

CROSSINGS

An unremarkable day in early spring found Gianni Poncivera working at a frenetic pace to finish his day. His wife had phoned to say she was feeling ill, so he needed to get to the farmacia before they closed to pick up some medicine. The farmacia was halfway across town. He was annotating and filing papers as quickly as he could, glancing nervously at the clock over his shoulder as the minutes ticked by.

At fifteen minutes past 4 he turned out the lights and closed up the shop. He rushed out into the sunlight clutching his jacket in one arm and glancing at the streetcar stop to try and decide if it was quicker to wait for it or walk the distance halfway across town. The tram schedule was arranged at twenty-minute increments and moved at the pace of an average runner. He judged that walking was better, as there was no one waiting at the stop. That usually meant a streetcar had just been by.

The flowers of early spring were beginning. He saw hyacinths and irises in the plots on the side of the road. The air had a certain unmistakable kindness that had been missing in the previous months. It wasn't very sunny out, but it felt nice to walk. He cut through a residential neighborhood before coming out the other end onto a wide boulevard. He decided to walk down it on the side where the buses picked up in case he could jump on in order to get there quicker.

Gianni got to a street and began to cross without looking properly. He didn't see the car until it was upon him, an overpowering hulk of metal that gave him the deepest sort of chill. He froze in place expecting to die. He almost felt its breath and unstoppable sense of motion. A better set of instincts would have made him move, but his feet were set and his brain wasn't telling them what to do.

He felt something pull him by the shoulders, a force that was strong and immediate. There was a brief yet also long moment where he was consumed by gravity before he hit the ground and felt the impact of hard concrete. He was aware of the sensation the car made as it brushed harmlessly past him at a great speed. The car had spared his life but not because it had altered or slowed its course.

Gianni felt a presence looming over him, pinning him to the ground. A man with a small mustache and deep impressive blue eyes stared at him while his heart impacted the flesh of his chest. They were grappled for a moment and then the man let go and stood up. It had all happened in about ten seconds or less. The man swore and adjusted his hat and then began to walk when the light changed. As he lay there humbled by the thought of everything that had just happened and trying to catch his breath, Gianni realized he had nearly died. He had almost been struck down in traffic by his own carelessness. It wasn't the driver's fault. The stranger with the mustache and blue eyes had saved his life. He stood up and brushed himself off and realized the man was gone.

The farmacia was out of what he wanted to buy, but there was another medicine that might work just as well, the attendant said. He bought it and went home. His wife was already feeling much better and decided not to take it. Gianni felt like he almost died for nothing.

The years went by. His wife bore them a girl and a boy and they were beautiful children. They possessed the best qualities of their parents. The family moved when Gianni got a job managing a law firm and they bought a modest house with a yard where

they spent summer evenings and had friends over. They had a garden full of vegetables and enough space for their dog to run around. They took a vacation every year, sometimes to Mallorca, and even once to Buenos Aires. The family got sick on that trip, but photographs would later show them all to look very happy.

The children became young adults and went to university. Gianni had worked and saved enough to provide for the expenses of each. His wife cried when they left home. When the kids were gone they felt somewhat lost. His hair had become mostly gray by now. She no longer looked young. They still loved each other more than anything in the world. They had built a great life for each other and were extremely content.

The passage of the years was kind to them both. They aged with a delicate grace and were admired by their family and community. When it came time for Gianni to retire, he looked forward to days of comfort and ease. He took to gardening, wood sculpting, and going with his beloved dogs to the park. She often had her friends over for small gatherings and volunteered at local schools. They had accomplished what they wanted out of life.

He was at his favorite cafe one morning enjoying coffee and reading the paper. It was mostly bad news. He put it down and stared out the window. A man entered the cafe who ordered a pastry and took a seat at the table closest to him. As Gianni sipped his coffee he noticed the man had a mustache and deep impressive blue eyes. As many as forty years had passed, but this man across from him was unmistakably the one who had saved his life that long ago day on the street.

It was impossible to know what to say or how to say it. The gulf of time between this moment in the cafe and that near fatal collision was immense. Everything between them would have failed to happen if not for the sudden response of this stranger. Not the children or the long and happy marriage or the dogs or the house and garden. Gianni owed not just his life but the web of lives attached to his and everything that went with it to one act of heroic kindness.

He decided to approach the man and introduce himself. He sat down and they talked about places where they'd lived. Gianni asked the stranger if he could recall pulling him out of the road all those years ago and the man said that he didn't. It had been so long, and that small moment in a lifetime of moments had not stuck in his memory. It was one of the most important things that had ever happened to Gianni, but the man with the mustache and the deep blue eyes had long since forgotten about it. He thanked the man profusely, and the man reacted with indifference.

They talked over their coffee. It took about five minutes before they realized they had little in common. The stranger had begun to act as if his presence was an imposition. He wanted to read the book that he brought. They ran out of things to say to one another. Gianni awkwardly tapped on the side of his coffee mug for a minute before he stood up. They shook hands, and then he left the cafe.