

Satisfaction leads to resignation

Fifteen years have passed since that amazing meeting, which I still haven't stopped talking about. Since then, I haven't been the same. I was unshakeable before that, a man who could not be unbalanced, a rock; rock-hard. Think about a nice antique set of scales, with on each side a bowl ... in one a weight, in the other bowl the object to be weighed – then you see what balance actually is. It is essentially unstable, it will easily tip if any changes occur on one side of the scale. Not in my case then. I had solidly screwed down the balance point of the scale, so it would never wobble again.

Everything was so tight that I could keep my balance in any situation.

The first gaze of that young man, that Italian doctor, wrecked that screw. He *was* balance, in every way. Except that in his case, the balance was there by the control he had over himself, as young as he was. Power yes ... but not over others. That is what I felt then and didn't understand any of it. What became very obvious however, was that I was now raging and out of control. A state of chaos developed within me which spread out and caused my whole self to

flounder. I could no longer be the person I had always been, and this continued. What had always been my strength became an empty powerlessness. First, only in meetings with him, but over time this effect spread out to encompass my relationship with others too. My power slipped like water through my fingers, my grip was deteriorating rapidly.

But I will go back to those first weeks and explain how it developed. I began to fall in love with that boy, with his beautiful external masculinity, but even more with the complete power he had over himself. He was by nature like a predator whose awareness is instinctively completely focused on its prey, in control. He could not be moved in any way but there was no trace of hardness in him. I began to understand that this was what I had been striving for, but somehow I had achieved the opposite. I burned with admiration just for this quality in the boy and I did have some difficulty in separating that feeling from actually being in love. I kept having to remind myself that I didn't feel the need for physical contact, that I actually only desired to be in his presence. I wanted to see how he did it and to enjoy his perfection. From the gentle warmth in his beautiful brown eyes, from the sudden breaking forth of merriment held in balance with a deep seriousness. From his muscled body with the delicate doctor's hands. It was a being in love but of a psychic nature. It was more than a love a father has for his son as there was no blood relationship, it was just that fascinating balance, by which he could walk through the world completely unhampered.

The ambivalence of the situation I found myself in, tore me apart. I felt love developing within myself but at the

same time a destructive disgust. How could this young fellow be like this, without any effort on his part, without any training? Was this a freak of nature? Was this the result of a unique genetic configuration? Or did he just make better use of the characteristics he was born with? And how come he could do that, and I could not? I constantly tested him with difficult questions, bad behaviour and hidden threats, but he never faltered, not for a fraction of a second. If it came to a fight, you would always be the loser, in a duel you wouldn't stand a chance against him. Everything he did or said had a faultless certainty about it, making any attempts at undermining him seem utterly pointless. I kept on trying, however, and became so stupidly ridiculous that I became seriously frustrated.

“What on earth is wrong with you!” complained Cindy. “I always thought you were a strong guy. But here you walk around in a daze, deep in thought and achieve absolutely nothing. When I speak you don't even hear me.”

“What do you mean by ‘strong guy’?” I asked.

“Well, at least not such a cry-baby. Have you been hurt by something; by me?” she asked. I uttered a mocking laugh then was silent. I found her boring, her beauty repelled me. I stood up and walked away.

I was always hoping that I would run into him. I knew his routine and when and where I might bump into him on his rounds. Then we would have a chat and, if he had time, a drink. We discussed everything but not my ‘work’.

In the third week of my stay there we went for a walk in the mountains at his suggestion. He seemed to know every route, every path. When we slowly started to climb I asked,

“Do you do this with all your patients? To see if your treatment is working?” I could feel my ankles, knees and hips. He stood still and looked at me searchingly and answered, “No, I just very much want to go for a walk with you. You can do this, you’ll see. It is an easy route.”

“OK, OK,” I mumbled.

Nimbly he walked ahead. He wore professional climbing boots and $\frac{3}{4}$ length trousers. I noticed his muscled calves. I was in good condition but twice his age and I did have, though healing well, rheumatoid arthritis. I felt myself to be an old man. But he halted often to point out the fantastic views and I delighted in his company. That, too, was a new experience for me; till then I had only ever experienced pleasure in myself. Then we reached a level country road with distant views all around. The mountains were less high but we could still see dales and valleys below us. There was an inn with a simple terrace where we could eat and drink something.

“Do you believe in God?” he suddenly asked me.

“I’d better not then believe in him. I haven’t exactly served him well up till now,” I replied.

He threw up his hands in the air.

“Does God exist? Apart from what you might or might not like?”

“You are asking me this at the right moment. At this moment, here in the sun, on this mountain-top beside you ... yeah, there must be a creator of all this. I am not a materialist, not at all,” I replied.

“Aren’t you afraid of him then? Do you not fear him?” he asked.

“Why?”

“Well, you did tell me that you were a criminal? So how will that go then?”

I burst out laughing and said with cynicism,

“Do you worry about that?”

He remained serious and answered,

“Yes”.

His ‘Yes’ was like a hard punch in the face. This is how he loosened the screw of my inner hypochondria, my balance point, and made me lose my balance completely.

“What do you care, you aren’t a carer of the soul, are you?” I said.

“I care a great deal, as I’m your friend,” he replied.

Friend ... that tile I saw, on the wall in the toilet in the bar, with that little verse by Toon Hermans... ‘if you have someone who laughs and cries with you ... then you have a friend.’ Sentimental nonsense really, but I tripped up over those words. I fell into an abyss of loneliness. I could not utter another word. He could though. He said,

“You never told me what it is that you actually do - maybe better not to, I don’t even want to know. Maybe I see in you the father I never had.”

“Nice father -” I protested.

“Don’t you have everything? A healthy body, strong, beautiful. A stunning face, a strong soul...”

“And a dreadful personality. Man, you don’t know me at all!”

What on earth had happened to me?

“I do know you,” he insisted.

“You are mistaken, you think you see something in

me that you have yourself. Only, I acquired this quality through a very special route; where, with you - well yes, I don't really know for sure. I never think that deep – and I certainly never talk about it.”

He was silent. Maybe somewhat disheartened. Our coffee arrived with a bottle of mineral water and a bread roll. Maybe this was the most beautiful moment of my whole life. A cloudless sky with the sun above and, beside me, my friend. Was the love mutual? He said,

“Maybe that is all true. My interpretation of your character may be incorrect, I haven't clocked up that much people knowledge. But the feeling of a bond between us is no mistake. Don't you feel it too?”

I nodded hopelessly and he continued,

“Therefore, I am concerned. God exists and he will judge you, believe me.”

“You Italians are so emotional, so over-dramatic.”

“My mother tongue is German, I was born in Sud-Tirol.”

“You are a real Italian. Theatrical.”

“If you mean that I have emotions, then, yes you are right, I do. You are a real cool Dutchman; me an emotional Italian. And I am concerned about you.”

“What do you want? Should I go and confess?”

“No, you need to reflect, and repent. Reflect on yourself and on your life.”

At this point an unbearable feeling of powerlessness rose up within me. I had to shut him up!

“For God's sake, shut up. Behave like my son then, and be quiet!”

He was quiet.

A bird of prey menacingly circled overhead, probably over its next victim...

Self-reflection is a seriously life-threatening occupation for a man like me - clearly becoming more obvious by the day. But every meeting with the young Italian put me in such a good mood that I longed intensely for our meetings. Cindy was beginning to get bored, so I took her to the airport. For myself, I extended my stay at the spa hotel for another four weeks. My symptoms vanished and the frequency of the meetings increased. For one reason or another he liked hanging out with me.

“To what do I owe the honour of your interest in me?” I asked him, during a dinner in the hotel’s divine gardens. He put down his knife and fork and looked at me with some surprise and a peaceful yet powerful gaze. He said,

“You are a very interesting man. Moreover, I miss a father as I already told you.”

I answered him uncomfortably,

“Well there are better fathers around! Interesting? Well...”

“You have had a lot of experience, even though you don’t want to talk about it. You know life, I don’t. I have undergone a training of course, that I have. I was at the Waldorf school in Merano, really a very good school. There I learned so many things. But about the world ... no, I only know about the world from a cultural and agricultural point of view. Politics, power relations, business - I have no knowledge of these at all. You’ve already got all that, I like that. What is life worth without wine? That is what life would be like without you! I never appreciated that side