

伤 感 的 卡 萨 布 兰 卡

英文版



贝拉 *Bei La*

*S*ENTIMENTAL CASABLANCA

Translated from Chinese by Ann Huss

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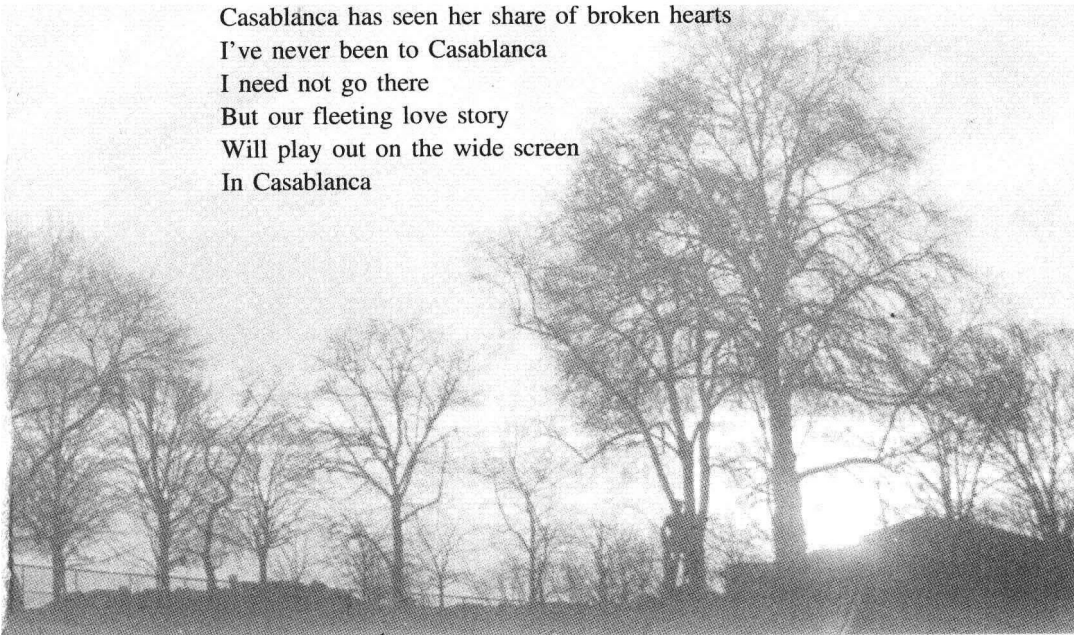
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I fell in love with you
Listening to "Casablanca"
In the falling darkness
At a little French restaurant
We looked into each other's eyes
And tasted champagne and caviar
We made love at twilight
In a Norwegian wood
You led me by the hand in a trance
At dusk in a horse-drawn carriage
We avoided the waning light
But the moonlight spilled in upon me
Bumping along in that old carriage
Beneath the canopy
You seemed one with the horse
Galloping to your heart's content
Upon the wilderness that was my body
Leaving mottled marks in your wake
Was it a reflection or a dream?
Unforgettable kisses, eyes closed
In Casablanca
Tears stream down
All of that is but a memory
Let me immerse myself in sentimental Casablanca
Dearest, I've loved you
But it can't be forever
With tears in my eyes
I bid you farewell
Casablanca has seen her share of broken hearts
I've never been to Casablanca
I need not go there
But our fleeting love story
Will play out on the wide screen
In Casablanca



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Introduction

A Lonely Valentine's Day

It's February 14, 2003 — Valentine's Day. Depressed, I walk along the southernmost part of Toronto's Bay Street. My lover John left me last night ...

Tears pour down my cheeks as I walk through the heavy snow. A bitterly cold, wintry wind pierces my moist, swollen eyes. In silence, I endure another night of anguish, a bitter, agonized Valentine's Day.

I can't help but think back to this same day last year. I was in Shanghai. John was with me and heart-shaped chocolates surrounded us ...

How do I understand everything that's happened? In a year, I lost one man and fell in love with another. Just one year, but it feels as if a century has passed.

I take a deep breath of night air and continue onward. I see lights flickering ahead of me and a huge tower rises from the shimmering water. Which tower is this? It doesn't look like the CN Tower. I rub my eyes, and then look again. It's not the CN Tower!

Now I'm confused. Where am I? Isn't this Toronto? In the blink of an eye, the mounds of silvery snow have disappeared and in their place are crowds of people crawling about me like ants and speaking in a tongue I haven't heard in ages. I stare blankly off into the distance at this gigantic tower. It looks so familiar. In an instant, I'm transported back in time ...

It's nighttime, and the azure blue sky above Lake Ontario is slowly fading. I stare off at the golden dome of the Royal Bank Building as it shimmers in the evening light and my mind fills with a thousand thoughts. My pace slows as I near the intersection that I traveled across with John so many times. Billboards line the street and looking at the dreamlike, gaudy neon lights, I'm reminded of the flame in my heart that's slowly dying out, a flame that once raged through

my being and filled my spirit. I cross Front Street and in just a few steps arrive at the Ballet. As I enter the building, music fills my ears, a melody so lighthearted, so elegant, so enchanting.

All alone in the world, I'm surrounded by couples out for a night of romance. Rather mindlessly, I'm holding two tickets in my hand that I reserved a while ago. As I stand amidst the crowd, I suddenly become faintly aware for just a moment that I may never again miss a man. I begin to work out the plot of *Sentimental Casablanca*. This book is already more important than him, more important than everything that has happened. Will it again be a story of life and death, love and sexuality? Will it be the story that finally hollows my heart? Will there never be anything other than sentimentality and raging desire?

I contemplate life, death, love, and sexuality as I make my way through the crowd of lovers. The image of John as he left yesterday remains in my mind and solidifies in my misty tear-filled eyes. The desolate sound of his footsteps seems to shake the very earth I walk on and frightens my sentimental heart. Perhaps because I've said so many goodbyes, the pain has numbed me. On the surface, it looks as though I'm far calmer about this breakup than about anything else that's happened to me in the past. But the grief is there, hidden by my silence. There's no question; I've been hurt. I feel as if I've just watched my most precious jewel drop inadvertently into the ocean. Oh, the pain! Yet another part of me knows there's nothing I can do. I can't get it back. All I can do is feel relieved, thank my lucky stars that I once knew him, and add the memory of that brief, brilliant moment to the river of memories that is my life.

John healed my spirit in two ways. When I had lost everything, when my loneliness had reached the deepest of doldrums, and I was ready to face death head-on, he made me want to live again, then he made me want to love again ...

This time, I was once again out of control and his departure woke me from my troubled state.

Once *Swan Lake* is over, I'll return to the lakeside apartment we shared and write him a letter. I'll tell him that losing him brings me unbelievable pain, but he need not return. Soon I'll once again travel to a far-off place. The past can finally be left in the past. I've decided to write a book to memorialize that period in my life, to keep his spectacular love alive always. I'll tell him that this novel will be different from *Celestial Wedding* and *Bella's Secret Garden*. He took me to life's highest point and taught me the true depth of death; in dreams after all, life and death are one and the same ...

The attendant tears both tickets. In front of a magnificent stage and surrounded by a spectacular crowd, as the sound of applause rises around me, I keep watch over the vacant seat next to me and guard the empty space in my life.

As the final curtain falls and the lights go up, the excitement I see on the faces of those around me shines in stark contrast to my own pallid heart. I finally realize, once the music is over and the audience has dispersed, that a part of my life is over. I have to admit that this book will be a tomb in which I might lay all memory of sadness to rest, as well as the me that once depended on love and belonged to men. From tonight onward, all of that is in the past. From now on, I will gather the power of all the men I've known within me and use that power to contend with life's difficulties. Death is in the past. My old life is part of the past as well. I want to go back to nature, to take all that it has to give, and to begin again.

I can guarantee that John is not the last man in my life, nor will he be my final love. Life is full of unfulfilled desire; the human spirit exists to keep the fire of love alive. I can imagine that in my last moments on this earth, my heart will be filled with love. All of the men I've loved are in fact just one person. His name isn't Graham, or John, but is instead a constellation of names that spell love — just as gatherings of stars shimmer in the night sky.



Chapter 1

Affectionate Toronto

Upon leaving Norway, we traveled about Europe for a while, then finally flew back to North America and temporarily settled in Toronto. I had chosen Toronto because of my attachment to Lake Ontario and because I could visit Graham's father Ricky who lived close by. Toronto's also not far from New York where John had to return quite often to deal with a business-related legal case that had been held up in the courts.

It was late November and the chill in the air meant winter was just around the corner. John and I had arranged to meet Anthony, a real estate agent with a great beard, in the lobby of the hotel where we were staying, the Royal York. We had asked him to find us an apartment that looked out over Lake Ontario. It just so happened that he had a brand new apartment on the thirty-ninth floor overlooking the lake. It was close to the hotel and near the CN Tower, the world's tallest building. We immediately fell in love with the place, and within three days, we had completed the paperwork and the apartment was ours.

How can I possibly describe our new life?!

I still recall our first day there. It was dusk and we were standing on the balcony of our thirty-ninth-floor apartment watching the sunset. A warm breeze blew over us as the sun turned from light yellow to scarlet, then finally disappeared. Across the lake, mountains rose from the islands of the United States, and the trees and the water, shrouded in rosy red, met a glorious purple horizon. What a spectacular view. The sky was streaked with a bouquet of color. It was so beautiful that I was filled with a delirious sense of happiness. I wanted to reach out and die, holding the waning light and the ripples upon the lake in my arms. I got a certain type of strength from Lake Ontario. In the cold, wintry wind, I turned my face toward the sky and asked the breeze to take my heart with it to heaven.

"It's cold, love. Let's go in!" John said, noticing that I was only wearing a thin shirt.

"Let me stay here just a bit longer. It's so beautiful, too beautiful." My voice was full of wonder, and as if in a trance, I stared off at the mountains and water below, sighing deliriously. "This is the most beautiful view I've ever seen."

He took a few steps backward, then turned to go into the bedroom. A moment later he returned with a shawl, quietly placed it around my shoulders, then left me there standing alone like a statue and staring off at the myriad of mysterious lights in the night sky. The rosy redness had faded to make way for stars that began to shimmer along the horizon as life surged with excitement, an excitement born of a perfect blend of darkness and dreams ...

Do you know what it's like to be loved by a man who exudes charm? Do you have any idea how the days linger full of warmth and fragrance? And how when night ends we're loath to part with each other?

Each day brought new temptations. Often we would sit at dusk side-by-side on the balcony looking out at Central Island in the distance and listening attentively to the harmonious, sweet-sounding music of nature as we stared off toward the stars. We knew that soon we would lie in each other's arms until the sun once again began rising over the horizon. Sometimes we would stay in bed all day, not letting even an ounce of sunshine into the room. With the curtains pulled, the earth stood still on its axis for just a brief moment in time.

What is the earth after all? I would lie lazily upon the bed contemplating such strange questions. Isn't she simply a big-breasted, full-bottomed woman? Her swan's-down body rises and falls with the current of the ocean as she wriggles indomitably, dripping with sweat, beneath the powerful weight of her ruler. Like me, over and over again, she joins him, naked of body; then afterward, she floats amongst the cloud-enveloped stars, her entire body emanating a light forged only from wild emotions. Her body, from her full breasts all the way to the outline of her thighs, confirms the brightness of the sun. She roams from season to season and year to year, providing life to women everywhere. When her body is suddenly seized with happiness or anger, she rouses that spider web in the sky and in a fit of irascible excitement, falls into her own whirlpool ... I find myself almost hallucinating about her at times. Sometimes she's a warm mother deer or mother sheep who has unfortunately fallen into a well, and with eyes wide open and her heart pounding wildly, she lies there waiting. For what is she waiting? She's waiting for yet another wild moment, another furious roar, to rescue and redeem her ...

Again and again, my body produces clouds with one turn and rain with another, topped off each time by a strike of lightning.

“Sweetheart, why do you love me so much? Can you tell me?” Every time I recalled that John had given up his job to be with me, I was so touched.

“It’s because,” said John, “because of this strange feeling I have for you — especially when you’re close to me like now. It’s as if there’s a string tied around a rib close to my heart and that same string is tightly attached to the same point on your body, making us inseparable. Even if one day we were to part, that string, this emotional bond, won’t be severed. But my heart, my inner being, will bleed. As for you — will you forget me, my love?”

“No, I won’t. I love you, John.” Like a tiny bird, I curled up in his embrace. Even I couldn’t tell if that “No, I won’t” meant I would never leave him, or I would never forget him.

John’s every touch was intoxicating. Each long, deep look from him would fill my body with rapturous expectation. We made love, wildly, softly. To me, lovemaking is just a small part of love. Over and over again, he would bring me so quickly to a smooth, graceful climax; then again, he’d take me onward to yet another magnificent peak. Oh, how moving it all was! Without any hesitation whatsoever, he brought forth the gigantic volcano hidden within me.

“Sweetie, God knows how much I love you!” he reminded me.

Every morning, John would wake with a yawn, then sit up and stare at me until I finally opened my sleepy eyes. Only then would his lips come to rest wantonly upon my face and then my lips, as if the sun were wishing me good morning. At that very moment, it was as if some sort of liquid flowed from his eyes and soaked every inch of me. I could almost feel a fragrant plantain lily take root and grow silken within me ...

Ah, what could be more tantalizing than the satisfied, sleepy, fruit-bearing body of a man!

Those days were filled with warmth and the air swelled with the fragrance of flowers. Rich fruits were ripening as the essence of the sun saturated our solemnly silent garden.



That night, after we had made love, I felt like lazily drifting off to sleep.

In the darkness, I stretched out my legs. The moonlight fell in splinters through the blinds and down upon my body. I closed my eyes, bathed in the warmth of the moon goddess, and slowly floated off to sleep.

All of a sudden, John mischievously crouched between my legs and held the beam of a very bright flashlight upon my private place ...

I grew excited and couldn't sleep. He said that he had never before looked so closely at a woman's body. He wanted to investigate every last secret space. He wanted to find the source of the magnetic field, the unbelievable power that attracted him. "Like rosebuds filled with snow," he said.

This reminded me of the time that I had seen a sculpture of the lower half of a female body — it was a work by Rodin.

I recall that the sculpture was headless, her legs were spread wide, and there was no upper body. At that very moment, I remember thinking that a woman was no more than that space between her legs and that man's mission in life was simply to plant his seeds there. Sex only grows mysterious when you add the element of desire.

I closed my eyes again, enjoying his eyes upon me. I could feel my own personal paradise opening up before him. Was it a black tulip or a snowy rosebud ... what has he found? Isn't that part of a woman no more than a secluded cave? The only difference is that some caves are magical and others are dead.

Once I was on a trip to Bombay as a reporter for *Asahi Shimbun*, and an old woman told me an ancient Indian folktale about the "temple of the goddess of sex." In this temple stands a gigantic statue of a man and a woman having sexual intercourse; the statue is known as "Shawa's magical cave."

The story goes that during the young virgin Shawa's first sexual encounter with a man, the pain was unbearable. Soon though, she tasted ecstasy and found herself wanting more. With wild abandon she pulled him further and further inside of her until he was completely spent. He was exhausted, but she couldn't stop herself. She continued to hold him tightly inside of her, thrusting, twisting, frenzied, enraptured, foraging over and over for another taste of paradise. At last, they died in each other's arms ...

The statue became a permanent memorial to their final lustful moment.

For generations, Indian women have thought of Shawa as the goddess of sex.

They've worshipped and admired her, and practiced hard to emulate her. "Shawa's magical cave" became their totem to reproduction and provided much-needed spiritual guidance.

Is it God who inadvertently bestows this miraculous power upon certain women?

I'm a bit shy about relating this question to myself, but once I'm able to detach myself, the whole thing has a sacred feel to it.

Who is truly worthy of the title "magical cave"? Perhaps it's best if the men in my life answer the question for you. I can only say that God created this miracle for all humanity. It's not a myth, nor is it some sort of magical power that can be perfected with practice. It's simply ...

Perhaps it's better if I describe this miraculous discovery slowly.

Just as I wasn't born a virgin, God once made me grieve for the unbridled magnetism that flowed from that part of my body. Was that too something I was born with? Perhaps. I just never realized I possessed such magic. All I had to do was concentrate and that private corner of my body would explode with unrestrained power; gripping his sex tightly I'd pull him down into my tempestuous, overflowing river. There would be no escape. He was mine — a powerless boat in wild waters.

Now that I think of it, this discovery of mine can probably be traced back to the experiences I had researching my first novel, *Endless Spring*.

I won't deny that while I was writing that book, I spent a considerable amount of time studying the sexual training that every geisha undergoes.

Imagine yourself looking through the window of one of the magnificent homes in Tokyo's Setagaya District. Allow me to take you there.

The geisha here are not the ones you may be thinking of, their faces stone-white and heavily made up; nor are they the geisha you might encounter playing instruments and dancing upon a stage. Their style of dress is like that of most other women. They wear simple, tasteful kimono, and when they're training, they train together in the nude.

The content of their training is extensive; and the process is mesmerizing. Witnesses to such training are sure to be shocked by what they see. Even I, who had seen more than my share of the world as a reporter for *Asahi Shimbun*, was astounded. They far surpass what you might see in one of those ancient imperial

paintings of enchanting beauties in compromising positions. Such paintings were always just a bit too elegant, too overdone. The boudoir was about seduction; the human body remained fettered, never free to express its innermost desires. In contrast, in order to control and then pillage her man, the Japanese geisha works her body until every motion, each twist of the hand, every coquettish step, is pure magic, flirtatious and seductive. Sexual prowess is their most important course of study. Those on the outside naturally often find just about everything about their lives comical; but the unflagging spirit of the geisha never fails to move even the diehard critic.

Their course of study begins with the eyes.

When a woman looks at her lover, she must be able to tell him exactly what she's thinking, just as a silent movie tells its story frame by frame. The expression in her eyes must speak silently of her desire. The eyes can tell him that you love him, that you're touched, that you want him, you're wet, you're melting, you want to come, you want to swallow him up ...

Is it difficult for the expression in a woman's eyes to take her to that magical place?

If we say that a woman's eyes are her emotional exit, then where is the entrance to her desire and her love?

The night Graham arrived in Tokyo for the opening of the movie version of *Endless Spring*, I became a geisha before his eyes, rocking and swaying and dripping with delectable sweat. I could feel myself floating, surrounded by flames of desire, and those flames were all extending in one direction, burning toward that special place. I lost feeling everywhere else. I felt light as air. All power had traveled to the center of my body and slowly, I could feel a tornado of ecstasy coming on. My hands were tightly fisted and my body rose up to meet his. Every inch of me contracted; my toes curled. The spectacular sweetness that was about to greet me flickered on my face. I threw my head back and with my hair wild about me, I welcomed a raging tide that I had never before experienced. In that moment, I exuded an electrifying magnetism.

All of the power, the love, and the fire burned there in that special place. Like a person drowning in the ocean holds on to a reed for dear life in a last attempt to stay on this earth, I held him tightly and drew energy from him. A roar grew in his throat; he could no longer move. His entire body stiffened as he spiraled, almost on the verge of death, towards that moment of sheer, beautiful ecstasy. In an instant, he became one with me, part of my body, son of the virgin mother ...

What a beautiful, heroic moment! My hands held his tightly as we rode the waves. Wave after wave crashed and receded, pushing us further into the clouds and burying us in mist. We were truly as one, body and blood inseparable. We were glued to each other, tied in a knot ... we had melted into each other, just as his blue eyes had melted each time he looked at me. I pulled him into me again as if to swallow him. I could feel my body reaching its limit. I could hold on no longer. I had to welcome the torrent. The most beautiful rainfall is that which has been wished for. Let me wish for that cloud of love to burst down upon me ... oh ... I'm coming, I'm coming ... my child!

I need not reveal too much about his wild climax. One moment he was swooning, the next moment he was splendidly satisfied. Every inch of his body let go. Even his hair shimmered in ecstasy and the bed cried out in secret happiness beneath the weight of his body. He met a love spirit and in a shower of kisses, he exploded within me.

Afterward, I melted, exhausted, in his arms. Hot tears poured from my eyes. I couldn't control myself. Over and over, I thanked God for this gift. Heaven! God, what kind of mission have you sent me on? I came here without my virginity, but instead I was given this unbelievable magic. For the first time, I've finally felt the power that's been buried within me. I'm more than happy. I don't have to train like the geisha. This love spirit has been granted me by heaven. I'm so content, so sublimely satisfied. I have this mysterious, womanly power and even the greatest of men will become powerless boats in the wildness of my waters.

If women are able to control men, then they will control the world. The world belongs to men after all.



"Tell me, what was the most memorable time you made love?" We had just made love ourselves and I was lying lazily with John on the sofa.

He sat up a bit and wrapped me tightly in his arms.

"Tell the truth. You have to tell the truth," I added.

"If I tell you, you have to tell me too."

"It's a deal!" I slapped his left palm with my right hand to show my agreement.

"The most unforgettable time was definitely at midnight on New Years Eve in Shanghai," he said quietly.

"No, no. It can't be between us; it has to be with someone else," I said, with the tone of a spoiled child.

"OK, let me think." He went silent for a moment, then continued; "It was when I was seventeen. Yah, that's right. I was in high school. We had a music teacher named Barbara. She must have been around thirty. She was tall and beautiful with long golden hair and a great smile. Her eyes were full of warmth — and the band on her ring finger told me that she was married. I'm not quite sure why, but each time I saw her I felt good all over. She was very kind to me. At the time, I depended on my uncles for financial support and life was pretty tough. I couldn't even afford to buy a record once in a while. But I loved music and I was a great fan of the Beatles. A friend and I used to go to Barbara's classroom after school to listen to records. She had all sorts of music, both classical and popular. We would lose ourselves in the music, hanging out late into the evening. It was always pitch-black outside when we finally headed home."

"To be honest, Barbara reminded me of a motherly figure I had idolized as a child — the character of Madame de Rênal in Stendhal's 1830 novel *Le rouge et le noir* (*The Red and the Black*). Throughout my childhood, Mme. de Rênal seemed at once so very far away and within an arm's reach at all times. She seemed to be looking down upon me. The purity of her emotions made me understand a mother's love. You know, I lost my mother when I was very young. In my diary, I wrote to Mme. de Rênal as if she were my mother, the kind of generous, loving mother that was to be found only in literature. Every day I would write as if I were opening my heart to her. Now this very motherly woman had walked into my life and she was real."

"I remember one evening as summer vacation was approaching, as usual I had gone to her classroom after school to listen to music. The boy who usually went with me had had to go home early, so I was there alone. A short while later, Barbara walked in and handed me two big gift boxes. She had bought the collected works of the Beatles for my friend and me to keep as a memento. Next week she would be leaving, moving with her family to California ..."

"At that very moment, I couldn't control my emotions. Tears began to fall from my eyes. 'Norwegian Wood' was playing in the background." John stopped for a minute, lightly brushed my face with his hand, and then said, "My love, I'm sorry. I never told you why I like that song so much. When we visited that real Norwegian forest, I was reminded of that period in my early life ..."

“Go on. Finish your story,” I interrupted.

“Barbara was surprised. She had no idea that a boy could like her so much. She comforted me like a mother would and hugged me gently. With that hug, I lost control. I held her tightly and couldn’t let go. Slowly the fire of youth began to burn within me. I knew she could feel it as well — then she kissed me and began rubbing my chest. She led me knowingly from the classroom to a room in the basement where she often rested between classes.”

“It was truly unforgettable. Once I had entered her, she went wild, kissing my eyes, my lips, moaning and grasping me tightly ... that was the first time I made love with a woman. Naturally it was unforgettable.”

“And later on?” I asked.

“Afterward, she told me I had made her feel special. After she moved, she sent me a Christmas card, calling me her ‘dear boy’. I sent her a card as well, but that was it. I never heard from her again. She must be around seventy by now. I wonder how she is.” John murmured.

“No wonder you’ve always had this great need for a mother’s love. Remember when we were in the forest in Norway, you called me — who’s, by the way, young enough to be your daughter — ‘little mother’?”

“I guess you’re right. Things that happen in your early life are sure to have some effect. Anyway, my story’s over. Now how about you?”

What could I say?

He was perhaps expecting me to tell him a story about Graham. I knew he wanted to know more, but was afraid to ask. Who could possibly be more unforgettable than Graham?

But I didn’t speak of Graham; instead, I spoke of something real, of sadness, of something truly unforgettable ...

Perhaps it was because every moment with Graham had been too romantic, too difficult to forget, that instead a memory from fourteen years ago came to me.

I was twenty-three that year and a graduate student at Tokyo University. It was summer time — early on the morning of my birthday, August 8.

In sharp contrast to John’s experience in a basement, we had trekked to the top