



Postcard of the old Jamestown-Newport ferry. CHARLES PINNING

A remembrance of love squandered

My disgraceful behavior toward her had long haunted me, and when I saw a resemblance in a laughing girl playing in the snow with her dog, something tripped. I made a phone call.

"Happy Valentine's Day," I singsonged when she answered.

"Who is this?" she asked.

"A secret admirer," I said.

After a time, she recognized my voice.

"Why are you calling me?" she asked acidly.

"I wanted to wish you a Happy Valentine's Day. And apologize for my deplorable behavior."

"After all this time? Just like that?"

"Yes. And I'm sorry if I'm bothering you," I said.

There was a long pause, after which she asked, "How did you feel?"

"When—"

"When you brought down the curtain!" she snapped before I could finish.

"Not good."

"Not good," she repeated sarcastically. "Then why did you?"

"I was being supremely selfish, and I'm sorry. Would it be best for me to say good-bye now?"

"You call me out of the blue after more than 40 years and now you want to say good-bye again? Is this some kind of joke?"

"Maybe I shouldn't have called," I muttered.

After another long pause she asked, "Do you ever miss the ferry rides?"

"Of course I do," I said.

"I almost believe you," she said. "What do you miss about those rides?"

"Standing behind you outside, on the chilly days. Wrapping my arms around you and kissing the side of your face. Feeling the softness of your long brown hair."

"It's still long. But it's gray now."

"So is mine," I said.

"I am sure you look very dashing," she said, and I could see her wry smile again, and the brightening of her green eyes. "You

obviously have my phone number, but I don't have yours. Give it to me." I did and she said, "Don't call me again. I will call you, if I do. Good-bye," and she disconnected.

I'd finally done it. Faced the music. I put down the phone and poured myself a drink. I'd met Nicole just after graduating from high school, at the beginning of the summer. I had a job helping a Thames Street mechanic, and she came in with her mother to pick up their white Volvo station wagon.

She was wearing a tan cotton dress with tiny red and blue balloons printed on it.

We started talking while her mother was in the office paying the bill. They lived in Jamestown, and I wangled an invitation to visit her. We went to the beach, took walks, went to the movies. I was playing for a summer baseball team at Cardines Field and she came to my games. Nicole was two years younger than I, and we rode the ferry back to Jamestown at night, and I'd walk her up the hill to her house and scoot back down to grab the last ferry back to Newport. It was a perfect summer. We always had a good time, never argued. Everything was easy. Her mother liked me and my parents liked her and then I did this thing. The end of the summer arrived and I was heading off to college, and I went over to Jamestown and told her I was starting a new chapter in my life and our relationship was over.

"Why?" she implored through tears. "Why?"

She hung on to me crying and asking "Why?" all the way down to the ferry. My last image of her was her crying as I got on the ferry and I didn't even look back.

It was the crassest, most arbitrary thing I've ever done in my life, and it was a total betrayal of our love. I doubt she'll ever call me. But what's done is done and I've apologized. There is nothing more I can do. It's Valentine's Day, and hers is not the only heart.

— Charles Pinning, a novelist and occasional contributor, lives in Providence.