

THE MAN I LOVE

“If only, all those years ago, you and I had started something...” I dare to suggest.

“You mean a relationship?”

“What else?”

“You know that there were far too many difficulties,” he replies, as always trying to simplify.

“Perhaps we did nothing” I say, so full of regrets I am, “because we knew that one day we would have to say goodbye.”

“That’s the rule, Marianne. People say goodbye at the end.”

“There’re no rules, Jake, and fewer rules at this stage in our lives.”

“You mean at this very late stage in our lives...”

The setting sun is shining softly on the bench where we sit. It is the end of the day and yet the birds sing without containment. Another week has gone by, but then it could have been another month, I can never be quite sure.

“And so we missed out because parting would’ve been unbearable?”

“Two lost souls we were back then,” I try to explain, “inhabiting our own little universe and unable to take part fully in the intricacies of the wider world.”

“More like two people who led complicated lives and who were not meant for amorous affairs out of films or books.”

“But...”

“It would have been indefensible since there was so much to lose.”

“Like an exposed posting in battle or... or long stretches of quicksand?”

“You exaggerate as always. It was simply a lost cause. You had your life and I had mine, and so we couldn’t have given up so easily for the sake of...”

“Of what?”

He is silent.

“Say it!”

“No!”

“Say it, please!”

“For the sake of...”

“Yes?”

“For the sake of love!”

“Yes, love!”

Now we are both silent.

“Or an animal stillborn”, I begin again, “since what we could’ve had was dead before starting out. Is that what you really thought back then?”

This time I have gone too far.

“Stop it! Enough of your musings!”

Jake will not put up with my sentimental view of things for too long. But I cannot stop.

“Those dreams we harboured about being together, the plans we separately made since we were never able to plan jointly...”

His eyebrows go up half a turn, he pulls at his white beard. He always does that when he gets annoyed.

“Yes, what about those plans and dreams?”

I manage to continue with my speech.

“Our desires for better and more, for gentler days, for wider landscapes, for things great and good.”

“Some plans were those!”

I pretend not to have heard him. Or perhaps I have not heard him at all.

“And so with all that unpredictability,” I continue, “the idea of being together vanished as something useless, finished...”

“The word *finished*” he again interrupts, “is more about doom than conclusion....”

“... and despite all that disarray, love could’ve been saved.”

“But how do you know it would’ve worked?” he asks, suddenly interested in my predicament.

And I soften my voice.

“Because... because I’d been expecting you for so long, though there was no certainty that you were real. Full of hope was I, yet without any sign that you might one day appear in my life. I was convinced that you had to exist simultaneously with me. Perhaps the word *simultaneity* was the wrong one for I wasn’t sure about the time you lived and the space you occupied, and perhaps you and I weren’t living in the same era or civilization or world or reality, but within me I felt the seed of what was to come, except that it was a seed sadly manipulated not to propagate and bear fruit. And all that time—the word was not *before* nor was it *after*—yes, all that time I knew.”

“You knew what?”

I am at a loss for words. I do this sort of thing: I start something and then I don’t know how to go on.

“What did you know?” Jake asks again, moaning now.

He is well aware that I will not provide exact replies to his questions. But I cannot do things differently, and I suppose he is used to me by now.

“You knew what?” he asks for the third time.

And somehow I manage to catch up again where I left off.

“Yes, I knew there was a softness in your hands and a quietness in your voice, and that when they made you there were more than just four elements: the fifth was filled to the brim with all categories of words, melodious and daunting, imagined yet factual, all those words of dissent against the blatant truth: it is so short-lived, so unexplained, so undeserved. But then it was so unjust that you and I were never able to be together...”

The sun has now set, the park begins to get cold. The long shadows of the trees reaching the other end of the path abruptly disappear. Birds are now silent.

“Why bring up the subject of my writing?” he shouts.

“I...”

“Yes?”

“I...”

Again I am lost for words. Only too well does he know that this sort of thing sometimes happens to me. And then I suddenly remember.

“I bring up the subject of your writing because by now it is pointless to bring up the subject of mine.”

Yes, I still have moments of clarity.

“Your writing...” he says, almost closing his eyes as if reminiscing some of my verses.

“My writing...”

He opens his eyes, looking at me as if he had forgotten who I was. He sometimes does this sort of thing as well.

“And what now?” he asks.

“Now?” I reply without really being sure whether I will make any sense. “I’ll have to make do with just watching you from afar. In a photograph. On a screen. From a bus. At a tragic wake. In the odious supermarket.”

He takes a deep breath as if he is running out of patience. Getting angry with me serves no purpose, and he knows that. Kindness is what he needs to show now –if only he had shown it all those years ago.

“So what would you have wanted?” he asks.

Finally here is a chance to speak my mind freely, and so I reply in kind.

“I would’ve wanted to be with you... always, forever. At the top of a mountain. Beside the sea. Surrounded by books, your books, my books. Among beautiful objects. And....

“And?”

“And most of all...”

“What?”

I look at the darkening skies.

“Most of all, in my bed!”

Jake breaks into laughter like a madman and throws his cane into the air.

“Too late for that sort of thing!” he shouts.

He continues to laugh and I begin to weep. It takes quite a few minutes for the two of us to calm down.

“This is why the relationship between us is so perfect,” he says, taunting me, “because it never happened.”

“But... we...”

“What?”

“We...”

“Yes?”

“We could start now,” I suggest, wiping away all those tears with my hands.

“What for?” he asks, closing his eyes.

“Is it really too late?”

“It is, Marianne!”

“Oh, Jake!”

He comes very close to me and whispers something in my ear.

“Can you say that again,” I ask.

He sighs several times before speaking.

“Let me take you back to where you belong.”

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