

## Garbo Returns

It must have been at least 5 minutes, at least – or was it just 30 seconds?

Garbo did not open her eyes, she was awake and she was thinking, should she open them.....or not –time elapsed and finally she opened her eyes; the room felt dark – she was on her back and no, it was not dark – her eyes felt sensitive and adjusted quickly to the light in the room.

This is not my bedroom, first thought,  
second thought- a cigarette.....

There were no cigarettes on the side table. Quickly she opened the draw but neither there...nothing in it, just some tablets and handkerchiefs. Actually, there was nothing anywhere, no personal stuff, just a funny clock...blue flashing numbers.....

4 pm.....

Garbo got up and had to sit down immediately again – she felt rather weak on her legs.....by the third attempt she got up properly and walked over to the curtains, opened a little gap and knew, this is not her home, this is not the East River, no river insight – just cars and buildings....at least it seems to be NY!

She had to sit down for a moment, again – she went back to the bed, it was clear to her by now that she was in a hospital; all surfaces were polished, and smelled neutral – hospital, definitely.....

How did I get here? Garbo tried to remember what lead to her staying in this room – she remembered clearly an unpleasant journey with her niece to a hospital, April...yes, it was April....and there was that awful man who took a photo, right when I got out of the car.....I do remember that but not much more..... it must be all over the newspapers by now...all those people running around me and talking to me, very scary.....very unpleasant....I hate crowded places....

Garbo felt an increasingly desperate need for a cigarette.....

She walked towards the door and was about to open it when she realized something very strange- she felt no pain; nothing in her body was hurting, she knew she was in big pain when she arrived in the hospital, yesterday.. it was a constant pain, for the past 2 years..... which made her loose the will to live – but now it was all gone, she felt young and without any pain.  
Whatever they have done, it worked....

She opened the door and entered a corridor, bright light hit her eyes...she walked down the corridor, following the emergency arrows – always my way to exit buildings, backdoors....the fastest way out...she thought

She stood still at the end of the corridor.....she looked outside and she saw dark clouds above in the sky, closing in on NY.....she could not see much further, the building next door was enormous and in any case she was distracted by the traffic below, which was only about 4 levels down.

Garbo entered the staircase and walked down slowly.....this was about the moment when she realized she was only dressed in pajamas. Well, they were nice pajamas, not my own, I would never choose a colour like this, but really nice quality....

She also realized that she was barefoot – and that bothered her much more. I will not be able to walk through NY barefoot – God, imagine the headline...barefoot divine Garbo spotted in lower Manhattan.....I refuse to give them such a story.... They might just wait for me to exit by the back door.....

When she reached ground floor level, she entered into the corridor, very carefully, not forcefully....but it was pretty safe to do, nobody seem to be around; she was actually just by the main exit door at the downstairs reception and there was a glass window open into a small office, where a TV was running.....and a man sitting at a desk, obviously the concierge, looking into the screen.....with his feet resting on the desk surface.....

Garbo noticed opposite of the office hangers with coats, hats, shoes, umbrellas.....well all I need.....but could I?, it is not really stealing, it is an emergency.....?

Garbo put on one of the coats and also pushed her feet into two rubber boots.... they fitted.....and the coat was a bit big but it has to do.... She rushed back to be out of the view of the guy in the

booth.....anyway, he was too concentrated on some news program and did not notice what happened behind his back.....

She had to lean over the corner for a second time.....something about the TV disturbed her....there was a woman reporter talking to the audience, in a snow storm? My god, snow in April, how could that happen.....Sweden, yes maybe.....but snow in NY is so rare and April, what has happened to the world..... over night.....

Anyway, when she leaned forward around the corner, she saw the program has moved on and showed people in a room, funny hats on with a Christmas tree behind them?? A Christmas tree in April.....whatever next.....this is strange, it cant be.....I have not slept for 8 months, impossible.....Garbo dismissed the thought at once....and focused more on her main need, which was a cigarette.....we are in luck, she found a half full packet in the right hand pocket of her new coat....and there were also matches.....Good, thank God this person is addicted too...so sorry for stealing the coat, it is an emergency after all.....and I will ask my niece to compensate them – anonymously....obviously....

Garbo entered the backyard of the hospital – more or less empty.....a man in an overall smiled at her and nodded .....she ignored him, and light up the cigarette...not her style, mint flavored and pretty long....but hey, beggars cant be choosers...

She inhaled and looked up, her hands deeply buried in the pockets, cigarette in her mouth corner....Garbo noticed that there were snow flakes hitting her forehead....she enjoyed the fresh air and was surprised that she did not feel cold in the slightest.....how amazing, no pain and no coldness....

She turned right, which was leading to an archway, where the main exit must be, .....she moved in that direction and passed by another entrance door, which was all glass and only facing outside....when she passed by she had to stop right away, she noticed her reflection in the window....and it was strange to see herself, she looked funny in that purple coat, shapeless, but that was not the strange thing....the strange thing was her face – she thought she looked rather younger then she was.....she had long grey hair, in the normal non-fuss way, but her face was old but no wrinkles....she looked at her eyes and nose and was pleased – what is wrong here?? Something does not add up....

She then walked further, still puffing away, reaching the main street, which was packed with yellow cabs and people rushing along very fast, ignoring her.....the press must be at the front entrance, she seems to win the game today....as most of the times....

What now...Garbo heard a deep voice saying: HO HO HO ....well, Santa makes an appearance in April.....she had to move on, no time to be surprised about this badly timed Santa..... she saw a public phone just next to Santa..... People will not notice me....with Santa getting all the attention, who would not stare at him, in April....a black Santa.....

Garbo found a few coins in her pocked and put them into the slide.....and released them immediately. ....who will I call, she thought...

I don't have my little green book with the numbers.....and I am totally lost without it, I am so not good with numbers and that is requested now, phone numbers.....I do need to call Claire, my dearest sensible Claire, she will rescue me from here.....with fresh clothes....I am so lost without that woman....but I never had to call her, she was always there, in the morning, .....she might be in my flat right now, waiting for me, worried, but then again, she knows I am in hospital and was not there, no flowers neither.....

Garbo had one number in mind, which she never could forget....it was Sam's number, Sam Green.....but she hadn't dialed that number for years.....because he betrayed her, like so many others.....but his number she always remembered, it was the street number, one out, plus Alva's birth year plus her month...very strange.....718 5119039.....

I have to do it....

She put the loose coins into the phone again and dialed the number..... It only wrung 3 times and a female voice answered.....

Voice: *"Green antiques, how can I help you today?"*

GG: *"can I talk to Mr Green please....."*

Voice on the other end: *"Who is calling please?"*

GG: *".....ah.....it's Miss Brown..."*

Silence...

SG: *".....hello, Green here, who is this?"*

GG: *"Mr Green, it is Miss Brown"*

SG: *".....what kind of sick joke is that??"*

GG: *".....but Mr Green, it is Garbo....."*

SG: *".....and I am Mr Gilbert...."*

and before she could say anything else he had hang up. How dare he!....how can he put the phone down on me..... She dialed again, with another coin, her last one, and this time Mr Green answered himself.....right away....

Garbo spoke again, but he cut right over her and said: *"look, you, I am not interested in your jokes, I am going to report you if you call again..."*

GG: *"But Mr Green, please, it is me, Grrrrreta!....."*

Sam stopped and was transfixed.....this can't be .....he recognized her voice but it was just not possible.....

GG: *".....Mr Green, are you still there, I do need your help, can we meet, right away?"*

SG: *".....yes.....hmmmm.....yes, Greta is that really you, Greta....., where are you?"*

....Garbo looked around and tried to see where she was, and she noticed a place called.....STARBUCKS???? what on earth is that, Starbucks....a bank storing the money of stars, and signposting it?

She said out loud: Starbucks..... and he seemed not to be surprised but wanted to know more, where exactly she was.....Garbo saw a hotel entrance on the opposite side, which will clarify her location .....

GG: *"Sam, I will be in the Starbucks opposite the Hotel Viceroy"*

SG: *"Got it - Greta, please go and wait for me in the Starbucks, I'm just two blocks away.....I am on my way....do you want my cell phone number?"*

GG: *"what are you talking about??"*

and that was the moment when the money fell through and that was the end of the conversation.....  
.....cell phone what does he mean....

Garbo was scared, she thought people will probably recognize her and corner her in that place. ...but she had no choices, she stood still, outside Starbucks....and waited for a few seconds.....it is either standing in the street, in full view of everybody or hiding in the corner of this tea room.....Starbucks it is....

She looked at the window of Starbucks and was again captured by her own reflection. She looked silly in that coat but she did not see this, at the moment. She looked at her calm facial expression and at her long grey hair...what is the matter with me, today....

Garbo checked again her pocket and found in the inside pocket a valet with cards and – cash, notes, fantastic!! One of the cards had a photo and a name on it: Conceptione Maria Gonzales-Mercedes..... and, based on the photo ....., she must be about 35 years old....and looked like she had a hard life...anyway, she will be compensated.....

Garbo decided to enter Starbucks, quickly closing the coat properly not to reveal her pajama trousers..... She entered Starbucks, which was not too busy but probably half of the 30 seats were occupied, everybody busy with reading or chatting.....

She went to the counter and tried to look "normal" and not like the most famous movie star who ever lived....she had nothing to fear, the girl behind the counter was about 2 years old and surely had no idea who Garbo was- Garbo positioned herself at the end of the counter and tried not to make any eye contact. She was a bit confused what to order and when it was her turn, she heard herself say: a coffee please, just black.....

Well, this was not enough and with the help of the girl behind the counter, she settled for a decaf, she felt it might be the right thing under the circumstances.....

She was a bit shocked about the prize but she decided not to react, this would just draw attention to her, which she had to avoid ....no eye-contact.....no attention....no press

She took the coffee and sat herself down in the corner....she was lucky, it was a pretty dark corner and she could imagine that she would be safe here for the time being.

5 minutes passed, and then she saw Mr Green through the window – him walking briskly towards the entrance and looking through the glass searching for her.

He stopped, when his eyes met her's and she could see some sort of shock and surprised in his face. He seem to have aged a lot in the past years, was it that long since she dropped him.....well.....

He came over and said: *"Greta, I can't believe it....."*

GG: *"Miss Brown, please, Mr Green, yes, I know, I was very angry with you, Mr Green, but I am in an awfully difficult situation and you are the only person who could help me right now."*

SG: *"Greta, I can't believe it, you are alive?"*

GG: *"please Mr Green, it is Miss Brown, the people..... of course I am alive, I was in a hospital over there and I seem to be totally healed, to be honest Sam, all my pain has gone, left my body.....I feel young and healthy...I can only recommend that place, it is a miracle....but what about you, you look very under the weather...."*

SG: *"and old, I know, you don't understand Miss Brown, we haven't seen each other in 24 years...."*

GG: *"don't be silly, we saw each other last in 1983, on our trip to Mexico....I remember our last conversation very well, it was after that news article"*

SG: *"sorry, Miss Brown, but that is about 24 years ago.....don't you know, you died in 1990.....April 1990"*

GG: *"well, Sam, don't be silly, you see me here .....talking to you....I am very much alive"*

SG: *"but we buried you! The family buried you, in Sweden, you were brought to a hospital on the night of 15.4.1990.....aged 84.....which makes you today 101 years old! Think about it – the funeral took place in 1999....in Stockholm.....!!"*

GG: *"this is not possible.....this is not the moment for jokes.....Sam.....I am not 101 years old, I feel about 60 and I am not up for jokes at all...this is all very confusing, I died in 1990 and they buried me in 1999 – but I am still here, who did they bury??"*

*However, something is strange about today, what is the date.....why does it snow??"*

This was the moment when Sam noticed that the person next to them started to loose interest in his book and seem to be more interested in the conversation they had....

SG: *"it is Saturday, 22.12., two days before Christmas, and the year is 2007.....lets go, Miss Brown, we have a customer next door waiting for the right move.....!"*

Garbo understood immediately, and she said to SG: *"let's go back to the flat, I need to get Claire there as well, it is Saturday....so she has her day off...."*

SM: *"Claire .....but..... but Greta, she is dead for a long time, she died in 1999..."*

Garbo stood up briskly, revealing her pajama outfit to SG, who seem to be no more surprised about anything and she marched towards the door and outside into the snowy street..... SG tried very hard to catch up with her, but he was in his 80s and had problems to follow her speedy steps.....

GG walked with Sam following her, around the next corner, passing the fat, black Santa, *"HO HO HO"*, which brought them right back to the entrance where Garbo started off a few hours earlier.....

GG: *"so what you are telling me: I am dead since 17 years?"*

SG: *"yes, or let me change this to you being asleep for 17 years and finally we meet up, I do hope this is not a dream...."*

GG: *"but what happened, why did they tell you I am dead,.....Sam, you have to bring me back to my flat, I need to change...I need to get back my old life"*

SG *"but Greta, that is not possible, your flat is no more .....your flat...."*

GG: *"what do you mean no more, my books, my pictures, my things....it must be still there...."*

At this point a thought crossed her mind; she seems to be wrong about so many things today, she thought it was April 1990 and it seems to be 2007 now, so what does she know about her flat....so she took out another cigarette and found herself walking slowly towards the entrance of the building where she started her journey two hours earlier.....

SG *"I see, some things never change...you are still smoking??"* he said jokingly

GG *"tell me Sam, what happened to my things, my Art collection, where is that now?"*

SG *"well it has been auctioned off and it"*

GG *"it has what??"*

SG *"Sotheby, your niece, they auctioned off your art collection together with some of your furniture, books, carpets....."*

GG *"you can't be serious, my Renoirs....sold off? I don't understand, I gave clear instructions that my collection should stay together, it is my legacy, it is my life-collection, what is going on??"*

At that point they arrived at the entrance – Garbo opened the door without thinking, half in trance – she realized that it was not the world, which was wrong – it was her...

Sam and Greta entered the building and the scene that welcomed them was quite different from before; the man in the reception office was leaning over the desk and talking to somebody in a white coat, the TV was off..... Further down the corridor was a group of more people in white coats and an older woman, dressed in a very elegant olive-green cashmere coat...she looked familiar.....

The entire group turned around and stared in Garbo's direction.....a little man with a beard and round glasses smiled in Garbo's direction and they all started to walk towards her.... He said: *"here you are, Miss Brown, we were worried about you.....that was very naughty of you...the entire staff is on alert because of you, looking for you...so nice to see you are back...."*

By that time the group had reached Garbo and Sam and they positioned themselves around Garbo and dividing Sam from her.... Garbo started to talk but nobody seems to take any notice of her... Sam tried to get back with her but they shielded her off and he saw the elevator doors open....

The man at the back turned around while the people together with Garbo disappeared behind the closing doors of the elevator, leaving Sam and two people in white coats behind..

Man: *"I think you better leave now, Mr Green; Miss Brown is in good hands now, Miss Gray is taking over now....."*

SG: *"well, I would like to know what is going on here....."*

Man: *"nothing is going on here, I have to ask you to leave the premises now..."*

SG: *"but it is Garbo, Garbo has returned....."*

Man: *"you can't be serious, Garbo is dead since 1990, as we all know.....nobody with that name is in this building....."*

SG: *"but....."*

At this point he noticed that two security guards have surrounded him and he found himself walking towards the exit door..... A few seconds later he was outside, in the back yard....

When he entered the main street the snow was coming down quite heavily; he walked around a corner right into the fat Santa, he shouted at Sam: *"look where you going, man....."*

Sam did not hear it, he was still dreaming – he was saying out loud: *"happy Christmas Miss Brown..."*..... yes, it must be dreaming, of Garbo being back in his life,....but then again, she had never really left.....

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