Love Is Not Like Merchandise

A reader in Florida, apparently bruised by some personal experience,

writes in to complain, “If I steal a nickel’s worth of merchandise,

I am a thief and punished; but if I steal the love of another’s wife, I am free.”

This is a prevalent misconception in many people’s minds—that love,

like merchandise, can be “stolen”.

Numerous states, in fact, have enacted laws allowing damages for “alienation of affections”.

But love is not a commodity; the real thing cannot be bought, sold, traded or stolen.

It is an act of the will, a turning of the emotions, a change in the climate of the personality.

When a husband or wife is “stolen” by another person,

that husband or wife was already ripe for the stealing, was already predisposed toward a new partner.

The “love bandit” was only taking what was waiting to be taken, what wanted to be taken.

We tend to treat persons like goods.

We even speak of the children “belonging” to their parents.

But nobody “belongs” to anyone else. Each person belongs to himself, and to God.

Children are entrusted to their parents, and if their parents do not treat them properly,

the state has a right to remove them from their parents’ trusteeship.

Most of us, when young, had the experience of a sweetheart being taken from us by somebody more attractive and more appealing.

At the time, we may have resented this intruder—but as we grew older, we recognized that the sweetheart had never been ours to begin with.

It was not the intruder that “caused” the break, but the lack of a real relationship.

On the surface, many marriages seem to break up because of a “third party”.

This is, however, a psychological illusion.

The other woman or the other man merely serves as a pretext for dissolving a marriage that had already lost its essential integrity.

Nothing is more futile and more self-defeating than the bitterness of spurned love,

the vengeful feeling that someone else has “come between” oneself and a beloved.

This is always a distortion of reality, for people are not the captives or victims of others—they are free agents,

working out their own destinies for good or for ill.

But the rejected lover or mate cannot afford to believe that his beloved has freely turned away from him— and so he ascribes sinister or magical properties to the interloper.

He calls him a hypnotist or a thief or a home-breaker.

In the vast majority of cases, however, when a home is broken,

the breaking has begun long before any “third party” has appeared on the scene.

**爱情不是商品**

佛罗里达州的一位读者显然是在个人经历上受过创伤, 他写信来抱怨道: “如果我偷走了五分钱的商品, 我就是个贼, 要受到惩罚, 但是如果我偷走了他人妻子的爱情, 我没事儿。”

这是许多人心目中普遍存在的一种错误观念——爱情, 像商品一样, 可以 “偷走”。实际上，许多州都颁布法令，允许索取“情感转让”赔偿金。

但是爱情并不是商品;真情实意不可能买到，卖掉，交换，或者偷走。爱情是志愿的行动，是感情的转向，是个性发挥上的变化。

当丈夫或妻子被另一个人“偷走”时，那个丈夫或妻子就已经具备了被偷走的条件，事先已经准备接受新的伴侣了。这位“爱匪”不过是取走等人取走、盼人取走的东西。

我们往往待人如物。我们甚至说孩子“属于”父母。但是谁也不“属于”谁。人都属于自己和上帝。孩子是托付给父母的，如果父母不善待他们，州政府就有权取消父母对他们的托管身份。

我们多数人年轻时都有过恋人被某个更有诱惑力、更有吸引力的人夺去的经历。在当时，我们兴许怨恨这位不速之客—但是后来长大了，也就认识到了心上人本来就不属于我们。并不是不速之客“导致了”决裂，而是缺乏真实的关系。

从表面上看，许多婚姻似乎是因为有了“第三者”才破裂的。然而这是一种心理上的幻觉。另外那个女人，或者另外那个男人，无非是作为借口，用来解除早就不是完好无损的婚姻罢了。

因失恋而痛苦，因别人“插足”于自己与心上人之间而图报复，是最没有出息、最自作自受的乐。这种事总是歪曲了事实真相，因为谁都不是给别人当俘虏或牺牲品——人都是自由行事的，不论命运是好是坏，都由自己来作主。

但是，遭离弃的情人或配偶无法相信她的心上人是自由地背离他的——因而他归咎于插足者心术不正或迷人有招。他把他叫做催眠师、窃贼或破坏家庭的人。然而，从大多数事例看，一个家的破裂，是早在什么“第三者”出现之前就开始了的。