

Silver Glass

By

Per Hydén

“You go ahead and rest now Mrs. Wagner, the treatments will start tomorrow,” the white gloved concierge said as he left the room.

Andrea Wagner replied a quick ‘thanks’ as she carried her suitcase into her home for the next couple of days. After organizing her clothes in the closet and putting her toiletries in the bathroom she lay herself on the bed. It was a classy room she thought as she eyed the chandelier which answered with a glow in her eyes, as stars reflecting in an ocean grove.

In order to release the anticipation Andrea closed her eyes and focused on her breathing. She thought the stay would do her good. A well needed break to relax the mind. Maybe even set the first words to a new story, a fresh beginning. Andrea turned on her side. She made a quick visual inspection of the room. Closet, reading chair, desk, a few abstract paintings and a window with long thick curtains. The hotel overlooked the bay and the radiance from the emerald lights glimmered in the sea. Her dark hair was tied in a tight braid except for two free curls dancing by her temples, barely touching her collar bones.

“Am I inconsiderate!?” A man said.

Startled, Andrea realized the voice came from the room adjacent. She touched the wall, letting the fingertips stroke the painted surface, and wondered if the thickness of the wall lived up to the standard of such a luxurious establishment.

“Yes, I feel you don’t care, you don’t care about my feelings, my experience!” A woman answered.

Since sleeping was out of the question, thanks to the couple next door, Andrea rose to get a drink. After quickly assessing the bottles neatly presented in a corner cabinet she choose a 20-year old port and poured herself a glass. She had never been an admirer of liquors such as whiskey and rum but a sweet vintage port got the job done, whether to quell a headache or let the shoulders drop after a busy day. And accompanied by a piece of milk chocolate Andrea found the Portuguese wine caressed her palate in a particularly colorful way. Unfortunately the room didn’t contain any sweets, quite surprisingly considering the generous liquor supply. Andrea eyed the liquid in the crystal glass as if being a long lost friend while the conversation next door continued on the subject of inconsideration. She strode to the window and, as her faint reflection watched her, gently put her lips on the glass rim and tilting her head. She had arrived in the city of Apastaran on that very evening. The air-dock lay by the harbor of this hub of northern affairs and as Andrea embarked she was greeted by a brisk auroric air with the scent of salt and fir. As the transport rushed over cobbled streets Andrea admired the Victorian architecture in between snow-covered trees. The city had gotten its name, meaning Haven, after the Armenian overtaking 25 years earlier. Andrea had only been a child but still had vivid memories of the events, changing the world forever.

Circling her hand over the ruby tunic covering her stomach she, once again, concurred the airship had been a bad idea. Andrea had been sipping one coffee after another to try to calm her nerves, ironically, and her gaze was fixed out the window until the horizon of the White Sea appeared and they began descending. Travelling by air had seemed the most convenient option. However, whilst rocketing in between the cumulus she had experienced nausea and regret. The airships were yet to experience their first accident for more than 30 years, meaning Andrea had in fact been perfectly safe in her white leather seat. She knew this, nonetheless her gut was telling her a different story. A story where she plummeted to the Earth and where the statistics simply could not save her. The technology of the flying vessel, based on solar sails and steam engines, had been developed by the Armenians and had revolutionized the world. The global market demanded everything from airships to power plants from the small country, turning it into a financial superpower in a few years. They took the free world by surprise when they launched the overtaking. After the brief war they controlled everything east and south of Austria all the way to South Africa and Japan. The Armenians had planned to conquer the world in just three months and was successful in the first phase, claiming Asia in only one. China and India had tried to coordinate a joint counter attack but had failed instantly. Southern Africa put up a longer fight but in the end they too had to face defeat and was succumbed to the great Jerevan Republic. Europe and the Americas were forced to cooperate, creating the Western Coalition and fought off the attackers and endured a two month siege on every front over the globe. It had been a war with few casualties compared to other armed conflicts in human history, but a war with unseen global impact.

“Bella, you are wrong.” The man next door said. “I didn’t do anything with her and I didn’t lie to you. We have been through this. You said it yourself with Dr. Peterson, you were ready to move on from it.”

“Well, maybe I’m not. Maybe I don’t believe you and who are you to say I’m wrong? Why are we doing this? Is it worth it? It shouldn’t be this difficult.”

The last words spoken by the woman got Andrea reminiscing of things she shouldn’t think of. Julien had said those words to her in one of their fights and it came back to her. With a sigh Andrea walked slowly to the desk turning on the entertainment unit. This weekend was about moving forward, not to dwell in the past. Scrolling through the options she finally found a suitable genre. While the melancholic saxophones poured out their tunes Andrea once again filled her glass and picked up a magazine lying next to her. The front page pictured a snowy Christmas market with the headline reading *Welcome to Apastaran*. She turned the pages, without interest. She had been fed the wonders of The Jerevan Republic many times and while it was easy for her to dismiss the messages as propaganda she remembered her dad’s words, “It’s not propaganda if you don’t have anyone to convince”. Andrea didn’t want to believe, she couldn’t believe, there wasn’t a single person discontent with the Armenian system. Her mother had never bought the act. “It’s not only the individual freedom they are depriving their people, to be fair, freedom is not one-dimensional. Freedom is perceived in numerous ways. What they are guilty of, their crime, is taking away the dignity that is inherent in every single human being on this Earth. Even the benefits of the East can’t

triumph that.” Her parents had more often than not differed in opinion when it came to political, religious and philosophical matters. In this case, as in most, Andrea agreed with her mother.

It had its upsides, the system of rule where she was visiting, Andrea admitted to herself as she examined a panoramic photograph of the city, touched by a late summer’s sun. Apastaran was nothing like Vienna. This city was clean, everything in order. The academic aristocratic rule had created a republic with material wealth for all. Her father had grown an admiration of The Republic. At first he had, alongside everyone else, loathed the ruling Armenians. He had been fighting against them during the war of the overtaking serving as a satellite reconnaissance operator as part of the coalition forces. They succeeded to yield the attackers by the Austrian border, along with strongholds in Stockholm and Bari, creating the European three point defense line which would eventually become the border between East and West. Surprisingly, over the years he changed his mind about the Eastern power when seeing the material wellbeing of its citizens. If there had been a possibility Andrea was convinced he would have migrated. He being a scholar at a prestigious University in Austria, Andrea imagined he was drawn to the credit the academia received here, unlike in the Western Coalition where the view of the people always came first, independent of relevance or scientific facts.

Thinking of her father, Andrea always got an uneasy feeling. She did have love for him but there had always been a certain blockage Andrea couldn’t fathom, a lost connection of some sort. Being a child seeing her father go to war was traumatic and he was not the same coming back. Self-absorbed, dull and with a non-existent interest in his daughter.

Andrea kept turning the pages and spoke to the main light to dim itself, creating a luminous glow around her. Her voice was gentle yet sharp as an arrow, never missing even the fastest target. Being by herself had never bothered her. Andrea was the only child of two busy parents and the upbringing in the war-torn West had not been a comfortable journey. Nevertheless, here she felt lonely. She thought of Julien. Her ex-husband. He had been the first person in Andrea’s life who reached her, got through her shields.

The day Andrea knew he was the one for her was a windy day in Vienna. The spring flowers were blossoming and her eagerness for summer had fooled her to choose a much too thin sweater. They had been walking down the busy street when a tall man started hitting his son with multiple slaps in the face. Andrea was the first one to react. She ran over and screamed to the man to stop. He turned towards her and starred her down, expressing a thousand threats with his blue fiery eyes. Julien joined and gently walked in between them and started to talk to the man, with the voice of a diplomat, humble but with great mandate. He was able to deescalate the situation until the police arrived. No more punches were thrown and the child was taken care of. Andrea was impressed with his calm instincts but it was what happened next that made her fall for him. Julien took Andrea by her arm and they walked to a nearby park where he asked her to sit. He looked in her eyes and asked her if she was ok. There was silence and he waited. He waited for her, he saw her. They kissed on that bench and Andrea’s world would never be the same.

She continued to read the magazine. A piece on the plans for colonizing Mars and another with the many wonders of the Tundra. There were articles about people living in Murmansk and the extensive schedules for basketball games and cross-country skiing races. In boredom she threw it in the waste and a sudden twitch ran through her body. She came to think of that horrible night. The night her mother past away.

The trash can had been to the edges with all kinds of trash, spreading an uneasy odor in her mother's room at the hospital. Andrea had called for a nurse and complained, demanding someone empty it. Her mother, Maria, was at the end of her life, unconscious. All kinds of medical equipment tied to her veins and skin. Andrea sat down on the chair close to her mother, the tears already rolling down her cheeks. The doctor had called half an hour earlier telling it was time to come in. Andrea's father who she had picked up on the way sat down next to his daughter, watching his wife dying, yet saying nothing. The nurse returned with an embarrassing color on her face and not only emptied the trash but made the atmosphere in line with the situation with candles and turned on calm tones of the cello. Maria's breathing was heavy and Andrea pulled up a handkerchief from her backpack. She gently stroke her mother's face with the soft fabric, preparing herself more than her mother for the inevitable. After a few minutes Maria took one last deep breath and was gone. Andrea was about to hug her mother's body when her father, without a tear nor a trace of the slightest vibration in his voice said, "well I guess I'll wait for you outside." He then quickly put his hand on his deceased spouse and turned to walk out into the quiet corridor. Andrea was trapped, imprisoned even, between the ravaging sorrow and deep resentment. She sat on the chair with the ability to do nothing. She couldn't cry. She couldn't scream. She couldn't stand up. For two hours she sat there. When the doctor came for the third time he asked her if they could prepare the body. Finally managing to walk out her father was gone. A nurse said he had left. Andrea made her way to the parking garage five stories below ground level. There, in a wet corner, she threw up. Andrea cursed her father for ruining her last moments with her mother and while driving home that night she promised herself to never speak to him again, screaming and in tears.

Two days later, she received a small piece of paper in the mail with a few sentences scribbled with a blue ballpoint pen.

A mirage was delivered by the King of old,
your mother, walking on the silver lake, carrying the sweetest of babies,
a wind blowing life in your lungs,
a man turned away, shivering and alone,
leaving the smell of sewage and rotten lard behind,
to Andromeda he ran,
to the stars he hid,
leaving everyone behind.

From that moment Andrea had accepted her father for who he was, now that he himself knew who he was. That he even had the ability to write down feelings, or an apology, in what could only be described as

a poem chocked her. She realized that the human element is deep and we too often only swim at the surface of each other.

Andrea came back to Apastaran when the woman next door made her presence known yet again.

“So you mean you don’t even bother, that you don’t even care how it is for me? As long as you check off your precious list of life goals, pathetic!”

“I didn’t say that. I was merely pointing out that you are incorrect about what happened. I always tell you about my schedule and you didn’t oppose. How can you even say I don’t care? It’s factual incorrect”.

“Oh come on John! That is bullshit. We have come all this way to try to work this out and you can’t even see your part in this. Even if you did show me your schedule, which I don’t recall, did it ever occur to you to ask how I feel or ask if we can do something together? Sometimes it’s not just about the words being said, it’s about your actions and desires.”

“Why are you being like this? I have busted my ass out trying to please you our whole marriage. I carefully see to my chores, spending time with the children and doing my job to the best of my ability. I even remember your mother’s birthday. What more do you want from me, Bella? Yes, I have visions for my life. Don’t you? I mean, did it ever occur to you why I always clean the house on Fridays or give you presents? It is my way of showing appreciation of you. And now you are bringing all this up just because I booked a trip with my buddies to Seattle. If you only knew how many times I’ve thought to end things with you, but I didn’t, I stayed.”

A silence succumbed the air for a few seconds. Andrea smiled when acknowledging John’s ability to express himself convincingly yet humbly. She couldn’t yet determine if it was a tactic or a genuine approach.

“You are just diverting now. Trying to dismiss the premise of the argument. You are not with me John! Great, you vacuum and bring me scarfs and flowers but I want you with me. Spending time with me, prioritizing me. I have never asked for a spotless house. It is just like you to try to turn this towards me when we both know the root cause of this. You are being condescending in the subtle way only you are capable of. If you really wanted to leave, why didn’t you?”

Andrea let out a deep sigh and rolled her eyes in loathing. The couple, clearly from America, wasn’t going to mend this. She thought the man was egoistic and stiff. It was obvious he didn’t understand the problem and tried to win the argument with facts and examples. They were not on the same page regarding the core of the problem. She retreated to the bathroom. Heavy feet and a stiff back signaled her mental state. She undressed, leaving the clothes on the floor, creating a dark mark in the surrounding tile whiteness.

The water on her body was a blessing. Not only did it cancel out the noise of the arguing, it offered a brief break from everything around her. However, Andrea felt restless and anxious. This was not the start of the mindful weekend she had imagined. The idea was to get over the past, not get reminded of it. While in

the spirit of unwanted recollection, Andrea turned the water to cold. Soon she started to hyperventilate in order to cope with the temperature. A method she hadn't used in a long time. The black ice entered her mind through the spine, the pain a blessing.

After a few minutes Andrea's fingers started to tingle and she noticed her mind slowly began to clear up. She observed her naked body in the large mirror. Following the rhythm of the breath she closed her eyes and saw them, Julien and herself, eyes locked in.

They had been at a house warming dinner with two other couples. The newly moved in hosts had served, in Andrea's taste, a delicious yet much too lavish three-course meal. The wine had been put out and the trivia game had begun. Julien and Andrea hadn't been in the same team and when Andrea and her teammate, Lucas, had passed on "What is the basic connotation of The Fermi Paradox", Julien couldn't keep his mouth shut.

"Are you serious!? And you're supposed to be the daughter of a renowned professor emeritus of Astronomy."

There was laughter around the table but Andrea was not entertained.

"Julien, give it a rest. Not everyone cares like you do about science and other kinds of trivia, your only use for it is in these silly games anyways. Next question."

"Yes, my factual knowledge has taken me nowhere, being a burden actually, in being a policy adviser for regional trade in the Coalition." Again more laughs around the table. "But how can you not know this? And a few questions ago Lucas saved you when you were blank to the capital of Rhodesia. I'm trying not to be condescending, but it's quite amusing. I should cancel our joint news account since you obviously never use it."

Julien laughed at his own joke but none of the others joined in this time. There was a tension in the room, originating from Andrea's eyes. Julien, who was now holding his fifth glass of Tempranillo, felt it, but carried on anyway.

"So you don't care about science?"

"No, not like you, not like dad."

"Ok, fair enough. We are different. But what do you care about Andrea? What do you find important, what have you learned in your life, what have you done?"

"I have lived my life!"

Andrea stood up and the others exchanged looks, one of them taking a biscuits to have some kind of shield to this awkward situation as Andrea continued.

“I have enjoyed myself. I have read books and forgotten every word. I have kissed boys. Danced with friends. Laughed with my mother. Ditching school to go trailrunning. I have travelled and slept in on weekends. I have lived my life, Julien. Everything is not about knowledge and what you can show for it. When you are living, actually living, you don’t care about making it a memory, you just live. And when living, you don’t give a damn about the Fermi Paradox.”

She had confidently walked out and taken a cab home to their apartment. Normally Andrea paid attention to detail everywhere she went, in people’s faces, paintings on walls, colors of the flower in a window. But from this occasion she didn’t recall any. She could only see emptiness and his eyes. Like someone just had stolen the cornerstone of her being, creating a void containing not so much as a glimpse of energy to start over.

He had apologized many times, and cried many times, and Andrea knew he didn’t mean to hurt her. He was regretting his behavior. They usually had a rough tone towards each other and it wasn’t all fair of her to get that upset. He was actually the more emotional and gentle one. But there was still something Andrea couldn’t let go of. In that moment they had lost something, or maybe they never had it and now it created a space between them. After that night Andrea had decided she wanted to leave him, to file for divorce, but she hadn’t. It had been Julien who broke it up. Andrea didn’t know why she was hesitant, but she just couldn’t tell him she wanted to leave him. The day Julien, sitting on the couch, told her he wanted a divorce, Andrea went over the edge and had been falling ever since.

In the bathroom Andrea turned off the water and made her way out of the shower. Feeling numb she started blowing her hair. Her head clear after the cold therapy albeit not in peace. She understood she wasn’t over Julien and couldn’t just have a weekend to start over. When her hair was dry she walked to the closet. Her lean figure shining with vigor against the dark wooden doors. She gently put on underwear and a pair of stockings and stood still to choose her outfit. With the stroke of her hand she felt the textiles of the clothes. She discarded the thought of sleep and moved on from the night robe. Her choice fell on a tight shirtless cream dress. It was casual enough for a night by herself yet nice enough if she decided to go down to the bar. She did not bother to make another braid, instead she let her hair be free.

Andrea opened the glass door and walked out onto the balcony. A brisk wind captured her, making her hair dance. Even after the overtaking, she had kept her long hair, despite the contemporary fashion to wear it short. It was a tribute to her mother whom Andrea missed every second of being alive. Maria Wagner was a rock and the definition of self-confidence. She had been full of life and dedicated most of her time to troubled children, ironically neglecting her own child while doing so. Andrea’s parents were each other’s counterparts where Maria always stated her mind and wanted to work things out whilst the father didn’t utter an unnecessary word. And while the father had his adamant moral principles Maria had no objections to break the rules whatsoever, as long as it was justified. Andrea would never forget when Maria’s mother-in-law had complained on the unusually large slices of onion in the lamb-stew during a Sunday dinner. Maria, without so much as a blink, said “I’ve done it *Le Répugnante*, you know, as the

French”. Andrea’s grandmother nodded in agreement to hide her lack of knowledge in the finer French cooking. Later that evening Maria whispered to Andrea “remember, some people deserves to be lied to, just don’t make it too often, like your mother”. They laughed together. It was Andrea’s favorite sound in the world. Seeing her mother joyful gave her an inner soothing difficult to explain. Andrea had always felt it was what it was all about. The purpose of life, of her life. To make her mother happy.

Andrea rubbed a finger on the balcony railing. The metal was rough and as she increased the force her skin started to peel off. “They did the best they could”. A mantra Andrea had to repeat every now and again to herself when being confronted with her past.

“I want to live my life”, the man screamed in the room next door.

Then silence, for what seemed to be an eternity.

The words echoed in Andrea’s head. They were hers. She had uttered those very same words to Julien.

While looking out into the last light of day and thinking about what she had just heard she saw herself. “Was I the inconsiderate one?” She thought. “Had I been egoistic, and as unjust as the man next door?” Andrea recalled her speech to her husband that rainy October night. Both had been exhausted, both in doubt. He had been sad, sitting on the grey couch and she had been angry, leaning on the mantelpiece while the fumes from the fading fire escaped the room. She forcefully reminded him of all her sacrifice and how he must be out of his mind not seeing the truth, laying blunt in front of them. From that moment he had said he wanted a divorce and then stopped talking. They had not had a full conversation since.

Andrea sat down, chilled to the core. “What was the truth?” she thought. “Maybe, Julien didn’t ignore the truth, maybe he had a different one?” She felt lost. A moment ago she loathed the man next door and now she appeared just like him.

A whistle blew from the town center. Three automated fishing boats left the harbor, their lanterns reflecting in shady waters. They would return in the morning with fish for the Apastaran people, delivered to their doors ensuring the health of the population, all according to the Plan of Tomorrow. A tune of melodic piano emerged from the speakers reminding Andrea of her best friend Anna. She had always been there for Andrea. Even when Andrea still went on about her failed marriage months after the divorce, Anna was there listening. One night they had been drinking at a worn down winery in town and after Andrea’s most recent retelling of the stupidity of Julien, Anna had suggested Andrea to give herself some well-earned pampering. Anna recommended a place up north in Murmansk. An exclusive establishment with treatments out of this world. “You will be able to move on”, Anna had said, “You cannot book it by yourself, but my doctor has some contacts and I can make it happen for you if you are interested?”

“Treatments out of this world” Andrea murmured to herself.

She suddenly stood up. Her pupils dilated. "It's part of it" she said. As if cursing the White Sea itself.

Andrea hurried inside and slammed the glass door shut. She could again hear the couple from the adjacent room. Only now Andrea knew. She had figured it out, not knowing to smile in triumph or hit the wall in rage. The couple weren't in the other room, they were in her head. There must be some new devilry tech invention this establishment, covered as an exclusive spa facility, is using on me. Maybe it was something in my coffee already on the journey here. Anna had planned this. To make Andrea realize her own fault in the divorce. Andrea stopped for a moment and sat down on the wooden floor. She took three deep breaths and closed her eyes, trying to figure everything out. Anna was her best friend and wanted to take care of her. Andrea knew this for certain and she had never once gone behind her back or lied to her. Although, if Anna had openly suggested some new hypnotic treatment to make her get an outside perspective and see her own blame she would probably have said no.

After a few moments in stillness Andrea saw the brilliance of it. She once again was impressed, yet still appalled, by the scientific miracles of The Republic. To get her, in just a couple of hours, to question her own behavior and scrutinize her part in the divorce. Her psychologist hadn't been able to come close in five months. Andrea started to think about what else she would be taken part in the days to come, if this was just an appetizer. She scratched her nails on her stockings and stared at the chandelier, as if she was trying to unhinge it and let it shatter on the parquet. Her heart started pounding in her chest, faster and faster. Thoughts came and went in an uncontrolled pace in her head. She questioned everything and most of all, herself. The anxiety rose and the muscles in her throat tightened. Andrea knew what it was and could yield the panic attack to a manageable degree. She focused on inhaling and exhaling, feeling the air move inside her.

"I'm losing my mind", Andrea whispered to herself.

She needed to confront someone she thought to herself as she got to her feet. She needed to let them know she was not going to stand this regardless of how amazing this treatment might be. Her integrity was being violated just being in this foul country and she could feel her mother's voice spoken through her. Yet, she stood still.

The woman next door started to cry. The sound broke the silence as well as Andrea's hesitancy.

She grabbed her platinum key card and walked out her door. The corridor was calmly lit with superficial lanterns, creating mysterious shadows across the murky oak panels. She walked to the door next to hers. She banged on it and waited. A blond woman with a long blue robe opened the door. She had black marks under her watery eyes and looked confused.

"Who are you" She managed to ask Andrea.

Behind her Andrea could see a man sitting in an armchair with his head in his hands.

“I’m sorry, but if it’s not too much trouble, would you mind keep it down just a little, thank you.” Andrea said while turning away but after a few steps she walked back. “...and I’m sorry.”

The woman with the blue robe nodded and tried her best to show some trace of a smile before closing her door.

Andrea Wagner looked down in embarrassment as she opened her door, number 114, with her platinum. As she walked in she was reminded of the concierge’s words and mumbled “the treatments will start tomorrow” and made her way to another episode of groping in the cave that was her psychological state. All she could think of was if she should call Him as she poured herself another glass of the vintage port.