

love story with guns and cigarettes

Experimental

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opening elements

Dee's apartment. Third story brownstone
across the street from the bar.

Chuck in the doorway.

Surprise.

Disappointment.

Dee gives him a look.

events

Chuck stands in the doorway expecting to
find Dee dead, but she's not dead.

Chuck has paid Jay to shoot her, which he
didn't anyway.

The event begins earlier at the bar across
the street. She (Dee) meets up this guy (Jay)
who is her (Dee's) lover's brother (Chuck),
and she (Dee) lures him (Jay) across the
street to her (Dee's) place. From his (Jay's)
point of view he (Jay) has hooked up with
her (Dee) for a fun Friday night/Saturday
morning, but really he (Jay) plans to kill her
(Dee) for which his (Jay's) brother (Chuck)
has paid him.

We don't know why. It's not important.

Jay follows her home from the bar across
the snowy street, then upstairs to her apart-
ment.

Now they sit at her table, drink wine Jay
has brought, discuss Russian novels — or,
rather she deconstructs her latest Dosto-
evsky find, while Jay, bored, stares at the
wall, thrusts his hands into the light that
falls through the Venetian blinds making sil-
houettes, creating stories he tells to himself
while she declaims on literature. Or while
she just reads.

After a while, bored, Dee puts Dostoevsky
aside and asks Jay who he is, what he thinks
following her home, what he wants, and why
he is still dressed.

Jay hems and haws, but reveals nothing,
not even his purpose, not even if he knows.

Then, suddenly, pop, out comes his gun
— revealing he has one — and he says he's
paid to kill her — but he doesn't reveal that
Chuck, his brother, is the one who has paid
him to do it. Remember, Chuck is her lov-
er, and Chuck wants to break off the affair.
How better to do that than to kill her. And,
how better to effect that than by paying his
worthless brother to do the killing.

Then, surprise, surprise, Dee pulls her own
gun from a nightstand. Now both are armed
and dangerous, sitting and staring at each
other.

the turn

Then, in a standoff, they swap gun stories.

"Have you ever killed anyone?"

Questions like that, her to him.

And "What do you think it is like to taste
death?"

Him to her.

Then she says, "I'd rather make love." He
agrees.

"Sure. Make love," he says.

Whatever love is.

They put their guns away.

aftermath

Well, shortly after she needs a cigarette,
and asks if he has one, but Jay doesn't

smoke, so she asks him to go buy her a pack.
He hems and haws (again) and says, "Okay,"
puts his clothes back on, his shoes and socks,
his pants, shirt and tie, jacket, in that order;
pulls on his dark cashmere overcoat, worn
around the sleeves, dons his hat.

Before he goes she calls to him, "Come
back. After you get the cigarettes."

He looks back at her. "Oh."

Then she says, "Many never do."

Then she adds, "Not generics, though.
Something nice. No filters. No menthol.
Camels are good. Pall Malls if they have
them."

The door closes.

"Men are pigs," she says.

She has read Orwell.

foreshadowing

Now, later, Jay's brother, Chuck stands
in the doorway. He has a key, same as his
brother. He opens the door. He wears a
dark cashmere coat, same as his brother, a
hat on his head, the same as his brother, a
puzzled look on his face, the same look Jay
often has. Light from the hallway behind him
makes it hard to discern minor features of
his expression.

Dee is reading Dostoevsky, as noted earli-
er. She is scantily clad at this point. She pulls
the sheet up to her neck.

"You should be dead," Chuck says.

"Who says I'm not?"

"My brother is incompetent."

"That guy is your brother? In so many ways
you two are nothing alike."

The plan has been for Chuck to find the body, to alibi by saying he is passing by, hears a shot, breaks down the door, finds Dee dead, then calls the cops. Then he will say he does not know this 'Dee' character, and, if possible, he will weep. He will say, finding her there, a stranger like that, will scar him for life.

time as narrative

Dee is in bed reading Doestoevsky, as noted earlier. Chuck opens the door as noted earlier. Dee turns a page. "So?" she says, not looking up. "You weren't at the bar."

"Where is he?" Chuck asks.

"Where's who, Chuckie Wuckie?" Because Chuck is her lover, pet names come as no surprise.

"The guy at the bar," Chuck says. "The guy bought this wine?" he asks, pointing to wine on the table. "The guy you brought home? The guy you had in your bed?"

"There's no one here, Chuckie Poo-Poo," Dee says.

"Does he look like me? Does he have a gun? Does he use it?"

"No one here except you, Chuckie A-Puck Duck, of course. You're here," she says.

"That's all. Well," she adds, "I'm here, too. But that's all who's here. Just us."

"We are through," Chuck says. He still stands in the doorway. "From now on, if I see you, or you see me, we'll just pass by each other like strangers. As if you are dead."

She's not dead. But what else can he say? He enters Dee's place and shuts the door behind him.

motivation

Now, obviously, people do what they do.

They make the choices they make.

They do as they do and not any way else. Why is impossible for us to deduce. We can only presume.

A person is One is on firmer ground stating only people do what they do and foregoing the guesswork. Anyway, people lie. Who knows what is unknowable, or hears what is unspoken. Even people who do what they do don't always know why they do it. And rarely do people give fair self-assessments. Mostly, even, they think one thing and do another. Etc. But, since many need more groundwork, I'll venture a guess.

Let's say, for instance, Chuck has been seeing Dee for years. Dee is his mistress. Many nights he holds court with her at this bar along Broadway, the one across from her house, not far from where he works. He has friends. She has friends. They all go to the same fun bar. They have fun in the night. Away from the light. Outside the suburbs. Out of sight of the normal. You know what I mean.

But, like an old car whose valves wear out, get loose, wobble in the cylinders, the truth, like engine oil, leaks out, and his night life becomes known to people in the suburbs, not unlike an oil stain on the driveway, and the more time that passes, the bigger the stain until it cannot be but noticed. To spare us more pain, not to burn out a gasket, not to overheat the block, not to freeze up the engine, Dee must be removed, rebuilt, reengineered, killed. Chuck hires his brother, Jay, for the work. Chuck will be able to say, "I was walking by, I hear a shot, etc.," so can then return to his suburbs to live in the light of the sun. 'I love you,' he will then say to his wife. 'I always have.'

Something like that.

meanwhile

Dee says, "Love is never over."

"It wasn't love," Chuck says. He stands between the doorway and the table, hat and coat, shoes and socks, pants and shirt, all on.

"True love never ends," she says.

"Or," Chuck says, "if it was love, there for a moment, if it was love early on, like when we first met," Chuck says, "like maybe that first time or two we went out together, or right after that first time we came up here and made love, when you read me those first passages from Dostoevsky in your sweet voice, maybe then it sounded like love back then, if it was love or not — even back then, as it might well have been, I'm not saying yes or no — but, what we had was what we had, yet it was never love — I mean, we are just animals — and still are — and it could not have been true love, because if it was true love for a while, or seemed like it was, it wasn't true love for long, was it? because it's not true love if it doesn't last forever, by your own definition, and it didn't last forever, you'll have to agree with that, certainly never true love at all, and probably not even love, whatever love is, so even if you're right, and true love never ends, in our case it never started, so it could not be then, and it couldn't be thereafter, and so it isn't now."

summary

Even now there are no tears.

It is dark.

Now light from the street flows in and over the bed — which is actually a foldout couch — stripes of light that fall from the Venetian blinds, but not on Dee's face, which she keeps in shadow. Instead the light falls

on the sheet she has pulled up to her neck. Thus, although she is on the point of tears, or might be, no one can see that, in fact there is no light else in the room, and Chuck is far away, and certainly she cannot see her own tears — who can see those — at best we see through our tears, not at them, after all, even if we have them, but then she doesn't, wo what's the point.

Now Dee gets out of the bed, wrapping her body in sheets, dragging the sheets behind her as she sits on her overstuffed chair, there by the window, her feet tucked up beneath her. Behind her is the window and beyond the window is the city.

Lights. Buildings. Streets. Cars. Smells. Noise. Etc.

Some faint noise come in through the window which is shut.

Chuck now is in the kitchen area in Dee's small studio, removes his dark cashmere coat, his hat, his gloves, and sits at the kitchen table. He fiddles with a half empty, but still open bottle of wine on the table. Red wine which, when light shines on it and then through it, casts a slight red light across the table. He pours the last of the wine in a glass. He doesn't know whose glass it is.

Yes, he is dressed like Jay. They are brothers, after all.

Dee explains

"So, there was this guy at the bar," Dee says. "He stares at me. It's our bar, Chuck. I talk to him because you aren't there. All his staring gives me hives. Then a little bit of this, some of that, more of this, then he comes over, saying this 'I'm the God of Love' bullshit. What's a girl to do?"

She continues. "Then he follows me home.

Right behind me, like a rat after cheese, we cross the street, we go upstairs, he follows me up, comes to my dump — really, Chuck, you could rent a nicer place for me in a nicer neighborhood, what must our friends think — and I come in and turn down the lights, and he follows me in, and there we are in the dark, and we sit at the table, drink wine, etc. I should add, he stops on our way here, and he buys us wine and cheese. Good cheese, too, Chuck, better than cheese you buy, when you come here. Gouda stuff. You ever had that? And crackers, because, what's cheese without crackers? About that time he starts up again with this God of Love business. What's a girl to do?"

Chuck explains

"So, I go to the bar," Chuck says now. "Go to our table, look at our booth, but you aren't there. I ask around, 'Where's Dee? Where's Dee?' And everyone says, 'She's gone off with the God of Love.' 'God of Love,' I say. 'How's that?' But then I figure it out, and say, 'Fine, if that's how it is, then that's how it is, and I hope the fuck whoever she's with knows what the fuck he is doing. God of Love, really.'"

This last he says as he rolls his eyes.

More Dee

"We are talking," she says now, "and he's up here at my place, and stuff comes up, and shit happens after that — doesn't it always? — and I forget myself, and you aren't there, and I lose track, and there he is, sitting in my little kitchen — if you want to call that a kitchen, I'd like a better kitchen — and we're sitting in the dark, and I'm lying in my bed, and then he's lying in my bed, and it is dark, so we do what people do

when it's dark and they're both in bed, and after that I need a smoke. Who doesn't?"

They negotiate

Now Chuck is sitting, takes off his shoes all wet from snow. And his socks. And wiggles his toes, which are cold.

"All I ask," Chuck says, his toes, now liberated, growing warm, "is for normality. One is one. Two is two. That sort of thing. Is that asking so much?"

"You don't love me anymore," she says.

"What happened to the wine?" he asks.

One bottle is empty. The other half full.

Dee leans back, her feet tucked up under her, wrapped in a colored sheet, maybe peach, but in the faint light of morning her sheet appears a mid-tone gray.

"What happened to the wine?" she says.

"What happened to the wine? Does everything always have to happen to everything? Can't we just let things be?"

"A normal life," he says. "That's all I ask. Did you screw him?"

"He was the God of Love. What's a girl to do?"

She continues. "I'd sure like a cigarette."

Light from outside passes through Venetians and turns red as it passes through the bottle. He reads the label. It is not the worst wine ever, not the cheap stuff he buys when he buys her wine. Light also falls on the red wax of a half consumed wheel of Gouda cheese.

Dee recaps

Now she says, "He follows me here. I swear to god. I leave the bar. He leaves the bar. I cross the street. He crosses the street. I come upstairs. He comes upstairs. He rips off his clothes and climbs into bed. What's a

girl to do?"

"It's not a bed. It's a foldout couch,"
Chuck says.

She catches her breath.

"He had a gun," she says.

"So, you are saying," Chuck says, "the
God of Love packs a rod?"

"Fuck you," she says. "He had a gun."

"Fuck you," he says. "Don't start tossing
metaphors around."

"I loved him," she says. "He was a good
man," she says.

"Gods don't need guns," he says. He leans
forward on the table, on his elbows, pours
a little more wine. Maybe the last of it. He
belts it down like men do.

"He climbed naked into bed. What's a girl
to do?"

The ending begins

Dee now sorts through her clothes on the
floor, finds her underwear, puts them on. The
room is cold. The floor is cold. Her feet are
cold.

"He was here," she says to Chuck. "I
thought, man, oh man, I better get him out
of here. Something is bound to happen."

"Something always happens," Chuck says.
"That's the nature of time. You've said it
yourself."

"I'll skip a few things then," she says. "We
make love, Jay and I. Sweat and grind. That
sort of thing. Then I needed a smoke."

"So, he leaves to get smokes."

"Exactly. I want something nice. No gener-
ics. No filters. No menthol. Camels are good.
Pall Malls if they have them. He puts on his
socks, which are still wet. Then his shoes.
His coat, his hat. And he goes."

She sits on the bed. Soft morning light
comes in through Venetians to warm her

shoulders, her hair.

"In the end," she continues, "it wasn't
love, Chuck. It was just a thing. Something
that happened. Something started. Then it
ended. But all I wanted, all I needed, was a
cigarette."

"So it ended," he says.

"Exactly. You know it as if you were
there."

Chuck stands. He tips the glass as if to
swallow the last bit of wine, but there is no
more wine. He puts on his coat, his hat.

"All this talk of cigarettes," he says, "I
need a cigarette."

Door opens to the hallway. A cool draft
goes out. Chuck follows it out to the source.

"Come back," she says as the door is clos-
ing. "So many never do."

The door closes.

It is quiet.

"Men are pigs."

aftermath

Now Dee cleans up the table.

Now Dee washes the glasses.

Now she pitches the empty wine bottles.

Undresses, returns to bed. Ah, bed. That
fold-out couch.

She opens Dostoevsky to where she has
left off, the murder scene. Close to where
Raskoinikov commits the crime. Did the story
stop when she stopped reading? Do things
that have been stopped ever resume, or are
they now something else free of history?

Now the morning light falls across the
pages.

Now her lips move as she reads. She
mouths the words, speaking to herself.

Now her eyes wander across the page.

Coal black hair.

Peach colored sheets.

Her body under the sheets.

Stripes of light coming through the Vene-
tian blinds fall across the foldout couch.

final elements

Now it is snowing.

An empty winter afternoon.

The pattern of our shoes in snow that lead
across the street.

Nothing ends.

Things stretch forward as far as possible
until they fall away.