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A Love Affair

Consider *Interview with the Vampire*.

Do you think Christian Slater was miffed, I mean, do you think Christian Slater was *really ticked off* when he first learned that he would be playing second fiddle to the likes of Brad Pitt and Tom Cruise?

I would have been.

Surely he remembered the days when he was the stud and the star, old Brad nothing more than an unshaven pothead languishing on the set of *True Romance* while our hero cruised around with Patricia Arquette in a snazzy Hawaiian shirt.

So yes, perhaps he was a bit angry at the beginning, but I like to think that shortly after the movie started to take shape, a wave of relief o'ertook the Interviewer when he, ever the consummate artist, realized that he had landed the only respectable role that an otherwise dreadful film had to offer.

Some of you disagree. Some of you, still reeling from the false dazzle of Brad Pitt's smooth way of walking or Tom Cruise's toothy grin, operate under the misconception that Christian Slater ought to suffer under comparison. But some of you deluded souls also truly believe that Keanu Reeves is a good actor, or, although you exist in a time when Steve Buscemi and Jeremy Irons still walk the earth, would have the audacity to vote (like my senior class did) for Adam Sandler, Jim Carrey and Ashton Kutcher as the best kind of talent Hollywood has to offer.

To each his own.

Do you know what I have been doing for the past week and a half? Do you know what I have been *doing*, I ask you, as the last of my summer vacation dissolves in this oppressive ninety-degree weather? I will tell you. I have been renting Christian Slater movies, watching Christian Slater movies and now, Lord help me, writing about renting and watching Christian Slater movies.

You think less of me already, but allow me to explain.

Where do I begin?

First you have to understand that, at its base, this is nothing new. Perhaps you've done it too, once or twice at slumber parties, a late night marathon featuring your favorite fella and his films. Where I come from (a very small town where, obviously, there is nothing to do), it's a tradition. We've had John Cusack Night, Andrew McCarthy Night, Hugh Grant Night. Rarely anyone of my choosing, you see, but *High Fidelity* is a good movie and *St. Elmo's Fire* makes the grade, so I have no complaints. Once there was talk of a Brendan Fraser/Leonardo DiCaprio/Paul Rudd extravaganza, permissible only because Rudd was in *Romeo + Juliet* with DiCaprio and Brendan Fraser co-starred with Alicia Silverstone in *Blast from the Past* who co-starred with Rudd in *Clueless* (it's all connected, we like to say, entwining our fingers theatrically), but it never came to pass. This combination would have required at least four movies and, let's be honest, with the possible exception of Andrew McCarthy Night, I don't think we've ever made it through three. What ambitions we have, combing the aisles at the video store, arriving at Chrissy's house with five, six, seven tapes, only to fall asleep after we fast-forward our way through most of *Little Women*, stopping briefly for the Christian Bale (not to be confused with Slater) highlights.

So it's been done before, but never, I profess, never has anyone indulged a fleeting passion in quite the same way that I have indulged these past few days. Never has anyone embarked, as I have embarked, alone and unhindered, down this decadent path of sloth and idleness. Thirteen films! Can you comprehend it? Thirteen films: approximately 32.5 hours of my life, 1.333 spins on the axis (Are you appalled? Are you disgusted?) devoted to my own personal Adonis.

Of course I had heard of Christian Slater. It's a distinctive name, a name that hovers in the part of your brain concerning famous people, but until last week I had little idea of who he was or what he had accomplished.

Enter *Untamed Heart*.

I'm not gonna lie to you. Sometimes, at night, when I'm alone with a box of cookies and a glass of iced tea, I'm not above watching the Women's Entertainment Channel. There's no shame in it. That station has a lot to offer in the way of obscure romantic films with flawed plots and excessive melodrama. So that's where you would have found me on August 10th, 2 a.m., sprawled on the recliner with crumbs inching down my oversized T-shirt, gazing on in dreamy wonderment at the scenes unfolding before my bloodshot eyes.

And it was great, man. Just great. Marisa Tomei in her cute little waitress uniform. Rosie Perez with her accent. Christian Slater. Above all, Christian Slater. His smile, his eyebrows, his slightly receding hairline, his voice saying things like, "Would you like to listen to my records Caroline? ..Caroline." But you wouldn't have liked it. Don't go out and rent it, or if you do, don't say I didn't warn you. "She said it was great," you'll rationalize as you watch it with your friends in growing disbelief. It was great. But it was just one of those things. I doubt you'd ever understand.

That was how it started. I was smitten. My town has a pharmacy with a basement video store where you can still rent five movies for five days for five dollars. I took it by storm. I cleaned it out. Behold the roster, in no particular order: *Heathers*, *Bed of Roses*, *Pump Up the Volume*, *Very Bad Things*, *True Romance*, *Name of the Rose*, *Interview with the Vampire*, *Legend of Billie Jean*, *Kuffs*, *Mobsters*, *Jimmy Hollywood*, *Murder in the First*.

My favorite? Impossible to choose. *Kuffs* made me laugh. A lot. In *Very Bad Things* he was a very bad guy. I'm glad I caught *Heathers* and *Pump Up the Volume*, two movies full of the characteristic eighties adolescent angst, while I was still at an age to appreciate them. And as for *Name of the Rose*, I have three words for those of you who think that a movie set in a monastery would be the least likely to have an explicit sex scene.

Not. The. Case.

Yes, I have watched them all. And yes, he played a major role in every last one of them. So what happens now, after the carnage? After the dozen empty cassette boxes lie strewn around me like corpses?

The phone rings.

"Hello?"

"Hey, it's Chrissy."

Chrissy: from whom I've heard nothing in a week or two. Where was she during this madness? See what happens, oh friend of friends, when you go gallivanting off and leave me to my own devices?

"Do you know what I've been doing?" I ask her lazily. "Do you know what I've been *doing*?"

"What?"

I tell her.

There is a small gasp at the other end of the line. Chrissy knows when she is in the presence of genius.

"What a great idea." She is in awe. "What a *great* idea."

We observe a moment of reverent silence.

"Did you see that one where he's a skateboarder who goes up against the Vietnamese Mafia?"

"No," I say, intrigued.

"Yeah, well, it's a pretty dumb movie. But, y'know," she chuckles, "he *skateboards* in it."

Can you imagine? A young, lithe Christian Slater. Muscles taut. The sun. The sweat. He maneuvers and meanders as the board becomes a magic carpet beneath his sneakered feet. I can definitely see the potential here.

"I'll look into it."

A pause.

"So," she starts, "you wanna go get food or something?"

"Fifteen minutes?"

"Okay."

The spell is broken. I sit on my deck and wait for her, eating mint ice cream out of a glass bowl as the sun streaks purple behind the Pennsylvania hills. I think about him, his beauty. Was there ever anyone so versatile? Ever anyone so equally capable of playing the good guy and the psycho, the scumbag and the intellectual? A small sadness creeps up my spine as reality repossesses me. I will never do this again, I decide. No more crazed frenzies, no more devouring. For with each new scroll of the credits, it becomes less and less likely that one fine day I will stumble upon a Christian Slater surprise at Blockbuster. Less and less likely that I will ever again witness his skittish, shirtless dance in some hitherto undiscovered comedy or action flick. There are few that remain. Just the bottom of the Christian Slater barrel, if you get my meaning.

What does all this say about me? What does it say about the degeneracy of America? Am I really as trivial as I sound? What is this superficiality, this love of the fictional character? Are people like me the beginning of the end of civilization as we know it?

Naaah, I say, with a wave of the hand. Glory be to God for motion pictures, for men so angelic that we are momentarily astonished.

[*Rosanna Nunan*]