

The Zoo

by Alain Elkann

It was Wednesday morning around eleven thirty, a beautiful day, rather hot for the beginning of October. Soon it would be Halloween, and most flower shops displayed small and large pumpkins. Central Park was still green, its foliage would shortly start to turn.

Fred had a day off and went to the Central Park Zoo in Manhattan with two of his grandchildren, Moses and Noah. They wanted to watch the sea lions.

In front of the pond where the sea lions play Fred recognised a gentleman he had known for many years, quite small, dressed in an impeccably well-tailored dark suit, standing alone in front of the pond.

If his memory was not wrong, Fred remembered that the gentleman in question was French, extremely wealthy and an important collector of Old Master paintings. What was he doing there at that time of day on a Wednesday morning? Did he have a secret passion for sea lions? Possibly, but at eleven thirty-five in the morning one would have imagined such a serious man to be in his office or visiting a museum. At the end of the day Fred was puzzled, and he could not decide whether to make himself known or just pretend he had seen nothing and slowly move with the children to the monkey's cage.

He decided to say hello.

"How are you? It is so nice to see you after such a long time!"

"Yes, it is. I did not know that you were interested in sea lions too."

"You know, my grandsons are, and of course I like to be here with them."

"They really are amazing animals. I feel the need to come and see them whenever I am in New York. Don't you find them so special?"

"Yes, I do."

After a pause the Frenchman said, "It was nice to see you again!"

"Yes, it was," answered Fred.

Their conversation was over, and the Frenchman went back to watching the sea lions with evident pleasure. After a while, his grandchildren totally absorbed by the aquatic games of the sea lions, Fred noticed that a young woman dressed in a black leather mini-skirt and extremely high-heeled shoes came close to the Frenchman.

He smiled at her. She was blond, had brown eyes and smiled too. He looked quite small next to her.

They moved and sat on a nearby bench, and started to kiss each other with unexpected passion, as if they were the only two persons left in this world.

Moses and Noah did not pay any attention to that old man and asked their grandfather, "Can we go to see the penguins? Please?"

And Fred answered, "Of course we can."

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