

My Story

One fine summer day, while I was spending time doing nothing, waiting for a response about my future from some higher authorities, I was watching tourists.

They were flowing in a stream and looked like parrots, while the locals — like ruffled sparrows — called out to each other in greetings.

The town was small: the locals knew each other, and tourists were probably a significant part of it.

While walking, I noticed a woman who stood out from the crowd.

She was well-dressed, and there was something unusual about her.

My “age-detector” instantly said — over fifty, but she looked younger.

Her behavior didn’t fit the usual program.

And I was even more surprised when I heard what she was asking people.

She was offering 20 euros to anyone who could tell her an interesting story — real or fictional — that she would enjoy.

But everyone just smiled and walked past.

Only one kid tried to say something, but his parents pulled him back, saying: “That lady’s not right in the head.”

I stood at a distance and watched.

But it seemed she noticed me — a drifting idler — and with a sly smile, she came up and said:

— Can you tell me a story that will interest me?

And I said, without thinking:

— Yes.

— Excellent, — she said. — My name is Claire. That’s enough for now, — she added, smiling.

I introduced myself, we shook hands, and at that moment, I felt like we’d known each other forever.

— Well then, — Claire said, — let’s go to a café. I think you’ll tell me a story. And if I don’t like it — it’ll at least be worth a cup of coffee.

I liked her approach.

We went to a café like old friends, glancing at each other and at the people rushing down the street.

We entered the café Claire had picked, sat down, and ordered coffee.

I told her:

— If you’re looking for a writer or just amusing yourself, I might surprise you a bit. From time to time, yes, I write small stories. Here’s one of them...

I told her the story about pho, the Vietnamese soup.

When I finished, she looked at me for a long time.

Then she placed 20 euros on the table and said:

— More.

Without blinking, I told her the story about the iron.

She took out her wallet and placed 50 euros on the table.

— Tell me more, — she said.

Then I told her “The Jockey on a Dead Horse.”

She laid down 100 euros.

Then — about the Telephone, the Café “Adieu”...

At some point she stopped me and said:

— Enough. I’ve run out of cash for your stories, — she laughed.

— But not out of interest or curiosity for what you’ll write next.

She pulled out a business card, placed it on the table, and said:

— I’m waiting for you at this address. Come when you’re ready.

She said goodbye and left.

I picked up the card.

It had the name of a publishing house.

And under the director’s name, it said: Claire.

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Vladislav