

A Love Story

ff

Couples



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1.1

All my life I've shown up late.

But when I do, I compensate

for my delay – I laugh and preen and carry on
as if I had been present all along.

I stayed in utero, for instance, two
weeks after I was due,

then came out so decisively and fast
I couldn't breathe. I spent my first

night on earth alone inside a tent
flushed full of oxygen, the event

from which (my dad believes)
have sprung like fires all my weird anxieties.

Mostly I can't see myself at all
until I sense in someone else a parallel,

like how I only realize what
I want at the moment I attain it,

my mind the final part of me to know.
I've hurt people I love being so

late to my desires. Last year, I met someone I thought
I couldn't live without, and in the process lost

another, without whom I thought I'd
die. *If I had only realized*

sooner, etc., etc. But I handled things ineptly
and he left. I didn't die. Instead, I went to therapy

and saw the stegosaur uptown, stayed with friends
and drank a lot of tea. Even then,

riding the bus to visit my new lover,
I was breathless always, early almost never.

1.2

She found me in the winter at a bar,
one of those places in Bed-Stuy not far

from Clinton Hill – a platonic meeting
set up by a friend who worked in media

and thought we'd get along. I got there first and snatched
a booth and started reading *Middlemarch*,

a novel I've been halfway through for more
than half my life. When she strode through the door,

*Oh shit, I love that book, I've read it fifteen
times*, she said, and asked my favorite scene.

I looked down at page 98,
open on the table. *Maybe when Lydgate*

*first meets Dorothea, and Eliot's
talking about how the 'stealthy convergence of human lots,'*

*when analyzed in retrospect,
shows a 'slow preparation of effects*

from one life on another,' I replied. *Totally,*
she said. The conversation turned to poetry,

our few mutual friends: one's PhD, one's startup,
one's divorce. I was too skittish and caught up

in my charade to feel, charging the space
between us like a ray, the knowing gaze

of Destiny, which Eliot would say stood *by*
sarcastic with our dramatis personae

folded in her hand. Besides, I practically had a husband –
a man as opposite to her as Casaubon

was opposite to Will. On the A train
home, I read that paragraph again,

then closed the book and marked the chapter,
telling myself that I'd resume it after.