

An Unwritten Love Letter

by Tom Smith

WHY WE LIKE IT: *'Stars in the eyes smitten' is the only way to describe our collective reaction after reading this beautifully written love story with its overtones of reverie and the poignant presence of longings lost lurking behind quietly unobtrusive prose. Although the POV is third person singular, the voice projects such an intimacy of tone we feel that it is Enoch himself sharing his bittersweet confidences with us. The author writes with a light touch but strung together the words thunder. Quote: ' "I knew we'd get along by the way you danced," she said once; one New Year's, in his arms, many years ago. He had taken lessons from a great aunt who lived two doors down, had won awards, stressed a gliding step. Their little girl was born that late August.' And: 'Persistence can lead to life sentences of all sorts.'*

Enoch Pratt was a tiresome equivocator, given to tergiversations. He couldn't make up his mind as to whether to stay or go, and with all those tubes in him hooked up to a room full of machines. He was in a coma but, like everyone else in comas, he was still cognizant. Maybe he would listen to one more confession of his wife's, Enid.

She had not held his hand so tenderly in so long. Enid and Enoch had been married nearly fifty years, so they had both logged quite a number of secrets they had kept from one another. He was half waiting for their only daughter to fly in from out west, but she was so flip as to be entirely unpredictable. She may have been stalling for the death certificate discounts. Besides, for all they knew, 'Daddy wasn't really there anyway.'

A maid was just in now to straighten his unaltered bedclothes and make some marks on a chart at his feet. He called them maids because his imagination was still vivid and he preferred to think that he had just slept late at some first rate resort somewhere tropical. For a man who had done very little with his life, he was easily bored. The one thing he surmised nobody knew when they were in a coma was whether or not you would come out of it. It was a waiting game, but he could afford to be patient.

Life was not that different though. His wife talked and he listened, or not. Indeed, there were times when he even wondered if he ever wanted to come out. His body was no longer good for much anyway. The things that used to give him pleasure were either cranky or hampered, or outright unserviceable. He did miss his jam on toast, mind. His wife would arrive at just after one each day. You think you need a watch or clock to tell time, but your circadian rhythms are a very precise timepiece.

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Enid always entered carrying bags. She was an avid shopper. And Pratt liked to guess how much she’d spent by the amount of rustling and crackling. She never told him what she’d bought, so he could only assume it was a lot. Why she didn’t just leave them in the car, he never knew. (There are still things you cannot know, even in a coma.)

The fact was she would take the bus because driving in the car without him made her cry, but why? It was too close quarters. The one thing they still shared was the front seat of that car: Shopping, visiting, taking doctors’ appointments. Enoch had the wheel, but Enid was ever in

charge: Sighting stop signs, making turns, watching the curb; holding fast to speed limits—braking too late, things of that nature.

Enid was now washing his bald head like he was being anointed and patted down the fringe that circled his ears. She took a little comb out to groom his eyebrows. Why wouldn't she have used it for what he had left on his head, he thought? If she attempted to trim his nose and ear hairs, he just might snap out of it. After all, he still had feelings. Thank god she sat down to hold his hand, presuming the ablutions had ceased. Now she was paring his nails. She had once cut the cats claws to the quick. Click-click-click, at least it could yowl and leap out of her lap. Now it was time for their little chat. How their days were going.

It was as one-sided as always. Naturally, he was losing his hearing but it was times like this he was almost certain he had surrendered it. He would routinely daydream during these discussions—for the last forty years anyway. He was sleeping better and his joints were not troubling him like they could when he was unnerved. He didn't miss those looping interjections, 'are you listening to me?' If she thought he had responded incorrectly. Enoch silently prayed that when she visited his gravesite she might be somewhat muted.

He had loved her once, he still did. The one thing he knew in his heart was that she was the one thing he could never have lived without. She was the only thing he ever knew he had to have. In every other aspect of his life, he had never been as determined or so absolute. He was timid by nature, but he sometimes thought he had practically bullied her into marrying him. He had certainly worn her right down to the nub. And she had two other admirers with much better prospects. He knew it. And over the years she had sometimes proclaimed it. Persistence can lead to life sentences of all sorts.

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He recalled when they first introduced each other to one another.

‘I’m Enoch—’

‘—I’m Enid.’

It was as if they had both shared an imaginary flash in a puff-of-smoke; like those old box cameras with the bulbs held above the subjects as the grand seer hid under a dark sheet shuttering.

‘We just might be meant to be a pair with a couple of monikers like ours,’ he said. She paused for a paining instant and then smiled that smile that still stuck in his head. Everyone was someone else’s fool, he thought. They were just lucky enough to be each others.

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He could see her in his mind’s eye at every changing age they had engaged: Her long dark hair, cut short and curled, coloured, and then let go grey. The weight she’d gained that had been so pleasing at first, as her shape changed for good, or better.

Now her feet ached, her face would knot and her hands looked like gnarled roots. But even without his eyes closed, all he could see was that same girl with the long dark hair. If he hadn’t have had her, she would have been the one he could never forget.

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He sensed an eye twitch, and he hoped she hadn’t noticed because he felt so peaceful. She would summon a nurse at the slightest token gesture. Now, all he could hear was that the machines had stopped. He could smell the perfume their only daughter always wore, as they commenced to removing his tubes and pulled the bed sheet over his head.

End.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *a fascination with the qualities, shortcomings and vicissitudes that cause people to stay together—even the prospect of death becomes richly incidental. (To be honest, I just find a new word like 'tergiversation' and try to write a story around it.)*

BIO: ...growing too old to play the long game. The mail I get tells me I live somewhere in Ontario, Canada. I have no idea what this has to do with blood type.