

Anton

by Alain Elkann

"Yes, my name is Anton."

"Wagner?"

"Yes. Anton Wagner."

"Are you related to Richard Wagner?"

"No, I am not related to the composer. He was German and, as you know from my documents, I am Dutch."

"Yes, I know. You were born in Paris, in 1943 if I am not wrong."

"Yes, I was."

"You said that it was 1943. Wasn't it?"

"Yes, 1943."

"June, 1943?"

"Yes, June, 1943."

"The 14th of June?"

"Yes, the 14th."

"13 Rue Vaneau."

"Right."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Yes. The address is correct."

"Very well. Your mother's name was Carla?"

"Yes."

"She was Italian?"

"Yes, she was."

"She died in Paris, in 2003?"

"She did."

"She had a cancer."

"That's what the doctors said."

"You don't believe it was a cancer?"

"I never said that."

"I see. Then it was a cancer."

"If you want."

"Yes or no?"

"Yes."

"Good. Your father was Dutch."

"He was."

"He died in Madrid, in 1991."

"Yes."

"A heart problem."

"So they said."

"You are not sure?"

"Everyone ends by dying of cardiac arrest."

"Yes, but in your father's case it was due to his high cholesterol, his high blood pressure, his stress."

"I am not so sure."

"So, from what?"

"Maybe it was an overdose of sleeping pills."

"You mean a suicide?"

"Possibly."

"He had troubles, problems that you know of?"

"I suppose he did."

"Love?"

"No."

"Business?"

"He was an opera singer."

"So, what?"

"His voice was no good anymore. He had problems."

"You said that you never had a heart problem and neither a cancer. But you have allergies."

"I would call them hay fever!"

"Allergies, to what?"

"Pollen, dust. You know. All sorts of things."

"If I am not wrong you are divorced at this moment, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am."

"For the seventh time."

"Yes."

"Are you going to marry again?"

"I hope so."

"Aren't you tired of getting married and then divorced?"

"No, not really."

"Why do you do so?"

"I don't think that this has anything to do with the fact that your insurance company doesn't want to reimburse my doctor's bill for an endoscopy."

"It has to do with it."

"How can you say that?"

"Because as a matter of fact I am questioning you in order to decide if our insurance company should or should not reimburse this medical expense of yours. And, as you can well understand, the fact that you got married so many times is a sign of emotional instability. And emotional instability can cause digestive disorders. But it seems that in a case like yours an endoscopy could be excessive."

"But this cannot be considered my fault as it was prescribed by a doctor."

"This is true, but you are a man and the endoscopy was prescribed by a gynaecologist."

"Because he is my friend and he knew a specialist, an internist."

"I get your point, but the very fact that the gynaecologist was your friend creates a certain amount of suspicion about the real need for an endoscopy."

"Listen, why are you asking me so many questions? You just have to pay me back."

"Why didn't you declare that you were suffering from previous intestinal pains?"

"Because I did not have them at the time."

"I see. But one of your doctors declared that you suffered gastrointestinal pains in the past."

"Yes, I did, but it was a nervous condition due to my first divorce."

"Then you got used to divorce and the intestinal pains went away. Am I wrong?"

"You are not. But what is your name by the way?"

"Vava."

"What kind of a name is that?"

"Vava comes from Varvara. A Russian name."

"I see. But when are you going to pay me back?"

"We will send you a questionnaire to fill in and then your case will be taken on by another department of the company and they will decide what to do next."

"But, what other questions do I have to answer?"

"You will see."

"But for instance, just an example?"

"Is your name Anton Wagner?"

"Yes."

"So, you will have to answer yes to this question that I just asked you, as you just did."

"But if I have already answered this question, many times?"

"You will have to answer it again. That is the way it is."

"But I have already answered three questionnaires, and I had a telephone interview of more than an hour with one of your doctors."

"So, you will answer the new questionnaire that I am going to send you within three weeks."

"What do you mean? Three weeks is far too long. I need the money now!"

"I see. So answer the questionnaire as soon as you get it."

"But what are you trying to do? Do you want to drive me crazy? Do you know how long this has been going on for? I should say more than six months!"

"Sometimes this kind of matter takes several years before they find a solution. You seem to be lucky, and well connected if we are already at this stage after only six months."

"What do you mean by this stage? What are you talking about?"

"So, I shall send you the questionnaire. By the way, can you remind me of your name?"

"Are you joking or what? We just discussed at the beginning of this phone call the fact that I am not a relative of Richard Wagner and that I am Dutch."

"Your first name please."

"Come on, you know it!"

"I beg your pardon, I did not hear you. Can you tell me your first name?"

"Anton."

"Right."

"But when are you going to pay me back?"

"Who told you that we are going to pay you?"

"I presume you will, as I am insured."

"Yes, you are insured, but first you will have to answer some questions and then it will be decided, when there is the next meeting of our central committee, which department will be appropriate to handle your case."

"But what do you mean by my case? I just want to be reimbursed for my endoscopy!"

"I understand you well and that is why I am trying to help you sort out your problem. But before that we will have to check with your doctors, in order to understand if you really needed the endoscopy."

"Listen, this conversation is driving me crazy. You have a way of questioning that is so annoying, exasperating, that you would have been perfect working for the Nazis."

"I forbid you to talk to me like this. Our company is American, based in England, but I am German myself and I forbid you to talk to me in such terms."

"You may be German, but it happens that I am Jewish."

"This cannot continue like this. I am sorry, but I shall put down the phone. Someone else is going to call you."

"When?"

She put the phone down. It was six o'clock in the evening.

Alain Elkann

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