

## LOVE LETTER REWRITTEN

The breakfast setting had been laid casually, as was rather usual on most days, white-with-blue Scandinavian crockery and unmatched bits of silver. No champagne flutes of mimosas, no egg cups, though sometimes on certain weekends those things, as in previous occasions, did appear. Winter mornings were rather hard to get started, generally with a feeling of not wanting to leave the warmth of the old bed; but, after lazing, in a bundle, one must at length rise up. The cold floor, even through the socks and the thin rug, sent a tingle of indignation through the soles of the feet and up the shins. The fires must be lit, and another day to be begun. (Summer was so much easier, one just rose with the sun's light, and no need for a heavy robe.) But winter had a rank way of seeping into the walls of the house. The indoor chill chased one down the stairs, and across the dining room, and into the kitchen where you must light a fire and turn on the cook-stove in order to chase that frostiness into the corners. Often one, Ben particularly, craved oatmeal. Odd how, other than having been baked into cookies, oatmeal enhanced its' appeal as one grew older, in one's winter of years. Ben chose his heavy robe, which helped him move, warmer and less stiffly.

Ben, in the hallway as he passed the closed door, heard Perry running the water in the bathroom. Perry still each weekday went to work, just because he felt it still did him good and that he should. He was, after all, three years younger; and the work, mostly talking on the phone and office duty, was not too taxing or strenuous. He actually did enjoy it after all, most days, getting out and mixing in conversations, and arranging.

Busy at the kitchen counter, Ben remembered the quote of poetry about life being measured out in coffee spoons—so vivid and sad, and ordinary—that had stayed in his memory since high school, however long ago that had been. It was so starkly true, visibly real as the frost on the windowpane; every single day, whatever the season, performing the ritual that lead one through the day to the next, and the next, and on, good days or bad.

Perry Galacka, radiantly scrubbed and polished and smelling of Dior lemons, hiding somewhat his slow-ish descent on the stairs, and so freshly as morning sunlight advanced into the almost toasty kitchen. He was dressed and ready to go to his work. He seated himself at the table. They exchanged “Good morning”s and crisp smiles, but lapsed again into silent meditations, as was the

habit they had formed. Conversation took a while to become warmed up as well in the early mornings, particularly after all the years of the measuring out of all those coffee spoons of time in the old house. Were the early-morning conversations mundane?; mostly perhaps so. Then, jerkily forward, a habit as well, bits of chatter leading to a flowing conversation of news and current events, sometimes incredulous, sometimes spirited, and the promise to continue the interesting ones over the dinner table, or in summer in the garden or in winter over cognac in front of a crackling fireplace. Sometimes they were forgotten; sometimes not.

Perry left for his work. Ben put the breakfast things aside, and started his day. Always there were things to be done. Ben had projects. In retirement, he meandered with many projects through his days, and memories, and daydreams. In previous times Ben had in his life filled time, any non-work time, with his various projects, shifting in importance, sometimes assuming the significance of a hobby or, other times, merely a passing momentary interest. Retiring from a daily work life—even his freelance occupation—certainly had added to the mix. A number of the endeavours grew into ongoing, some even became finished, with a new one assuming their place in the line. Ben seemed always moving. Shuffling a

list of ever-evolving procrastinations amidst his many projects, he was the laziest busy person he could imagine.

Last week, having come across an old photograph which had found itself stuck in back of some rarely opened drawer, Ben had to sit down surprised, to stare at it, its' fading colours, the reflection of a yesteryear. So long it had been; but he could see so distantly what it was, where it was, remember almost when—some of the names were fuzzy and vague, hard to recall, from so many years ago. Pictures, as Ben considered the faded colour, photographs from life—a series of developments; Ben did like his little jokes. Ahhh, young love.

Ben stared at the photograph, turned it over to find no inscription, and then back again to the fading image. Across those years there were a trunkful of memories--of moving, of work, of family, of journeys and excursions, of pleasures, and infatuations. Infatuations, after a few minor—and then one mortally devatating experience, a dream that became undeniably a disaster, a crushing gut-punch, then a knock-out to the head—became more elusive. Afterward instead, life became a forced march around the prison yard, then back to the empty cell of confinement. The infatuations virtually stopped, and no one

anticipated a conscious wanting for them to return; Ben centering now, by default, but certainly not entirely his own, on the severed and unattainable.

Still, captured, in a spirit-world illusion, in an antiquating photograph, in a perspective quite so distant, a memory—of containing some apparitions who had quickly faded into a vapour that dissipated like dawn fog, or those other stubborn apparitions whose obdurate memory lingered quite longer than had their actual appearance—froze those momentary bits of the past onward, captured, somehow no escape. The past would, could, continue on.

Years passed into later. Then, by accident, by celestial timing, by FATE, Perry came. On one night out as a tourist in a distant place Perry came, appeared in a puff of light and electro-music, like an electrical red-heat match, ignited after a dark dark night. Ben, rather aimlessly, and dawdling while waiting a couple of days to return home for Christmas, while wandering a sightseeing respite after having come there to the resort on a now completed work assignment, cautiously entered into the milling solicitous crowd of a rousing danceclub, and Perry was on holiday as well; and their lives met in an instant, eyes met curiously, smiling suddenly at each other, and became entwined. Ben reeled. Perry was the

embodiment of glowing enchantment, of attention, of beauty, of sophistication. Ben, then, could not think of himself as any of those things. Who could say how it had happened at that happenstance moment in the universe, how chance had crossed both their paths, what kindling had burst into flame? Ben and Perry, swayed as like in the lapping surf of a tropic sea, sank luxuriantly into the comfort of a warm warm bath at just under the edge of too too hot. Heavy with perfume on tropic air, unfurled a blossom tendriled for ten days in heaven, in paradise, but then the separation back to different lives, separate flights, different destinations. The comfort flew away. Ben's time was more free to continue afterward entwining their lives, smitten; and they made it happen. There were trysts, there were trials, there was separation, there were good times and bad, most there was the cozy rest of warm comfort, and bounding trips, and walks, the seashore, and countless charming dinners. Years sped into a past, with a future. There was the old house, polished at first, then patched up over the years. Each days' coffeespoon lead to another.

Ben could look at all the myriad motion pictures of moments held in his mind and remember the little nuances of Perry's movements, his smiles and manner of speaking, sometimes his taunts, remembering how exceedingly

handsome, like a Greek marble, Perry was when he was a youthful charmer. He could recall of having met, when they were both somewhat youthful still, in Key West, remembering the music, lingering insistently, enthusiastically, in the mind, that they had heard at that time when they had first met. Ben remembered when he heard the tingle of calypso, the swell of one of the pop anthems of that time—to live forever...someone remember...to call your name...like a little prayer.

Lately, many times Ben had the queasy feeble feelings of having grown old none too gracefully, rather of having fallen tumbling down a hill and into a ravine where he could not get out. But Perry was there, always there, as ever he had been, to offer a hand to save him. Ben recollected all the caring smiles, the shared tumultuous years, the breakfasts and dinners. Soon, this day as all others, Perry would be walking through the door, coming home; their respective day would idly be recounted, the dinner would be set. Perry's face, even tired or disheveled, caroomed large into Ben's vision and this familiar globular tip of his nose became the consuming mount of the universe, as he kissed it, kissed the lips so familiar yet fresh, as soothing as tea and as sweet as cake.

With a craving hunger, famishment, he looked into Perry's astonished eyes. As before in distant times he had thought of all his objects of desire as boy-man whatever age they had attained, he thought still of Perry, thought of him, as always, as the boy-man (a spirited coaxable boy who, at the same time, was a definite hard lean solid man); just as he thought mostly of himself as perpetually young inside his own mind.

They were a matched set—*en suite*. Ben and Perry would lie in the bed at night, awake reading late or in the dark, and listen to the creaking of the old house, familiar sounds but, rather often, a sudden surprising disturber of wandering end-of-day meditations. They would turn in the dark, and smile. Unlike the quiet and bucolic rest that on other evenings so settled like soft dark night upon the mature outlines of love's gently rolling region, there were times in the evenings when the tumultuous earthquake of desire's love trembled the landscape of their entwined bodies. Often before bed, with a caress, grateful Ben felt, in the steaming cup of his curled hand, the soft orbs that defined the most visible part of Perry's manliness, luxuriant, malleable, and warm. He squished them, languidly and warmly, lovingly and then abundantly.

Without explaining, Ben and Perry could could express the love that permeated them. At times Ben wondered, what WAS love anyway? Was it enduring companionship, or complicated compatability that upon meeting was initially a visual attraction, or some indefinable electrical impulse, a thunderbolt? How different it could be, how unique, this coupling, miraculous—though in times past the love Ben and Perry shared had dared not speak its' name. Yet how magically ordinary it could as well be, day by day, as in all the varied couples that filled all the houses up and down this street, and every street. Unforeseen; What a world had developed...In every residence across the entire country where, among the general populace, the divorce rate had exploded to have been around ninety per cent.

That was the fact of it, the simplicity of it, that one could touch and feel the welcome comfortable presence of companionship, if that is what one called it, of love, of memory of all the years past... it gave one an inner essentiality of feeling, the hearty glow, of warmth.