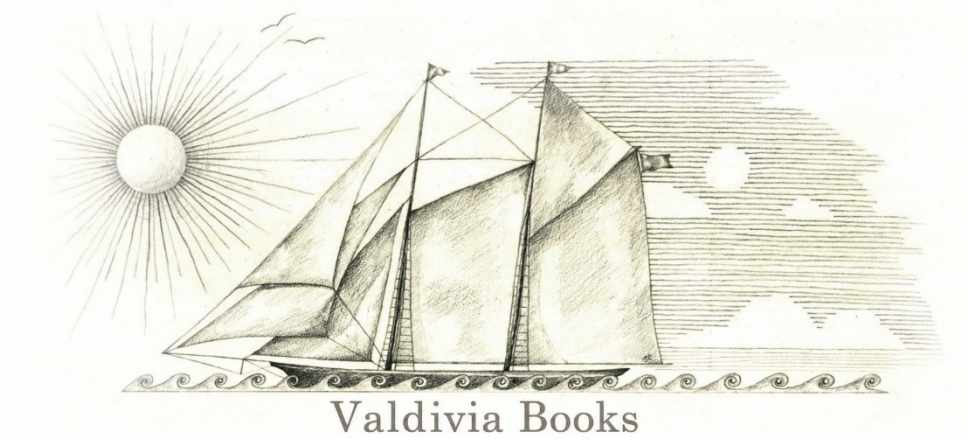


Memoirs of a 20th Century Gentleman

Reading Sample —

Part Four: In A Sense

by

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This sample presents the prose.
Typography and page layout may differ in the published edition.

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April 2011 – A Work of Fiction …?

The following is based on my attempts after a conversation with someone maintaining the position that men cannot write romance. It turns out they may be right! You decide:

"Hello"

"Hola?" He sat up and pushed aside the throw, which hung from nails, acting as a curtain.

The bright sunshine glaring in at him made him blink involuntarily, his eyes trying to adjust to the brightness.

She was climbing aboard, delicately negotiating her way, while the dog excitedly pushed at her for attention.

"Come on Lloyd, let her on before you pummel her for a cuddle"

"Hello Lloyd, hello gorgeous"

She stroked the dog behind the ears. Grumbling with pleasure he shook his head and pushed against her harder, making her momentarily lose her balance, as she perched on the gunwale.

As his eyes became accustomed to the light, he watched the 2 of them with a mixture of pleasure, and to his consternation, jealousy.

"Hey, hey, hey pretty lady – how fares your day?"

She pushed the dog away and grabbed at a large shopping bag and passed it through the doors onto the day bed. He reached over and took her handbag, placing it next to the larger bag, and then tidied the sleeping bag away under the bed, throwing a couple of cushions across where he knew she would settle herself.

"I found the coolest thing today…"

He watched her as she gave her account of her acquisitions of the day; as she bent down to take her shoes off, he watched her with a pride that astonished him. After all, she wasn't his to be proud of – in fact, they were, on the face of it, relatively new acquaintances – friendship was forming, but it was overshadowed by an easy connection which had been apparent from the first moment they met.

It was this thing, whatever it was, that was growing faster than the rest, taking on a life of its own, like an alien virus from a second rate sci-fi movie.

He was more aware of this as he gazed at her hairline at the back of her neck, wispy strands of dark hair, natural and unruly.

Having divested herself of her footwear, she sat up catching his gaze, looking straight into his eyes – he suddenly blushed as a teenage boy might having been caught looking at a girl he secretly fancied.

She recognised it immediately and he could see the mixture of trepidation and amusement in her eyes – neither said a word, just an eternity that lasted but a moment.

He was embarrassed, and that made him angry with himself. He was a man of the world, wasn't he? He knew how to enjoy a woman's company without losing his bearings. He clung to that thought. He simply would not allow himself to fall for this girl—not today, anyway.

He turned away, climbing from the bed and walked across to the oven and filled the kettle. The humming of the water pump cleared away the last whispers of the moment, which, to the relief of them both had passed unmentioned.

As he took a matchbox from the counter, he could hear her rustling through the larger of the bags, rummaging around to find her latest treasure finds, in preference of which gave her the most pleasure.

She was always finding little treasures; it was one of the first things that had endeared her to him, he thought. Standing 8 metres away, lighting the hob, he could see her in his mind, rummaging through the bag, face inside it almost completely, as her long, dark hair spilled over the edges of the large paper bag.

Shit, he thought, I really like this one, and as he did the anger at himself flared up again. As he turned around, she emerged with something wrapped in tissue paper, a broad grin and a look of proud achievement on her face.

"I found this in Jericho" she said as she gently peeled away the layers of tissue paper from the object, before discarding them carelessly across the bed. With sparkling eyes she held out the glass bowl – by the look on her face you might have believed that she had found the Holy Grail.

She was twenty two years old, but had an effortless charm and confidence of someone much older. She had a prominent nose, which should have drawn the attention away from her full lips and beautiful round eyes, but strangely it enhanced her beauty, made her look more real, as if, were her nose any smaller, she would just look like the rest of the beautiful, young girls the City of Oxford seemed to boast.

He walked back across to the bed and took the proffered bowl. Still seething at his own embarrassment, he looked directly into her eyes and gave her his most charming smile. He saw the shot go home as her pupils dilated and capillaries exploded

into a full blush. Good, he thought, as he saw her eyes steel into the same self anger he himself had just felt. As long as this is mutual, I can stay the course – his pride, his ego would never allow him to fall for a girl who didn't feel it too.

But they had decided early on to be just friends – and as obvious as it was becoming that that was, at best, not going to be easy – they both refused to change that deal, almost as a matter of pride and as a show of strength of character.

She broke eye contact and rummaged again into the bag. She threw her head up again suddenly as if challenging him to be caught looking at her again in that way. But he refused and was intently studying the bowl – making the approving noises he expected she would want to hear for her latest find.

We're more alike than I ever would have imagined. We're both point scoring, taking pleasure in each other's unease, while also getting contentment from the time we spend together.

The dog lay on his cushion and watched them, as he always did, dancing their way through this emotional tennis match. He couldn't understand the conversations, but he could read emotion with ease.

He made a loud grumbling sound and buried his face into his body. After all, to him it was all so simple, but he'd long since stopped expecting his daddy to see it that way.