

The Blueberry

I used to be a single bachelor, until recently. In fact, I used to joke that I was a single bachelor. Redundant? No, I just meant to emphasize the point. I was a poor businessman who would schmooze with the cream of society to look important. But I was uncomfortable with everything about myself, so I would joke on myself before others would. I would say, “I am part of a couple (minus one),” and I would say the “minus one” in a rash whisper, much like I had a bad cough or was trying to throw up a distorted chunk of meatloaf lodged in my larynx. Not my esophagus. My larynx. That sounds worse and more muffled. I would assume so, anyway, I am not an entrepreneur of getting meatloaf lodged between my head and my stomach. I suppose I wouldn’t know.

I did need help with this love bit, though, until last Friday, when I went down to Ralph’s Breakfast and Din-Din and ordered a cappuccino. I was going to order a coffee, but cappuccino sounds so much more sophisticated and rich. I also ordered a blueberry muffin. I had to say that rather muffled. ‘Blueberry muffin’ sounds much less chic than ‘tea and popovers’, if you know what I mean. After I had eaten my muffin, the waitress came back by to ask if I would like some more cappuccino.

So I said yes – to the cappuccino, that is.

She smiled at me. Bright. She giggled. Then blushed.

“Yes! Yes! Yes!” I thought. She definitely was beautiful. Long blonde hair. Shaped like a chime that seemed to blow softly in the breeze. My heart started to pound, my head spun a little, and I felt like a million praying mantises were jumping around in my stomach.

That had to be the sign of true love, right? I felt confident, but not quite confident enough to spur the big question on. No, not yet. I would come back tomorrow. Perhaps then. After leaving a twenty dollar tip for my dollar and a half breakfast, I sauntered out into the wild streets of the city like a new man, a calm man, collected and cool, not cold, but just coool. Yeah.

So, as I stepped by the stores in my even stride, I caught a glimpse of my shiny teeth in the store window reflection, my shiny teeth with a big, bright, blue berry smooshed tightly, but poignantly noticeable, between my two front teeth. The waitress's smile flashed across my memory, and the giggle reverberated in my ear, into my soul, ripping away at my ego, until all that was left was a tiny, pulsating id.

I was too embarrassed to dig out the source of my imperfection right there on the streets, so I decided to head straight home. As I turned around, I almost knocked over the girl of my libido.

She smiled.

I smiled.

I kept my front lip pulled over my front teeth.

She giggled and blushed.

Perhaps she had rushed off from work just to see me. Perhaps she quit her job because her boss wouldn't let her leave, and she sprinted for me, with Romeo and Juliet searing through her mind, like a wild untamable willow tree, each branch swaying the words, "Love, Love, Love" over and over, until her body could take it no longer, until she felt those same million praying mantises jumping in her stomach, until she was swept up in this fit of passion and rushed to sweep me off of my feet.

I was instantly in this euphoric trance, rhapsodized into the Rhadamanthys, this deity of the nether world.

I smiled bright.

Her eyes streamed down my face, and in utter horror, beheld the big, bright, blue berry screaming from my teeth for freedom, and as the words, “What is a girl like you doing in a place like this?” ventured forth from my heart, the berry flew from my teeth and clung to her right nostril.

Of course, I expected a scream. I expected her to holler for the police. I expected to be locked up in jail for life for raping her right nostril with my undigested imperfection.

What I got was a naïve response revealing a total incomprehension of the events that just seemed life threatening: “Hi.”

Because she hadn’t noticed the blueberry, I asked her if I could walk her home. She nodded enigmatically. I say enigmatically instead of enthusiastically not because I didn’t think she was ecstatic at my proposal, but simply because I wasn’t sure of myself. When one looks into the face of undefiled beauty, all one can do is wonder. And all I could do was wonder about her work, about her life, about her soul, about that little berry now stuck in her right nostril.

We walked silently, but her breathing was altered by the berry and her smooth, sweet breathing I was sure she possessed was turned into a tumultuous sound much like an ictonyx, or a wild hyena during mating season, or some such horror as a rhinoceros being forced to blow his nose, rhythmatically with each step home. Each romantic thought that flashed across my imagination was blown away like a helicopter leaf in a hurricane, spinning it around and around and around, teasing my heart until I could bare it no longer.

So, you see, to get the berry out of her nostril, I thought to suggest it ambiguously. I said, “Uh...have you ever noticed someone’s zipper down and wondered if you should tell them?”

She giggled.

Not quite the response I was hoping for.

“I mean..uh..well, are you busy tonight? For dinner, I mean?”

After all, how often does a man run into a beautiful lady twice in the same day? As the crude Americans always say: “Don’t look a gift horse in the mouth!”

So, she said no, that she wasn’t busy, and that she would love to go out for dinner. Now I was getting somewhere. That night, I picked her up in my Chevy (Chevette) which I either muffled in a cough or half-lied by saying, “My vette’s outside.”

She climbed in, lifting her knee-high, white dress, and turned to me with a smile.

I blushed.

‘I don’t belong with her,’ I thought. She needed a guy with muscles, with pizzazz, with brains, with good humor. I looked up at my reflection in the rearview mirror. Well, okay, maybe I was the right guy.

I looked back at her. “So, does The Olive Garden sound alright to you?”

She said nothing, just looked down and blushed. Then I realized I hadn’t actually verbalized my thoughts.

“Does The Garden Olive sound alright to you?”

“You mean The Olive Garden? Sounds perfect.” She nodded quietly.

Then, in horror, I noticed that berry, still clinging desperately to her nostril.

Was it possible she had not noticed?

Was it possible she happened to get a different berry stuck in her nostril after removing the previous one?

Was it possible she was mocking me, keeping it stuck there as a reminder that I was the one with the imperfection I merely passed over to her?

No! No to all of these! I would not stand for it.

“You look like you are about ready to sneeze. Would you like a handkerchief?” I asked, pulling one out from my pocket.

She nodded no, but smiled still, completely ignorant of her tiny flaw, her large imperfection, her gargantuan berry slowly pushed out, now sucked in, pushed out, sucked in, like a pendulum with each breath she took. It sounded like wild ostriches in battle over a large chaw of meat. Or do ostriches eat meat? No matter. The one they were fighting over now was fatty and raw and bloody and they craved it, they thrived for it, they longed to devour it like a parched nomad seeks for an oasis, even an oasis mirage.

We arrived at the restaurant in quiet conversation. By quiet I mean nonexistent. Or perhaps we spoke to each other in our thoughts. We both glanced at each other now and then, she giggling and I straight-faced, trying to shake the berry from her nose with my mind, with my evil stare.

The night did go well, though. Oh, the night had its occurrences. Like when the waiter tripped and spilled our steak, raw and bloody, all over my lap. Or when the berry finally gave way with a sigh from my date and planted itself down my shirt, slowly rolling over and over, making its way down my chest, over my stomach and fitting quite compactly into my inverted belly-button. (My innie was a curse from my birth, I knew it!) And there were other small incidences. But the one I should probably note to you was the incidence driving her home. We pulled into her driveway, and she leaned over to kiss me. So many thoughts flashed through my mind. My

imperfection. My view of this sweet, innocent girl sitting beside me, with lips puckered and eyes closed. I thought, “Perhaps I am just being ridiculous. Perhaps minute imperfections really don’t matter. Perhaps I better kiss the girl.”

So I did.