

The White Lily

The evening sun cast amber-red crepuscular rays across the sea-facing windows of the restaurant, staining the linen-draped tables in hues of fire and honey. Soft jazz music filled the air, harmonising with the heavenly scent of freshly brewed coffee, making the entire place feel almost magical.

She sat alone at a quaint table, deeply engrossed in her book. Her glasses rested on the bridge of her nose, and her fingers traced each page like a familiar map. Occasionally, she would tap her feet in rhythm as if she was lost in a world of her own.

He watched her intently from a distance. His posture was slightly stooped, a testament of years of life experiences yet he still exuded a suave confidence.

As he smoothed down his tailored grey jacket and combed his salt-pepper hair with his hands, he decided to approach her and spark a connection.

“Ah, ‘The Great Gatsby.’ A classic. I couldn’t put it down when I first read it. The green light at the end of Daisy’s dock still haunts me,” he said with a charming smile, his crow’s feet crinkling at the corners of his eyes.

She looked up, confusion etched across her face, accentuating the fine wrinkles around her eyes. She took off her glasses, placing them on the table. “I’m sorry. Do I know you?”

He chuckled softly, leaning slightly against the table, his movements graceful yet deliberate.

“Not yet. But literature has a way of connecting strangers, don’t you think? Fitzgerald understood that better than most.”

“And how exactly does quoting a book connect strangers?” she asked, her voice carrying a hint of scepticism edged with the slight raspiness of age.

“It’s a bridge,” he replied, his eyes sparkling with intelligence. “A shared moment of understanding. These words,” he gestured to her book with a hand that bore the marks of years well-lived, “are not just ink on paper. They’re experiences, emotions waiting to be rediscovered.”

She raised an eyebrow, her curiosity flickering beneath a veil of caution. The gesture highlighted the delicate creases on her forehead. “You sound like you’ve rehearsed that line.”

“Perhaps,” he admitted with a disarming smile, revealing slightly yellowed but still strong teeth. “But sincerity can’t be rehearsed. Just like the genuine moments, Fitzgerald captured.”

The woman hesitated, her discomfort growing. She adjusted her cardigan around her shoulders. “I... I don’t think that’s a good idea.”

A waiter approached them, wearing a crisp white shirt, with a professional demeanour. “Good evening,” he greeted them, offering a polite smile. “May I take your order?”

“Chamomile?” he asked gently, before she could speak.

She looked up, startled. “How did you—”

He smiled faintly. “Just a lucky guess.”

But she frowned, fingers curling slightly around the edge of her menu. Her mind whispered something, then went quiet again.

His persistent conversation made her feel increasingly uneasy, her discomfort growing as she gathered her things, preparing to leave.

The waiter approached the table again, his voice firm and concerned. “Ma’am, are you being troubled?”

She stood there, bewildered by the situation.

The waiter turned to the man; his tone resolute. "Sir, I will have to ask you to leave."

"But you don't understand," the man protested, his voice quivering. "I'm her-"

"Sir, if you don't leave immediately, I'll be forced to call security," the waiter interrupted.

Defeated, the man rose from his seat. Before leaving, he reached into his pocket, pulled out a white lily, and placed it on her table. "*Heard these were your favourites,*" he whispered, his eyes filled with sadness as he turned to walk away.

She stared at the flower, her arthritic fingers trembling as she caressed the delicate petals. The faint, familiar scent caught in her throat, a quiet pang of recognition that stirred in her mind.

And then, the restaurant faded, the world flickering, like a fading dream. The clinking of cutlery gave way to the rustle of autumn leaves, crisp and golden beneath her feet, whispering secrets from long ago.

Suddenly, she was no longer in the restaurant.

She was sitting on a park bench, the sun casting a warm golden glow. The man, a younger version with a charming smile, stood before her, holding an identical white lily. "Heard these were your favourites," he said, his voice familiar. She looked at him, as the memory of their first date flooded back.

"Ah, The Great Gatsby," he continued, his eyes twinkling with excitement. "A classic. I couldn't put it down when I first read it. The green light at the end of Daisy's dock still haunts me."

A wave of warmth flooded her. This was the beginning, the moment that had sparked everything between them.

The memory shifted seamlessly, pulling her into another moment.

She was at a candlelit dinner. Soft jazz melodies filled the air as they shared a plate of pasta. His hand brushed against hers, swaying gently to the rhythm, her stomach fluttering.

Then, the scene changed again.

The moonlight was bright, casting silvery hues across a quiet beach. She felt his arm wrap around her waist as they gazed at the stars. The salty breeze was comforting, and she heard him say those words she'd held onto for so long: "I love you." The sound of the waves danced in rhythm with his voice, a moment she could never forget.

The memories continued to unfurl in front of her, each brighter and more vivid.

She lifted the lily closer to her face, the familiar scent bringing another memory through her mind.

The wedding day.

The white lace gown shimmered in the sunlight, streaming through stained glass windows. She could hear the joyful cheers of their families and the scent of lilies in the air. His eyes reflected pure love as they sealed their vows with a kiss.

For a moment, her mind wandered through a maze of memories and thoughts, and then—with a jolt—the present returned, crashing back into reality.

The world around her focused again, but she struggled to contain the intensity of her emotions. She stood up, her mind swirling as the recent memories strangely faded again. Without hesitation, she rushed out of the restaurant towards the beach, her steps hurried but shaky, her heels clicking against the pavement.

There he was—standing against the setting sun, a familiar silhouette. The memory of the restaurant faded, replaced by the flashes of warmth from the past.

“*Darling?*” she called out, confusion and affection filling her voice. “What are you doing here? I thought we were meeting at home.”

He turned, his face filled with relief. “*Don’t worry about it,*” he reassured her. The endearment, once so familiar, filled her with comfort.

She rushed into his embrace; her movements slower now but still filled with the same eagerness and love they had shared for decades. She furrowed her brow slightly, trying to recall the events of the evening. Everything felt slightly out of place, yet the connection was undeniable.

As they stood there, basking in the fading sunlight, she squinted. The sunset, the man in her arms, and everything around her seemed blurry, as if a fog had settled over the world.

“*Here,*” he replied, handing her the glasses she’d forgotten in the restaurant. “*You left these behind.*”

She blinked, baffled. The world around her cleared as she slid the glasses on. The blurriness faded, and everything came into focus for the first time that evening.

“Thank you,” she whispered. They walked into the fading light of the evening, their footsteps perfectly in sync as their feet sank into the warm white sand.

She didn’t remember why she’d left or what had unsettled her—but with his hand in hers, she knew she didn’t have to.

Author’s note

Dementia may take memory, but it can’t erase love. Some truths don’t live in the mind—they live in gestures, glances, and the space between silence. Yet, in the face of this struggle, love persists. It adapts, evolves, and finds new ways to express itself. Some memories are stored not in the mind but in the heart - in gentle touches, familiar voices, and shared silences.

The tragedy of dementia is that it robs us of the ability to hold onto our dearest memories, but the person we love is still there beneath it all.

- Meryl Comer