

Lost and Found

By Julian Scutts

Distraught Youth:

Ere to Lethe's brook the woeful way I take,
one final phone call shall I, O wretch, now make.

Person receiving the call:

Do-dee-dum-diddle-do.
Good afternoon, Matcham Junction Lost Property Office. Can I help you...
sir ...madam?
(aside) Oho, we have a right one here, I fear, from the sighs and deep
breathing, it would at least appear.
Sir, this is not "Counsel for the Despairing." Their number ends 2190. Ours
ends 2191. As you might expect, these numbers often get confused. I repeat,
this is the Matcham Junction Lost Property Office.

Distraught Youth:

O noble counsellor, wise comforter.
You speak so soon the quintessential truth!
What spirit-mentor whispers in your ear
that you speak of lost things? Aye, there's the rub!
How great, how irretrievable the loss,
how sanctified to memory is the lost,
how miserable, how wretched is the loser, I withal!

LP Officer:

Oh, very well, sir. If you insist on me helping out, I'll try my best for
you. In fact, I've become something of a professional - both in my capacity
as an LPO and as a "counsellor" - for want of a better word. Sir, could you
give me a description of this lost article, this 'ere heart that appears to
be missing?

Youth:

Describe the heart!
What man has art
enough for that i' faith?
Is depth so deep that ne'er the heart shall plumb it?
Is height so high, the heart ne'er reach its summit?
In length so long, the heart

Officer:

Sir, sir, I do get your point, sir. The heart is indeed an incommensherubble thing?
Silly of me ask. Let's try another tack. Could you give me an account of
the circumstances under what you lost this article - like, time, place and
that?

Youth:

Speak not of circumstance, but speak to me of fate!
Star-crossed am I like Romeo, betrayed like Samson,

Cupid's arrow has hit the mark, it has laid me low.

Officer:

Just as I thought, sir, just as I thought. Some young lady has had a part to play in the matter of this loss.

Youth:

A young lady you call her!
You are too kind and moderate.
A vixen, I say, a Jezabel,
a Celimene and Delilah on top of it.

Officer:

Oh, really, sir. Never mind. But perhaps you could give me a description of this young -er - vixen-cum-celery of yours, in as far as she has tangible assets, that is, sir, if you see what I mean.

Youth:

The locks that lap her temples
were woven on the loom of dawn.

Officer:

I see, sir, er - honey-blond. Could you continue your description?

Youth:

How can poor words describe the gilded dawn,
the taste of honey-melon,
the scent of morning rose?
She walks on high where angels walk,
she talks in tongues that angels talk.
The fairest of ten thousand she,
unto what compared is she, the one
who daily tortures me?

Officer:

Surely you can tell me the colour of her eyes, sir.

Youth:

Her eyes, choice sapphires of the rarest hue!

Officer:

I take it, sir, her eyes are blue.

Youth:

O man of prose, write what you will - write "blue".

To see her eyes glister like diamonds,
or of Venus the star when eve's purple
o'erlays the gold of the Hesperides!

Officer:

oh, very well, sir: Blue under normal lighting conditions, otherwise there's
no telling. Any other characteristics?

Youth:

More seductive than Salome at dance,
she could weedle from Herod his kingdom all,
or tempt Joseph more sorely than the wife of Potiphar?

Officer:

A good-looker, eh, sir?

Youth:

She gambles on the mount of Lebanon like the doe,
she is supple of foot, she is nimble of toe.

Officer:

Got something of a middle eastern or Levantine allure with it, sir,
has she? Hmm. It's only a hunch, but I've got the feeling that this - er
-vixen-cum-celery of yours called by at this office the other day. Funny,
she was also complaining of the shaggrins damm'er, too.

Youth:

Compare my deep woes to those of some cheap girl!
You do me a great injury, sir!
No one but me has felt so inwardly deep
the turning knife, the bitter gall of love.
I'll brook no trifling with the common herd,
for sorrows like theirs are two a penny.

Officer:

Well, sir, all I can say is that she did rather fit your description, though
I only saw her eyes under normal lighting conditions - fluorescent tube to
be precise. She complained of losing her heart under circumstances not
altogether different to them under what you lost yours. She had apparently
lost her heart to ..

Youth:

To whom?

Officer:

Well, sir, to quote her words: "to a rather non-descript young gentleman who
insisted on flopping all over the place like some latter-day Lord Byron".

Youth:

Aye, that's her all right. None but she has so cutting, so malign a tongue.

Officer:

Reading from my notes, sir, I gather that the young gentleman in question had forsaken her for another.

Youth:

Has some ligo whispered falsehoods in her ear? For whom, pray?

Officer:

Apparently for a very enticing young lady quite outside of this world. I quote, sir:

"She walks on high where angels walk, she talks in tongues as angels talk .."

Youth:

Enough! She mocks me. Oh, cruelle!
O drag me to the highest cliff,
O cast me in the deepest sea,
to a great millstone fasten me,
and toss me awf the wind-tossed skiff!

Officer:

Far be it from me, sir, to put me off your stroke just as you're really getting going, like, but I wouldn't advise you to do anything extreme. She tagged on a message.

Youth:

More vitriole! To Lethe yet I come.

Officer:

I'd stay around, personally, sir, if I were you. I'll read the message to you if I may.

Here goes: "If the ubiquitously flopping latter-day Lord Byron should turn up some time in the day on Thursday the 22nd of this month" - which is today's date, sir, is it not? - " Would he pick me up at the Bricklayers' Arms around 7 p.m. There's a good horror film on at the Odeon. Then we can go to Kwei Fu's in Station Road for take-away Chop Suey or have a pizza at Romeo's place."

No, that's all right, sir, quite all right. Don't mention it. Quite, quite. I couldn't agree more. You're a very lucky young man. Well, I was young once, you know. That's going back a bit, mind you. Anyway, have to be getting back to work, sir. Glad to have been able to help out there, Tara then.

Replacing the receiver:

Another satisfied customer.