

## **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 could almost see he was ashamed  
of, disgusted with, himself  
for being so abjectly in love.

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 it's always something and for us  
it was when I told him I agreed with those who say  
seduction is a kind of rape as if, he said,  
violence and friendly persuasion are the same;  
just more victim-villain porn,  
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.  
*Affinity becoming intimacy*  
he called it, quoting somebody or other,

*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 nothing occupies  
men's minds like the bodies of women and I  
if I knew it or not was the kind of woman  
who had the power to suffuse a man, haunt him  
like a witch's spell, a possession too easy  
he said to confound 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 said he always fell in love too easily  
and though he knew he would get hurt again he saw  
I needed to be reminded what love felt like  
so I could get out of the mess I was in while the getting was good.

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 might have been a perfect partner  
for polyamory and made it sound good —  
an open but committed relationship,  
casual but uninhibited sex  
with regulated communication and rules,  
a sense of mutual obligation  
and a look of real love in his eyes —

but I seldom felt that versatile  
and besides, who has that much 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 wanted me to get excited  
every time he got the urge, even though I  
usually, and eventually only,  
just wanted to help him get off.

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 was all about being uptodate,  
done with retro puritanism,  
patriarchal bs of any kind,  
then turned out to value intellectual clarity  
far more than emotional intimacy:

score one more heteropessimism.

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 was like a book I'd already read:  
new levels to discover but otherwise boring.

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* a sister 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.