

Eulogy

Brigid Martin

“There is always some madness in love.” Nietzsche said that, and with him, it was true. He liked Nietzsche, though not as much as Kierkegaard, and would quote him to me whenever I was admonishing him for being ridiculous. I think he would have liked to have Nietzsche read at his funeral, even though he thought funerals were a waste of time because the dead can’t appreciate them. Funerals are supposed to make the living feel better, but they do a shoddy job.

I do not remember the exact day we first met, but it was in a seminar on religion, and he was sitting in the front row with the air of someone sprawled in the back. His legs were crossed as he sat slumped in the auditorium chair, but the notebook in front of him was brand new with a ballpoint pen slanted casually across the fresh page. His shirt was crisp and pressed, but the necktie was undone, clinging limply to his chest.

When I sat down, he stuck a hand out, taking mine with only a slight press of the fingers. “Hello.”

God, I loved his voice, airy and light, strangely intoxicating, like pineapple cotton candy. We ate that on a Ferris wheel, wisps of sugar sticking to our fingers like yellow cobwebs. It was up at the top, and he clung to me like he was scared, even though I could see all his teeth from how much he was smiling. It was like bottle rockets bursting in my chest because I wasn’t going to tell him that I did not like heights, not when he had wind in his hair and pineapple in his smile. The cotton candy wasn’t very good, but we ate all of it anyway, drunk on the moment.

We were friends first. He found me in the library one evening, when I was reading a thick tome of psychology.

“Is that for class?”

“No,” I said, after getting over my surprise at being spoken to by an almost-stranger. A girl a few tables away looked up, studying us for a moment before going back to her other work.

“Thank God.” He dropped into the chair across from me, shrugging out of his coat. “I was worried I had misread the syllabus.”

Spoken like someone who would never do something like that.

“Just for fun,” I said, and he laughed.

The things we did for fun. Climbing the roof of the parking garage at 5AM to watch the sunrises. Going to the girls’ volleyball games, him trying his best to knock me over while screaming so loudly he lost his voice. Building snowmen outside the dorms. Walking out on the frozen lake and shrieking when the ice creaked underneath our weight. Falling asleep during movie nights. The long, long summers of trying to cultivate a relationship over phone calls and text messages, him in Denmark while I was in England.

“What’re you thinking about?” Low, tinted with sleep. It was 4AM, and I was still wide-awake because I did not want to miss a single word he said.

“What your voice sounds like.”

“What?”

“When you’re tired,” I whispered, feeling like we were on the brink of something, “Your accent gets thicker.”

He hums. “Ja. I’ve heard that before.”

“From who?”

A pause. “No one important.”

“Am I?” It was only because I was floating in my own head that gave me the courage to ask.

Without hesitation. “The most.”

I don’t know if I believe in love in first sight. With him, I’d like to think so. I love him now, so when I look back on the moment of our meeting, I think, yes, yes I do.

Third year, I tried to take up running. I enjoyed getting up in the mornings in late summer, jogging around campus, enjoying the silence of it without anyone else around. Feet pounding on the pavement, free of stress for half an hour. Sweaty, but content. Breathless, but calm.

I’d take the stairs up to our home after this daily ministrations, two at a time. We had a little flat above a delicatessen that was mainly a bedroom and kitchen, our textbooks strewn around the floor by a futon from his dorm that was stationed in the place of a dining room table. One bathroom, all of my things tucked neatly away, his hair products and cologne sprawled across the counter. There was a red mug, half-full of coffee mixed with whisky, that read “Wife Material” on the side. We found that in a home décor

store, and he thought it was funny. The sunlight filtered in too early through broken blinds, but neither of us really minded. He could sleep through a nuclear holocaust, and I either got up early to run, or simply lay there, tracing all parts of him with my fingers.

I came into the bedroom, where he was still bundled under the covers. Grabbed my shower caddy, but was yanked off my feet by a thin arm.

“C’mere.”

“I have to shower.”

His arm found its way around my waist, and pressed, settling me in the semicircle of his torso.

“Jeg elsker dig.”

He first said this eight months after we met. Sitting outside on the steps of the library.

“Where are you from?” I had asked, “Your accent is... different.”

“Denmark,” he said, not looking up from the book jacket he was reading to make sure I had picked out a good one. “Why haven’t you asked me this before? I assumed you knew.”

“Can you speak Danish?”

“Ja.”

“Say something.”

“I just did.”

“That sounded like German. Say something else.”

He rolled his eyes, closing the book. “Do you know how annoying that is? People asking you to say something in another language?”

“Je parle francais. Tu me l’as fait avant.”

“Ne compte pas, je connais aussi le francais.”

“Ego atque latine cognosco, quam vocari non possit.”

“Fair point,” he smiled. “I still can’t believe you can conjugate Latin verbs well enough to speak it.”

“I’m very talented.”

“I know.” He paused. “Jeg elsker dig.”

Back on the bed, I whisper to his sleeping face: “I love you too.”

When his father died, he left me. I followed, of course. I would have followed him to the ends of my life. I nearly did.

He returned to Denmark, to a house of corruption and deceit, one that smelled of roses choked with thorns, of expensive cologne, the taste of aged wine on every piece of silverware. It was dark, clothed with people, and he did not belong there, my beautiful scarlet heart, whom I had just begun to see.

He was corrupted by this place, by the people here. He no longer saw me, wrought as his vision was by ghosts. I tried to keep him, I tried so hard, but against his shining silver mind, I could do nothing.

When the time came, when I was holding him, he was scared. Oh God, he was scared, and that’s something that he never should be. He didn’t say as much but I could see it in his eyes, the tremble in his voice. He was terrified, and all I could do was hold him as he died surrounded by those he once loved, toppled like chess pieces after a losing match.

He is gone from my hands, but sometimes, in the peripheries of sunlight, I will see a lengthy form curled over a bedspread, not quite touching any of reality. Lips of light, eyes hot like stars. Jeg elsker dig, he says, come to bed. I will step forward, and the rest?

The rest is silence.