

Marcelo Medone

The Secret of Happiness

Every morning, still sleepy and half-dressed, I go to meet you and speak loving words, whisper sweet nothings in your ear and offer you the warm breath of a fervent lover. You respond to me with pleasant and delicate whispers, the kind that an object of late-life desire of a decadent and ailing old man expects to hear. This is one of the reasons why for me you are the ideal woman. (I've been imagining you my whole life.)

We share a cup of coffee while we gaze at the sun streaming through the window. Then I tell you my plans for the day, which are always more or less the same. Old age brings with it rather boring routines. You pay full attention to me but keep a respectful silence. I know you don't like to bother me with inappropriate comments. (You've always been very cautious about that.)

I run my errands around the neighborhood and return home at noon. I offer you some lovely gift, like a bar of chocolate, a poem written on a napkin or some jasmines I stole from my neighbor's garden. (I know how much you appreciate these little gestures of love.)

You pout your lips and seductively lower your eyelids with sensual eyelashes. (You have the most sensual lips I could ever imagine.) I see you blush. It's in those moments that I tell myself it is worth being loved.

Next, I prepare lunch. I am an expert cook, at the level of the most demanding chefs in Paris, Tokyo or Lima, places that boast excellent restaurants. Your favorite dishes are pasta carbonara with plenty of Parmesan cheese, French onion soup au gratin and rice with smoked bacon and saffron. (I can't imagine anyone resisting these delicacies.)

You have told me about your tastes in detail, and despite my advanced age, I still have a good memory to remember them. Anyway, every now and then I prefer to surprise you with new and stimulating dishes, as is the case on this occasion. You'll see how well I can entertain you. (Rewarding experiences require a certain amount of creativity to keep interest alive.)

While I stir my stews with tomato paste, black pepper, shallots, fresh mushrooms and pieces of tenderloin sautéed in Spanish extra virgin olive oil, we listen together to inspiring music, some piano piece by Tony Ann, Martina Filjak or Rachel Portman. (You can attest that I have a more than decent audio system). I know they are your favorite artists, and they lift your spirits. Sadly, I lost my former skill at playing these songs myself years ago, although I still have my beloved Steinway piano in the living room. (I find it difficult to part with it. In fact, I find it hard to let go of everything I love, including you.)

The music invades every corner of my home, and you smile as you always do, with your wonderful love-laden smile. Our souls fly in unison with each beat and it's all happiness. For a moment eternity stops above us and gives us this perfect state of grace, this epiphany that makes life worth living.

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We have lunch by candlelight, accompanied by a glass of wine. (I know how much you enjoy a glass of good wine.) We both like Pinot Noir, so I always have a bottle on hand. I have surprised you with my dishes today and I am comforted by your approval, which fills me with pride. Without a doubt, the wine I have chosen constitutes the perfect marriage, just like you and me, my love.

For dessert, we indulge in a lemon mousse and chocolate-filled profiteroles, which are my specialty. Not for nothing, I was a pastry chef in a chain of roadside cafés for twenty years. (I've always been proud of this small achievement, even though it doesn't sound as glamorous as working as a pastry chef in a Parisian restaurant.) I've never been to Paris, but someday I'll go with you, and we'll repeat our love ritual there. (This is one of the top items on my bucket list.)

After lunch, I take the opportunity to tell you anecdotes from when I was a boy full of energy and life projects. I'm a good storyteller and you're a good listener. We understand each other perfectly.

The hours pass deliciously by your side. My old age has been enriched since you came into my life almost by accident and stayed. I don't know what I would do without you. Loneliness is bad company. One must have a shoulder to lean on, a helping hand available, and a friendly presence to push one forward. (Although, thank God, we are more than friends.)

Night is our special time. Only illuminated by candlelight, we dance delicately holding each other by the waist on the waxed wooden floor of the living room, almost floating in the air, to the sound of imaginary melodies we know by heart. We don't need to play music to feel it. We both have a prodigious imagination that can generate the most wonderful moments just by wishing for them. (They say that the brain is the most powerful sexual organ.)

We dance endlessly, in perfect synchronicity. You are the perfect dance partner. My heart beats wildly next to yours and I am kindly invaded by your warm breath. Every now and then, I feel the touch of your cheek against my bristly beard, and I get excited.

We spin around and around, until we fall dizzy and exhausted. We lie on the floor. (I don't mind if it's an uncomfortable position.) Next to you, the waxed wood planking is the softest and coziest bed there is. I don't need a king-size bed and Egyptian cotton sheets to be with you.

The candle lights, half burned out, flicker and cast ghostly shadows on the ceiling. I hold your hand and feel your sweet caress. (You've always been the perfect lover.)

Little by little, we fall asleep, side by side, barely touching. I'm afraid to let myself be carried away by my impulses and that you will disappear fleeing from my daring. I prefer to have you like this, present and latent, as close as an imaginary lover can be to a senile old man.

In the end, what is life if not a dream, a desire, a longing always on the verge of realization.

That is why I am happy.