

Breathless

by

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"BREATHLESS"

FADE IN:

EXT. THE PROMENADE - DAY

A peaceful morning on the promenade. The sea laps the shore. As it does.

An elderly man settles onto a bench.

He puts his walking stick aside. He removes his cap. He lays a brown bag next to him. He opens the morning paper and turns directly to the crossword. As he does.

An elderly woman steps past the bench to the rail overlooking the sea, her back to the elderly gentleman.

He looks up and notices her mid-length skirt, her bulging handbag, her shawl to protect her from the chill.

She is intent on her watch. He returns his crossword.

All is still for a moment. She watches the sea. He searches his mind for an eleven letter word meaning "random romantic encounter".

She stirs from her reverie. Looks around her. She steps away, crossing in front of the elderly man.

He looks up. She glances over. Their eyes meet. Did she smile?

She passes.

He watches her take a few steps and then returns to his puzzle. He looks up again and then back to his crossword, comparing and contrasting the merits of each.

He reaches a decision. He folds the paper, collects his brown bag, dons his cap, takes his walking stick in hand, and rises. He steps in her direction.

She is enjoying her stroll. He draws alongside. They each pretend not to notice the other.

She steals a glance at him. He catches her eye. She looks away, caught. She turns her head to hide her schoolgirl smile.

They walk a few more steps trying not to look at one another. She cannot take it any longer. She turns her head and meets his gaze straight on.

A lingering moment of hesitation. And then... they both smile. The distance between them decreases. They continue their walk.

They walk together, sharing the same pace.

She breaks from his admiring eyes and looks bashfully at her sensible shoes. She takes a couple of quick steps, putting her just out of his vision.

He takes a quick couple of steps himself to put him even with her again. They share a gentle laugh. She appreciates his persistence.

He continues his quick steps. He looks back, teasing her, inviting her to catch up.

She does. And passes him.

He closes the distance again. They laugh out loud.

She looks ahead. The promenade stretches into the distance. A lone bench beckons in the distance. She looks at him, sizing him up.

He spies the same bench and returns her mischievous look.

There is a moment of calm between them. Their eyes narrow. They inhale. And without warning they break.

They walk at a brisk pace. She clutches her shawl. He swings his walking stick with intent. She edges forward with a slight lead.

Their pace increases. They are enjoying their rivalry.

She teases him. She lets him get close and then she pulls away.

His breathing becomes heavier. She notices his struggle, but he doesn't slow. He keeps pushing on. She admires his persistence. She takes a bigger lead.

He drops his bag. His paper. He raises his hand to loosen his collar. She begins to have concern for his struggle. Did he just stumble?

His breathing is laboured. His hand darts to his chest. He doubles over. She lets out a gasp and reverses direction rushing to him.

She reaches his side and puts her hand out to support him.

And he bolts!

His hat flies from his head. His walking stick doesn't touch the ground. He takes a formidable lead.

She is dumbstruck at his deceit. Her face screws into fierce determination, she lifts one side of her skirt and pursues.

He rushes by a young couple. They are pulled from their mutual admiration by his passing. They watch him hurry away with bemusement.

He continues at his feverish pace. He expects her at his heels at any moment. But she does not appear. He doesn't understand.

He risks slowing down. He dares a look back.

She is on the ground. The young couple are kneeling next to her. She has fallen!

Or has she?

He slows. He stops. He watches.

The young couple try to help her to her feet. She tries to bear her own weight. She cannot. They lower her to the ground. The young man pulls out his mobile and dials for assistance.

He walks back toward her. He is still cautious. Is this a trap?

The young man speaks to emergency services while the young girl comforts her. He approaches. She looks up at him. She is wounded, chagrined.

He hurries to her, burning with shame.

She is glad he has returned. She tries to stand again. The young girl puts an arm under her. She raises her hand toward him. He reaches out to take her hand.

She grabs his hand and yanks him to the ground, launching herself in the process.

The young man instinctively leaps out of the way. The young girl, confused, tries to hold on to her. She wallops the young girl with her handbag. Girl and handbag go down.

She hikes her skirt with both hands revealing her support stockings, and scurries away.

He scrambles to his knees. The young man comes to his aid.

He waves his walking stick to ward off the assistance, climbs to his feet and then with a smile tosses his stick to the young man. He gives chase.

She has a lead, but he is closing.

She rips her shawl from her shoulders, hoping it will fly into his face. He bats it aside.

He tears off his jacket to better pump his arms for speed.

He is catching her! He is at her heels!

The bench draws closer...

Her hair is undone and tossing in the wind.

...and closer...

He rips his shirt open at the collar for breath, buttons scatter.

...and closer...

She can feel him just behind.

He draws even. Their eyes lock for an moment in visceral anger, betrayal, competition.

He inches ahead and hurtles into the bench. He is first!

An instant later she collapses onto the bench beside him. She has lost.

They pant.

He lords his victory over her. She eyes him with malice.

They laugh.

They look back at the ground they have covered. The promenade is littered with their clothing and belongings. The young couple stare open-mouthed.

Their breathing subsides. She fixes her hair. He straightens his shirt. Their eyes meet with curiosity, hesitation, attraction.

She smiles coquettishly.

He leans in. Her eyes close. His lips seek hers. He leans further forward, closing his eyes. And he falls face first onto the seat of the bench.

His eyes open in confusion. She is gone! Well, not gone exactly, but she does have a sizable lead. He propels himself from the bench.

They are racing again. They are exhilarated.

The light reflecting off the water grows brighter and brighter, washing everything out.

FADE OUT.

THE END