

A Cup of Tea

(Encounters I)

Juhan Puhm

The man entered the treasury line at City Hall to pay a bill. There were three people in front of him. A woman and one more person took up spots behind the man.

Everyone was nicely distanced and wearing masks, so only the sparkle of eyes could be seen. Immediately the man recognized the second woman in line. He recognized her profile and her tall slender frame.

He quietly spoke her name and almost in slow motion she turned to him. Her greeting was happy and her eyes sparkled.

The man asked her to wait for him after they had paid their bills, as she was two in front of the man and would be done sooner.

"Yes," she said.

Then the man right away asked, "Would you like to have a cup of tea?" which meant would you like to have a cup of tea presently in the near distant now.

Again, the tall, slender woman answered, "Yes, that would be very nice."

"Did you walk down?" asked the man thinking they might walk back together.

"No, I drove," she said, "would you like a ride?"

The man declined and the woman went up to the counter. She was only at the counter for a very short time.

"Are you sure you don't want a ride?" asked the woman.

"No," said the man, "it's winter time and I need my exercise. I'll see you in half an hour?" asked the man, "that's how long it takes for me to walk home."

The woman replied in the positive, and the man watched the tall, slender frame of the woman walk out of treasury into the City Hall rotunda and disappear.

The man went to the counter and paid his bill. When he finished, he turned around and smiled at the woman behind him, nodded his head and quietly said "hello" as he walked past her. The woman behind him was wearing a red coat and smiled a knowing smile in return. Even with masks one can tell when one is smiling.

The man left the building and started walking home. The day was sunny, cold and brisk, and ice and snow crunched beneath the man's boots.

And the woman in the red coat?

The woman in the red coat had heard every word, had watched every motion and expression of the man and woman. She had heard the quiet gentleness in their voices, the natural flow of answer and question. The woman in the red coat had witnessed a brief moment in time that was unique, just by how simply and in harmony it had flowed. So few words were spoken, yet each word, question and answer fit together like a mysterious, spontaneous puzzle.

This was not a "hi, how are you doing, nice to see you" encounter. This was something else and deeper entirely. Anyone who would have witnessed such a unique interaction could not help but wonder, wonder how and in what way the two were connected, what sort of past did they share, how did they know one other?

It was obvious the meeting was entirely by chance, and that they hadn't seen each other for a long while. Yet they knew each other well, and were incredibly comfortable and safe with one another. And they knew where each other lived.

It might be easier to guess what they weren't. Their interaction was very simple and pure and natural, and so must have been unclouded by having ever suffered the emotional extremes of a relationship.

What could it possibly be? What mysterious story would the woman in the red coat weave? All these woven wonderings of the past in her imagination, would also be formed by her own feelings and experiences.

It was very obvious that the woman in the red coat had witnessed a very unique, rare and fleeting moment. She had witnessed the very absolute moment of the birth of a new future, being born right before her eyes. A new future being wrought by the universe in that very moment.

And how from that moment on would those two lives entwine and unfold? In what ways and paths? Not even the universe knew the answer to that!

At the very least they were going to share a cup of tea!

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