

The Two Lovers

By

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A heavily throated engine roars in the distance, breaking the quiet of the cool night. Headlights crest over a small hill as the late model sedan crunches and compacts the torn up macadam. Walter, a handsome man in his early 30s with perfectly coifed dark hair, pilots the beast masterfully one-handed as his other hand caresses the leg of Sally, his co-pilot. The cool night invades the car through the cracked windows as “Love Potion No. 9” plays on the radio.

“We should have done this a long time ago, Sally,” says Walter, looking at her for a brief moment, then touches her hand. “You’re so cold,” he says, worried. He places her hand on his thigh, keeping his hand on top of hers. “There. That should help, my sweet.”

“I wish we had more time,” says Walter, lost in the moment.

“Sweetheart, when we’re together, time stands still and I’m lost within you,” says Sally, her voice a touch raspy yet feminine.

Walter smiles like the Cheshire Cat, realizing in this moment that he’s the luckiest man on this or any other planet. They sit silent as the road below them sings its familiar tune. He wants to say so much but can’t seem to bring himself to that point. It’s like standing on the edge of a cliff awaiting a gentle push. He mulls it over in his head ten, one hundred, one thousand times and then makes the final decision. He’s going to ask her to be his wife. The truest and purest expression of his love. No more waiting.

“Sally,” he begins, choking back tears as he searches for the words. “I need to ask you something.”

“Is everything okay?”

“Couldn’t be better. I just wanted to ask –“

Before Walter can finish, the engine hiccups and burps. The car jerks haphazardly until it sputters and dies, coasting to a stop at the side of the road. Walter looks down at the instrument panel in disbelief. “Out of gas. I knew I should have stopped a few miles back.”

“It’s a beautiful night for a walk, don’t you think? We’ll just have to get it.”

“I’ll go,” he says, patting her thigh.

He exits the car, pausing after closing the door. “I nearly forgot!” he says, reaching into his pocket and pulling out a small card. “I made something for you.” He opens the door, bringing the dome light to life, and slides back into the driver’s seat. With a wide smile he places the expertly painted card into Sally’s taut hand. Smiling, Walter brushes the blonde hair away from her pallid face. Looking dotingly into her eyes he says, “It’s the two lovers – like us.”

Sally, her eyes clouded over with death, stares back at him – unmoving and unfeeling. Her lips, blue under the crudely lipstick, are frozen in fear. Her face white as the blood has long since drained from the jagged smile across her neck. The blood, dried and dark, is caked and cracked around the wound and stains the front of her white dress like a field of roses. Walter caresses her face as he gently kisses her. “Do you like it?”

In a more feminine voice Walter responds, “I love it! Thank you, Walter.” Despite the stench of iron mixed with bile floating in the air, he takes a deep breath then leaves the car as he exhales. Sally is shrouded in complete darkness once again as the door closes.

With jacket over shoulder, and several miles behind him, Walter is relieved as headlights approach. His thumb juts out, he waits. The pickup flies past but stops down the road. Walter jogs up to the driver, smiling. “Thanks for stopping,” says Walter, out of breath.

“Where ya headed?” responds the elderly man.

“Closest town with a wrecker, sir. If you don’t mind.” Walter casually places his arm on the open window, exposing his blood-stained sleeve.

The man nods toward it. “What happened?”

“Haven’t gotten used to a straight razor.”

“Must have been a gusher.”

“You have no idea,” replies Walter with a winning smile.

“Get in. Ain’t gettin any younger.”

The passenger door screams as Walter works the rusty slab open and lifts himself into the truck, closing the door with a thud. “Tell me, sir,” begins Walter as he removes a card from his pocket and places it on the dash: The Hermit, an elderly man naked and tied to a tree. “Have you heard of the tarot?”