

Coffee

1600 words

“I thought you died,” Trent said.

“Gosh,” Alice said, “do you always jump to such conclusions?”

“I heard something. Weren't you in South America, and there was an accident?”

Alice shook her head. “You’re looking at me as though you’re still not sure. That I need to disprove it.”

“I’m just saying,” Trent said.

“That was Sharon Westlake,” she said. “We were in college. But she made it. She limps just a bit is the extent of it.”

“Oh.”

“I’ll have to tell her I ran into you. She’ll get quite a kick out of it, especially here, this circumstance.”

“Well, it’s about that time,” Trent said, drinking up. “Any requests?”

“Gee . . . how about . . . would *Itchycoo Park* work?”

“Dang,” Trent said. “The Small Faces . . . Of all music, how’d you come up with that one?”

“I won the 45,” she said. “You remember on KYA, they’d give away records if you were the correct caller?”

“You had to go down to the station to pick ‘em up.”

“Yes! I forgot about that, that was so much fun.”

“You got to meet the DJ, whichever one was on the air.”

“I always went to sleep with the radio on,” Alice said. “My dad would come in later and turn it off.”

“I did too,” Trent said. “Those DJs, it was an act, but it was like they were speaking to us direct. This artificial world, but we were in it.”

“I know. Every day. You don’t have that now,” Alice said.

Trent had a guy with him on stage who synthesized instruments, including the drums, and sang a little backup. Trent played guitar and keyboards and Alice was amazed by his vocal range.

By the third set it was mostly drunks in the audience. A woman requested *When Irish Eyes Are Smiling*. Trent’s rendition was so clean and pure that Alice cried.

A guy yelled out, hey, what about something Italian then? Without missing a beat, Trent launched into *Luna Mezza Mare* and half the lounge was standing up having fun by then, and he medleyed it into *Hava Nagila* to close the evening.

“Come back to my house for a while,” Trent said to Alice. “I’m not gonna bite you.” A band was setting up, getting ready for the late show.

Alice was in the middle of driving home from visiting her daughter in Boulder. She was tired, but what were the odds of this? The cheesy sign had said *For Your Listening Pleasure: Trent Ingersoll*. She had to admit, the casino smoke was getting to her, and a little desert air, how could it hurt.

It was a warm night and Trent made iced cappuccinos and they sat out in back. “This hits the spot, actually,” Alice said.

“Glad you like it,” Trent said. “I stole the machine from the casino.”

“Excuse me?”

“The guy that rotates in on my days off? He got sick, so I worked 17 nights straight. They’re supposed to pay me overtime for that but they didn’t, so I took the machine.”

“Whoa, okay, I’m not going there,” Alice said. “But your versatility, I’m not kidding, I couldn’t believe it.”

“You’re saying you enjoyed the George Jones selection then.”

“I’m not sure who that is, but seriously, I mean Motown, Country, schmaltzy Pop. The Allman Brothers. Heck, even Jason Mraz thrown in. . . Not to mention *Itchycoo Park*, easily as good as the record.”

“All in a day’s work, I guess.”

“And then at the end -- you got to me with *When Irish Eyes*.”

“You’re Irish?”

“On both sides. My mom came over.”

“It’s funny, you never think of that stuff when you’re kids . . . yeah, I can see it now.”

“And then the Italian song, and the Israeli one. Have to say, you quite blew me away.”

“Nah, those were no big deal. I sang all three of them once at a luncheon at the Italian-Irish-Jewish Club.”

“There’s such a place?”

“Yeah. Used to be anyway, in South City.”

“So . . . you’re Jewish then?”

“No, I’m none of those. I was a member for a while, to use the handball court, and they found out I was a musician . . . How ‘bout we shift gears though?”

“Of course,” Alice said. “What do you want to talk about?”

“You tell me,” Trent said.

“Okay then . . . What circuitous route . . . could you have possibly taken . . . to end up in Wendover, Nevada?”

“*West* Wendover, don't forget,” Trent said. “Wendover is across the street from the casino, but you're in Utah then.”

“I'm not knocking it. I'm just curious.”

“I could piece it together, but you'd be bored . . . How about you? You must have a few interesting secrets you've cultivated over the years.”

“I do have one. That I carry around. It's not for public consumption.”

Trent went inside and got some brandy and a couple glasses and turned off the lights. You could hear the occasional big rig on Highway 80 against the hum of the crickets.

“My God that is some sky,” Alice said.

“The high desert. It can be soothing . . . I got one I carry around too.”

“Do you own this place?” she said.

“I do. Free and clear actually. I sold my condo in Walnut Creek, the timing was pretty good.”

“How long ago was that?”

“Six years.”

“Jesus Christ Trent . . . what do you do all day?”

“Well the main thing, there’s a music store in Elko. I give lessons in the afternoons.”

“How far is Elko?”

“An hour and a half. Not for everyone, but I’m good with it.”

“So . . . what is it you’re carrying around?” she said.

Trent took a moment.

“I had a crush on you at Grant,” he said. “You knew that, right? Then we moved.”

“I remember. That was after 7th grade. I wondered where you went.”

“My dad was a big dreamer, was always losing his latest job. Every boss was incompetent. I came home from school one day and I realized he was screwing around with one of the neighbors. I told my mom, and she left him.”

“Wow . . . so you blame yourself.”

“Yeah.”

“Gosh . . . If I could ask you one question -- it’s not exactly related, but would you have recognized me?”

“You’re jumping around. What you’re *supposed* to say, you had nothing to do with it, it wasn’t meant to be with your parents.”

“You don’t need me to tell you that.”

“Anyhow . . . You driving straight through tomorrow?”

“I’m hoping to. Always seems crazy to stop off, once I get past Reno.”

Trent said, “To answer your question, you don’t look all that different. And you have the same body language.”

“You’re playing with me, but I’ll accept it,” she said.

“Stick around another day,” he said. “We’ll go out to the flats.”

Alice slid down in her chair and put her head back and looked at the stars for a while. “If I tell you my secret, will you think worse of me?”

“It’s possible, I guess.”

“My daughter . . . she’s not my husband’s.”

“So?”

“So . . . she’s 19. I never told him. Or her.”

“Good . . . Seems pretty minor honestly, all the hands people get dealt . . . Don’t be an idiot and worry about it anymore.”

Trent drove her back to the hotel. It was past his bedtime, tonight definitely threw him out of his routine, and when he got home he hit the pillow right away and slept for 9 hours.

He was finishing his morning loop through the neighborhood -- it was old-fashioned, but he liked to power-walk, swinging a light barbell in each hand -- and there was Alice's car in the driveway.

“When you mentioned the flats,” she said, getting out, “those are the Bonneville Salt Flats?”

“Correct. Years ago, they ran commercials of people trying to break speed records there. I think during NFL games. No idea what the product would have been, but I liked all the white.”

Alice said, “Did you ever watch the 49ers at Kezar?”

“Oh yeah, with my dad. When they moved to Candlestick he said forget it.”

“There was a Mexican place on Geary. Festive, very popular after the games.”

“El Sombrero. We went there all the time.”

“We don't have to do the salt flats,” Alice said.

“Why not? They’re only 12 miles away. If you’re worried about my lessons, I’ll call the store and cancel them.”

“I’m going to leave in a minute,” she said. “The reason I came back here -- I called Keith last night after you dropped me. He knows now.”

“Sheez,” Trent said.

“So mainly I wanted to thank you. I can’t express how good it feels.”

“Your daughter too?”

“We’re going to massage that one. We’ll do the right thing.”

“He’s a good man then. It were me, I wouldn’t have taken it well.”

Alice stepped forward and gave him a hug, mentioned once again how Sharon Westlake would get such a kick out of this, and got in the car and drove away.

Trent stood there for a minute. Then he went in the house, took a shower and made himself a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

The day was getting on, and it was time to head over to Elko.

