

ON LOVE

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Clare Cunningham

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“She comprehended the perversity of life,
that in the struggle lies the joy.”

- Maya Angelou

ON LOVE

CLARE CUNNINGHAM

CHAPTER ONE

Unconditional Love

No Borders

Prospect Park with Sima. The flowers on the trees had not bloomed yet and were full of hope and life to come.

Sima took pictures of me and Julian, and she posted them on her newly formed instagram account.

We made signs with her friends for the occupy wall street protest. I remember the train ride over feeling so powerful and infinite.

Sima had her 20th birthday party at my house.

She was a butterfly dancing in the wind.

After the party she put a random yarny blanket over me that she found in my mom's room and picked me up while she set up an air mattress on the floor. Then she picked up the blanket and tucked me in and set up a movie for me and Julian. It was some type of animated Christmas movie, the name is escaping me.

She fed me, she played music for me, she drove me around New York City in our aunt's old car which ended up being towed, she babysat me and picked me up from acting class when I was a little 7 year old, she wanted to hang out with

me on weekends even though I was a little seven year old to her grand 19 year old self.

She limited my screen time, like a mom would do, and cooked me healthy meals when I stayed over at her house in Chicago during the summer, like a mom would do. She didn't need to do all this, she had no obligation to me, she wasn't my mother, yet she loved me like one anyway.

She always held my hand even though it was clammy. She spent 3 hours once unknotting my hair after it got all knotted in the ocean.

She didn't care when I clogged the toilet, she didn't care when I constantly messed up chords in the song we were playing, she didn't care when I accidentally crashed into her with my scooter and visibly hurt her; she didn't care.

CHAPTER TWO

Crushes

The Beginning

Quiet, nonetheless so exciting

The way you walked up the stairs made me shake

Only two dates and I'm swept away

"Relax" you whisper and take my hand

Guiding me in that gentle way of yours

Butterflies flutter in my stomach

You never worried about what to say, you simply said what you were thinking, something so simple, but rare.

You're so phlegmatic

I wonder where it comes from

Your past is as much of a mystery to me as your future

Most of you is unknown to me

I want to know more about you

I fidgeted with my hair in the mirror wanting to be perfection

You were leaning against my brick building as soon as I walked
out of the lobby

Hi!

Hey

I blabbed and you listened

You are forever listening to me

When I jumped I hurt my foot but I couldn't have cared less

Nothing mattered to me in those moments except you

So many neurons were firing in my brain when we were together.

Each stage was as exciting as the one before, each stage bringing
something new.

Every moment with you was unforgettable

Strong, unfaltering, unmistakable; solid iron.

A Stare With A Thousand Words

The day was overcast

I am a body

in ripped boyfriend jeans and a big beige raincoat

Entering the grand library

He stares at me wide-eyed

His eyes told a story in a second,

They spoke to me in

clear English

As clear as the sky when the clouds faded later that day

I questioned his story

as a myth

He kept it under the radar,

as if the two of us were screaming and jumping around and
no one else but us saw it

Only after,

when the story his eyes told was transcribed by time,

and I was confronted with the truth when my mom analyzed
his stare

as the witness

Was when I understood everything

You're rude, you're mean, you're competitive, yet still, despite it all, I have a crush on you.

Dear Cat,

I want to sit by the river and watch the water lap over the rocks with you. I want to climb up on the hill with you and watch the sun rise and set every night. I want to run around the house and play catch with you forever. I will go out and frolic in the field and catch mice for you. I want to climb trees with you. I want to lap milk from the bowl with you. I want to take catnip together and go crazy. I don't care if we're different species. Who says dogs have to be with dogs and cats have to be with cats. I am a dog and will fully and boldly profess my love for you, cat. I know I only just met you cat but I can't stop thinking about you. Forgive me for being so sudden and frank with my love for you but I can't help it. I can't help noticing just how awesome you are.

Sarah and I rode the train together. I used to giggle with her constantly. We used to smile at

each other on the train and she would listen to my wacky stories and laugh loudly and her eyes would crease and seeing her smile would make me smile. I always had a small feeling that maybe, just maybe, she had a crush on me. I know in my life I probably will never bring it up with her. Unless we someday happen to both be at the same party, and I end up getting a little too drunk, and I utterly spill my guts to her and tell her how I had a small but worthy crush on her.

I know I'm going to college in the fall in Ohio, far away from you, and that at most this will be a summer fling, but what a fun summer fling it would be.

CHAPTER THREE

Obsessive Love

Love is a mental illness

You lose your common sense

Against everything that makes sense, love persists.

You forget your main responsibilities because THEY become your main responsibility, your purpose

Willing to put it all on the line for that one person

Despite it all

Isn't it absolutely magical then,

When the other person likes you as much as you like them
(At that point it's pure wizardry)?

And you don't have to worry about them liking someone else because you know they love you too and you can finally relax

How I long for you to like me like that

and how it hurts when you don't respond, when you seem like
you couldn't care less when all I think about is you,

I changed my sleep schedule for you

My day is centered around you

And the hoops I go through to seem like I don't care, all to
seem cool to you

It is taking all my willpower not to call you 20 times

To run over to your house and pound on the door and scream
your name until you open the door

Cheers to being weird and creepy and stalkery

This is for you.

Boing

Snapchat from Jake

I got so excited every time your name popped up on my phone. I'm not sure what drove my obsession for you. You never called me. You never asked any questions about me. You never wanted to talk to me. You couldn't have cared less about me. You weren't even nice to me. You gave monosyllabic answers to everything and then asked me to do your homework for you. I liked you anyway. I spent 365 days snapchatting you, dreaming about who you were and what you were like, thinking about you in classes. I changed my schedule around for you. I slept during the day, and stayed up at night just so we could snapchat back and forth. I was deliberate with every snapchat I sent you. You always sent me pictures of the ceiling, or wall, yet I would always send you selfies of myself that I spent a minute taking. I wanted you so badly. When I finally told you how I felt about you, after I was so vulnerable with you over text, you didn't even have the decency to respond. You couldn't have even typed one thing. That's when I knew that you weren't worth it. That's when I knew that we were done.

CHAPTER FOUR

One-Sided Love

Edges

I feel like I'm moving at 100 miles per hour and you're moving at 2. Timid passes, conversations at the sand bar, and no further. Your lack of effort is quite alive. Our pulse started out 60 beats per minute and never got faster. You are lingering with me. You are on brinks, on cliffs, on sides, on edges, but never in the valley with me. If you are inside with me, we're in a two-dimensional shape. Never 3D. Why don't you want to know me? Why don't you want to take what we have, and multiply it? Why does the word rush have negative connotations? The word rush insinuates that you are late, that you need to catch up and thus you are moving fast. But I think rushing is wonderful. Because rushing is exciting. I want to rush with you.

CHAPTER FIVE

Self Love

Scary Things

You are lying with me right now, in a field, with no predators here because they don't even exist.

The dark scary monsters never even existed in the first place. It's your imagination running with you. His name is Demetri and he's trying to scare you. That's your anxiety talking, remember that it isn't real. We are surrounded by the beautiful green grass that billows in the wind, wrapping us in its kind blanket. The forces of nature are always with you, never against you. You are you, I am I, and we are together and that's all that matters now. Remember that this is just a moment, and moments don't last forever. Moments are fleeting. Every moment is a new moment, a new chance to make something new.

CHAPTER SIX

Admiration

No pretensions,

No evil games,

A placid lake in the mountains

A breath of fresh air

Speaking,

Laughing,

Listening.

Just you,

Being,

Existing,

And ingesting the data as it was given,

No transcribing or sifting.

I met you and immediately I liked you. You were constantly impressing me with your sedate, logical manner. You didn't seem to have a filter over yourself, like so many people I feel do seem to have. No one seems to say exactly what they mean. Except you. You were proud of your accomplishments, and neither were you trying to be humble or brag, you just said things the way they were. You seemed content with yourself. You seemed comfortable with yourself and I admired that so much. You looked at things with an objective eye.

We were watching tv together and there were skateboarders skateboarding on tv. “I don’t skateboard, I just think it’s cool to watch.” is what you said. I remember thinking about what you said and being impressed by it. You were direct. You were observant. We went to the deli to buy some snacks. They didn’t have what we wanted there so you biked all the way to Duane Reade 12 blocks away to buy some snacks. I admired the way you ambled through life in the unworried, unhesitating manner of yours. You seemed comfortable with yourself. I loved sitting with you on your couch and laughing with you. You didn’t raise any red flags for me; you gave off non-competitive vibes, kind vibes, which I appreciated. You seemed confident in yourself and down to earth and honest. You didn’t seem needy or wanty. You were receptive to my feelings. I liked how you were socially aware like that and that you cared about my feelings.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Moving On

Bare Minimum

My finger hovers over the unadd button

I let conventions become formalities

You gave me the bare minimum

I Poured my heart out

And it disintegrated into a sea of lava

Hiding in the nooks and crannies of my brain

I am living in a house

With a picket fence

And two kids

And a dog

Somewhere in the suburbia of America

With you

But not anymore. I no longer imagine a future with you.

If he gives you 2 give him 2

Instead of jumping with glee when he responds to your text or says thank you, jump when he treats you to dinner, or takes a rocketship to see you

You never asked me about myself and you never wanted to see me

Pitfalls, excuses, your ceaseless conventions

Unadd you,

I did

With the passing time of us not interacting comes paling hope. My hope has lost its color and vigor. A springy hope that jumped around is now slumped in the corner. You are standing in the road in the rearview mirror of a car I'm driving that's steadily going forward. I see glimpses of you on my phone everyday, in the snapchats you send, but that's the only thing keeping me tied to you. While most of you fades from my memory, I will never forget how you made me feel. I wake up every morning with just a glimmer of hope, that one day, one day you will reappear in my life.

I believe in true love. Yes, that corny thing that they talk about in movies and young adult novels written for confused and heartbroken kids who've had tragic lives and the hope for true love is the only thing that keeps them trudging through this minefield we call life. I believe in true love just like I believe in magic; I believe that anything is possible, because technically, anything truly is possible. Because there have been moments in my life when I've met people and my heart stops, on a machine it would look like the normal up and down zig zags and then a line. I believe that true love can happen more than once. I believe that there is that one person who you are meant to be with. But I believe that there is also another person that you can be with too. There doesn't have to be one single person. There are many who would work for you. Love is open. Love is messy. I also believe that there are many people who are inside the door and the other person is the key. I truly believe that love can be that perfect. I believe that one person can mold into the other without a space. I've also learned other things about love through what it feels like trudging slushy 18 and a half years of life. I've learned that normally if you have mixed feelings about something that isn't a good sign. It probably means that they aren't worth it. They have to appreciate you. For who you are. Don't let your circumstances gauge your self-worth. Just because you were born in a poor family and got a bad education doesn't mean that you are not worth it. And there is always, always, time to improve. If you are willing to get that A, you can get it. Don't jump at the first opportunity. Don't jump at the first person who wants you. Just because

they want you doesn't mean you have to reciprocate. If you don't like them that is okay. That is completely okay. I believe that voicing these truths into the tundra will someday ring loud enough that they reach a human being and that human being truly internalizes these messages because I believe that voicing is the first step to change. That voicing things about love, pointing them out, will help guide them. Recognition of these truths, voicing them, is key to change. Because people will hear me give out this advice, and of course they'll have to learn it their own way, but having it in the back of their mind can help them.

Many wonderful people that you meet in your life tend to come and go like *butterflies* making their once-in-a-lifetime migration. You pass each other in each of your migrations, frolicking for a bit, dancing around one another, until the winds of life blow you apart, and you are off on your own paths again, and your diaphanous wings can do nothing to stop the winds blowing you apart. The winds are inevitable. Which is caused by the earth's tilt, which is caused by the earth's rotation, which is caused by the gravity of the sun, which is caused by the universe. If you had the opportunity to stay close, you would.

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Praise for Clare Cunningham

“Interacting with Clare Cunningham is an exercise in knowing oneself more deeply. She walks among us as an incredibly funny, beautifully silly person who is a gifted conversationalist... only to later reveal that her true nature is as a prolific performing artist, a stunning writer, and a person who is tapped directly into the nuances of emotion and feeling. In On Love, Clare allows us to see that she takes in the world with the keen observations of a poet, and has a unique ability to understand humanness in its most stripped down, raw form. Clare’s intricate stories and recollections take us on a journey that expounds upon the magnificence of her own humanity, and ultimately brings us closer to ourselves.”

- KATE DETRICK, SAY Director of Confident Voices

“My goodness. It is not often in this world that you come across people like Clare Cunningham. A razor sharp wit combined with an enormous heart and a gleaming intellect, Clare is an extraordinary writer and human. Filled with warmth and humor and love, she seeks to change the world with her voice and her kindness, and knowing her - she’ll do it.

Her groundbreaking book. On Love is truly like nothing else I’ve ever read. Through blackout poetry, stream-of-consciousness freewrites and dazzling poetic meditations, Clare expresses with urgency the feeling of being alive and in love as a young person in this world. Turn to any page of this book and you will find something of deep value; allow yourself to read it in its entirety and you’ll find yourself changed for the better. This is a remarkable piece written by a remarkable poet.”

- AIDAN SANK, SAY Artistic Director of Confident Voices

“Clare Cunningham is truly one in a million. She is the kind of young woman who can split your sides with laughter while she challenges you to think a little more deeply about your life. Her zest for life is contagious. Whether you spend 5 minutes or 5 months with her, it is abundantly clear she is destined for greatness. She shares her voice and spirit in such a relatable way and the world is absolutely a better place because of it.”

- COLLEEN O’CONNOR, SAY Teaching Artist

“On Love by Clare Cunningham is an honest and vulnerable expression of one person’s journey into the complex and dynamic arena of love. Her meditations on the subject awaken in the reader a sense of nostalgia for young romance and provides a captivating glimpse into modern day connection. Clare’s creativity and artistic voice leap off the page, allowing us to feel as though we are with her in every line; the mark of a true writer whose pen is destined for the page. It has been my sincerest pleasure to have had the opportunity to work with this brilliant and beautiful soul.”

- MIRANDA DI PERNO, SAY Writing Mentor and Teaching Artist