

## Virility and Sadness

He laid the pen down on the desk, and he slouched back into the chair. What was the matter? His chest was burning. The sensation was gripping, nearly surreal, but so distinct that he could not ignore it. This part was not nearly the worst, but certainly it did seem as if his heart had begun to radiate, just as when a light bulb is not in use, it lies idly in a socket. But, once the switch has been turned on, the light bulb generates both light and heat, the former instantly and the latter slowly, in a similar manner, pain radiated from his heart like heat. As it became more manifest in his chest, a feeling of deep anxiousness began to permeate his limbs. Knowing what would shortly follow, he bounced his leg incessantly. These episodes were not foreign to him. In truth, he was well acquainted with them—he embraced them like an unruly child. He tried to lift himself out of the darkness, but it was too late, since the sinking had already begun. From the locus of the sensation, or of his entire existence, an intense grip seized him and began to pull him down. His mind panicked as it realized that a war had begun inside of him.

It called out, “What is the cause of this sudden disorder? Oh Reason, why have you left me? I always held you so dear, I always defended you as if you were my own creation, and never did I suppose that there was anything greater than you! But what now? When I need you the most, of course, you are nowhere to be found. I loved you. I changed for you (he thought I never would) because you provided the light for me to see, but now when my past has come back, having been biding its time like a parasite, which grows slowly and weakens its unknowing host, you seem to have left me here all alone to fight without my greatest ally—in darkness.”

There was no response, and so it began. From within, a darkness began gradually to conquer his conviction, and his thoughts, which were occasionally interwoven with reason, raced around, but he lacked the clarity at that moment to see that they were only going in circles.

Suddenly, the thought of Andrea presented itself to his mind's eye. Surely if anyone could comfort him now, then it would be her. She had been such a good friend since he met her, and she always provided him with a comfort that at least made him forget, if it did not completely alleviate his woes.

She was never one to care much for formality, and he needed to get out quickly, so he grabbed his coat, and then rushed through the front door. He knew that she would be awake, and also very glad to see him, regardless of the circumstance. It was not too late, only a little after eleven. His apartment was close to hers, but she did not live in the same complex as he did, and so he had to walk to see her under the cloak of darkness and in the cold. Along the path between the two complexes, there was a small nook which looked over a river, and he stopped for a moment to look out into the water. He looked over the ledge, and wondered what they might say about him at his funeral. Who would come? It was not much of a serious consideration, but merely a passing thought which he contemplated more out of curiosity than self contempt. Just as he was about to continue onwards, he felt an abnormal resistance to his movement and looked down. He had stepped in gum. He could not help but smile; however, he also noticed a small flower lying on the ground near a wall. It was only a dandelion, which is certainly not the most beloved of all flowers, but he remembered that Andrea had mentioned a fondness for these flowers, and more importantly, he knew that this would prompt a smile from her which would be richer in beauty than any possible deficiency in the flower. Just to see that would be enough for him; most people do not seem to appreciate a smile enough.

He arrived at her door, and he knocked gently, being mindful of the possibility that she could be asleep, but also fairly confident that she would not be. Sure enough, she opened the

door, smiled as she always did, and invited him inside. They sat across from each other at her kitchen table.

“Tristan, look at me! Why do you sit there so foolishly? Why did you come here?”

She smiled endearingly at him in order to captivate his attention again and soften the harshness of her previous statement. She could not understand what was going on inside of her beloved man. Why couldn't he seem to embrace it? She loved him. It was a deep, penetrating love that had developed very quickly, but felt as though it had always been (although this might seem strangely reminiscent of another, *lesser* sort of love, Andrea had been assured on many occasions that this certainly was love, and that she would undoubtedly be able to provide for and protect him better than any other woman.). Nevertheless, Andrea was truly in love, and though one might not typically suppose that a relationship, which had begun only a few months prior, could blossom so quickly into such a divine experience, the quality of her sentiments towards Tristan was undeniable. She genuinely wanted only what was best for him, and had always done everything she could to help him battle through the relentless gloom that masked his existence.

She always thought that Tristan was a good man. He was not a pious one, but he certainly had a marked interest in the well being of his fellow man. This was his misfortune, because no matter how much he empathized with those he encountered, a pitiable darkness always loomed. It was not his *nature* to be poisonous, but rather the culmination of the continuum of accidents in life which slowly infused itself into his character. In spite of this, he had not resigned himself to unhappiness, and his pensiveness gave him the clarity to see that her interest in and care for him was more than a passing act of charity. He knew exactly what was going on. He was not a stranger to love; in fact, he saw it coming before it had even arrived. The problem was that he

did not love her—romantically. The unwarranted interest which she had taken in him was something that he was very appreciative of, and admittedly, the initial excitement of having the attention of a beautiful woman is difficult for most men to disregard. However, love is not always such a rational encounter that one is able to immediately fall for any person who displays the capacity to care for another genuinely, but fails to have the lasting ability to excite that nether spirit which drives men into madness.

“Hmm—you look very handsome today, Andrea.”

She had always loved the way he used the word handsome instead of beautiful like most other men.

“Thank you, my Triste. You are such a sweet and gentle man. Well, I guess if you are not going to tell me why you came, I would like to know your thoughts about something. What do you think about *love*? Is there some sort of unspoken rule about how long two people should be together before they should begin to consider it? I’ve never taken it very seriously in the past, but having gotten to know you, I cannot help but think about it.” Her eyes lit up, enflamed with hope and passion.

He looked down between his legs, and he rolled the stem of the flower between his fingers as he thought about what she was saying. His stomach sank as he mustered up the strength to disappoint her. “No, I don’t consider time to be—especially important, but—hmm—you know there seem to be different types of love....”

“Wait, what? Different types of love? Yes, of course I *know* this, but are you suggesting what I think? Are you *stupid*? I say that I think I love you and you give me that garbage?”

Her indignation, though genuine, was only the manifestation of her suspicions. She was a strong, intelligent woman, and she knew his sentiment even before he had made it explicit. She had tried to fool herself into believing otherwise, into believing that if she could somehow demonstrate her love through the vigor of her actions, then maybe he would have a change of heart.

“I’m sorry—it’s just that I—I do care about you, and there are certainly an innumerable number of traits that I admire in you—but you have to understand that—if it were a matter of will then I certainly would—but I just could never *marry* you because I don’t love you, in that way. I—look at what I found on my way over.”

Hoping that it was not too late (though suspecting that it was), he lifted up his hand, and presented the flower to her. She looked at it, and smiled faintly, but she was too disappointed to appreciate the sentiment. He laid the flower in the middle of the table.

They each stared at the flower. One had a lucid, penetrating stare which was searching for some sort of answer to a question hardly understood, whereas the other had a stricken, disappointed stare which was wanting, not an answer, but simply to be understood.

Andrea stood up and solemnly she said, “I think that I am going to go lie down. You are, of course, welcome to stay if you would like.”

“I am really sorry, Andrea. I should probably go back home.”

He left her apartment, and he began to walk back home. He stopped again at the nook where he had found the flower. Walking up to the ledge, he peered over as he had done before. How much time would pass before the world realized that he was missing? Would the world

miss him? This river really is quite offensively unappealing. He laughed again to himself and sat down on the ledge. Sitting peacefully, he closed his eyes, and began to lean backwards.

Only a moment before that eternal slumber was set in motion by a fall, his eyes popped open, and he noticed a little, yellow blemish growing out of a crack in the concrete. He stood up and walked over to look at it more intimately. The flower seemed to be still an atrocious, little specimen. He smiled to himself, and walked back home.

“Oh there you are,” he thought to himself, “I was just wondering when you would come back. I do not suppose that things can ever be the same between us now. I suppose that I will be okay with that though, since it was not your warmth which attracted me from the beginning. We can still be friends (although I would like to be more), but at least you will always be very dear to me. I think that there might be something better anyway. She may let me down, but I love *her.*”