



Future Justice

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True Love's Faux Kiss

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Once upon a time, before Hedonists were invented, there lived a comely young lass named True Love. Man took one look and dropped his club, instantly besotted. He glorified her in a multitude of media, including art, literature and music. Then, alas, he took a roll in the hay with her evil stepsister, Casual Fling, and that was the end of that. Now, as the 21st century crawls forward, we see True Love gasping her last, and the wise words of Shakespeare come hauntingly to life: 'All the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players'. No pun intended.

Living in the ultimate Age of Break-ups, we are perpetually attached to our tissue boxes and tubs of low-fat icecream. Although our era is characterised by an unprecedented dependence on comfort food in the midst of relationship trauma, the notion of transitory love that we cradle so fondly is not a wholly modern phenomenon. The demise of enduring human affection can be traced deep into the tapestries of ancient Greek mythology, where the Goddess of Love herself cheated on hubby Hephaestus for the likes of shallow (albeit dishy) war god Ares, and the similarly dim-witted yet delectable Adonis. Et tu, Aphrodite? Better make that full-strength icecream, ladies — it appears we puny mortals have no hope.

Let's leave ancient Greece for a moment. Flying across the Mediterranean, we alight in Rome. Here we witness The Birth of Venus, Aphrodite's Italian counterpart, as captured by Botticelli. The tempera-on-canvas embodies the dangerous yet

intoxicating ideals of romanticism that have endured the epochs, anaesthetised our sensitivity to the concrete world and destroyed the capability of hundreds of generations to truly and devotedly be in love.

I might point out a cross-cultural stitch here, woven into the fabric of our own society. While the destruction of lasting love embodies culture-specific mechanisms, (enter Ancient Roman Cupid sporting heart-shaped laurels and a mini-toga), its effects on the human psyche are staunchly universal. In an age where ‘tasteful’ billboards blot the landscape, the confusion between affection and sexuality in our world is clear. So too is the link between commercialisation and romantic materialism. In Chanel’s latest television advertisement, Keira Knightly coyly dabs perfume on her lover’s bare chest, then flees to the rhythm of Nat King Cole’s L-O-V-E. It seems love is no longer free, but for what it’s worth, it’s on sale for only \$199.99 — catch it while you can.

Despite the Wallet’s quick-fix ability, however, it is not the supreme confounder of the Heart. That honour must go to the most seductive and corrupting aphrodisiac of all: Language. Hasn’t usage of Lewis Carroll’s portmanteau words coincided with our pagan adulation of frightening two-headed beasts like Brangelina, Vinnifer and TomKat, in the place of classic lovers Romeo and Juliet, Mimi and Rodolfo (*La Boheme*) and Buttercup and Westley (*The Princess Bride*)? Didn’t the divorce rate climb to one in three marriages around the same time we swapped words like ‘handsome’, ‘striking’ and ‘beautiful’ for monosyllabic ‘hot’, ‘cute’ and ‘babe’? How can we experience fervent, eternal love when there is no word for it in shallowspeak?

Gone are the days of musket-to-chest style sacrificial love. We’re as trustful as Othello was of Desdemona; as trustworthy as Delilah was of Samson. Today’s media etches Orwell’s Ministry of Love inside our brains, where Room 101 holds death by Browning-inspired Porphyrian strangulation.

The perfect contrast to today's decadent romantic ideologies is embedded in a popular schoolyard rhyme. For those of you who don't know it, the second verse of '[Girl's name] and [boy's name] sitting in a tree, K-I-S-S-I-N-G' is 'first comes love, second comes marriage, third comes the baby in the baby carriage'. With mainstream ideologies sheepishly accommodating teen pregnancy, encouraging premarital sex and turning a blind eye to extramarital affairs, kids of the future will be singing the rhyme in reverse.

We live in a frenzy of commitment-phobia. What a tragedy it is that our deepest human desire is to be loved, yet our deepest fear is that our love will go unrequited. So suddenly we're stuck between a rock and a heart place. It's no wonder that, when it comes to lifelong commitments, (dare I say the dreaded word, marriage), we have a sailor's skill of untying knots.

So how to cure the love bug? Perhaps Elizabeth Bennett was onto something in *Pride and Prejudice*, in declaring that 'nothing but the very deepest love' would 'induce [her] into matrimony'. Perhaps the key lies in waiting for a dose of maturity before we decide to commit. Can we really wear our hearts on the same sleeves we're still wiping our noses on? Perhaps it comes down to the frosted perceptions of reality we see, gazing into the bathroom mirror each morning.

Ladies, for example — why do we obsess about dark, brooding, mysterious men? Surely all the Darcys, Heathcliffs, Rochesters and (swoon) Edward Cullens are no match for one good, honest Atticus Finch? (Especially in the form of Gregory Peck — there's a man I'd shave my legs for.) It seems Calypso and Circe had the right idea in Homer's *The Odyssey*, in going for the very real, full-fledged mortal, Odysseus, rather than fluttering over an unattainable godlike figure. The paintings of Rembrandt offer even greater wisdom in all things true-love, portraying realistically some of the most desirable women in history — Artemis, goddess of fertility, is given a large, matronly

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figure; Bathsheba is depicted as a full-figured and curvaceous beauty.

The media, in stark contrast, present us with unrealistic and unattainable ideals of romance — at least until it turns around and plays devil's advocate with a chubby cherub in a diaper who shoots arrows into the backsides of witless mortals. One minute, we are questioning the very existence of the kind of love that, as Sophocles once claimed, 'frees us of all the weight and pain of life'. The next, we are lying in a mangled mess with our heads in the vicinity of our heels.

So that leaves us with two options. (And now the analogy turns to you, gentlemen.) Option 1: stay as you are, walking slowly but surely into Dante's second circle of hell with Casual Fling. Option 2: toss Cinderella into her pumpkin-carriage and prepare her for a long ride home. Take the evil step-media with all her hollow delusions of so-called love and slap both her fickle faces. The glass slipper is yours to fit as you choose.



Thilini Liyanage wrote this in 2009 when she was in Year 12 at Somerville House in Queensland.