

V. LOVE'S HEAT

Helena became accustomed to Tony's touch. She ached when he was not around even if it was only for a short while. She didn't want to become dependent on him, especially since he seemed too confident of himself. She feared that this would prove her undoing.

She had never realized that her passion had held so much promise. She clung to each second as if it allowed to savor each drop of its sweet flavor. She believed that even Celia and Jenny could never feel things with this intensity. Helena had held so much inside. Now she was totally liberated. She let the light penetrate to her soul as if she was opening all the windows to air out a room. The clarity was sparkling.

She hardly needed to imagine his look, and he would appear before her. She saw him turning and looking towards her. That smirk of his worked every time. He would brush his hair away from his eyes, and she would catch her breath. That alone was enough for her to become part of his world, one flesh. Day would turn into night. And the night would crackle like a lightning storm. Two fronts coming together—hot and cold. Even the daytime sun could not capture the vibrance of their connection. And she was reassured by this deep feeling even while he was not there.

“I love you.”

She tried to mouth the words.

“Dear, did you say something.”

“I was just thinking how good this is. Too good. It won't ever be this good again.”

“Helena, don't say this. This is just a beginning.”

She sat on his lap and wrapped her long legs around him. He could feel her warmth sustain her already.

They pressed their foreheads together. He couldn't contain himself. “I want to float with you.”

And he was losing himself in her eternal ocean. Her treacherous depths. He couldn't sound the bottom. As much as she was overwhelmed, he was unable to make sense of it all. He wanted to believe that she was a slave to her passions. That he still was loyal to his noble side. But this made him more of a cad. And he felt it all with such crazy intensity.

She kissed him. A few pecks that resolved into a slow burn of a kiss. And she buried herself in his affection. She forgot about everything else. This was the only design that mattered. Love was her art.

She felt proud of her body as she gave it to him. All inhibitions vanished. There was a vision of completeness that she had never imagined. Was this physical or mental? It made little sense. She felt herself slipping under its spell.

His hand moved back and forth along her back. The gentle caresses. She moved her hips in a relaxed motion. And he was swayed by the rhythm. He had difficulty controlling himself. He felt weak as they embraced. Their clothes were still on. And it felt so hot in the room. He took off his shirt. She gently kissed his chest. She ran her hands up and down. She pushed him against a wall so that she could feel the resistance of his body. It was all so real.

They both collapsed in the fervor of the emotion. She wrapped her legs around his body as he balanced himself against the wall. This became more difficult as her movements became

more pitched. He slid his hands under her skirt so that he was now rubbing her bare legs. She licked around his lips until she lost herself in a deep kiss. Their bodies swayed in the overall excitement.

She was on top of him on the couch. He was bare chested in his white pants. She had her blouse open. Her skirt flowed around her. He let her burrow with him as they both faded into relaxation.

In the lull she started to nibble at his ear. Her hands worked their way through his hair. She teased him by pulling it. He took this as an invitation to become assertive. He pulled her body down to him. They rocked together.

Up to this point she could contain the passion. Beyond this, she wanted more than sexual satisfaction. She was ravenous. She wanted to consume him.

Helena was afraid of becoming this machine for pleasure. Beyond caring, she wanted mere stimulation. Not just a little, she wanted it all. She didn't like to think of herself as insatiable. It sounded like a trashy porn movie. She tried to imagine his face. That she was doing this to get close to him.

He kissed her, and it sent shivers through her body. At this point, she knew that she had already gone too far. Way too far to turn back.

“My angel, I want you to open wide for me.”

She wanted to laugh. But what he said was so right. He could express so much without saying a thing. She bit his lip. There wasn't any blood. She just wanted to provoke him.

“Why did you do that?”

“Your angel has horns!”

“Stick them in me.”

They both found humor in his command.

The first time together had been so wonderful, she never thought that the second time around would be even more tender, more involving.

His tongue explored her body like a curious cat lapping up its dripping liquid treats. He was bold. There was no shame in his inroads. He made the smooth skin into these hidden corners of desire. From the sun-kissed back and legs to the more concealed regions of dark desires, he created feelings where there was none. He made her body come alive.

With each expression she felt more and more of this wall melt. He was completely inside her. That space that always felt so personal. The body within the body.

“My will is your satisfaction.” He held back nothing. He helped to become truly free. She felt a self within a self. She was now so attuned to the slightest stimulation. He was refashioning the flesh. Deep, deep inside she could feel this tingle. She wanted to scream out. Her eyes were closed in concentrated meditation. She was not herself at all. Just this pleasure. And he kept working away. The quick caresses. Kisses that were forever. Kisses that exploded in the immediacy of now.

“Stop. This is too much. Don't stop.” She murmured to herself. Her heart raced. She floated on this feeling.

His expressions recalled the waves of the afternoon. As one would crest and roll over her, she could feel another initiate its path. His touch was so uniquely physical. But her feeling was other worldly. This fire consumed her. She passed through it only to be beset by a passion

all encompassing. Her cries matched the intensities of the pleasure.

He felt that his gift only made her more open to his remarkable sense of being, how his hand rested on her body. How his kisses were felt inside the soul.

It was not stopping. It was more intense. As he found one spot to excite, others opened up. The minute folds of the flesh that gave in to his incursions. The curiosity. The cat licks. The electricities of the skin. Her body just gave in completely. The waves were more massive. She was learning how to prolong her ride. She balanced against its intensities. She held on against her desire to just let go. As the progression reached its peak, she felt as if she was falling. Falling and falling. Another gasp. And he was relentless with his caresses. Each floor was higher and higher. So the ceilings of her pleasure were death defying heights. She was flying. Nothing was in her way.

She wanted this to mean something. Even as she gave in to his touch, she believed that there was more to this. His caring. He was selfless. All the pride that she had known in him seemed to submit to his desire, his desire to please her. This was the essence of pleasure. That she was getting to know him in a way that she never had before. She fell deep for this humility. It only made the skin come alive. She could sense that this was the core of her desire. She had always thought of it as a spiritual place. A cave where she could hide from the world. Now it was completely physical. And he was in this place with her.

She wanted to pull away from the intimacy. But the physical sensations were so strong. With each promise she wanted more. Again, this animalistic desire seemed to reign. She wanted to be pleased. She wanted to feel the stimulation in the most intense way. Any sense of reserve was gone. She felt afraid. That she was at his mercy. At the same time, he had been reduced to just this physical thing. To find this place again meant to fulfill her physical expectations. She saw his body in just this way. And the physical reality only added to the hypnotic appeal. He could have his way with her. She could never push him away. She fell under the spell. Her sighs were more regular. There was no way to restrain herself. She could feel how she was carried across the universe. She just let herself be taken into flight. She soared and soared and then completed the arc in this mellow touch down.

His body yielded equally to her caress. She welcomed the easy play. She would follow the road of his excitement. She would make him scream for more.

The kisses were only the beginning. She wanted to show him her gratitude for taking her to this place that she had never known before. He nurtured the garden of her delights. Now she wanted to worship at his temple. She didn't fear his pride anymore. This is what she sought, a confidence that would not subside. His ardor was constant. She needed to sustain him. Nothing else would do her trick.

She drenched herself in the sweat of his body. The pungent aroma mixed with a sweetness. She drank it in. It was not enough. She was dominated by her thirst. She could no longer retreat to the protection of her garden. She was overwhelmed with the overgrowth. Now she needed to submit to the abundance. Her worship was constant and without equal. She offered herself to these idols.

His body sang the new delights. And her appetites were heightened. She wanted his firm flesh. She grabbed. She scratched. She made her way into his zone of arousal. She needed to give as she had received. There was just so much more to give. Her lips brought him alive.

There was now something automatic in her kisses. They had an immediate goal. Both of them yielded to this. Her expression came from such a guarded intimacy. But now all security for her seemed shattered. She was completely open to him, completely serving his desires. She didn't want any of this to be taken for a whim. She was so tied to the intensity of the expression.

She was gratifying his want. His will. It was so abstract. Almost spiritual. It was so real. So physical. She was now so attuned to the least changes in his body. The blood flow. The swelling of the skin. The response to her caresses. To her kisses. To her tongue against his skin.

She would do anything for him. For her it was like a baby with her bottle. She wouldn't let go of it for anything. It was thirst-quenching. She gave in to his magnificence. Everything about his body—she yielded.

He wanted to let up. But he kept going. She knew how to give just enough, and then how to pull back. He learned how to sense this communication. This helped him sustain. He learned how to respond to these changes. He no longer was overwhelmed with the intensity of pleasure. He relaxed as she gave herself to him. He let her lead them.

This was what he wanted all along. She submitted to his desire. He had made her feel like a queen. Now she was doing her part. She knelt at his throne. She gave him the deserved tribute. She welcomed his empire. The laurels surrounded his achievement. To represent all the power of the flesh. The surprises. The excitement that pulsed through the veins. She was now familiar with all of this. Her familiarity was too much to bear. And in this burden she came to know something so particular about him That she could physically touch something so supernatural. He was totally vulnerable. But he drew strength from this openness. As she accepted him into her, she felt weaker and weaker. He was sapping her vigor, even as he shared his honey with her. The sweet flesh. Tender caresses. The thirst-quenching kisses. Now this raw contact. Again skin against skin. Mind to mind. Her lips drew in his being. He floated on this ecstasy.

He practiced an intense restraint. He wanted to reward her for all her effort. Already she was giving him so much. He was not just inside her body, he was penetrating her mind. His flesh was this sign, this switch inside her. It made the machine go. And it was going at super speed. She couldn't control herself. He couldn't stop himself.

She was ready. They both were. They were crossing over to another side of pleasure. There was this uncertain erasing of the self. She was afraid that it would become too brutal. Already they moved so fiercely together. For the moment, they believed there was nothing else than the physical pleasure. It was a wind-mill hurtling out of control. Still at the center of their desire, there was this incessant flow. She was coming to know this different part of her. It was the source of an even deeper fright. Her intimacies were so tied to a physical feeling. She didn't want to mistake one for the other. Even if they were together in the flesh, he could still hide part of himself. He was turning her into some kind of freak. She didn't want to feel enslaved by her passions.

As they felt as one flesh, she was so absorbed in their connection. The naked athleticism drove her to new heights. It left her with little to say. She pushed him. She made the exercise more extreme.

Something was getting lost in it all. She felt that she was being cut in two. That his

luscious appeal was just driving its way into her soul. All that she could perceive was this solitary heart beating. She thought it was her heartbeat. Or did they beat as one. She held on as the intensity again washed over her. Something welled up deep inside her. It was like a tidal wave sweeping over her. It left her completely defenseless. Naked and defenseless. She clung to that feeling, its raw aggression. She rode its turbulence. In that attack, she found herself again in him. This was the most frightening part.

She had changed so much. Now she relied on this physical extreme. It was like being suspended on a cliff and looking down. As long as she could keep her wits, she was turned on by the risk. She was living for these dizzying heights. But the crashing fall seemed to beckon. She was clinging on for life. There he was to give his support. This wasn't like her at all. She hated it.

She continued to believe these intimacies. She wanted him to say something. They were both too drained for words. They just floated in the afterglow. He held her as they became drowsy. They were losing all sense of time.

That morning he had the hotel prepare them a picnic lunch. They went up to the higher part of the island.

"This is a goat path."

Helena seemed more cautious, "I think that even the goats avoid coming up here."

He held her hand while he carried the basket with the other. They were developing a sweat by the walk.

They finally reached their destination, a perch above the ocean and the rest of the island. He stared in her eyes

"What?" She gave him a strange look.

"Your eyes are so calming. They guide me through the desert of my soul."

She was deeply touched by what he said. She didn't want to lose him. She could feel that she was heading into a daze.

"What is it? Helena, you seem so far away."

"I don't want to lose you. It seems that I just found you."

He gave her a hug.

"You have nothing to worry about. We'll see each other back in London."

But London now seemed to be a million miles away. It was another life that had nothing to do with him. In a way, she still looked at it as her security. She had given so much of herself to him. She hoped that there might be something back there that was still her own.

She was not exaggerating: the Mediterranean sun was now his sun. She tried to topple this Adonis. Instead he was turning her world upside down. The sea air, the sun, her feelings. It intoxicated. She sipped the wine, but she was already light-headed.

"I need you to hold me!"

"You look like you're going to faint."

"It's the air."

"We're not that high up."

"There's something in the air."

She almost passed out in his arms. She didn't want to show this weakness. She thought that it made her look silly.

“Here, eat something. It will make you feel better.”

She did feel a little better. She kissed him. She could taste the wine on his lips.

“Don’t say anything. Silence.”

They held each other. He was a part of her. She couldn’t let go. The scene below was so placid. Another sparkling day in Corfu. In London, he would go back to being a mortal. Here he was playing with more lofty ideals.

Helena wanted to say something light. She needed some humor to break the ice. Romance was becoming hard work.

“I want to have the chance to sketch you when we get back.”

“Of course. I’d love to be your model.”

What could she show in that glorious face? In that hair which always hung over the forehead. The artist in her suggested a caution which the lover ignored. She was looking at herself from a distance now. Even as she gave in to his embrace, she was elsewhere. Back in a gallery in London looking at this scene as it was displayed on a wall. The critical distance helped her regain her strength.

That night would be their last. She wanted to renew the dream that they had discovered before. There was a bit of trepidation in thinking about their love-making. She felt that she had a standard to live up to. Was this one of his tricks. Was he draining the feeling from their time together? This would only make the break up easier.

The daytime sun had reached inside. Now they attempted to overcome the fatigue. With night time, they recovered from the bewildering heat. He no longer dominated with his alliance with the sun. A sliver of moonlight gave her just the power that she needed. Her spells were applied with utter self-assurance. It was no longer a physical contest, trying to reach the heights of pleasure. You reestablished that supernatural connection that flowed in the body. These were the rhythms of the moon, the rhythms of the tides. She knew these forces intimately. This was why she welcomed her time by the sea.

He gave in to her regime. The king lay his crown aside and submitted to the sorceress. Ancient arts combined with her skills as an artist to create this solemn atmosphere. She was a phantom. He also lost himself in the night air.

Their gestures were automatic. The caresses were not mechanical. She sculpted his body with her sure hands. Her every whim had its correspondence in the flesh. His firm chest. His magnificence. His gentle lips. His peering eyes. She needed to shut down that gaze. He closed his eyes as he kissed her. His soul was hers. She cast her magic.

They hardly slept. This was the final night together. But they still woke up refreshed. They got their swimming suits and headed down for quick swim before breakfast. The water dripped from her hair. Her sleek body had all the contours of a dolphin. She walked with her head in the air. The world was her runway. This beach belonged to her. Nature seemed to stop just to catch a glimpse of Helena as she passed.

They ate a hearty breakfast. They spent the rest of the morning relaxing together in bed. They hardly moved in the hope that their stillness could make it forever. But as the afternoon sun made its heat known, the mugginess renewed the inroads of time. They couldn’t hold on to the forever.

Before they dressed he held her in a long kiss in the middle of the floor. She held his

hand with an intense grip. It almost drew blood.

They had a light lunch. She tried to slow it down with a glass of wine. It only made time speed up. He was going back to London that evening. She could see it all coming to an end, and she was in a panic.

She could pretend that this was just one of those silly things that happen in the spring. A decidedly dour few months of late Winter and then the explosion of Spring sunlight. How else could she react? It was a time for lovers. She had been a victim like everyone else. The afternoon heat reminded them of the lessons of Summer. She had known the intoxication of the lovers' sweat. But the heat only made her feel more fallible. Fatigue would come upon them sooner. They would only get impatient with each other.

Maybe this was all for the best. He was leaving while she still cherished his love. What followed would only be heartache. Her art only made her more a fatalist. She needed to enjoy this moment. She ordered another glass of wine.

She regretted that final kiss. It seemed to have a deathly ring to it. It should have been a time of joy, not a funeral knell. This wasn't something that she could think about or plan. But she had to let it overwhelm her. This fear of parting made the kiss even more intense. She would just give herself to all her misgivings and hope that the kiss would redeem her for the time being.

When his lips touched hers, there was more electricity than the first time that they had kissed. She wanted to savor this moment. She wanted to swallow him up in her. To just take all her feelings and make them part of her for once and forever. She knew that the more that she pulled him close, the harder it would be to end this time. She had to capture that fever-pitch without letting it take her over. The kiss ended almost as it had begun. She could time suspended in this contact between them. More than any time between them she felt that he was part of her. He was hers. They lived that one flesh as an idea. Their lips held them in that hypnotic state. Even as they separated, she felt that the parting was a way to make their experience together live on.

"I better go if I'm going to make that plane."

How could either of them break apart? Their connection to the reality of his leaving seemed to cheat their commitment to that last kiss. In this, she feared that she doubted their getting back together. It was blasphemy against their eternal love. Even as she defiled the temple of their love, she dedicated the last stone that held it all in place. Her dreams had built this edifice. But could he live up to this love that she had offered in his place.

He didn't look back that last time. Was it the pressure of that final kiss. Or something in him that didn't want to be reminded of what they both knew. If their love was real, it would could survive anything. This brief time apart would only be a preview of other greater trials between them. He had to know that a great love would be tested again and again. It must have been what made him different from everyone else. What had drawn her to him in the first place.

She didn't want to move from this place. As he moved from sight, she was left with the image of the hotel exit. It came to express how she was feeling at this moment.

She let his image burn its way deep into her heart. She hope that this would be enough in the days that followed. She wouldn't mope around. But she felt so much like a character in a farce. Her former grace was lost in clumsiness. The beach no longer had its appeal. Not at first.

She spent the rest of that day holed up in her room.

In the living room, she could hear the girls scurrying around. She had tolerated them. For the moment, she hated their merriment. She tried to put it all out of her mind.

She took a bottle of wine with her. She wanted to use it to remember him. She only felt like a sloppy drunk. All the melodrama welled over her. She felt positively awkward.

She embraced the night. This would be her rescue. Even if she was trashed, she had an excuse. She didn't want anyone else to see her this way. She felt like a widow in mourning. She closed the curtains and pulled the covers over her head. This would end it all for now.

She didn't have trouble falling asleep. The wine supplemented her sorrow. It was if he was lying next to her. She gave in to this illusion. The warmth of his body filled all her doubts with new certainty. She could let him go. The memory of their time together was so strong. She wouldn't look at another man again. He would be one of his devotees, and she would worship in his temple. Her artistic imagination brought his form alive. If she was overcome by the passion, she felt that he too was a slave to the same appetites.

In the morning, she had forgotten about her troubles. She welcomed the clarity of the morning air and the sharp early day sun. She put on her swimming suit and headed for the secluded part of the beach. She needed to be alone.

She took off her sandals and let her feet get buried deep in the hot sand. The heat burned away the alcohol and any illusions that she had about love.

“When will I see you again?”

“At your beloved Bessborough Gardens. Tuesday night at half six.”

She could still hear their pledge echo in the swirling winds of the ocean breeze. The gods had blessed her. He had undergone a metamorphosis. She no longer loved a man. She was enamored with his new form, the immaterial form of the shifting winds. Besides, this was a safer love. Its heartache could only result in a storm. Hardly the catastrophe of being abandoned by a lover.

She was a Penelope for her new love. She incorporated the currents into her art. The water twisted to match the curls of the air. If he was transformed, she could accept her own deification. Her constancy would make her a goddess. And the winds would protect him from his enemies. From her enemies, until she could reclaim their love in the garden.

She thought about the turbulence of passion. She wanted to recapture that same feeling in her devotion to nature. She found a spot in the shade. It was still early but the sun was beating hot.