

Hate and Love.
a collection of short fiction



J. A. Svercek



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For Marissa.

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“Odi et amo. Quare id faciam, fortasse requiris.
Nescio, sed fieri sentio et excrucior.”

- Catullus

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One.



“Youth would be an ideal state if it came a little later in life.”

- Herbert Henry Asquith

I dream of anarchy...

Knees shatter by daybreak in a place like this
On a hillside built from plaster and wine,
Chains forged from the grip of plastic smiles
Pierce lungs and wrists like fishing line

Cast into the murky depth of my next door neighbour's
Eyes watching from the slit of a white, white blind
And handicapped by secrets like onion skin fraying, praying
To monuments of hedonism.

I swear I am losing my mind.

Shackles shapeshift cleverly in a place like this
Close tightly around my Achilles' heel, slicing deep
Into tires and pumps, inhalers breaking stagnant air
Hanging over cliffs as hollow as they are steep

Prices rising, full moon over pocketbooks tearing
Masks from ugly pretenders who are not as pretty as you
Dreaming of cardboard roles, click, click, flash, the camera
Is mercilessly catching me on the edge, ball and chain

Five inches from jumping.

Hands reach across aisles inches apart in a place like this
Linked pinkies to rings and ring fingers stinging
From having been robbed of slow sunsets and the bloodred
Rush of a million hours screaming complete ecstasy,

In slow-mo, missing fractured moments before they happen
You are caught in a winding cycle of
Paralysis, dementia, schizophrenia, dream quietly
For in a place like this I cannot touch you

But find my mind too close to believing.

By night the air is fierce to compensate and
I dream of anarchy and graffiti skies.



Valentine's Cards

Remember
in elementary school
when it was safe to give
Valentine's cards with
"I love you" and
"Won't you be my Valentine?"
to other boys because they
didn't have cooties?

I spend the day
thinking about the little gay boys
and little gay girls who were
left
with these
torn, badly-taped, wet with spit
cards, deciphering the
handwriting with a flashlight
under the sheets and wondering
what it all meant.

Lighting Up

I pretend I am invisible
when I make the run for
(battery) cocktails, lemon-
flavoured (soap), and
hors d'oeuvres twisted off with wire.

Let's have a party, clinging
to ceilings, wet and breaking,
where I can drink in the glow of
your face lighting up with
fire.



Stockholm, 1973

My walls, pallid against
My skin, sing of Atlantic
Buoyancy and krill
Clinging to anchors.

How hollow saplings
Await hummingbirds,
Twigs growing from
Imaginary trunks.

I am a million humming-
Birds, all lifting an old
Sky and fighting nativity
For my parish of captivity,

Roots growing around
Scars, warm as quilts
Stitching tight without that
Sour pity of charity.

Cadavers

He did not like thinking of coming or going or anything at all. He lived in a place where words were shrunk before they were eaten, and people talked quietly and ate nothing at all. He had breakfast with skeletons, and in this mausoleum it was easy to pretend that time was frozen in place.

By day, he and the other cadavers were paraded before the living, who dissected them with their eyes, and nodded and smiled, and understood absolutely nothing at all. They peeled away his pale skin carefully, inspected his files, and when they left tore away his muscles as a souvenir.

“We don’t want you.”

Every time, he collapsed in a heap of bones, and his skeleton was taken away in the hopes that he would regrow his flesh and his pride and stand before the examiners a little more weary...but a little less afraid.

He grew to love the inspections, the pain of the scalpel cutting away his defences, because maybe...just maybe...they’d take along his bones, too, and he could move again without the fear of being torn apart.

Every night, as the moon glowed eerily through the cracks in the wall, he scratched softly in the bedpost another day, and prayed, “Please, tomorrow, somebody take me away.”



Why We Stay

Your knuckles are smoking like a
wailing train,

My shoelaces are sinking in rough
terrain, like slugs melting in
thunderstorms coated with blue rust.

And I am, yet,
and you are,
here.

If I have dreams, what I remember
are the pillars knotted with fear,
up and infinite against the sky.

So if I could lie one more time:
there are things that I cannot
hold in my palm, but if I could
I would tie them round my pinkies

and never let go.

The .grape.flavour.of rainbows

She sets out to caress granite walls,
Chipping away with toothpicks at the
Angry cracks, and I

Have rubbed my palms raw
Scaling skylines to see
Her pry

Open strangers' jaws
With stories
About why

You can't lick the grape flavour off rainbows
No matter how hard you try.

But I see her struggle to swallow
The lead in enough empty paint cans
To colour the world red, and I

Plow battlefields, row
By row, to see if the land
Has buried her sighs.

I am not brave enough to grow
Something in the sand
From my

Ear canal, when I laughed at her trying to feed the world
With pieces of the sky.



Self-contained

I do not have
the power
to be so self-contained

As you when you pluck
the heads off daisies
and watch them
tumble from your
fingertips.

Their story is
tragic in your
head—

Their petals are
moist on your
lips—

(and)

You tell me that they
taste like honey, but
I know better.

I know they taste
like the shattered window
panes in your
eyes,

Like the paper bag
you buried
(not so) secretly
next to our old dog
(who wasn't really old)
because you miss tagging along to
the grocery store,

Like the awkward
boy down the street
you held hands with
and almost kissed
because you are intimidated by
the cute ones,

Like little girls,
fragile girls,
who die off like flies and dreamers,
every one clutching something bitter

Like crushed daisies,
because they are more fragile than you.

