



Lella
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Lella

Lella. She was a girl I once knew in a time that was full of laughter and kisses, whispers and chocolate. She went to movie theatres to see scratches on film reels. She read, recreationally, heady philosophers like Foucault, Derrida, Buber and Sartre - thinkers the average person would stare blankly with no recognition if asked, and serious minded students of ideas would begin to dissect. She came from a long line of painters and architects, but only dabbled a bit in photography and poems. She was an emotive pianist - often I wept at the sound of her fingertips. She collected Russian Orthodox icons and put them around her studio apartments. They were always in seedy dark burghs of Brooklyn and she lived in three while I knew her. On Friday nights, she frequently had nothing to do, and on Sundays she bought flowers for herself so she might feel special and connected with nature. Everything of her was mystery. I remember her on nights like this one. She was my one love.

Sometimes, I believe love is a divine portent; gift of angels breathing flame in dust to spark the soul to life. Other days, I believe love is merely the accident of synapses - chemicals in disarray causing the body to recall something ancestral, primitive and necessary for the progress of our race through ages. Propelling the anthill upward, trodden underfoot by history over and again.

I believed both and was uncertain of both. Now I'm cynic and held down, burnt out, incapable of belief.

Lella, I loved. We first met in awkward teenage times; gawky, tripping over limbs and falling out of ourselves due to acne or what rumors travel through notes and cracked voices between class periods. I remember that day with her mother at my doorstep, the hot city evening - I have been undone since that sundown, and filled up with all things new.

In the eighth grade, we began to have sex - secretly, nothing suspect, no one watching us showering eyes and touches at each other all day long. We were never apart, the best of friends. But at night we tiptoed across marble floors of my father's, stealing parts of each other, sharing bodies in hidden art. Quiet, hushed, hands pressed over mouths. We dreamed -

Louisiana mansions we would reinhabit; rivers like the Ohio, the Mississippi, the Old River, the Lost River; what we would discover far away from this crowded and electric metropolis; names of our children (Dylan for a girl, Brennan for a boy); weddings in cathedrals. We dreamed it all.

Lella had a huge bent towards astrology and spoke often of it. She was a Pisces. I, a Cancer. She said we were a match made in heaven. Years later, she learned of Chinese astrology - she was the Sheep, I was the Horse. Again a match from God.

Our sex grew into a complex language, full of subtle sounds, signals, motions - our own tongue far advanced from all our peers. We graduated high school and still no one knew of our love. We liked it like this, hiding from family and friends, fragile, always risking it all. I kept myself busy with projects and art, having no time at all, so that nobody would ask why I never had girlfriends. My excuse was simple.

For Lella though, she got sticky with relationships - Lella had a constant lust for other women. Always holding one at bay, whispering promises, eye darting quickly across crowds to find her next. I couldn't get enough of her. I was her only man and didn't care at all how many women she consumed. The looks on their faces for weeks after she unleashed our language of bodies on them was priceless. With Lella, she was the softest and the gentlest. With Lella, she was scandal and an enigma.

She grew up, my love, into such beauty - jet black hair, full hips, eager eyes, a new tattoo every Valentine's Day. I eventually became a full-time artist and my big break came when a wealthy patron put me up in a flat in Williamsburg. I spent the days in my bright lit home and most of the nights alone with Lella. I wanted nothing else. We traveled the country, her lovers multiplied. I was always, always, her only man.

It is hard to be without her, now, right now, as I write this, all I can do is remember the wearied loss from battles I made no ground against. I did not choose to be here. Lella, believe me, I never wanted to be here. Now my nights are silent hum of halogens, alarms, trickles of faucets, lonely voices in walls and air ducts.

Two Junes past, we broke out of the house, full of shrimp and chili-coconut chutney, asparagus with slivers of garlic and sweet onions, a

bottle of two-buck chuck put between us. We hopped the metro, but the A-Line to Chelsea that night felt long, heavy. We held hands. I was sweating.

Lella met Denise that night,

I'm so sorry Lella.

Denise - a butchy dyke who made a pass at Lella within minutes of our fashionably late arrival to see our friends. I nursed my gin and tonic long, uncomfortable for once with Lella's flirting and kisses. I didn't like Denise. She was base, unrefined, crude. I swallowed and tried to let it pass. We left in silence and I fell asleep with a bottle of wine in hand.

Denise and Lella began to see each other off and on for the next few weeks. I painted and could not stop sweating. It got so bad I went to see my physician who had no clue what was happening. I shrugged it off, painted more. Lella constantly came home late, showered, we made love often... I began to notice the bruises. Welts. She shook periodically in the bed when we slept. It was all wrong.

July. Perhaps it was a sickness in the heat of New York that night. Perhaps it was the overflow of a repression I had long sought to quell via denial. The ultraviolet of neon signs? The chatter and clamor of foreign tongue at the newsstands? The breaking point of a heart too open? I still don't understand, don't know. I wish to Christ I knew for Lella.

July. I walked out alone, unable to sleep, 2:39 a.m. I saw them down the street (I'm so sorry L), they had not seen me. The heat, that fucking humidity. I saw Denise strike her. Call her two-timing bitch. A whore. My Lella. My only one. She threw her on the ground and held her head into the concrete.

I did not mean to kill her, Lell. I wanted to defend you. Protect you.

When it was over, when it was done, Denise silenced, her brain running out into the drain off, Lella screaming at me, police forcing me onto the ground, where Denise had pushed and held down my girl, profaning her name - I couldn't breathe at that moment. A picture of Lella and I graduating high school flashed in my mind and I began to wail and fly blind

and uncontrolled at the cops.

Upstate New York, I am held down. Mom and Dad disowned us when they learned of years and years of Lella and me. The papers love their famous artist and the sin he committed in a crime of passion. I paint on the walls, hourly, and wait for the warden to turn off the lights at night. I used to turn off lights and hold her till the break of sun. I held the sun and all of life in my arms.

There is perhaps a God but I do not believe in His justice and His mercy. There is no sun and no Lella. I call weekly to a stilled and answerless beige phone next to the kitchen stove.

Written by Drew Andrews

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