

END OF THE
SEASON

Truly a Love Story



Eduard Meinema

End of the Season

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Linedrawing / portrait Mia: Joeff / www.joeff.nl

Website: www.eduardmeinema.com

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“Happiness has the property of becoming visible only when it is over.”

Godfried Bomans (Dutch writer, March 2, 1913 - December 22, 1971) in: *“Buitelingen; Aforismen, buitelingen en capriolen.”* [1948, pg. 33].



“Life is a movie whose end everyone knows...”

Eduard Meinema in: *“Open End”* [short story, October 1988].

FOREWORD

A tribute to Mia

A few weeks ago, I received a request that I had not seen coming at all. Eduard approached me to write an introduction for the book he created for Mia. After all, he told me, Mia had died suddenly 1 year ago, a few days after her 60th birthday.... Oh My God.... I didn't see that one coming.

Mia was a remarkable, special woman, or a “very special lady” as Eduard characterized her after their first encounter at the temp agency.

When we were just fifteen summers young, Mia and I met at a campground near St. Tropez. It clicked immediately between us, and we spent a fantastic week together, and also inseparable. We never lost sight of each other again, but in my eyes, we saw and met far too little afterwards. Unfortunately, we cannot get that time back or turn it back, because Mia is no longer here with us on earth. It is very special that Eduard conceived, wrote, and marketed this book for Mia. Bravo!

Full of recognition I experience the pages of this work and am grateful that Mia lives on in us in this way. The memory remains.

In love,

Chimène van Oosterhout

[Dutch TV personality]

1

Mid-October. Not exactly the right time of year to visit a tourist spot. But then again, we're not here to be tourists.

It has been over ten years since we last were here. Or was it fifteen years? God, how quickly time goes by. But despite the new constructions, many high-rise buildings close to the coast that were not there then, we effortlessly remember where we have to go. Almost naturally we drive to the boulevard of the Spanish village on the bay of Rosas.

Now, for us, literally a "*Boulevard of broken dreams*."

But we didn't know that at the time.

Damn...

Okay, we drive *almost* naturally in the right direction. Searching for familiar buildings, landmark structures, or anything at all that looks familiar to me, I pay too little attention to traffic and miss a car that has the right of way at the traffic circle. Well, just say a car that *takes* the right of way. A high-pitched scream from my youngest daughter, who is sitting next to me in the passenger seat, makes me stop just in time and makes my oldest daughter, who was in the back seat in a sort of trance reliving old memories, now screaming just as loudly as her sister, sit up dead straight.

We are nose to nose. Bumper to bumper. One second later, no more than a few inches extra and I had rammed off the license plate of the German car. And probably more.

“*Scheisse!*” the corpulent man shouts at me, waving two middle fingers, from behind the wheel of his equally fat Mercedes.

“Yeah, yeah, you too have a happy vacation...,” I grumble, angry with myself. Unfortunately, I can’t really blame him for the near miss.

We struggle to find a parking spot right along the coast. Unbelievable. It was crowded back then in the summer. Always difficult to find a spot when we wanted to go to a restaurant, or just check out some stores, or stroll along the promenade. Even now, so late in the fall, again all the parking spaces are occupied. Extraordinary. Anyway. Here we are.

The autumn fog partially takes away our view of the horizon. Despite the many parked cars, the boulevard looks deserted. Where are all those people? It doesn’t matter. Nice and quiet this way and in our minds, we can still hear the waiter with his unchancy German. Why did he address us, Dutch people, in German? No idea, but let’s say he did his utmost to be the perfect host. In his unchancy German, he said the name of the drink agonizingly slowly and placed the glass neatly on the small table without letting his eyes wander away from my mother-in-law. “*Apfffeelsaffffit.*” Sure, apple juice for the little girl. Even though I ordered everything neatly in Spanish: “*Zuma de Manzana por favor.*” Well, it was in my best “terrace Spanish,” just enough to order something to eat and drink. Of course, “*Cerveza*,” summer and beer belong together. And soon I also figured out “*Bikini*”. Apparently, that was the name for a simple grilled sandwich. Yet, being a man, it’s a little strange to keep ordering a bikini....

Anyway. Here we are.

Together. My girls and I.

Our girls.

It feels somewhat familiar, but oh so wrong.

It's just not right.

Not anymore...

2

June 21, 1991. I remember the day exactly. The time approximately, but it must have been after five. That afternoon she came by for the first time. Fluttering into my life. I saw her approaching from afar, the red lips - even then - and her curly hair, tied together in a ponytail that danced along spunkily and stubbornly to the rhythm in which she, self-confidently and with large strides, stubbornly and charmingly walked up the worn-out sidewalk in front of our building. An old monumental building that used to be a bakery. For its current function, it had been largely converted into a modern office, which even had, and this was unique in those years, a fax machine. The bakery's old oven was not to be removed. Age comes with defects, but monuments come with stringent building regulations. Anyway, because of those restrictive regulations, my "manager's office," where I never actually sat, had a beautiful, atmospheric setting

I worked at a temp agency and on Friday afternoons, as usual, the temps came by to turn in their timesheets and chat over a drink.

My colleague and I looked at each other. She was talking to one of the temps, so I spoke to the girl who had just come in. "Um, sorry, but on Friday afternoons we never actually enroll anyone. You can come back next week..."

"My little brother sent me here," she said without letting me finish talking. "I work at an American company; they are reorganizing right

now. Soon my position will also be eliminated. That's why I'm already looking hard for other work, but since I'm still working there at the moment, I can't come over here during the week. So, I hope it's possible now?"

I felt the gaze of Sylvia, my colleague, prickle. She didn't say it out loud, but I knew her well enough by now to know what she meant to say "*Don't you dare.*"

The girl was still standing in the doorway. She looked at me piercingly rather than questioningly. Glanced casually at Sylvia who was still silently trying to impose her will on me. The beginning of a cold war. Little did I know. I had eyes only for the girl with the bright red lips and, now that she had walked very stubbornly slowly further inside, I couldn't miss it, two brown eyes looking right through me.

"Oh, ummm. Yes..." I didn't just feel Sylvia's gaze. I saw it now, too. "Um... You know what, let's go sit in my office for a while..."

"Okay," she said with a beaming smile and - was I imagining it? - a triumphant glance at Syl. My "more than colleague." Something more was going on between us than we were allowed to let on as colleagues, but the girl with the red lips had apparently sensed it flawlessly. Talking about female intuition...

We sat down in my small office. I with my back to the antique oven so that she had the best view. Although. My view was a thousand times more beautiful, but I wasn't allowed to let that show either.

I placed a cup of coffee in front of both of us. "Good. Let's just start at the beginning. What's your name?"

"Gerdy-Mia," she replied with a mysterious smile. "But call me Mia."

I looked at her, tilting my head slightly. “*Gerdy-Mia*? That sounds ... very peculiar?”

She sighed. “Yes, I know. I’m named after my grandparents. Not my favorite grandparents. So, please, call me Mia.”

“Um, yeah. Sure...,” I babbled barely intelligible. Everything she said distracted me from my actual task; I was literally and figuratively hanging on her red lips. I did my best to interview her the way I had been taught. Because ultimately, I had to find out as much as I could about her so that we could present her with the right job. All the answers I wrote neatly with a pen on the registration card, as was the custom at that time. After a while, out of the corner of my eye, I saw one temporary worker after another leave and Sylvia tapping her watch drily. “Go ahead,” I mimed and gestured for her to go. This time I was thrown a deadly look that I already knew would generate some discussion next week. Well, maybe a weekend’s rest in advance would help clear the air.

Without realizing it, Gerdy-Mia, pardon me, *Mia* gradually took over the conversation. When I ended the interview, well after closing time, she knew more about me than I knew about her. Still, something didn’t quite sit right with me. “Um, your little brother had sent you on, you said?”

She laughed. “Did I say that? Yes, he’s my younger brother. But *little brother*...? He’s six foot seven. Or more, I don’t even know how tall he really is.”

A light went on for me. I’m not the smallest myself, so there aren’t that many people I have to look up to. “Oh him. Yeah, who laughs as spontaneously as you do...” It was out before I realized it. “Sorry. I mean...”

“Never mind.” Again, that bright radiant smile immediately followed by a seductive question. “When will I hear from you?”

“Uhhh...” I felt a red blush on my cheeks. *Wow, I didn’t see that one coming....*

She nodded at the enrollment card. “You know everything about me now, don’t you?”

“Oh...” *Shit, did she mean that...* I stared at the card. Everything she had told me confirmed my suspicions about her from the moment she walked through the door. She wasn’t just out of my league. But also, for what this temp agency could offer her. “I, um... I’m afraid we don’t have that many jobs for you. You know, we’re more of a technical staffing agency. Secretary and telephone operator jobs are not our specialty.”

“Not? Too bad...” She stood up. “Still, I hope you can do something for me. I’d love to hear from you. And I will drop by regularly, because that works best, huh? Walking by and asking if you have anything yet? So that my card stays on top of the pile.”

“Yes. That’s the best way to keep your attention.”

“Okay, well, goodbye,” she said. One last smile and she left. I looked after her. More or less in a trance. Looked again at the white coffee cup left on my desk that now had the imprint of her red lips on it.

“So, was it something?” Sylvia’s voice sounded loud and closer than she actually was, but I was still startled.

“Shit. I thought you left already?”

“No, closing up together, huh? That’s what colleagues do...”

I closed my eyes. Ouch. Painful moment. “Yes. Right. We always do that don’t we?” I picked up the card, to put it in the file of job seekers. But figured I had one more thing to do. With each new temp, we scribbled something unique, something recognizable on the card. Back then we didn’t have photos to put on the card, so we described

everyone we enrolled as a job seeker by naming something specific about him, or in this case her, that allowed us to know who he or she was even after a few weeks. For example, “broken pantyhose.”

Ah yes, that was *that* girl....

Or: “one earring”.

Ah yes, that was *that boy*. Our own transgender...

With Mia I wrote, without thinking: “*Very special lady*”.

Well. Not really something that would make my colleagues know who the girl with the red lips was. But it said exactly how I felt about her....

3

After the weekend, no explanation was needed. The unspoken, not even formally named, disagreement between Sylvia and me, degenerated into a battle not visible to others in which Mia's card ended up either on top - *guilty!* - or at the very bottom of the job-seeker pile. But my good intentions notwithstanding, my initial assessment was woefully correct. The girl with the bright red lips was not the type we were getting jobs in for. Nevertheless, she faithfully stopped by almost every week to ask if we had anything yet. I was surprised not only that she kept coming back, but also that the other temp agencies specializing in administrative jobs couldn't do anything for her either. Although. Occasionally she would hint that she had been offered a job, but that she preferred to wait a little longer.

It wasn't until fall that something came in for her by chance. One of the production companies we did business with temporarily needed a telephone operator. "Well, grab your chance," Sylvia said. "That looks like something for *Gerdy-Mia*."

"It's *Mia*," I said, "but I don't think it's for her. It's only for two weeks, and I think she still has work at that American company right now."

Sylvia shrugged her shoulders. "Then suit yourself. It's turnover though..."

Hmm, a sensitive point. Of course, we tried to find the best jobs for our job seekers. But headquarters had only one objective: to meet the budget. And preferably more than that. I waited until Sylvia was on break. Took the plunge and called Mia.

“Shit, the answering machine ... I mean ...” *Ah, no*, I thought. *Now that’s what it says on her answering machine. Quick, say something else*, I thought. “Hey, haiiii, Mia... I um,” *How the hell do I solve this?* “Hey, I know a rhyme... I’m sitting in front of the window glass, untold boredom. I wish I were two little dogs. Then I could play together. Hihi... That’s by Godfried Bomans. Anyway. It doesn’t matter. But um, I have a nice job for you. So, will you call me back?” I hung up quickly. Sloshing armpits and redness of shame on my cheeks. *What the hell have I done*, I thought, *how unprofessional*.

The call didn’t take long. Unfortunately - you’ll always see... - just at a time when I was on break. So, Sylvia took the call and arranged an introductory meeting with our client. The interview was just a formality. With her engaging personality, Mia had the job and was able to start a week later. “But your job with the Americans then?” I asked her when she came to sign the contract. “This is only for two weeks you know?”

“I know, but I’m all done with those people. Let them figure it out. I’ve come to work for you.”

“Well, for me. It’s not my own agency, but good. Nice that you want to do it.”

Even before the two weeks were up, we got a call from the client. The operator job was temporary, but in the meantime the company was also looking for an executive secretary. And they would like to ask Mia for that.

So, she continued to turn in her timesheet every Friday even after those two weeks. I was fine with it. Sylvia wasn’t. Just as Mia and I

circled around each other without anything actually happening, Sylvia and I, in the office, were also still circling around each other. An impossible situation for which Sylvia had only one solution. She resigned and went to work for one of our clients.

It became a strange year-end. Sylvia was already gone. I hired a new colleague. And Mia kept coming by. “What are you going to do for Christmas?” she asked in early December.

“I’m going to America for a week. First, for a congress. Then a few days to visit my grandparents. My father’s family almost all live in the USA, you see... But for Christmas I’ll be back, celebrating with my parents.”

“Alone?”

“Yes. My cat can do without me for a few hours.”

“Oh, so you’re single? Like me?”

We looked at each other. For weeks we had talked to each other, without saying anything. Circling around each other. And only now did that important question come out. Are you single?

“Yes. I am single...”

But beyond that, it went no further. We both celebrated Christmas knowing that the other, after the obligatory dinner with parents, was home alone.

4

Monday, January 13, 1992, on my lunch break, I ran into her in town. Loose curls and a short, black leather jacket. “What have you got?” she asked, pointing to the vase I was carrying in my arms.

“Oh, um, a vase.” Duh huh... What a brilliant comment. Could I have left a worse impression? “I ... I had gotten birthday money from my grandmother, and I wanted to buy something permanent from that.”

I didn’t have to ask. Her look said it all; she clearly didn’t like the purple thing I was now juggling a little. “So, when was your birthday?” she asked instead of saying anything about that gaudy, in her eyes undoubtedly ugly, vase.

“Last Saturday. Turned twenty-nine.”

“So, golden oldie...”

“What about you?”

“Me? You should know. It’s on my registration card,” she laughed. That radiant smile, the red lips....

I knew her well enough by now to know she wouldn’t tell me today. And asking about it was *not done*. Instead, I made a note in my mind: at the office immediately check when her birthday is! The conversation, on the street among the strolling shoppers, was clumsy