

Puppy Love

Larry Moffitt
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Puppy love is more than just a test of your gag reflex. God invented it.



This little blogito began on an Amtrak train stalled in Philadelphia Station. The polar vortex had downed some lines north of Trenton. A conductor strolled by and I heard his radio say "... *squak... crackle... sixty to ninety minutes...*".

"We're gonna miss our meeting," a guy across the aisle says into his cellular. The thought of an entire train full of people, hundreds missing meetings, made me weak in the knees. New York City is going to come in way short on meetings today. Attorneys will go to bed hungry tonight. Curse you, polar vortex!

However...

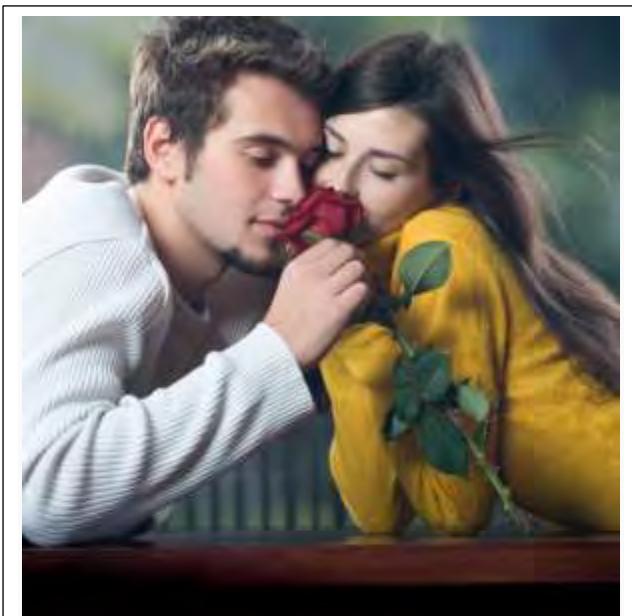
On a dead train you hear things that are normally drowned out by the rumbling wheels.

One of those things, two actually, are directly behind me. A man and woman in the grip of the onrush of love's intoxication, are giggling and kissing big – kisses that sound like Tom Sawyer slapping a paint brush against fence boards. It's great. Skyrockets explode, waves crash against the shore, locomotives go rushing into tunnels. Sigmund Freud lights another cigar.

Puppy love builds a cocoon around a couple and time loses all meaning. The continuation of our species will not be denied.

The guy across the aisle glances at them, then looks at me and rolls his eyes. I don't commiserate. I am in the presence of the ground floor of love and I must be respectful. Yes, it's messy, lacking in dignity, and not for the faint of heart. Don't shout at them to "get a room," or hose them down with shaved ice. This is the preamble to happily ever after. It greases the DNA skids, so to speak.

(The following is actual dialogue from the train.)



Juliet's SIGH of approval on young love:

"This bud of love, by summer's ripening breath,
May prove a beauteous flower when next we meet.

Good-night, good-night! as sweet repose and rest"

Come to thy heart as that within my breast!"

"I love you too, poopy head."

"How much do you love me?"

"This big" (Don't jump to conclusions, it could have been anything.)

"(giggle)"

I know this taxes your ability to refrain from puking, but remember, God invented puppy love for good reason. And not only is it necessary, but the more improbable and storybook-like it is, the better adventure it makes when you tell your grandchildren.

Picture this...

You're at a farmer's market. You're hungry for apples. You and he, on opposite sides of the fruit stand reach out, and your hands touch the same apple at the same time. You look up, your eyes meet. And you *just know*.

Here's another...

You're the owner of a rare dog, an Appenzeller Sennenhunde. It's a misunderstood breed, a working dog, very protective but often hostile to strangers. You've been given an impossible CIA mission that will keep you out of the country for six months. (You're being sent to Australia to teach the Ozzies how to be nice to Americans, if you must know.) Your dog has already bitten all your friends and nobody will take care of him while you're gone. Your heart is sick. In the quiet of, for example, a stalled train in Philly Station, you strike up a conversation with a nice girl next to you. At some point, you tell her about your dilemma.

Her eyes light up. "Hey, I'm a Sennenhundista too," she says, and shows you a dozen pics of her dog on her cell phone. "I love that breed. I'll take care of him for you."

Turns out she lives in your same apartment house. You're both single, and looking. You both have the same mythic god tattooed on your left cheeks (not your face cheeks). She **bakes** bread. You **eat** bread. *Omigod! and... and... on and on and on it goes...*

Whatever God was thinking when he... she... invented the emotion of falling in love, I would love to have been there.



*Why it's so hard to teach Ozzies to be nice:
"So I asked him, say mate, you know why war was invented?"
and he says "No, why?"
and I said "To teach geography to Americans."*

I'm telling you God lives for this stuff. God never does it halfway. God never phones it in. Every time you meet God, the sleeves are rolled up and there's dirt under the fingernails. Love is all God thinks about, and that's why love jumps up and bites people a zillion different ways every day.

Big fat puppy love actually has a function. Learning how to love takes a lifetime. What separates a saint from a selfish S.O.B.? Somewhere along the line, the saint learned how to love others. The puppy love stage is not the only entry level grade in the school of love, but it is a common one.

The first stage of a rocket is the most powerful because it has to overcome inertia and gravity, and put your ship of love most of the way into orbit. That's what the first rush of giddy, stupid, puppy love does. Loveologists in white lab coats tell us the "in love" phase burns hottest for about 18 months, at which time a more solid steady-state love takes over to smooth out the hills and valleys.

Various other shades and temperatures of love kick in when their times come. Having been initially boosted into a high orbit by that intense first rush, you live two lives as one and grow old together as you circle the earth together forever and ever. Amen.

You may be thinking, so what about the love St. Francis and Mother Teresa have for humankind? Their love is all about unselfish caring for the eternal spirit of others. Their love was probably never frisky or puppyish or romantic. Well, we don't know, but as I said there are other ground floors in the school of love, some of which are purely about caring for others in the service of God. But even for saints, love was a learning process and they started somewhere.

There is children's love for one's parents, there conjugal love between a man and woman, there is the most sacrificial final level of parental love. These loves have existed in every age and culture. It's how life continues.

But for 21st century urban humanity, blithering romantic love is a phenomena that I believe God uses to bond couples. I further believe that God participates in human love. Someone oughta write a book about it. Actually, they have. Lots of books in fact, and songs, and poems, and movies, and paintings, and ballets, and operas and father's throwing suitors out of their daughters' parlors, and ecstasies, and gunfights, and sighs and laughter.

I'm not saying God is happy with all of this. But he... she... did invent love and passion. And meant for it to last.



*Forgive my idealism, but if you make good choices
and you catch a break or two along the way,
love's passion can launch your happily ever after.*

The highest love – that which gives of the self completely for others. This is where love ends up. Puppy love is one of the beginnings, and it's all a continuum. God's continuum. Later on, when you and your life mate go on to cure diseases and rescue nations, it is because your foundation in love began somewhere, and over time grew to be rock solid and deep.

So don't sneer or scoff at the slappy, schirpy, syrupy couple behind you on the train, no matter how much you're tempted to smack 'em upside the head. I don't think God is all work and no play. If you can be on good terms with puppy love, you will more closely resemble God.

Bill the Bard's Romeo and Juliet are so hot their honeyed verse caramelizes on the page. It's as over-the-top as love itself is. Why does love so often translate into poetry? It's because love's first rush

isn't "reality." To lovers, gravity only barely exists. Love makes its own weather, and it doesn't come from your head, but rather from the place where you dream.

Steel yourself, I'm going to conclude with a poem that rocks my planets. This one works best if you read it aloud quietly, maybe a couple of times. Really, do I seriously think you're actually going to read this aloud to yourself? Yes, of course I do.

How Do I Love Thee? (Sonnet 43)

by Elizabeth Barrett Browning

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of being and ideal grace.
I love thee to the level of every day's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
I love thee freely, as men strive for right.
I love thee purely, as they turn from praise.
I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints. I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life; and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.