

A MAN IN DEMAND

Carolyn Hoxenhorn was appalled when she answered her door and found her brother waiting there. “Manfred,” she gasped, clutching at her throat, “I told you not to come here today! I have a very important person inside.” Her brother, Manfred Glazer, a former distinguished dentist in Washington, DC, now retired, was baffled. Turning to his young assistant, he asked: “Kraus, are we in error here?” Though only a boy of twelve, Albert Kraus had proven himself invaluable. It was his task to remind the doctor of appointments he would otherwise forget, and to avoid those in which he had been warned to keep away. Dr. Glazer had formed this alliance with Kraus after he had been told by his doctor that there had been some notable decline in his cognitive ability, i.e., Alzheimer’s, and that he must expect to have some of these disconcerting problems from now on.

“I guess I blew this one, Doc,” said an unhappy Kraus, “but I can swear that Mrs. Hoxenhorn said...”

“I know what I said,” bristled Carolyn, “after all, wasn’t I the one who said it? And if your parents would give you *any* attention, you might...”

“All right, we’ll have cup cakes instead, downstairs, ” interposed Dr. Glazer amiably, who was only too happy to retreat from his sister, and what’s more,

he didn't want to embarrass the boy by bringing up his family's negligent treatment.

But it was now too late to expel them. A very small woman, Emily, an acquaintance of Carolyn, had popped her head in from the living room. "My Polish cousin heard a man's voice and wants to meet him!"

"A man? Are you sure, Emily?" quavered Carolyn. "Maybe your translation was wrong."

"It was *not* wrong. Come in, quick! She's very excited! " and she disappeared again.

It was time for Carolyn to give orders to Manfred. " Listen: Emily has brought a Polish cousin to visit America, even though she doesn't speak any English. And, guess what: Emily can't speak much Polish either! I guess she had no place to take her, so she brought the woman to my house! Why? Do I speak Polish? No! But Emily is chairperson of the bridge club, and I want very much to join it, so please, no shenanigans."

And pointing her finger menacingly at him, she said, "When you go in there, please don't repeat yourself over and over again. And *please* try to remember who I am; the boy can help you."

"You're imagining things," said Manfred soothingly.

He was about to receive a stinging retort, when Emily shouted again. “Regina wants to meet the man!” And so, reluctantly, the three entered the living room.

The majestic appearance of the Polish woman took Manfred by awed surprise. Regina was a large and ample lady of sixty two years, wearing a black satin dress bedecked with shimmering layers of ornaments and jewelry. Her hair still retained some flashes of darkness in her abundant white coiffure, and the smile which she bent on Manfred was warm and confiding. But she noticed that Carolyn had placed Manfred and Kraus far from her, and she looked about for an explanation.

Carolyn lost her nerve. She thought that Manfred was looking at her oddly. Oh, no! She must tell Regina and Emily the whole story now, before Manfred starts talking, before he has the effrontery to deny recognizing her, and her chance for the bridge club lost forever. So, she suddenly shouted: “My brother is an idiot!” And to enlighten Regina further, she fluttered hand symbols in the face of the bewildered woman.

Poor Regina! She was already going out of her mind. And now, hoping to meet a man to at least make things interesting, she is told – and there can be no mistake – that the old fellow with the kindly face is a nut.

She looked up in despair, pleading, “Proze, Panie, zabierz mnie stad!” (“Please, Lord, take me away from here!”).

And then, something miraculous happened. A voice, warm, wonderful, and from her homeland, replied. “Zal mi twojego nieszczescia tutaj!” (“I grieve for your unhappiness here”).

She looked wildly about and found Manfred coming toward her, and they both spoke in Polish. “You are not an idiot?” she asked.

He laughed. “Sometimes”. He had the gift which so many elderly people enjoyed. They remember every detail of their “long memory”, which enabled Manfred to recall his military service just after World War II, assisting Polish refugees in making their way back home.

“Will you be kind and help another refugee?” she asked timidly.

“It is my pleasure. Let us get some air.”

They made their quick farewells, though Manfred stopped for a moment. He pointed out Carolyn. “Do I know that woman”?

Regina didn’t know, and didn’t care.

END

