

## Sweet-Smelling Lion

by  
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I knew I was in love with him the summer of my sixteenth year. It was not an adolescent crush. It was wanting for him every good thing that he wanted for himself and hoping to help him to make that happen. His name was Leonard. He used to say that his name was from *leo nardus*, sweet-smelling lion. He would often comment that he worked at being at least sweet-smelling because he was not lion-hearted. "I am a weird wimp with no balls," was the way he usually described his method of relating.

Leonard seemed always to have been a part of my life. He was our paper boy for a time when I was a child and my grandmother's as well. My first conscious memory of him was as crucifer at the Corpus Christi procession when I was in Grade One. He and two other young men who were acolytes were priestly in their bearings in the eyes of my six-year-old self. He would later describe me as the "prettiest little girl in Grade One when I was in Grade Eight." I always retorted that I wasn't sure about prettiest but I was surely the tallest. I felt plagued by my height on those days when I was a good head taller than the tallest boy in my class.

There was a lapse of several years when I saw Leonard only on a few occasions. My mother explained that he wanted to be a priest so he had gone to a special place to study. I really didn't think of him after that except with incredible awe. Imagine being one of those who could bring God among us, who would always be God's very own. He was going to be special. Much later when I told him this he said, "Yes, touch not my anointed means that if I fall down you have to pick me up with a shovel."

I did see him for years on the Fourth of July. All the churches, Protestant and Catholic, marched in the town's parade on that day. After a colour guard of mounted police, the priests and priests-in-training marched at the head of their parish group in Roman collar or black tie and in the regulation Panama hat with black band. Catholics were determined to prove that they could be both good Catholics and good Americans and the Fourth of July parade was a public statement of that. The smiling Mr. Broughan waved to all along the route.

There were several pecking orders connected with this parade and the picnics which followed. In the case of my parish, girls in the summer between grades seven and eight were expected to serve food in the Big Tent, the territory of the Ladies Aid Society. My grandmother was among the most respected cooks in that association and so the summer on the verge of my thirteenth birthday, I got lessons in serving from the right and removing food from the left, and never ever scraping dishes at the table. And as luck would have it, I was assigned to serve Mr. Broughan whose dinner was free of course, one of the perks of dedicating one's life to God's service.

I watched his impeccable table manners from the corner of my eye wondering where he had learned them. "We were such uncouth dummies our teachers took nothing for granted. They drummed table manners into us big time. Thank God for that civility," he eventually explained to me when I asked him where he had learned to eat his food with such skill and decorum. I remember how he mused, "Most priests wolf down their food like pigs at a trough. How can they preside at Eucharist with any dignity when they can't relish an ordinary meal?" In his greater maturity he connected liturgical circuses with this fast food mentality. But that was years away, that sultry July day in Philadelphia.

It was the summer between Grades 10 and 11 that I knew I loved him. I didn't have the words for the differences between infatuation and authentic loving but I did seem to know intuitively what they were. We were told horror stories of priests and nuns who had forsaken their vocations or never answered them in the first place. We were also told that when a boy and girl got into "trouble" it was the girl's fault. She had more "control" than the male. Control over what was never explained. But young women soon learned that they were responsible for the moral living of males as well as their own.

Who was I going to tell about this love? He was headed for priesthood. I couldn't tell Leonard, I couldn't tell my confessor, I couldn't tell my parents. I was simultaneously terrified and gratified by these feelings, by the special warmth that his being generated in me. I didn't tell anyone and kept reminding myself that he was God's alone.

Leonard was a frequent visitor in our home after his adored and adoring mother died. My mother and his sister were friendly and my mother picked up the slack of the loss of his beloved parent. His father had died long before this. He would come for meals and sometimes would bring seminary friends to our home and to our parish centre for a game of cards, or pool, or bowling. Then my mother and I used to put out the snacks and beer for those visits. He would help out around the parish when he was at home and I did, too, more occasions for relishing his company.

He always asked how I was doing in school. I was usually first or second in my class academically and

he seemed proud of my accomplishments. He came to my high school graduation party with two other seminarians. I was surprised and delighted. The following year he was to be ordained a sub deacon and then deacon and priest. It was just after my high school graduation that he began to write to me. The first letter came just after my eighteenth birthday.

I regret that I didn't keep those letters. I destroyed each one of them two or three days after I answered them as I have done with almost all of my correspondence over the years. I remember his letters as rather pious at first, filled with quotations of things important to him, new ideas, and funny stories of things happening to him and his friends. There were some allusions to stories about his professors which he shared with me personally when he was at home but never revealed in writing. He was a great story teller and an even better mimic.

Just after my nineteenth birthday and shortly before the time he was due to be ordained a deacon, the letters took on a new intensity. It was the custom to ordain in early December and then the young man served as deacon in his parish for Christmas Mass. The following year he was ordained priest. It was the months before his ordination to the diaconate that the qualms began to appear. He worried about the petty despots among so many of the pastors under whom he would be expected to serve. He doubted his ability to put into practice all that he had learned that priesthood would ask of him. Later, much later, I would learn that he was terrified of the number of practising homosexuals who were in the priesthood.

Then came the letter that I felt was coming. He wanted to leave the seminary. He was going to chuck it all and come home and "work" for a living. I should perhaps have mentioned that these letters to me and mine to him were coming through an intermediary. This kind of correspondence was completely proscribed. Any letters had to be placed unsealed on the desk of the priest who was his spiritual father. Nothing else was permitted. There was a handyman in the seminary who had become a kind of father to Leonard. Leonard told the man how much he needed to write to me and the man willingly sent his letters to me and took mine to him. He must have been an extraordinary man. I never met him. He was risking much to help us to keep our friendship alive. I marvel now at the absence of my own usual scrupulosity about such things. What was I learning even then? Perhaps I was learning that rules that hampered the enhancement of our humanity deserved to be broken.

I remember taking that particular letter to church. I knelt with it at the altar rail and prayed, "Oh, God, I know that he is Yours. Leonard needs to be Your priest. I dream at times of the life that he and I might have together otherwise but I know it cannot be. I will love him all the days of my life and his, but help me now to write what he needs to hear and wants to hear, that he must be Your priest." I remember that there were no tears but a calm and a certainty about this priestly vocation of Leonard's. I know that I wrote him to that effect and our next meeting was after mass at Christmas when the Reverend Mr. Leonard Broughan greeted me warmly and with moist eyes. We went on to an after mass sing song which the organist, a mutual friend, had each Christmas Day, which finished over scrambled eggs and bacon, before we returned to church to sing at the 5:00 a.m. mass. Leonard was to help with Holy Communion at all the Christmas masses.

Leonard came back at Easter to help with the assorted ceremonies. By then I was acting as sacristan in the parish. The sisters who had done that work for years had decided against doing it any more. I took over, training altar boys, decorating, scrubbing marble, putting the Altar and Rosary Society to work in a way that it had not been used in its hundred years of existence. One of the things we were going to get ready for that year was Leonard's first solemn mass. I wanted it to be perfect.

One day I arrived home from work to find an obvious invitation in Leonard's so identifiable handwriting. It was to his priestly ordination. I was aghast. I knew how very few invitations each deacon had and pondered what his family would say. I thought of refusing so that he could give my ticket to someone else and then I decided I was going to be there. I had the right, and in some ways the duty to be there. What his family thought would be their problem, not mine.

I remember the day, a bright, glorious Pentecost Thursday. I remember the procession into the cathedral of those to be ordained. I was not prepared for the pain that closed my throat and pounded at my heart as the candidates for ordination prostrated themselves at the altar. I was in physical agony and extreme mental duress. "He is Yours, forever, and ever, please," I prayed. And then selfishly I thought, "At least he won't ever belong to any other woman." Little did I know how many women there would be in his life and how uniquely each would "belong" to him and vice versa.

The rest of the ordination is a blur. I was invited to the family breakfast after the ceremony in a rather seedy restaurant. "I told Margaret [his sister] that you were invited or I wasn't coming," Leonard explained quietly to me. Forty-five years later she still doesn't understand my love for Leonard. I don't think she ever tried.

There was so much more over the years, crises of one sort or another, joys at some academic successes, a twenty-year teaching career which launched many young men into top positions in industry and even some into priestly life, adventures with Benedictine life, a pastorate which "failed", in the eyes of his cardinal archbishop,

our mutual joy at Vatican Council II, and finally a decision to join the Carmelites for their purported prayer life. Strangely, perhaps providentially, this decision resulted in his eventually being posted to within a few miles of my home in Canada where I had moved shortly after my marriage. I was widowed by then. He had buried my husband, my mother and my father. We had some pleasant times socially and professionally. We had some wondrous laughs. Our lives which had begun in each other's back yards as it were, ended in each other's. Yes, ended.

A year ago today, this Christmas Eve, Leonard died while I was away in India. A fax reached me there on the 26th. He had been hospitalized two weeks before that with a heart attack. While in hospital he suffered a massive stroke that left him blind, unable to speak, and paralyzed. Tests indicated that he had brain and liver cancer as well. At 2:45 a.m., Christmas Eve, 1998, Leonard went home into the arms of God. He was a month away from his seventieth birthday. Just before I left for India we had a surprise birthday party for him. He had told me that he planned "to be 69 forever" and so we made that the theme of the party. Little did we know what we were predicting.

I am in Philadelphia this Christmas Eve. I have just re-read these pages prior to dinner with two friends. They are so dispassionate. So little of what I really felt and feel is here. I am reminded of Emily Dickinson's observation that "after great pain a formal feeling comes". His dying has caused and continues to cause me great pain.

He chose to be buried in his Carmelite habit in a place far from here in New Jersey where he spent many happy days in the first fervor of his life with this community. I visited him there once. He made Baked Alaska for dessert that night. He became disillusioned with that life. Once when he was putting himself down and blaming himself for not being a better member of his society, I began to weep uncontrollably. I said, "Leonard, I have loved you since I was sixteen years old and it hurts me when you talk of yourself in this way. Please stop." He looked at me and wept. I took him in my arms the way I would a small child until his sobbing stopped. "That has been my whole problem all my life, Katie. I really can't believe that I'm lovable."

I did keep one of his letters, one that he wrote me immediately after the above incident. He thanked me for inviting him not to shrink from being loved. I think he meant that.

I was well into middle age when I read something that put all the intuitions of the value of my loving Leonard into words for me. It was in a book by Chaim Potok, the title of which I am forgetting at the moment, but in it a blind rabbi says to his son, whose love is unrequited, "Never be ashamed of loving. It is an even greater gift than being loved." Yes. It is.

Leonard believed that dying was like the slap the baby gets when it emerges from its mother's womb. It is a movement into a new and different kind of life, another way of being. I heard him preach this again and again at funerals. I'm not sure anyone preached it at his. With all my heart I hope that this has been his experience.

Philadelphia, Christmas Eve, 1999