



# MY BLOODY VALENTINE

RAPE, MURDER AND PILLAGE – NOT YOUR CONVENTIONAL TAKE ON ST VALENTINE'S DAY, BUT *ASTRID WYNNE* HAS OTHER THOUGHTS

**F**ebruary 14th often makes singletons want to spew. It seems the whole world goes mad for sugary love declarations, explosions of red and pink and sickening cuddly toys. Couples intertwine into smiling, self-satisfied fusion. But when you see these repulsive pairs, be comforted in the knowledge that their relationship needs a healthy dose of pain and brutality if it's ever going to be a classic.

It's not just Romeo and Juliet, that rather flimsy plot set against teenage hysteria. (He thought she was dead but she was just pretending and then he drank some poison and then she woke up and then she was really upset so she stabbed herself and... oh please). Literary history is full of unholy alliances between love, pain, and death.

Ever since ancient times, people have thought it an excellent idea to remember love stories where the characters suffer horrendous ends. The Greek myths are full of vicious titbits: young nymphs "ravished" by Zeus doing themselves in or transforming inanimate objects; kings, queens and gods in love with members of their families, with murder or suicide as a result. And then there's our first Valentine, the saint who was either a politician or a priest (no-one's sure which) and got himself battered to death with clubs before having his head lopped off in third century Rome. Look on the web and you will see a whole host of sites waxing lyrical about him opposing a law against marriage and leaving a note signed "From your Valentine" for the jailor's daughter.

An aside on this is that the link between himself and the celebration of St Valentine's is dodgy. Until 1969 the Catholic Church recognised eleven St Valentines, three of whom died on February 14th in a sufficiently hideous way to be martyred. One is our Roman friend, the other Archbishop of Terni and a third expired in Africa. Even if we had the right one, it's not until Chaucer, eleven centuries later, that we find the feast day linked with romantic love.

But let's not be killjoys about this. There's no denying that a healthy dose of blood and guts makes for a fine tale. "Frankie and Johnnie were lovers", so the song goes, but "they had a long and fruitful life together" would make an absolutely terrible chorus. Far better "she shot her man/ because he was doing her

wrong". That way neither gets old and saggy with stretchmarks and middle aged spread. Of course, it's not entirely necessary to die young if you want to go down as legendary lovers. Heathcliff managed quite a twisted version of it in *Wuthering Heights*, although he did have to spend half the book in love with a ghost. In real life, Abelard and Heloise from the early twelfth century have been remembered ever since as inspirational co-devotees.

The beginning of their relationship is slightly suspect by modern standards – she was just 13 and he was a tutor 20 years her senior – but what happened next is rip-roaring stuff. She had his child. He shut her up in a nunnery and secretly married her. For his troubles, her uncle had him dragged out of bed in the middle of the night and castrated (for seducing her, not locking her up). Not that any of this stood in the way of their later relationship, by the by.

They never saw each other again but started up as pen-lovers. The letters, considered a treasure of romantic literature, are filled with passionate devotion that will only reach fruition on the other side of death. The only fly in the ointment is she regularly berates him for having deserted her. Now this last sticks in the craw somewhat when retelling the yarn. The illicit relationship, the agony, the separation are all excellent. But the whinging is a little too pedestrian.

This being the case perhaps it is best to eschew romantic sentiment altogether in a Valentine's tale and go straight for the gore. Al Capone made his contribution with the order of seven deaths in 1929 Chicago. The St Valentine's Day Massacre, perpetrated by four of his cronies machine gunning six opposing gangsters and a mechanic certainly did capture public imagination. Though one of the perpetrators was shot to death on the same day in 1936, no-one remembers this with as much vigour as the bloody slaughter in the garage.

Hearts and flowers, it seems, are much improved with a healthy dose of blood to match. Insignificant greeting card love is a pale imitation of the unrequited, doomed and tortured varieties. Or at least as far as story telling is concerned. In light of this, we should perhaps all go and watch *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* on February 14th. It makes sense in a twisted sort of way. ♥