Perfect

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Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"Christ, those eyes. Those big, soft, amazing brown eyes. They just beg to be stared into. And those small yet full lips - they're so inviting. To watch them mouth my name would be ... ethereal. And the shoulder-length brown hair, pulled back into a ponytail and styled in a way that both timeless and contemporary, its timelessness being the reason for its fashionable style. What makes all these features the better is the fact none of them are highlighted or hidden by make-up. Her beauty is natural. In a word, she's perfect; ironically, that's the cause of so much of my confusion."

Cover Page Footnote
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"... and I'm paying in pain but it's the cost of the high 'till the weight of the secret and the weight of the lie makes my heart want to burst feel the ache as time goes by getting better and worse getting better and worse and there's a screw that I tighten as I dream of the kiss ..."

"Splintering Heart"
Marillion

Christ, those eyes. Those big, soft, amazing brown eyes. They just beg to be stared into. And those small yet full lips - they're so inviting. To watch them mouth my name would be ... ethereal. And the shoulder-length brown hair, pulled back into a ponytail and styled in a way that's both timeless and contemporary, its timelessness being the reason for its fashionable style. What makes all these features the better is the fact none of them are highlighted or hidden by make-up. Her beauty is natural. In a word, she's perfect; ironically, that's the cause of so much of my confusion.

"She" is Baine Elizabeth Murphy, a waitress at the diner I frequent. I go to this diner, simply called "Restaurant", three or four mornings a week on my way to the small college where I teach Recent American History. I also go there for the occasional lunch. I don't go, though, for the food; I go to see Baine. I've been going to see her for about four years now, always making sure that I get a table in her station. On busy mornings, she only has time for a quick hello and to take my order; during slower times, we talk about a number of things, sometimes at great lengths. We discuss movies, books, politics, current events and our major mutual passion, music. We both consider music of all types essential to our lives and can talk for hours on end about it, particularly modern music. I even teach a class about the history of popular music, which Baine may take next semester. She doesn't know it, but she often helps me plan my lessons for the coming weeks. What she also doesn't know is how badly or how long I've wanted her.

I've wanted Baine for as long as I've known her; for as long as I've realized how perfect she is. I don't want to say that it was love at first sight since I don't believe in such things, but there was some ... experience the first time we met, something intangible but definitely there. This longing for her manifests itself in so many small ways throughout the days. When there is a note from my student assistant with an unknown number on it, I wonder if it's Baine's; when I'm at my desk, buried in work, and an unexpected knock on the door draws my attention, I wonder if it's Baine, armed with nothing but her infinite beauty and proclamations of affection; and when there's a letter in my mailbox with an unfamiliar zip code or writing style, I hope that it's the invitation to Baine's for dinner and conversation. Sadly, these things never happen and remain a part of my secret wish list where they have resided for so long already.

When the weight of this secret passion gets too suffocating, I screw up the courage to ask her out but always abandon myself at the last moment, saying that she's too busy at the moment or that I'm running late and will miss a class or that there isn't a place in the conversation to work in the question. Of course, this is bullshit, and I know it. I know that it's merely a matter of opening my mouth and forcing the words out. It's that simple. Or is it? Objectively, it's only a question of asking her out; personally, there is so much more to consider: what happens if she says no? do we stay friends? can we stay friends? will we want to? What if Baine says yes? will we find ourselves entirely incompatible? or will we find out that we're not the people that we thought we were? To love her, and be loved by her, would be otherworldly, intoxicating; to have her love crumble at my feet would be devastating, incomprehensibly empty, rendering life a useless burden.

In Baine, I see perfection. The way she's cynical and skeptical at just the right times; how she's inquisitive and intelligent in all that she does; in how she finds the humor and laughter in each situation; in how well-read and informed she is; the way she manages to find the word I'm looking for to finish my thoughts; the way she smiles; the way she is. I want to revel in this perfection of hers, let it guide, shape, mold, define my life, I want to run and shout my feelings for Baine, I want Baine. I want the courage to tell her that I want her. I need the courage to tell her. I need Baine.

If only she knew how many nights we've spent together, how often we've passionately voiced our affection for one another. And if she only knew how many times, in my mind, we've had dinner by candlelight, a dinner I made especially for her, and how we danced slowly, scoring points with one another as Bryan Ferry or Joe Jackson serenaded us
as her dress fell to the floor and we made love right there, too eager, too anxious, too passionate to make our way to the bedroom. It only she knew how many times I’ve woken up next to her. If she only knew. If she just knew...

So why don’t I tell her about these desires, about these deep, sincere feelings that I have for her? Because I’m scared. If we get close enough to share intimate dinners and make love on dining room floors, then this image, this perception of her perfection would vanish forever. I would know things - worries, cares, secrets - that would erode my view of the perfection that accompanies her. I would see her flaws; flaws that daily conversations at a restaurant don’t afford one to see. I would know things to do and say that could hurt her in unimaginable ways. I would know all her vulnerabilities and tender spots ... knowledge that would be too painful for me to possess. It would force me to admit that she’s fallable and imperfect which is exactly what I don’t want to do. I want to keep her encased in my romantic fantasies and away from the imperfections of everyday life. I want to keep her perfect.

If only I knew how to reconcile my fears with my desires; if only I could make Baine’s flaws a part of her beauty instead of distinct from it. So many times I’ve opened my mouth with words of affection for Baine about to cross the threshold of my lips only to have these goddamn fears of mine steal them away at the last second, making me all the more aware of them. Instead of saying what’s on my mind, my heart, my very fucking essence, I impotently end up asking Baine if she’s seen DeNiro’s new movie or read the new John Irving or heard the new Rush CD, not really giving a damn about her response at the time, only seeking to salvage any shred of respect for myself to build on until the next time that I attempt to profess my feelings to Baine.

Someday I will announce these feelings to Baine. I’ll sit her down, take her soft, cared-for hands into mine and vocalize every thought, feeling, wish and longing that I’ve had for her over the years. And then I’ll kiss her so passionately that every nerve in our bodies will release the well of feelings that have been collected and suppressed day after day after day as we cross the divide between fantasy and reality. I just don’t know when this day will come, when I don’t care about being late for class or the conversation offers me the opportunity to ask Baine out. I don’t know what will cause the conversation to turn to an opening for me to ask the question. I don’t know how the question will be asked. Or when. Or even if it really will be asked at all. I only know why it needs to be asked.

So here I am, trapped by my own insecurities and hurting because of them. Every part of me aches to be joined to Baine; every part of me is also terrified of the things that I’ll learn because of it.

I want to hold her, touch her, kiss her, love her, consume her. But I can’t; I won’t. I want to keep her perfect. And how often in life do we encounter perfection?