

World aflame

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I light the candle next to my bed as I do each and everyday and have done since the very first time I saw you.

The match catches the wick and you become real again, in the minor width of a flame your world is so small, but you never complain.

I remember the first time I saw you. I remember the way you looked over your shoulder at me because you knew, for the very first time you *knew* I could see you.

I haven't been able to think straight since. How many times does something amazing and fantastic happen like this?

I don't understand how you became trapped there and I don't know if you could tell if you knew. To live in a flame, to have such a small world...

He sits and watches the candle next to his bed, chin in palm, elbow on the drawers upon which he has set the candle. His eyes are glazed and the only sign of life is in the flickering of his pupils while they dilate and contract in time with the flame.

I haven't gone to work again. I'm probably going to lose my job. I don't care.

I just want to sit here and watch you. I hate the thought of not giving you life, I know when there is no candle you are in the darkness and it gets so hard to breathe! I am just doing what I think is best for us. I can say *us*. Can't I?

It has been two whole days now since he went to work. He has left the house once.

To buy a large supply of church size candles from town. He got some looks carrying the almost bin liner sized shopping receptacle but he doesn't care. You can tell just by the dazed expression that the man has got the worst case of love-struck-itis.

Looks perhaps like he is putting together a candle lit evening for his lady fair. Looks

like a romantic at heart. It will be candle lit. It will be romantic.

I know that there will be some people who would me crazy, I don't care, they haven't seen you. Not that I ever would give them the chance. Your mine. I keep you alive and watch you live and grow and I never ask much do I? All I need is to see you.

*Yes Charles*

?

And now there is confusion. He has two lines of thought regarding the lady fair. He sees her so he suspects she must be real. She lives in a candle flame so it's a very real possibility that she isn't real. But she just spoke...

What happens when the left side of the brain and the right side of the brain after coming too a rather rickety conclusion are given cause to entertain a third possibility? That something that has no business of being real, is?

*Don't worry Charles. We don't need anyone else. Do we?*

"No" he leans closer to the flame, drinking of her face and figure etched in amber and auburn.

And so it continues. He eats, sleeps, bathes...and lights the candle. Everyday when he awakes he checks she is there. He carries her into the bathroom to watch him

shave. After that he takes her downstairs so they can have breakfast together. He smiles around his mouthful of toast as she shimmies and shakes in her flame, his eyes never leaving hers. After that if the weather is fine they may sit in the back yard a while. It's not unusual these days for him to draw curious glances from his neighbours, after all, how many times have you seen someone sat talking to a candle?

I can't believe my good luck for you coming into my life. I haven't known a lonely day since you arrived to stay by my side. I don't know what I would do if I lost you. I guess I'd just about rip my own heart out, nothing would be worth living for.

What's your name?

*Belinda...*

And so he lost his job. As good as he was there wasn't any way the manager could see his way clear to granting him special leave for personal circumstances, not after three weeks had elapsed with no call, no word as to whether he was living or dead. Many a man would have despaired as to what possible future there was without a job and no financial means, candles alone cost him a small fortune. He looked to the candle for more than adoration now, he wondered if she had any of the answers, if she had a solution to the problem he now found himself in.

All day with you, everyday. Paradise. A few more weeks and there won't be any more money, don't worry my love, I'll stop buying food. You'll be alright. I promised didn't I? Love can sustain me my beautiful Belinda, I, your keeper, guardian and betrothed will always be here to open the door between our worlds.

If worse comes to worse I'll eat the stuffing from the mattress, it should be filling, not at all tasty but I really couldn't care. It'll quiet my belly.

*I love you Charles.*

And so the vigil continued. Two more weeks finds him withering and almost frail. A shadow of his former self. No one calls to see him anymore, they have come to learn that there isn't any point. They have also come to learn that he is on a fast track to hell. An acquaintance he had held for 13 years spent 10 minutes in his front room with him while he watched the candle, until the silence and the smell drove him out. The house was unkempt, as was the man. He could no longer afford such amenities as soap. Not at the expense of a candle.

There are bugs on the walls now and litter on the floor. The man wears clothes that were last washed almost four weeks ago. The only thing about him that seems alive and refreshed are his eyes, they blaze with a ferocity and love that only the truly devoted or demented can attain.

*Do you want to be with me Charles?*

My heart leapt. Is it possible? Can there be a union between us. Can we be together?

There is nothing here for me Belinda. If you can take me then please, don't dally, I feel my heart muscle paperthin now, I am weak for you. Ready for you. I have but one candle left.

With any major dilemma there will always come a major solution. We see the shell of the once virile and upwardly mobile man set about the final tasks, in this world at least.

Belinda has given him an answer. She has told him how they can be together. It will surely mean death but he isn't perturbed by this, his body starved and poorly looked after of late is willing and ready to make the leap of faith required.

The last church candle has been lit...

*Into the fire Charles.*

I know it'll hurt. At first anyway. When I am fire as Belinda is then we will bond in heated ecstasy whilst the house falls around us. When the fire is no more then we will disappear. But we will disappear *together*.

The entire house has been prepared. Wadded balls of paper and pages of magazines scattered hither and yon as the catalyst to take the house. He would have bought petrol had he any money left. His last belongings, the half candle and the box of matches. He will set about lighting the paper balls, each giving Belinda the energy to come closer, close enough for him to touch?

*Make me warm Charles.*

She dances for me. Only for me. We will become man and wife aflame.

The paper balls share their heat, the carpet catches fire, next comes the wallpaper,

then the settee, noticeably there is a seat cushion missing, he ate this the week before last. It was also the last thing he ate. Water was still free and that's all he had taken in.

The house became smoke and fire. He watched and waited. The candle melted into obscurity and he waited for his Belinda to come forth and take him.

*Here Charles...* "Over here"

His failing heart trip hammered in an unsteady rhythm, there, even after his fears that she was nothing more than an illusion, he fell to his knees.

"Belinda?" He sobbed, his heart ka-thudding painfully.

"Yes darling" She knelt down to him and took his head into her arms.

He turned to kiss the inside of her bicep and his eyebrows caught fire.

"Shhhhh. It won't be long. Are you ready Charles?"

He was more than ready. He was smiling up into her ethereal face through his burning eyes and his heart stopped fighting. This was peace. This was an end to pain.

Belinda knew her time was short. She held him for as long as there was fire to give her substance. Always the end was so cruel. Always she hoped and dreamed that one day she would have her hearts desire. She had really thought he was going to be the one. In her momentarily real body Belinda wept, her tears running down Charles's charcoaled cheeks to run the course of the smile he had had on his face when he had died.

“Maybe next time” She kissed his forehead, not sorry about what had happened, more melancholy that yet again happiness had been snatched away at the last moment. She had liked Charles a great deal and she knew he had felt very powerfully for her. It just wasn’t enough though.

The front door was kicked in as the cavalry arrived. It made little difference at this point though. The house was a gutted ruin and all but the smallest flames had disappeared. Belinda returned to the flame. It seemed that for now it was her home again. She had no need of firemen and she certainly didn’t want to see Charles get carted off like an unwanted piece of bracken wood.

Maybe next time she thought as she turned away from the scene and went back down the golden corridor to the room of lights to look for her next hearts desire.