

A HAPPY MAN

by
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Based on A HAPPY MAN by Anton Chekhov

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INT. TRAIN. SMALL DINING CAR - DAY

JOHN, (38) sporting a disheveled tuxedo with a drooping boutonnière, stumbles through the door, then weaves his way the length of the car, clutching at tables as he goes.

JOHN
(muttering)
Wrong. Wrong. All wrong.

PETER, (early 40s), and IRINA, (30) look up from their meal to watch him.

Peter stands up.

PETER
John! My old friend, John! Where do you hail from?

John peers at Peter for a moment and approaches his table.

JOHN
Is that you, Peter? Oh, the station, just the station.

PETER
Join us. Have a seat, man.

John shakes his head sharply.

JOHN
Can't do it. Cannot do it. Fact is, I'm lost. I have to find my way.

John sways and Irina reaches out and catches his arm. She smiles at him and nudges a chair towards him.

IRINA
Why don't you sit down and tell us all about it?

John sits down heavily in the chair.

JOHN
It's odd. Isn't it odd? It's a good day. A very good day. A great day. I am the happiest of fellows.

PETER
(smiling at his inebriated friend)
I can see that. You look happy - giddy, if I might say.

JOHN

Happy! Yes, that's the trouble. Happy day. Best happy day. Happy hour. Best of happy hour day.

Peter and Irina share glances.

PETER

Where are you headed?

JOHN

Heaven! Absolutely to heaven. Didn't I say, "best happy day"? I got married today.

IRINA

That's wonderful. I wish you every happiness.

PETER

That's amazing. And your bride?

JOHN

She's here. We came right to the train. I just spotted my friend Viktor in the bar at the station as we hurried past. After we got settled in our compartment, I rushed back to tell him the good news.

John sits up straight and his eyes light up.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Happy toast. I mean, happy hour. Get one free. Got two free. Viktor bought four free. So happy. Slammed them back and rushed to jump on the train. I am the happiest man.

PETER

It sounds great. What are your plans now? Are you on your honeymoon?

JOHN

Got married in Morro Bay. Wife wanted to take the scenic 101 route up the coast. Meeting her father to see my new office. He's taking me into the business.

John puffs out his chest proudly.

We have a little condo waiting. A gift from my new F-I-L. I am happy! Beautiful bride. Great job. We create our own happiness, you know. I will be happy, so I am. Ridiculously happy.

John waggles his head and emits a chuckle of delight.

Peter and Irina laugh along with John's obvious joy.

PETER

So, we create our own happiness, do we? Is that a drinking happiness or a wedding happiness?

JOHN

It's nature's way. You reach a certain age and nature nudges you to fall in love. You fall in love. You get married. Marriage is happiness. Drinking is happiness. The Scriptures say that wine makes the heart glad. Jesus followed a perfectly lovely wedding with the best wine ever. In vino veritas. I create my own happiness.

John looks over and winks at Irina.

JOHN (CONT'D)

You should get married, Peter. Choose happiness. Take your fate into your own hands. Be a creator and make joy your own. It is your choice and nothing can stop it. Look at me. I am the epitome of happiness.

PETER

Well, what if one wants to create it but something bad happens? A tragedy, for instance. What if the train crashes?

JOHN

Nonsense. There is no reason for it to. I am not going to leave the happiness I myself created to dwell on something as menial as a train accident. I am perfectly joyful.

A frown sweeps across his face.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Except for losing my bride, of course. I popped her into our compartment as neat as wax. The next thing you know - I ran back to see Victor, you know - and now I simply cannot find our compartment. I have been up and down the train, sticking my head into perfect stranger's compartments, trying to find her.

John looks down at his hands, folded together on the table. His face is serious for a moment.

Irina pats John's hands sympathetically.

John's eyes light up and he throws his head up with a big grin.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Enough with the philosophy! There's no use for it, I tell you. Who cares if 1000 angels dancing on the head of a pin will notice if they get into a train wreck or not? Ignore all that and enjoy happiness. That's my philosophy.

PETER

Well, that makes a kind of sense, I suppose. So, where in Los Angeles is your new office?

JOHN

No, no, not in L.A.. I am in San Francisco, near the Palace of Fine Arts. A wonderful office. Beautiful office.

PETER

But we're not going to San Francisco. This is the Highway 101 Express to L.A..

There followed a moment of silence.

JOHN

I can't... I don't...

John moans and drops his head in his hands. He pushes his chair away from the table and stands up unsteadily.

JOHN (CONT'D)

(his voice rising)

But,--- my wife. My job. Our new condo.

John begins pacing in the small room, tears rolling down his face.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I'm such an idiot. My beautiful bride.
She will never forgive me. I am so
unhappy. I am the creator of the idiocy
of unhappiness.

Peter and Irina watch him sadly. Then, Peter SNAPS his
fingers.

PETER

I got it! Let's call the northbound train
and tell them to go through the train and
locate a Mrs. John Alexander.

Irina quickly starts scrolling in her cell phone to look
up the number.

John continues to weep.

JOHN

(moaning)

My new Dad is going to think I'm a
buffoon. A total numbskull! He was going
to meet the train.

John wipes away his tears, and straightens the chair with
shaking hands. He sinks down at the table.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I am an un-happy man! What am I to do?
What am I to do?

Irina pats John's hands again.

IRINA

It's okay. I am sure it will be okay.
Remember your happiness. It lies ahead.
You can get a return ticket when we
arrive in Los Angeles. Look! We are
almost to Santa Barbara now.

JOHN

(wailing)

Los Angeles! I will be hours and hours
behind.

Peter bolts upright.

PETER

Santa Barbara! John, our old sargeant's
got a private plane here.

Peter pushes his plate to the side. He jumps up and
throws some bills on the table.

John and Irina stare at him with open mouths.

PETER (CONT'D)

C'mon! We have three minutes to get off the train. Sarge can get you there before your wife's line even pulls up in the station.

John leaps up and embraces his friend.

JOHN

You are the best of friends! I am the happiest man!

John and Irina laugh and John joins in. The three rush out the door, with John pausing briefly to slug down the contents from Irina's abandoned wine glass.

JOHN (CONT'D)

In vino veritas. I am so happy.

THE END