

## Body Parts : *The Anatomy of Love*

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**RICHARD BARDSLEY**  
**BODY PARTS**

THE ANATOMY OF LOVE



CAMBRIDGE

PUBLISHED BY SALT PUBLISHING  
PO Box 937, Great Wilbraham, Cambridge CB21 5JX United Kingdom

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First published 2008

Printed and bound in the United Kingdom by Biddles Ltd, King's Lynn, Norfolk

Typeset in Swift 11 / 14

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ISBN 978 1 84471 432 2 hardback

Salt Publishing Ltd gratefully acknowledges  
the financial assistance of Arts Council England



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*For My Parents  
&  
Danielle*



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## *Acknowledgements*

THANKS ARE DUE to Michelle Patel for her invaluable editorial observations, Jen, Chris and everyone at Salt for absolutely everything, my friends for their support of my writing habit over the years, and Danielle, for a love which never for a second failed to believe in me. Special mention goes to the preposterously monikered Harv, Poosie, Textbook and Tubs who, like a musty yet reassuring smell, have always been around and long may they remain so.

*'Love's mysteries in souls do grow,  
But yet the body is his book.'*

— JOHN DONNE

*'One seeks to make the loved one entirely happy,  
or, if that cannot be, entirely wretched.'*

— JEAN DE LA BRUYÈRE

# Prologue



## *The Whole Being*



## *'I Love Everything About You'*

SHE WAS NEW to the village and when I saw her for the first time, stars appeared, swirling around before me.

*Stars.*

I grew dizzy and fell to the ground. She came to my aid and from that moment I was besotted. I loved her in all her entirety, from head to toe, and all that was fashioned between.

Her ways dissolved me. There was nothing I could do, you see.



It was the translucence of her pale skin, which had the ability to refract the daylight in innumerable ways, and appeared always to be naturally and delicately scented with dewberry. It was the dense black hair that closed in around her wonderful oval face like the perfect frame; the soft down on her arms that goose-pimpled at the roots when I first touched her; the crooked smile which formed on her silken lips as she picked up something she had dropped from her elegant fingertips, and she was always dropping things.

It was the way she walked upstairs in front of me, in little stomps which tensed the curved, eclipsed moon of

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her sculpted calves; how she winced and furled her button nose when unscrewing a bottle cap; the giggles that emanated from her throat when she found everything so strangely delightful; the line of her waist and hips which lay curled before me like an art nouveau masterpiece.

It was all these things and so many, many more, I couldn't begin to tell you.

I marvelled at everything she did, was constantly bewildered by how such peculiar beauty could exist. There was not a thing wrong with her, not that I could see, and I wager that if I had been able to see her intestines, her liver, her lungs and her heart, and if I had possessed the scholarly eye of the surgeon, then I would no doubt have been amazed by their individual quintessence too.

Do not get me wrong as I carry on with all these eulogizing. Though she was perfect to me, beauty is indeed in the eye of the beholder and you no doubt have your own criteria. She was not by any means the most beautiful girl one might lay eyes upon and for all that she dissolved me, you may perceive a forgettable instance of female mediocrity.

But that was not my experience.

My experience was a love like I had never been party to before in my life. In my eyes—which never ceased seeing stars in everything that passed before them when she was by my side—she could do no wrong.



'You complete me,' I said as I woke one morning with her

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soft, spongy buttocks spooned against my adoring tumescence. 'I really don't need anything else,' and I kissed the nape of a neck that was as graceful as the finest Ming vase.

She turned and smiled at me once again with the love I had waited my whole life for, smiting every part of my being.

'Nor I,' she cooed, and we kissed vigorously.

The stars became too much and I passed out.



It was true though, that as long as I had her I required nothing else. So with that thought in mind, later in the week when she had left the village for a few days to tell faraway friends and family of our love, I determined to get rid of everything, absolutely everything, all our worldly possessions. I wanted to show her how much I loved her, that I had meant what I had said, and what could be a more resolute enactment of my devotion?

We would eat whatever nature provided for us in the fields and forests, sleep under the infinite cloak of the night sky with our smouldering love to keep us warm, bathe in waterfalls and rosewater, and fuck each other inside out, wherever and whenever we so desired.

It took longer than I thought to get rid of our belongings. We had a lot of stuff.

When finally I had removed everything from our dwelling by giving it to the lonely and loveless, the poor and needy, I set about demolishing its stone shell with a sledgehammer until it was mere dust which then blew away in the wind. With nothing remaining apart from the

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hammer, I tossed it to the bottom of the deepest lake with a joyous cry of liberation.

Word of my activities spread like wildfire. Friends visited, enquired what exactly it was I thought I had done.

'Begone!' I said. 'Begone! I do not need you!' And I gestured them away with two hoisted fingers.

My love returned later that day to the place of our previous, superfluous existence.

'Where is our home?' she cried. 'What happened?' I explained.



I explained. Later, I pleaded.

I thought she had felt the same. Had she not agreed with me as we had lain together?

Her words were not true. She did not love me as I loved her. She thought me insane in fact, mad as a balloon. Perhaps I was, but then love can do that to a person.

She left the village and went faraway, and I now sleep alone on the ground where our home once existed, with nothing but memories of her big round eyes, the sweep of her arms, the dimple of her bellybutton, the waggle of her toes and all the other things that made her, her.

As I speak I lie freezing on the ground in the middle of the night, and I no longer see the stars I once saw when she was by my side, not even those purported to be in the sky. Instead I see black holes. I see black holes everywhere I look.

*Darkness.*

I loved everything about her you see.

# Part One



## *The Head*



## 'Hair'

A LONG TIME ago a woman was found washed ashore near the lighthouse in the village of Bakartsu, barely breathing and ragged amongst the pebbles and seaweed. A vicious storm had materialized out of nowhere the previous evening and it was presumed she had fallen overboard from her passage.

The woman was taken to the local tavern, where there was a comfortable room with an open fire available for her to recover in. She was tended to by its proprietor, a kindly old man who had never married and had no family.

For four days and nights she didn't say a word.



When, bar a chill, she had recovered, the townsfolk enquired how they could help her continue on to wherever it was she was going. She told them she didn't know where she had been headed to.

'But you must know,' they said. 'Unless you were taken against your will?' Bakartsu was a small fishing village located in an isolated area of the country and whilst it attracted hardly any visitors, the busy port of Lizunkeria, further up the coast, was frequented by nefarious sailors on long journeys. If one found oneself occupied with feelings

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of loneliness and melancholy after many nights at sea, one might be inclined to stop here, do as one pleased and not be noticed in the cacophonous milieu.

But the woman was resolute that she could not remember a single thing; how she came to be on the beach one autumn morning, where she had come from originally, what direction her life had taken in the intervening years; nothing.

She knew only her name.

‘Ondina,’ she said, blankly. ‘My name is Ondina.’



She was a pretty young thing of meek manner, and appeared to abhor all the fuss and attention her ordeal was causing in the village, and so hid her pale beauty behind cascading waterfalls of black hair, as if in shame.

Not knowing where else to go, she decided to stay in Bakartsu. The old owner of the tavern said that she could stay in the room she had recovered in, earning her keep as a barmaid until she found her memory returning, if indeed it ever did. He would be glad of the company, he said.

Ondina accepted, though seemingly neither happy nor unhappy about it.



She was not what one might call the ideal barmaid.

Whilst being proficient enough at serving drinks, Ondina would not partake of conversation with the

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patrons beyond a few polite words. This did not go down well with some elements of the populace, as a certain degree of intimate banter was necessary to keep the spirits up in such a close-knit and remote community as this.

Still, her reticence was mostly put down to her quiet demeanour and incalculable misfortune, rather than a rude abruptness and, despite her quietitude, she was good for business.

As I mentioned earlier, Ondina always went about her duties with her head hung low, never revealing her face in full, instead preferring to hide it behind her hair, which glistened even in the dull candlelight and smoke of the tavern. Once they had become used to her ways, the men of the village quickly found themselves spellbound by Ondina's effacing timidity, and business began to boom as they gathered to see a teasing glimpse of the beautiful high cheekbones, the sweet upturned nose, or the fluttering eyelashes which hid tantalizingly behind those luxuriant locks of dark hair.

Word soon got out to the other nearby communities that there was a new, enigmatic arrival. Though there was the occasional (and circumspect) Sapphic investigator, it was mostly men who came to see what this mysterious new arrival was, for men will always journey far and wide to see something feminine and wondrous. Just as the beacon from a lighthouse draws sailors through the darkness towards port, full with feelings of safe and comforted anticipation, so did Ondina.



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The patrons rarely saw anything substantial of her features of an evening, but this didn't matter. A woman's hair can often play havoc with the workings of a man's mind, for when more intimate pointers of the feminine way remain sheathed, it can sometimes be fetishized, be rather too tenderly dwelt upon for its outward fecundity, and all the menfolk had agreed that her hair was indeed something almost magical in its vitality.

Wondrous hair, when it is light in colour, is often superlatively described as *flaxen*. Ondina's hair was beyond such simplistic portrayal. It was long—down to the small of her back—but was not weighted down in lank suspension. It was thick and glossy like the darkest, most exuberant red wine, flowing in silken kinks and waves which seemed to roll to their own rhythm like the gentle, peaceful waves of the sea on a midsummer's night.

Ondina's hair was just so full of *life*.

It was most definitely not something that was perceived everyday in an insignificant, isolated village, where different surnames were not plentiful and appearances were further maligned by the harsh, salty winds that blew for six months of the year during the pitiless winter.

The few that had been to the big cities in the south and east, had remarked that even the most well-to-do of ladies, which they had seen perambulate along the wide avenues, had not managed to maintain hair so beautiful, even with all their wealth and any number of exotic cosmetics at their disposal.

How *did* she do it?

People wondered, but never asked, for Ondina seemed to not desire any attention whatsoever, and Bakartsu was

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a polite, conservative place which, as a rule, respected people's privacy.



Respect however, does not mix well with yearning.

Some weaker men she had unwittingly afflicted with visions and temptations, and they began to experience her as an obsession or illness, wearing the red of sickness and dangerous heat on their intoxicated cheeks.

After trying repeatedly to woo Ondina without success, they grew tired of her elusiveness, which was now starting to be perceived as haughty and remote. How could she not desire them? Or if not them, then at least *somebody*, for surely every soul needs another to confer with, to entwine and to seek comfort with?

Not Ondina. Apart from when she was working in the tavern, nobody saw her.

One night, as she was collecting glasses from the tables, a rascal dared to touch her hair, to feel its velvet stroke and then lift it away from the face it sheltered with a leering giggle.

Ondina looked at him with compelling, dusky eyes that he felt cut right through to his very soul.

'Be mine,' she purred.

Her face had not been what the man had expected. Whilst its composites were individually enthralling when perceived through stolen glances, the whole did not add up to the sum of its parts. It was attractive, but somehow steely, barren—sepulchral even—and the rascal was somewhat taken aback.

He froze, but his hand remained fixed in her deep,

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dark undulation.

He felt a tingling in his palm.

Ondina lowered her head and whispered in the man's ear.

'Meet me by the pier, after midnight.'

She turned and left, allowing her hair to slide through the man's hand like sand, until there was none left.



The man, whose name is not important, for he was one of any number of identical lusty, macho chancers, could not believe what had just happened. His friends egged him on, nudging him with their elbows and unveiling yellow, broken smiles as they asked him what she had said.

He lied.

'She said *'Take your hands off me.'*

He knew that if he had told the truth of their impending meeting, word would have got round the tavern quicker than a wink. There would be eyeballing and gossip and the moment would not be his alone.

He smiled ruefully as his associates joked that there might be better luck next time.



When everyone had gone home, and he was waiting by the pier in the moonlight, the man reflected on what had transpired as he reached for Ondina's hair. She had tensed like a startled animal, but then relaxed, as if relieved. And those words she had uttered in his ear—was he perhaps

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the one she had been waiting for? Had she seen something in him that she had been waiting for all this time, something she could trust to reveal herself to?

Her face had not been what he had expected at all, but the hair—the hair—oh, what it was to touch something like that! Such inimitable follicular loveliness! Something so utterly redolent of abundant femininity!

As his mind scampered through any number of prurient deliberations involving her tresses—spread over a pillow next to him, or flowing southwards over his chest perhaps—he heard a whisper in his ear.

‘It’s time,’ it pronounced. The man turned and saw an eye peeking out mischievously from the tresses.

‘Ondina, why I . . .’

She cut him off, placing a finger over his arid lips.

‘Sshhh. You need not speak. I know what it is you desire. You need only act on it.’ She shrugged and turned her head away coyly.

The man was still for a minute. Then a tentative hand reached out towards her. It pinned her hair behind an ear and then continued around the back of her head.

It was so comforting, and yet there was that strange tingling again. He drew her closer, placing both hands on her forehead then running them through that dark hair and all its mysteries within, before drawing it away from her face so he could see what it truly evoked when exposed.

It said nothing to him. The eyes were desolate, there was no pinch of a smile, no hint of desire in cheeks that were without flush. But it didn’t matter. His hands were in her hair, which was so warm and soft, so vital as it shone in the moonlight. He drew her even closer, so their bodies