



Beast

Ulf Wolf

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They say that it's natural to fall in love—and what an amazingly appropriate verb “fall” turns out to be in this context. Natural to lose your appetite, your focus, all other dreams? Natural to see nothing but the lack of her, the vast and Heatherless nothing that now spreads before me and makes up my world. Natural? That's natural?

When the rules of love were written, one of them stated: “Once you put a face to the hunger of your heart, your heart cannot let go.”

Unaware of this rule, for love had never confided in me, I recently put a face to my heart's hunger, and this was an unwise thing to do; for with the fresh sting of hope in its nostrils, its hunger grew exponentially and fast, and soon engulfed everything: my thoughts, my dreams, my room, my day, the streets, the earth, the sky, and before I really noticed, and before anything could be done to stop the beast, or even slow him down, my life was nothing but hunger for that one face.

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Unaware of this rule, yes, but I am no stranger to the hunger. We are well acquainted, Beast and I. I say Beast, for Beast he is, but a beast with the softest voice and the sweetest yearning. He is the whisperer of dreams long abandoned and the promiser of delicious perhaps futures. He is also the ruthless and unremitting tyrant that once in his claws dictates, moment by helpless moment, what you feel and what you do and what you don't do.

To this I should add that he is also a jealous beast, covetous not only of the here and now of her lovely face, and of its future, but also of its past: for in a brilliant corruption of logic, his greedy eyes can turn pastward and inward in an instant, to hunt for and there discover others, and with each such discovery his claws—issuing black, long and sharp from broad paws—will find and slash the tender fabric that is memory into long, painful wounds.

“But,” I protest, “I didn't even know her then.”

At your voice, Beast slowly turns his shaggy head your way and fixes you with red eyes that quietly but firmly tell you to back off. Then he proceeds to seek and find new betrayals by a life you had yet to encounter. And with each discovery, real or imagined—in this frame of mind he is not very discriminating—he gouges yet another wound, another jealousy for you to ache with.

For a spell you retain sense enough to marvel at this amazing illogic, at this temporal sleight of hand, but soon enough his claws have gouged too often, your wounds have grown too deep and too many, and so the ache turns overwhelming, and then you will do anything, anything in this world, to quench it.

At which point Beast is as likely as not to sneak up on you from some unguarded behind and whisper in your ear, in your heart, another yearning, one so soft and so convincing that all is forgiven.

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Beast.

The poets knew him all too well, and as a rule suffered his rage through many a tribute, beautifully. Some, by naming him—Eros of brute lust, the lover of Psyche, the wayward child of Plato's Aphrodite Pandemos; or Eros of spiritual love, the favored child of his Aphrodite Uranina; or Cupid, son of Venus, his Roman cousin; or Kama; or Freya; or Libido, that modern god so heralded—others by dressing him in one of his many euphemisms: affection, fondness, warmth, adoration, devotion, attraction, closeness, intimacy, passion, infatuation, fancy, desire, longing, wanting, pining, craving, yearning, ardor, heat, fervor, flame, rapture,

what have you. And so they tried to wrestle him down onto paper, where they hoped to better view, perhaps even dissect and understand him (as if letters could shackle him and words keep him still). They soon discovered:

He is unnamable and will not brook inspection.

Others—the ambitious, the desperate, and the foolish—deluding themselves, searched their hearts for the one name they thought would fashion for Beast the magical reins with which to control him. Of course, none succeeded. There is no such name, there are no such reins.

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