

Turbulence

Typically one of those moments that you better fasten your seat belts.

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1.

Suddenly he stopped. What was it that caught his attention?

He looked around again, but could not find anything special in the street that was so familiar to him. And yet he felt that distinctive excitement and tension when he witnesses something extraordinary. Again he looked around. The street looked the same as it had been for years.

For years he walked this stretch between his office and the post office every morning to collect the mail from his mailbox. It had become a good habit to first walk to the mailbox and then look through his mail while enjoying a cappuccino at the corner cafe.

On this particular morning he had done the same and, as the other mornings; he walked expectantly to the mailbox and retrieved his mail. Strange, how a person can look forward to his mail like that.

He always had this feeling of longing, every time he opened his mailbox in the morning, to see what was inside. As if that one letter would ever be included; that one letter.....

Actually, he didn't even know what kind of letter he was looking for or what kind of letter he expected, but the feeling of expectation and excitement was there, every morning. Sometimes he would find a letter or postal item that was slightly different from the rest and then he was as happy as a child; he could hardly wait to sit at the corner behind his cappuccino to open that letter.

In the café at the corner, they had become accustomed to this ritual after all these years. The waiters saw him coming towards the door from the other side and could already see by the way he walked, what kind of mail there was in his mailbox. If he looked around and watched the traffic, it was the usual mail. On such a day he greeted them and ordered his cappuccino.

However, if there was something special in the mail, he would cross the intersection dreamily while reading that mail, or would be completely lost in thought and completely out of the world. The waiters were sometimes terrified as he crossed the intersection that way. Not even the bells of a passing tram could bring him out of his trance.

On such a morning you'd better put a cappuccino in front of him right away, because even asking three times, wouldn't get through to him.

This morning, however, it was the regular mail, so he'd carefully crossed the street and now he was almost at the door of the cafe. Just before he was about to enter, he suddenly stopped for a moment. What was it that caught his attention?

He had been attentive this morning, hadn't he? And yet he felt he had missed something. Again he looked around. No, there was nothing strange to see at the intersection and the terrace was still deserted at this time of the day.

For a moment he hesitated to just go in for his cappuccino and the mail, but he changed his mind, turned around and walked back to the post office. He wanted to know what he had missed. He had learned to take this kind of doubt or hesitation seriously. There were instances in the past, such as getting out of the car and walking away and then feeling a vague sense of emptiness only to discover later that he had indeed forgotten something, like that day, when he forgot his laptop. Or the other way around: noticing that he had forgotten something and then hesitating whether or not to go back and eventually, on his way back, encountering someone he would otherwise surely have missed.

Strange how a street you've been walking through for years can suddenly take on such a different look when you walk through it very consciously and extra attentively. He now noticed for the first time that the pizzeria on the corner had a different name. He also noticed that the parking meters were removed.

Again he stood in front of the post office. For a moment he had the urge to go back in there, but he thought that that was a bit too exaggerated. His feeling told him not to look there. It was like the old game where you had to find something the others had hidden for you and they keep on saying hot or cold to show you the way.

Even now it was as if someone told him whether he was hot or cold. The post office was cold. Slowly he turned around and retraced his route to the café. Softly he heard himself say, "Cold, cold, cold, warmer, warmer, HOT!"

He stood in front of the window of the Le Roy furniture store and again heard himself say: "Hot!"

Curious, he peered into the store through the window. In fact, he never really looked inside this store because he assumed that the pieces of furniture sold here, were far beyond his budget.

"So, € 3,000 for one chair!"

No, that surely was not a chair for him. He knew of other necessary things to do with so much money. And then that couch, € 10,750 !

Okay, his couch from Ikea was already starting to wear out and certainly would not win an originality award, but that much money for a couch..... no way! So it was not for nothing that he always passed this place without looking inside. And yet, he stood in front of this store and looked inside. Something about this store must have caught his attention. His heart was pounding in his throat with tension and he felt that he was alert all the way down to his toes. What was it about this store that was so special that he was drawn to it?

There were the usual couches, chairs, cabinets, and tables with price tags, he thought more appropriate for second-hand cars than for furniture. There were also very modern lamps hanging and standing around in the store. Some of them looked more like half-demolished bicycles or pieces of scrap iron welded together than lamps, but of course, he knew that when it came to art and design he was a total barbarian.

A bit strange was the doll that was laid out a bit nonchalantly on a large leather couch. You didn't see that very often, that they used dolls in a furniture store. That was more something for clothing stores and even there, they were more and more replaced by those stylistic shapes of iron wire. However, this doll was very realistic and if you didn't know better you would almost think that someone was really lying there on the couch. But the immobility and the staring, unseeing look betrayed the lifelessness of the material.

Suddenly, he actually realized what he had just thought: "the lifelessness of the material". What he was looking at was not a doll at all, but was indeed 'lifeless'. He was facing a deceased woman, who for whatever reason was sitting on a couch in the middle of that store.

Shit, what was he supposed to do with that?

He automatically reached for his mobile phone, only to discover that he had left it in his car. Stupid, you will always have it like that; just when you really needed it, you forgot to bring it.

Given the time, a quarter past eight in the morning, he did not need to check if the store was already open, so he decided to walk to his office and call the police. Before walking away, he took one more look at the dead woman and only now, he realized that he knew this woman. She was the same woman he had met for a first session less than three days ago.

2.

Quarter past nine. His first client for this day could walk in right now. Since it was a new client, he already anticipated that she might be too early.

It was funny to see how clients make their first entrance at the time of the doorbell. Out of fear for being late, some clients arrive already twenty minutes before the agreed time, while others are walking back and forth outside, to ring the doorbell exactly at the agreed time. And of course there are also the usual latecomers, who arrive at every appointment ten minutes late or we have the kind of clients who forget their appointment just about every other appointment. They only show up every second time.

Fortunately, he had the habit to bring these kinds of patterns up quite early in the sessions. Partly to prevent himself from getting irritated, but mainly also to explore with the clients the possible symbolism of such a pattern. For many clients there is a parallel or symbolism in their way of dealing with appointments or time in general and their actual question or problem for which they are going to therapy. In that sense there are no coincidences for him.

He was curious about his new intake this morning. She had sounded very pleasant and strong on the phone, and her question also seemed quite clear. Fortunately, she was not "sent" to him by anyone, but came on her own accord. That often made working with the client more pleasant.

The doorbell rang. He opened the front door with the door opener and stood curiously waiting at the top of the stairs to see who would enter.

With a smooth movement, the door swung open to reveal a beautiful young woman. Before he knew it and could restrain himself, he called down in a voice that was maybe a little too enthusiastic and also too much full of hope: "I suspect you're coming for me."

She looked up where the voice came from and said questioningly: "Stefan?"

"Yes that's right. Come upstairs."

As she walked upstairs, he already made a step back to let her through to the meeting room. They shook hands and again her clarity and strength surprised him.

Sometimes people shook hands with him, giving him the feeling that he was handed a handful of soft 'frankfurter sausages', or they wanted to show him how powerful they were in their handshake, leaving him with four cracked 'frankfurters' himself.

However, her handshake was smooth and convincing and she also spoke her name very naturally.

"Hi, I'm Doris."

After the usual question whether she would like to have coffee or tea, he showed her the room and went to the kitchen to pour the coffee.

"Nice floor you have," he suddenly heard her say to him. Apparently she did not like to sit, passively waiting for him to return, and was now exploring the floor.

"Thank you. We are very satisfied with it. Shall we?"

With the coffee in his hand, he led her into the meeting room and they took a seat in the corner by the window.

After his usual 'nesting ritual', in which - for some inexplicable reason - he always took off one shoe and tucked that foot under his rear, he lifted his cup again, looked at her and asked his usual opening question: "And what brings you here?"

There was a pause while she alternately looked at her coffee and at him.

Again he noticed how beautiful she really was.

"Wow, you can easily fall in love with her," he said to himself. And as he thought this, he felt the warmth in his stomach and chest.

"Watch out brother," he admonished himself. "Red lights on."

"Well, as I told you on the phone, I've been feeling a bit tensed lately. It's like something is about to happen and I don't understand that, because I'm actually pretty happy."



Again, there was the silence. Her eyes drifted to the coffee in her hand and lingered there for a while.

It was a special silence and he did not want to break it. Something was coming into existence, which took time to be born.

"I have a new boyfriend since a few months. I have actually known him for a long time, because he used to work for my father, but I recently ran into him again."

"Maybe a little too literally," she said with a smile.

"It clicks very well and we now also want to start living together. But the strange thing is, that since we've been talking about that, I've been feeling so tensed. If something isn't right. And I don't understand that, because I really love him and he loves me."

With the latter she looked him straight in the eyes and it almost felt as if her eyes were asking for a confirmation from his side.

This moment lasted only a second before she lowered her eyes again and began to cry. One by one, her tears rolled down her cheeks and fell, as if they were meant to, right into her cup of coffee. The splashing sound gave a rhythm to the silence.

After a while he broke the silence. "I have the idea, that this confusion isn't easy for you."

"No, I don't get it either, because I'm always so sure of myself. My gut feeling always tells me exactly what to do and now I don't know. I don't know myself that way."

Stefan noticed some confusion in himself too, but he wanted to park this awareness for a while.

"Perhaps you would like to tell me a bit about yourself first and then later, we can come back to your confusion."

Doris started to talk about her life and told him that she was an only child and had a very nice childhood. Both her parents were very enterprising and always involved her in important decisions and events. They had always done a lot together and the holidays had always been highlights.

When she was 15 years old – thirteen years ago now – her father suddenly died.

“He came from work a little earlier, because he wasn't feeling well. He sat down on the couch and before we could even call the doctor, he was already dead. So suddenly. He sat there half sunk with those staring, lifeless eyes.”

She paused for a moment. Stefan noticed how he was touched by what she just said and looked at her and saw that she was staring at her hands, which she had folded in her lap.

“You know, I've been thinking a lot about him lately. I haven't had this so strong for years. He has always stayed with me of course, but as strong as lately...”

And again the silence filled the room.

“They did look for a cause of death at the time, but they couldn't find anything. They diagnosed it as a cardiac arrest.”

She was still staring straight ahead, her mind apparently drifting back to some thirteen years ago. Perhaps she saw her father again on the couch. Stefan felt quiet and connected.

A little later she broke the silence: “I actually got to know Rik back then already, because he was working in my father's garage. But because he was 23 and I was only 15, there was nothing else between us yet. I liked him, but nothing more than that.”

She continued to talk about the period after her father's death, which had been very difficult, but with the help of friends and family, they had overcome it quite well.

“In that time we did get to know our real friends. My mother received a lot of support from my father's brother. He did even quit his job to work at my parents' business and to help my mother. When I left school, I also started working in the garage. At first, I helped a bit in the maintenance department, but later, I did evening studies and last year I completed my last education. Now I am certified as a Mazda service technician and dealer. My mother is now in the process of putting the business in my name. It is quite a challenge for me to run the company by myself soon.”

As she said this, she sounded as energetic again as when she came in. It was clear that Doris was full of energy and zest for life and eager to take on new challenges, while at the same time she was still dealing with the sudden loss of her father.

At this point, however, they decided together to take a break here and only discuss the more practical aspects of the therapy, like appointments, costs, etc. Next time they would come back to her confusion.

As he watched her going down the stairs some moments later, he realized how moved he was by what she said, but also how impressed he was by her zest for life and energy. He was really looking forward to working with her.



3.

The police immediately arrived. In this neighbourhood, it looked like as if they were constantly in the starting blocks to turn up. Stefan had also walked back and was watching how the police searched everywhere for traces that might indicate a crime. It was therefore very busy around Doris and this bustle contrasted sharply with her silent, lifeless demeanour. If Doris hadn't been sitting there so completely motionless, you'd think it was a customer waiting to finally be served.

Stefan looked a bit dazed. He still couldn't imagine that this lifeless, staring woman was the same as the one who was so energetically talking to him just three days ago.

The manager, who had also arrived, was very upset about the whole situation. Yes, he remembered her. She had entered the shop around five o'clock, but wanted to take a look around. Because a couple came in just at that moment and wanted to discuss the furnishing of their new villa with him, he had not paid any further attention to her.

In the end, it was half past six before he had finished with the couple, but by then he did manage to get an order worth € 40,000. In his rush to get to the Hotel New York on time for his date, he quickly closed the place and, as always, left through the back door. No, he did not check everything as he would do normally, he had just taken a quick look around. Therefore, he could not say if she was still in the store. Slowly, he started to realise that if her death would have been caused by a crime, he would be one of the possible suspects.

No, he did not know her and he had never seen her before in the store.

When asked about his appointment at Hotel New York, he clearly felt embarrassed.

“Shit, just when you go out for dinner with a friend, just for the first time in your life while you have told at home that you have to work late, everything immediately goes wrong.”

And the situation really got worse when the police also wanted to know the name of the couple who were in the store with him yesterday.