

I Loved Them All

Curiosity more than hunger or lust
- Robin Morgan

I loved them all she said and most still do
for all the usual unexplainable reasons —
touching parts of me that needed touching,
letting me touch them; attention, affection,
a warm body to hold and be held by
when two alone were still miracle enough
seeing ourselves mirrored in our lover's eyes.

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This one would take me abruptly and then,
satisfied, we would never lie content
but look at one another obliquely, abstractly,
trying to figure out what we were doing
to and with each other in the real world.

This one courted the lady in me: flowers,
compliments, deference, respect,
not fawning or abject but gentlemanly,
never touch me without my smile or nod,
some sign, then as we would get into it
hold himself back until I opened myself
to the power I'd given him over me.

This one was such a good sport about it,
in it for the exercise the feeling
of accomplishment and just reward
the rush to push us over the finish line.

This one loved to look at me naked, slide
his hands over me like the mere feel
was intoxicating — not adoring
the way some do as if you were delicate
or fragile but as if he wanted to be absorbed,
wanted to know me that way, wanted me
to know he knew, better than he knew himself.

This one wanted it always to depend on him,
and though afterwards he'd laugh at himself
for what he called his macho side, that's what
it almost always came down to.
What I liked was watching him lose control.

This one could never get enough.
Satiated but unsatisfied.
Said he was one of those men who would go to the grave
knowing however much he'd had would never
be enough to fill the need he felt
such pure desire entitled him to —

eyelids too heavy to keep open
bodies too close to tell apart
but unwilling to fall asleep
for fear each time would be the last.

This one was like a protective brother.

This one, no different from most, wanted me
to keep nothing from him — no secrets
share everything — except that
instead of looking for a way to own me
he was looking for a lover to open to,
soul friend as well as soul mate,
to see our shadows in broad daylight,
our self-understanding deeper by the power of two
to ease the labor-pains of self-exposure.

This one intrigued me, something worth exploring
always likely to turn up on our weekends together,
a pretty good fit when making a living came first
thing for both of us every Monday morning.

This one inspired us both to acts of charity.

This one was prototype Eastern Shore —
a steel-trap intellect, biting wit,
photographic memory and money —
who to his heart surgeon father's sorrow
washed out of Anapolis where he'd excelled
in mechanical engineering and freestyle wrestling,
but did very well in West Indies imports,
had yards of porn on his bookshelves, a portrait
of Maharishi on his bedroom wall and felt
red velvet cords helped make up for his shame

This one was a kind of useful idiot —
cute, amiable, available
whenever what was needed was low key
small talk get-togethers — relaxation, relief,
release and not a lot of strings attached.

This one, hung up between his mother abusing him
and the commandment to honor her, bounced back and forth
between rage and empty-eyed silence, wanted me
to somehow make up for the love he'd never had.
For a long time I convinced myself good sex
wasn't all that important until one day
compassion turned into pity and I told him
to go find an analyst or wet nurse.

This one loved falling in love, made it easy
to set aside the years of worldly wisdom,

step with him into a light-hearted
bright-eyed giddy wonderland —
all those delicious memories
confused frightened excited trusting
uncanny synchronicity
numinous coincidence
everything significant
all the clichés fresh again
all love songs our song
all romances reflections of ours
each glance each word a revelation
smiles innocent of pretense
only the two of us in focus
a clairvoyant intimacy
more in love the closer we got
loving both what and that we were.

This one would go on explaining his words and reasons
as long as he thought I was following and if not
(which was the case more than he guessed) would stop
and explain his argument again while I followed
the way his lips and eyes danced to his voice.

This one said I was the only woman who made him feel
she loved him, then complained I contradicted myself
when I said *to* love isn't the same as being *in* love,
though I was clear from the start all I was into with him
was friends with benefits; that if he didn't lighten up
he'd spoil a good thing; that nice as it was sometimes,
his passion had nothing to do with me but was
a prurient growth of his fantasy world,
a dark hole all his own only he could fill.

This one couldn't get past the idea that once we'd had sex
we had to be in love or married or bound up some other way.

This one said he first realized
we didn't have a chance when I told him
I agreed with those feminists
who said seduction is a kind of rape.
That was a version of victim-villain porn,
he said, damsel-in-distress, poor thing
taken advantage of, spirit unwilling
but flesh all too too, a condemnation
of even the old do-si-do couples
have always used to talk ourselves into it.
Friendly persuasion he called it
affinity becoming intimacy,
the fine art of winning the loved one's love.
We never were as close after that.

This one, those of you who say I think

too much, or like a man, will be glad to know,
I can't find words for even now, years since he left.
Violet-blue eyes that saw deep into mine.

This one insisted that *taken for granted*
was exactly what we should be for each other.

This one said I was the kind of woman
who had the power if I knew it or not
to suffuse a man, haunt him like a witch's spell
a possession too easy he said to confuse with love.

This one wasn't younger than his years but fit
physically and mentally, both grace
and gravity, more than enough libido,
never in a hurry to get anywhere else
so sometimes we would just cuddle for hours,
content, but he insisted the chemistry
must be there until the very end;
reminding me now and then that for better or worse
I would be the last woman in his life.
When he was alone he obsessed about death
every day being that much closer.

This one was taking forever to go through what someone called
the radiance of the Zomboid Phase all men
with any feminine consciousness seem to go through.

This one was of two minds: angels looking down
on our love-making or spooks listening in;
edgy at best somewhere between goth and noir,
never knowing if anything ever was
or could be between just the two of us.

This one seemed like a perfect partner
for polyamory but then
who has the time?

This one wanted to be lost in me,
give himself up to the feel of us
touching as much as we could of each other,
sensuousness its own reason
flesh caressing responsive flesh
speaking in tongues only we understood
getting to know each other again
from the inside out;
the afterglow could last for days.

This one was one of those rare birds
who could feel the ecstasy of romance
without needing the drama of being lovers.

Color this one Mr Unrequited:
great sex *à l'orientale*,
from hands an inch above my meridians
to tantric chakra ecstasies but never
crossing the line into intimacy, never
letting himself love anyone else since
the one he wanted but never had in his teens.

This one, no matter what we talked about —
and sharing ideas was what first brought us together —
it always came back to gender and our different ways
of experiencing sex, love, desire and all that,
and somehow the dissection didn't flatline our romance.

This one said he was a disciple
of Our Lady of Perpetual Orgasm,
vowed on his knees to invoke her presence
as often as permitted, was glad to have me
take part in what he called her rites of passage.

This one was neither here nor there
which was ok because I wasn't either.

This one took years to give up trying.

This one when we met was just beginning to see
how uptight he was, how narrow his scope of pleasure,
how stuck he was where he'd been since puberty.

This one was so nice, thoughtful and non-demanding,
so intoxicated by the warmth we generated,
it was almost impossible to feel sexual about him
and my affection sort of curdled into obligation.

This one more than anything wanted to know
himself, more than to understand me or us,
who we were when we came together as we did
more and more often for a time to escape
our everyday lives, so once in a while what we called
his delphian eye would close so we could see
ourselves at our best as hardly half the puzzle.

This one took *the personal is political*
very personally; saw love as a strategy
for the power of two to overcome the powers that be,
relationship as domestic detente to ward off
mutually assured destruction, love-making
a sort of last resort suicide pact.

This one followed the self-help shows,
said I was the victim of false memories
while he was an obvious case of incomplete weaning,

always confusing carnal desire and love.

This one was kind, affectionate, gentle, playful,
responsive to my moods and whims at the moment,
yet still his own man ready willing able
to find that edge where my safety belt unlatched
and I'd go into freefall. Nothing at all
about having no choice so no guilt
or becoming mindless in order to be able to love,
but self-surrender, surrender to myself,
our foreplay suddenly incandescent —
I loved the lightness of his body, the feel of him
behind me, his grip, my desire his,
my demand to be taken, known, undone,
satisfied, fucked *mens sana*
in corpore sano giving up giving in
giving us the woman I'd always kept to myself.

This one had learned the hard way that intimacy
for him meant shame and guilt for moral impurity
intellectual dishonesty
emotional immaturity
and of course sexual inadequacy.

This one said when you feel good, I feel good
and when I can help you feel good, so much the better,
but if you're not really there, then
it's just like jacking off for me and frankly
I'd rather use my hand than use you.
The energy between us multi-orgasmic,
both of us believing mystical union
in sexual love is the natural goal of pairing.
Sometimes I think the main reason we split up
was neither of us was ready to take the next step
to consummate by alchemical sacrament
what nature had given us by coincidence.

This one seemed almost to understand
that underlying all my other desires,
even very early ones like wanting
to be called pretty or be sincerely cherished,
was to feel non-threatened, to be with people
in ways that weren't always so intense, so dramatic.

This one emanated something, I don't know what
to call it — not priapic or lewd or alluring — maybe
hermetic — a vibe or aura that made me know
I had to have him, have him have me
(*the voice of the Goddess through him* one of our sisters said),
which when it happened filled me so completely,
left me so *fulfilled* (there is no better word)
that when he left though I felt the loss there was no grief,

only warm memories and this deep contentment.

This one wanted to know what I did with others
I wouldn't do with him, and why, and why not.

This one was always at loose ends, a waif
needing to be comforted, reassured
it was ok to love, to be loved,
to make love, and then the tenderness
was overwhelming, a giving and receiving
beyond incestuousness that opened me
and opened and opened until we wept
in awe and joy to be together again
in that warm place before the birth of time.