

Lord, I have a scuffèd heart.

That's how it feels.

Not just the scuffèdness, I mean, but the need for imprecation too.

Lord, hear me.

Like that Spiritualized song from around the time, *Broken Heart*.

And like in the song, I gotta drink you right off of my mind.

Long time ago, I know, a quarter of a century now it must be.

But I can't let it go.

I like the word *scuffèd*. Don't know why, it just seems to fit. Bit antiquated. Sounds a bit fancy and high-falutin even though it means quite the opposite. Suits me. And it sounds a bit like *scuppered*, with that grave accent over the E. Which fits too.

I know it's nothing new, nothing different, nothing special in my case. Everyone's been through it. Everybody has a scuffèd heart.

Like that Springsteen song.

See, so many songs. Nothing out of the ordinary.

Except it is.

I actually have a scuffèd heart.

An actual scuffèd heart.

It was for you.

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It was in Spain.

I'd loved you since before then, of course, your smile had twinkled for two whole years - at the Turf, at the Turl, at the Angel & Greyhound Meadow; in Rose Lane and the Rad Cam - but this was in Spain.

You remember? The geological mapping trip?

I know you remember, everything that happened there you couldn't forget. You may not remember it like I do but I know you remember.

Remember Pamplona? San Fermín? The running of the bulls at the fiesta. We missed taking part, thank God, cos we got so drunk the night before cos the sangria wasn't Don Simón and came in litres, not in pints, and we had to sleep in that purple Micra we'd hired, and I knocked the handbrake off in my sleep cos it was digging into my ribs, and we rolled down the hill and when we woke up we'd nearly gone through a shop window. You laughed at me over your breakfast churros as I nursed an orange juice with a head like Edgar Allan Poe. So my field notebook says. Although that was a lie, you just made me pose hungover for the photo. You were the one who was horribly hungover. But you were pretty chuffed with your churros though. And then the next night we slept in our sleeping bags in a roadside ditch beneath some billboard and I woke up with the *zunzunzito* lowering over me, that great bloody Bacardi bat.

And the actual bat that landed on my chest that night in the hostel in my sleep and I nearly hit the roof. It hit the wall and we made a bed out of my t-shirt on the windowsill for it and prayed it would be OK. We were so happy it had flown off in the morning.

The pool we found in the mountains. You could clamber up the rocks if you were athletic enough and we kept trying and when I finally made it, show-off that I was, I tried

triple-somersaulting back into the water and opened my eyes at the last moment and nearly blinded myself. My eyes were bloodshot and my face was red raw for two days. As was my right foot after those bloody sandals from Bilbao broke on the rocky road back.

And the thunderstorm.

Wow, that thunderstorm!

The biggest thunderstorm I've ever seen.

Lightning lit the mountaintops across the whole horizon and the rain fell like spooling silver.

It was hot as hell.

And we stood on the veranda arm-in-arm, laughing like lunatics and drinking bottles of ice-cold beer.

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And I found my heart.

Your heart, I thought.

Out there in the dense and thorny scrub on top of a little hill where I picnicked for lunch and took a few bearings with my compass-clino.

And, as I checked out the dip and strike of the dusty marl in amongst the dusty scrub, something that was once not so dusty caught my eye in a crevice.

A 1955 five peseta piece with Franco's head.

How long has this been here?

But when I dug it out

behind it

a small broken heart.

The front door, as it were, of a locket.

A broken doorway to love.

Bronze - not expensive - but enamelled the colour and richness of double cream. With a heart-shaped window through to the picture of the beloved.

Now vanished.

Now scuffed.

Now unbelovèd.

Now mine.

Now yours
if you like.

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And I showed you it when you came in the purple Micra to pick me up in the shade of the fig tree.

Do you remember?

I do.

'Oh, that's pretty.'
'You can have it if you like.'
'Oh no, I couldn't. You keep it.'

So I kept my scuffèd heart.

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I put it on a little chain and wore it as a necklace to the GeolSoc Dinner, a black tie affair so I borrowed that cute little black cocktail dress from Claire, and Eleanor's expensive heels, for a bet. You were in on the bet and we sat on high table, I next to Doc Hesselbo, and we giggled as he blanched and squirmed.
You noticed the necklace though.
Do you remember?

'Oh, that's pretty.'
'You can have it if you like.'
'Oh no, I couldn't. You keep it.'

So I kept my scuffèd heart.

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I was still wearing it a year later when I came to visit you in London when you'd gone to do your MSc. Then you didn't notice until we were fooling about on the Tube and I fell over and cracked a glass panel with my head and vice versa. We were meeting your friends for a drink and you were trying to convince me girls find blood sexy, but in the end we really had to go to the hospital. I had to take my shirt off and when you saw it your eyebrows scrunched for just a fraction of a second and it almost looked like you remembered.
Almost.

'Oh, that's pretty.'
'You can have it if you like.'
'Oh no, I couldn't. You keep it.'

So I kept my scuffèd heart.

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Then there was something of a downturn and I got depressed and things kinda turned out not so well my end

kinda Clifton Suspension Bridge not so well

and you said to stop emailing and posting stuff if I was just going to be miserable, I was just bringing everyone down.

So then I kept my scuffèd heart to myself.

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And then in Lockdown you took up painting, and you started posting all your gorgeous Georgia O'Keeffey flowers on Facebook from over in Colorado

and timorously I clicked Like.

And you Liked my Likes.

I daredn't say anything more.

But I still have my scuffèd heart.