

TICKETS



In 1906, on an early autumn morning, a 21 year old man awoke with an ugly groan as he remembered that today he would be leaving New York for London. He had completed his apprenticeship and was eager to return home and start his new life. All of a sudden he heard a knock at the door. The manager of his boarding house began speaking loudly, “Mr. Carlo J. Perkins. If I’m not mistaken your rent was due exactly 2 months, 1 week, 3 days, 4 hours and 22 minutes ago.”

“I’ll be there in a minute. I’m trying to pack and get dressed and I’ll probably need to...”. But as he began to speak, Carlo was interrupted by the loud man.

“You see my fellow gentleman, your failures have caused Mr. Burkley, the owner of this fine building, a lot of *stress* and *anger*. I demand you pay your rent by the end of the day!”. Carlo heard the man’s feet turn and go down the creaky stairs. The boarding house was not fine. It was dark, damp and old or *dank* as Carlo described it his letters home. Carlo left out the part about the rats that roamed the place.

Carlo knew he couldn’t pay his rent. It was \$20 overdue and he didn’t have that much money. When he was done packing his meager belongings, he opened the window and threw out his old trunk. Carlo nodded to no one in particular and was ready to go. He sat on the windowsill for a moment and then slowly slid down the fire escape, calmly landing on his feet on the street below. He saw a lovely girl looking at him strangely. He tipped his hat to her and began to walk away when the girl said, “Excuse me kind sir. My name is Ethel, I couldn’t help overhearing you yesterday when you mentioned to your friend that you were traveling to London today. I...uh...was...er...uh wondering if I could...um...travel with you. You see I used to live there, but my family allowed me to come to New York to work...so...”. Her voice seemed to trail off into a different world. Carlo thought the request strange and was pondering whether Ethel was a liar or criminal or just slightly off, but that train of thought died once he looked into her sweet, lively, brown eyes and saw her electric smile. Carlo seemed to feel trust right away, which was odd. He stood there for several minutes saying nothing.

Finally, Ethel raised a single eyebrow and said, "Sir, I don't mean to be rude, but you've been day dreaming for a long while and I do so need your answer."

Carlo, surprised at the words that came out of his own mouth, replied, "My name is Carlo, not sir, and I will grant your request. Am I right to suppose you already have a passenger liner ticket?"

"Well, I haven't got a ticket, exactly", Ethel said staring at her feet. Carlo shot her a look of alarm, since they were now both in danger of missing the boat. "Not to worry, dear Carlo, you see I will make mine on a typewriter, lickety-split".

"And just where do you propose to find a typewriter handy?", Carlo asked with an impatient tone. Ethel smiled and started to run. Inexplicably, Carlo followed. He didn't bother to ask where they were going. Finally, a red-cheeked Ethel abruptly stopped and pointed to a sign hanging from a small storefront. The sign read, *'Ron's Cafe. Home of the Best Roast Beef Sandwich in New York. Family Owned Since 1852.'* Inside it smelled delicious. Carlo tried not to stare at the odd assortment of customers, including a man who was sucking on his dentures while reading his newspaper. Ethel walked directly up to a large round man who was working behind the counter. He looked up at her with bright eyes and a warm smile. "Hello Uncle Ron. May we use your typewriter?", she said casually.

"It's in the back, dearie." Uncle Ron said. As Carlo followed Ethel back, he realized he was starving. He hadn't eaten for nearly two days since he'd been saving all his money to pay his rent. He felt a strong pang of guilt. Since he'd escaped out the window without paying, it now seemed he'd starved himself for nothing. He asked Uncle Ron the price of a piece of buttered toast, since that was all he could afford, and dreamed of the orange marmalade his mother used to make.

"We've got coffee, tea and roast beef, and I can definitely supply you with a toothpick.", said Uncle Ron with a hearty laugh, his hands on his belly.

Just then Ethel came into the room triumphantly waving a document which looked nearly identical to Carlo's ticket!

"Where on earth are you two going?", Uncle Ron asked.

"To London!", they exclaimed at the same time.

“It’s a long way from New York to London. You both travel safely and take care of each other. Ethel, it will be so wonderful for you to be reunited with your family. After all, I’ve been looking out for ya’ for many years and I will surely miss you as if you were my own daughter”. With a tear in his eye and a heavy heart, Uncle Ron bundled Ethel into a tight bear hug, lifting her off her feet.

“It’s time to go”, yelled Carlo. Carlo grabbed Ethel’s hand and the two began to rush out of the shop. As they passed, Uncle Ron threw them a brown paper bag filled with two of his best roast beef sandwiches.

Only then did Carlo realize he’d forgotten his favorite cap. His mother had made it for him. Carlo vividly remembered ripping off the wrapping paper, finding the blue felt cap inside, and his mother saying, *‘My dearest, darling Carlo, I want you to remember that wherever you go and whatever you do I am always with you as long as you have it’*. He told his mother he was going to be an explorer and would see the world with the hat on his head. His eyes teared up as he remembered his love of the old worn hat. He decided to return to the boarding house even if it meant missing the boat to London. He had lost his mother to yellow fever, and he wasn’t about to lose his hat!

Carlo explained it all to Ethel as quickly as he could. He left his trunk at her feet, frantically threw his jacket and his ticket at her and shot off like a bullet. As he ran, Carlo’s face was cold and wet, and his lungs were hurting. The wind was whipping his eyes. He ran by the children playing on the street and realized his shoes were painfully rubbing against the backs of his heels. He stopped, ripped off his socks and shoes, and ran the rest of the way barefoot.

In the distance, the boat sounded its horn. It was about to leave the dock. Ethel was frantic. She desperately looked around for Carlo. She knew she couldn’t wait any longer. Realizing that Carlo would miss the boat, she left his coat and trunk and grabbed his ticket. She was worried the crew would know her ticket was phony and then neither of them would be allowed to travel. She walked slowly onto the boat, her head hanging, and thought back to the telegram she had received from her mother.

“Ethel Alice Goldstein, you must leave New York at once my dear. Your father is not well. We need your help in caring for him. Your father’s sickness is costing us a fortune! I am your mother and you would do well not to forget that!”

Mrs. Meredith Alice Goldstein

Ethel thought back to the last trip she had made with her mother, when she had first come to New York.

“Oh mamma I’m so tired may I go back to sleep?” Ethel had said.

In a velvet sweet voice her mother replied, *“My dearest Ethel you may not even rest a finger for a single second longer. We will be late for our train that will take us to the boat dock. So up you go my little honey bun. We haven’t got all day for you to dilly dally!”* Ethel packed her favorite pink and yellow dress in her trunk. Ethel would miss many things about London, her family, her friends, her dog, Sammy, but she was not going to miss her high school teacher, Mrs. Elle Schmidt, or the dunce cap she made Ethel wear when she was in 10th grade for raising her hand and asking what time Mathematics would finally end. She was excited to be going to America to live with her Uncle Ron and work in his cafe, but she was also nervous and little scared..

Carlo ran back to where he was sure Ethel had been standing. He rubbed his face and eyes. He saw his coat and trunk, but no Ethel and no passenger liner. He searched his coat. His ticket was gone. He had no money to buy another. His anger at Ethel boiled over. Had she planned this all along? But, she couldn’t have, she couldn’t have known he would need to return for his beloved hat. Since he knew he couldn’t return to the boarding house, he took a job at the boat dock making \$2 a day. He slept in a shelter and ate at the church soup kitchen. After saving his first \$20 dollars, he returned to the boarding house and paid his long past due rent. He continued working at the dock for anyone who would hire him. He unloaded boats, scrubbed boat decks, and sold fish at the pier. He often thought of Ethel and over time his anger began to fade. He remembered her lovely eyes and beautiful smile. He dreamed of her when he slept.

After many long hard months, Carlo had saved enough money to buy a new passenger liner ticket to London. As he boarded the boat he felt so proud! He had paid all of his bills and left America knowing he was a good person. When the ship finally arrived in London, he began to lug his old trunk, with his coat draped over his arm and his blue cap on his head. Suddenly, he felt a warm embrace as a woman wrapped her arms around him and began to cry. Feeling sorry for her, he gently held her. When the woman took a step back, Carlo realized that it was no stranger, it was Ethel. Carlo’s blue eyes crackled with anger as his mother’s had when Carlo misbehaved as a child. Ethel started to speak but Carlo interrupted, “Ethel, how could you? I trusted you? Because of what you did, I had to work my fingers to the bone”.

“Carlo, I’m so ashamed of myself. My father was ill, and I felt I had no choice. I realize now there is always a choice and I made the wrong one. I know you are angry and you have every right to be but... every morning for the past 6 months I have returned to this pier praying you would walk off one of the ships. Please let me make it up to you. I want you to come and stay with me and my family”.

Just then a whole group of Ethel-looking people stepped forward. All of the adults eagerly shook Carlo’s hand or simply said “*How do you do?*”. The children greeted him sweetly with hugs, all except a small little girl, approximately 2 years old who, who grabbed Carlo and wrapped herself around his leg. She wore an orange jumper, had just a bit of hair, and laughed with a toothless smile. Carlo felt so awkward at all the attention that his face and ears went pink. Finally, Ethel’s mother pried the child off Carlo and collected the remaining children. Just then Ethel’s father stepped forward looking strong and healthy. He embraced Carlo and thanked him for helping his daughter get home. He explained that Ethel had helped to nurse him back to health and earned enough money to keep the family together through his long illness.

Carlo felt his remaining anger melt away for good.

Ethel and Carlo stared into each other’s eyes and both began to cry. They kissed, hugged and walked together in the rain, arm in arm with Ethel apologizing every step of the way. Without warning, Carlo stopped, got on one knee and removed his blue hat. “Ethel, I feel as though we have been on a very long journey, some of it together and some of it apart. But we are together now and I want us to stay that way. I love you. That’s right...I said it...I love you. Will you marry me?”.

Ethel put her hand on her mouth and squealed, “Yes...yes...yes...of course...I feel the exact same way!”.

As they kissed, neither Carlo, nor Ethel, ever felt happier. In two months time they found themselves in a church getting married, and in another year, they had the first of their seven children, a little girl named Grace.

“Well, that’s how I met your mother, but now it’s time for you to go to sleep.” As he tucked 10 year old Grace into bed, he felt hungry. Carlo stuck his head into the kitchen doorway and announced, “Ethel, I need a roast beef sandwich”. He kissed Ethel on the cheek, put on his blue cap and walked to the corner deli.

The End!