

Eternal Moment

I hate New York in December! It was incredibly cold and I was so annoyed that I had been so silly to fly to the East coast instead to the West, going to my beloved Palm Springs. How much more pleasant would it be to enjoy the mild climate there without freezing. Now I was strolling down Lexington Ave. with that bittercold wind around my ears and icecold feet in my thick boots which didn't keep them warm. No, Big Apple wasn't inviting at all. Feeling like an iceman couldn't be fun.

I decided to warm me up, was feeling like having a hot cup of coffee. Thank God I saw a coffee shop across the street with big windows and people sitting inside without coats and jackets. A warm room and a hot drink. I didn't wish something else more at the moment. Thinking of that I even felt a warm run in my body.

The traffic light at the crossing seemed to rest on red for an eternity. I was waiting in a small crowd of people longing for that coffee shop on the other side. Finally the colour changed. I just wanted to cross the street with all the other passers-by when an old lady just in front of me collapsed and fell backwards towards me. I had the presence of mind to catch that falling body with my spread out arms. Holding her tight and being more surprised than she was, I carefully pulled her up again and kept my arms around her. Now she was standing on her feet

again but still staggering. Her big slouch hat had got out of its place and covered her face. Some of the passers-by surrounded us and asked me if they could help. The old lady didn't say a word. And I didn't know what to do. I just felt that weak body pressed to mine. And I didn't feel the cold anymore. Her breath was visible and her hands embraced my neck with a soft pressure.

"Are you o.k., lady? You just fainted and I caught you when you fell. What can I do for you? Shall I call the emergency? Do you need medical help? Can you talk to me, please?"

Suddenly she rose her head and looked directly in my eyes. And I saw hers. Eyes I had seen so often in my life, eyes which had been in my heart for such a long time already. Eyes which had accompanied my whole life since I was a little boy. Anna Karenina's eyes. My knees were shaking, I couldn't believe it. Greta Garbo's eyes were looking in mine...

She opened her mouth and whispered with a soft smile: *"I am o.k., don't worry, it's just a little attack of weakness because of my circulation. Can you be so kind as to take that little bottle out of my right pocket. I only need some drops and will feel better again. No, no, you don't have to call somebody. Silly me, I went out without breakfast this morning and suddenly I collapsed. Thank you very much, Sir, you are very friendly, thank you so much."*

And she still smiled.

"O.k., lady, but then I insist to bring you to that coffee shop overthere where you can take your medicine. And then you have to drink a hot cup of tea and to eat something. And no argument! Please, do me that favour and let me bring you there to rest and to gather new strengths again. I feel responsible for you."

She didn't say yes or no, she just kept on smiling at me. Slowly we crossed the street, arm in arm. And I took so much care of her because I had the most precious person of New York in my arm. With little steps and without saying further words we reached the coffee shop and entered it. Her hat still covered her face, nobody could recognise her. She was just an old lady accompanied by a younger man. Maybe grandmother and grandson wanting breakfast. Nothing particular.

We were lucky. Two seats in the rear corner were vacant. I helped her to take off the coat and she thankfully sat down on the chair with her backside to the other tables behind us.

She didn't take off her hat but she adjusted it so that I could see her face. Her eyes were still as young as they had been when she was Anna Karenina or Camille or Ninotchka. And her smile around her lips was still as charming and full of magic as it had ever been before. I didn't dare to stare at her. I ordered a peppermint tea for her and a coffee for me and besides two big breakfasts with eggs, ham, cheese, toast and muffins. I took the medicine out of her coat pocket, took a spoon and counted 20 drops before I passed it over to her. She opened her mouth and swallowed the medicine. I passed her a glass of water and she carefully took some sips. Then the waitress appeared with a tray and our orders.

We drank and ate together without saying a word, just a silent gathering. A gratitude with an admiration. I still didn't dare to stare at her. But I was glad that she had appetite, she really liked to enjoy her breakfast and her plate was even empty before mine was.

"What a wonderful breakfast", she suddenly proclaimed with that incomparable deep voice which sounded so familiar to me. "I feel much better now. How can I thank you for your help and your kindness?"

"Don't worry, lady, I am so glad that you feel better again. And it's a pleasure for me to invite you."

"No, no, I can't accept that", she replied, "I want to invite you. It's a must. And no argument! You took care of me, now I want to prove my gratitude. And you are not allowed to forbid that!"

I couldn't resist anymore and looked at her eyes. Sparkling blue eyes, so young, so vivid, so smiling. It was as if we were sitting quite alone in that coffee shop. No voices around anymore, no noises, no disturbings. Just she and me. Her eyes and mine. And suddenly I felt the pressure of her hands. She took my right hand and kept it in hers. Quite gentle, quite careful, quite cautious. She warmed it. For a moment that became eternity. And in that eternity we both could feel a silent understanding between us. Everything was said without words. We could hear each other without talking. We could understand what that moment meant. A little eternity full of tenderness....

She took a 20 Dollar note out of her pants pocket and placed it on the table. *"Would you be so kind as to bring me my coat, please?"* I stood up and got it. She raised and I helped her to dress. She stroke my cheek. *"You are a wonderful man. Thank you for your help. I won't forget you".* And she smiled again.

I stood rooted to the spot, incapable to move. And I saw her eyes for the last time when I stroke her cheek as well. "God bless you", I whispered, *"Miss Gustaffson"...*

She turned around and went off. And I heard the loud voices in the coffee shop again, the clatter of knives and forks, the noises out of the kitchen. The moment of eternity was over.

And reality back.

Reality? I awoke abruptly, alone in my bed, not in New York, not in America but in Europe. I still felt that pressure on my hand, I still saw those sparkling eyes in front of me, I still noticed her touching on my cheek. But I was alone. And she wasn't present....

When I stood up and switched on the light in that early morning with a view of my pillow,

I discovered something mysterious. There was a little troll sitting and staring at me.

No, not staring. Smiling...

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