

No Love Lost

When Tina heard Stephen's words, she was suddenly every soap opera star-she was a dethroned queen for a day. She kept reaching for the apron she wasn't wearing and feeling awkward in the overalls she was wearing. Tina wanted Stephen to tell the priest-yes, confess everything and pound his chest for forgiveness.

But Stephen wasn't Catholic, and Tina was just trying to make sense of everything. Maybe she would go to a priest herself as she had done. When she was married, "bless me father... I don't know what to do. My boyfriend has told me he is in love with another woman.

Tina packed her dishes, clothes books and old letters she'd saved from childhood and moved into a camp ground. Some friends were camped nearby. Friends when she was Tina of Tina and Stephen. She felt like a left over like Tina with one leg, or one arm or half a set of teeth. Tina who never finishes a sentence because she's waiting for Stephen to finish it.

Tina took long walks in the forest-- birds squawked in the gray trees. Trees that looked crooked and left sneaky shadows around them. She walked along a brook that was dirty with cigarette butts and angry water seemed to be drowning defenseless little fish.

At night Tina sat near a fire, with her friends, a fire that would not get warm enough-- would not rage outta control. A fire completely lacking passion.

"We all want to support you in your decision."

(The friends are saying).

"He was not worth all the love you gave him!"

"I never liked him... He was much too vulgar."

"So let him run off with this other woman. Maybe they'll move far away and you won't ever have to see them again."

That night, Tina curled up in her empty double sleeping bag and wrapped her arms around her lonely tummy and let tears filled the spongy pillow.

Then she imagined Stephen standing at the door with his arms folded--

"why can't we have an open relationship?" Stephen asked as though he were right there. "We don't have to be monogamous."

"Gessus! No, that sounds like a disease plants get!" Tina snapped out loud.

Tina sat up in the tent and blew her nose on an old sock. She lay back and watched Stephen's

image float in the air. He's a tall skinny man with a nose too small for his face. His private parts are nothing to brag about. So why did she love him so? "No one can love him like I can." She sat with her head buried in the pillow sobbing uncontrollably.

In the morning, Tina, with her swollen eyes, went to town with the friends. "I need to call him," She told them, "I, ah, emm, believe I left one of my books at our, I mean his apartment."

"Are you sure that's why you want to call him?"

"Please, let's have no S&M around here!"

Tina dropped coins in the box—dialed slowly—oops! wrong number—she dialed again and she tried to catch her breath— to stop her heart from beating so hard. Although she was standing perfectly still, her body was responding as though she'd just run a mile.

Then: "Ste-ph-ph-en?" Tina said to the familiar hello.

"Oh honey," Stephen said in his winey nasal voice, "I miss you when can we see each other?"

Tina was surprised. Why did she think Stephen wouldn't want to see her? She pressed her cheek against the window pane of the phone booth. Her breath clouded her view. There was a war all around them. Medics were collecting and wounded... bombs bursting in air. Would they ever get out alive? Would they ever find their way back to one another? They would meet a week from this day at the rock near the bridge, where they often watched the sunset together in the past.

Tina left the phone booth and walked slowly with her head down to the store where she bought two candy bars. "Be careful!" Say the friends, "He is just trying to satisfy his own needs. He doesn't love you."

"Oh yes, I know" Tina lied, "I'm getting that book and leaving at once." She cleared her throat. "We're finished, really, there's not an ounce of love left in either of us!"

A week passed, and Tina stood behind a van parked in a lot near the rock, where she and Stephen were to meet. She watched Stephen standing on the rock with his hands on his hips looking here, looking there, looking for Tina, most likely.

It had been a month since Tina walked out on Stephen. She knew a month to the very day, because she had scratched out the slow-moving days on her calendar as they passed.

They embraced as they had never done before with such intensity. Then they walked with the wind to their backs. Tina stood closer to Stephen... one twinkled the other glowed. Stephen smiled a smile that once warmed the coldest nights for Tina.

They huddled on ships together, riding the endless waves. They dance around passionate prairie fires and sang in unison. And then Tina asked, "what did I do wrong?"

"Nothing" Stephen assured.

"If I had my bunions removed?"

"No. It's just chemistry. I can't explain it."

"I'm not pretty enough?! You hate me because I don't wear makeup!"

"You know that isn't true, honey, I still care for you."

"Are you still in love with ah...?"

"Yes"

"Then go to hell!"

Tina left the campground and friends and moved into a large chaotic commune in a big city. She popped pills, drank and slept with anyone who'd have her. She'd become a saggy bag lady... she was someone who watches parades but never joins in.

There is no end to love stories. If anyone tells you there is they know very little about love.

-Or-

Something changed for Tina. Time thundered on like a small raft on a rushing waterfall. Now her former lover, lives alone in a gloomy trailer court. And Tina lives with a brand-new lover on a sun drenched island.