



A WALK IN AMNESIA

That morning my wife and I said our usual goodbyes.

She left her second cup of tea, and she followed me to the front door. She did this every day. She took from my coat a hair which was not there, and she told me to be careful. She always did this. I closed the door, and she went back to her tea.

I am a lawyer and I work very hard. My friend, Doctor Volney, told me not to work so hard. 'You'll be ill,' he said. 'A lot of people who work too hard get very tired, and suddenly they forget who they are. They can't remember anything. It's called amnesia. You need a change and a rest.'

'But I do rest,' I replied. 'On Thursday nights my wife and I play a game of cards, and on Sundays she reads me her weekly letter from her mother.'

That morning, when I was walking to work, I thought about Doctor Volney's words. I was feeling very well, and pleased with life.

When I woke up, I was on a train and feeling very uncomfortable after a long sleep. I sat back in my seat and I tried to think. After a long time, I said to myself, 'I must have a name!' I looked in my pockets. No letter. No papers. Nothing with my name on. But I found three thousand dollars. 'I must be someone,' I thought.

The train was crowded with men who were all very friendly. One of them came and sat next to me. 'Hi! My name's R.P. Bolder - Bolder and Son, from Missouri. You're going to the meeting in New York, of course? What's your name?'

I had to reply to him, so I said quickly, 'Edward Pinkhammer from Cornopolis, Kansas.'

He was reading a newspaper, but every few minutes he looked up from it, to talk to me. I understood from his conversation that he was a druggist, and he thought that I was a druggist, too.

'Are all these men druggists?' I asked.

'Yes, they are,' he answered. 'Like us, they're all going to the yearly meeting in New York.'

After a time, he held out his newspaper to me. 'Look at that,' he said. 'Here's another of those men who run away and then say that they have forgotten who they are. A man gets tired of his business and his family, and he wants to have a good time. He goes away somewhere and when they find him, he says that he doesn't know who he is, and that he can't remember anything.'

I took the paper and read this:

Denver, June 12th

Elwyn C. Bellford, an important lawyer in the town, left home three days ago and has not come back. Just before he left, he took out a lot of money from his bank. Nobody has seen him since that day. He is a quiet man who enjoys his work and is happily married. But Mr Bellford works very hard, and it is possible that he has amnesia.

'But sometimes people do forget who they are, Mr Bolder,' I said.

'Oh, come on!' Mr Bolder answered. 'It's not true, you know! These men just want something more exciting in their lives - another woman, perhaps. Something different.'

We arrived in New York at about ten o'clock at night. I took a taxi to a hotel, and I wrote the name, 'Edward Pinkhammer', in the hotel book. Suddenly I felt wild and happy - I was free. A man without a name can do anything.

The young man behind the desk at the hotel looked at me a little strangely. I had no suitcase.

'I'm here for the Druggists' Meeting,' I said. 'My suitcase is lost.' I took out some money and gave it to him.

The next day I bought a suitcase and some clothes and I began to live the life of Edward Pinkhammer. I didn't try to remember who or what I was.

The next few days in Manhattan were wonderful - the theatres, the gardens, the music, the restaurants, the night life, the beautiful girls. And during this time I learned something very important - if you want to be happy, you must be free.

Sometimes I went to quiet, expensive restaurants with soft music. Sometimes I went on the river in boats full of noisy young men and their girlfriends. And then there was Broadway, with its theatres and bright lights.

One afternoon I was going back into my hotel when a fat man came and stood in front of me.

'Hello, Bellford!' he cried loudly. 'What are you doing in New York? Is Mrs B. with you?'

'I'm sorry, but you're making a mistake, sir,' I said coldly. 'My name is Pinkhammer. Please excuse me.'

The man moved away, in surprise, and I walked over to the desk. Behind me, the man said something about a telephone.

'Give me my bill,' I said to the man behind the desk, 'and bring down my suitcase in half an hour.'

That afternoon I moved to a quiet little hotel on Fifth Avenue.

One afternoon, in one of my favourite restaurants on Broadway, I was going to my table when somebody pulled my arm.

'Mr Bedford,' a sweet voice cried.

I turned quickly and saw a woman who was sitting alone. She was about thirty and she had very beautiful eyes.

'How can you walk past me like that?' she said. 'Didn't you know me?'

I sat down at her table. Her hair was a beautiful red- gold colour.

'Are you sure you know me?' I asked.

'No.' She smiled. 'I never really knew you.'

'Well, my name is Edward Pinkhammer,' I said, 'and I'm from Kansas.'

'So, you haven't brought Mrs Bellford with you, then,' she said, and she laughed. 'You haven't changed much in fifteen years, Elwyn.'

Her wonderful eyes looked carefully at my face.

'No,' she said quietly, 'you haven't forgotten. I told you that you could never forget.'

'I'm sorry,' I answered, 'but that's the trouble. I have forgotten. I've forgotten everything.'

She laughed. 'Did you know that I married six months after you did? It was in all the newspapers.' She was silent for a minute. Then she looked up at me again. 'Tell me one thing, Elwyn,' she said softly. 'Since that night fifteen years ago, can you touch, smell, or look at white roses - and not think of me?'

'I can only say that I don't remember any of this,' I said carefully. 'I'm very sorry.' I tried to look away from her.

She smiled and stood up to leave. Then she held out her hand to me, and I took it for a second. 'Oh yes, you remember,' she said, with a sweet, unhappy smile.

'Goodbye, Elwyn Bellford.'

That night I went to the theatre and when I returned to my hotel, a quiet man in dark clothes was waiting for me.

'Mr Pinkhammer,' he said, 'can I speak with you for a minute? There's a room here.'

I followed him into a small room. A man and a woman were there. The woman was still beautiful, but her face was unhappy and tired. I liked everything about her. The man, who was about forty, came to meet me.

'Bellford,' he said, 'I'm happy to see you again. I told you that you were working too hard. Now you can come home with us. You'll soon be ad right.'

'My name', I said, 'is Edward Pinkhammer. I've never seen you before in my life.'

The woman cried out, 'Oh, Elwyn! Elwyn! I'm your wife!' She put her arms around me, but I pushed them away.

'Oh, Doctor Volney! What is the matter with him?' the woman cried.

'Go to your room,' the doctor said to her. 'He'll soon be wed again.'

The woman left, and so did the man in the dark clothes. The man who was a doctor turned to me and said quietly, 'Listen. Your name is not Edward Pinkhammer.'

'I know that,' I replied, 'but a man must have a name. Why not Pinkhammer?'

'Your name', the doctor said, 'is Elwyn Bellford. You are one of the best lawyers in Denver - and that woman is your wife.'

'She's a very fine woman,' I said, after a minute. 'I love the colour of her hair.'

'She's a very good wife,' the doctor replied. 'When you left two weeks ago, she was very unhappy. Then we had a telephone call from a man who

saw you in a hotel here.'

'I think I remember him,' I said. 'He called me "Bellford". Excuse me, but who are you?'

'I'm Bobby Volney. I've been your friend for twenty years, and your doctor for fifteen years. Elwyn, try to remember.'

'You say you're a doctor,' I said. 'How can I get better? Does amnesia go slowly or suddenly?'

'Sometimes slowly. Sometimes suddenly.'

'Will you help me, Doctor Volney?' I asked.

'Old friend,' he said, 'I'll do everything possible.'

'Very well. And if you're my doctor, you can't tell anybody what I say.'

'Of course not,' Doctor Volney answered.

I stood up. There were some white roses on the table. I went over to the table, picked up the roses and threw them far out of the window. Then I sat down again.

'I think it will be best, Bobby,' I said, 'to get better suddenly. I'm a little tired of it all now. Go and bring my wife Marian in now. But, oh, Doctor,' I said with a happy smile. 'Oh, my good old friend - it was wonderful!'

- THE END -

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