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Love—In Other Words by Harper Lee

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Many years ago an aging member of the house of Hanover, on learning that the duty of providing an heir to the throne of England had suddenly befallen him and his brothers, confided his alarm to his friend Thomas Creevey: "...It is now seven-and-twenty years that Madame St. Laurent and I have lived together; we are of the same age and have been in all climates, and in all difficulties together, and you may well imagine the pang it will occasion me to part with her...I protest I don't know what is to become of her if a marriage is to be forced upon me..."

Amused by the Duke of Kent's predicament, Mr. Creevey recorded the incident in his diary and preserved for us a timeless declaration. The man who made it was not overly endowed with brilliance, nor had he led a noteworthy life, yet we remember his cry from the heart and tend to forget his ultimate service to mankind; he was the father of Queen Victoria.

What did the Duke of Kent tell us? That two people had shared their lives on a voluntary basis for nearly thirty years--in itself a remarkable achievement; that they had survived the fevers and frets of intimate relationship; that together they had met the pressures and disappointments of life; that he is in agony at the prospect of leaving her. In one grateful sentence, the Duke of Kent said all there is to say about the love of a man for a woman.

And in so saying, he tells us much about love itself. There is only one kind of love--love. But the different manifestations of love are uncountable:

At an unfamiliar night noise a mother will spring from her bed, not to return until every corner of her domain is tucked safely round her anxiety. A man will look up from his golf game to watch a jet cut caterpillar tracks through the sky. A housewife, before driving to town, will give her neighbour a quick call to see if she wants anything from the store. These are manifestations of a power within us that must of necessity be called divine, for it is no invention of man.

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What is love? Many things are love--indeed, love is present in pity, compassion, romance, affection. What made the Duke of Kent's statement a declaration of love, and what makes us perform without second thought small acts of love every day of our lives, is an element conspicuous by its absence. Were it present, the Duke of Kent would have left his mistress without a pang; the sound barrier breaking over her head would not rouse the mother; sinking his putt would be the primary aim of the golfer; the housewife would go straight to the store with no thought of her neighbour. One thing identifies love and isolates it from kindred emotions: love admits not of self.

Few of us achieve compassion; to some of us romance is a word; in many of us the ability to feel affection has long since died; but all of us at one time or another- be it for an instant or for our lives- have departed from ourselves: we have loved something or someone. Love, then is a paradox: to have it, we must give it. Love is not an intransitive thing-love is a direct action of mind and body.

Without love, life is pointless and dangerous. Man is on his way to Venus, but he still hasn't learned to live with his wife. Man has succeeded in increasing his life span, yet he exterminates his brothers six million at a whack. Man now has the power to destroy himself and his planet: depend upon it, he will - should he cease to love.

The most common barriers to love are greed, envy, pride, and four other drives formerly known as sins. There is one more just as dangerous: boredom. The mind that can find little excitement in life is a dying one; the mind that can not find something in the world that attracts it is dead, and the body housing it might as well be dead, for what are the uses of the five senses to a mind that takes no pleasure in them?

Having at long last realized that he must love or destroy himself, man is proceeding along his usual course by trying to evolve a science for it. The ultimate aim of psychoanalysis, when its special brand of semantics is put to rout, is to release man from his neuroses and thus enable him to love, and man's capacity to love is measured by his degree of freedom from the drives that turn inward upon him. As one holds down a cork to the bottom of a stream, so may love be imprisoned by self: remove self, and love rises to the surface of man's being.

With love, all things are possible.

Love restores. We have heard many tales of love's power to heal, and we are skeptical of them, for we are human and therefore prone to deny the existence of things we do not understand and can not explain. But this tale happened:

On an August evening in a tiny Southern hospital, an old man lay dying. His family had been summoned, among them his eldest grandson, a boy of sixteen. The boy's relationship with his grandfather had been a curious, almost wordless one, as such things often are between man and man. All that day the boy said nothing. It seemed that he could not talk. He would not wait out the old man's dying with the rest of his family in the hospital lobby; instead, the boy found a chair and stationed himself in the corridor beside his grandfather's door, where he sat all day, oblivious to the starched scurryings of hospital routine. Late in the evening the family's doctor found the boy still sitting, still silent. The doctor said, "Go home, son. There's nothing you can do for your grandfather." The boy took no notice of him, and the doctor went into the room only to emerge moments later, looking bewildered. "Er--son," said the doctor. The boy looked up. "He's asking for something to eat. He's better." Showing no sign of surprise, the boy nodded: "I reckoned it was about time he was hungry," he said, his first utterance of the day. Then he picked up the chair, put it back where he found it, and walked down the corridor, stretching his lanky frame and yawning. "Where are you going, boy?" called the doctor. "To get him a hamburger," answered the boy. "He likes hamburgers."

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There is no satisfactory explanation for extrasensory perception--it simply is. There was no rational explanation for the old man's recovery--it simply happened. One may only wonder.

Love transforms. Why is it that the quotidian we are seeking, when we can't find it in the Bible or in Shakespeare, most often turns up in *Don Quixote*? Because Cervantes, from sheer love of life, made the nuances of life immortal. Why, when we are familiar with every line, must we stop and listen when "The Messiah" is playing? Because every note was born of a man's love for God, and we hear it. Try this experiment: catch (if you can) someone who loathes baroque music; play for him any part of *Semele*, then sit back and watch his polite attention turn to compulsive attention--see your captive become Handel's captive. Avarice never wrote a good novel; hate did not paint "The Birth of Venus"; nor did envy reveal to us that the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares of the two sides. Every creation of man's mind that has withstood the buffeting of time was born of love--love of something or someone. It is possible even to love mathematics.

The history of mankind contains innumerable testaments to the power of love, but none touches the transformation undergone by the otherwise cantankerous St. Paul when he addressed himself to the subject: loving, he wrote of love itself, and he gave us a miracle. Listen:

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

"And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing..."

After St. Paul, we have done our best, but our best has never come near him.

Love purifies. Suffering never purified anybody; suffering merely intensifies the self-directed drives within us. Any act of love, however--no matter how small--lessens anxiety's grip, gives us a taste of tomorrow, and eases the yoke of our fears. Love, unlike virtue, is not its own reward. The reward of love is peace of mind, and peace of mind is the end of man's desiring.