

## *Savior Sorrow*

Another day closes its doors at dusk and I've fallen in love again. Today it's Dorothy, she works at a gas station in Needles, California. After having some troubles with my car I came into the mart irate, sweaty, and gas-doused. I nearly lashed out at her but felt shame as I stood before her. She knew it all and before I had a chance to pay for my gas, her child, behind the counter as well, handed me the drink she asked him to get; no doubt the day-care too expensive for this hard-working duo, whose work must be play, lest they have none at all. Confused but at once recognizing the gesture of peace I nearly cried. I offered, like a fool, to pay for it, but she said it was a gift. I thanked her and left, swallowing deeply, and took the long highway across the desert to end a day's journey.

I think of Ryan, from yesterday, and the happy way he hugged his kids when they dashed into his office to see him right as we had finished our deal. He's a good man, I've always liked him... but that fine moment! The way he greeted his children and pulled them high into his arms as I was clearing the desk of my papers, methodically, pretending not to notice the illumination of family... and I loved him.

Each day my heart bursts though I hide it and reel back my tears of joy before they crest and fall.

I have no one. I am a coward and a pretender. I live behind walls and gates, battlements and false doors. I simply fall in love with a phrase, or after the brief meeting of eyes, or from a gesture too light to craft with thick words. I find

myself crying during sentimental commercials when I'm alone in my apartment lapping up a frozen dinner made warm. I return calls only when I absolutely must for each exchange takes so much. My small dog, who spends half his time unattended and alone, simply destroys me with his tongue-heavy, tail-wagging, eye-bulging greetings when I return home to see him.

At the end of each day I rest in exuberant aloneness, thankful I don't have to face a soul, at least for a few hours, as my heart palpitates and my palms sweat, exhausted and worn from the love I've felt all day.

My job is routine, my schedule unaffected, my work truly dull. I hide and rest, incommunicative at my best moments, unable to utter a word lest my throat swell with joy and choke on some words as my eyes erupt in tears. Oh, it's happened, God what they've thought of me! Always asking what's wrong. Wrong! If there were something wrong! If only I could get help but I know there's none for me. I'm heavy with love, like a morning-bright, dew-laden bud, overburdened with beauty before the fullness of the day in the sun's early light.

Children wound me with their still unreserved shrieks and even with practice I can't restrain the grin that pulls unnaturally wide across my pudgy face. I pick up my steps, avoiding a look, knowing I'll surely fall down in tears and convulsant sobs if I do.

I once joined a charismatic church loud with alleluias and fast with dancing. Even there I stunned the ecstatic masses and had to leave for fear of them seeking 'help' for me.

I walked by a black man in a bookstore last week. He was the darkest shade of night I'd seen and my eyes tore over to him with the irreducible glare one shows in front of a true masterpiece. I quickly averted the look and pulled myself in, acting as if I hadn't seen him. Poor soul! He thought me a bigot or some such fellow and made a gesture. A wise man, he hoped to counteract hate with love not realizing my own love for him, even just his appearance, the strong, happy way he stood and the bright ivory eyes set wide under his sculpted black brow. He worked in the bookstore and strolled right over to me, Oh God! Don't make me face him again!

Happily he asked, "Sir, can I help you find anything?"

I answered laconically, trying to hide my eyes as I routinely do.

"No, no thank you. I'm fine."

"Look, we're only supposed to give these out for special promotions but you look like a book lover. Here's a coupon for a free book from Hawkins' Paperbacks. You can pick any Hawkin's book and this'll cover it. I kept a few of these from the giveaway last month."

I felt my hand tremble and I couldn't resist, I slowly lifted my head and looked at him, a tear hung heavy.

My voice was throttled and uncontrolled.

"Thank you, thank you so much."

He was taken aback and stuttered, "Uh, no problem, my pleasure."

He must've known I wasn't a bigot the moment I faced him, for I can't hide my love once my eyes meet another's. It frightens people and it hurts me terribly so I often look down and prance around people as furtively as good taste will allow.

I notice the smallest things, the elegant haircut someone in the office has freshly gotten, the new shoes a man will wear with pride like a schoolboy, the prudish, but wonderful consistency with which someone will keep their desk in order. I blush at each instance and want to laugh and shout, hug them with zest, let them know how much I follow their lives, the lives I overhear them live as they talk to friends and acquaintances. I know all their children's names.

I'm always an acquaintance, myself, I can scarcely string together more than a few words at a time so heavy do they seem to my lips as I carress them each and leash them to a kiss to meet the ear of the hearer.

I'd love to be a savior. To tell them I'm the son of a living God come for all time to love and redeem them. To tell them that all is permitted and every action excusable. I wish I could cause them to swoon from my words and feel a small sum of the pleasure they give me. I have tears enough to make the world wet with love and could never learn to forgive because each thing seems so right. Each crime a child's fawning attempt to speak of hurt pride. If I could only be justified in my love, legitimized by being the son of some God. But I was born nearby, the only child of a wordless, good father, and a simple, round mother

who liked to bake and feed, both softly asleep in death by the time I had walked away from their home to settle my own. I have no one close as all suffocate.

To look at I'm quite common, rounded with age and a soft life, meek in my movements and quiet in manner. I'm as formally courteous as I can stand to be and seem to leave all I deal with a bit light and confused.

I am no savior, but a common man, and my heart seems strangely placed. It would better be served by a religious man, fiery with eloquent and ancient words. Or in a humanitarian who spends his days toiling for those the world has hurt. This heart, though, alien as it is, found itself in a most typical man, whose notions of peace and love are mute from intensity and whose too common looks causes no rapture.

Lord, though I were a savior. What worlds I'd create!

But alas, the day has ended, and I rest in bed, lulling into the dark journey, to rest my stumbling heart, for tomorrow's breaks. My dog lies quiet facing me, his eyes still open, sure to close as my own do.

-John J. McGraw

November 10, 1999