

Sandor Kovacs – If you could fly

As I enter the well-lit flat, a gentle breeze caresses my face from the direction of the balcony. I don't remember leaving the window open, and my husband is at work.

Not caring about closing the front door, I walk closer to the bedroom to see what's happening. I drop the grocery bags, and my heartbeat triples, like I received an electric shock. James is standing outside on the balustrade, barefooted and half naked, wearing only jeans. If he stepped forward, he would fall to the street, without anything stopping him. From the seventh floor, that would mean instant death.

I pinch myself to make sure I'm not hallucinating. But no, I'm not.

"Honey? Everything's all right, darling?"

He stands still.

"Honey, whatever is wrong we can solve it. Please, come in," I say, trying to create a reassuring atmosphere.

"I have to try it, Jess. I think I'm finally ready," he says.

"To do what?"

"To fly."

And then, an awful amount of memories and flashbacks flood my brain, making the situation clearer.

When he first mentioned this about a year ago, we were lying on the grass in a park, watching the clouds.

"What would you do if you could fly?" he asked.

"What? I hate flying, and you know it," I said.

"Nah, you hate planes, airports, and all the hassle, not flying itself."

"Yeah, true. But I don't want to fly."

"What if you could? Just like that. What if you could just leave the ground and fly away, like Superman?"

I started to grin. "Is this a trick, young man?"

"No. I'm curious... Young lady," he said with that cheeky smile on his face I loved so much.

"Okay... Would I have any protection against falling?"

"You wouldn't need that, babe, 'cause you'd be able to fly."

"Don't think I'm stupid."

"I don't--"

“What if you forget, huh? Like when sometimes you forget your PIN code. Like, you don’t know how you forgot it all of a sudden, but it doesn’t come. What if that happened during flying? You don’t know how to do it anymore. And you fall...”

“Ah, got you now. Nah, that wouldn’t happen. Imagine walking or running. You can’t forget those because your body doesn’t let you. Muscle memory. After lots of practice, flying would be the same.”

“This is silly,” I said and picked up my glass of wine, still staring into his eyes.

“Look up,” he said then, and I did. “Can you see how beautiful it is? The sky, the clouds, everything up there. Imagine if you could go up on your own, touch it, inhale the freedom, looking down at the world as God.”

“Are you drunk?”

“Never mind,” he said and kissed me passionately, which made me ignore the whole conversation.

However, he kept mentioning this, even after we had gotten married. I still ignored it, but clearly, something was wrong. Now, it all made sense. The nights when I woke up, and he wasn’t next to me, telling me later that he hadn’t been able to sleep and had gone for a walk. The evenings I found him on the balcony, glaring at the sky in utter silence. It was a cry for help; a thought eating him alive. How could I not see? Did this craziness take over his mind? Does he really believe that he can fly?

“Honey,” I say again in the softest voice I can manage, “please, come in. Humans can’t fly.”

Hearing this, he turns his head, and the mixture of doubt and anger shows up on his face.

“You know nothing, babe.”

“Honey, please...” I can’t suppress crying anymore. “Please, come in and let’s talk. I can’t live without you.”

I hear sirens. Someone must have spotted him from the street and called the police.

“You don’t have to live without me. I’ll come back soon.”

“Please, don’t do this to me... I love you.”

He turns towards me, showing his back to the open world, then his mouth widens into a mysterious grin. “I love you too.”

I scream so loudly that I think my throat will shoot out through my mouth like a cannon ball, as I watch his body disappear. I want to take a step, but the pain in my heart overwhelms me, paralysing my muscles. Everything becomes blurry, then black.

“Mrs Horner...”

“Mrs Horner?”

I hear a distant voice like it’s talking to me from the end of a long corridor. I glimpse at the face of a stranger in a police uniform. Next to him stands a woman, holding a red box. She’s a paramedic.

“Where am I?”

“You are at home, Mrs Horner. My name is Paul. We are going to take care of you, don’t you worry.”

“What happened?” I ask while other strangers shuffle around us. There are groceries scattered on the floor.

“You experienced a severe shock,” Paul says.

“James? Oh my God. What happened to my husband?” I begin to sob as the remembering deepens, hurting my head.

“Please, try to calm down.”

“*Calm down?* My husband just jumped off the balcony!” I grab my hair with both hands. Officer Paul looks at the paramedic, who takes out a syringe.

“Oh God,” I cry. I want to protest against the needle, but the pain in my head is so strong I can’t move. I want to die too. I want to stop the pain.

As soon as she gives me the injection, calmness rushes through me like a benign inner stream.

“Please, tell me what happened to my husband.”

“Mrs Horner, the situation is quite complicated. After the shock you’ve received, it would be best if—”

“I’m not going anywhere until you tell me what happened to him.” Confusion rises on their faces. He died, I think to myself. They just don’t know how to tell me.

“Mrs Horner, you see, we are not sure what happened. Your husband is missing.”