

Much is made in literature of the human heart. A marvelous contraption, it is comprised of four chambers, there are the left and right sides, of course, each comprised of a ventricle and an atrium. The atria serve as antechambers, the waiting rooms of the heart, where the blood is marshaled and staged for its eventual entry into the real workplace, the ventricle, where it shall dally only for the briefest of time before being propelled out to ferry oxygen to the many constituent parts of the body.

Maximilian had a heart, but it was often said that Max's heart had many more chambers than yours or mine. Max had a heart with at least forty chambers, by his reckoning. You see, Max had figured out that into each chamber of each heart one love could fit. He reasoned that a typical person could harbor a few loves at once. There would be two, two precious ones, which could tarry in the atria, and two others, two turgid ones, which could rush through the ventricles. A man, by Max's theory, could husband the love for his wife and his mother, preserve it, and yet have a place for the fleeting lust for a mistress or a waitress, or both. Max was no mere man. Max was sure that he had his forty chambers in his heart, and Max set about finding a love to fill each of them. As his heart was no larger than the average man's, it necessarily had much smaller chambers. Thus, he harbored much smaller loves. Rather than a lavish boudoir, a chamber in Max's heart resembled a bus shelter or phone booth. The loves he sequestered there would thus be more modest, if they were to last, or more abrupt, if they were to be intense. This is all a delicate balancing act, and this required Max's utmost attention if he were to maintain even the slightest degree of decorum.

Because of the peculiar demands of maintenance his heart imposed upon him, Max had learned to avoid those deep and broad loves. That would never fit within one of the countless chambers under his leasehold. No, Max would seek the shallow, the fleeting, those briefest and most transient of affairs. Whenever he would start to fall in love, *in love*, Max would remind himself of the massive amount of housekeeping which would be involved merely to arrange accommodations for this love.

He would imagine the swarms of romantic white blood cells sent in to evict excess or dilatory loves to make way for the new large one, and the lymphatic moving crews required to clear away the detritus. He would think of the security deposits to be processed... By the time Max was done with his cardiac bookkeeping he would have lost all interest in this new, larger love. He would go back to the small loves.

The small loves, they always seemed to keep him company anyway. They made only small demands upon him. They gave him small delights. They left only a little scar tissue. They couldn't even be missed.

And neither, it seemed, could Max.