent, if somewhat un-athletic, and charmingly shy. (Do not think me arrogant. The person described is not the person describing. I have become so separated from this lively young lad that I recall these things because I know, intellectually but not personally, these things to be true. To compliment

my then is to condemn my now. It is not egotistical masturbation to say that I was not unpopular with girls.)

My coolness toward life lent itself to an ease of conversation, a sparkling empty wit, that put my visage in the dreams and diaries of more than one squealing, giggly girl. I describe myself not only to set up the situation of my second encounter with my Love, but also to reiterate the magnitude of my emotion. It should be made clear that my love is honest; it is not merely the emotional grappling of a pimply-faced, frustrated youth. My love offers more than any nauseatingly normal life could.

Imagine, if you will, two naive youths under a sparkling summer sky in papa's Plymouth watching movies at the drive-in and timidly holding hands. Safe in the pure and mediocre arms of mid-America, they are dreamy, drippy darlings. They are the youth of America! She likes his dark eyes and the cleft in his chin. He likes her freckles and the shape of her breasts. She dreams of a house and him as a husband. He dreams of her hard, pink nipples. She is moved to school-girl passion when he strategically moves his hand to her knee. He shifts uncomfortably, knees against the steering column, self-conscious of his evergrowing manhood. They are only faintly aware of the screen as the third and final film unfolds before them.

Suddenly, a voice from his unconscious pulls his attention from under her skirt. He stares at the screen where his forgotten Love stands, twelve feet tall, clothed in an imitation wooly mammoth pelt.

I would discover later that the film in which I met my Love for the second time was called Bear-Claw. It was a movie she made early on in her career, right after Ravenpeople.

Bear-Claw, for all practical purposes, marked the start of our relationship. As I sat in the front seat, a dreamy Suzy Q with flared nostrils and closed eyes wrapped around my naughty finger, I was mesmerized by the mammothed beauty that would become the guiding force in my life - the

shoulders, the neck, the breast shapes that would make me stir, in uncomfortable bliss, in my bed night after troubled night. Simple Suzy must have been flattered by my erotic squirming, perplexed by my orgasmic panting, shocked, perhaps, by the wet spot on my pants. She would have been relieved, though, to learn my passion was not for her. She would have been repulsed had she known for whom I felt.

From that time forward, I have become something more than human, humanness being a mere staring point. What I have become is something real, a monster of love, the personification of passion. This player of bit parts in B-movies would, from that time forward, pervade in all parts of my life. The way I ate, slept, breathed, smiled, frowned, laughed, cried, brushed my teeth - the way I would live - was all because of my Love.

I remained with a confused, crying Suzy Q to watch the credits unroll, hoping to catch a glimpse of the name of my strange, new *raison d'être*. To my dismay, the credits listed two possibilities: "Woman in Fake Woolly Mammoth Pelt #1" and "Woman in Fake Woolly Mammoth Pelt #2". My Love's name was either Tina Bartholomew or Candy Callahagn. This mystery was easily solved in the following years and subsequent films.

That I fail to say which name it was here is not due to an overt oversight. Her human name will not be uttered by these lips except in cases requiring extreme pragmatism. Her human name, being human, must fall short of the divinity of my Divine. In a hundred years, no one will recall the human name of my Love. If properly stored, celluloid will last forever.

A relationship is most magical at the beginning. Everyone knows the sparkling eyes of newlyweds and young lovers. It is the sparkle of new discovery and intimacy. It is the sparkle of romance. Usually, this romance fades and evolves, after a few months, into something more stable and mundane. For me, though, the magic has per-

sisted for years. Since my Love played only supporting roles, her human name was never on a film's poster-ad. Consequently, meetings were rare and very, very special. I have spent thousands of dollars on chances of reunion. I have spent countless hours sitting through bad scripts and idiotic plots in the hope of finding a film in which my Love would show her heavenly face for a few brief seconds. If she had a speaking part, her voice was always new to me. I was always brought to tears.

I became thin and pale, trading some of my food money for movie fare, trading sunlight for the potential rookery of a dark movie-house. The temples I worshipped in had sticky floors and slanted walkways. My life was broken into 90 minute increments. Consequently, I have become quite an authority of the B-movie genre. I have seen gallons upon gory gallons of movie-blood spilled - seen dozens of decapitations, disembowelments, and dismemberments. Of the hundreds and hundreds I have seen, there have been only thirteen films in which my Love has appeared.

When I would find one of these rare treasures, I would call in sick at work and watch every showing. Sometimes, if I was lucky, the picture would play for two weeks straight - forcing me to sell possessions for ticket money. I would sit in the back row of nearly empty movie houses, nervously keeping a lookout for tuxedoed-flashlightcarriers, stroking myself gently, timing my climax with the appearance of my Love.

Other times, a film may show only once - usually as the third attraction of a triple feature at a drive-in. Though they showed but once, these films allowed me, in a rented car, a safer arena for my fondling.

For the first few years, these rare meetings were enough. I realized, however, it could not last forever. I knew I had to find and secure my Love in a more permanent way. It was after a profound dry-spell, during which I had not seen my Love for months, I decided to find her in her

uncinematic form.

During that time, I had decayed to a near-death state. I had quit going to work, fell behind on rent, starved myself... My days were spent wandering zombie-like through my empty (I had already sold what little furniture I owned) apartment. I remember little of that cold time, but I do recall sitting for days on the floor next to the carcass of my heat register, listening to the voices from the apartment below mine as they reverberated up the pipes. I hallucinated it was the voice of my Love, calling to me and mumbling about cab fare in a thick Oriental accent. I saw my Love's face looking up to my window from a passing car in the pre-dawn hours of morning. I stared at a depiction of my Love's figure in the print of my stale, yellow wallpaper. I breathed the stench of my humble abode with a waterless commode. I crawled under the sink, hiding for hours from the aliens that made scratching noises on my ceiling, and imagined the rusty pipes were really bloody entrails.

You must see... You must know... My love as true. One cannot know true love until one has suffered for it. In those despairing days, I suffered for my Love.

At the end of forty days, my love was true. My love, decadent and delusion-ridden, was true. Those days were desperate, but, at the same time, they were a confirmation and a victory. My divine suffering and a true and tested love were, for me, religious signs. It was time for me to enter into Heaven.

So, with a purified soul and a renewed conviction, I went back to work. I quit going to movies, pinched pennies for my pilgrimage, lived diligently, made plans, and waited anxiously for my journey to Hollywood.

At the end of five months, I had saved enough money for a one-way bus ticket from mid-America to the Promised Land and whatever living expenses I would need there. In May, I climbed on a Greyhound pointed Westward with a little under a thousand dollars in my pocket, gave my ticket to Noah, (Forgive the Biblical references, they are thick I know. They come to me, now, as I recall it.) and settled into a seat among the other animals.

I was too alive with anticipation to sleep, so I spent the hours among snoring passengers watching the barren fields of Nebraska, Utah, and Nevada pass away beneath a midnight sky. About dawn, I caught my first glimpse of the Los Angeles skyline, haloed with electric light.

As I remember it now, I am still moved by the image. The smoggy mysticism is still intact, untainted by the events of the weeks that would follow. It was not the same city that would fade behind me a few weeks later. Had I turned to look over my shoulder, perhaps the ugliness of the city would have crept in and destroyed the magic of my initial vision. Had Adam turned around, Eden would not have remained real. It is only when we try to unify the broken events - to connect our thens and nows - that life presents itself as ugliness. Life passes by at eighteen frames a second; we must remind ourselves that our eyes are fooled. I must remind myself and be grateful for what I have. I rented a room and slept for fourteen hours.

When I awoke, my anxiety had eased. I was overcome with a calmness one feels on the edges of great events. I prolonged my simmering excitement with a long bath and a large breakfast at an all-night cafe called Antonio's. Though it was nearly midnight, the city was alive with noon-like light, and I sat for three hours watching the cars and the people passing on the walks of life. At four o'clock, I returned to my room, eased myself between the cool sheets and soaked my pillow with tears.

At twelve o'clock, I returned to Antonio's for lunch and pondered the phone book, looking for my Love's human

name. I had feared her name would not be there, but, to my surprise, there were seventeen names just the same - enough to fill two napkins and days of searching.

Would you believe that I visited sixteen homes - suburban houses under huge oaks, ultramodern pads in towering high-rises, dingey apartments that reminded me of home, docile duplexes, faded flats - before narrowing the possibilities to one? My weary quest was truly a design divined by the gods. I was forced to visit some of the houses up to four times. Perhaps it would have been easier to just call the numbers, but, by extending my search, I sought to magnify the satisfaction of my reward.

Oh, how my heart fluttered as I counted the numbers to 1022, Rudyard Avenue. I feared my shaky-kneed legs would give way, and they would find me dead on the walk. Coroner's Report: Death caused by nervousness, anxiety, and love - a true attack of the heart.

As I was walking, I approached a tall man, dressed all in black, that I was sure was brother Death, coming to strike me down for trying to push things to perfection. It turned out only to be a friendly rabbi that tipped his hat and blessed me with a knowing smile. When I finally stood before the the house, I felt as if I had narrowly passed a test, a chasm of circumstance.

The house of my Love was an aqua-green bungalow with pink trim - a castle unfit for my Queen. I felt like I was in a dream as I approached the front door, noticing the grass that grew through the cracks in the walk. As I stood before the door, staring at my Love's human initials, pasted plastic on a brass knocker, I thought of turning back. I went even as far as turning around, but, as I did, a station wagon passed on the street. I had reached the apex of my journey, of my life. It was the moment when everything hinged on the motion of a clenched fist, wrapped knuckles on a wooden door. In another second, it was over.

From behind the door came a voice that was only faintly familiar telling me to hang on. Oh, how I hung!

After a two minute period that lasted forever, my Love opened the

I remember little of the conversation that passed between us. It probably consisted, at first, of nervous mumbles and small talk followed, eventually, by a clumsy attempt, on my part, of some explanation.

The interior of her home seemed as inadequate as the outside. The small room we were in was constructed, vertically, of wood paneling that was littered, more than adorned, of frameless posters that depicted, in one, a torn and taped skyline of Los Angeles at night. The view was from a different perspective than the one that had impressed me. In fact, I would not have recognized my beloved Sodom had its name not been printed in trendy lettering at the base. Horizontally, my Love's bare feet, with their rusty nails, rested on stained shag. The stains were, perhaps, the source of the pungent smell of animal urine that is familiar to cat houses. The alleged cat, however, was not to be seen.

My Love sat across a tiny ocean of unexpected ash-trays and impossible communication, wearing a terry-cloth robe and, perhaps, nothing else. The woman who faced me seemed a stranger. Her motions were graceless and mortally unchoreographed. But her blunt, unorchestrated characteristics, which appeared to me as they would on paper, in a list, instead of in their familiar, planned and unforced perfection, refuted any last chance that this was not the woman I was searching for. I felt like a small child on Christmas morning, unwrapping that big present to discover it wasn't a bicycle after all. I was a child. A meek and cheated child.

I was struck by her age. I had expected her to be younger than the woman who sat smoking a cigarette. She must have been nearly fifty. As I look back now, I should have been surprised by the nonchalance she displayed in allowing a strange man with a crazed look in his eye into her home.

I told her that I loved her, charmed her with eloquent words that had brewed for years. She smiled and offered me

a drink. I suppose that I had expected her to react with horror because I was confused by her calmness. She looked at me like anyone would look at anyone. She looked at me like a waitress awaiting an order.

I said it again. She smiled and said they all did. I was becoming angry. How could a person for whom I felt so much treat me with such casualness? There was not even scorn in her expression. Never did I imagine it would have been this way. The one person who was on my level of Being was blatantly spurning perfection for basic mediocrity. I tried to communicate to her the degree to which I suffered, the importance of her in my life. All of this she disregarded as mindless babble and asked me for fifty dollars.

When I finally sorted through the emotional confusion and understood what she was asking, I gave her fifty dollars, and we had sex.

You might imagine that I was crushed by heartbreak. You might imagine, even, that, at this point, I was led to violence, that I am writing this from her apartment while she lays before me. Hungry for climax, you, my jury, imagine my Love's gory body sprawled on the floor of this humble house, bastardized Americana gone awry, blood coagulated like Karo syrup in her hair. And me, just out of reach of my posthumous Precious, lying white like a fish, my demented brains splattered on wood paneling.

But it was not like this. More than anything, I was burdened by disillusionment, passionless anti-climaticism, and, perhaps, true sanity. I suppose, somehow, I always knew it would be this way. Now that it is over, I recall my constant awareness of the naivety of my attitude. Call me a romantic.

I bummed around Hollywood for the next couple of weeks in a state of subdued melancholy and clear-headedness I had not known in years, idly spending the money I had saved. I took my meals at Antonio's, healthy helpings of roast beef and mashed potatoes, and read the

papers. I visited tourist attractions - Disneyland, the stars of the walk (hers was not among them), and MGM Studios.

The evening before I went home, I caught a midnight showing of *Ravenpeople* at a theater near my motel. As I sat alone in the darkness, I was struck by the most profound feeling of love I have ever known. As I sobbed, blessed salty tears running down my face, I knew my love was real. My Love is real.

-Christopher Snethen