

A Love of Her Own

Short story by Allison Fine

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She heard the sound of the clacking train from her window. The last town she left held the man of her dreams and she did not want to dream of him any more. No matter that she had never met him. He knew she was there, he knew she left, and she knew he was not what she wanted him to be. Maybe. Maybe nobody knew anything.

Why there was such a difference between a man's public image and his real self, she could not guess, but it brought such a pain to her heart she could not stand it. So she left that town. It was easier that way.

The dream of being the one woman to win his heart was shattered and clattered along the skyline like the train she heard. The expanse of mountain and sky where she was living drowned her senses and her eye span, she was able to soften up and stop being so critical. She was able to stop mourning the death of her fantasy. She couldn't bring back a man who never was, so let it rest, she told herself. Too much had fallen away, she had lost her armour and her self esteem and her belief in her own self worth. She blamed him, even though he hadn't participated directly. Her love had ended and it was because of his evil, she decided.

When she thought about his evil it quelled the pain and she could sleep. If she pushed the evil to the side, the pain was unbearable. Unrequited love; desire without the object. Why was she such a fool?

Evening saw dawn creeping fingers of red, pink and deep blue over her head as she drove aimlessly all over the valley, crying, washing the dreams down her face in tears

she could not comprehend. What was this obsession? How could anyone find a love that didn't exist? These questions brought a hard knot to her insides.

She could not comprehend how a person like herself, so responsible and so much in love with her home and her kids, could have dropped everything to run after a man she never knew and never would. Family members secretly thought she had lost her head. She had. The imaginary life had a vitality all its own, she decided, and she had to sort it out. Perhaps its branches would reach out into the fiber of life and teach her something about mystery. She didn't know, but she had to try.

The mystery was that her kids still loved her. The mystery was that everything had changed and would never go back to what it was.

After two years she came to her senses, and even though the fabric of life had been torn apart, there were pieces left, and she made a valient effort to patch them back together. She called and wrote all the kids, she talked to her ex-husband again, something was still there. Their love for her was stronger than her foolishness. She was grateful for that. How could she have gotten lost for two whole years? She castigated herself repeatedly, to no avail. The only thing was to rip doubt out of her belly and forgive herself.

Now that she was standing in this small western town, alone, tried by the independence of a life by herself without reference to anything outside, writing every day, barely scraping by, but scraping by nonetheless, she thanked God for letting her live through the battle. She thanked God for this tiny, poor little town, for those huge, old mountains way off in the distance, for the occasional cowboy she'd catch riding by in a pick up with a horse trailer behind.

He didn't care about her on a personal level, that she knew for sure. He directed all manner of people, especially women, to be drawn into his energy, keeping them at bay with subliminal and psychic manipulation, that was her theory. She had no proof if she were right. It was just a theory. He got off on watching all those women pursuing a completely fruitless dream--it gave him power, she thought.

When she dwelled on the evil she felt better. When she dwelled on the reason she loved him in the first place, she felt useless. Life was futile. And who would come to save her now?

She still wished to be saved, but had saved herself in the meantime. She had watched all manner of people attracted to him, women especially, go down into despair and disillusion, get sick, get angry or adapt in the weirdest way. The adapting ones fascinated her. They developed personality disorders that appeared normal. They dressed in a self-effacing look with that western, bland wardrobe.

They became sexless and worn, like the boards of a barn washed by too many seasons of weather, their faces took on a thin, dried up, weathered look. They did not laugh, or open up, they dwelt in paranoia; the kind of paranoia she saw rampant all around his energy. Everyone was afraid someone else was there to usurp his or her place in the pecking order. Conversation was driven by fear of gossip, fear of rejection, fear of not being part of the train to hell that was named like sun but felt like darkness. Everyone was looking over their shoulder. Everyone was looking around to see if they could spot Him.

It was the darkness that finally drove her away. Every time she caught Him somewhere, saw His half hidden face or saw Him hurriedly streaking by, as was His

style, or watched Him as He maneuvered himself in public in one of his many subtle, shape-shifting disguises, she wondered exactly what was that awful feeling in the pit of her stomach. The angels told her “evil,” and asked, solicitously, “There. Is that better?”

She just could not fathom it! How could his public image be so sweet and warm, emotional, with a quietude of extraordinary power? How could he look as if whatever held his attention kept it totally, burning into his heart? How could that be, when the private man appeared to be so manipulative, selfish and mean? She was sure he had to be mean. All the people around him were mean. And if he wasn't mean, she decided, he was certainly selfish and oblivious. Of course, she could also be telling herself this because, he hadn't noticed her at all, and it was just her fantasy all along; to be noticed by Him.

It is familiar, and so common, the way women of our culture deify creative men. We give them more power than they have, more emotional content than they possess, more sexuality than they would know what to do with. What a terrible burden we place on successful men! How we encourage them to use us in a most degrading way, just because they have so much contempt for our fantasizing. On the one hand, they wish to be treated as real, on the other hand, they damn well know the power of withholding, the power of mystique. “Easy to be hard, easy to be cruel,” were the words of the song in that sixties musical. These men have mastered the cruelty and the hardness when they need it, and they have mastered manipulating the public image to make them appear like Gods and Gurus, soft and hard, strong and compliant, compassionate and passionate, all knowing and innocent of evil. It was too good to be true.

It was not him, she decided. She knew what it was. It was the need of women in our century to find men capable of them, men equal to their awareness, men who could unlock the secrets of womanhood without abuse. This was impossible.

It was just her fantasy all along.

She wondered if people could communicate through thought. She knew they could, it was just that no one ever admitted it. It always hurt her to live in a world only dimly recognized by the rest of the human race.

The evening shade was restless and her heart was wrenched plain. She wanted to keep moving for years, but she stayed still and took a writing class.

Evenings she would go down by the lake, or walk the dead town, looking inside windows of closed up stores. She didn't even have enough gas or money to leave town for a few days. She was trapped in the west, in the muddy thoughts of what had just happened.

Evil, good, plain, sane, gone. What was love anyway? She longed for a love of her own, and she realized it could never be Him. He was too removed from her sphere of thought, he was too golden in the eye of the sun. She was riding in the shadow of the moon and her horse was a phantom.

The horse and rider were both like ghosts; they just visited earth for a while and left threads of invisible thought. His leavings were immense; enormous great slabs of energy that everyone ate huge chunks of. He was able to influence style and behavior, she could hardly get a hold of it, let alone influence it.

So when she whispered His name at night, she was entering the mouth of history. The history of all those women who were attracted and obsessed by mystery, and instead

of finding it inside of themselves, placed it outside of themselves in the body of man. That man was hardly aware or deserving of this honor was not the point. Woman has woven her thoughts and dreams around him anyway.

She named her fantasy, recognized it, gave it a shape and a color. It was really her favorite angel, clothed in his form, coming to comfort her loneliness. She knew it could be a tree that she loved, just outside her window, as much as Him. She knew her love was just a quest into the universal pool of possibility; a message to the world of energetic interaction with thought: Come to me, it would say, sympathize with me, love me, clothe me in your warm and emotional body, sell away the ugly and buy the beauty. The price is just the night and the day, one night and one day after another, until all the nights and days tumble down into one possibility.

These thoughts would push her into sleep. The days were long, filled with writing and walking and longing. The nights were impossible. She had no distracting elements, could not afford them, so she would sleep and eat and write and think and wonder.

Her wishes did not come true. She hated Him for not making her dreams reality. She hated herself for having those dreams in the first place. Her only hope was to find a love of her own. She prayed it would come before too many nights took away her hope.

A love of her own was waiting in the wings, but he would not make himself known yet. She had left the previous town. Now she was wondering in this town, waiting. Sweet words would not penetrate the pain just yet. Like the wettened grass by the lake, she was watered by the sweet rain of creativity. That was her lover. She'd said goodbye to the man of the sun. He was shining sun and speaking blackness. She would never forget that valley.

She was inside the sleep that surpasses dreams, waiting for a love of her own.