

Rado Antolović  
THE PERFECT BETRAYAL

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# I

## ~ Love as seen with my own eyes ~

*Love is composed of a single soul inhabiting two bodies.*

– Aristotle

I have always wanted to embrace the entire world, climb the highest peak and hold the whole Earth in my arms, squeeze it so tight that you can hear the crackling of the Earth's core. I want to cause tectonic changes. I want to trigger an avalanche with one single hug. And while I'm standing on the top, I want all the winds to flow into me, I want to be whipped by the wisdom of ancient times and not to understand a single word except that which can only be understood internally, for which no knowledge is needed except the trembling of the heart – I want the wind to tell me about love.

And then, when all the stories flow into my ear, when the winds finish the ballad about legends from all corners of the world, when there is nothing else left but love, I want to jump into the deepest ocean, sink into the blue and become water myself.

I am an ocean dweller. In every drop I see salt and all depths. They remind me of the past lives of pirates, of the song of sailors, of my life woven from sails, decks, leather cracked by the salty wind, of the beauty of the horizon when the eye sees nothing but the blue – the blue that shines in the place where the sky

and the sea meet in a perfect line, like a skilful stroke made with a wonderful watercolour brush, where they merge into one – what is shining here is love.

I wonder, can we comprehend the beginning of something, if it hasn't already ended? Does knowledge reveal itself repeatedly to us like a perfect circle, so that, in fact, we have never started and will never finish? Like a snake biting its own tail, the mighty Ouroboros conceals the wisdom for which we also yearn. We want to constantly feed ourselves with new knowledge, with a new feeling that we are whole, that we are complete, that we have found the missing part, because all our lives we have felt that something was missing, a part of ourselves that was torn away and sent to the other side of the world. And we search for each other, wander, sail after each other, feeling the magnetism, which is often oppositely charged, and even when we meet, we don't recognise each other and the magnets clumsily repel each other, throw the bodies even further and further away from one another. And then, after one blink, we let out a sigh and start all over again, continuing our search.

Some people just give up sometimes. They end their search even before they began, because they don't know that there is neither an end nor a beginning. Life can be seen as a continuous cycle, yet even this cycle may pause or be redefined. When embraced, it can acquire lasting significance, prompting us to value its ongoing motion. Ultimately, everything is possible when we find love.

With the passage of years, although I have remained youthful by refusing to succumb to time, I have embraced knowledge. I have come to understand that humans, ever since they were thrown into this world and took their first sip of water, ever since they first cupped their hands to quench their thirst, they have tried to decipher what cannot be seen at first glance, but is felt by the fullness of existence – from the very beginning, humans have endeavoured to comprehend love.

Understanding love is not enough. Love eludes reason, but humans, in their finitude, try to grasp, define and determine love, they try to understand those strong intense emotions that strike wildly and do not let go, that possess and overwhelm them. And even when they feel as if they were immersed in water, a sense of clarity emerges, the vision is clear and the future itself is born and develops right there before our eyes, like stroboscopic light, like pictures, interrupted, cut out hastily to fit into a story. Instinctively, we reach out with our hands to grasp the promise given by what we feel in our hearts.

Love is ancient, it could be said that it existed even before man. But there was always someone wise enough to grasp it, to gather certain knowledge and express the unspeakable and to try to bring it closer to everyone because everyone is subject to this force – except for a few truly unfortunate ones; I feel sorry for them the most, because love is beautiful even when it hurts. Pain is just proof that we are alive.

Love inspired the wisest and greatest minds to try to explain these feelings in words. The cradle of culture listened to the words of Plato and Aristotle, everyone wanted to say something about love. Perhaps they were on the trail of something important, more important than anything else, when they saw and described love as the only purpose of living, of life as a concept, of life as a generality. Who are we without love? Is it even worth living then?

The purpose of life may be unattainable, but it remains an aspiration, and Plato saw exactly that. At the beginning of time, man and woman were one – a perfect being; androgynous. As such perfect beings, they were a threat to the gods. So, the envious, jealous gods, not without fear, split one body into two parts and condemned them to eternally search for each other, making each the purpose of the other. Some people spend their whole life searching. However, they do not despair even

when the search ends without success, because they filled their drought with the awareness that one part of them still exists somewhere and that they are perfect even if so separated.

It was not only these two sages who saw purpose in love, this wisdom was transferred to the entire Christian world, to all the desert dunes and Arabian nights, to Scheherazade's Thousand and One Nights, all the way to King Solomon and the Song of Songs in which love lives unbridled and beyond all restraint – *for love is as strong as death*. Love and death, Eros and Thanatos, the two greatest forces without which there is no life, because who are we if we do not love with fiery love and what are we if we are not finite?

Eon after eon, epoch after epoch, time passes, cities collapse, civilisations disappear, new ones are created, from the Tower of Babel to the skyscrapers of the twenty-first century, but something has remained constant – humans are still looking for love. Nothing has destroyed the human need to love and be loved.

We feel the changes. They remind us that we are not such ephemeral beings anymore, and even if we are, we will not just disappear. Time grows, we grow too, reality is not that romanticised, cities are not romantic because they grow smaller. So now, you can also see, recognise and classify love. It is up to us whether we believe in it, whether we are ready to accept the limitations of divisions, as well as the painful truth that love is also different, and that it is not always fireworks.

Psyche-Soul-Reason – here is another trinity in addition to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit trinity. I think about how much courage it took a person to embark on the study of what is beyond the physical, to try to understand the psyche, especially because this trinity is not always in harmony, the one always tends to prevail and overpower the other. It is difficult to create unity. Does this mean that Cupid lowered

his bow, discarded his arrows, dipped them in the river Styx and left everything to oblivion?

I'd rather say no.

It took a lot of courage for Freud and Jung to become Freud and Jung and draw a map of the invisible in humans and to allow us to now heal the soul almost as much as the wounds of the body. By dissecting the psyche, we approach each other more cautiously, we know that invisible injuries are serious, we are gentler, touch has a new meaning. Now I can say that an action of yours has hurt me, now I can sympathise with your pain, now I know what empathy means. In all the arranged chaos, in the entropy of life, empathy is the best starting point.

Trinities and the three unities accompany us throughout life, whether we are talking about a single day divided into three phases, from morning throughout the day to the night, or about childhood, youth and old age. Isn't that exactly the indicator of the existence of three loves, three phases of love, three different manifestations of the same phenomenon packed in those four letters, the one word that is written beautifully in all languages?

Just as the world started with a bang, if we believe in that theory, so does the first love. A great blinding bang, a deafening explosion in which the entire existence simultaneously loses and gains meaning. The air stirs and thickens, the world swells and expands, the crackling of electricity is heard in the air, it shrinks, dwindles and diminishes, everything darkens, blackens and disappears, and then flashes, a storm splits the air, there is thunder, an explosion, the ground moves, and then – silence.

After the explosion, there is silence. The air becomes thinner, the clouds dissipate, rumbles can be heard only from afar, the rain washes everything away, clear vision returns, and we

no longer see love. It is not so strong anymore, it has gone, but it has touched us on the cheek, it burns for a while, the cheek still hurts because the love was strong, as if it had challenged us to come look for her. The feeling of first love remains forever engraved in the skin, in the body, in the pores and is transferred even to the smallest blood cells. We keep it in our hearts because it was beautiful, maybe sad, but that doesn't diminish its beauty. Love purified us and showed us what the human body can do, what the mind is ready for if the heart joins it. We have discovered emotions that we did not know existed. It is only then that we can we call ourselves human.

Reason alone is not enough, something eludes even reason, even though we have learned through reason an elementary state that we cannot fully explain. We get the impression that when love consumes us, the mind remains silent.

Maybe the secret lies in that first unthinking blind love. Maybe we are just too strict with ourselves, confined within the framework of reason and social roles, deconstructed into positions, statuses and life stages, and we see love differently.

It is difficult to repeat the bang, almost impossible, just as we cannot make a first impression twice or step into the same river twice. It flows away, it is gone, it passed. We collect what is left of us, we rebuild ourselves, maybe with more caution, because the older we get, we do not become smarter, but more careful. Experience tells us: "Don't! Be careful! Think!" – and then we slow down, we become more careful, reflect more and carry on step by step. We do not yearn for storms, whirlpools and acceleration; true, we secretly covet such states, and sometimes the ship does rock again and waves crash, but other times we choose a calmer sea, looking for harmony and order, feeling that we have encountered another and different love.

Such love comes later. It seems, exactly at the time when we say to ourselves: yes, we are ready for a new phase! There is no thunder, but there are subtle movements inside the body that tell us to try, that someone we see in front of us is important, that that person is worth it and that we should surrender ourselves. We are weighing the aspects, we try to reason, feverishly trying to create parameters and examine whether these two ships can sail side by side and more importantly, whether they can be anchored together in the same harbour and resist the winds, the constant raging of waves and the erosion of salt. Is the construction strong enough to bear the burden of experience, the burden of personality, the burden of the past, so that, together, we can face the future that we cannot see even when we try our hardest. Can we last until both ships go down?

Most of the time we don't have or don't know the answers. We can perhaps anticipate them, and courage helps us to give it a shot. Hand in hand we build what will be called "our life". We establish a community, and we strive to create something that will have a part of both of us in it – at least three of us. One "I" and one "You" combined into what will bind us forever.

We give it a shot, we give it a chance, and we invest everything in it. Then the path presents challenge after challenge. Character hits character, the strength of the one disappears, because the strength of the other prevails, one is always apparently stronger and slowly, everything begins to fall apart. Sand seeps through the fingers of the hand and there is less and less of it. It disappears grain by grain and the dynamics change. "I love you" no longer sounds the same, as if completely different words were used than those that were spoken the first time; the same is said, but the meaning has moved away from the original.

"You are like a sister to me",

“I love you like a brother”,  
“I don’t love you at all.”

What then? What happens when life gets involved? What happens when circumstances arise that create a gap? Where does the compromise end? And who will be the first to summon the courage that was there in the beginning for the initial *I love you*? Who will summon the courage and be the first to say *it’s over*?

Someone must do it. Respect will remain, tenderness will remain, and separation is possible without friction. It is not good to become a stranger, because by doing so we have turned our backs on ourselves, we pretend that we have nothing to do with the person we evidently once were, no matter how much we no longer recognise ourselves in them. We must not forget that “that third” part of us is also there, created a little from your *You* and a little from my *I*. It still must have us *both*.

And that’s okay. Now we have raised the anchors, and the ships went their separate ways. We know that we have made mistakes, maybe love itself bothered us, maybe our emotions clouded our vision of reason, and we realised it too late, but the important thing is that we did and that now the touch of the other does not hurt us. Respect has prevailed. It is important that we can still be glad to see each other and wish each other happiness, even though we don’t love each other as we used to. Even if there was no *third*, the union of our flesh, blood, bone and genetic material, we still have something in common, we were still one.

The path is like that, with smaller and bigger twists and turns, turbulences, bumps and landslides, and it varies from person to person; but it is like that. The path is winding and long, and the search continues. After two loves, the third is the one in which I still believe most deeply.

The third love transcends itself, it goes beyond the scope of everything we knew until then, it is greater than itself, because

it is precisely that meeting of two halves that once formed one being, so powerful that it was a threat to the gods. The love of kindred souls erases the boundaries of existence and swallows everything in its path. It will suck me into you and you into me. You and I will be what we were always meant to be. I will see myself in you and you will see yourself in me. I am your mirror, and you are my reflection. Does this mean we are the same? Not at all. But your body and your spirit are what I open myself to. I will give you my secrets and I will not be afraid. I will not be afraid that you will abuse them. I will not be ashamed. I will not be ashamed to be who I am in front of you. I will tell you all my secrets, no matter how dark they are. I will share all my pain with you, and I will also feel all your pain. I will want to take it off you and suffer your hurt for you. I'll talk to you, knowing that you're listening. I will look at you and see myself in your eyes and be sure that you really see me, exactly as I am – naked and without any mask, exposed and transparent. And there will be no fear, only peace and security. There will be no judging, no counting of mistakes or adding up of points. There will be no settling of accounts. I will share all my experiences with you, and give you support when you need it, and you won't have to tell me that you need support – I will know. Just like you will know without words when I need your hug, your word or just a smile, so that I can continue with new energy, with new fiery blood.

We will grow together, we will reach our full potential because I have your back and you have mine. I will be the wind in your sails and you will also send the winds when I need them. There will be no exhausting excitement, stress will be an unknown word whose meaning I will never learn or understand – there will be only peace and joy because we are together, in any place, in any corner of the planet.

The work will not be difficult, I will perform all the tasks with ease, I will be better than ever, because the feeling of fulfilment

will not leave me, knowing that at the end of the day I will return to you, that you will look at me sincerely with a spark in your eye and one simple *How did you spend your day* will solve everything. Our hugs will speak synchronised with our heartbeats; our blood will flow almost united. I will be a complete person.

Complete once and for all – that's love for me.

I once believed that I found this kind of love. Unfortunately, this book and all its chapters will say otherwise. It was all in my head and in my half of the court, on my side of the shore. On the other, she stood alone with herself – Love.

I wove into her a belief about the values I wanted, I believed in respect, loyalty, support, I believed that we were growing together, that we were building a future and a family, that nothing was only mine or only hers, but that it was ours, ours jointly, that we lived the same present and hoped for the same future, the same stability and protection. I believed that we lived honestly and that we had a common Truth.

And I did. I gave everything for Love; everything I believed in, what I still believe in, even though my heart has been deceived by fickle women, by the most successful actresses in a play with multiple victims of the most serious crimes.

For me as a man, as a human being, the purpose of existence and an inseparable part of my identity are my children, my two sons. Wounding them is an unpardonable crime. And Love dared to do exactly that – she is ready to sacrifice our son as a victim in this process, which I see only as unfounded retaliation without reason.

The chapters of this book will go through everything I went through with her, but they will also lead to my liberation from this painful experience of seven years. The pain was so strong that it penetrated to the bone. Until the final betrayal, until the *perfect betrayal* embodied in one person – Love.

Let these pages and all the words imprinted in them be a testimony of trust and to whom not to give it, and not to lose faith in it; let my story be yours too, let it be a lesson and a warning – manipulation is a dangerous destructive force, and love, that sublime feeling worthy of the gods, can be fickle. It is most dangerous when our eyes are blind, blinded by the power of emotions, when the heart opens itself and can be easily pierced with a knife.

It did hurt, it still hurts while I am writing this, but not all pain is bad or evil – this book will be my cleansing and purification, from these pages I will emerge clean, free and liberated with the same faith in great love – I am sure of that.

## II

### ~ A Bolt from the Blue ~

Such is nature. There is so much of it in us – it is powerful and relentless – yet we are ready to suppress it, to fight against it, as if we ourselves were not of the earth. We were born of it and to it we shall return.

I'm not surprised we fear it – we mustn't forget that the Sun was once a god. We worshipped nature because we admired it, but also because we feared it. We saw it act and understood that we would never match its power. All that force, always looming above us, is a reminder of how small we are in comparison – just a moment in the wind, a drop in the ocean, and nothing, truly nothing, before the thunder.

And thunder is strong – it often strikes suddenly, when we least expect it. At least, that's how it was for me. I cannot say that I regret it, or that I'm not grateful for the quake. Without it, these pages wouldn't exist. There would be no cleansing from the spilling of words onto blank paper, no melodic rhythm in the sound of keys being struck. But now, every touch of the keys, every new word, every twitch of the cursor lead me toward purification, toward the truth. Here I can stand before the world, stripped bare, and speak my name loud and proud.

There are no lies in me, I don't want to hide the truth. Only the truth can cleanse us. The truth is worth fighting for. Those who know will understand. The truth is a mirror that we like to avoid. Its reflection in words, written or spoken, will burn even

the toughest ones. Truth burns, truth hurts, but it also sets you free. You need courage for it, but truth also defends honour. And for that, I'm ready to do anything. A thunderbolt isn't just there to strike, to burn and destroy – it is also there to illuminate, so that even through the densest darkness, it reveals even the deepest secrets.

Memory craves peace, it needs darkness for the kinoscope to unfold and project images onto the white wall of remembrance. I am closing my eyes now. I'm going back to the 21<sup>st</sup> of September 2017, to the InterContinental in Ljubljana, which had opened just a few weeks before I arrived there, after my trip to Belgrade, Serbia.

It is weird with memories; they sneak up on us so slyly and hit us when we don't want them to. Then, suddenly, we see images and scenes as if we've stepped out of our own bodies, we are somewhere on the side, very close, we can sense the smells vividly, our skin is exposed to the wind, sun and rain, and everything takes such clear shape.

As you might know, at the end of the 1980s, I emigrated from Yugoslavia, traveling through Belgrade to Australia. Nearly thirty years later, I returned to Serbia, Belgrade, for the first time since then. Belgrade, a city I have always loved. I can say without hesitation that this city played a key role in saving my future, because it was from Belgrade and the Belgrade airport that I set out into the life I have today.

Three decades after emigrating to Australia in the 1980s, I found myself returning to that very place – Belgrade, Serbia. Certain places linger in our memories, and we love them regardless of public perception, architectural recognition, or commonly accepted reasons for valuing a city. I have loved Belgrade, I think, since forever. And now, here I stand again, this time free from fear, anxiety, uncertainty. Belgrade and I look at each other, both happy, recognising the strength of spirit that makes us both steadfast.

I came here to meet my associates – people of trust are infinitely important, wherever you go, and I had precisely such people. You know that my gift for people and reading their personalities has always served me and defended me from bad intentions. This is invaluable, especially in the world of business. At that time, I was in the Board of a very important port, even Board President, after working four years as a director. And I never stood still, I always wanted to give more, to offer beyond the limits of maximum dedication, because phrases such as 'I cannot', 'I don't know how' and 'I don't want to' never existed for me.

I remember that I was very satisfied. My mood was additionally improved by a very successful meeting with a colleague, a friend from Slovenia, who I appointed as consultant and entrusted him with exploring growth or investment opportunities in a harbour on the Danube. Everything was coming together just right. Uroš had a great meeting with me and with certain ministries, which is why I could relax after the tension you usually feel in such circumstances.

"My friend, it has been a pleasure", I said to him, offering my hand. "I've got to go now. I'm traveling to Slovenia, everything's arranged, the plane's booked."

"I have a better idea", he said, smiling. "Let's go by car. You'll like it. Trust me, you won't regret it."

Everything around me told me to say yes – that this day had a plan for me. Because, if we carefully observe things around us and open ourselves up, we can sense things that are only beginning to develop. I let the day guide me and set off for Ljubljana with my friend.

He was absolutely right – I didn't regret it, at least not back then.

The road from Belgrade to Ljubljana is beautiful, as if it were a testimony of all our crossings and meetings, both historical and cultural: Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia, then again Croatia. It is a fusion of tradition, effort, progress and the European Union, to which Croatia and my destination – Slovenia – belong.