



Undying Love: The True Story Of A Passion That Defied Death

Ben Harrison

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The power of obsessive love seems to know no bounds-- yet one man took his unrequited passion to a grotesque new level that will shock even the most hardened readers. *Undying Love* is that story-- read on if you dare...

Carl von Cosei was a German immigrant who worked as a technician in a Key West tubercular ward. When a beautiful young woman, Elena Milagro Hoyos, was brought in with an advanced case of tuberculosis, von Cosei-- a self-named count-- was determined to cure her with his own unconventional methods. But Elena eventually succumbed to the fatal disease, and the Count was heartbroken, for despite her rebuffs, he had fallen madly in love with the fetching Latina.

For two years, von Cosei worshipped her grave-- until he could stand it no longer. One moonless night, he exhumed Elena's decomposing body and took it home with him. Through an elaborate embalming process, von Cosei managed to preserve the corpse from further decay and even garishly dressed it up to become his eternal bride. In their macabre marriage bed, von Cosei made love to his mummified wife-- and kept her shriveled corpse for eight years...until his twisted crime was discovered!

Undying Love: The True Story Of A Passion That Defied Death Details

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Melanie says

I found it unsettling, of course, but for reasons other than the obvious. What bothered me most was the fact that while the author keeps trying to present the Count as a sympathetic character (and in fact most people alive at the time the story broke in the news were also sympathetic to him), I couldn't get past the fact that this was an older man who had abandoned his wife and young daughters in a foreign country while he obsessively pursued a 'relationship' with a much younger woman, who was already married and not interested in him. The Count believes he is in love with Elena, but he barely knows her, and his condescension towards her family and her culture is really off-putting. He has fallen in love with her based on looks and how she apparently matches some dream woman he has in his head, and since the bulk of their 'relationship' takes place after she's dead, it's pretty obvious that it's not actually her he's in love with. Since this is not a work of fiction, however, my issues with the Count himself aren't relevant to my review of the book. Overall I think Harrison did great research and really brought together the different sources to put together a multi-faceted presentation of the story. He did a good job of trying to discover how much of what the Count writes in his memoirs is actually true, and gives a good sense of the place and times where the events took place. In many places however there are typos and sometimes the text does get a bit repetitious. I do also think more cultural notes would've been useful, particularly when it comes to the way the newspaper articles at the time would put so much emphasis on the nationalities of the Count and Elena in a way no reputable modern paper would. I also think it's a bit remiss not to include a list of resources, so one could follow up and read the original sources in their entirety, and also see if one comes to the same conclusions the author did.

Aubrey scott says

The story "Undying love" is a chilling story of one of key West's most famous tales that has been told to almost all who pass through this area. historical and Paranormal tours bother tell the story of this morbid man and his obsession. After reading the book "Undying Love" and taking the tour of the area you get a strange feeling about this creepy city.

The author does a fantastic job of painting the image of this man and the city during this time. He both portrays the body thief, Count Carl Tanzler, as a sick in the mind criminal who deserved to be punished as well as a man with a love that deserves the sympathy of the masses.

This week written, unbiased book gives you a look at both angles. It shows you how the people in Key West and the government viewed this situation and how the Count himself viewed this morbid situation.

I would suggest this as a must read for many different circumstances such as a death or dying class in school or for any tourist interested in Key West and its interesting history.

Kristin says

There is a lot I could say about this book. I was in a store for some other reason when I ran across this book. I like to read some true crime stuff so I bought it. On the good side: It was what one would expect. It is deeply disturbing as is the situation and the man whom the book is about. I was trying to figure out what was wrong with this man that caused him to live this way, and I don't think those questions were answered.

Is this story for the weak of mind and the easily sickened?....nope.

I am not sure that my life was enriched by reading it, but I am also positive it did me no detriment.

Sorry I can give more of a glowing recommendation. If you have the slightest curiosity about true crime, then I would suggest that this book may be for you.

Melissa says

DNF

I was so excited to find this book because this story has always intrigued me. The story is written around the published memoirs of Von Cosey and to me that is where I find a problem. Harrison in his research on Von Cosey's life hints that these accounts are the factitious ramblings of a man who was mentally ill. If that is true why create a story based on those accounts as if they were completely true? Maybe some of the details are true but it would take a lot of research to find what parts were true and what parts aren't. Von Cosey's accounts were written long after his days of body snatching and necrophilia and for a pulp magazine so I doubt he could recall in perfect detail everything that was said or happened. If the author could of written a book without it revolving around such questionable material I would of enjoyed it and finished it.

Kathy Love says

I got this book after taking a ghost tour in Key West, FL. The story the tour guide told us is nothing compared to reading the story told from the actual diaries of Carl Von Cosey. He was a man who lived with the corpse of his (unrequited, although he didn't seem to know that) love for years. Definitely the most bizarre and disturbing love story you will ever read. Sometimes truth is way weirder than fiction. Honestly, I couldn't put this book down.

Heather says

The story was incredibly intriguing - a man falls in love with a woman he has only known from afar and sets about to make her his own forever, even after death. I could not put the book down! So bizarre and fascinating!

While the story was compelling, the writing was not. I kept with the book despite the writing style. The last several chapters are mainly word for word the newspaper clippings that are found in the photos section.

I recommend this book to anyone who can look past repetitive, purple prose to dig into an incredible true story. It made me ask myself the question "Has anyone ever loved me like this?" But I'm not dead yet to see!

Kristina says

Interesting book, even more interesting/funny musical! Good Valentine's Day Book Club read...

Kim says

I read this book after taking the Key West Ghost Tour because I didn't believe the story was true. I enjoyed the book, which goes into great detail about the strange life of Carl Tanzler and his "bride". I recommend this book to anyone who has taken the Key West Ghost tour, and also to anyone who enjoys stranger than fiction.

Heather says

Absolutely terribly written—and even worse, it talks about an old man harassing a young woman then defiling her corpse as some grand love story, which is how Key West has apparently framed this awful tale for years. The writer has far, far too much respect, bordering on adulation, for this criminal and, like his subject, hugely (and badly) oversexualises a teenage girl. This book only scrapes 2/5 because the subject matter is fascinating and I read it as research for a new novel.

Kyla says

Addicting and creepy. Fairly well written.

Sheryl says

It is unbelievable to me that this story was never made into a B movie. Having gone on a ghost tour of Key West last year, I was intrigued by the story of the "doctor" who preserved his young love in wax and kept her body in his bed for 7 years. It just sounds lurid and creepy, but the story is in the details: he claimed to be a Count in Germany, but no one ever found any evidence. He claimed to have something like 27 degrees, but again, no proof. He claimed to have built a castle out of rock off the coast of Australia...He was refinishing an old airplane on the grounds of the Key West hospital where he was employed as an xray technician. He built numerous pipe organs and strange medical machines including something he called a "million volt machine" to rejuvenate his beloved.

This would be a great fiction story, but the fact that these events really happened makes it even more amazing.

I gave it only 3 stars because the writing is a bit muddled at times. The author quotes extensively from the memoirs of the doctor which were published in a "true stories" serial in the 1940s--sometimes it's hard to tell where a quote ends and the author's analysis begins. The author clearly took the time to research some of the doctor's outlandish claims, but lets others go by without comment. The final few chapters are pretty lurid with the author playing up the titillation of "did he or didn't he?" with respect to a physical relationship with

the corpse. (if you are curious, ask me)

I would recommend this book to people who like a good true crime story, or goths, or sociologists (one of the most interesting things to me is the reaction of the general public to the doctor's trial)

Cassandra says

I bought this book because of a ghost tour in Key West. The tour guide promised graphic detail, as did the reviews. I was sadly disappointed. One weak paragraph at the end of the book was all I got. Call me morbid but I wanted to know more! Although fascinating the book is extremely repetitive. News paper article after news paper article recounting the same events.

Kate says

The story is enthralling (heard about it on This American Life), but damn, this book itself was just bad. How many news articles essentially saying the same thing must be shared, for example? Just listen to the TAL podcast instead.

What a letdown.

RickyB says

spoilers

If you removed quotes from newspapers and von Cose's memoir there would be around 20 pages of the author's own writing, and most of the time he was simply summing up the quoted material.

The story was very interesting and that is what the 2 stars are for. The writing, when we heard from the author, was terrible. a couple of errors didn't improve it any. Eg. year of birth was quoted as being 1908, but on the photo of the headstone it clearly reads 1909. This is probably more a copy editor problem than an author issue but it makes for a bad reading experience when I'm going back and forth to confirm which fact is right.

Probably the most interesting thing about this story is how much sympathy and support von Cose received after his crime became public. I wonder what the effect would be if it happened today. He was never charged with anything so I feel a little bad for the family but, again, this is because there was so little about them that made sense. In the beginning they were caring, although overbearing, and opposed von Cose, but at the end Elena's family apparently knew about what von Cose had done but were paid by him to keep quiet, even though this had never been suggested throughout the whole story.

It's a thin book so didn't take long to read. I'd recommend it if you just wanted a basic overview of the story.

Kylie says

I was attracted to this due to my love of the bizarre, and this certainly satisfied my curiosity. The only critique I have is that after a while the long reproduction of newspaper articles in the later chapters became

dull due to their repetitious nature. Maybe it would've been better if he had included only one or two, and paraphrased any extra important contributions from other articles. I was fine with the lengthy quoting of the Count's memoirs, since it gives an insight into his mindset -assuming of course this was what he truly believed, and not a cover for 'standard' necrophilia. I personally believe it's somewhere near the truth of his feelings for Elena but we can never know for sure.
