

## **How Love is a Victim of War**

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*A Very Short Story* is a story written by Ernest Hemingway that follows a couple through the trajectory of their relationship. The pair fall in love amidst a time of war, but their relationship does not stand the test of time. Due to what Ernest Hemingway himself has experienced within his lifetime, and other novels he has written about the jarring effects of war, it can be concluded that he intends to portray how the trauma of war can negatively impact a person's ability to love.

### **The Life of Ernest Hemingway**

In order to understand the theme presented in *A Very Short Story*, it is important to take a look at the author who wrote it. Ernest Hemingway was born July 21<sup>st</sup> of 1899 and was already experiencing war at a very impressionable age. World War I had begun by the time Ernest Hemingway was 18 years old and in his senior year of high school. He immediately sought out the action of war and “had enlisted for a six-month tour of duty with the American Red Cross as an ambulance driver” (Hemingway, 2003, p. XX). Hemingway quickly became a “military expert, a student of war in its totality” (Hemingway, 2003, p. XX). However, he was injured by an Austrian defensive and hospitalized for his wounds. This is how he met his first notable love: Agnes von Kurowsky. Their brief affair, which took place six years before publishing *A Very Short Story*, was a large inspiration for a variety of writings of Hemingway's writings about love.

After recovering from his wounds, he “was awarded the Silver Medal of Valor” and returned home in January of 1919 (Hemingway, 2003, p. XXI). Hemingway proceeded to get married four different times over the short span of twenty years. During this time, he continued to “[witness] and [record] the major conflicts of the first half of the twentieth century” (Hemingway, 2003, p. XIX). Ernest Hemingway both experienced and documented the effects of war on people, whilst clearly trying to cope with his own disturbing experiences. If his love life

is any indicator, war had a rather negative effect on Hemingway, a common theme his characters tend to portray in his writings.

### **Luz and the Soldier**

*A Very Short Story* is a great example of how love is negatively affected by war. His characters, based upon his real-life romance with Agnes, are both effected differently by the unstable environment they are in. Through Hemingways' characterization of his characters and their relationship, assumptions can be made regarding how their attachment abilities are impacted.

Emulating Agnes and Hemingway, Luz and an unnamed soldier meet while she is tending to him in the hospital. They fall in love and quickly want to get married. The development of their relationship is described very briefly. Hemingway assumably does this on purpose, giving their relationship a sense of fragility. Their love developed within the loneliness of war and his readers can assume that the pair fell in love to cope with the tragedies occurring around them. The relationships lack of foundation alludes that their bond is not deeply rooted in anything other than comfort and convenience.

Nonetheless, the pair intends to get married, because they want "to make it so they [can] not lose it" (Hemingway, 1924). This line of reasoning is another allusion to the fragility of their connection, portraying both characters as afraid that their relationship will end. Despite wanting to, the couple cannot get married, due to the fact that the soldier must return to the warfront and Luz has her duties to attend to at the hospital. They are separated by the war, but the next sentences state that "Luz wrote him many letters" about "how much she loved him and how it was impossible to get along without him and how terrible it was missing him at night" (Hemingway, 1924). This establishes that their relationship is still going strong, despite the

distance between them. The couple decides, in order to be together, that “he should go home to get a job so they might get married” (Hemingway, 1924). However, this decision to leave the war and pursue their relationship in the real-world seems to trigger the end of their relationship.

The problem is Luz does not want to come home, directing the reader to believe she is hesitant to leave the war. Her love for the soldier seems dependent upon being amidst the war, leading one to wonder if that is why the soldier is unnamed within the story. Luz doesn’t know how to love someone without the presence of an ongoing war. On the other hand, the soldier is afraid of losing Luz. He uses their relationship as a coping mechanism for what he has endured in the war. Desperate to maintain their relationship, he moves back to America with one goal in mind: Luz. Hemingway wrote that “It was understood he would not drink, and he did not want to see his friends or anyone in the States. Only to get a job and be married.” (Hemingway, 1924). It seems as though he gave no further thought to his own wants or needs outside of convincing Luz to join him in America. While she was afraid of loving him instead of the soldier war had forced him to become, he needed to love her to forget the war entirely.

In the soldier’s absence, since he had returned to America with the hope that Luz would join him, Luz met a major to find comfort with. She wrote to the soldier, explaining how “theirs had only been a boy and girl affair” and that “she expected, absolutely unexpectedly, to be married in the spring” to the major (Hemingway, 1924). Once again, Luz has fallen quite quickly into another unexpected and very sudden relationship. The readers can see this pattern and assume Luz isn’t experiencing actual love, despite what she is writing to the soldier. This is confirmed by the fact that the “major did not marry her in the spring, or any other time” (Hemingway, 1924). Her ability to develop meaningful relationships has been ruined by the war. She seeks out comfort in convenient soldiers of whom need her as well. The soldier’s ability to

love has similarly damage, as he sought out a way to escape the war through Luz. He desperately tried to hold onto her, but she wouldn't follow him back into the real world.

### **Another Example by Hemingway**

Ernest Hemingway was a victim of the war himself, exhibiting this by continuously creating characters who “all have war disgust” (Rizwana, 2022, p. 8). Another example of this is in *A Farewell to Arms*, a novel of which was similarly inspired by his affair with Agnes. In this book, the main characters also meet in a hospital, where a nurse, Catherine Barkley, meets and falls in love with injured soldier, Frederic Henry. The novel concludes with Catherine and their child die, leaving Frederic mourning and alone, a statement to how love goes in to die in the midst of war. Hemingway's “personal pain enables him to describe [Frederic] and his feelings to a great amount of detail” (Rizwana, 2022, p. 7). What he learned within his life are used to explain how war “can destroy anything, even one of the most beautiful things on Earth, Love” (Rizwana, 2022, p. 9). A multitude of novels written by Hemingway reflect this common theme amongst them through the anguished characters within them.

### **Hemingway's Intention**

Ernest Hemingway's *A Very Short Story* was written as a statement piece on the negative effects of war on love. The events of Hemingway's own love life, which took place during a time of warfare, inspired a variety of written works about heartbreak and the impacts of the battlefield. Knowing his intention behind writing *A Very Short Story*, it is easy to see how his main characters, Luz and the soldier, are meant to portray how war can damage a person's ability to love.

### **Bibliography**

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