

THE ROMANTIC

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When Charles woke in the morning, he never considered it to be "just another day." To him, the brash clanging of the alarm clock could mark the beginning of a potential novel. At breakfast, he might be inspired by his soggy scrambled eggs to write an English sonnet. On the way to class, he might observe an exciting objective correlative to use in his next short story.

Charles wanted to be a writer. All he had ever wanted to do was write. He thought in terms of introductory paragraphs, character sketches and hidden themes. Yet he was not so involved in his aspirations that he was detached from his observations. No, far from detached. Charles felt a part of everything. His emotions ruled him freely. Mental passions and extravagant fantasies of life filled his head and kept him searching—but for what, he wasn't sure.

In the fall of his first year of college, Charles was walking aimlessly around the leaf-covered campus, contemplating the vastness of the universe. Then, recalling that he was still in the middle of the American mid-west and not in some mystical foreign land, he blinked and looked forward again.

And there she was.

It hit him so quickly that he was at a loss for words, which for him was a true rarity, and he stood frozen—in the middle of a step—with his mouth gaping. His muscles tensed instantly and a tingle shot through his entire body right to his soul!

She, walking toward him, noticed that he seemed somewhat dumbstruck—but by what, she didn't know. She leaned close to him, looked into his glazed eyes and inquired:

"Excuse me, but are ya all right? I mean . . . is there sumptin' I could do ta help ya?"

Charles was totally, thoroughly and absolutely overcome. He had never seen a more illustrious picture of feminine beauty! And not only did she *exist* but she had actually *spoken* to him! It was beyond comprehension. He feared that if he were to blink, she would disappear and his dread that it was a dream would become a reality—and there he

would be, alone, standing in the leaves, empty. But he blinked and she didn't disappear.

"Look buddy, are ya okay? Want me ta call a campus cop er sumptin'?" she questioned.

Realizing that he had better answer or she might leave before he could learn her name, he blurted:

"I'm fine, er, I mean, I'm just fine, thank you . . . and yourself?"

She nodded with a look of confused apprehension.

He was so flustered, nothing seemed to come out the way he wanted it to.

"I wonder . . . that is, could you tell, er . . . what is your name, may I ask?" Charles stuttered.

Just standing near her he could smell the flowery aroma of her perfume. Her blue eyes gleamed and the shafts of golden hair glowed in the autumn sun. He felt faint. She smiled slightly and said:

"Deb, it's Deb De Lurve."

He managed a smile and realized that he was staring.

"Look, I gotta go to 2 o'clock class—I'll see ya," she said, still rather puzzled, and she walked away.

Charles stood right where he was. He wanted to memorize everything that had just happened. Blizz! Ecstasy! This was truly love at first sight! Eventually, he floated back to his room at the dorm, oblivious to the world around him.

The next few days were a total blur for Charles. He missed classes, ran into walls, and sometimes even forgot to eat. His room mate, Jeff, noticing that his friend seemed a bit preoccupied, inquired:

"What the hell is wrong with you, boy? You're acting like a total space cadet!"

"It's her—all I can think about is her. I see her in my dreams! I can think of nothing but her! She is the beauty and meaning of life! She emulates love!" Charles gasped.

"Oh God, Chuck, be real. No chicks *that* great go to this school!" Jeff chuckled.

"You may jest, but I have found a radiant flower in the midst of a barren and meaningless desert! She is my treasure and without the knowledge of her existence, my life would have little meaning," Charles resounded.

"So what's this chick's name, Chuck, my man?"

"Deborah—Deborah De Lurve!"

"Oh Jesus, Chuck—De Lurve?! You mean that bleached-blondie that got a nose job last spring? Her a radiant flower? Have you been hittin' the bottle er sumptin', boy?" Jeff howled.

"I see that you have minimal appreciation of true beauty," Charles said defensively.

Jeff, not wanting to shatter Charles' illusion, clutched his half-flat six-pack of lukewarm beer and Chemistry book and sat on the bed.

"So Chuck, are ya gonna ask her out?"

"Oh no! I wouldn't dream of it! She is too perfect, so I must be content to watch her and wait," Charles said while silently composing poems and sonnets for her in his mind.

"I will worship her from afar and send her my poems to express my affections—I dare not dream of aught else."

And so Charles worshipped and waited. He sent her anonymous poems every day and flowers and boxes of candy and other delicacies on the weekends. He continued these "expressions of his undying love and devotion" for about one month.

Finally Jeff convinced Charles that Ms. De Lurve might want to meet her anonymous admirer and that Charles should invite her out to dinner. Charles, who was growing tired of worshipping her from afar and was rapidly running out of funds for flowers and candy, agreed to the idea.

The next afternoon, the sun was shining brightly when Charles headed for the girl's dormitory. He felt giddy and light-headed. Everything he wanted to say to her was perfectly scripted in his mind. He just hoped that she would say the lines he wanted to hear.

He walked through the heavy oak doors of the dorm and into the lobby. A girl wearing a bandana and pair of faded Levi's looked up from her books.

"Can I help you?" she said for the millionth time to another frightened young man coming to call.

"Yes, could you please ring Ms. Deborah De Lurve?" Charles requested, trying to maintain his composure.

"Sure, no problem," the receptionist managed to say in between the

bubbles she was blowing with her chewing gum.

Not many minutes later, Charles heard a door close behind him. He whipped around and there was Deb.

"Oh, hi! I didn't have any idea who would be comin' ta see me. Wow, long time, no see!" she exclaimed.

"Hi, yes, I guess it has been a while. Deb, I won't keep you long but there is something I'd like to ask you."

"Sure, try me."

Charles was momentarily stunned. *That* wasn't in the script.

"Well, I was wondering if you might like to join me for dinner this Friday evening—that is, of course, if you don't already have plans."

"That sounds real nice—sure I will."

"Great. I'll pick you up about 7 o'clock. See you then."

They exchanged smiles then Charles started for the door. When he stepped outside, the sun was so bright he had to squint to see where he was going. Something wasn't right. He should feel elated and he just felt sort of . . . well, the same. He had dreamt of this girl for weeks and now he had a date with her and he wasn't even excited. It was so easy. She just said yes. He didn't have to beg or plead. It wasn't even a challenge. As a matter of fact, it was rather anti-climactic.

Charles started down the steps toward the sidewalk, staring at the ground, contemplating the mysteries of the heart. Then facing the fact that it was not to be understood, he blinked and looked forward again.

And there she was.

It hit him so quickly he was a loss for words—and he stood frozen. He had never seen such striking red hair, skin so fair—and yes . . . freckles! As she passed him, the autumn breeze caught a whiff of her girlish perfume and blew it across his face. He was totally, thoroughly and absolutely overcome. He had never seen such a perfect beauty before! This must be a dream because she couldn't be real! This was truly love at first sight!

He watched her walk by and tried to memorize everything about her. When she was no longer in view, Charles turned away and floated back to his dorm room, oblivious to the world around him.