

The Suffering
by Quensetta Williams

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1. Chapter

Some would say that every ghost story is a love story. They would say no matter what, somewhere in the history of the death or life of the person or ghost there existed a beautiful and gut wrenching love story, and some even believe that love had, in some way, shape, or form, a direct result on the death that occurred. The amount of time that may have passed mattered not; they were connected, no matter what.

Spring love is the freshest of love, the love of the brand new start, a love consisting of pastel tie-dye and springtime flowers. Some also say that if the death of the one in a love affair happens in spring, and the love is in the spring as well, the ghost of the deceased will spend eternity bidding for love in a barren place that has no changing seasons, looking for the same love, the fresh spring love that had been ripped from their souls.

While that is a romantic theory, the fact is the season doesn't matter whatsoever. If you die in the throes of love, it could be a burning hell hot summer, and you will keep seeking. Fortunately for Gertrude Franz it was a beautifully perfect autumn. Weather-wise anyway.

2. Chapter

Gertrude Franz. With a name like Gertrude Franz she had spent most of her life believing she would never find love and the entire blame would lie with her name. Gertrude. Gert. Wow. So, While she had dated frequently and even gotten serious once or twice (once), she went ahead and got a cat, a male suffering terribly from lunacy. At the slightest sound of anyone even near the front door, Issues (yes, this is the cat's name) would bound through the entire house via the elevated cat train system called "the curtains". The cat was large, grey, and perpetually miserable. They were complete opposites and they were perfect for each other. Issues was Gert's husband, and that was good enough for her.

Gert was perky, with a personality that drew attention like a magnet and laughter the way a canyon drew an echo. She made a friend of everyone she met. People were one of her favorite things. Her taste in clothing, bright and flamboyant, not only drew positive attention but fit her perfectly, all 5 foot, 104 pounds of her. Best of all, she had a shoe and hat collection most women would willingly go to prison for. That, my friends, is not to mention her bags. She had friends, she had a great job, she had hobbies, she had a life.

She didn't need a man...she didn't even want one.

3. Chapter

Gert had a long, slow, boring weekend which consisted of Issues dictating the movies they would watch and the fattening food they would eat. They did not move, except to scratch and run the remote. That was the one thing Issues let Gert do. It gave her purpose. It almost seemed like he was smiling sometimes, like he knew the truth: she was the cat to his human. By late Sunday morning it appeared Issues had literally taken root and begun to sprout, while Gert was in a perpetual cramp from absolutely no bodily movement whatsoever. Small amounts of stretching had begun on both parts, and it was mutually known that movement and life were soon to begin again. Just as acceptance of the inevitable was mentally taking place, the telephone chirped. It chirped again.

Gert was never one to ignore the phone when it rang, especially when all this stupid cat did was sit and stare at it. He certainly wasn't going to answer it. Worthless feline. Worthless. Gert grabbed at the phone at the very thought of forgetting the existence of her cat/spouse. Worthless.

4. Chapter

"Hello!" Gert tried to sound as excited as possible. She was hoping the call would result in getting out of here for a couple of hours.

"Gert? Hi! It's Caroline! You know, from work!" Caroline Fitch was one of these women that tried so hard to make friends that she didn't have any friends. It was a real "shoot yourself in the foot" type of situation for the girl. The problem here is that Gert didn't have a mean bone in her body, and they had formed what Gert referred to as a "close acquaintance-ship". Gert was the ear she bent and the shoulder she cried on, mostly about her love life.

Now what Gert had in beauty and charisma, Caroline had in insecurity. She was functional, had been with the company an impressive amount of time, and was dependable. As a matter of fact she had been in line for the Administrative Assistant position Gert now filled, but the fact of the matter was the boss felt Caroline was not emotionally able to withstand the pressure and responsibility. He was right. It didn't matter. Gert knew that her and Caroline, well, they'd be "acquaintances" for the rest of their lives; Gert's anyway.

5. Chapter

The main reason, actually the only reason, Caroline would actually call her at home had to be her love life. Fortunately for Gert, she had gotten enough bodily rest to be strong and ready. She could take it. She braced herself for about 2 hours of ear numbing chick conversation.

"What's up, Caroline? I didn't think I'd hear from you; I thought you said something last week about going to your parent's home to paint before winter. I thought you were there." Caroline's parents had a beautiful home Lake Raintree. They lived there year around. Why was she here?

"That was last year, Gert. Look, that really is beside the point. I have come to ask you for a favor. A really big favor." Her voice seemed to lower, and mine did the same when I responded.

"What, Caroline. What do I have to do?"

"Oh, I knew I could count on you! Okay, listen, Kyle and I are going to be going to the theater this Friday night for a midnight premier showing of that knew movie "Nut Crackers". Now, it's hard enough for me to get Kyle to do anything with me at all much less go in public to a movie. The only way he would go is if his cousin Brandon could come, and that meant I have to find a date for him. Gert, you're perfect." All of this poured from Caroline's mouth at approximately 73.5 miles per hour, and one could tell she didn't want Gert to speak until she had given her every thing she had defense wise concerning the request. Gert just listened.

6. Chapter

Caroline had been scared to death that Gert would say no; she could tell, and she hadn't the heart to let her down. Caroline had been dating who Gert liked to call "Kyle the Controller for nearly a year, since last November, and she wanted this to be the one. She wanted Gert to double date with his cousin, and she wanted it badly, just so she could see Kyle. She had to complete a task if she wanted to see Kyle, and she did. Gert shook her head in the isolation of her little home. Did she want to go? No. Would she go? Yes. The reality of the situation is this: she had an abundance of really good platonic friendships with men she had met going on double dates. She got along great with them; she loved them. The problem seemed to start with the words "commitment" and "surrender". "Teamwork" was a good one, too. The date was Friday, giving her a great reason to look smoking hot, and it gave her a week to plan it. Yes, she would definitely go on this double date. It would be a blast. She would make it a blast.

She understood the relationship problem to be hers, something just didn't click, and they never worked out. She called herself "romantically challenged", kind of the same way she was vertically challenged, but that is another story. Even though she agreed to that date, she felt like she was suffocating already, and by the time her and Caroline hung up from the conversation, a cop show, "Trigger & Slugs" was just beginning. She plopped back in the same position on the couch she had been in before, noticing Issues on his back, spread out, and dead asleep, his mouth wide open.

Wow. I wanted to be just like him when I grew up. I knew deep inside I was really much more lonely than I wanted to admit.

7. Chapter

Monday morning consisted of a bagel and cream cheese with 3 cups of coffee, and Gert soon found herself dressing like a mad woman, clothes flying, hangers hitting knick-knacks, the works. Gert had a beautiful tone of natural red hair which she wore in a cute pixie most of the time. She was light complected, with a light sprinkling of freckles across her little nose. Her eyes were bright blue. This seemed to surprise people. They always expected brown or green. What kind of an expectation was that? Because of it, she loved her eyes, and tried to accentuate them purposefully. This can make her different than any other ginger in existence, if she works it, and she does!

After a long period of using clothes for confetti, Gert settled on a pair of red slingbacks to accentuate a bright yellow pleated skirt that lay just above her knee and accompanied that with a blood red button down, untucked. Over this she wore a red cable-knit sweater vest, and she wore a bright yellow headband with small red flowers on her pixie. With a bright yellow bag in hand, she gave a bit of love, if you could call it that, to Issues, and she headed out the door to work. She always considered her place of employment as a way to be fashionable in a professional atmosphere, and showing one's sense of fashion is vital to an individual, no matter the sense.

Gert genuinely believed she felt good enough that Monday that she honestly could have fallen in love with every other Monday in the future of the world. She thought that forevermore all was to be right with the world, and she even found herself in the depths of ultra-productivity and multi-tasking she had never known. She wasn't sure what to attribute her mood to, and she did not care. It was, however, during this time of clarity and efficiency she heard a knock at her office door.

8. Chapter

The knock. It was on Gert's tiny office door, and it was the timid knock of a female who more than likely wants to talk about a Friday night double date with someone named Brandon, and Gert really, really does not want to do this.

"Come in," she said. What else was she going to say?

Caroline walked in, stooped a bit in her posture, her head hanging low. Gert asked her if she wanted a seat and proceeded to sit back, close my eyes, and just think. Caroline didn't say a word and Gert even opened her left eye a couple of times just to see what she was doing over there. Finally it could be taken no more.

"Okay! Let's have it! Tell me all about it! Tell me all about this Brandon guy!" That was all Gert had to say and Caroline was off and running. Brandon was not only an engineer who graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, but he then got his Master's at Stanford. He had gone through one divorce after a very short marriage, and there were no children involved. He was obsessed with his work, his friends, and his cat "Troubles" believe it or not. Wow.

It turned out that Brandon had actually been divorced for sometime and because of this fact, he was very set in his ways and routine, just like me. While he was use to living alone he was smart, motivated, funny, and independent. In short, he was a great catch, but, like Gert Franz, there was absolutely no thoughts of potential commitment or anything else, Caroline said. This was a perfectly safe double date, she promised. No expectation between either of us at all.

9. Chapter

Surprisingly enough, Gert blinked and it was time to get off work on Friday. She had spent the last 4 days listening to Caroline talk about nothing but the date and reassure her she was going to have the time of her life; it will be the "bee's knees", Caroline said. She even had one experience that week of receiving an unexpected visit from Caroline's guy Kyle, also encouraging her to follow through with the Friday date. Now this is too weird to Gert, and she sent him packing, telling him she would be there, and if she heard about it again they were going to blow it.

She went right from work to get a last minute mani-pedi that is required, and then she headed home fast to get ready for the "amazing, incredible" night out. If you haven't noticed, Gert was very particular about her appearance, and it was a major source of personal expression for her. Tonight there was no need to run around like a rainbow, but she would be noticed. The nails of her fingers and toes were done in a color very comparable to pearl. Wearing a black satin dress, about mid-thigh and form fitting, was the perfect match for the light satin white blazer she wore over top. Her shoes were a black lace finish wedge that was perfect. All jewelry was in white pearl but for the ring on her right hand: it was one single black and one single white pearl, set in white gold and highlighted with small diamonds. She wore her pixie with pride, looking amazing and knowing it. That will put a pep in any step.

10. Chapter

She arrived at the theater a bit early, but it wasn't too chilly to enjoy, at least not in the beginning. She had a tendency to be punctual to a fault, but by the time the other three arrived she had read the movie poster so many times she was pretty sure she knew the movie itself by heart. Filled with jitters and regrets, she was fully equipped to carry on any amount of conversation that was needed, if talking was indeed needed in a movie. For this type of thing she was unprepared. You would think it would be easy.

She began the date very insecure, wishing she had not only never agreed to it, but actually considering making a run for it on all three of her trips to the ladies room. By the time they stood in line for candy and drinks for what seemed like an hour she had become what seemed like the best of friends, and she found herself excited to sit side by side with him for a couple of hours.

Life is a funny thing, an enigma filled with painful surprises and cruel sarcasm. These were not, however, the events of that particular evening. Neither Brandon nor Gert were able to tell anyone a thing about the movie; they talked to each other the entire time, and were finally forced to sit the duration of the film out in the lobby by the powers that be (this happened within 15 minutes of the film), and before the evening drew to a close, Greta and Brandon had memorized every plan they had made together for the next two weeks.

Gert was in love and had not a clue as to that fact.
Perfect. It couldn't be more perfect.

11. Chapter

Brandon and Gert took their relationship up the ladder rather quickly. They didn't start out as friends; they were best friends. Why not? They had everything possible in common two individuals could have. It was kind of creepy, Gert thought at times, but isn't that what a girl dreams of, after all? In addition to the commonalities, he was willing to talk. He would actually participate in a one on one conversation with her that felt mentally and spiritually enriching way. This was a valuable aspect of their relationship, and made all the difference in the world to Gert when compared to other men of the past.

They went to a pet shop and bought matching style kitty leashes for Troubles and Issues, one blue, one red, and they would walk their cats together in the park, talking, laughing, flirting, and staring into the eyes of the other.

Within two weeks, Gert was simply positive Brandon was the one the long wait was all about. The one all the pain was in preparation for. See? She asked herself sarcastically. I told you this wasn't all for nothing. She was sure he was the absolute one. He seemed abundantly worth the wait.

The Thursday into the third week of their dating/relationship experience, Gert received a call from Brandon in the early afternoon, right after she had returned from lunch.

His voice was soft, gentle, and even a tad romantic, she thought, as he started. "How do you feel about dinner at Roberto's Bistro tonight Gert? You don't have any prior plans, do you?"

"N-no. I guess you took me by surprise. It's a work night; we both know how we feel about going out on work nights." It was true, and we agreed on this mutual rule wholeheartedly.

"I just wanted to go over a few important things, you know, get some facts straight," he answered. His voice remained gentle and soft; I could even detect a slight smile. I was already picturing an oyster with a ring in it. The funny thing is I could also picture myself saying yes.

I had known this man three weeks.

12. Chapter

Gert had always been an optimist in the love department. She had accepted her self-presumed fate long ago. She liked having her own control. She enjoyed capturing attention. These things could not only intimidate a man, but they can emasculate some of them as well.

Okay, there is another reason Gert may die an old spinster maid.

Brandon did seem different though. He seemed tough enough to handle her. It seemed perhaps she had met her match, and that was very, very sexy. Tonight, she would have the most amazing dinner of her life with a handsome, intelligent, and accomplished man, and she would leave with a ring on her finger. She wanted to look classy and gracious all at once.

She spent her time choosing a sea foam colored skirt suit with lapel with satin piping. She wore a satin dark teal button down, and chose a beautiful aquamarine earring and necklace set from her graduation years ago. A simple gold ring on her right hand was embellished by an aquamarine of modest size. Her hair hand swept and tousled, and her make-up set off with a light teal eye-shadow, she was simply wonderful. She entered the bistro with an inner nervousness that was invisible in the shadow of her glow and grace.

Brandon had chosen a very intimate seating arrangement for 2. A very small area separated from the rest of the restaurant and patrons by use of reconstituted potato sack material. This material was embellished with antique fishing hooks and sea shells, and they were in complete privacy. He had poured her wine, a decadent Cabernet Sauvignon, and held her seat for her as she sat. She was simply in heaven.

Brandon sat and gave her one of his beautiful million dollar smiles. He told her how amazing and beautiful she looked. He asked about her day. She kept glancing, waiting for the appetizer that surely would change her future. Instead, Brandon looked her firmly in the eyes, and smiling, told her he never wanted to see her again.

He offered no explanation, and she did not ask for one. She let not one tear fall from her eye. Rather, she gulped down her glass of wine, filled the glass and gulped it as well. She then grabbed her bag, thanked him for the drinks, and as he continued to fumble his words, she turned on her heel and walked out of Roberto's. Alone. It didn't even matter they were bringing the food. Who could eat now? What kind of guy dumps you before he feeds you anyway.

Wow.

Fortunately for Gert, there was a bar directly across the street, the neon beer lights making the nighttime seem like day. A Budweiser or ten would do just fine. Her jog slowed to a speed walk and finally a stroll as she approached the door of the establishment and went inside. She glanced behind her as she did, just to see if he had followed at all. Wow, she got out of that by the skin of her teeth. What kind of man lets a woman run off in the dark and doesn't even try to make sure she's okay?

Certainly not that puke.

These pipe dreams of love and marriage were ignorant and presumptuous. Who needs that? She was finished, and she swore she was NOT going to try again.

And that included double dates. Especially double dates. Done, done, done. Talk about escaping by the skin of your teeth.

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