



What Love Is

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Taitto ja kansi: Books on Demand
Kustantaja: BoD · Books on Demand, Mannerheimintie
12 B, 00100 Helsinki, bod@bod.fi
Kirjapaino: Libri Plureos GmbH,
Friedensallee 273, 22763 Hampuri, Saksa
ISBN: 978-952-89-4036-4

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Prologue: Bob

Julia is lying in the cottage on an old spring bed. The bed has sunk into a pit in its old age and creaks and squeaks like a mouse or a ghost hiding under the bed when you turn sides. It is still almost dark, the grey mist of the November morning can just be glimpsed through the windows, which have no curtains, only a beige hand-crocheted lace cape. It had cost a lot, 700 marks. Julia plans to tear it down, with its holders and its clothes, and take it with her when the moment comes when she knows for sure that she will never set foot on this riverside again.

Julia doesn't know why she is awake. She feels clammy from a cold sweat, even though the heat in the cottage has faded. The fire must have gone out in the stove. Her pink top is stuck to her skin. She sees nothing but the misty clouds hovering outside the window, squirming like restless ghosts before dawn, trying to creep in between the logs and under the door. The black tree trunks stretch out their bare branches that look like charred hands.

Julia opens her eyes. A man approaches her, who is not a man, but a creature from the edge of the twilight. The creature crawls towards her. A wicked grin. Long grey-brown shaggy hair like lichen. It spreads its arms and leans on them, swaying and hovering like a devil above the woman, pinning her to the mattress, to the trap. Julia starts screaming. It's Bob. Bob from Twin Peaks.

Chapter 1

1. Once Upon a Time

A little girl is walking on the soft sand of the Terijoki River on the shore of the Gulf of Finland on a sunny summer day. Her long skirt is wet with seawater, and her dark brown braids sway as she takes dance steps. She is happy about the beautiful new doll that her father had brought from St. Petersburg. Her father always brought gifts when he visited Vyborg or St. Petersburg. In the morning, her mother had hummed as she brushed her hair and told her that on his next trip, her father would take them with him, and they could visit the Round Tower of Vyborg.

Years later, Alina is a beautiful young woman. She is walking in her high heels on the market square of Vyborg and meets a handsome Russian soldier, to whom she smiles seductively with blood-red lips. By mutual agreement, they go hand in hand to a nearby hotel.

2. Good Girl

Little Julia sat on her uncle's shoulders wearing a pink fluffy faux fur coat. She was cute with brown curly ponytails that her uncle's friends admired. Her uncle used to take Julia with him to the schoolyard sometimes to meet his friends, and Julia found it exciting but lovely. She hugged her uncle tightly by the neck and pressed her head against the back of her uncle's head, glancing at the passers-by. Julia was a shy girl. Her uncle was a handsome young man, and everyone said he looked like a Cossack with the features he inherited from his Russian father. Julia had never seen her grandfather, because her grandpa died after being hit by a car on his bicycle before Julia was born.

Julia was a shy and good girl. Every parent's dream. Beautiful and witty. She immersed herself in the stories in books and had adventures in other times and worlds. Her father had a large book collection, shelves full of fascinating stories. When Julia learned to read, she chose a book with the scariest possible title, *Sparkling Cyanide*. She read it secretly in her room but was disappointed because the story was boring and no one died in the first chapter. Agatha Christie hadn't yet made much of an impression on her. Later, Julia, like her father, became interested in science fiction, and devoured space adventures. *Childhood's End* and *The Sands of Mars*. She decided that she would go into space one day and, floating weightlessly in orbit, look at the blue planet from the window of a shuttle. Like Princess Leia.

As a teenager, Julia began to rebel. She became wild, disobedient, and impossible. She started putting on makeup

secretly in the forest on her way to school. Boys became interested in her and she in boys. Julia told her parents that she was going to her girlfriend's house for the night, but the girls ran away to the city to a disco with black eyeliner on their eyes and blood-red lipstick on their lips. The girls always got some older friend to get them a bottle of cheap wine, which they drank in the forest. They smoked cigarettes, and Julia snuck her first cigarettes from her father's Virginia pack. She told her father how the name was supposed to be pronounced in English. He learned his lesson, after all, his daughter got straight A's on her English exams. The shop clerk did not understand and stared at the man with a strange look.

Julia was working at her father's pulp factory for the summer. She was sweeping sawdust in a large engine room, and the machine was constantly spitting out more and more on the floor. Endlessly, like in a limbo from which you can never escape. She waded through the sea of sawdust and met Aki, who was the most beautiful boy Julia had ever seen. Long black curly hair, a beautiful face, like Jim Morrison. They threw their brushes to bury themselves in the sawdust and secretly slipped away on the roof. They sat in the sunshine in the shade of the chimney and smoked cigarettes. That summer they went to a rock festival together and slept in the same sleeping bag in a small tent. Aki asked at night:

– Should we do it now? Fuck?

They didn't do it. Aki's small tent was so cramped that it swayed from side to side when they tried to turn. The guys outside laughed and encouraged them. They didn't fuck; they just kissed. They were sixteen years old, still innocent for a while.

Julia was put to piano lessons because her mother had read somewhere that playing the piano activates the brain and relieves stress. It only increased Julia's stress and anxiety. The teacher was an old woman with a stern look who poked Julia's wrists with a ballpoint pen if her hands were not in the right position. The woman slapped the blue sheet music on the girl's fingers if she pressed the wrong key and caused disharmony. Julia practiced the Christmas carol *The Earth is So Beautiful* night after night at home, gritting her teeth and crying her eyes out, so that she would dare to go to class and play harmonic notes. She played it at the elementary school Christmas party, dressed in a short dark blue velvet dress with a white lace collar. Her long hair was combed into braided buns over her ears like Princess Leia in *Star Wars*. Julia played through three books of music from Aaron's piano school, from blue to green, from Beethoven to Mozart. The fourth part, brown, was left halfway through because the teacher died. Julia told everyone that her piano teacher died of a stroke because every time she poked Julia with a pencil, her veins would bulge blue.

– I guess I killed her.

Julia did not become a famous pianist for concert halls. She hadn't touched the piano in years. She loved drawing and painting. She loved reading. As a teenager, she fell in love with rock and roll and rockers. Her favourite TV show was *Twin Peaks*, starring Bob. Bob was a scary, shapeshifting creature who fed on pain and sadness. Bob, with his shaggy hair, became the face-changing man of Julia's nightmares, inside of whom lived all the men and their evil deeds.

Julia wasn't always good, and sometimes the naughty girl inside her would bubble to the surface, even though

she tried to stop it. A two-faced girl. If her younger siblings or the Down brothers with developmental disabilities who lived nearby were bullied, she would get angry and turn from a little pigtail-headed girl in suspenders into a bad girl. She hit the neighbour's big boy, the neighbourhood bully, on the head with a red plastic shovel, and the wooden handle of the shovel broke. One summer day, large concrete rings had been brought to the edge of the neighbour's garden. Julia deliberately pushed one of the rings onto the slope. As it went, it tore down all the flowering apple trees like a sudden landslide. Julia ran to hide in another neighbour's backyard to throw darts with the boys. All the children were interrogated. Julia wondered aloud with her green, innocent eyes wide open:

– Terrible! Who would do something so crazy? It must be Kimmo. He always teases me and everyone else. He stole a lollipop from the store yesterday and he smokes cigarettes in the forest.

The culprit was never found. Julia snuck a cigarette from her father's cigarette pack. She had also stolen a lollipop from the local store, sneaking it into her pocket while her mother was talking to the saleswoman. It was exciting, after which she felt relieved. That evening she slept in a tent in the backyard with the neighbour girl, Marita. The girls giggled until sunrise, and Marita whispered:

– I know how babies are made. A man and a woman lie naked on top of each other.

Julia was horrified by the image and said, pretending to vomit:

– Yicks! That's disgusting. I will never do that.

Sometimes her mother sent little Julia by train to Helsinki to visit her great-aunt, Alina. Alina's husband, Erkki, was an old sea captain who liked to joke with Julia and tickle the giggling girl. They had no children. Olga brushed Julia's long brown hair and said that Julia had inherited her appearance from her mother, who had once been famous for her beauty in Terijoki and even in St. Petersburg.

Julia slept on the living room sofa. When she woke up in the morning, she was surprised to realize that her pyjama pants were down to her ankles. Uncle Erkki was standing at the end of the sofa, smiling. He was wearing a bathrobe, which was open enough to show his penis. It was strangely erect and sticking out from under the robe. Julia was embarrassed to have her private parts exposed. She thought her pants had accidentally dropped during the night.

Alina and Erkki had a summer cottage by the lake, where the whole family was invited to celebrate Midsummer. As the guests were happily drinking sparkling wine, Erkki quietly led five-year-old Julia to the lakeside sauna and lifted her onto the bench in the dressing room to stand in front of him. Smiling, he pulled Julia's red shorts down to her ankles and tickled the girl's genitals. The front of Erkki's pants suddenly bulged. No one noticed anything in their party mood. Let's light the bonfire! Wine in the glasses, cheers to Midsummer!

3. Juliet Wants Romeo

It wasn't love at first sight. Or maybe it was. A tall, vaguely handsome, dark-eyed boy came to sit next to Julia at the table in the student restaurant. He had uncombed black hair and a grey, shabby sweater, but something about his shaggy appearance lingered in Julia's brain. She wasn't attracted to sleek, neat men with ties and short hair cut at the barbershop. A man had to have edge, rock, and ruggedness. She remembered the black-haired Russian Dimitri, from whom she had escaped during her beauty queen days in Helsinki. He also reminded her of a young actor Julia had briefly dated. However, the time wasn't right.

Julia had just returned from the United States, where she had been an exchange student for a year and lived with a family that took her in and taught her the ways of the country. The previous summer, Julia had been on adventures in London and had done naughty things in her teenage rebellion, such as drinking in pubs, falling in love, sleeping with a boy and losing her virginity in Camden Town. Among the decent church-going American teenagers in high school, she felt like an experienced woman and an old soul.

Julia was again a good family girl. At least for the most part. She went to church on Sundays because that was part of the deal. It had nothing to do with faith and God-related stuff. At church, people met up with friends, ate donuts, played games, laughed and gossiped. Julia didn't drink or smoke except once, secretly in the basement. The family's

blue house was in a small Midwestern town in the middle of cornfields. In nearby Lafayette, there lived a boy named William Bruce Rose. At that time, no one had any idea that he would become the world-famous rocker Axl Rose, who would compose the legendary song *November Rain*. Julia's survival song.

Her schoolmates gave Julia the nickname Crazy Finnish Girl because she did things that were unusual and sometimes controversial in a promised land of hypocrisy and double standards. Julia was not a child of the corn who killed all the adults, but she walked half a mile alone through a deserted town to school, while others drove in their cars listening to *Hotel California* by the Eagles. A daring act, a strange Finnish girl. During her summer vacation in Mexico, she climbed to the top of the pyramids of the Sun and Moon with her handsome Spanish teacher and drank tequila at a beach bar in Acapulco, where life is hot and humid, while the good American girls slept. Her best friend Kevin had bravely dared to come out of the closet and was openly homosexual, which was unheard of in that pretentious hillbilly corn village at that time. She was taken to the prom by the handsome black football player Kyle, who at that time was still hiding in the darkness of the closet with the door tightly closed. Years later, Julia learned that Kyle had died of AIDS. At a Friday night party after the football game, Julia and her girlfriend Maggie were smoking a joint. The girls sang to Kyle:

– *Voulez-vous coucher avec moi, ce soir...*

Julia exchanged a few words with the dark-eyed boy but turned and fell in love with the handsome Lauri sitting

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Julia's survival story is a mix of rock and romance, love and loneliness. Julia experiences sexual harassment as a child, which continues into adulthood because she dares to be beautiful and herself. On a spring day, Julia meets the Romeo of her dreams, gets married and has children, but becomes a victim of domestic violence for years. She sometimes has nightmares about the scary Bob, inside whom dwell all men and their evil deeds. Julia searches for happiness her whole life. She loves falling in love but doesn't know what true love is. Will she ever find out?

BoD



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