

Free Falling (Martin Rathgeber)

You know
how when you're a kid,
a kiss is something you turn your eyes away from and say "ew;"
how when you're a kid,
the affections of love your parents give each other are nothing but awkward;
how you don't yet understand what love is
but take it for granted,
and when your parents scold you, you never understand it's because they love you.

You grow up.
There is a girl in your class sitting right in front of you.
You spend your days staring at her thong peeking out of her tight jeans,
and you think you know what love is.
You get your first girl friend,
hoping that some day soon, she will be your girlfriend.
Your friends tease you,
but you see it through
and ask her out.

"I'm sorry," she says, "but I already have a boyfriend."
You know it's a lie,
but you go with it.
There's plenty of fish in the sea.
You can try again.
And you do.
You do.
You try again.
You get lucky once, but it doesn't last.
She leaves you because you're immature.
She wasn't the one.
Plenty of fish in the sea,
but you have no bait.

You embark on a rollercoaster
of ups and downs,
of unexpected turns and twists,
of moments when you think you'll lose your grip
and fall.
But you don't
because you still believe
that somewhere deep inside of you,
there's bait.
Plenty of fish.

And yet,
with every loop
the track gets a little closer to the ground,
and when one day you hit bottom,
you stop.
You stop believing
in the empty promises everyone makes that you'll find someone,
in that goddamned proverb,
in yourself.
You stop trying.
You believe you are incompatible, weird, boring,
ugly, skinny, fat, too small or too tall,
that you have nothing to offer.
You accept that the friendzone is your place;
a great big apartment you share with all the other nice guys,

because it's the jerks who get the girls,
and you might as well make yourself at home.
You believe that love is for the others.

And you're fine with it.
You have plenty of friends
because you're a nice guy,
and you haven't lost your smile.
Because you keep telling yourself that
Life is good.
More space in your bed if you don't have to share it.
More you time.
No money problems because you don't have to buy gifts
for your hand.

Some of the friendzones persist.
You have girl friends who will never be your girlfriends,
and you don't always zone out as soon as you hear one of those phrases
you've grown to hate.
"I'm sorry."
So are you because she has no idea what she's missing out on.
"Let's just be friends, okay?"
No thank you. On second thought, I think I had my boner confused for my heart.
"I think you're a nice guy, you make me laugh. But I don't think of you that way."
Well, making her laugh is more than you have to show for most of your crushes.
"I have a boyfriend, but if I hadn't, you might have a shot."
You have a shot alright. Or two, or three, until you pass out at the bar you still go to
because somewhere, way down, hidden away even from yourself,
there is still hope.

You know now what love is.
It's not even about the sex, although you wouldn't mind that.
It's about the cuddles,
the little kisses,
the secret smiles,
the feeling of trust knowing that
there is someone waiting for you who loves you.
You know now what love is,
and you want it,
you want to give it away because you have so much of it bottled up inside of you.

But in those years
of not trying
you have lost not only your bait
but also your fishing-rod,
or so you think.

And then there's that one girl,
that one wonderful girl who smiles at you,
talks to you,
understands you.
Who is not scared off
by the world you've built for yourself
so you don't suffocate on your loneliness.
You tell her your story.
She listens.
Smiles again.
Even touches your hand in sympathy.

And you skyrocket like a drop tower on its way up.
You tell her
how she's everything you've envisioned over the past few years,

how you don't feel you have to hide anything from her like you do with all the others,
how you feel accepted the way you are.

You go up,
up,
up into the clouds
because for the first time in years,
the butterflies take you there.

And you forget
that what goes up
must eventually come down.

You ask her out.
She looks at you,
a smile stuck halfway there,
baffled.
You realize you've made a mistake.
A terrible mistake.
You're on the drop tower, but you haven't put your seatbelt on.
And then she says those inevitable words:
"I'm sorry. I'm so, so sorry, but I would never---
I would--- how--- I didn't know you thought of me that way."
And the gondola drops,
faster than you
because without a seatbelt on, you stay hovering in the air for a bit
while you realize that the impact would come,
and it would be harder than ever before.
Because for the first time in your life,
everything fit.
Or so you thought.

As you hit rock bottom,
you shatter.
A million shards of a dream dreamt every night and forgotten every morning,
and a heart broken one too many times.

But you pick yourself up again,
piece by godforsaken piece.
And you go back to the one place you can go,
that one place where you're accepted,
where no one can hurt you,
where loneliness does not exist
because it's built out of it.

"Seek
and you will find," they say.
You know that when it comes to love,
nothing could be farther from the truth
because love does not want to be found;
it finds you.

But how,
how can you stop looking
for the one thing you desire more than anything else?
And so, as you rebuild the wall around your heart,
you leave a little crack,
just big enough for you to peer through
while you lick your wounds,
hoping for a glimpse of that one dream
that has always eluded you,
so you can break free once more
and this time, maybe, catch it.