

**Come Back Early Today**

**A Memoir of Love, Alzheimer's and Joy**

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## Chapter 1: A Rude Awakening (2000)

### A Crisis

I was deeply immersed in writing a short story about three parakeets, trying in vain to unravel an especially tangled sentence, when I was startled by the phone's strident ringing.

*Must be Ed.*

But it wasn't.

"Hello, is this Marie Marley?" asked a sweet female voice I didn't recognize. I braced myself, knowing from recent experience that when an unfamiliar voice asked to speak to me, bad news about Ed would likely follow.

"Yes, it is," I answered, turning away from my computer screen.

"My name is Lila Greenwich, and I'm here at the Edgecliff with Dr. Theo. ..."

"Is he *alright*?" I interrupted.

"I think so. He's a little disoriented though."

"What happened?" I asked, alarmed by her tone of voice.

"He was driving down Victory Parkway on the wrong side of the road. He must have realized it too, because he stopped as I happened to drive by. I was worried so I circled around and stopped behind him, got out and approached his car. He was quite confused so I offered him a ride home. We just got here and he asked me to call you."

"Oh, my God," I said, slapping my hand to my head, hurting my ear. "Thank you so much."

*He could have been killed. Or killed someone else.*

"His car is still parked out there on Victory Parkway," she continued. "I can take you there if you want to drive it home."

"Of course. I'll leave right now. It'll just take me a few minutes."

Cincinnati's a big city but at night I could get from my place in Oakley to the Edgecliff near Eden Park in around twenty minutes. And that night I tried to break my own record.

I raced to the garage, jumped into my old Civic, backed out of the driveway and floored it. I was really angry. He *knew* he wasn't supposed to drive after dark. He *promised* me.

I tried to convince myself it wouldn't have happened had he not been driving after dark. In my denial I failed to make any connection between that event and the many lapses of memory and other signs of confusion he'd been showing for some time.

When I arrived at the Edgecliff exactly seventeen minutes later, John, the doorman, was waiting for me. He was the friendliest of the doormen, always smiling, and the only one who ever addressed me by name.

"Dr. Marley," he said, "Dr. Theodore is waiting for you in the lobby with a woman and her daughter. I hope you don't mind that I gave her your phone number."

"No, I'm glad you did, John," I said.

I entered the pretentious, cavernous lobby where I found a pleasant, refined-looking African American woman and a strikingly beautiful teenager sitting with Ed on the overstuffed sofa. He was 5' 8" and only 120 pounds, and the enormity of the sofa engulfed him. He looked dazed, confused and even a little scared.

"Oh, Kitty!" he said in his deep bass voice when he saw me. "I'm r-r-really glad you're here," he continued, sitting up a little straighter. "But I'm amazed! How did you know r-r-right now to come here? This nice lady just brought me home. I was lost."

"Yes, I know. You told her to have *John* call me," I said, hoping I was hiding my anger, not so much from him, but from the kind strangers who had saved him.

"Oh, I see. I forgot," he said. Then he leaned back into the sofa cushion.

I introduced myself to Mrs. Greenwich – Lila, she told me to call her – and shook her hand. She was in her early 40s, and a mild pleasant fragrance wafted in the air around her. Medium height and weight, she was wearing a long flowing black skirt, stylish black high-heeled boots and a patterned black and white blouse under a gorgeous brown wrap. Her smile betrayed that she was the kind of person who'd stop in the

dark of night to help a total stranger. And of course, that's precisely what she had done.

Tanya, her daughter, was less ethnic in appearance except for her intricately woven hair. She was wearing jeans, sneakers, and a royal blue sweater. Her light blue down vest lay crumpled on the sofa. There was a well-worn book bag at her feet, and she looked up only briefly from the paper she was reading when her mother introduced her. Her mother's Good Samaritan behavior was obviously interfering with her homework. Somehow I got the impression this might be a frequent problem.

Frankly, I wouldn't have done what Lila did. Ed lived in an upscale apartment building, but it was in one of Cincinnati's worst neighborhoods. If I'd seen an old man pulled over on the wrong side of the street after dark there I'd have thought he was either drunk or on drugs. And I probably would have been right. It was just incredible that there were still such brave, caring people as Lila in the world. While it might ruin her study schedule, Tanya was learning a lot about the Golden Rule at a young age.

"You're Dr. Theodore's daughter, I assume?" Lila asked.

*Everyone asked if I was Ed's daughter.*

At 50, I was certainly young enough to be his daughter, but I wasn't. I should have said, "No. He's the love of my life." But instead I gave my stock answer.

"We're best friends."

Of course, "best friends" didn't even begin to explain our relationship.

Lila and I got into her black Escalade to drive to Ed's car while Tanya stayed behind to finish her homework.

"He has the most charming accent. Where's he from?" Lila asked as I fastened my seatbelt.

"Romania," I said as she pulled out of the driveway.

"Romania," she repeated. "I don't think I've ever met anyone from Romania. How does he pronounce his last name?"

"It's 'Tay-oh-door-oooh,' but Americans have trouble pronouncing it so he usually introduces himself as 'Dr. Theodore,' but that just confuses people because he can't pronounce 'th,' so it comes out 'Tee-oh-door.'"

"Tay-oh-door-oooh," she said, as though practicing it. "What a delightful gentleman he is! He's so sweet. How long have you known him?"

"Oh, about twenty-five years."

“Twenty-five years! Wow! How did you guys meet?”

She seemed fascinated by our relationship. Given the enormous age difference, I’d never felt quite comfortable telling people our story, but somehow Lila put me at ease.

“We met at the University of Cincinnati back in 1975,” I said. “My history professor introduced us. When we first met he was such a perfect gentlemen, he even bowed formally before shaking hands.”

“Quite the gentleman,” Lila laughed.

“Yes, a gentleman and an incredibly brilliant scholar – with a PhD *and* a law degree. He also had a booming bass voice, that charming Romanian accent and a curious smile. I was intrigued by that smile.”

The bit of information I couldn’t tell a perfect stranger was that Guido, my history professor from Italy, wasn’t just one of my teachers. We’d been having a passionate love affair for seven years. Introducing me to Ed was the worst and last mistake he made in our relationship.

“Ed and I were lovers and lived together for three years,” I continued. “Then we broke up but became inseparable friends. Life partners. Soul mates.”

“All those years! What a remarkable love story,” Lila whispered, appearing to grasp the nature of the relationship.

“How old is he anyway?”

“*That’s* a state secret,” I said, my body tensing up.

I always dreaded that question.

“Oh, you can tell *me*,” she said, glancing over and smiling.

“He’d kill me.”

“I won’t tell anyone. I promise.”

I knew better; and I knew he really would kill me if he found out I told her – or anyone else for that matter. But I couldn’t resist giving her a hint. I was kind of proud that he didn’t look anything near his age.

“Don’t *ever* repeat this,” I said. “He says he’s 77 but he’s really older. I can’t tell you how *much* older.”

I was immediately sorry I’d told her. I felt like an ‘eed-yut’ as Ed pronounced it. He’d sworn me to secrecy and here I was betraying him to a total stranger.

I changed the subject.

“I love him dearly but I’m livid that he was driving after dark,” I said. “I’ll have a serious talk with him when I return.”

Anger permeated my voice.

“Now, Marie dear,” she said, patting my knee and speaking compassionately. “Don’t be mad at him. He couldn’t help it. He’s a very sweet, adorable gentleman. You be good to him, you hear, darlin’?”

She didn’t seem to understand the seriousness of the situation. But I didn’t want to contradict that wonderful woman so I promised her I’d be sweet.

*Good thing she won’t be around when I talk to him.*

We arrived at Ed’s ancient – 1984 – silver Accord and I successfully maneuvered it onto the proper side of the street. Half frozen, because in my haste I hadn’t put on a coat before leaving home even though it was a bitterly cold evening, I followed Lila back to the Edgecliff, where she pulled up under the ‘grand portico’ to pick up Tanya. While Tanya was getting into the Escalade I parked Ed’s car in the parking lot – the ‘platform’ he called it – to the left of the building. I rushed back to thank Lila one more time, squeezed her hand, said good-bye, and waved as they drove off, all the while figuring out what I was going to say to Ed when I got upstairs.

### **Stop Driving for God’s Sake**

I got angrier by the minute as I went up to the ninth floor. Coming off the elevator, I saw that his apartment door was ajar. He often left it like that when he was expecting me. I stomped in, flinging his car keys down on the little drop leaf kitchen table he’d bought at Goodwill when he first came to the US. He was sitting in his recliner, the TV blaring with Fox News coverage of the Supreme Court’s deliberations over the presidential election. A water glass half-full of vodka was sitting on the little side table next to his chair. He’d long ago outgrown shot glasses and had begun using water glasses when he wanted a drink, a practice that had been alarming me for years.

While I was gone he’d changed from his navy blazer and dress slacks into his ‘house- clothes’ – thread-bare washed-out dark blue slacks with stains that wouldn’t come out, a pitifully wrinkled blue shirt, and worn-out house slippers. This pathetic ‘uniform’ always seemed to relax him and bring some comfort. When he was still teaching at Northern Kentucky University – just across the river from Cincinnati – from which he’d retired several years earlier, he wouldn’t have been caught dead dressed like that, even at home. Back then he never left his apartment without a stylish sport coat and tie – not even just to go to the

lobby to check his mail or to the basement to do his laundry. In fact, he once told me he had a nightmare in which he was at Kroger's without a tie.

I resisted the urge to slam the door.

"Why were you driving after dark?" I asked, towering over him and putting a piece of Nicorette in my mouth. "You know you're not supposed to drive after dark. You only have one eye and it has a cataract."

"I know, Kitty," he said plaintively, looking up at me.

'Kitty' was the pet name we called each other. It was based on the generic name I'd given my cat. Ed loved Kitty and for whatever reason had started calling me 'Little Kitty.' One day I asked him if I was 'Little Kitty,' then who was the cat 'Kitty?' I laughed out loud when he immediately said she was 'the *Very* Little Kitty.'

"Well, what *were* you doing driving?" I demanded.

"I went to Servatii to get some Italian bread and when I came out it was r-r-raining hard. I didn't want to drive in the r-r-rain home so I waited until it stopped. But by then it was dark. So I *had* to drive in the dark. I got 'meexed' up. I turned on the wrong street and got lost. Would you like a drink?"

He was visibly shaken; like a poor little child trying to explain to his mother that whatever happened wasn't his fault and she shouldn't be mad. His hands were literally shaking, but that in itself was not significant. Ever since I'd known Ed his hands had been unsteady. When he held papers they fluttered. A cup of coffee would quiver in his hands. People who didn't know him must have thought he was a very nervous person with all that trembling. The doctors didn't know why he had the tremors but had ruled out Parkinson's or anything else serious. Although I usually refused his offers of vodka, I accepted that one, feeling the need for a good stiff drink to fortify me for what I knew was going to be a major battle. But I wasn't used to hard liquor and it burned my throat so much that I put the glass down and just left it there.

"Why were you driving after dark?" I asked again, raising my voice. "And turn off the damn TV."

I should have been sweet and loving as Lila told me. He must have been terribly frightened to be lost after dark in that neighborhood. But instead of showing love and compassion, I expressed white-hot anger. I

acted as though he'd done it on purpose and needed to be yelled at. But then I realized the cold hard truth and my heart sank.

"Ed," I said quietly, "you have to stop driving. That's all there is to it."

Then he started to yell.

"No! I will never stop driving!"

He abandoned the 'poor little child' mode and put his glass down so forcefully that a few drops of vodka flew onto the table.

"You have to stop," I said again calmly, as conflicting emotions overpowered me. "You're going to kill yourself."

"I don't care 'eef I 'keel' myself," he said.

"I care," I said. "And besides, what if you kill someone else?"

He raised his voice even more. "I don't care about *that* either," he said, staring a hole through me.

"Ed, you're crazy. How can you say you don't care if you kill someone?" I asked, hardly believing I'd heard him correctly.

"I *don't* care," he said, suddenly standing up.

We were facing each other, nose to nose, inches apart.

"I tell you, I will *never* stop driving," he shouted, wagging his finger in my face.

I'm sure the neighbors heard us, but they were used to this. They'd been hearing us yell at each other like this for years. This was how Ed and I 'dee-scussed' things. I wouldn't yell like this at other people, but since it was Ed, it was not only allowed, it was expected.

Saying he didn't care if he 'keeled' someone else really upset me. Ed could be bizarre and eccentric, but this statement shocked me.

Our fight escalated, and finally he roared in an ugly guttural tone of voice, "Get out!"

"I'll be happy to!" I shouted, and slammed the door behind me.

What I didn't realize was that beneath the angry protests there was probably a vulnerable man worried about getting older; a man spending a lot of time thinking about death. This fiercely independent man couldn't and wouldn't accept that the time when he was able to drive himself wherever and whenever he wanted might be over. In his mind, having to rely on others must have seemed like a small death in itself. At the time I wasn't aware that underneath the tough exterior could be a man secretly frightened that his mind might be slipping. He was



struggling to make sense of what was happening to him. Why did he get lost? Why did he drive on the wrong side of the road?

Ed had been showing signs of mild confusion for a while. At first it had been little things like forgetting his wallet when going to Kroger's and leaving his headlights on when parking at the mall. Twice he'd gotten lost coming to my house. Both times he'd gone to nearby houses and asked to use the phone to call me to come get him. And twice he'd called me early in the morning to report he'd been up all night searching for something he'd lost. Once it was his passport; the other time, his safe deposit key. He never did find either. Then he started mixing up proper nouns, referring to 'Kroger's' as 'Stover's' and the 'Medical Arts Building' as 'the 5/3 Bank.' And he'd confuse the names of people and places. He'd started calling ABC's George Stephanopoulos 'George Popadopoulos.' Even though the two names were similar, he *never* would have made that mistake before.

Then he began forgetting to turn off the coffee maker and stove. Little things we all do occasionally, but it was happening to him far more often than to the average person. He routinely forgot the names of common objects (once he called his eyeglasses 'com-poo-ters' and referred to his hands as 'elbows'); he didn't recognize his favorite talk show hosts' names; and then he even started forgetting where he'd put everyday items such as, unbelievably, his clothes. Sometimes he spoke Romanian to me, and that although he knew I didn't understand a word of it. Then there was this driving problem, but I still didn't connect the dots. I just viewed it as an isolated area of dysfunction – not a sign of early dementia. Little did I know that it was just a matter of time until he wouldn't even remember he owned a car.

Alzheimer's is, above all, an insidious disease. Its symptoms begin so mildly and progress so slowly that it's easy to deny them until one day there's a 'defining incident;' an incident so bizarre that not even the spouse, child or other loved one can explain it away. Years may pass between the earliest occasional confusion and the inevitable 'defining incident.' And during those years, the person may annoy or even anger loved ones by being late, forgetting things, being short tempered and confused, and a whole variety of other troublesome behaviors. As the afflicted person's brain slowly deteriorates, he struggles to adjust and continue functioning. This alone takes extreme mental effort, often leading to anger and agitation. During this time the person may also be

in denial, realizing something is wrong and trying to understand it in any way possible that doesn't involve the words 'Alzheimer's' or 'dementia.'

In the days, weeks, and months after the driving incident, I asked Ed to stop driving. I begged him to stop. I implored him. Cajoled. Pleaded. Insisted. I ordered him to stop. Sometimes I cried when I talked about it. I alternated that with trying to explain in reasonable terms why he should stop. I talked about it on the phone. I talked about it when we went for walks. When we went out for pizza. On the way home from the movies. I talked about it all hours of the day and night. To no avail. His response was always the same.

"I will *never* stop driving!"

Of course I could have taken away his keys, but he was still alert enough to know how to get replacements made. Finally, when I went to see him one Friday afternoon, I decided to threaten him.

As we were having our usual Turkish coffee I looked him right in the eye and said, "If you don't stop driving, I'm going to report you to the Bureau of Motor Vehicles. They'll make you take a driving test and you know you'll fail. Then they'll take away your driver's license."

*Silence.*

Ed was at a loss for words for the first time in the twenty-five years I'd known him.

*Dead silence.*

We stared at each other.

"Would you like to go to Lenhardt's for lunch?" he asked.

"Sure. I'm starving," I said, deciding to let it go for then.

I had no intention of turning him in. He'd never speak to me again, which would devastate me. I was just hoping the threat would scare him into giving up driving. I'd have to wait and see.

### **Problem Solved**

I didn't see Ed again until the following Sunday, when he asked me to take him shopping for suitcases at Tri-County Mall.

He always wanted to shop for suitcases. It was one of his more quirky features. He was obsessed with suitcases, or 'luggages,' as he called them. Even he admitted it. If we were in a department store and happened to pass by the luggage department, he felt compelled to stop, just as a child is drawn to stop in the toy department, and spent a good

thirty minutes or so while he examined *each* suitcase. Sometimes he would buy one only to return it the next day, disillusioned with one feature or another. And sometimes when he'd return one suitcase he'd buy another one, which more often than not would also be returned. Aptly, when he retired from Northern Kentucky University they gave him a suitcase as a retirement gift. Of course, he exchanged it for a different one the next day.

He frequently and shamelessly returned other merchandise, too, even when it had been heavily used. He once returned an area rug to Pier 1 after nearly six months. Remarkably, they took it back despite the date on the receipt. When stores didn't want to take back his used merchandise, he argued so long and so loudly that they'd relent just to get rid of him and avoid a scene in front of their other customers. He was so adept at returning used merchandise, my friends occasionally asked to 'borrow' him to return items for them.

Despite his obsession with buying and returning suitcases, he did own several, arranged neatly in his walk-in closet, standing side by side like sentries, waiting to be called to duty. They were of all sizes, shapes and colors, and with different numbers and configurations of compartments that he loved exploring. I think he enjoyed these investigations more than he loved actually using the suitcases. Most of these bags had locks. He had a stack of stray keys in his desk, but most belonged to suitcases he didn't even have anymore. Nonetheless, every time he packed for a trip he tried every key in every lock.

His self-proclaimed 'mania' with buying suitcases was surpassed only by his idiosyncrasies when it came to packing. 'Making my luggages,' as he called it, was always traumatic because he had a horrible time deciding what to *put* in these suitcases.

He would always drag me right into it. It would go like this:

"Kitty, should I take the blue shirt or the white one?"

"Take the blue one."

"Oh! No! I want to take the *white* one," he'd tell me.

"Okay, Kitty. Then take the white one."

"No," he'd insist. "I really want your *advice*."

"Well, if you want my *advice* dammit, take the blue one."

"But I don't *want* to take the blue one."

And so it would go with *every single piece of clothing* that went into the suitcase. And then, when the suitcase was finally packed, he'd start

taking things *out*, and start all over again. It took the two of us three excruciating days of packing, unpacking, and repacking for one of our five-day vacations, for which he actually ended up taking four suits, none of which he wore. His ridiculous packing routine was so exaggerated it made him look like a caricature of himself.

'Making my luggages' was a phrase that would stay with us forever. In the years to come, whenever he was seriously ill, he'd use this phrase as a euphemism for 'putting my final affairs in order.' But during all these luggage shopping trips, packing nightmares and references to 'putting affairs in order,' I never would have guessed that one day I'd be the one to bear the responsibility for 'making Ed's luggages' when the time came for real.

In our early years together I found his obsession with suitcases charming. But by this time, it had become annoying beyond belief. That particular Sunday, about a week after the driving incident, it was unusually sunny and warm for the middle of December; there was not a cloud in the sky. With the sun beating through the windshield, the car was hot and so we shed our coats. But the weather didn't make the shopping trip any less agonizing. He insisted that we go to three different stores, where he kept store clerks busy showing him 'luggages' in different shapes, sizes and colors. I was bored to death. When it was all over, he had bought nothing.

When we returned to the Edgecliff, Ed went into the galley kitchen and I followed on his heels. He poured himself a generous drink and offered me one. I declined and took a Diet Coke from the fridge. We sat down at the kitchen table, covered with black newsprint from his precious New York Times, which he read from front to back every day. Then he began what sounded like a well-rehearsed speech.

"*Little Kitty*," he began calmly, accentuating 'little,' as he often did. "You have me in the palm of your hand. 'Eef you want as a bad driver to turn me in you can and there is nothing to stop you I can do." He paused. "But I can tell you r-r-right now, it will cost you tens of 'tousands' of dollars. Not '*tousands*' of dollars – *tens* of 'tousands.'" Then he repeated himself. "*Tens* of 'tousands.'"

It took me a few seconds to understand, but when I finally did, I burst into laughter.

*He's threatening to disinherit me!*

That was vintage Ed. It had taken him three days, but he'd finally found a fitting response to my threat.

"Oh, Kitty. Come on," I said, laughing so hard tears were rolling down my cheeks. "I'm not really going to turn you in. I just wanted to scare you so you'd stop driving."

"I know you weren't r-r-really going to do it," he said. "I r-r-really wasn't going to do what I said either."

I never got him to *agree* to stop driving, but I finally did get him to *stop*. Slowly, as time passed, I discovered the solution. One day I was going to Kroger's and asked if he wanted to come. He said he did and I drove. So I started inviting him every time I went. He was always happy to go and let me drive. Then I started inviting him to various other stores and took him to those, too.

Taking him shopping was not without peril, however, for he was maddeningly slow. At Kroger's, for example, instead of simply putting a box of spaghetti in his cart, he would pick up a box of every brand of spaghetti and read everything on it. Then he'd compare the prices of all the brands. And he'd repeat this process with every item he bought every time he went. It typically took him three times longer to buy his groceries than it would have taken for me to buy them for him.

His increasingly erratic behavior added another layer of issues. Sometimes he'd lose his temper and yell at me for no good reason. And sometimes he behaved inappropriately in other ways. Like once at the salad bar he decided he'd taken too much lettuce, so he picked up some from his plastic container with his fingers and put it back in the salad bar while other people looked on. I was mortified. So eventually I just had him give me a list and I bought and delivered his groceries. It was a lot faster and much less nerve-wracking.

Little by little I started running all the errands for this formerly vibrant, self-reliant man. This man who'd always been completely independent; who, though never a very *good* driver, managed to go anywhere he wanted, anytime; who sneaked into my house on my birthday every year and left yellow roses on my dining room table. Now I was the one doing pretty much everything for him. I picked up and delivered what he needed from Kroger's, CVS, Starbuck's, Servatii, the Public Library, the University of Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky University Libraries, Widmer's Dry Cleaner, and Barnes and Noble. I took him to his internist, numerous medical specialists, his podiatrist,

and his dentist. I drove him to the 5/3 Bank and his lawyer, Stuart Susskind. I took him to buy clothes, shoes, and ‘luggages,’ which he still wanted even though he didn’t travel anymore. These duties were now part of my life. And if I wasn’t available, he used his ‘driver,’ Mr. Ellington – or ‘Ellington,’ as he called him – a compassionate African American Evangelical Christian who drove a regular cab and would make time to drive Ed to do his errands.

And since I had taken away his *need* to drive, pretty soon Ed stopped driving. In fact, he never drove again the rest of his life. However, in an ironic twist of fate, one year he made me drive him to the Bureau of Motor Vehicles to renew his license even though he hadn’t driven for years.

Thus, without even realizing – or acknowledging – it, I’d solved Ed’s first serious dementia-related problem. Little did I know just how many more lay ahead.

## **Chapter 2: The Longest Day (2003)**

### **A Trying Day**

One fateful day I had to take Ed to see his internist, Dr. Bibler, because his allergies were acting up. His nose was running constantly and he was sneezing uncontrollably, sometimes six or seven times in a row. It was the dead of winter, 2003. Ed was 90, I was 53. We'd been together 28 years, most of them absolutely blissful, fascinating and breathtaking, but since the driving incident three years before, things were continuing to deteriorate badly. Ed was becoming more and more difficult to deal with, and I didn't know how much longer I could tolerate him. I really didn't. I wasn't aware that he was slowly becoming demented. I was in deep denial – not uncommon among loved ones of dementia patients – and just thought he was becoming incredibly mean.

Before picking him up for his doctor's appointment, I'd stopped at Kroger's to get his groceries. I arrived at his apartment around 10:00 with eleven plastic bags of food. When Ed didn't answer his door, I let myself in with the key he'd given me after a series of long heated debates many years before.

Ed was supposed to be dressed and ready to go, but I found him in his threadbare pajamas and worn-out slippers sitting on the edge of his bed, holding the telephone receiver in his lap while speaking Romanian into the air. I figured he

was trying to talk to either the Romanian jeweler or the Romanian housekeeper, two of his old acquaintances. I walked over and physically moved his hand – and the receiver – up to his left ear, the ‘good’ one. Soon he finished his conversation and put the receiver down on the red plaid blanket on his bed. I hung it up for him.

“Oh, hello, Kitty,” he said, looking up at me. “I’m so happy you’re here.”

“Ed,” I said a little curtly, entering the bedroom, where clothes, shoes, books and newspapers were strewn about. “You’re supposed to be ready to go see Dr. Bibler. Why aren’t you dressed?”

“Honestly, Kitty, I forgot I had an appointment with Dr. ‘Bee-bler.’”

“Well, you do. So hurry up and get ready,” I said a little impatiently.

“Certainly. R-r-right now!”

He stood up and began unbuttoning his pajama top. I was relieved that at least he seemed in a good mood.

While he was getting dressed I went into the living room, dropped my Coach bag on the sofa, then wandered into the kitchen to inspect the refrigerator. Sometimes he kept Snickers bars in there for me. The first thing I noticed was a water glass half full of vodka on the kitchen table.

*Jeez, it’s only 10:00 AM.*

Thirty minutes later he came out fully dressed, and nicely so, wearing tan slacks, his chocolate brown corduroy sport coat, a yellow Oxford button-down shirt, and a tan and white striped tie. Then he noticed that I was wearing a tee shirt with a wolf on it.

*Damn, I forgot.*



"Kitty," he said, walking toward me and nearly tripping on the edge of the living room Kilim, "I *told* you not to wear shirts with wolves on them!"

His anger was palpable.

"They're frightening. What's wrong with your memory?"

*As though his memory were better than mine.*

"Go home and change r-r-right now."

"Ed, there isn't time," I said. "We'll be late for your appointment."

"Go home anyway. I don't care 'eef we're late. I'm not going anywhere with you dressed like that," he yelled.

His outrage was way out of proportion to my transgression.

"There isn't time," I insisted, pointing to my watch. "I tell you what. I won't do it again. Okay?"

"Okay," he said. "But be sure."

We returned to the kitchen and he began his highly ritualized process of putting away the groceries. I placed the bags on the counter atop the stacks of several recent editions of the New York Times, and then he started putting the items away, but not before first checking off each one on the cash register tape.

"Ed, hurry up," I said, annoyed at his time-consuming habit.

"Leave me alone," he shouted, bending down awkwardly to put a bottle of Dawn in a baseboard cabinet. "I'm almost finished."

*We'll never make it on time.*

Then he opened the bag with the bananas in it.

"What are these?" he asked, holding them at arm's length, as though they might be dangerous.

"Bananas."

"Bananas?" he asked, looking confused.

"You know – bananas. You put them on your cereal."

His face remained blank. His bewilderment scared me, but I thought, or chose to think, that it was just a moment of temporary confusion. I didn't acknowledge that it could be a sign of something far more serious.

Finally we were ready to leave when I inadvertently committed another offence. It was an extremely cold snowy day and I'd worn my camel's hair coat. Without thinking I put it on *'the wrong way.'* I held it in front of me with the front of the coat facing forward, one hand on each side of the collar, twirled it up over my head and behind me, and then let the sleeves slide down my up stretched arms - first the left, then the right.

"Kitty," he said loudly, "I told you 'hunnerd' times not that way to put on your coat. You look r-r-ridiculous. You should r-r-really be more r-r-refined."

I knew if we fought over it he might get so infuriated he'd throw me out and refuse to go to the doctor at all. Although Ed no longer cared about his appearance, he had become adamant about mine. He had always encouraged me to dress nicely, had helped refine my style and had been incredibly generous in buying me beautiful clothes over the years. But by then he had begun dictating how I dressed. There were many rules. Sweats were forbidden, as were shorts. Although tennis shoes and jeans were sometimes allowed, they could become the objects of ridicule. Then there was this coat issue. He was adamant about it. So after a dramatic sigh I took my coat off and put it on again, starting by holding it low behind me, then pulling up first the left sleeve, then the right.

As we were leaving he had one of his typical sneezing fits. Eight times in a row. Then just as we were going out the door he brought up a sensitive issue for me - my weight. Over the years I had steadily gained, ballooning from 110 when I first met Ed to 185. At 5' 4", I was a good 65 pounds overweight,

and since most of the excess weight was around my stomach I looked pregnant. Even at my age (I was 53 at that time), I'd had people ask me when my baby was due, which was immensely embarrassing. Ed had been on me about it for years, and brought it up with just one sentence.

"Kitty," he asked, "*when* are you going to lose some weight?"

*And the day had just begun.*

### **I'm Not with Him**

During the short drive to the Medical Arts Building – the MAB as we called it – Ed calmed down and behaved as though nothing had happened between us. It was snowing heavily and the wind made the car sway at times. I was lost in thought about how different Ed had been in our early years together. How he used to praise and compliment me all the time instead of berate and criticize me. He always thought I was a genius for having a thorough knowledge of music theory, especially that of the Greek and Medieval periods. He was self-effacing when he talked about it, and said he'd *never* be able to learn anything as complex as that. He was impressed that I'd published a critical and performing edition of a sacred cantata by Sammartini from handwritten manuscripts I'd discovered in libraries in Munich and 'Sveet-zair-lawnd.' When I explained to him the meticulous process for preparing such editions he'd looked at me in awe.

I remembered arriving at Ed's apartment early one morning when his dearest childhood friend was visiting from Romania. The man was an intellectual and at that time was the president of some or other highly regarded American Romanian society. He was in the US for its annual meeting in New York and Ed, generous as ever with friends, had bought him a ticket to come to Cincinnati for a five-day visit. When I

walked in, there was John – yes, his parents had given him that English name – in his bathrobe and slippers, sitting at Ed's little kitchen table in his outmoded oversized horn-rimmed glasses, a cup of Turkish coffee in front of him, dutifully reading my historical introduction to the Sammartini edition. Ed was so very proud of it that he'd actually made John sit down and read it. Ed was sitting, also in sleeping attire and with tousled hair, on the other side of the little table with his own cup of coffee. I assumed he was waiting patiently for John to finish reading and give his esteemed opinion of my work. I felt honored, but at the same time sorry for John. The introduction was quite long and part of it was rather technical. It couldn't have been of any real interest to him.

Ed routinely sang my praises to others whenever there was the slightest opportunity to fit it into any discussion. In addition to praising my abilities as a musicologist, he was always talking about my tremendous success as a grant writer at the University of Cincinnati Department of Family Medicine. He couldn't resist telling others that my grants had brought in millions of dollars over the years. Ed's incessant praise of me, while earnest in his mind, was rather inappropriate. My intellect wasn't anything extraordinary. *He* was the one who was brilliant.

Ed was a true Renaissance man, as were many Europeans of his generation, but he stood out among them because his memory was phenomenal. It was his most distinguishing feature. He'd remember everything he read, heard or saw. It was that simple. We refer to such people as 'walking encyclopedias,' but Ed was far more. Ed was a walking library.

Many times when my friends and I had academic discussions we'd get stumped by some question or other. I'd

always say, "Let's call Ed. *He'll* know." And he did. Every time. I was ever so proud that my Ed could delve into that stunning memory and within seconds retrieve the answers to our sometimes ridiculously obscure questions. He would eagerly shout them out as though on a TV game show when the first contestant to answer correctly won.

Ed was a cosmopolitan, too. He knew so many languages. In addition to his native language, he spoke English, French, and German fluently, and he read Italian, Latin, and Russian. Most highly educated people know multiple languages, of course, and Ed was no exception. What was nearly unbelievable, however, was that even when he became seriously demented he could still speak English, French, and German. He couldn't remember if he had lunch, he didn't always know if it was day or night, he couldn't tie his shoes, couldn't talk on the phone, but he could easily converse in those languages.

Ed had received a classic European education in Bucharest and subsequently earned a law degree there. He became a tenacious defense attorney, racking up an astounding number of acquittals for his clients. Then he changed his professional focus to literature and philosophy, and studied further in France and the US. He had read nearly all the 1,200 books in his personal library - "Plus," as he once said to a friend admiring his collection, "a *few* more." The "*few* more" were in fact 'hunnerds' more if not 'tousands' more.

His 1973 doctorate from the University of Cincinnati was in Romance Languages and Literature, which required a thorough knowledge not only of literature, but also comparative literature, literary theory, literary criticism and other related areas. It seemed that when I arrived to visit he was always hunched over his kitchen table smoking a

cigarette while deeply immersed in a thick book in one language or another about those very topics.

And if he wasn't studying those issues he could usually be found pouring over one of his numerous books about philosophy, most of which were in German. Philosophy was actually his first love. He was obsessed with it. Reading those arcane books brought him great pleasure, but also appeared to be an awesome duty – almost a moral obligation. Those books, like the *New York Times*, had to be read every day. Suffice it to say there was no dust on his book shelves.

His knowledge and scholarly interests didn't stop with literature and philosophy, however. He was incredibly well versed in many other areas as well, including music, art, architecture, history, and – most of all – current world events. He'd routinely tell me about events - even those of little interest or none at all – that had happened that morning in some tiny country I couldn't even find on a map.

Though Ed's unshakable memory and vast fund of knowledge were amazing, his brain was far more than a mere repository for facts and figures. He could *do things* with the knowledge he possessed. He could analyze complex philosophical issues. Discern subtle differences between quite similar works of art. He could debate controversial literary theories. Distinguish between the core of an issue and the fluff. Synthesize voluminous amounts of information and get to the bottom of it, distilling to what was truly significant.

Even more surprisingly, for a proud man – and Ed was indeed a proud man – he was humble before the scholars he'd met along the way, scholars he considered more knowledgeable and capable than he. He especially admired Mircea Eliade and Jacques Derrida. He told me that he had 'but a poor mind' compared to them. He attended lectures by each and talked about them for days afterward. With awe in

his voice, he told me how fascinating, challenging and illuminating they had been. From the way he talked you'd have thought he'd been to hear orations by Plato himself.

But all that would fade into darkness when Alzheimer's overtook him. I was grateful at least that he didn't suffer. As it turned out he never knew he'd lost anything.

As we got closer to the MAB for Ed's appointment with Dr. Bibler that morning, I realized Ed was 'meex-ed up' and thought he was going to see another doctor, Dr. Bracken, about his prostate. I told him he was seeing Dr. 'Bee-bler' for his allergies. He seemed to understand, but I didn't know how long he'd remember.

"Go sign in, Ed," I said, when we got to the waiting room.

I sat down on one of the few available chairs, which was far more uncomfortable than it looked, while he walked to the Plexiglas-covered receptionist's window, sneezing four times on the way. He picked up the pen and started to write his name, but then, without warning, he shouted, "I will *not* sign my name here!"

His voice drew everyone's attention. People looked up from their cell phones and worn magazines and stared at him. Some looked shocked, especially an elderly silver-haired gentleman in a dark blue suit who peered up over his dark-rimmed glasses. Others just appeared to be curious.

"You have to sign in," the receptionist said, "so we know you're here and what time you arrived." She said it curtly, apparently sure it would convince him to sign.

I knew better.

"No! I r-r-refuse. You *know* I'm here," he insisted. "I am *not* signing my name here like a school boy."

*Oh, God. Not this again.*

I gritted my teeth and closed my eyes. He'd done the same thing at the dentist's office the previous week.

He came back and sat down beside me. Embarrassed, I immediately moved one seat over, picked up a ten-month old issue of Time, and pretended I wasn't with him. He then moved to the chair I'd just vacated, so we were sitting adjacent to one another again. I ignored him and kept staring at the dumb magazine, hoping people would think we weren't related.

Dr. Bibler was obviously running late. Very late. The minutes ticked by ever so slowly.

"I've been here waiting twenty-five minutes," Ed said a few minutes later, stomping back to the receptionist's window. "How much longer do you r-r-really think I'm going to wait?"

I wanted to just get up and go home, leaving him there all by himself.

"It will be just a few more minutes, Dr. Theodore," the receptionist said firmly.

Her name was Mary. She was very young and couldn't pronounce his last name properly, but she'd known him long enough to know he wanted to be addressed as 'Dr.' Theodore. Ed was obsessed with the fact that we both had PhDs, and he never missed an opportunity to refer to me as "Dr. Marie Marley" or introduce himself as "Dr. Edward Theodoru." Frankly, I was embarrassed by this. There was no reason to introduce me as "Dr. Marley" to the paper boy or the cab driver. When writing his name on a form or something, he always put "Dr. Edward Theodoru," instead of "Edward Theodoru, PhD." Although the former was correct, of course, it sometimes made people think he was a medical doctor, and I honestly believe that's what he wanted. When he'd call CVS to refill a prescription, he'd follow the instructions of the recording with precision: "Press one if you're a patient. Press two if you're a doctor." He always pressed two.



He walked back and sat down in the chair next to me.

“Always here they are late!” he told me.

There was no way I could keep pretending I didn’t know him; he was sitting right beside me and was obviously talking to me.

When the nurse finally came out and called his name, he got up and disappeared with her behind the door leading to the exam rooms.

I sighed, resigned to the fact he wasn’t going to understand half of what Dr. Bibler was about to tell him and wouldn’t remember half of what he did understand.

*Thank God this visit isn’t about a life-threatening condition.*

Ed returned ten minutes later, a little white sheet of paper fluttering in his trembling hand. We filled the prescription without incident at the first-floor pharmacy. I hoped the rest of the day would go better.

“Let’s go for lunch at Lenhardt’s,” he said when we got settled in the car.

All I wanted was to get away from that man and have a little peace and quiet.

“Ed, I would love to, but I don’t have time,” I said, fastening my seat belt. “I’m working on a major federal grant. It’s due Friday.”

“You have time for lunch,” he said matter-of-factly as I helped him with his seat belt. He was no longer capable of fastening it by himself.

“No, I don’t. I have to go home and work,” I said, putting the car in reverse.

I often worked from home. After the scene he’d made at the doctor’s office I had no intention of having lunch with him that day. I was sure he’d just make another scene right there at the restaurant. He’d been doing that often in those days.

### First Date

I couldn't help but think of how gallant and chivalrous he'd been at our first dinner at the Edgecliff back in 1975. I remembered how he'd kissed my hand when I opened the door of my apartment to greet him. That gesture and his smile had felt slightly seductive that night. And that even though he had tricked me into the date.

A few months after Guido had introduced me to Ed, the phone had jarred me awake from a much-needed and pleasant Saturday afternoon nap. I'd delayed a moment to light a cigarette, then lifted the receiver.

Exhaling the smoke, I answered.

"Hello."

"Is this Ma-r-r-ie?" asked the heavily accented bass voice.

"Yes, it is."

"Here is Edward Theodoru," the booming voice at the other end introduced himself.

I was thoroughly confused. I couldn't imagine any reason for Ed to be calling me. At first I was terrified that something bad had happened to Guido and Ed was calling to tell me the news.

"Would you have with me 'dee-ner' this evening?" he asked.

That confused me even more. He *knew* I was deeply in love with Guido, his *friend and colleague*. I couldn't believe he had the audacity to make a play for me. So I just took a drag from my cigarette, not yet fully awake and too confused to respond.

"Ask to come with you a girlfriend," Ed suggested, evidently noting my indecision.

Well, that changed everything. I exhaled in relief and crushed out my cigarette. If I could bring a friend, then he obviously wasn't asking me on a date. He probably just wanted some company for 'dee-ner'. So I accepted and – *just as I'm sure he had hoped* – I didn't bother asking a girlfriend to come along. That's

how naïve I was. But truth be told, although I was passionately in love with Guido, who was away on his annual summer trip to Italy, I secretly found Ed enchanting and felt a tinge of excitement at the prospect of having 'dee-ner' with him alone.

I was decked out in an unusually gaudy dress in a tacky shade of turquoise, cut too short, nearly transparent and showing entirely too much cleavage. Having an atrocious sense of taste in those days, I innocently thought I was dressed splendidly. He was probably aghast, perhaps even a bit embarrassed to be seen with me, but then again, I *was* young and pretty. A little on the short side at 5'4", my body was nonetheless well proportioned, although at 110 pounds I was almost a little underweight. My long brown hair, which I often wore in a ponytail, drew attention to my brown eyes, which my mother always lovingly referred to as "big and beautiful."

Ed, on the other hand, was well dressed in a navy blazer, tan dress slacks, and a pale yellow shirt embellished with a tasteful burgundy and grey striped tie. He had a distinctly triangular-shaped face and aquiline nose. Combined with his black hair, chocolate-colored eyes and bronze complexion, he was truly tall, dark and handsome.

I was twenty-five and decidedly immature for my age. I didn't know how old he was. Certainly old enough to be my father, but then so was Guido, so I didn't really think much about it. Besides, this wasn't a date, as far as I knew, so our relative ages didn't matter. I wouldn't have bothered asking anyway because I'd learned that when older men spent time with young girls they usually lied about their ages.

He lived at the Edgecliff apartment building, which just happened to have a restaurant, and he just happened to suggest we go there for 'dee-ner.' In my youthful innocence I never saw it coming.

The restaurant had a striking view of the Ohio River, and Ed requested a table next to one of the large windows. When we reached the table, covered with a starched white tablecloth and bearing a little vase of fresh daisies, he pulled out my chair for me.

*Gee, no man does that anymore.*

Soon after, a rather young looking ultra skinny teen-aged waiter wearing a black shirt and very tight black pants brought us ice water with lemon slices on the rims.

"The service is usually r-r-really slow here, so we'll have for conversation a lot of time," Ed smiled.

Just as I was unfolding my napkin he motioned for the waiter.

When the young man arrived, Ed calmly announced, "We'll move to that table there," and he pointed to a table on the other side of the room, also by a window. I have to admit I was perplexed as to why he wanted to move, and I felt somewhat embarrassed as we picked up our silverware and napkins and traipsed to the new table following the waiter, who was carrying our water glasses. I thought about asking why he wanted to move, but decided to let it go. He held out my chair for me as he had at the first table. Once we were re-situated, the waiter took our orders. I ordered broiled pork chops; he, baked halibut. I also ordered a salad, but he didn't want one.

"It is just grass," he said.

I started the conversation off awkwardly by asking him a most predictable question.

"What did you write your dissertation about?"

I put my napkin on my lap again.

"J. G. Sulzer and his contributions to the French Encyclopedia."

"Who was J. G. Sulzer?"

“He was an 18<sup>th</sup>-century Swiss aesthetician.”

I didn’t know what an aesthetician was, but didn’t want to appear ignorant so I didn’t ask. I got a Salem from the pack I’d placed on the table and was pleasantly surprised when he produced a lit match just at the instant I put the cigarette to my mouth.

*What a gentleman.*

“Swiss, huh?” I asked, inhaling. “What language did he write in?”

“German.”

“German? So you know Romanian, English, French, *and* German?” I said.

I only knew English, of course, and Italian, but would need to some German and French for my doctorate.

“Yes. And I can read Italian and R-r-russian,” he said with gusto. “And a ‘lee-tle’ Greek.”

As that was sinking in, the waiter brought my salad and some warm French bread wrapped in a linen napkin placed in a little wicker basket. The bread’s aroma made my mouth water. Bread was one of my greatest weaknesses.

“What is your specialty?” he asked.

“My bachelor’s degree is in performance.”

“Oh! What do you play?”

“I play the clarinet. In fact, I won a performance competition for a four-year full-tuition scholarship to UC – that’s the only way I could have afforded to go to college at all – but later I changed my major to musicology.”

“I *thought* Guido told me you were a musicology student. What did you do for your Master’s thesis?” he asked as I took a sip of my ice water, hoping I was doing it daintily.

“I studied a group of sixteenth-century Italian madrigals set to sonnets by Petrarch.”

“Madrigals set to Petrarch’s sonnets. What an interesting topic!” he said. “I recall there was a r-r-resurgence of interest in Petrarch’s sonnets among the sixteenth-century ‘Ee-talian’ madrigalists.”

I sat there with my mouth hanging open, amazed that he knew this bit of information. Many musicologists wouldn’t even know it unless they’d specialized in Italian Renaissance music.

*This man is brilliant.*

And not only did he *say* my thesis topic was interesting, he truly *was* interested in it. And what he asked next really pleased me.

“Ma-r-r-ie, would you let me sometime r-r-read your thesis?”

“Of course,” I said, beginning to really enjoy this ‘dee-ner.’ It never occurred to me that he might be flattering me as a means of seduction.

Then he changed the subject and, lighting a cigarette for himself, stated proudly, “I don’t want to brag but I was a r-r-really successful defense attorney in R-r-romania before I came here in the ‘60s.” He had a broad grin on his face. “I love to argue and almost always I win.”

I would later learn that, unfortunately, he really did love to argue; in fact it was one of his hallmark traits.

“Tell me about one of your interesting cases,” I said, partly because I thought that was the polite thing to ask and partly because I was curious.

“Well, let me see,” he said, tilting his head back and slightly to the left as though trying to recall some ancient memory.

While I was waiting for him to decide on a story, I picked up a piece of bread and buttered it, which was difficult because the pat of butter was very cold – almost frozen.

“Once I defended a young man accused of r-r-raping a ‘veer-gin,’” he began. “The beautiful girl’s testimony sounded convincing, and things were looking pretty grim for my client.

But I was convinced of his innocence, so I decided to play detective. I went to the small town where the accuser ‘leev-ed’ previously and did some legal r-r-research. After hours of tiresome review of stacks of public documents, I discovered that this same girl had brought an *identical* lawsuit there. So my client was immediately acquitted and the prosecutor brought charges against his accuser.”

As he ended his story he took a slice of bread and began working to smooth the cold butter onto it. He looked as annoyed as I’d been.

“Wow, that’s impressive. Why did you become a French professor here instead of a lawyer?”

“I realized I’d never well enough master the English language – plus I have a heavy accent.”

That was an understatement, to say the least. But to me his accent was so charming.

“I doubt I’d have been a successful defense lawyer in this country,” he continued, “and that’s the only kind of lawyer I’d ever want to be. I couldn’t stand to be a corporate lawyer – sitting at a desk ‘feel-ing’ out forms all day. So I just decided to become a French professor. I knew it would be relatively easy since I already knew the language.”

I was really hungry by then. The waiter was headed in our general direction, but as he neared I could see he was carrying some other diners’ food.

“How did you learn to speak French so well?”

“I learned it as a child. When I grew up in R-r-romania all the middle class people knew French and, in fact, many spoke French at home. How about you? How did you learn ‘Ee-talian’?” he asked.

“I taught myself. When I was in high school I loved Italian opera and followed along with the translated libretto when I listened. But I always felt I was missing something in the

translation so I just decided to learn the language. I studied a textbook and then I found an Italian family that let me practice speaking Italian with them. Then when I got here I took Italian classes for three years.”

I took another cigarette out of the pack, which he lit as quickly and chivalrously as he’d lit the first. I smiled.

“Tell me another story.”

I said it as innocently and eagerly as a child asks her father to tell her another bedtime story. I propped my elbows on the table and clasped my hands under my chin. I was enjoying this.

“Okay,” he said, pausing as if to think which of the many stories he had lived he wanted to tell me about next. “Oh, I know – I’ll tell you the ‘Jeep-sie’ story.”

Sounded good to me.

“Once I represented a group of ‘Jeep-sies’ in R-r-omania. A little band of them, very filthy and loud, came to my tiny waiting room one day making quite a bit of noise. I made them come immediately into my office because they were disturbing the other lawyers in the building. They presented their complaint: the government had confiscated all of their gold coins.”

He leaned forward, looked around to see if anyone was listening, then lowered his voice and whispered, “The damned communist r-r-regime didn’t allow *any* citizens to possess gold, but my family had some hidden.”

I didn’t know at the time that he’d come to this country as a political refugee or that at one point the Romanian secret police had been looking for him.

“They begged me to take their case,” he continued, sitting back in his chair and resuming his normal tone of voice. “I finally told them I would do it under one condition. They had to promise they would *never* come back to my office again. I said



I'd meet with them at a nearby park. To make a long story short, I eventually did get their coins back through a loophole I discovered in the law. They were overjoyed, rewarded me generously, and invited me to a big celebration they were going to have at their camp way outside the city that night."

"Did you go?" I asked.

"No, of course not. I politely declined."

"Yeah. I can't see you going to such a thing. By the way, I had an odd experience with a Gypsy when I lived in Italy."

"When did *you* 'leev' in 'Ee-taly'?"

"My senior year in college. UC has an exchange program with the University of Pavia. Guido convinced the Italian teacher here in charge of the program to select me to go that year."

*We sure were making a lot of references to Guido.*

"What did you study?"

"I studied the operas of Monteverdi with a well-known Italian musicologist named Rafaello Monterosso –

"That's an interesting combination of surnames."

"Yes. I know. Green and red mountains. Anyway, I also studied clarinet with Orlando Ianelli, who was the second clarinetist in the La Scala Opera Orchestra."

"R-r-really?"

"Yep."

"You studied with a La Scala Opera Orchestra clarinetist?" he asked, squeezing some lemon into his ice water and inadvertently squirting me in the face.

I dried my face with my napkin, which made him realize what he'd done.

"Oh. I am so sorry, Ma-r-r-ie. Excuse me, please."

"That's okay."

Then I answered his question.

“Yes. I studied with a La Scala Opera Orchestra clarinetist.”  
“Seriously?”

“Yes, sir. I took the train to Milano once a week, which was like thirty miles from Pavia. In fact, the year I was in Italy they had an opening for the third clarinet position and my teacher wanted me to audition for it.”

“*Did you?*” He raised his voice and sounded excited so I knew my answer was going to disappoint him.

“No,” I said, firmly putting out my cigarette in the tiny glass ashtray.

“Ma-r-r-rie! Why not? You mean you actually passed up a chance in the La Scala Opera Orchestra to be?”

“Well, I didn’t think I’d have any chance of winning the audition. And if I did, I’d have been petrified. Imagine the pressure. It was *La Scala* for God’s sake. Anyway, I wanted to come home after my year was over. I missed Guido terribly.”

*And here he was again – Guido.*

“Speaking of opera,” I asked, as the waiter approached our table only to veer off in the other direction again, “do you like it?”

“What – opera? No. I *hate* it. I can’t stand seeing the singers on stage with ‘the mouth’ open wide.”

He made an exaggerated facial expression, grossly mimicking an opera singer hitting a really high note. I wondered how he expected singers to emit sound if not with ‘the mouth’ open.

“But a funny thing happened one night when I was at the opera in Bucharest,” he said. “They were performing R-r-rigoletto and I was bored to death so I decided to leave. I very slowly walked to the door and discretely opened it.” Then he laughed. “Only thing was,” he said, “it was the door to a closet. So there I was in front of all those people standing in a closet with a mop and a broom!”

We both laughed and simultaneously reached into the little basket for another slice of bread. Our hands almost touched.

The waiter arrived and put down our plates. I'd been so engrossed in our conversation I hadn't even touched my 'grass.'

"You can take the salad," I said.

The moment the waiter was out of earshot, Ed casually asked me in his deep bass voice, "Speaking of 'Ee-taly', would you like to go there on a vacation with me sometime?"

I was shocked by his brazenness. I guess I'd been wrong about his intentions for this 'dee-ner.' It was a date after all. I rested my cigarette in the ashtray and, as the smoke curled up toward the ceiling, just stared at him. I had no idea what to say. My eyes turned toward the window and I gazed at the magnificent Ohio River and the Northern Kentucky shore as I tried to think of an answer.

Finally one came to me.

"I'll have to think about it," I said.

We continued with more pleasant conversation, but that startling precipitous question stayed in my mind for an incredibly long time.

### **Lunch at Lenhardt's**

I was abruptly jolted back to the present when a driver cut me off right in front of Lenhardt's. I slammed on the brakes to avoid hitting him. Cursing out loud, I turned into the parking lot and found a spot all the way in the back. Ed had talked me into lunch after all, and when we entered the restaurant, the aroma of the Hungarian food was so tantalizing I could almost taste it. We hung up our coats, whitened with snow just from the short walk from the parking lot, and the elderly owner's wife escorted us towards a table in the main room.

“No,” Ed said. “We will in the other r-r-room sit.”

He pointed to the room on the right.

His tone of voice had been polite enough, but I wished he’d said something like, “May we please sit in that room?” But that would have been asking too much those days.

She changed course and we followed. She seated us near a young couple with a child who was pounding his spoon on the table. I didn’t think that seating arrangement was going to work. He never wanted to sit near children. Sure enough, after we’d been there five minutes, he motioned for the waitress. I knew what was coming.

“We want to move *there*,” he said loudly, pointing to a table on the other side of the room. “The child is too loud.”

I was embarrassed for the child’s parents – who certainly heard Ed – and for myself, as we got up and walked to the new table. Shortly thereafter, the hostess brought us some ice water. She was a sixtyish pleasantly plump, well-coifed blond. We went there often enough to know that she was from Hungary and spoke Romanian rather fluently. I loved her charming accent and mannerisms.

I wanted to kid Ed sometime and call him a jerk in Romanian, so I asked her, “How do you say ‘jerk’ in Romanian?”

She answered almost instantly, dramatically flinging her right arm high into the air, “There *are* no jerks in R-r-romania!”

Soon she brought us bread and pats of butter wrapped in gold foil paper, and a little later the waitress came to take our orders. A brunette in her mid-forties, this particular waitress, Jenny, had been serving us for years. Short and a tad overweight, she was wearing her required uniform of black slacks, a white blouse, and a white apron. Jenny was consistently pleasant and put up with the rudeness Ed had

been displaying in recent times. I was grateful and admired her for it.

We both ordered Wiener schnitzel, their specialty. It's what we always ordered. A few moments later, Ed – and I'd been afraid he'd do this – decided he didn't like *that* table either.

He motioned for Jenny and when she arrived he said quite loudly in an angry tone of voice, "This table is *drafty*. We'll move over there."

I was embarrassed again, but not surprised. He'd been doing this 'triple-table-changing routine' for years and I was used to it. So was she. We picked up our silverware and napkins; she took our water glasses; and the three of us paraded to the new table.

Once ensconced, we started talking about my sister, who was coming down from Toledo to visit for a long weekend at the end of the month. Fredrica, whom we called Freddie, was 46, five years younger than I, and had met Ed on several occasions when she'd come to visit me. She called him 'Mr. Ed,' based on the TV show that ran in the early sixties when we were kids. Since he wasn't in the US when that show was on, he didn't know she was good naturedly calling him by the name of a talking horse. I don't think she understood why I was involved with someone as old as Ed, but she liked him and was taken by his chivalrous manners and charming accent. He liked her, too. He liked *all* pretty young women, and she was very pretty.

Freddie and I enjoyed our visits tremendously. Sometimes we laughed ourselves silly over little nothings. We didn't have much in common, yet we always had tons of fun, and I was looking forward to seeing her.

Jenny arrived with our food and put it down on the table. The schnitzel smelled incredibly good and steam was rising

from the mashed potatoes. I hoped the meal would proceed without further disruption, but I wasn't counting on it.

"You've never told me anything about your brother," Ed said, as we started eating. "Why doesn't he ever come visit like Freddie does?"

"I don't want him to come visit," I said with no hesitation whatsoever.

At 55, Phillip was four years older than I. We grew up fighting constantly and hating each other, which my father encouraged. Once we left home we didn't keep in touch until we were much older and circumstances *forced* us to communicate. But when we were younger we didn't visit. Didn't write. Didn't call. Not even at Christmas or for birthdays. We only knew about each other's lives what our parents told us in our weekly phone calls with them.

"I'll tell you about him some other time," I told Ed.

Thinking of all the fights I'd had with my brother reminded me of the first argument Ed and I had. It was back when we were lovers in 1976. I was 26 and Ed had just turned 63. We'd been together about a year. One evening we were driving to the university. He was going to teach his Evening College French class and I was going to the College Conservatory of Music (CCM) library to continue my dissertation research on Sammartini. It was a rainy evening and strong winds were strewing leaves all around the campus streets and lawns in big wet clumps. So many landed on our windshield that the wipers got clogged with them, and the leaf-laden blades were swinging back and forth making loud thumping noises. Ed was talking about Jimmy Carter's recent election.

He hated Carter and was berating him endlessly.

"I don't really care about politics that much," I finally said because I was getting tired of hearing Ed say the same angry

things over and over. I was shocked when this heretofore mild-mannered gentleman started yelling.

“You *should the hell* care about politics, Kitty!”

I cringed and stinging tears flooded my eyes.

“Why are you crying?” he asked in a normal tone of voice, sounding genuinely perplexed.

“Because you’re mad at me,” I sobbed, getting a Kleenex out of my purse and dabbing my eyes.

“I’m not mad at you,” he said calmly, reaching over and resting his hand on my knee. “What made you think I’d be mad? I’m just telling you what I *think*,” he said, as though that would explain why he’d yelled.

And so it was. I soon learned that when Ed yelled it didn’t *necessarily* mean he was angry. Sometimes he just got carried away and raised his voice while expressing himself. This was one more of his signature attributes. I thought it was strange, but finally did get used to it and labeled it ‘just being Ed.’

Eventually when we talked and he started yelling, I just yelled back – neither of us actually angry, just expressing ourselves ‘Ed-style.’ He was the only person in my life I routinely yelled at. More importantly, he was the only person I ever allowed to yell *at me*. Unfortunately, those around us didn’t understand our way of communicating and thought we fought a lot.

We did have some *real* fights, too, of course. Usually about twice a year. And they were good ones. Yelling, cursing, slamming fists on tables – that sort of thing. But when it was over it was *over*. After a few minutes we’d pick up and go on affectionately, saying “Kitty this” and “Kitty that,” as if nothing unpleasant had happened between us. In a way it was almost funny. Only much later would our arguments have far worse consequences.

“How’s your mother? Have you talked to her lately?” Ed asked, interrupting my thoughts.

“Oh, she’s fine,” I said. “I talked to her Sunday. I talk to her every Sunday as you know.”

When my father had died of a stroke a few years earlier, my mother couldn’t take care of herself anymore. She’d lived with my brother and his wife for a year but after that he put her in a nursing home. She’d made a lot of friends there and was getting along very well.

“She gets coffee for the residents who can’t walk to get their own. She’s been doing that for awhile now, and so the management is going to give her a volunteer badge. She was thrilled about that. She also told me the nurse practitioner there said she’s ‘a ray of sunshine in a dark place!’

Just then Jenny brought our check. Ed got his Visa card out of the disintegrating wallet I’d given him fifteen years earlier. He refused to replace it, saying he was emotionally attached to it. He tallied the numbers in his head but got confused so he passed the little slip to me. I never checked my restaurant bills; I just paid. But I humored him, added up the numbers and told him it was correct: \$19.96. I figured the tip should be three dollars plus another dollar just for putting up with him.

“Leave four dollars,” I told him.

“Four dollars?” he blurted out. “That’s too much. What did she do that was so special she deserves *four* dollars?”

His voice was so loud that not only could everyone in the room hear him, I was sure that Jenny, who was just outside in the hallway, could hear him, too.

“Ed,” I said calmly, “just leave the tip and let’s go.”

“No. I will *not* leave four dollars, Kitty. She doesn’t deserve it,” he shouted.



He'd made scenes like this in restaurants twice in the last six months and this time something in me snapped. It was one thing if he yelled at me in private. But it was another if he embarrassed me and others like this in public. I vowed right then and there that I would never ever take him to a restaurant again.

And I never did.

Surprisingly, he never asked me why we weren't going to restaurants any more, and he never asked me to take him. He just seemed to forget that restaurants existed.

I was still in denial, of course. It still didn't occur to me that Ed might have dementia, which could be causing him to behave so badly. I just hoped we could get through the rest of the day with no more outbursts from him.

### **Choosing a Lover**

On the way back to the Edgecliff Ed quieted down, as he had on the way to the MAB earlier that morning after our fight at his apartment. He remarked how beautiful the trees were with their snow-covered limbs, but that he worried about driving conditions even though I was the one driving. I was sad about my resolve never to go out to eat with him again, but I knew it was the right decision. Things simply had changed too much since our first dinner at the Edgecliff.

Thinking about that first dinner never fails to bring a smile to my face. In retrospect, I can't believe how naïve I was then. As anyone would have predicted, after dinner he invited me upstairs to his apartment. I don't recall if it was to see his etchings or if he offered some other enticement, but I went. His one bedroom apartment on the ninth floor was nicely decorated with Kilim area rugs. The living room walls bore a mixture of modern prints and original artwork. The former included Klee's *Blaue Nacht*, which now hangs on the wall

across from my desk. The latter included, among others, two works by a Romanian artist who was a distant relative of his. The furniture was a fitting combination of contemporary and older styles.

The room had glass doors leading to an intimate balcony, where we went to smoke and enjoy the gorgeous view of the river. We saw not only the river, filled with little pleasure boats flitting around, but also the colorful Northern Kentucky shore, replete with anchored restaurant boats and their requisite parking lots.

It was a little chilly, and so we went back in. As soon as I sat down, Ed offered me a drink, but all he had on hand was Scotch. I hated Scotch and declined twice, yet he stubbornly insisted. I finally gave in and drank a little. It burned my throat as I swallowed, and I was beginning to feel somewhat uncomfortable. But what he did next downright floored me. After lighting a cigarette, Ed walked over to one of the many bookcases standing guard along the perimeter of the room, picked up a well-worn copy of Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* – pages yellowed, spine creased – sat down across from me in his recliner, opened the book to where there was a bookmark, and started reading aloud. What he read were some rather 'titillating' passages.

I took a cigarette for myself, which, of course, he reached over and lit immediately, and sat stiffly on the sofa, hoping he wasn't going to approach me sexually. I had a policy about not sleeping with men on the first date. Although Ed was always distinctly eccentric, I would later learn that his behavior this evening was unusual even for him.

Oddities aside, I honestly don't remember how that evening ended, and that's the truth. If we had sex it wasn't memorable. What I *do* remember is that after that first date he

pursued me in the usual ways, adding, of course, his most chivalrous European touches.

Throughout July and August, while Guido was living it up in Italy, Ed and I saw each other more and more often. Three weeks into our relationship I began staying overnight at the Edgecliff, sleeping with Ed in his cozy twin bed. At the beginning of August I just moved in. All the while I was wondering what on earth I was going to do when Guido would return at the end of the month. I finally decided to enjoy myself and worry about Guido when the time came.

And the time *did* come. Guido returned from Italy at the end of August, and was excitedly anticipating our first get-together. He was badly shaken when he found out where I was and what I was doing. After the initial shock, he decided to put up a fight to win me back. A monumental tug of war ensued. The more Guido pulled me toward him, the more Ed pulled me back. Each bought me presents like clothes and jewelry, sent me flowers and candy, and took me to expensive restaurants. But mostly, each professed his love for me, told me that he loved me more than the other did, and elaborated on what he could offer me that the other couldn't. Although all the attention was nice in a way, it didn't feel good for very long. I was torn between my two Latin lovers, and the three of us approached emotional exhaustion. I tossed and turned every night, reviewing my feelings for them, weighing the advantages and disadvantages of each.

Guido was a cute 5'2" small but perfectly proportioned man, who, because of his size, had to have all his clothes tailor made. He was a passionate and expert lover both emotionally and sexually. He was Italian in every way, sensitive to his core, never reluctant to cry openly about things that touched him. He was forever expressing his ardent love for me.

Ed on the other hand had a calmer disposition. A quintessential European gentleman through and through, he always opened doors for me, held out my chair in restaurants, frequently kissed my hand, and never missed an opportunity to send me flowers or deliver flattering remarks. He was less melodramatic in conveying his feelings for me, but he treated me like a cherished treasure and made it clear that he loved me and wanted to be with me. While Guido seemed to love me more *passionately*, Ed seemed to care about me more *deeply*.

The whole month of September went by as I anguished over my decision. My love for Guido was passionate, whereas my feelings for Ed seemed more like affection than love. But the thing was, I was enjoying myself so much more with Ed than I ever had with Guido.

I made several false starts. First I chose Ed, of course, because he was the one I was living with. But then after a beautiful afternoon with Guido I changed my mind. We had a long talk during which he kept calling me his 'beloved,' telling me he loved me more than life itself. He said no one, not even Ed, could possibly love me so much. After our talk we had spectacular sex, followed by more professions of love. He cried and asked me to come back to him.

I did.

When I told Ed I was going back to Guido he said he accepted my decision but asked me to have just one more 'dinner' with him for sentimental reasons.

I agreed.

I thought it was only fair. He was so gallant and chivalrous that evening that I was once more taken by his endearing charm and sincere expressions of love. By the time the evening was over I had changed my mind again and ended up spending the night with him.

This pattern kept repeating itself until the two of them got together and shook on a gentleman's agreement. They would cease all efforts to win my heart and simply let me choose. They also agreed that neither one would tell me about their conversation. The very next day Guido told me all about it. Ed, on the other hand, never said a word. I always admired him for that. I brought up the subject much later and all he said was "*Pacta sunt servanda*," which he immediately translated for me, "Agreements are to be kept." Then he added, "Cicero." Ed always peppering his speech with Latin sayings like that.

I finally settled down with Ed. I can't quite say why I made that decision. It just felt right. Our ever-deepening love over the years would prove I'd made the right choice.

This marked the end of my relationship with Guido, but Ed stayed in touch with him, calling from time to time just for a friendly chat. Their struggle over me was eventually forgotten. He continued calling even after Guido moved to Florida in the '80s. One evening several years later Ed received an out-of-service recording when he called Guido. Ed was distressed and started pacing the floor. I assumed that Guido, like Ed in his eighties at the time, had probably had to move to a nursing home. I was right. Early the next morning Ed sat down and called several nursing homes in and around Deltona, the small town where Guido lived, and finally found the nursing home where he was living.

The nurse gave him the sad news, "I'm so sorry to have to tell you this but he has advanced Alzheimer's. You wouldn't want to talk to him the shape he's in. He wouldn't recognize you and he can't speak coherently."

Ed was devastated, more distressed than I'd ever seen him. In the following weeks he brought up the subject frequently. He suffered deeply for his old friend and colleague.

### **The Crooked Stamp**

Pulling up under the portico at the Edgecliff after our appointment with Dr. Bibler and lunch at Lenhardt's, Ed asked me to come up and help him pay his bills. I didn't know if he really wanted help or if he just wanted me to spend more time with him. I said okay and sighed, even though I really should have gone home and to work. But Ed's bills had to be 'payed' (as he spelled it) or they'd turn off his lights, stop delivering the paper or cut off his phone, and I'd just have to spend a lot of time straightening everything out. This was the lesser evil. And I thought maybe if I spent some more time with him we could end the day on a better note.

He brought out all his bills and put them in a stack on the dining room table. Before we started I made us Turkish coffee and put out two little plates with Linzer torte, his favorite dessert, which I bought for him every week at Servatii, one of the best pastry shops in town. Then I opened the bill on top and told him to write out a check to Cincinnati Bell for \$50.26. I was pleased, and a bit surprised, when he did it correctly on the first try. Then he put the slip of paper to be returned with the payment behind the check and stuffed them in the envelope, with the check showing through the window on front. I told him to reverse the order of the slip and the check, and he was able to do so.

*This was going well.*

Then he got up, went to the freezer and got his Popov. He poured a water glass half full, as usual, and brought it to the table.

When he sat down again I told him to write his return address on the envelope. He looked at me as though I'd spoken to him in Chinese. He said he couldn't remember it and would I please just do it for him. I did, abbreviating

Cincinnati as I always did – ‘Cinti.’ I felt deeply sorry for him that his mind had deteriorated so much.

What happened next caught me off guard.

With no warning he shouted at me, “What’s wrong with you, Kitty? Do you abbreviate Cincinnati on *your* bills? You have to spell out what it stays for.”

*He always says ‘stays for’ instead of ‘stands for.’*

He grabbed the envelope in his shaky hands and tore it to shreds, continuing to yell at me.

“Do it over!” he said, getting a new envelope out of a box on the table and throwing it down in front of me.

I took a deep breath, and did as he asked, careful to spell out C-i-n-c-i-n-n-a-t-i.

“Good,” he shouted. “Thank you. That’s the r-r-right way.”

Next I put on the stamp, a little too haphazardly.

Realizing that the stamp was askew, Ed lost it.

“Kitty,” he hollered, putting his glass down forcefully and slamming his fist on the table. “Look what you did. It’s crooked. You *r-r-ruined* a perfectly good stamp!”

“Ed,” I said, struggling to control my temper and not slam down *my* fist. “It doesn’t matter. The post office doesn’t care if it’s on *straight*. They just care that it’s *on*.”

“No!” he screamed, standing up and leaning over me. “You know you are *w-r-r-rong*!”

I lost it and unleashed the anger that had been building up all day.

“Ed,” I yelled at the top of my lungs, hurting my vocal chords, “it doesn’t *matter* how the stupid stamp is on the envelope. Do you *hear me*? It doesn’t *matter*!”

“Get out!” he hollered.

“Go to Hell!” I said.

I put on my coat, the wrong way on purpose, and ran out, slamming the door behind me.

I was seething with anger. I was so angry my hands were shaking and I was virtually hyperventilating. I was grateful no one else was on the elevator with me. After I got into my car, I slammed its door, too. Hard. I fumed all the way home, cursing at him aloud and silently in alternation. All I could think about was how mean and hateful he had become and that I never wanted to see him or speak to him again. But most of all I was incredibly pissed because I knew that was a luxury I didn't have. I could never desert him.

### **Stalemate**

Later that evening after relaxing on my sofa and watching Fox news for a while, my anger subsided some and I called him, hoping that he, too, was in a better mood.

No answer.

I knew he was there because he didn't drive anymore. Awhile before he had started not answering the phone when we'd had a bad fight. I went to bed, frazzled from the day's events, and fell asleep stroking Peter, my beloved little ShihTzu, who curled up with me and intermittently licked my face.

I spent the next morning working on my grant but had trouble concentrating. My mind kept going back to the terrible scenes Ed had made the day before. But mostly I was sad that our relationship was in such a bad state. I didn't bother calling in the morning because I knew he wouldn't answer. In the afternoon I couldn't stand it any longer and I tried.

Still no answer.

When he didn't answer later that evening I realized I was going to have to end this stalemate in the only manner that



would. I would have to write a formal letter of apology. As infuriating as it was, I'd have to apologize even though I'd done nothing wrong. Recent experience told me it was the only way to move on. I needed him. He needed me. So I wrote the damn letter.

Dear Kitty,

I'm sorry I upset you yesterday. I didn't mean to. I was just stressed out from my job. Please forgive me.

Love,  
Kitty

PS: Peter is crying because he misses you.

He loved Peter and I hoped saying that Peter was crying might soften his heart. We often talked about Peter as though he were a person. I knew that, just as he'd done the other times I'd written such letters, he'd pick up the phone and call me and we'd have a pleasant talk. Neither the fight nor the letter would ever be mentioned. Earlier in our relationship this used to happen once or twice a year. Now it was happening once or twice a month.

I was near tears as I went out into the cold and dropped the letter in the ice-covered mailbox on the corner, wondering how many more times I was going to have to go through this abusive routine.

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