LOVE, LORELEI

By Joe Hartman

BRYCE AND HIS SISTER MELODY ARRIVE BACK TO HER HOME FROM A BOOK SIGNING. HE CARRIES A BOOK IN HIS HAND.

BRYCE

They say you should never meet your heroes. Well A-fucking-men

to that!

MELODY

You don’t think you’re being a little melodramatic?

BRYCE

Melody, I was practically born in the water. I started swimming lessons when I four years old!

MELODY

Well, that’s not all that uncommon. Don’t babies take swimming lessons sometimes?

BRYCE

Tossing little sausages in the water and making them swim for their lives is not “swimming lessons”, it’s sadism. I was an artist. I wanted to live, sleep, and eat my lunchables in the water. And why? Lorelei Garnett.

DIANA, A SCIENTIST TYPE ENTERS, HAIR AND GLASSES ASKEW.

DIANA

My God, you guys, you scared me half to death.

MELODY

I’m sorry, Diana, were you working?

DIANA

Yeah, I guess the time got away from me. How’d the signing go?

MELODY

We were just talking about that, in fact. About Lorelei Garnett.

DIANA

Who?

MELODY

I told you. Nobody knows who she is, but us and the dozen or so people at the book store. Our Mom used to love her. Made us watch her old movie musicals, and with Bryce, something snapped.

BRYCE

Lorelei Garnett was my inspiration. At age three, I watched “Leave her to Neptune” and there she was, seated on an enormous conch shell. Platinum hair, body poured into her shimmering suit so it looked like she wore nothing but silver scales and magnetism. She dove into a marble pool and weaved in and out of sullen chorus girls, so envious they couldn’t be her. But I wasn’t envious. She inspired me to be as at home in the water as she. And when I found out she was the reason Synchronized swimming became an Olympic event, I vowed to compete!

DIANA

I thought that was Esther Williams.

BRYCE

Esther William’s is a second rate hack who slept her way to the top and stole Lorelei’s glory!!

MELODY

The premier of Lorelei’s first film actually pre-dates Esther Williams by seven months, but no one remembers her.

BRYCE

The one who does it first blazes the trail, and someone else always breezes on through after to soak up the glory.

MELODY

You should have seen Bryce the day Mom told him he’d never compete in the Olympics. I thought he’d drown her.

BRYCE

It wasn’t her I was mad at! It was those officials. Men can’t compete in a “girl’s sport”? A girl’s sport!?! I didn’t want to be a girl. But can’t a man feel the freedom in the power of movement? Can’t a man revel in the power of what his body can do? And then to go to the book signing and…have THAT happen!

DIANA

Good Lord, what?

BRYCE

She was drunk!

DIANA

What????

MELODY

She wasn't drunk!

BRYCE

She slurred her words! She pulled out a flask! Oh Lorelei, how low we’ve sunk.

MELODY

That was an oxygen mask. She’s eighty-seven! You’re just saying that to cover the fact that you froze.

DIANA

What?

BRYCE

I…I…Alright I admit it!! I froze!! Like that episode of The Brady Bunch where Cindy Brady goes on that television quiz show and her eyes glaze over as her face goes blank as a broken doll.

I tried to speak, but it came out in a choked whisper. Terrified, I turned around and walked out, without even having her sign my book! She probably thought I was an imbecile. And you know what? She would have been right. What have I done? Who am I? Nothing. And no one.

MELODY

But, you are someone. You’re you.

BRYCE

Spare me the Hallmark bullshit, I’m living in your guys’ guest bedroom, working the graveyard shift at Donny’s Donuts. I was supposed to be something more than this. How am I going to blaze trails as a dancer of underwater ballets if life keeps giving me water thick as shit to swim through? If only I could relive that moment with Lorelei. Say how much she meant to me. Maybe then I could take heart and move on.

DIANA

It could be done.

MELODY

What do you mean?

DIANA

Well, you see, moments ago, when I stumbled from the basement? I had just completed… my time machine.

BRYCE GASPS.

MELODY

You’re kidding. It’s finished?

DIANA

 Seven years work. Complete.

BRYCE

Could we…do you think we could use it? To go back in time, to the book store so I can speak to my idol? To redeem myself? Please?

DIANA

I don’t see why not.

SLIGHT PAUSE.

MELODY

Are you fucking kidding me?

BRYCE

What?

MELODY

You could do anything with this machine. We could witness the discovery of America, Columbus sailing the ocean blue…

BRYCE

Columbus was a hack just like Esther Williams. He didn’t discover America! Leif Erikson did it way before! Columbus sailed on his coattails to glory, destroying a whole fucking civilization in the process! He didn’t even know he was in America, he thought he was in the god damned East Indies! I’m glad he died of syphilis…

DIANA

I didn’t know he…

MELODY

He didn’t.

BRYCE

Yes he did! Little known fact, with a wrinkled, puss covered cock due to syphilis, and it’s what he deserved.

DIANA

It’s no matter. We couldn’t go back to October 12th, 1492 anyway. There are too many things we could impact, completely changing the world as we know it. The book signing is recent and insignificant enough for us to travel back to. If you think you really want to.

BRYCE LOOKS NERVOUS, BUT MELODY, THE DUTIFUL SISTER, STEPS FORWARD.

MELODY

We do.

DIANA

All right then, friends. To the time machine!

BRYCE GRABS HIS BOOK, UNLESS HE NEVER SET IT DOWN, AND THE THREE OF THEM EXIT (WALKING DOWN IMAGINARY STAIRS?) AND ARRIVE AT THE MACHINE. MELODY AND BRYCE ARE AWESTUCK.

BRYCE

It’s…

MELODY

Glorious!

BRYCE

How does it work?

DIANA

I don’t want to bore you with the details, so let’s suffice it to say that you use this knob to select the time and date you want to go back to. Today…

SHE PRESSES THE SELECTED DATE.

And the signing began at 8, so let’s say 7:40?

She pushes those buttons.

DIANA

 Then I press this lever over here (she motions to the lever) and off you go. You’ll end up in this exact same space at that time, where I’ll still be finishing up the machine.

BRYCE

But if the machine isn’t complete and ready, then doesn’t that mean…

DIANA

Nope.

MELODY

Wouldn’t’ it be impossible to…

DIANA

Neh!

BRYCE

But it…

DIANA

 Don’t try to figure it out, just go! I’ve got to stay here and pull the lever. Go!

THE TWO OF THEM RACE DRAMATICALLY TO THE MACHINE AND BELT THEMSELVES IN.

DIANA

Now, you have exactly one hour. At that time precisely, the machine will return here. Do you understand me? One hour! Or else you’ll be trapped in the past forever!

DIANA PULLS THE LEVER, TURNS HER HEAD AND BEGINS MAKING TIME MACHINE NOISES AS BRYCE AND MELODY MAKE THE SOUND ONE MAKES ON A ROLLER COASTER. PERHAPS SHE CIRCLES THEM WITH BIZARRE PROPS FROM OTHER ERAS (FLAMINGOS, PHOTO OF LINCOLN…) FINALLY SHE EXITS AND THEY ARE ALONE.

MELODY

Well, it looks like we made it.

BRYCE

How can you tell?

MELODY

Look! The clock on the wall!

THEY BOTH LOOK.

Melody and Bryce

7:40!

Melody

Hurry! We haven’t got much time!

THEY EXIT QUICKLY AS LORELEI ENTERS AND SITS AT A SMALL TABLE. One book sits on the table next to her. She is slightly hunched, her head wobbles a bit, but she is regal, dignified, warm. She begins to adlib interaction with imaginary fans. She signs a book, turns and watches them leave, and repeats the process as Bryce and Melody patiently wait in line and chat quietly amongst themselves. Inching up in line, bit by bit.

Melody

Are you doing ok?

Bryce

Yeah. At least I think so. Oh, look, we’re next.

Melody

You go on up. I’ll be right behind you.

Bryce

You’re not…

Melody

This is your moment. Not mine.

Lorelei is mid-conversation with another fan.

LORELEI

Well, it was a long time ago. Enjoy the book!

She turns to Bryce who is visibly nervous. He starts to speak.

BRYCE

(choked whisper)

Miss Garnett?

LORELEI

Hmmm?

BRYCE

(same whisper)

Miss Garnet.

Lorelei

Well, same to you darling, thanks so much for coming.

Bryce’s eyes widen, he involuntarily turns, but no! He steels himself, takes a deep breath and turns back around.

BRYCE

Miss Garnett!

LORELEI

Yes?

BRYCE

I love you so much. You. Are. My. Idol. When I was little I decided I wanted to do what you do. Swim like you, with that grace, that power. So free.

LORELEI

It’s the best feeling in the world.

LORELEI AND BROCK

There’s nothing like it.

LORELEI

And did you? Do you swim?

BRYCE

I used to.

LORELEI

(at this moment she breaks from her dignified self and becomes more of a broad, Roz Russel, Bette Midler…)

Used to? What happened? You got two arms, two legs. What’s the problem?

BRYCE

I wanted to be a synchronized swimmer in the Olympics, but they won’t let men compete.

LORELEI

So? (slight pause) So you swim somewhere else! You make your own venue, create publicity. OR you cause a big damn stink at the Olympics. Build your press! But here’s the unfortunate thing, kid. You gotta do it for yourself. Blaze your own trail.

BRYCE

Like you did.

LORELEI

Yeah, and look where it got me. MGM and Esther Williams left me in the dust. SO who cares? You think I give a shit about that? I don’t give a shit about that. I kept swimming. And when I couldn’t swim anymore I built swimming pools. You don’t stop, kid. You keep on dreaming. You only fail when you’re dead or you’ve agree with the shitheels who say you you can’t do it. Agree with them and you’re dead in the water. Hell, Johnny Weissmuller and I did a picture together…you know Johnny right? Big time swimmer, Tarzan?

BRYCE

Yeah.

LORELEI

Well, he was also a grade A ass-hole. One day in the commissary he told me I couldn’t hold my breath for six minutes like he could. Do you know what I said to him? I said “Go ahead gorgeous, stick your finger up my nose. See what happens.” Then I clamped my mouth shut, he plugged my nostrils and we waited. And do you know what? I held it for six minutes and twenty-two seconds. Trust me. You’ll show ‘em yet.

BRYCE

(handing her the book)

Would you sign your book for me?

LORELEI

Sure, Kid. (as she signs) Keep on swimming, Kid! Love, Lorelei

MELODY

(stepping up to them)

Bryce, we’ve got to go. We haven’t much time to make it back to the machine!

BRYCE

Good bye, Miss Garnett, and thanks!

THE TWO FO THEM RACE OFF AND BACK ON STAGE TO THE TIME MACHINE. THEY BELT THEMSELVES IN, PUSH THE BUTTONS AND GO. DIANNA IS BACK. MOVING THE PROPS IN FRONT OF THEM IN REVERSE ORDER, SAME SOUNDS, ETC. FINALLY THEY ARE BACK AND DIANA WAITS OUTSIDE PATIENTLY.

MELODY

Well, little brother? Was it worth it?

BRYCE

To get a second chance? To live life balls out? Yeah, I think so.

MELODY

And now? What next.

BRYCE

Next, I make my dream come true. Today’s version, whatever that may be. And when the Johnny Weissmuller’s of the world say I can’t hold my breath, I’ll just say…

MELODY AND BRYCE

Go ahead gorgeous. Stick your finger up my nose. See what happens! (They laugh)