

Leila

by **Orazio Longo** © 2011

Translated by Adriana Tonon

Leila says it's late. It's time to take the baby to mum's. To grandma's, actually. To Leila's mother, in brief. She lives there, just a stone's throw from our house. *Refugium peccatorum* (refuge of sinners [TN]). I'm not a whining type. And honestly, the fact that Rina and Ambrogio lived so close to us has never bothered me. They are my parents-in-law, Rina and Ambrogio. And in fact, every time we can, Leila and I pay them a visit and spend some time with them. It's a sort of 'happy family' picture, it's true, but Leila likes it. And, as a matter of fact, I like it too. Moreover, since the baby was born, it has been more practical this way.

There's a lot of traffic outside at this time of day. There's a supermarket nearby. And there are cars triple-parked. Leila is still in front of the main door. Our house main door. We live downtown. And it has always been noisy. Even at night. Especially since a new disco opened in the neighbourhood. Leila is standing. And waiting. So I get out of the car to open her door. She has always had princely attitudes, let's say, Leila. But it's not that I dislike to please her too much. On the contrary, to tell the truth, I really love to. 'Cause Leila is my woman. And I love her so much. And there's a lovely sunny afternoon, today. It's hot. And Leila is beautiful. So we do as she likes. Leila.

Mum Rina smiles at me now and tells me that the chair, the one she is holding in her hands, has been inlaid by me. I couldn't recall it. "Nice job" I say. "After four years, I succeeded in almost one thing", Leila smiles. And she is beautiful when she smiles. And I love her so much. I love her more, indeed. More?! More than what? I love her, that's it. Even though I feel I love her more today than yesterday, actually. And this is true. But surely, it's not that I loved her less, yesterday. Less than today, I mean. 'Cause I have loved her so much. Always. All along. Since the high school. Since the first day.

"My parents have caught us – she told me that time, she was sixteen and I was seventeen and her eyes were

watery and swollen after a night spent in tears in her room – and they won't allow me to go out any longer. Can you wait for me? If you can't, I will understand". We had kissed for the first time two weeks before. At the school prom. Our secret, the forbidden love, had lasted as long as taking a piss. They used to say so, even if it rather doesn't sound like an elegant expression. Anyway, they had caught us. Sure, they had. Almost at once.

"Can you wait for me?" She asked me then.

And I naturally waited for her. Because she was not a fling. I had got it since the first moment. She wore a sheath tiny little dress. With braces. Beige and brown, dark. Her hair tied up with two wisps falling down on her neck. She had put on her make-up. It was like she were inside a spell. And the first kiss was the best of all. So I loved her more and more every day. More and more. Without loving her less, the day before. I must say that.

Leila is now sitting. Her arms leant on the kitchen table. A round wooden table. She wears a short skirt and her legs, which are beautiful, are bent outwards. She is talking to mum Rina. About practical things. Everyday matters. And I look at her. And I remain silent. She has a little scar on her right thigh. And I find it very sexy. Like the line of the muscle of her leg. She takes a size four in shoes, Leila. She has a tiny delicate little foot. And I have always had a foible for feet. And for ankles, thin. And for hands, too. I love her pale hands. And she is still wearing dolly shoes. Golden yellow. With a small ribbon on top. As the first time. I like high-heel shoes. And they suit her beautifully. But dolly shoes suit her too. I'd rather say that dolly shoes suit her better than anyone else in the world.

There's a song on the radio. And I am listening to it and Leila is listening to it, too. It goes like this: *If you're down because she has left you. If she's not the one who can suit you. If you're not the best of the artists... If you've not the sweet charmer's hand. If you don't want to be left apart. Come and buy yourself a tart. Purchase me, I'm right on sale for you. And don't you ever think that I'm not in the pink. A bit of love, a moment though, a simple man I took. A word, a motion and a verse will make a sense, running away with you.*

It's a Viola Valentino's song. We like it. We sing it softly. And, who knows why, it makes us fantasize about,

you know, ‘strange things’...

Leila is beautiful, even now that she is wearing her hair tied back. She wanted to have it cut, trimmed; she showed me how, up to her chin, with a fringe, but I said no. I asked her to keep it long, just for me. Straight. Alright, she said. But now she often wears it tied, *cause it's hot*, she says, especially in summer. And she can't stand summer heat. It's alright for me, 'cause I love her hair clips, too. And the smell of her hair spreading from the clips. But when she loosens it, her hair, which is blond – brown actually with blond highlights – I just can't resist. Because even her face becomes brighter. So I hug her. And then I kiss her. And I really wish I would never ever part from her.

At the beach Leila wears a bikini. She says that one-piece swimsuits are old-fashioned. And I think I agree with her. Even though I also like one-piece swimsuits. But I must admit that bikinis are also very sexy. Moreover, Leila's bikini is green with little pink stars on it and a pleat under her belly button and two knots on her hips. And her bikini top seems to be drawn on her breast. Leila is beautiful at the seaside. I mean, at the seaside too. And we always go swimming. Because Leila is not a lizard-type. She's not one of those lying down on the beach under the sun all day long. Leila wears her swimming goggles and we dip down. Fish-watching. Trying to touch them. Without ever reaching them. So I move closer to her, down, underwater, and I hug her. And I kiss her. And I wish I could stay down there, until fish go and rest. But then I run out of air. So we resurface.

My favourite film is Stanley Kubrick's '2001: A Space Odyssey'. But also 'Breakfast at Tiffany's' is not bad. Starring Audrey Hepburn. It's Leila's favourite film. And I have bought the DVD and we usually watch it lying in bed. Then I hug her. And I kiss her. But Leila is far more beautiful than Audrey Hepburn. But she is not aware of that. And she thinks that Audrey Hepburn is the most charming woman in the world. In that film. But Leila wears a black pinafore dress – It is called this way, she told me – which matches her pearl necklace, black tights and black heel shoes, *decoltè* – that should be written in another way but it doesn't matter – so I think she's the most elegant woman in the world. In her pinafore dress. And I wish I would never close my eyes. Not even for a moment. Without stopping looking at her. Not even while she's sleeping. Because Leila

usually sleeps on my lap, huddling up, with her head on my belly. She hugs me, now and then. And I kiss her. I kiss her fingers. And I keep my eyes wide open. As long as I can. And I struggle to stay awake. *Refugium peccatorum*. Until I surrender, even this time.

And I cannot still believe it.

Until I open my eyes again.

Because I know that was the size of it. And then I understand.

Because Leila has now left me. Whoever could have said that! Just like that. She simply left, one day. My Leila.

Now she's got two children, Leila. And a husband. Who is not me. Who, honestly, has never been me. Because Leila did actually get married, this time. Three months after. After she left me. Gosh, it was hard! Terribly hard, actually. But that's what happened.

'Cause I wished I could have a baby. With her. Now Leila is happy this way, instead. I'm not, but it doesn't matter. Now it doesn't matter anymore. 'Cause, sooner or later, Leila always comes back to me. Every night.

As last night, for instance. All night long. Until I wake up.

And even tonight, as last night, we'll make the same things. We'll go to mum Rina's. To take the baby to her. And I will look at her once more while she will be sitting on a chair for a bit in the kitchen, with her white short skirt above her knee and her legs, which are beautiful and sexy, bent outwards. And I will have inlaid mum Rina's chair. Even though I have never inlaid a single toothpick, actually. And then we will watch 'Breakfast at Tiffany's' again. And I will hug and kiss her one more time. And we will plunge into the sea. As when we were still together. And we will go down. And this time we will wait until fish go and rest. And I am happy again. Because there, in my dreams, nobody can take her away from me. 'Cause Leila is mine, there, and still loves me. So I sleep, but my eyes are wide open. Or rather I live, but my eyes are wide shut.

Only by night. By day, the only thing I long for, is the night to come. Even if, before coming, the night scares me so much. Because when I finally wake up, I feel really bad. And I would like not to dream of her anymore. But then, as I fall asleep, I meet her again. Because it's not up to me what's going on in my mind. Neither in my dreams. And

Leila is still there. So I close my eyes and I'm happy again, and this is good, because also tonight she will be back to me and I open the car door for her while she's waiting before the main door. And we listen to that song together. And we sing it softly. While we start to fantasize. Who knows why, then? *Purchase me, I'm right on sale for you. And don't you ever think that I'm not in the pink. A bit of love, a moment though, a simple man I took. A word, a motion and a verse will make a sense, running away with you. Such a delight, a crazy song I'd like to sing with you on my side. A swinging tune that makes me dancing shaking all night...*

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Picture "On the Bench" by Cristina De Martin © 2011



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Purchase me
(Viola Valentino)
(Brioschi-Minellono)
If you're down because she has left you
If she's not the one who can suit you
If you're not the best of the artists...
Or you cannot make any conquests
If to her you've just been a friend
If you've not the sweet charmer's hand
If you don't want to be left apart
Come and buy yourself a tart

Purchase me,
I'm right on sale for you
And don't you ever think that I'm not in the pink
A bit of love, a moment though,
A simple man I took
A word, a motion and a verse
will make a sense
running away with you

Such a delight
A crazy song I'd like to sing with you on my side
A swinging tune that makes me dancing shaking all night

If you cannot take actors' lines
From one colour movies primes
If for you on Saturday nights
There is not a girl you can size
If there's not someone on your list
Who could be more than a feast
If you cannot go very far
Where your hand can't take you there

Purchase me,
I'm right on sale for you
And don't you ever think that I'm not in the pink
A bit of love, a moment though,
A simple man I took
A word, a motion and a verse
will make a sense
running away with you

Such a delight
A crazy song I like to sing with you on my side
A swinging tune that makes me dancing shaking all night...