

Chance Meeting on a Bridge

It is three minutes past three a.m. on the pedestrian walkway at the Golden Gate Bridge. It is foggy and the bay is dark. But people don't come here for the view this time of the night. They come here to think about their lives. Sometimes they end them.

The car traffic is still a steady stream at this hour. The people in their cars below are a stark parallel to the people who come here thinking the loneliest of human emotions. On holidays the police are here to stop the suicides.

She was short, fat and ugly. He was extremely handsome, tall, with chiseled features. She was in her thirties. He was in his early sixties. She looked like she had been sleeping in her dirty threadbare clothes, which she had. He was impeccably groomed wearing a thousand dollar sport coat, silk shirt, alligator shoes and a Rolex.

He startled her in the darkness as she was about to climb over the railing. "Sorry, didn't mean to scare you" he said.

"Are you a cop or something?" she asked.

"No. I'm no cop".

She stepped back and tried to look out in the Bay. She was hoping she could maybe get some pretty view of the City or something like that.

"Well I guess I don't have to ask what you're doing here." he said

"I don't have to ask you either." she replied. They both stood at the railing for a time each trying to see something through the fog. "I could ask you why?"

"Why? I think you've got a point there. That's a valid question. Why? Does it matter?"

“Yes. I hope it matters. That might be one of the few remaining hopes I’ve got. I still have hope it matters. What’s the why for you? You are rich and beautiful mister. What could have brought you here?” she asked.

“I am here because I am absolutely without value as a human being. I don’t believe there is a soul in this world that cares that I’m here or what the world will be like tomorrow without me. I can’t blame anyone else. It was all my own doing. You’re right, I am beautifully and rich and charming, and brilliant and a host of other things. All of which I used like weapons. I’ve robbed and cheated and lied myself out of every friend, wife, business partner, employee and anyone else you care to name. I did it all in the name of greed. I took everything they had and when I’d gotten it all, I threw them away like a piece of garbage. I was wrong. I was the garbage.”

“Got any kids?”

“No. There’s a young man out there somewhere that has my DNA but for good reasons he cares even less than anyone else.”

“What about you?” he asked.

“I’ve got three little ones. They are the only good things in this world. That’s why I’m here. I’m here because of them.”

“How is that?”

“I lost my job when I got sick. That took away my health insurance. My unemployment benefits ran out. I got evicted and we were living in my car until it got impounded. We’ve been in a shelter but that runs out tomorrow at noon.”

“What about their father?”

“He’s the most worthless son of a bitch in the world. He’s in prison now.”

“How did you pick him?” he asked.

“I wasn’t real smart at fifteen. Mother died and my stepfather was a real bastard. The kid’s father was the only guy that paid attention to me. I’m not pretty. Actually I’m ugly. That makes life a lot tougher on girl. No looks, no education, no family, no husband, only these three wonderful kids.”

“What will happen to them?”

“The state will take them. If the Mother is dead and the Father is in prison then the State will keep the kids together. That’s why I’m here. They will at least have each other and a place to live and food.”

“You know, I never did one single good thing in my life. That’s why I’ve got no one at all” he said.

They stood there together looking out for a few minutes. “What are you looking for?” she asked.

“My home. It’s one of those big mansions on Knob Hill. It has a great view of the bridge. If it wasn’t foggy and dark we could see it from here.” He paused for a few moments, “I guess the State will get it. Isn’t that something? The same State is going to have your kids and my home. Seems unfair doesn’t it?”

They looked out for another few minutes. He spoke, “I know this is crazy but it’s going to be morning soon. Your kids will wake up and you won’t be there. That is kind of like me never being there for my son. Let’s go pick up your kids and we’ll stop at a grocery store on the way to my house. We’ll fix them a breakfast feast and then go buy them some clothes and stuff. You can stay with me. The kids and you will each have your own bedroom.”

“I don’t know mister. I don’t know.”

“Well, if it doesn’t work out the bridge is always open.”

“I guess you’re right.”

When they reached the stairwell there was a patch of water on the platform. She slipped and was headed down between the guardrail and the stairs to the water below. He caught her by the arm with his left hand.

“God! You could have been killed!” he exclaimed. There was a shared silence and then they both started to laugh. He pulled out a cigarette and lit it with his diamond studded lighter. “Don’t you know that could kill you?” she asked laughingly. He tossed the cigarette over the side where it slowly floated downward to the icy bay.

They looked strange together walking back from the bridge to the white Rolls Royce. They looked strange together when she has lost all of her hair to the chemo and she wore ball caps. They looked strange together when the kids all graduated from college. Their stepbrother was there. When people asked how they got together their response was a shared smile or a laugh and the words, “chance meeting on a bridge”.