

# Taller To-day

By Edith Kirby

I suppose that stalling...will not make much of a difference, so...because the fact that what happened happened...happens to...I think I'll stop here while...okay, I'm going to...I know I'm going to end up telling you everything eventually, about love, about her...eyes, and laugh...she would laugh...ridiculously hard at things that weren't quite funny...it might just be me...but, Joseph Heller, Voltaire...wouldn't make her laugh...and then I'll start talking about...the...do you ever feel like going into a large crowded area, some urban... vicinity, and...yelling, "I love you" to the whole crowd all at once, or sometimes individually, hoping that someone will affectionately return your love, and you'll be able to drop everything at that time and forget all your past loves and run away that one beautiful someone?...because I don't either. That can be a rhetorical question.

This is what I need to show you. I really hope you'll like this...but don't read into that...

This is Auden. Auden's poetry...is...great...these are the collected works as...selected by Edward Mendelson...who...I don't know who he is...but...he's brilliant...obviously...page thirty-three ...*May*...the name of the poem... "May with its light behaving stirs vessel, eye and" there are better ones in here...so I'll read...*A Walk After Dark*...this is good..."A cloudless night like this/ Can set the spirit soaring/ After a tiring day/ The clockwork spectacle is/ Impressive in a slightly boring/ Eighteenth century way"...it's so pretentious...it's...I love it.

Um...anyway...at the time I was...well...a lot of things...but...I was...studying literature... at Columbia University...in the city of New York...and, if you're going to study past your bachelors...don't...don't study literature...I did...but, please don't do it. Why would you want to interpret and reinterpret literary masterpieces that have already been beaten to death by pretentious nineteenth century scholars who said things like "Well, I believe the *Aeneid* of Virgil is biblically allegorical under the guise of Homeric principles"? But...I studied literature...and I don't necessarily regret it. But...I don't want to talk about that...um...

She...I might as well give her a name now...she has a name but...her name is Jill...Jillian...Jillian Warner. And she was beautiful...um...I was twenty-three and she was twenty-one...she was studying engineering...talk about pretentious, especially at Columbia...and, um...

When we met...it was perfect. I mean...in retrospect...if there was a love song playing...and if our eyes rose in slow motion...we would have been in an Academy-award winning film.... just for that scene. We were in the library right off of 114<sup>th</sup> Street...and I'm going through my daily readings of literary criticism on...Thomas Hardy...it was *Mayor of*

*Custerbridge*... and as I'm reading about deterministic disputes on Michael Henchard and worrying about my next three...page...written...response...

Sorry...she was fifteen feet away...at least...from me...and...reading some advanced Calculus or engineering book on finite mathematics...and...our eyes meet...she looks down...I don't...which might've been creepy...but...uh...no, it wasn't...she looked so happy...and her eyes were...perfect...

As you can probably guess, it was love at first sight. Not love...but...fervor...no...that's, that's too sensual...anyway, we were friends...we became friends from that meeting...Me and Jill. Or Jill and I...or...She lived in an apartment with three roommates on Riverside Drive, five blocks from my apartment, and generally we used to meet at some time in the evening when we were both tired of stuttering...studying...speaking of stuttering...and...we would just walk, and talk, and...it was wonderful.

She had these deep blue eyes that were so telling. She would smile with her eyes. And for the first few months I knew her she would never frown with them. Her hair was...she was absolutely gorgeous. We never...it's funny...we never got into any conversations with one another about past loves or friends we had had earlier in life, but I think...um...I was...I had to be her only love. It's funny how much you can know a person without being able to recite or list off facts about the person.

I met her in September of that year. And in February we started to officially be involved in...a relationship...of sorts. It was snowing...again...a perfect, cinematic moment...that anybody would want...she...snow is slowly coming down...we had been walking for an hour or so...and we both stop and...consciously peek through...some branches of this tree...looking at the streetlight in focus. And we just stayed there...for as long as it took for us both to realize how like-minded we had just proven ourselves to be. That's when you know you've met her...when you establish this deep...um...connection that...if you put words to it...might ruin...something about it.

Well, anyway, despite the short amount of time I had been dating Jill, I loved her. That's also really strange, when you hear yourself uttering those words...what with love...and...how silly and fickle it is...there are a lot of things better than love. Horseback riding, for example...I hate horseback riding, forget about that...snow, snow is better than love. When it snows, all the children walk out on the sidewalks when school is cancelled, building snowmen...and throwing snowballs at grumpy men, their mothers come out with hot chocolate, fresh off the stove...snow is better than love. But, the first time I experienced snowfall after Jill...um...even though it was five months after...I hated it.

She...uh...called things off, so to speak...one of those, 'it's not you it's me' monologues on the value of independence and the mutual appreciation of a long lasting friendship, despite the clarity I offered her when I told her that I needed her, that she was a source of beauty and...encouragement to my otherwise...literature-filled life. That was May. May twenty-third.

The past few weeks had been strange, what with finals and her getting and not getting into graduate schools, or whether she wanted to work for a year...or...I don't know...

Her old roommate called...me...last August...saying that there had been an accident...one of those massive off-roaders had hit their Mazda...and...Jill's father was in critical condition...and Jill had died instantly...from the impact...

She had actually died a few days earlier, the funeral was in California the day I found out...I was working that *summer in the City*...so...

That's just pitiful...she was the one to cut off connections with me that summer, and I wasn't allowed to grieve her at all...because to her parents...everybody else...it didn't matter that I was in love with her...um...but...not be able to say anything...and to grieve passively...it feels like...

Auden. I'm telling you, when you feel miserable, it's Auden who'll help you out. *Funeral Blues*: "Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,/ Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,/ Silence the pianos and with muffled drum/ Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come."

I'll skip down to the fourth stanza: "The stars are not wanted now: put out every one;/ Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun;" Dismantle the sun...great line...sorry..."Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood;/ For nothing now can ever come to any good."

That's page fifty of the Mendelson selection. W.H. Auden. Wystan Hugh Auden. Jill gave me this book. For...Valentine's Day.