

Mother Goes Gaga

“Let’s go down to SouthCenter this morning,” Mother suggests at breakfast. I leap at the idea. I have come over from Richland with two of the kids to pick up our third, who has spent the past week with Mother and Daddy at their new house in Seattle. Trying to keep the kids occupied at her house here is no easy task. They aren’t used to the house and don’t know where things are and don’t have anything to do. They are bored. When they’re bored, they fight. When they fight, Mother gets crazy, and I get a headache from it all. Tomorrow we’ll go home, but today we need to keep busy. A trip down to this major mall should at least kill the morning.

We don’t stay at SouthCenter long. The kids each want to run off in a different direction, and shopping for things Mother and I would enjoy is just out of the question.

“Let’s go home,” she announces after about twenty minutes. This isn’t a suggestion or request. It’s an order. We head out to the car and climb in. While the kids squabble over who sits where this time, Mother digs in her purse for her keys. Suddenly she looks up and her head moves forward as she peers intently out the windshield. Her lips are parted. I follow her gaze and notice two men getting in the car parked diagonally in front of us, to the right. The driver is a nicely dressed young man, and an elegantly attractive older man with wavy, snow-white hair opens the door on the passenger side.

Noticing that their headlights are on, I roll my window down and call out to the younger man. “If your car won’t start, it’s because you left the lights on.”

“Oh! Thanks. Could you wait a minute while I check?” he asks, lowering himself into his seat.

I look over at Mother. Her eyes are practically bulging out of their sockets. Her mouth hangs slack, and her knuckles are white from her death grip on the wheel. She gives a weak nod. Sure enough, their car won't start. The older man lazily unfolds his trim body from the car and saunters in Mother's direction. She fumbles with the crank in a frenzied attempt to roll the window down. He bends down, leaning his arm casually on the door.

"Do you happen to have any jumper cables we could use?" The words rumble forth, slow sweet, and mellow as well-aged sherry, giving ample exposure to a full set of perfect pearly whites in the process.

"Oh, yes! I'm sure I do. We always carry them!" Mother stammers. What's come over her? I wonder. I've never seen her in such a state. I get out when she does and walk around to the trunk. She has trouble getting the key in the lock. Again, I'm baffled by her behavior. She's always had great hand-eye coordination. She finally gets the trunk open and rummages in the contents. She tosses a blanket aside, and moves a couple of small boxes and a mini-cooler. No jumper cables appear. She goes through them all again.

"I . . . I guess I don't have them today," she stammers in dismay. "I can't imagine why they aren't here. We always carry them." She's repeating herself. That's not like her. Neither is the shrilly quavering voice. She's acting like a moonstruck teenager, I think. Who is this man, and what has he done to my mother?

"No problem. Thank you so much for checking." Mystery Man flashes another yard of smile directly at Mother and bows slightly toward her. I wait for him to kiss her hand, but he turns to leave. "Oh! No trouble at all. My pleasure," she squeaks at his back.

"Try Mall Security. They should be able to help," I suggest. I don't want this stranger to think I'm as ditzzy as my mother!

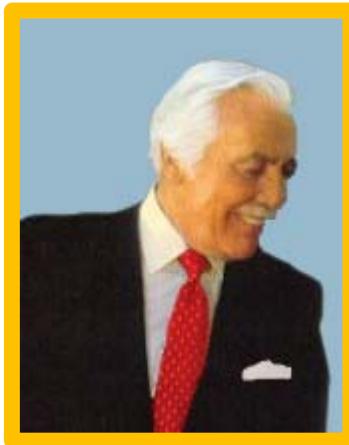
"Thank you. Thank you so much. We'll do that." He smiles and waves over the top of the door as he gets back in. I wait for him to blow us a kiss, but the moment passes.

Mother sits quietly for a minute, breathing deeply. She's only a little shaky as she puts the key in the ignition, starts the car and backs out. At this point, I'm relieved that she can manage to drive at all!

"That was Caesar Romero!" she finally gasps as she reaches the end of the lane. "I'll never wash my car door again!" Her voice has a distinctly misty tone. Now things make sense. I recognize the name of the classic movie star, but wouldn't have been able to pick him out in a line-up — unless the others were women. She said she knew he was in town, but of course she never expected to actually meet him.

"Wow, no kidding? He really is a hunk! Good thing I noticed the lights," I observe with a grin. He hasn't lost the magic that makes women swoon, I think, especially when they know who he is.

She just nods, lost in a euphoric daze as she heads up the ramp onto I-5. I'm a little awestruck myself. I wonder if I would have been quite so nonchalant if I'd known who he was sooner. I'd like to think so, but in my inner core of truth, I doubt it. I'm glad I didn't. I decide that only in ignorance could I have given her this gift.



One morning a few months later, Mother is back in Richland for a visit. I'm busy fixing lunches, and she doesn't say much as she sips coffee, staring out the sliding glass door.

"It really was him!" she announces out of the blue.

“Who? What are you talking about?” I’m lost.

“Him! Caesar Romero!”

“How do you know? I thought you were sure back then.”

“I was. But he was back in Seattle again at the Dinner Theater. We went and sat close to the stage. So now I’m really sure.”

“Wow, that’s great. Maybe someday I’ll run into Robert Redford or Sean Connery in a parking lot somewhere. I wonder if Susan will be with me?”

We both laugh at this happy thought. I turn to unload the dishwasher and she finishes her rice cake.