

The American Side

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The veranda was shaped like a wedge of pie, jutting out over the gorge. The mist from the falls drifted across the tables and settled on everything—the menus, the glasses, his wife's bare shoulders.

"It's really something," he said.

"Yes."

"You can feel it in your chest. The vibration."

"Oh, I'm feeling plenty."

He signaled for the waitress. "Two more?"

"I'm fine."

"I'll have another." He smiled at the waitress, then turned back to the view. "They light it up at night. Different colors. We should stay for that."

"Should we."

"I thought that's why we came."

"Did you."

He picked up his glass, found it empty, set it down. "Ellen."

"Don't."

"I'm just saying—"

"You're always just saying."

The waitress brought his drink. He thanked her twice.

Ellen watched the falls. After a moment she said, "You couldn't even be bothered to renew your passport."

"What?"

"The Canadian side. That's where everyone goes. But you couldn't be bothered."

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"It expired. I didn't think—"

"No. You didn't."

A couple at the next table laughed at something. The woman leaned into the man and he kissed her temple. Ellen looked away.

"Twenty-two years," she said.

"I know how long it's been."

"Do you."

"Ellen, can we just—" He gestured at the falls. "Can we just be here?"

"I am here. I've been here."

He rubbed his face with both hands. "What do you want me to say? Give me the script."

"I want you to say something true."

"I don't know what that means."

"I know you don't."

The waitress appeared again, too soon, hovering. "Can I get you folks anything else?"

"We're fine," he said.

"You have beautiful hair," the waitress said to Ellen. "I just wanted to say. The way the mist catches it."

Ellen looked up at her. For a moment, something crossed her face—gratitude, or surprise, or the particular sadness of being seen by a stranger.

"Thank you," she said.

The husband pointed at a nearby table. "What's that? The drink with the beans in it."

"Sambuca con la mosca...Sambuca with the flies"

"Sounds French. I'll have one of those."

The waitress nodded and left.

When she returned, three coffee beans floated in the glass.

"Can I get one for you too?" she asked Ellen.

"She'll have one," he said.

"No."

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"Of course you will."

"I didn't come here to get drunk."

He shrugged and lifted the glass to his mouth. The beans tapped against his teeth.

Ellen was quiet. The falls roared. Someone at the railing took a photograph.

"Ellen—"

"Don't say my name like that."

"Like what?"

"Like you're trying to calm something down."

He leaned back in his chair. "I don't know what you want from this trip."

"I didn't want this trip."

"Then why did you come?"

She looked at him for a long time. "I wanted to see what you would do."

"What I would—"

"Someone went over," a man shouted. "Jesus Christ, someone—hey!"

The veranda erupted. Chairs scraped back. People rushed to the railing, pressing against each other, phones raised.

The husband stood, took a step toward the crowd, then looked back at Ellen.

She didn't move. Just stared over to the Canadian side. He reached behind him for his drink, then went to join the crowd.

Ellen raised her hand, caught the waitress's eye, and signaled for the check.