Love is a Loyal Erection

Keith Barlog
College of DuPage

Follow this and additional works at: http://dc.cod.edu/plr

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://dc.cod.edu/plr/vol23/iss2/13

This Selection is brought to you for free and open access by the College Publications at DigitalCommons@COD. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Prairie Light Review by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@COD. For more information, please contact koteles@cod.edu.
Love is a Loyal Erection

-Keith Barlog-

For me presentation is not a necessity. You see, I do not work, I do not date, and I rarely leave my residence, save for the primary needs, the week's groceries, maybe a new book, or a newspaper, usually the New York Times since the Tribune is so unwaveringly liberal. I keep myself presentable for my own sake. Shoes shined, hair combed, shaven, and clean. That is my modus operandi, my routine of maintenance and self-respect, preventing sloth or despondency.

Yesterday morning around 10 a.m., the sun shining through the blinds of my apartment on West Belmont, I slipped off my sheets and waited for my eyes to come to focus. I swung my feet over the side of my bed right onto the pointed graphite tip of a poorly placed pencil. It crudely found an angle into the tender area at the arch of the foot, making a ridiculous pop as it pierced the sole like a hole-puncher punch- ing paper. I couldn't help thinking this was the worst possible way to start a day. Either that or it was an omen of ill approach, and after cleaning the plume of blood off the carpet returning to bed should have been my instinctual decision. But predictions don't run my life and I suppose sometimes you cannot avoid being the fool. Of course, I still never anticipated doing anything other than maybe picking up the Times or listening to a little lounge music in bed. In fact there was an article on the shape of the universe that I'd read that I'd been meaning to write the editor about. "Dear Editor: The article regarding the shape of the universe was most fascinating. The skepticism of some cosmolo- gists seems reasonable, but I must hold that this is a major step in understanding the astrophysical dynamics....." or something along those lines.

It's been about two years now since I've been out of work. I was a pharmacist for twelve years until it became unreasonable to stay. Years of seeing them, the customers, up close, handing out birth control and antihistamines to every other, you begin to feel nausea or spite over the triviality of people's problems and their constant need. I wanted to stop it all. "No. You can't have any codeine. I don't care if you need it." "Zoloft? Buy a cat. Play a sport. I'm not giving it to you." I wish I'd left more on my terms, but it was refreshing to be away from everybody's wants, even if Claire didn't feel the same.

Every couple of months or so my mother would call and talk about her house, some new pain in her back or foot or hip, whether I saw
a particular episode of some show: "Oh you've got to catch that some-
time. It's not as corny as it sounds. It's really good if you get over
them being vampires." I switched to unlisted a year ago. God knows
how my mother retrieved my number, but she called when I was sitting
on the toilet cleaning off my foot and putting on a band-aid. This time
she was crying and when that woman begins crying her words mix with
snot to make a repulsive smacking and whipping noise: "Allen the doc-
tor's have me taking this new medication and it gives me these
headaches. I can't take this stuff, I get constipated. Joan would help,
but she's got work and she's always sleeping. They just tell me to take a
laxative, but I can't be getting up every half-hour, I can't get around
that easy anymore and....." On and on this goes the snot thicker in her
larynx until I cannot bear another smacking sound. It wasn't long
before I agreed to meet her and my sister Joan at 7 at the Northside
Café in Bucktown.

One thing to know about my mother is that when my father left
with another woman she began eating voracious amounts of food. She
was obese, disgusting to the point of nausea, the kind of disgust that
people seem to want to stare at. Wishing to avoid the moment where
she finally succeeded in eating herself to death I started avoiding her.
Beside that, she had become annoyingly loopy ever since Joan moved in.
Maybe the fat had risen to her brain. Joan was also divorced and since
mom had the house to her self with my father's absence, Joan moved
back to help her and also to get free rent at the same time.

I spent most of the day relaxing, preparing for dinner with a
loopy mother and a sister who despises me. Ever since I told her hus-
band that it was wise to leave her she has been less than cordial. I was
right though. She is a child that needs. Her game was to always be a
train-wreck, a wounded animal caught in a trap of her own making; to be
drunk and hung-over, sad and crying, depressed and lethargic. "Honey I
want to go home, I don't feel well." "Don't you love me? You don't, I
just know it." "I'm not drunk. I'm having fun. Why let me have fun one
in while?" Let her be curt if she wants. It was right to give him the
advice I gave.

It was just after six so I grabbed my blue gabardine coat, put on
my shined Clarks, and left my apartment to hail a cab at the corner.
"Street wise," yelled a peddler, sliding to his right to meet my
front. "Hey man, ya want a Street Wise." He walked backwards for a
couple feet with his dirty sneakers and dreadded hair to keep in step
with my gait. This is the same peddler I pass on the corner of Clark and
Belmont almost every week when I go for groceries, trying to sell his
garbage paper.

"Back off," I muttered without raising my head or removing my hands from their pockets. He moved aside with a slight glare and I raised a hand to flag a cab that had stopped near the intersection.

"Where to?" said a dark man in the front setting his meter.

"Riverside Café. In Bucktown...uh...just before Milwaukee on Damen."

"Meeting someone for dinner are ya?" he asked, looking in the rear view mirror to make eye contact with his passenger.

"No. Well, yes...sort of. Not a date though," I said, tripped up, "I'm meeting some family for dinner that's all." I hoped he wouldn't ask any more. This kind of social intercourse was always uncomfortable and strained, having to make small talk for a ten minute drive. It's like sex with a complete stranger, very quick and clumsy.

"That's good man. Staying close to your family is good. Me, I don't get to see mine. They're back East in Philadelphia. I was born there...."

"That's too bad. Look, just stop here at Fullerton. Yes here." I'd rather walk the last few minutes. "Six? Here you go." There's something about being forced to listen, especially when you're not driving and trapped behind some plexiglass.

Ten minutes later I walked into the lobby of the café. I had no problem seeing her sausage link fingers waving me come near already with an appetizer of fried mozzarella sticks at hand, her large oval face, her jowls like a floppy leather satchel. She was straining a smile and the light reflected in the glaze over her eyes. It was still early but there was still a minor clamor of voices near the bar and smoky rills that moved near my mother's table. The café was a trendy little brick structure that really became more of a bar at night. I don't know why I had suggested the place over the phone. Possibly because in my 20's after work some co-workers and myself would come here or the bars across the street to pick up women. This is before I got serious with Claire. I could see mom had eaten her way into a wheel chair since I last saw her. Joan must be in the bathroom, I thought. There was an empty wine glass at her spot.

"Goodness, you like nice Allen. Always dressed nice you did. For the girls I suppose."

"Jee-sus. Look, you're in a wheel chair now," I said, saddened by helplessness of her position, bringing frustration to my head, "Why can't you watch yourself a little better."

"Oh I know. It helps me get around though. But please, sit
down, sit down. We'll you get a good meal since I haven't seen you in a while. You know I missed your birthday last month."

"Mom, forget that. I came because you were neurotic on the phone. Where's Joan? I thought she could....What is she doing that she can't help; she doesn't need to pay rent or anything. Does she even work now?" I said, picturing Joan hung-over, doing nothing but sleeping all day in the living room. A child taking care of an invalid.

"Well I don't know, I think so. What about you, are you working now? Claire told me...."

"So that's how you got my number," Claire, I'm sure, made me sound psychotic, "Look, don't talk to her. She doesn't know anything. We haven't even talked in a year so she couldn't know."

"Well, I didn't have your number and she sees a lot of people you used to see. She said you probably weren't working yet, that no one has seen you for while. She said you used to just read the paper or listen to music, that you never let her talk." She assumed a troubled look.

Joan entered from the right and sat opposite me nearest the aisle. She appeared to be the same as ever except what looked to be a different tint of hair, black, it looked. Must be trying to reinvent herself, I thought. Joan was an avid self-medicater. She was no addict; she just abused her body to get the attention it rendered from others. When she was young she was attractive. Brown curls, brown eyes, a good bust line, a bit stubby in the limbs, but altogether nice to look at when she allowed it. She had no trouble attracting men. She was also shallow and insecure; keeping herself in a relationship was her way to feel whole. That's all that mattered to her until she got older, and her looks faded enough so she was left with what little she had inside. I quickly flagged down a waiter and we ordered food and a few drinks.

"Hello Allen. I hear you've become a recluse. Can't tell you how proud I am and that I don't have to see you at all during the year." smirked Joan.

"Thank you Joan. Yes, I do live a quieter life than most. You still mixing Cognac and Rohypnol? You know I still have some friends at the pharmacy; Halcion and some Jameson is really a much better combination, with just a touch of Lidocaine if you're going to kill yourself. I could have some sent over." I said, receiving her scowl.

"Quiet, both of you. Let's just eat; fill each other in about things. I thought we might be able to...you know...I mean we don't get together anymore." said mother. Joan and I both took long drinks from our glasses. I looked over near the bar and saw a pretty brunette in a white shoulder-baring dress that looked like a pearl negligee. She was-
n't alone.

"So Allen, have you found anyone special? Are you seeing a girl?" questioned my mother, poorly trying to change the subject to a less contentious discussion.

"Phluhp! Mom he's a recluse, he doesn't have time for women," Joan let loose from her thick flapping lips.

"No, I am not with anyone. I have other things on my mind than that." And I really did, even though I was currently watching the lady in the white put her smooth tan hand delicately to her dimpled knee.

"God Allen, you don't do shit all day-- what else could you spend your time doing?" Joan interrupted. She was clearly in a mood to bring up past grudges whether my mother was there or not.

"Yes, Allen what have you been up to? If you're not seeing anyone...and Claire said no one has talked to or seen you. Are you upset...about your last job. Aren't you back working?" Mother asked hoping all was well. I was really tired of questions. It was her neuroticism I came to talk about, not my life choices. I took drink.

"I'm like a cockroach, mom. The light comes on and I scatter. Except for me needy, annoying people are the light."

"So you're scared to live life. Boo hoo, the world is too rough for baby Allen; I'm just going to lock myself away." Joan parodied. I smiled, taken aback by her calling me a child.

"Please Joan. But really Allen, if you live shut in like that you...well...life is waiting for you. What are you waiting for?" Mother said, feeling she had expressed a profound truth in question.

"I'm waiting for Godot, mother."

"Who?" Mother and Joan said. The waiter came and set down our food and refilled our wine. We were silent while he served. Still too proud, we were, to argue in front of someone else and look foolish.

"Never mind. What's this with you two saying I'm hiding away like a child? Mom you're just one big ball of comfort food and you, Joan, you're a spiteful cunt who always needs a man to take care of you. I worked and I live off my money, without a hand-me-down house or some little settlement from a husband." Could have said it more elegantly, but it was true. They live off others' work and then they try to criticize me.

"Allen." Mother protested.

"Such a lovely way of putting things. I can see you're still a miserable cynic. Too serious and too much of an asshole to ever enjoy yourself." Joan said.
"Not true, I've had my fun. It just now that I would like to devote my life to more worthy causes, other than shoving some stiff protruding skin into a lubricated sleeve of muscle," I said, feeling loosened by the wine. "Just because you're dried up and drunk Joan doesn't mean..."

"Fuck you. Why did you even come here?" Joan said, losing composure. The sleek woman in the white dress swished and shuffled behind her.

"Why, to celebrate my birthday. This beautiful woman right here," pointing to my mother, "falling out of her crotch almost thirty five years ago began my wonderful life."

With this final touch, determined to leave on top, I stood up and pushed in my chair, a bit harder than I'd thought as the chair hit with a thud knocking over a glass. I wanted to look calm when I fled and not like the angry child they accused me of. Joan was blathering on to my mother: "Why did you...." and "He's just a...." and my mother was laboring to stand to hold me from leaving. I threw down a fifty from my wallet and turned my back to the scene, the noise sounding muffled as I dodged, quick and evasive, the night crowd beginning to move in. A tall man, healthy but too thin, an obese woman knocking over her fodder while struggling with her wheel chair, and a middle-aged drunk cursing the man; take a picture to remember that moment.

I stepped onto Damen feeling the warmth of the sultry night and a bar-fragrance smell of barley and hops in the air. The night needed vindicating. I walked Bucktown for a while watching and listening, taking breaths of tepid air. Outside couples clattered at outdoor tables of bars and bistros, holding and touching, kissing and whispering. Love is nothing but a loyal erection, I thought. No metaphysical tie that binds, just a fleshy area that stays moist or hard that doesn't tire from the constancy of one person. Two blocks further in a parking lot I saw a couple near a parked car. She lay backed against the passenger door, his hand rubbing under her arm near the side of her breast on her slinky dress. I backed just behind a gate guarded by some bushes and listened.

"Do you think I am a dirty girl," she said, teasing. He just continued to rub, their frottage becoming heavier. Unexpected glimpses like that brings strongest arousal. Despite my views, I am still a man with strong desires. A sexual anomaly maybe, as sex is more relief than it is a pleasurable. It's good not to have to see this when I'm in my apartment. Watching, I began feeling like a clogged drain. If I go any longer I might dry out like my sister. There was a hotel about ten minutes walk from here.
I found myself at the Wicker Park Inn leafing through the phone book for escorts. Model Inc. looked promising, so I gave it a call. I received a voice mail telling me to leave a number and they would call back in thirty minutes. These services are a hassle with trying to avoid police, but they are much less risky than the whores on the street. That is unless you like pleurisy, hepatitis, or a nice gonococcus. I left my name and number and waited on the bed. I washed up, my hands, my face, my genitals. She would ask again for me to wash when she got here, unless for some reason she trusted me. About a half hour later a call rang up.

"What do you need?" a male voice said.
"Yeah, I saw your ad in the pages. I wanted some information about your services though."
"Like what?"
"Well, what's behind the different rates?"
"One and a half, an hour, a half hour. That's it."
"Well what services are provided?"
"What do you mean?"
"Escorts. Come on' what is this?"
"I don't know what you mean man."
"That is the standard terminology isn't it? Don't be coy. What the hell...I'm looking for a girl tonight."
"Look, we provide companionship."
"As in sex, right?"
"We can't help you." He said and hung up.

It had been years since I called one. The scene must have changed a lot in the last few years because that guy was insanely cautious about the police. The Mayor and his crusades against sex. Must say I was very disappointed having already worked myself up and everything. There used to be an adult book store where all the hookers hung around where I would go. They were all around the streets there under a corrugated tin roof. But they put a blue flag draped over the "Adult Books" and then built a Home Depot there to revitalize the area and I heard the police have been really beating on the area. It's probably undergoing gentrification, the residents calling the cops the minute they spot a girl. I napped for an hour or so—I think the wine made me drowsy—and awoke around eleven still needing to walk it off.

I took Wolcott to Milwaukee when I noticed a girl just down the street. Her breasts were perked tight against a green neon halter top. She look drawn in pastels; pink skinned with a nice full figure, kind of big in the haunch where she wore a maroon skirt. She looked about thir-
ty. I decided to risk it. I was not in the mood to be finicky. I made eye contact with her until she acknowledged me and began to follow. I took a turn around the corner into an alley.

"Are you a cop?" She asked direct. Stern.
"No."
"What do you need?"
"How much is oral?"
"Blowjobs are $20, and a half & half is $80. You gotta wear a condom."
"Just oral then."
I took out my wallet and handed her a twenty. She may have noticed I had more cash. She took the bill and stuck it in a silver, plastic sequined hand-purse. She took to her knees and unbuttoned and unzipped quickly. It had been over three years since I had oral. I don't know how long since a good one. She was warm and I was rather enjoying myself when, in a muffled voice she said:
"Give me your wallet or I'll bite your dick off."
"Wha..." I didn't need to finish the question as her wide eyes outlined in black and her unctuous scalp told me she was serious.

Of course I nearly vomited from the thought, but slowly I reached in my pocket and removed the wallet. My breath was gone and my hand shook as I felt the teeth tight around my deadening member. She grasped the wallet and stuffed it down her neon-green halter at the cleavage. She took a small blade from her purse and slowly released her jaws, backing away with the blade held out, she trotted off. I vomited next to the dumpster near some dirty Kotex and used condoms.

I began walking the forty minutes home to Belmont. On the corner of Damen and Belmont the light turned red. It reminded me of the blood stain on the carpet. Even life has its traffic laws. I walked home swiftly. When I arrived home I cancelled my credit cards, took another shower, lay down and turned on some lounge music.