

Heaps ain't Enough

by Michelle McEwen

I have had men before tell me how much they love me— in spoonfuls, cupfuls, truckloads, and heaps. But how much don't matter much to me 'cause how much ain't for keeps. How much can always be outdone— say he lovin' me spoonfuls then come 'cross another woman that he loves cupfuls. Naw, I don't care too much for how much. What I care about is the why. I got me a man now who is always telling me why he loves me and I don't have to ask him, “Baby, why do you love me?” He just starts telling me on his own like he can't help but to tell me. He gets up in the morning telling me why, he sit at the dinner table — mouth full — telling me why, he go to bed — pulling the covers over his head — and still steady telling me why. Just this morning my man came downstairs in the work-clothes I pressed for him the night before talking about why he love me, why he can't get enough of me. This morning, when I was still yawning and putting two slices of bacon in the skillet for him for his breakfast, he said, “You know why I love you?” I shrugged and he kissed me on the back of my neck. He said, “And it ain't 'cause you press my clothes either— any woman can manage to get wrinkles out some clothes.” And I said “I know baby, now sit down and get ready for breakfast before you end up late for work.” And he gave me his I-ain't-thinkin-bout-work look then said:

“You the only black Clara I know, that's why I love you.”

“It was my mama who named me,” I said—pouring him some juice. “I ain't name myself.”

“And I love that you come from a black woman who thought to name her black child Clara.”

“I know lots of black folks named Clara,” I said—even though I only know one other black Clara and that's the woman who taught me math.

“Well, you the only Black Clara I know and plan on knowin,” he said and went on talking about how the only Claras he knew were the white ones his sisters worked cleaning houses for. He went on

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talking about how if he ever meet another Black Clara he gon' tell her she must be lying about her name. And I listened, too, sitting at the table with him with my palms on my chin and my fingers on my face 'cause I love listening to my man talking about why he loves me.

When we first met, it was at a flower shop on Hazel Street. I was there picking up flowers for a great-aunt's funeral and he was there picking up some flowers for some girl he was on his way to meet. When I had my sad-flowers in my hand and he had his love-flowers in his hand and we were both heading for the door, he turned to me and said to me, "I gotta know what kind of name belongs to a woman with a face pretty as yours." When I told him my name, he gave me this funny look like he smelled something bad. He said, "You too pretty to be named Clara." Then he told me how he ain't never met a Black Clara and he walked with me to my car where he told me he ain't never met a woman who drove a car as long and as yellow as mine. This made me smile and hand him my number on the back of a receipt even though I knew he was on his way to meet this woman he had flowers for. But she couldn't have been much because my name and my car almost made him forget about her. He called me later that day, and on my kitchen phone, I talked to him for hours. We've been lovin' ever since— going on six years now.

Most women worry about the how much too much— thinking it mean something. I'm sure the woman my man was on his way to meet that day thought he loved her "heaps" because he showed up with flowers. And that probably was enough for her. But heaps ain't enough for me. I need to know why and how come— never mind how much. Once, in the liquor store, while waiting in line to play my numbers, I heard this woman (who smelled like liquor) behind me, talking to another woman, saying how her man had told her that his love for her was bigger than a mountain. I turned to her and asked her which mountain. She didn't like that when I asked her that. She just looked at her woman-friend and told me to mind my business. I shook my head and left the store with my tickets. I couldn't tell her that the size of his love didn't matter because if he loved her so

much why was she in the liquor store so early in the day smelling like liquor *and* buying more? Someone with a man lovin' them hard don't need no drink. That's how I see it. When you got you a man telling you every day why he loves you, like I do, there's no need to drink. Your man is your drink. And my man is *my* drink. This morning, my drink said to me, before he left out the door for work, "You know why I love you?" And I shrugged like I always do when he gets to explaining his love for me. He said, "I love you 'cause you the only woman I know who smell like flowers before she even take a shower." I shoved him out the door and away from me and told him to get on to work. I said, "Flowers don't smell like this." And he said, leaning out the car window, "Black Clara flowers do." He was so loud when he said it; I saw old Miss James, who measures loves in heaps, across the street look out her window and shake her head.

