

Moth Story Slam - February 6, 2020

"Love Hurts"

I fell in love with a man who loves jazz. He is 18 years older than me, and so the jazz he fell in love with had come long before my time. His favorite genre is smooth jazz from the '70s. To me, smooth jazz was in the same group as Yacht-Rock. I imagined middle-aged white men wearing boat shoes by day and half-buttoned silk shirts by night. No, smooth jazz was not for me and neither was he. Yet, I fell in love with both anyway.

I didn't mean to fall in love with a man almost two decades older than me. I told my Southern friend about our encounters, and she passed on a word of wisdom her mother had shared with her... "Honey, you don't want to be an old man's darling." I'd like to defend that he didn't look his age, nor dress his age. There is a rugged, salt-and-pepper ambiguity about his demeanor that allows him to pass for anywhere in his forties. If it weren't for his grown sons and aversion to social media, we might have passed like a couple with a socially acceptable age gap.

Our first connection was through music. He had a passion for collecting vintage audio equipment and had set up the house I was living in with a system and stacks of records. He is a close friend of my past housemate, and at the time was remodeling her sunroom. I was home most days, working and packing. I came to love the sound of vinyl. I'd play Miles Davis and John Coltrane as I packed boxes or prepped dinner. Meanwhile, he'd thunder up and down the stairs, his work boots hitting heavy on each step. He had a commanding presence and cynical humor.

Sometimes he'd stop for a break. Then we'd chat for hours while sipping whiskey sunrises, a mix of OJ & Makers, as horns played soulfully in the background.

It wasn't a big love that we shared. It was a baby love, young and playful. It was born in the banter of our like-hearted souls. I was recently divorced, living in the shadow of heartbreak, and I only had a little love stored up to give. He sensed early on I needed something from him. I needed to repair my understanding of love: Who am I in love? What could I ask love to give me? I had lost my confidence in what love could or should be in the divorce; it was somewhere tucked away between the coffee maker and cast iron pans my ex had driven away with. I needed to know that I could ask someone to create a love with me that was deep and satisfying. I had walked away from a "good-enough" marriage convinced there had to be a better love and terrified that I was leaving the best I would ever get. Sitting on the couch one afternoon, I told him I was in a research phase; I was collecting data on what kind of person I wanted to be with, now that every option was open to me. He offered a suggestion: pick someone who loves smooth jazz.

Whatever I asked for he gave generously and without reproach. There was one evening in particular, he showed that best. After spending a warm and delicious evening with two close friends, I invited him over to the house. He met me in the living room, where my leather jacket

and boots lay tossed over the love seat. I was dancing unencumbered to Lake Street Dive, the voice of Rachael Price singing out, "*Hard time, hard times. When I really need somebody to hold me tight and tell me I'm strong.*" It was the brave statement I couldn't find the courage to say aloud, and so I danced and let her say it for me. He smiled at me as he walked through the door, not unfamiliar to the sights and sounds of a younger booty-call. As I struggled in the bedroom to take off my tights, the ratio of pasta to wine tipped against my favor, he grabbed my jacket and boots, thoughtfully putting them back into my closet.

As we lay in bed, he asked questions about my life. I couldn't remember what he asked exactly, only how it made me feel. In response, I turned onto my stomach, and repeated the words, "I'm fine. It'll be OK...I'm fine, it'll be OK." I remember my knees were curled up to my elbows and sobs swept over my body like pulses of grief. He had asked me if I wanted to have kids with my ex-husband. The truth is, I ached to have kids of my own; the plan was to have one this year. Now, the uncertainty of that reality was agonizing. In the morning he explained that with each heavy sob, he had pulled me closer and closer. He had tried to squeeze out the pain like the flu. As we drank coffee, he played Roberta Flack. Her haunting lyrics, "*She aches just like a woman, but she breaks just like a girl,*" giving me permission to let the loss of love hurt.

Our relationship only lasted a handful of weeks. I was moving back to the Northwest. As I left I asked him to create a playlist that would make me cry. I wanted the love to hurt because it meant I was beginning to believe in it again. I was beginning to have faith that love could be as seductive as Gato Barbieri's Latin rhythms or as commanding as Grover Washington Jr. 's saxophone. I was learning I could ask love for anything and it would give me everything. And for the first time since I lost my love, I had found two great new ones; one to last a moment and one to last a lifetime.