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Mr. Noah Webster, always a fast man with a word, gives several definitions in his famous book for Passion. Among them are the following: "Ardent affection for one of the opposite sex; love . . . sexual desire; lust . . . an object of love, deep interest, or zeal."

Naturally, we have no idea how much time Curtis Casewit gives to the study of his dictionary. But within the space of a few pages he has put together an unforgettable bit of fiction which does more to define passion than anything Mr. W. could come up with in a month of Tuesdays!



TRANSFUSION

By CURTIS W. CASEWIT



WARMTH in the air; sunshine felt through the still closed lids; tires humming a tune on the remote mountain road. Slowly she awoke (Paul, Paul! Where are you?), her eyes opening, kindling, turning toward him. *Him.* "Hello, Paul."

Silence.

Suzanne's check bones were aglow already. "Hello! I slept.

How long did I sleep, Paul?"

Paul didn't answer. His left hand held the wheel while the right rested on the seat-cover beside her.

"How long did I sleep?"

"An hour. Two. What do I know?"

She gazed at his hand and at the patch of light playing on his veins and at the tiny hairs. It was like

a hypnosis, this hand. Her fingers slid toward him. She felt his fleet-wish to withdraw.

She shuddered.

(Paul, please! Come back!)

Presently she turned her head. The Alpine scenery was unrolling itself as if from a spool: below, the mint-colored valley; a toyland of houses; miniature cattle grazing amid a blue splash of flowers.

Flowers. "Look, Paul!"

She gazed at his face: deep lines from underneath his eyes to the angular jaw. A shadow of ennui.

Flowers, losing their petals. No — no, I mustn't.)

"And over there—" (She hadn't given up.) "Please, look! The snow is steaming, Paul. Why?"

"Why? Why?" he mimicked. "The heat, of course. Melts the snow. The last snow." He turned toward her. "It melts, like everything. Everything passes."

(It melts. Like everything. Everything passes. Oh God, Paul, why do you say this?)

The car climbing; the constant swish of rubber on asphalt. Trees flitting by. Young trees. Saplings. And higher up: dead trees.

She asked him why the trees were dead and he said that storms killed them. In his curt way he began to elaborate on the storms: how the heat brought clouds and how these clouds gathered — all because of the excessive heat — and how all at once jagged

lightning struck the trees. . . .

He went on driving, quietly. Suzanne pondered about what he had said. She began to grasp the meaning of his words: the melting snow, the dead trees: a melting of her three-day-old marriage, and its death. They had known each other for a whole year; he always wanted her; waiting, he had been good to her. She had held her senses back, yes, accumulated her passion, as it were. Their marriage then — and the dam broke loose, its boiling waters drowning him. Ah, he spoke of drowning! The dam was by no means empty.

Her eyes went on watching him. How she loved the unruly blond hair, the muscular neck. She stared at him now, at his shoulders, the strong naked arms. And his hand.

His hand. She wanted to touch it again. Temptation tore at her. For an instant she fought, then yielded. His hand curled into a fist. The wall of silence wedged between them.

After a while: "What is it, Paul? Oh, please, what is it? I feel it now. What have I done? I'm crazy about you —"

"Too much perhaps."

She had not heard him; he had breathed, not spoken these words. Besides, there came the sounds of cowbells from outside her window. She saw mountains again and glaciers, far away, as if at the end

of the world. They were on a dirt road now. Furious serpentines; a summit, seen, unseen. Little lights kept dancing in her eyes; she edged closer again, sliding her hand under his arm. Her warm breath was on his cheek again.

"Suzanne! You mind? I'm trying to drive."

Haze over the peaks ahead; menacing clouds sailing above the haze; curious patterns of light and darkness on his face. Two anguished miles on a plateau; two miles down, curves, curves.

Flames again.

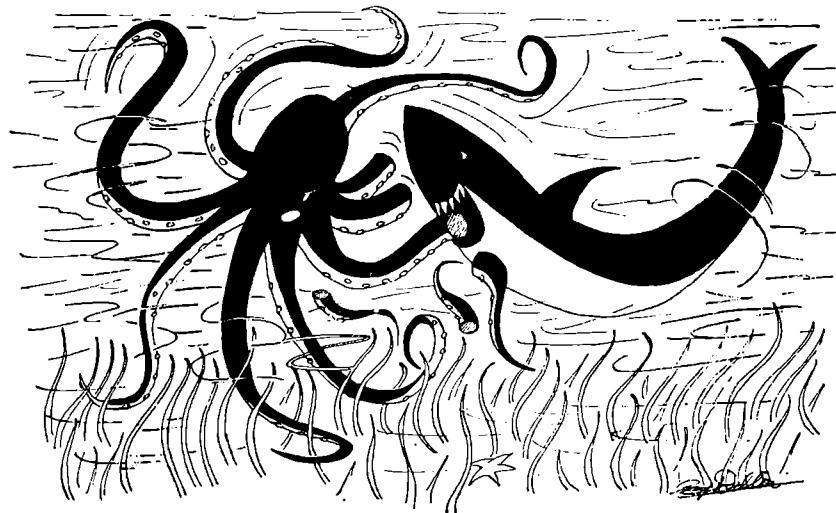
Control yourself. Even higher flames, longing, clutching at her.

Suddenly she leaned over him; kissing him on the mouth.

It all happened within a split-

second: he jerked his head to the left, then to the right, unable to see; and now his eyes closing and hers still open: the speedometer plummeting to zero. He kept at the wheel frantically, but the scenery had already burst into a dozen chaotic fragments, like the vision from a banking airplane, and amid a fracas of glass and metal she had the faint consciousness of the machine careening down the hill.

When Suzanne came to, her lungs were filled with dust and the strong smell of gasoline. She felt a numbness in her bones and the blood trickling down her arm. She tried to move and was overcome with horror that she couldn't. She managed to turn her head and found Paul. He was lying at a



"She loves me, she loves me not . . .

distance and breathing heavily.

Her lips quavered. "Paul . . . Paul!"

The sound of a church bell came up plaintively from the valley. Otherwise, everything was quiet.

She heard a gasping sound from his throat now and saw his hands, his hands clawing the dried grass underneath him, his chest heaving up and down.

The wind came up, and then a first raindrop followed by another one. Rain. She slowly found the strength to prop herself up. Where was her shoe? Ah, there, a yard away. She crept to it and put it on.

Seat covers ripped to shreds; pieces of chromium scattered around him. He was coiling in agony. A film of sweat and water on his forehead, his chin quivering, his hands still boring themselves into the ground.

"Wait, Paul. Wait! Get you a blanket. . . ." She staggered to the car and pulled one out. It was raining steadily now; she heard the drops on the automobile, felt the chill through her silken blouse.

"Here. Under your head, Paul."

He winced. She grasped for his pulse; it was weak. Gurgling sounds from his throat; the heavy breathing from his chest.

All at once fright crawled through her, spread within her bosom like a spider, like a huge spider trying to get out, invading her skin now. She shivered. Blood was leaving her head. Dizzily she

left him, climbed up past the car through boulders and dwarf pines, up to the road.

On the road she shrieked for help. But there was no one. Mountains resembled the bellies of wild animals; pitch sprayed over the sky.

When she got back to him her legs were shaking.

His head lay very still now, the blond hair on the soaked blanket. She knelt down and opened his shirt. Her hands trembled and water dripped down her fingers. She lowered her ear into his chest. His heart did not beat anymore.

She sought his pulse. "Paul, Paul! Answer me!" His pulse was quiet; his face all waxen glossiness. She thought of a cigarette, fumbled in her pockets for one, and



"May I trouble you for a match?"

sheltering it from the rain placed it between his lips. She lighted it twice, with jerking motions. The cigarette fell from his mouth, soggy.

Frenzy beset her then. She was shaken with tears. As if dying herself, she leaned over the inert body, clutching his hand. The dam opened, the floods sprang forth: she was burying her head in his chest now, passion swept over her again, every fiber of her body went to him now. She stroked his hair. Desperate tenderness. She cradled his head in her palms; she gazed at him as if seeking his very depth — his missing depth. Before long she was covering his wet face with kisses. Her lips parted, her eyes closed, she went on doing this, again and again, murmuring things.

All at once she felt a remote movement of his pulse. Then a flutter, and presently a clear beating. At the same time, ever so lightly, his chest began to move up and down. With rapture, she buried her ear into his open shirt: the first stir of his heart now. His eyelids trembled, then opened. Her lips rushed over them.

“Paul, Paul,” she babbled.

And then the sensation. The sensation of her own heart beating slower, slower, still slower, as if it might stop altogether; the feeling of her whole body emptying itself, and the drained remainder

leaving her too. She felt the stiffening of every muscle and the sudden gooseflesh on her skin. It was like a trance, icy, uneven. And now the heartbeat in her ears . . .

“Come,” he whispered.

She had heard him. She did not move.

“Come,” louder now.

She could not respond. She had given all of her very self to him while reviving him; now there was nothing left but the hollow specter of her ardor.

She had risen and stood over him, aloof. She saw him writhe toward her, his eyes widening, the mouth gashing open, his body coming to life, trying to rise now, hands groping blindly. Gruesomely distorted, she met her own glowing self in him.

That — that was her?

“Come, little dove, I want you —”

The sting of his nails in her arm. His thumb, viselike, held against her. His hot breath was on her cheek until she jarred herself loose, fleeing.

“Suzanne! Come back!”

She didn’t understand. As she ran, fright ran with her and her heart was missing every second beat — the heartbeats she had given him.

Finally she stopped. The sky was a dirty rug now, and at a distance glaciers shone again like sharpened guillotines.