

My Friend's Friend

A little story. A friend of mine told me about a friend of his. His friend is devastated. His sig. other split, says *that's it*. A baby is involved too. Apparently Mom's the type who makes up her mind and *goes*. My friend says many have tried before. She's dropped them all like spuds and slammed the door.

So my friend's friend's grieving big-time. Mind you, he just got back from a trip to India and tree planting before that. He says he's worried about a certain French woman coming to visit him in Victoria. He met her in India. Says that'll *really* be it. Says she's so beautiful he hardly knows how he deserves her. Says he doesn't think he has anything left to offer her. Apparently he's a lady's man. But he really loves his wife and wants her back. Apparently it's not his affairs that bother his wife but he's bossy. That's what she can't stand. She says I've had enough of your bullshit honey time to get another man.

It occurs to me and my friend that with all his moaning and groaning and saying it's all my fault and please come back he's got it turning tragic for him in his own head. He cannot make her want him back by enjoying himself with the French woman. His wife is obdurate, cannot be made to be jealous now in sufficiently mad a fashion as to need him back. Yet he will have his affairs, it seems. It is his bossiness that bothers her. Can he not be bossy, love his wife, have his affairs, and have his wife? It seems unlikely. Yet could he turn it in the way of laughter? A man who loves his life and loves his wife and shows her so she knows it is at least not a repentant mess.

There is little point in passing up the opportunity to consider the world with the French woman, I think. Should she come all the way to Canada from France or India or whatever exotic locale she last landed in to find her rare man whimpering in a corner, unable to enjoy the world with her? She should whisk herself away then no doubt, the songbird. How many French songbirds from India do we get to sing with? Perhaps he has had some. I think he should acknowledge the theater of his love thus far and be not too surprised by a wife's discontent in the wings.

If he goes to his wife sorry and tragic, not enjoying himself in life—well who wants to be with such a miserable wretch anyhow? Turn it into a comedy, not a tragedy. But I doubt that he'd be up to that sort of calculation, strategy and tactic of the heart. He's not *that* cool. So he may be due to lose her. But what choice has he, really? His wife may already have summoned the power of the inevitable in her will to kick him unceremoniously out the door.

Better, perhaps, to be of a different nature. Keep the charm, drop the bossiness, love one woman. And she loves you, and not a day goes by without challenge to this utopia and it founders but not your love. Or your love founders too runs ashore on some quotidian where there is an illusion of unbounded and relentless monotony. But you know it is an illusion and shake your head, once again catch glimpses of the cosmic drama and its delight in disguise and realize that it is the world that you love. And so then you are able, perhaps, to once again meet your mate on the rocky shores of the unknown.

But my friend's friend, my friend's friend—should he really trade his adventuresome ways for something more domestic? And where is *my* songbird?

Love is kind, love is kind, love is funny love is blind.

My friend's friend should have a sense of humour
not turn his love into a tumor.

The mating game's as old as apes
comedy in tragic shapes.

There is winning there is losing.
But which is which is confusing.

If he takes the road to laughter
will he get what he is after?

If he takes the road to pain
he will be true but lose again.

The road dissolves into the air
and every road is everywhere.

And from the mist, a voice above:
“*What is it that you know of love?*”

You remember that the other day
you saw the birds above at play:

starlings shoaling in the dusk,
a thousand bodies, they who must

before the night's stars are birthed
make a thousand stars on earth

dusklings, starlings, her delight
strolling to John's Place at night.

Bitter-sweet now that she is gone—
yet still the starlings sing their song

as she, no doubt, still sings hers.
To someone else. It could be worse.

You'd reply to the voice from the mist
who asks you who you've kissed

and what it is you know of love,
angel agents from above,

and how you got to where you are
a million miles but not that far

where the road dissolves into the air
and every road is everywhere.

You take a breath, begin to speak
but cannot hold it and the grief

pours out in croaking, heaving sobs.
Your arms are raised now to the gods

you laugh, your eyes are glistening
you wonder if they're really listening

or if they even are at all
or whether, like the starlings

we are all moving out of love perchance
a larger body of romance

of hate and murder, joy and love
which may as well amount
to cosmic conspiracy from above.

You stand perplexed center stage
within the theater of love.

And so you shout it in full rage
out into the night: "Love! Love!"

A searing lungful or two of it.

And it echoes, you know, near and far
amid the sounds of distant cars

and the rumbling machinery of night.

And this is where my friend's friend was
I see him now, the handsome scuz

and all the games have fallen away.
He simply doesn't want to play.

For now at least.
He's in his grief.

I wrote this several times;
these used to be the final lines:

*Ab, with all his women he will find
another woman in no time.*

*And she will find another man
interchangeable as spam.*

*The babe's the one who pays the price
learning early love's device.*

*Yet he will grow into a man
who loves as best he can.*

*Like his parents he must risk it,
play the game or bite the biscuit.*

*Or not play at all but love severely
and gum the biscuit wearily.*

*Or be a saint now go ahead
and take a biscuit to your bed.*

*Or... one lump or two? One lump or two?
We're in a mess this bud's for you.*

But of course it isn't really fair
to write them off when what's theirs

is hidden from me deep inside
the warm and unrelenting tide

that terminates upon their lips
and elsewhere at their fingertips.

They are friend's friends to me
which is close to what it means to be

a character inside a poem.
You do not really know them.

Besides, I owe them a debt.
It's in their story that I met

the comedy of my own life
where jealousy has been a knife

for far too long, a darkling shape
within which weeps the brooding ape.

So much for that. I had to laugh.
Jealousy's an ancient gaff

or banana peel they toss behind
(the husk of love for you to find),

tossed over a departing shoulder
not looking back and getting colder.

You slip and split your head apart.
It needed splitting you old fart.

The roads dissolve into the air
and every road is everywhere.

We take them all, eventually,
to comedy and tragedy

yet still the heart's a deliberate piston,
drives you deep into the mist in

which the voice commands above
to tell it what you know of love.

*Directions diverge to deepest space
yet there is the meeting place*

*where all directions meet again
lover, parent, child, friend's friend.*

