

Tick-Tock

The Way to Oz

By Mihaela Iancu

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Dan was looking out the clean windows at the six cars parked near the charging pumps. He saw his reflection in the window and passed his fingers through his grey hair.

“Are you ready to order?”

The waitress was standing by his table looking at the notebook she held at her chest, ready to note.

“Not really. I would like to wait a few more minutes.”

The woman put the pen and the notebook in the pocket of the uniform.

“Fine, as you wish.” she told him while picking up the menu. “But I’m going to bring this to another table. When you decide, if you’ll still need it, please tell me.”

“Thank you,” said Dan, looking at her wide hips while she was walking away.

Then Susan entered the bar of the gas station. She was holding in her hand, like a sack, the bag which Dan recognized. She looked for him and found him as she saw his raised hand.

“This heat is killing me.”, she told him and sat down on the bench in front of him.

She was looking good. She had dyed her hair blonde in the meantime. “I know”, she said. “I kept on saying no and still I ended doing it.”

“I haven’t said anything.”

“There was no need.”

They smiled briefly at each other while she took a napkin out of the box between them and wiped her forehead, lips and neck.

“What did you want to tell me?”, she asked him.

“Let’s order first. Do you want something to drink? The usual scotch on the rocks? Should we have two?”

“I quit drinking. An ice tea will do, thanks.”

“Such a shame! I would have loved to have a drink with you.” He raised his hand to call the waitress. “You know, it’s hard to talk during midday.”

“I’m sorry I couldn’t make it to dinner. It’s almost impossible for me not to be at home in the evening. You know how it is. Kids and everything. Robin arrives home later than I do and we cannot leave them on their own for long. ”

He looked out the window for a second. There was no one else in the gas station.

“I’m going to order a scotch”, he told her.

“So? What will it be?” The waitress pressed her pen twice nervously then took it over to a blank page.

“We’ll have an ice tea for the lady and a scotch on the rocks for me, please.”

“That’s all?”

“For the moment. Thank you.”

“OK”, said the waitress heading towards the table in the opposite corner. On her name tag it said Jenny. On the back of her uniform, Dan read “Fill up. Don’t stay empty.”

“You could ask her, you know?”

“What? I don’t know what you mean.”

“You could ask her at what time she finishes her shift and if she would like to go to a movie with you afterwards.”

“Whom?”

Susan smiled from the corner of her mouth and raised her eyebrows and shoulders.

“Whom? The waitress, of course...”

“You’re kidding. What does that got to do with it?”

“Nothing. I was just saying.”

“I have no business with her.” He pushed the napkin box closer to the edge of the table.

“Jesus!”, he added.

“Right. What did you want to talk to me about?”

“Are you in a hurry?”

“I’m not really in a hurry. I can’t stay long either. Gillian and I agreed for an hour.”

“Yeah.”

“You made me curious, Dan.”

“It’s like having a deadline. That’s how I feel when I’m with you.”

Susan watched him while he lowered his head.

“Why don’t you take advantage of the fact that I’m here now instead of wasting our time with foolish talks?”

Dan looked at the bar. Jenny didn’t seem to hurry back with his scotch.

“We haven’t seen each other for how long?”, he asked her. “A year? A year and a half?”

“Something like that. I’m not sure.”

Dan kept quiet.

“You’re worrying me”, she told him. “You call me out of the blue, after we haven’t spoken in months, you tell me you would love to see me and talk to me, I come and tell you that today we have only one hour, unfortunately, and I find you quiet and absent minded.”

“Oh, Susan, give me a break with your wisdom. You have always been the one who had the head screwed on the right way in this relationship. Fine! Bravo! I was the dumb, immature and pathetic one. I was able of making a mountain out of a molehill. You poor little girl. Lover and mother of a 30 year old child that would not grow up.”

“Your tea...” Jenny’s hand suddenly appeared before Dan’s eyes, “...and your scotch.”

“Thank you. You’re very nice.” Susan told her.

“You’re welcome. Let me know if...” she nodded her head, and then disappeared.

Susan was sipping her tea.

“It’s good. I think lemonade would have been even better. I haven’t thought of that.”

“I’m a jackass. Forgive me.”

“It’s nothing. Nothing happened.”

“You know, you’re driving me mad?”, Dan told her on a low voice. “I called you to tell you that I understood and I accepted it. Because I missed you and I started to forget how you look. Because I felt I have changed and I wanted you to see it. That’s why. Anyway, now I’m not that sure. I don’t know if there’s anything to change.”

Susan held out her hand to him.

“It would have been much easier to harm you. I mean something you could clearly define as harmful. Do you know what I mean? To beat you. To cheat on you. Or get drunk every night. It’s easier to fight all these; it’s easier to understand them. Everybody understands them. Everybody knows that they’re bad.”

Susan reached out her hand to him. He stood still.

“I talk too much for a man. I complain too much for a man, don’t I?”

Half an hour had passed.

There was still half an hour to go.

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Translated by: **Raluca Ichim** and **Andrei Alecsa**

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