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Lifeimages

Content

Glittering worlds

Tracks in the snow

The Woman behind the curtain

Just a word

From the individual to the dividual

The Moment of Expectation

Masquerade

Wanderlust for home

The Billboard Advertisement

What will I leave behind?

A House of Memories

Just seeing

Glittering worlds



"Nice to see you," she said, as he arrived home that evening. As soon as he had opened the door, she had run over to him and put her arms on his shoulders. As she pushed the snow-damp hair out of his face, she looked at him, with her soft, warm eyes, showing a smile, before she kissed him. Her book was still next to the fireplace. Next to it, he saw a cup of tea. She had curled up like a kitten, to read her book in the warmth of the fire, but stopped all of this when she heard his footsteps. It had always been that way. He could not remember that it had ever been any different. Even when he came home in the middle of the night and she was fast asleep, he could rely on her waking up. A kiss, a smile, a welcome. Small gestures, unspectacular, almost invisible, so subtle that he did not notice.

But that evening, he had wandered through the streets. Christmas was over, the celebrating was over. Many were happy about that, but still, traces of the holidays were to be seen everywhere. Most of all, the glitter and lights remained, everywhere glitter and lights. Decorated streets, aroused illusions, Christmas in the glittering world. Artificial light for artificial happiness, becoming continually louder, ever more hectic, until it blows all of our fuses. The more it tried to hide its artificiality, the more obvious it became, leaving a residue of poor taste at its best. There was nothing that touched the heart. It was much too pompous to be real. He was so fed up with all that fuss and nonsense, progressively louder, continually wilder!

But her gestures? They were soft and gentle. She did not force herself forward, but simply remained at his side, with all of the attributes of a love which does not need to explain

itself because it, itself is sufficient explanation. In all of its simplicity, it communicates vitality. He had experienced it often, so often that he had begun to overlook it. But that evening, he discovered it once more. In contrast to all of the artificial glitter which made him disgusted and nauseated, her smile was like a peaceful ray of sunshine, in the midst of a snow storm. At that moment, she had left everything in order to welcome him. It wouldn't have to be that way, but it was. She wanted it to be that way. And he realized just how much good it did him. That was the moment when he came home, the moment of acceptance.

Normally, on any other day, each of them would have pursued their respective activities again, but today was different. This time he held her back. He responded to her look and her smile. He touched her. There was gravity in his gaze.

"Is everything all right?" she asked, feeling somewhat unsure.

"Now, everything is all right," he replied, but his serious look remained. He added that he had to leave for a short while, which made her wonder why.

When he had returned, though, he invited her to join him by the fireplace, where he fastened a small silver chain around her neck. Carefully she traced its contours and felt its coolness underneath her finger tips.

"But, Christmas is over and you know that you do not have to give me anything," she said.

"I know, but I wanted to," he said, "Nothing artificial or intrusive, but something that is close to you and real, just as you are to me."