

Just Another Love Affair

“Oh, John. When you hold me like this, I know I will never love another as much as I love you.”

“Oh, Martha. I could hold you forever and I will. I will, I swear it.”

“Oh, John!”

“Oh, Martha! Promise you will love me now and always.”

“Yes, oh, yes, I promise. I’ll love you till the end of time. I’ll love you for as long as the sun continues to burn in the sky. And for as long as the moon is a mirror of its passion, I, too, will reflect your wondrous glory. I’ll love you for as long as --- John, do you hear that sound?”

“Yes, it is the gentle trembling of my desire for you, it is the beating of my heart like thunder, it’s the unmistakable eruption of true love.”

“Actually it sounds more like a train.”

“Yes, it’s a train, a speeding locomotive of love and we’ve got two one-way tickets to bliss.”

“No, it sounds like a real train and oh my god, John! We’re standing on the railroad tracks! Jump!”

“Sir,” began the slightly morbid detective, “I know this is upsetting, but do you think you could tell me what exactly happened here?”

But John was too crushed to answer. And Martha was crushed, too, but not for the same reasons. John still couldn’t believe what had happened, could not believe that Martha, knowing they both could not escape, had pushed him to safety while she suffered the full impact of the speeding train. She had made the ultimate sacrifice for her love and John knew he could never repay that even with the thirty-seven bucks he had found going through her purse, while the EMTs searched for the rest of her body.

For the next two hours John was a wreck. He couldn't eat, he couldn't sleep, and he couldn't stop thinking about Martha. Martha, who was so perfect and so pure. Martha, who would love him until the end of time. Martha, whose exquisite countenance would be forever, like a delicate rose, pressed between the pages of his heart.

John's friends did what they could to help ease his suffering. They told him about all the other guys Martha was seeing. They told him about the sex-change operation. They even told she had switched his regular coffee with new dark, sparkling Folgers Crystals. Nothing could bring him out of the deep pit of his emotional despair. He was convinced that Martha was the one and only true love for him, and now that she was gone, so was any hope of happiness for him. That's just the way it is with young lovers; they have such idealistic beliefs about the objects of their affections. No love is truer, no lover more perfect and no memory of the six "perfect" loves before this one. Neither rhyme nor reason will convince them that their love is false. John knew Martha was up there in Heaven waiting for him and he was determined to join her.

His mother said that, in time, John would forget all about Martha. She said he would find some nice girl and settle down. But it had already been three hours since her death and John felt no different, no better. He still missed Martha. He missed the gentle warmth in her voice when she asked him to turn off the TV and do the dishes. He missed the silky smoothness of her caress as she tried to comfort him when the Yankees blew a six run lead in the ninth. He missed her graceful, gliding movements as she walked to the kitchen to get him his dinner and another beer. He missed her so much he ached; from the core of his being to the very tips of his fingers and toes, he ached.

He tried to get over her by seeing other women, but the brief affair that afternoon with the butcher's wife had done nothing to help him forget. All the blood on her apron just reminded him of his dearly departed Martha.

There was no relief. His heavy sighing made it difficult for his friends to breathe around him, and the incessant wailing made it impossible to listen to the radio, let alone keep their shirts dry. It became apparent to them that John had given up his will to live and nothing could bring it back. So naturally they did what any good friends would do; they took out a bunch of sharp objects, some rope, an assortment of prescription drugs and the Liquid Drano and left him alone for the evening.

Never since Romeo was any man so devoted to a woman as John was to Martha. And like Romeo, John was certain he could not live without his true love. So he decided to kill himself. After ten of the most painful hours of John's young life, he set out to do himself in. His plan was to be with Martha in Heaven for all eternity and nothing could stop him. It was a beautiful, tragic plan, he thought, the stuff of which lyric poems are made.

John hanged himself at two a.m. on the twelfth of June, eleven hours, seventeen minutes and thirty-three seconds after the death of his beloved Martha. He hanged himself again at two thirteen a.m. on the twelfth of June, eleven hours, thirty minutes and seventeen seconds after the death of his beloved Martha, this time without his arm in the noose.

It was a splendid success; John had never felt so light-headed. Excitement overwhelmed him as he ascended to Heaven. The thought of being reunited with his one true love was more than he could bear, that and the high altitudes, so as John rose, he drifted off into a state of unconscious bliss.

If you like clouds, Heaven is a pretty cool place. But if you have any great fear of falling, it can be your worst nightmare. You're basically living on a bunch of gaseous H₂O and any sort of logic will tell you that this can't be the most stable platform to strut around on. Luckily for John and all the other dead people, heaven doesn't work on logic. For that matter, neither does earth.

When John awoke he was concerned neither with the infirmity of the surface beneath him nor with the infirmity of his own dizzy thoughts. He had but one purpose and that was to find Martha. By an amazing coincidence, Martha was the first person John ran into in Heaven.

"Martha?"

"Huh?"

"Martha! Oh, Martha! I'm so glad it's you. I've been miserable living without you. Each second seemed a painful eternity, each ---"

"John?"

"Yes! John! Your one and only true love!"

"John? My true love?"

"Yes, me. 'Until the end of time.' Remember? Oh, Martha, it's so good to ---"

"Ohhh, John."

"Oh, Martha!"

"No, no. 'Ohhhhh, John.' As in, 'Oh no, not good.'"

"What do you mean, 'Not good'? I'm your true love. I'm here. Aren't you happy to see me? Didn't you miss me terribly?"

"Oh, John. I'm sorry. I've got some horrible news to tell you."

"What? What is it?"

"John, I'm married."

"You're what?!"

"Married."

"No!"

"Yes."

"But how? Why? To who? What ever happened to 'till the end of time', to 'I'll love you always'?"

"Oh, John."

"Stop saying that!"

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be sorry, just explain yourself. How could you forget about me? About us? About true love forever and always?"

"Well, John, it's like this. In Heaven, things are a little different. Time has no meaning here."

"But it hasn't even been a day!"

"It doesn't matter. In Heaven, a day, a week, a year, they're all the same. We have to be up here for the rest of eternity; it would get awfully tedious if we had to count out each individual day and week. We don't even count milleniums here."

"Well, if time flies by so quickly here, then why couldn't you have waited for me? How could you have forgotten all about me?"

"You don't understand, John. We can't have pain up here. It wouldn't be Heaven if everyone here was hurting all the time. Now of course you're going to have people coming up here and being upset about the lives and the loved ones they left behind, but that just won't do. They're in Heaven, the mother of all vacationlands; they have to be happy . . . or at least not sad. So in Heaven it's really easy to forget. That's how we deal with pain. As soon as it starts to hurt, it's forgotten about, no more painful memories. It's just like a reflex."

"But it hasn't even been a day."

"I'm sure when I had to leave you it hurt me very much, but as soon as I got here, 'Poof!', I forgot all about you and the pain disappeared, too. It is really the only way I could've enjoyed Heaven. I've saved so many tears . . . And that's another neat thing about Heaven, all the tears that no one cries here become raindrops. Rain is all the sadness Heaven has to offer. Isn't that neat?"

"Yeah, neat," replied John, his spirit crushed.

"So anyway, I got here and all my hurt disappeared. Unfortunately, so did all my memories of our love. And that's why I didn't feel the least bit guilty about marrying Peter. Wait till you meet him, you'll love him; he's a saint. At least I think he is. If he's ever done anything bad, I can't remember. See, that's the great thing about Heaven, it's so easy to forget wait, did I say that already? Anyway, it doesn't matter how hurt you feel now, John. And it doesn't matter that I don't love you anymore. I know that at this moment it seems really painful, but soon you'll forget that you ever loved me and everything we had will be erased forever and --- oh, now I'm getting all upset! You see what you're doing to me, John?"

"I'm sorry, do I know you?"

"Why, no, I believe we've just met. My name's Martha."

"I'm John."