

arts/entertainment

A little romance beats Valentine blues

By Peg Sheldrick

It had just started snowing—again. In view of the rotten weather and the recent demise of my car's battery, not to mention the poetic melancholy I felt creeping over me, I decided to slip into a local pub and hold a private wake while my feet warmed up a bit.

It was hard to adjust to the dim light of the bar after the dull brilliance of the snow outdoors. I glanced around the room to see who else would be hanging around saloons in the late afternoon to take shelter from this, the winter of our discontent. (I get terribly Shakespearean when I'm melancholy.)

humor

The only other patron there was a short, humpbacked old man in a worn-looking overcoat seated at the bar.

Probably a wino, I thought. Hope he doesn't come my way.

As if in answer to my unspoken insult, he slid from his stool, picked up a gunny sack, and made a beeline for my table.

Perfect, I thought. Just what I need, an over-age hustler.

Familiar face

He came closer, and I was surprised by the boyishness of his face, like a pudgy baby's. It was familiar somehow. He was not tall, and the curve of his back made his body seem old, for all its corpulence.

"Good afternoon, Miss," he said. "How are you this fine day, and may I ask how you feel about Love?"

"It's Ms. to you, buster, and, no, you may not ask."

"You misunderstand me, my girl. I'm asking you an honest question. Do you believe in Love?"

"I believe in Mace, and I'm going to use some on you if you don't buzz off, buddy. You think just because I'm here alone you can come over here and hand me some hokey line and I'll buy it. Well, you got me wrong, pal, so just leave me alone."

The little man sighed heavily. "I suppose you're right. I did have you wrong. I saw that kindly-looking face of yours and there I was all alone and there you were all alone, and I was simply hoping we might share the table, pass the time of day, save the barmaid a few steps is all. But you're right, I was wrong."

Felt like a heel

I felt like a heel. Here's this harmless old guy, no where to go and nobody to

talk to and I treat him like some drunken fraternity boy, I thought.

"Hey, wait," I said. "Please—uh—join me. Really. I guess I'm a little overwrought, with the weather and all. Please sit."

He made himself right at home and fixed me with a smile that melted the snow on my shoes and probably could have revived my battery. There was definitely something familiar about his face.

"May I buy you a drink?" he asked. I nodded, not knowing quite why.

"Waitress—two Shirley Temples, please!" He turned back to me, seeming terribly pleased with himself. Where had I seen that face?

"Permit me to introduce myself. I am—Love, and I am at your service."

"Swell. I am Music, and I write the songs," I fired back. I'm sitting here with a live one, I thought.

Love, Eros, Cupid

"No, it's true. I am Love—Eros—Cupid."

if you like. Call me what you will. I am Love. Look at my face. Don't you know me?"

"Well, you do look familiar. But . . ." I studied his face again, and suddenly it came to me. I had seen that face before, on 1,000 Valentines, 100, candy boxes. Without the fedora and the coat, all he needed was a heart-shaped frame of lace to peer through and he could pass for Cupid any day.

"Okay you are cherubic, I'll admit. But Cupid? I think not."

"But it's true, lass. Here, look here." He drew the gunny sack into his lap and proceeded to extract a small red bow and three arrows.

"What are you doing with that? Don't you know it's against the law to carry a concealed weapon? Put that thing away and get rid of it before somebody spots it."

Rubbery arrows

"But it isn't a weapon. Truly. Here, feel the tip," he said, holding an arrow out to me. Reluctantly I reached out and touched it. It was rubbery and soft.

"Okay, so it's harmless. Just put them away, huh?"

"Ah, but it isn't harmless either. Heh, heh. You should know that."

"Look, friend, I know it pleases you to play at this, but let's come back to Earth, okay? There's no such thing as Cupid. And even if there were, what would he be doing in a joint like this?"

His eyes misted over. It was a moment before he spoke. "Suppose he—he really did exist. Suppose he got—discouraged. Just look at these little arrows. Think they're likely to pierce much of anything? Think he's had much success in an age where sex seems to be beating him to the punch at every turn?"

"Would these little darts get through all the cynicism and selfishness that shrouds a modern soul? Wouldn't he get a bit discouraged when even a kindly young lady doesn't believe in Love? Wouldn't that be enough to drive a cherub to drink?"

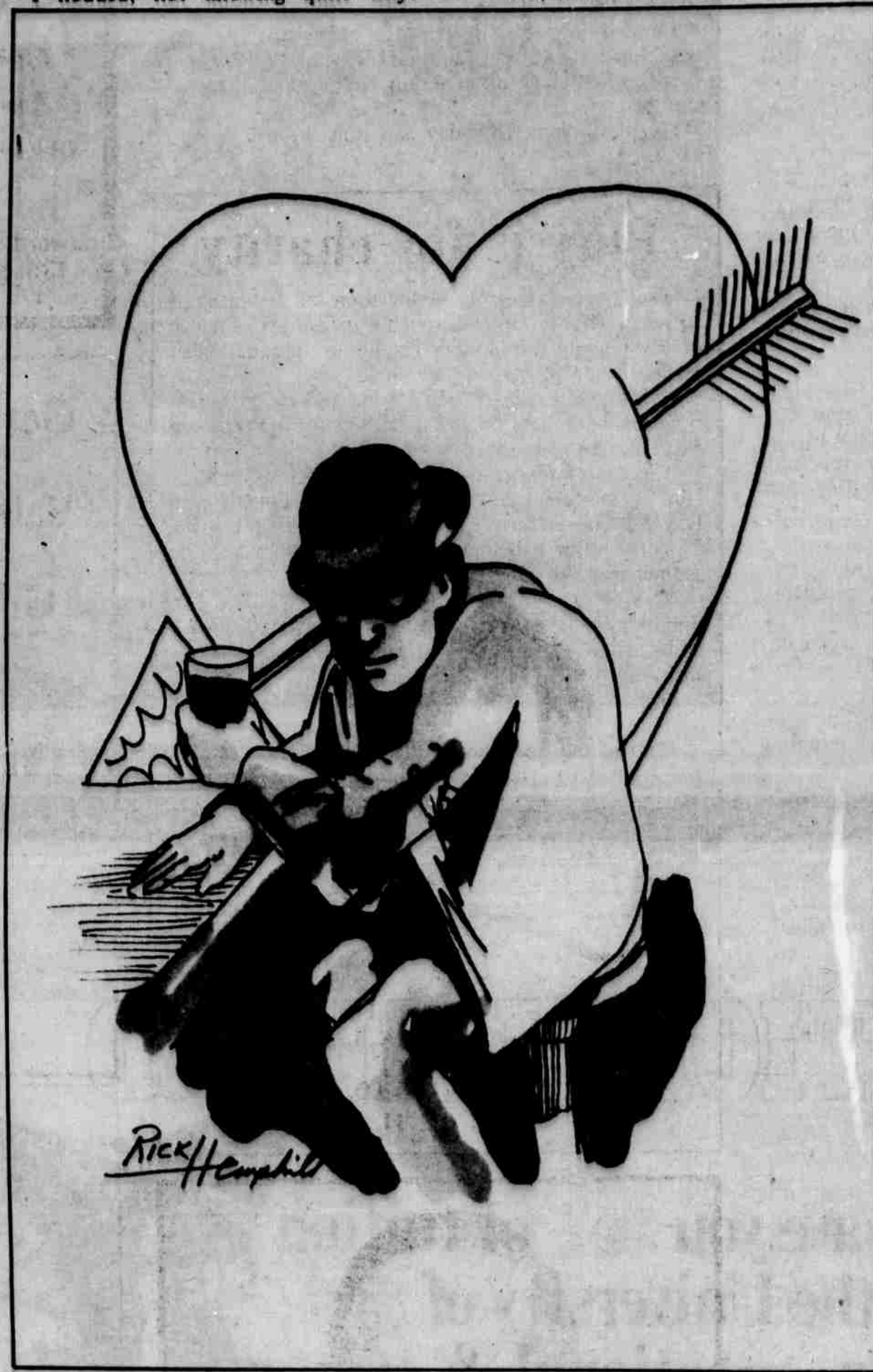
Sipping Shirley Temples

He took a long sip of his Shirley Temple. "Wouldn't that be enough?"

I studied him a moment. "Yeah, I suppose so." I eyed the hump on his back. The outline of two soft-looking lumps, almost like—but naw, I thought. Naw.

"It's just I get depressed this time of year over the state of romance. There doesn't seem to be much place for it these days. Love seems to be a one-person affair anymore."

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Fischman's new book furthers mystical fantasy

By Scott Kleager

Mystical fantasy, since George McDonald's classic works, *The Princess and the Goblin* and *The Princess and the Curdie*, has retained the same basic characteristics that define what is fantasy and that which is not.

book review

Augmented by the later works of C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien and, more recently, Madeleine L'Engle, fantasy has branched off to become a genre of its own. Containing some mystical, unexplainable good force, the heroic quest resulting in some form of maturation, an evil force that battles good, and the functionary heroine or hero, this genre has become nearly rigid.

The Man Who Rode His 10-Speed to the Moon by Bernard Fischman represents a new publication that may further shape fantasy.

Becoming invisible

The story of Stephan Aaron, a New Yorker who realizes he is entirely numb to feelings and consequently feels he is becoming invisible, is classic in that it is mystical from the start. The main character begins to feel that the wheels of his bike are floating above the ground

when he rides because of, he reasons, his waxing transparency. He decides to ride to the moon—and does.

Of course the trip represents more than just pedaling to the moon, just like Frodo and Sam's trip to Mount Doom in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* is more than just a physical challenge. The flight symbolizes Aaron's heroic quest for himself and his maturation.

"This time I will not turn away from myself," he thinks as he pedals up the ramp to the sidewalk on the top deck of the bridge. Like Curdie's trip into the caves in McDonald's *The Princess and the Goblin*, Aaron looks for and finds an understanding of a universal force that not only defines his being, but puts all things in their rightful place.

Classic fantasy

The story's treatment of time and space is also an example of classic fantasy. Days seem to linger on when Stephan Aaron is bike-riding. There is no description of when all this is taking place and the texture of the narrative is almost water-like. The main character drifts in and out of dream-like situations; when he is on his bike it is hard for the reader and him to tell whether he's fantasizing or not.

Certain qualities of this work step into new types of fantasy, and may redefine the genre somewhat. Aaron's feeling of transparency, for example, offers an open reference to feelings that one doesn't find in most fantasy. Usually, as in C.S. Lewis or Tolkien works, the battle

between good and evil is exterior and reflects the struggle of one human being with himself.

Hauntingly real

Instead of making *The Man Who Rode His 10-Speed to the Moon* less exciting, this characteristic makes for a hauntingly real and relatable account and is a step forward from the masterpieces that preceded it.

Another quality of the work that somewhat redefines the genre but stays within the boundaries of what can be considered classic fantasy is the author's masterful witch, Pia.

In the beginning she seems to be a manifestation of the classic witch, magically appearing as if out of thin air, and unexpectedly disappearing. She seems to be causing Aaron's mystical experiences as well as knowing the answers to all his difficult questions.

Witchery of life

But in the end, at the point of revelation, he finds her to be human and representing "—the witchery of life. That part of ourselves that keeps reaching out, knowing no barriers—"

The Man Who Rode His 10-Speed to the Moon is a unique and pioneering blend of classic mystical fantasy and modern psychological straight-forwardness that adds another dimension to a solidly defined genre, while at the same time staying within its limits. It is a fine book that deserves to be read.