

PARCEL OF LOVE

by Harold Monro

THAT love he had not asked for, and did not want, had hurt him by now almost beyond endurance. He would find himself at moments, stand up and extend his body, stiffen his muscles, try to stretch himself into the space of the solitary room. Then, as he wanted, he became deliciously conscious of his finger-tips. It seemed to him that, if he pressed hard enough, it might pass out there and evaporate, or fly through the window, and leave him for ever. Always a hopeless expedient. The normal returned directly he contracted his body again. Love regained its complacent habitation of him. He ached as before; his brain glowed, rekindled and burst into flame; his heart resumed the hard volcanic beat. He was utterly possessed. No movement of limb or thought, no change of surrounding, could free him for more than a moment or two.—Long hot pain, night and day, asleep or awake; one tired perpetual obsession, and no release.

His hardest moments were those of recalling looks and words. He scarcely ever loved that occupation now, yet could not stop. Normal life had become entirely automatic for months. He felt there could be nothing outwardly unusual about him: he still performed the customary routine correctly—though without conscious attention. He kissed his wife without difficulty, called her “darling” at appropriate moments, signed her cheques, paid a compliment, went to church with her, even made occasional straight-forward love to her—all quite naturally. How could it possibly matter (in view of this other thing) what he might do? No ordinary actions or conventions could concern him. So long as it would not pass out of him through his finger-tips, or any other way, he remained possessed, and untouched by those other ordinary events or customs of living.

Almost every scheme for ridding himself of it came into his head. He was not even afraid of madness; that idea hardly occurred to him; rather he was faced night and day by grim staring sanity. His normal activities, of course, he was obliged to neglect. Pastimes were no help—why read for instance, seeing that every sentence vanished from his memory before his mind could absorb it? Those quiet other eyes stared into the sockets of his own; the long smooth beloved hands folded themselves round his brain. One or two words of the last meeting, (their tone, their hundred

meanings), would ring like chimes all through the long interval of waiting for the next. The hours everlastingly beat time, while those infrequent swift moments of proximity always marched out instantly—then the hours beat time again. He remembered no clear entrance to his present state; he could imagine no exit. So he was burning to ashes—Alas! the intolerable slowness of the fire.

One night early (perhaps about midnight) he saw a piece of waste brown paper in the corner of the room. At first it was scarcely a definite object to him, though his eyes kept returning to it—unconsciously perhaps, afterwards however, certainly with design. Later he moved over to it, picked it up, spread it on the floor, thoughtfully fetched a piece of string, spread that across the paper, then sat down and deliberated.

Eventually a definite plan took hold of him. He set about it with the conviction of one who has at last solved a life-problem. How, precisely, it was to be accomplished he had no occasion to ask; he knew only that now he was to be free: that was enough. So he wrapped up the neat parcel, tied it securely with the good string, sealed it in four places with that good seal of the family crest. There love lay in waste paper; a parcel 10" by 6". There he stood, a whole man, sane and ready for the sweet ordinary life he had so disastrously neglected. To-morrow—but first the work must be finished. He almost laughed—but: "First, to the task!" he thought.

It was a stiff three miles over the fields towards dawn into a strong wind. The wind would be strong of course. He heard the canal unnaturally long before he reached it. He wanted now so much to finish quickly, that he started running in little spurts before he was half way. And toward the end he was running quite hard, panting, his tongue slightly out, leaning forward, burning with eagerness for freedom.

Would it sink? Does love sink in a canal? A vision came to him for a moment of it floating with the wind, being found, at mid-day dinner perhaps, by some barge, fished up with a boat-hook, examined, and passed round amid laughter. It *must* sink. It must be weighted. He stumbled over a rut and fell, rose covered with soft mud, and ran forward panting. He was heavier now by the moist earth that clung to him. He must fasten some weight to it. The canal gleamed under the wind. At last the moment had come. Why had he not discovered this way before?

He held it in both hands, twisted his fingers through the string, fastened himself tight to it, and ran for the final throw.

Waters remarks very little on such matters. It is troubled by no acute self-consciousness. It just opens, forms some mathematical rings, closes, and very often, be the secret not dragged from it, is silent for ever. So the parcel of love was thrown in well weighted: one little sigh ended the tedious affair. By good luck even the coroner was not allowed his usual comments. Nothing matters very much afterwards.

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