

Tales of Love
by Richard Rose

Tales of Love first appeared in the 1978 *TAT Journal*, Vol. 1 No. 4, and was republished in *Carillon: Poems, Essays and Philosophy of Richard Rose*.



A few years ago I visited Niagara Falls for the first time. I found an atmosphere of magic there that first time that I have not found since, but I have a memory of magic that keeps me going back, not to look at the gorge or river so much as to watch the different expressions on the faces of the tourists. Seemingly I am looking for the same face, or a similar one, of a person I met there.

I had made the trip with my son James and my daughter Ruth. They had gone into a novelty store very close to the falls. I went over to the rail, and was looking down into the turbulence where a boat, "The Maid of the Mist," was wallowing around in the heavy swells very close to the cataract.

I became conscious of an old man standing near me. He looked like a lonely old man, but he was not pushing his loneliness. He had a quiet friendliness that wanted to find an open door, but his look of resignation showed that he would go away as happy as he came even if I did not speak to him.

I had seen men like him before. Something like a philosopher-hobo. Generally they never get married because they are averse to watching suffering. They meet people only in happier moments, to share a handout, a glass of beer, a few secrets about making money without losing freedom ... and they always hurry away before their acquaintanceship gets turned to the point where they might have to share suffering, or anger with their fellow-wayfayer. Their lives contain reels of stories of friends found joyously and lost the next day. They keep only good memories. They know other men like books, but recall only the beautiful elements of the people that they meet.

And so I thought I knew this man. I felt that I could predict the exact reaction that I would get from him, by meeting him on his own ground. Share a few words and memories together. Do not ask names. Do not talk about aging ... now is forever. Do not gripe about things ... only look at the fair side of things because if you feel like griping it is griping at restlessness within. In this manner both of us would bypass all opinions (which require endless description and apologies), and go right to a common state of mind, and float like two swallows on the breezes of happenstance and hope and wait to see if we were successful in making the trick work. The trick of instant rapport with infinite lights and dimensions.

"There is a lot of power there. I wonder how deep that water is at the foot of the falls," I noted.

"Yeah. Looks threatening the first time you see it ... but after that it ... well it changes...." A few seconds of silence followed as we both stared at the spectacle. "Where you from?"

"West Virginia.... Where's your home?"

"Oh ... I'm a hopper. Been hopping around for years. I was an orphan. Now I am a bum that poses as a writer." He gave a broad grin. "I pick up material here for stories. Lot of stories come here. Honeymooners ... but not as many as used to. Lot of old people taking the only vacation that they had time to take, or money enough to take."

"That's odd. I had the same impression. I have seen a lot of beautiful old couples here. They seem to be capping some sort of mutual ambition ... or fulfilling some selfless phase of life."

"Right! Right!" he whispered enthusiastically. "You know it. It's their romance. They've survived a life of struggle ... maybe even a bit of hell together ... but they generally have given up all the physical or selfish reasons for sticking it out ... and they come to find a deathless relationship ... friendship."

"Resignation maybe?"

"Love." He tightened his jaw as he said it. He meant it.

"Never believed in love. I always thought people meant something else when they dropped the word." I tried to grin too. I wanted him to notice that I had made a few observations about people and their devious methods.

"Oh, you know what I mean. This is the place of love. Millions of people have come here because they were in love. Young honeymooners who saw beauty in the other one's eyes. The falls only gets the best of them. They come here all charged up with love and beautiful dreams. They will go home and pull each other's hair out the next week, but the falls never sees it. The old people fought and scratched for years ... but nobody even seen it. All we see here is two gentle old people who value each other a terrible lot.

"Maybe so. Death and love magnify each other."

"I've heard that before.... Who said that?"

He grinned broadly, patiently. "Me. I don't read much except what I write. Sounds hard to buy, ya think?"

"No. I feel the same way. It just seemed familiar."

He pressed on earnestly. "You see, we are not talking about some biological urge. We are talking about a principle. Blake said that Eternity is in love with the production of time. People in love sense that they have touched almightiness. It's like this river rushing for the sea where it will be nothing. The big moment for it is here, right here. One big fling. One roar of joy.

"These people don't know it, but they come up here to show their love to the world, to the elements ... and maybe to God. They go out in that boat as if to say -- We are greater than death. We cannot be killed. We may lose our bodies, but in this love we will be together forever. Never again alone in the universe like the old God of Adam was."

"That's interesting...." And it was.

"Let me tell you some of these cases of love. A young bride and groom came up here in the winter. The falls were frozen solid, so a lot of people were out there on the ice. Some had built shacks for tourists. But the ice gave way and started to sink into a hole at the bottom of the falls. It must have been the greatest spectacle for this region. I guess most of them made it off to the shore, but three people went down for sure.

"The young couple never tried to go. Quietly they embraced and held each other until they disappeared. Their love-challenge was answered, and they knew beyond a shadow of doubt that their love was still greater than death.

"Another fellow, a man, had come out alone. He did not try to mingle with them too closely. He retreated inside himself, knelt down on the ice and prayed until he was gone."

I was thinking of the poor fellow who had to die alone. "I get the idea of what you're talking about ... but it seems that the few cases of beauty are outweighed by the millions of cases of lovelessness, of squalid human existences, of murder, crime, hate and retaliation."

"They are all part of the picture of love. These are all love stories, and love's defiance of human fear. The hunter goes out and kills for his loved ones. The soldier and the gangster do strange things to prove their stature. And let us say that the reliefer that keeps his family on welfare is a coward of sorts, but he is still that quiet defiance of obstacles to his created love-unit or family ... even though to us it is a damned bummy existence."

"But why?"

He hesitated a moment. He looked more serious as though he were remembering something way back in the past. "Ah ... yes. I see. I said something a minute ago about Eternity being in love with the production of time. I quoted Blake and Blake was talking about the stage ... so to speak ... not only the stage or planet, but show-schedules, billions of opening times and closing times ..."

"The Cecil B. DeMille of the original production of The Ten Commandments." I threw that in because I thought it was appropriate.

"... Right. In a way.... Have you ever heard the Kabbalistic twist to the creation? Not hard to relate to. Before all things got started there was only one consciousness ... God. Anything alone that long has to conjure up some company."

"So now we have to suffer. And does this make us any more than shadows in another being's reveries or conjurations?"

"Maybe. I don't know. The male black widow spider makes love, knowing that he is going to be immediately nothing more than a meal for the gut of his mate. He must know it, because he usually tries to get away from her. But that is his capacity for love. Maybe the old lady spider pays a price too, to prove herself. I've heard that she has to stand by and watch her babies eating one another."

"What about those who pay and never get the change to love ... like the little spiders?"



"Every reproducing creature loves. You're thinking about the millions of teenage soldiers who die on the battlefield and never had a girlfriend. But you do not see their drama. The locust digs for seventeen years to sing his song for six weeks, and dies. He never sees his children. Never knows if they made it or not. The soldier is very romantic. Nearly every one has a girl friend. Most of their girl friends are unreal, superimposed dream-copies projected upon the memory of the girl next door ... or the pin-up in the barracks.... But he's a lover. He is the creator of love stories that never come true because they have never happened yet. He is still a child enough that he loves his mother. When the moment of death comes for him, he calls for her and immortalizes her. He dies protecting her, or protecting one of his buddies, and immortalizes himself. And he sees it all coming and doesn't mind."

"But why all the pain?"

He paused, and stared at the sidewalk for a moment. "There's no pain. You are looking from the outside. The audience suffers, not the actor. The more trauma in the script, the greater the glory. The story is what's important. That's why I wanted to take a crack at writing.

"You see, love is more important than empire-building. Empire building is a vanity, unless done for the love of someone else. It is love too, but it is a frenzied method of torturing yourself to death while often alienating yourself from the real people that you might love.

"Eternity may have produced endless space and endless time ... but life is something else. Love is the song of life. The Kabbalistic God hungers for the experience of love. He got hungry, he groaned, and out came the Logos. The word. The story. The stories multiplied."

I still felt that he was missing a point. "How do you account for the evident unbalanced situation ... the cost seems to exceed the reward. A man has a moment of love, but he pays for it with years of sacrifice and suffering, getting an education ... if he survives the gauntlet that he has to run with the army and other dangers ... and finds that he has just prepared himself to start sacrificing himself for this thing called love ... for the rest of his life!"

He was waiting patiently for me to finish. "Maybe we have to prove our claim to love. In a relative world-picture we would need the pain to identify the love. Better than identifying it with hate. But I think that through this ambiguousness, or polarity of thinking, we do experience a relative love. The hunger that we really have then is to eternalize that feeling. And we do not know it at the time, perhaps, but we are helping to create a cosmic picture, which might be a cosmic experience ... eternalizing the love phenomenon."

I felt like saying that we might well be eternalizing man's ability to fool himself, but I knew this would throw cold water on the warm friendship and candor of our relationship. I made some excuse and suggested that we go sit down in his car or mine. He wanted a drink. We were on the Canadian side of the border and I did not know if they served alcohol near the falls.

It turned out he wanted a soft drink, so we picked up a couple of sodas and sat in my car. I cannot remember every detail of the conversation, but I remembered a lot of that which was said because he made an impression on me later, which somewhat intensified my memory of nearly all that was said.

I remember that when he sat down he said, "That falls is a young man's tallest tree ... and for every woman it is the symbol of the most terrible sacrifice or masochism ... an initiation for an eternal motherhood...."

I felt that I knew what he meant. Boys start climbing a tree to impress their girl friends. Then they climb tall buildings or take dangerous jobs to guarantee their mate's security. Some grown men actually try to overcome the falls itself. Quite a few went over the falls in barrels, and some of them died. Some died just trying to ride through the lower rapids. Looking across to the American side I saw several wrecked automobiles at the foot of the cliff at the water's edge. I wondered if the drivers had committed suicide on a dare ... daring the everpresent threats of nature ... for a final time. If they survived they are forever fearless, and if they died they will be free of fear.



Strangely, only one woman had ever tried to conquer the falls in a barrel. I saw her picture in one of the souvenir-booklets describing the falls. She looked as though she suffered from an unwelcome masculinity, and I do not think that she ever expected to survive. I think she wanted to experience masochism in its most extreme form.

I knew that there was some wisdom in this man, and it occurred to me that I valued his friendship. I did not even know his name and I knew that I wanted to keep in touch with him. I could not get the idea of the falls being a proving ground for the young man in search of ultimate self-validation. That same day I had to pull my son from the wall, and once he succeeded in getting through the pipes above the wall, pretending to retrieve something that had fallen on the grass on the other side. I realized at the time that James would not try it again because he had made his point. He had something to brag about when he returned home. And he felt satisfied with himself.

"What's your name?.... Mine is Rose, -- Richard Rose."

"Adam." No great joy to him to know my name, this I could see.

I waited, thinking that my wait would bring out his full name and maybe a little personal history. He knew about my tactic.

"Just Adam." And this with a look that seemed to say that we were both OK, and did not need to get into personal gossip.

I was amused by his refusal to be pressed into the simple conformity of an introduction. But I felt that I knew his reasons.

"I will remember Adam ... but maybe I would not remember Adam Jones or Adam Smith who I would try to relate to all the Joneses or Smiths that I ever knew ... right?"

"Meeting people is like ships passing at sea. It serves no purpose for one ship to turn around and follow the other ship just because they did not fire upon one another. Maybe that don't put it the way I want to...."

"I know ... I know...."

"I prefer to be a story for you. I want you to know only the good part ... a few non-political ... hopefully non-egotistical minutes. The writer never tells the real nature of his characters ... just the good part ... and that is the part that we are interested in. Who knows, maybe we will meet again ... if so, that's good. But we have no shackles if we do not. People like to make themselves miserable sometimes ... now I am not aiming at you ... but people can't let go ... and when they get tight about leaving a pleasant scene they destroy the memory of the scene. All relationships have to turn into agonies. I think that is the reason people loose track of one another when somebody dies. They have a wall of agony between themselves and the person who shipped out."

"I can see that this is consistent with your idea of real love. Real love deals with people but not with capturing or holding...."

"Each man is a story ... maybe he can be a better story ... or maybe he can just play it out better. You are a brief walk-on in my story. I am a brief walk-on in your story. Our story is more vital if we play the brevity to its best.

"One of the greatest stories was the life of Christ. I wonder, though, if people really see how well He told His story. There is an art to allowing oneself to simply allow the story to happen. The art is chiefly not falling for lesser love-impulses. You see, Christ played the role of a man who loved supremely. Maybe if He had played His cards right He would have been King of the Jews. Or He could certainly have gotten rich if He healed people a little under that which was the going AMA rate. But He was heeling people so that people would love Him and so that He could sell out that lesser love itself. Now that sounded damned weird ... but I think you pick it up. He decided to be the greatest love story. So He had to show the difference between all the different forms of human love and universal love. He died in the prime of life when He would have been able to maturely love individuals, a wife or lover, or friends. And He had that type of love too maybe.

"So He gave them all up and immortalized them besides, forming for all time a new, non-relative love. A love beyond the pain and the payment. He rejected the payment of His love for His mother and family which tempted Him to cling to them in a dreary life of mutual watching-over, of identification with everything that afflicted Him or them. He rejected the role as king because that role always calls for more human hate than love. He had created an esoteric brotherhood, but He gave up that fellowship, knowing that maybe by bidding for the greater goal He may have interpreted His role in the drama incorrectly, and maybe had lost the impersonal love that the brotherhood represented, and which may have been his real purpose for living....

"He must have had some shaky moments ... but He played it out because it was placed before Him. Just imagine having to hang there and watch your family going through more pain than yourself.... He must have been half-dead by the time they got Him nailed to the cross ... or in shock. So the pain at that moment was not significant. His pain would have been the surrender of His concern for those in his immediate circle that only knew about personal love. He was bound to have had a sympathy for their love.

"His brotherhood had scattered. They suddenly became body-conscious. A few morbid people were now his only following ... that is, besides the family. He also gave up his reputation ... and the reputation was the catalyst that may have helped effect all those miracles. But He gave that up too, for the long shot."



I was getting an inkling of his picture, or thought I was. "I always thought that later historians and devout but happy morbid minds, detracted from the figure of Christ by drawing bloody hearts and lacerated bodies. Christ became for centuries a fetish for a weird form of meditation."

"Not at all. Don't get carried away by the drama. Noble actors must occasionally play the part of the creep. Why was he noble? All men are noble ... they just have to take the role that allows them to learn about love. Judas had to become a classic heel ... the greatest historical heel ... then the noble Judas kills the Judas creep ... and the light and attention validates the theme of the drama, because it is all reflected in the direction of the Christ-objective.

"It was the greatest drama ever enacted. The actors had to be the greatest. They were called upon to give up the most. When young lovers die in an unconsummated love ... they die for human love. Their story is good ... but we always have the feeling that if they had lived it would have become very carnal once it had been consummated. The Romeos and Juliets gave up their physical experiences ... in the name of selfless friendship ... but not universal love. The manifest dream of the Romeos and Juliets is an eternal love in which those two will immortally share a bodiless love. Just those two. The hell with the rest of humanity."

"Is that wrong?" I asked, meaning was it wrong to reject humanity?

"No ... no. I was just trying to point out lesser love stories. But those lesser love stories are greater than most of our stories. We act out our parts well, but we just do not sign up for the real good stories.

But every man and woman is a lover ... and every life is a story. We like to think that we are conscious actors.... I say we have to be conscious of our act and then we can see it from the audience for what it is. We get too identified with a stage-play, and feel responsible for writing the play. Occasionally the creep believes that he really is a creep. He does not realize that he surrendered himself into that play before he was born. Sometimes the greatest sacrifices are made before we were born.

"Christ was aware of that. Once He was asked for the cause of a certain man's affliction. The guy asking the questions thought that the afflicted guy had some genetic defects or some curse that lasted for seven generations. And Christ replied that the man was born to be healed by Christ, -- made sick so that Christ would heal him. From this it is evident to me that Christ knew that He was acting out a drama. The stage had been set a long time ago. Yet it is possible that Christ through some exceptional talent was merely able to see conditions that launched Him into this life. It could be that Christ had a power over events, but it looks more to me like He too surrendered to the terms of a contract written before He was born."

Adam saw everything as aimed at love ... mostly human, selfless, love. People act out selfish lives to glorify that much more -- the selfless type of human personal love. The human personal love can be witnessed. Impersonal love is very hard to witness.

I felt that I had suddenly been taught something by Adam. He was deliberately giving up the importance of Adam Jones the lover so that I could get a glimpse of

Impersonal Love itself. To him the prostitute gives up the sweet role of loveliness to publicize and endow loveliness. The hater becomes the black paint on the back of the mirror of love ... so that we will only wish to see love. The killer kills the lover and not only immortalizes the love of the lover, but immortalizes goodness as well.

The man who works for forty or fifty years in the mill, or in the mine, does not do it for himself. He places his loved ones above himself ... and he may drink himself to death just to hold his job for them.

Then we see the man who gets drunk and loses his job, and becomes a bum. And his wife and children descend into poverty. This man has a family that has problems that require hardship in the prescription for their evolvment. Perhaps the bum is under contract for hardship for the same reasons. And so he acts it out, suffering greatly because he cannot help those that he loves any better.

I knew I had a lot of questions to ask Adam, and the first one had to do with getting a line on his activities for the following day. I knew that I had to find my children and prepare to camp for the night.

Then I remembered that he did not wish to be obligated to any social requirements. I could not call him up if I did not know his name. So that when I left him, I tried to be as casual as possible. I said, "Maybe I'll run into you tomorrow. If I do not, I'll sure remember the Story."

He cocked his head and grinned, and shook my hand. Even handshaking to him was an unnecessary formality, but he obliged.

I got out of the car to lock it up preparing to go up on the hill to the pylon where the children had headed several hours before, but as I locked the car I saw them coming only a few feet away. So I unlocked the door again, and went back to the driver's side and started up the car.

We drove back to the American side to camp along Lake Erie. We were all tired and sleep came easy, even in a camper. I have forgotten the name of the park into which we pulled, but the sunset was very beautiful. A long pier extended out into the water. It was concrete and may have been placed there to prevent erosion. We walked out on it and took a few pictures.

I fell asleep and was awakened by a dream. It was morning. The heavy hues had left the sky. It was clear and cheerful, and the birds seemed in agreement. I had been dreaming of Adam.

We had gone down to the pier and taken some pictures. Adam had appeared and I was overjoyed. I realized I should have gotten his picture at the falls since we had a camera. So he walked out on the pier and we snapped the shutter. All dreams have strange abilities for change. My camera was a small Kodak Instamatic that held film in a

sealed plastic cartridge. But in the dream it had now become a Polaroid. Ruth and James were hovering over the camera as we waited for the picture to emerge.

When it came out, there was no pier, only the sky with all its different shades of red, yellow, blue and vermillion. The picture now apparently had not fully developed. We stared in amazement as a face appeared in the picture taking up the whole horizon. It was Adam, and he was grinning.

The pier now appeared slowly across the bottom of the picture. And as we watched them forming, two words appeared printed the length of the pier. They were -- IN TECHNICOLOR.

I had to wait a while for James and Ruth to awaken. I could hardly wait to tell them about the dream. After we had washed, we sat at the large rustic picnic table allotted to us, and had breakfast.

"Had an odd dream about Adam last night."

Ruth said, "Oh?"

"It seems that we were down there on the lake, and we took a picture of the sunset, and it turned out to have Adam's face in it."

"Adam who?" Ruth asked pedantically.

"You know, the fellow I was talking about on the way over here last night."

"You mean the bum."

"No, he wasn't a bum. He was well dressed. He paid for his own drink ... in fact insisted on paying for his own. But you saw him. I was shaking hands with him when you walked up to the car."

"If you say so, Daddy." She gave an impatient sigh.

"What do you mean by that... 'If I say so?'"

"Daddy ... you were asleep when I came up to the car."

I never saw Adam again. In a way I never expected to. And I realized that if I were ever to tell this story I would have to surrender any claim of immunity to senility ... to get it told.

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If you like the dynamism and spontaneity of Richard Rose as speaker and teacher, please read his books, which are available which are available at www.rosepublications.net or www.tatfoundation.org.