

# *The Big Swim*

*...Brendan Kelly*

*I knew Elisabetta was in love with me; I could tell by the way she completely ignored me.*

I WAS TWENTY ONE YEARS OLD, LIVING IN MILAN, Italy and being the hopeless romantic that I always was and still inescapably am. After my first week in the city I saw and fell in love with the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. Her name was Elisabetta and she worked in the women's division of the agency I was with, Ricardo Guy. Elisabetta was about my age but mature beyond her years. She had long dirty-blonde hair, dark-olive skin, and deep green eyes. She was about five-foot-seven and dressed impeccably conservative.

She was small on top and thick on the bottom—the way Michaelangelo always painted women. Although very striking from a distance, as you approached her she actually resembled more of a Picasso with her eyes a bit close together, a broken nose and a full lipped, droopy mouth with spaces between her front teeth. To me she was perfect. I wanted her to be my queen until the end of time. I knew she was in love with me, too. I could tell by the way she completely ignored me. I think it took me weeks to capture a smile from her, which catapulted my heart into a distant stratosphere. Time went on and one day I found the courage to speak to her and the few words which I got in return could have kept my avariciousness charged for months.

I don't remember how it all came about, but some of the models were getting together with some of the agents and we were all going to a local fair in town. I asked my buddy Marco, an agent from the women's division, to invite my beautiful Elisabetta. I think I held my breath for the rest of the day waiting to see if she'd come. That night was perfect. She was there, I was there. We were in a group but we were alone. She was a treasure and was to be treated as such. I could think of nothing but speaking with her quietly, maybe being close enough to feel her skin brush against mine, breathing the same air as her and possibly having our lips softly come together for a perfect kiss. The night came to an end and our hands had found each other while

we were walking. That was enough for me. The butterflies could find no place to land in my stomach. We said good night and she kissed on each cheek.

This was not the same kiss she gave to the others who were with us that night. She kissed me better than them. I felt the side of her mouth touch the side of mine. That was perfect. Pure. I was satisfied. Right before she left with some of the others, she told me she would be in Portofino all weekend. She asked me to come and see her. She said she'd be there waiting. "Yes, Elisabetta," I swore to myself, "I will come and see you."

For the rest of the night I was on a mission to find a ride in the morning to the seaside. I fished around at the pubs, combed the discos, and came up empty. Finally, as the night wore thin I went home in despair—no ride, no Elisabetta. I slept two hours, woke up, and started phoning taxis, checking out trains, and buses. My roommate's door opened and out came his Swedish girlfriend named Corina. She said hello as she headed out the door and I asked where she was going at such an early hour. She said she and her friend were renting a car and going to Santa Margarita--just a port away from my rendezvous. *Pay dirt!*

Being a gentleman and an experienced driver through the mountains to the seashore, I offered my services to do the driving, even though I had never been to this place. They accepted my offer and we were off. They had the map, the credit card, and the driver's license for the rental. Behind the wheel, I was set for a wild ride with herds of Italian weekend race car drivers headed to the same destination. They were in cars big and small. They were on speed bikes, dirt bikes, and scooters. Every turn was competitive, every straight away was a death race. It was hectic. I hadn't driven in years, but after a three hour road trip from hell, we made it. Praise God!

Now, I was a port away from true love but, after the Swedes had witnessed my display of driving along with dozens of altercations, they were not going to lend me the car or let me drive again. I was a passenger from now on. That was okay. I was an accomplished swimmer. There were three things in life that I could do very well: box, tell a good joke, and lastly, I could swim like a fish. Portofino couldn't be more than two miles away. I could swim that! What I wasn't ready for was the boats (probably the same racers I battled on the road there), the jet skiers, the water skiers, the gasoline infested waters, the brutal current, and finally, the people pointing and laughing at me from their luxury boats for attempting such a foolish feat. It mattered not. My Elisabetta was my destination, and I was in unrelenting pursuit.

It took me well over an hour, but I made it. A friend of mine, Steve Tartalia, who is now a successful stunt man in Hollywood, was there in Portofino. He tells the story like this: “We were on the dock, smokin’ and drinkin’ up a good time. I looked out to the sea and barely saw these two arms slapping in the water as they rounded the mountain and entered the cove. I continued having a good time and every now and then would look up to see that set of arms getting closer and closer. Finally, they came up to the dock and out of the water emerged that Irish boxer guy, Brendan Kelly—in a speedo!” He welcomed me with a beer and I gladly accepted. Before I could answer any of his questions as to what the hell I was doing swimming to Portofino, I told him that I was in search of my love, and that time was of essence. I asked if he had seen the girl from the agency. He had not. I walked up and down the dock looking for her feverishly. I searched for an hour, but there was no Elisabetta. Now, after the unsuccessful search the night before, the Indie 500 race to get there, the big swim and to top it all, not finding what I had so earnestly sought after, I was tired and incapable of swimming back to the other port.

Luckily, another buddy of mine, Francesco, showed up and after hearing my tale of woe was kind enough to offer me passage. This, of course, meant on the back of his motorbike. Now, if I thought I got a hard time from the drivers on the way to the seaside or by the boaters during my swim, it was nothing compared to the heckling Italians who saw me riding on the back of that bike in my Speedo! He drove like a maniac and I held on for dear life with my legs held out as far as I could hold them so they wouldn’t get burned on the hot pipes. I made it back in time for my endless ride home with the Swedes driving half the speed I did. I said not one word. I got home and went to sleep and I don’t think I got out of bed until Monday.

On Monday, however, I got up and went to the agency right away. I wanted to know why Elisabetta hadn’t been there like she told me she would be. Was she sick, did something happen? I needed to know! I walked in and straight up to the women’s division and there she was looking beautiful as always. I approached her cordially and asked, “Elisabetta, I went to Portofino, but I didn’t see you. Why didn’t you go?” Looking at me sweetly, she said nonchalantly, “I changed my mind.”

I stood there a bit stunned at her admission that it could be that simple for her. And in a moment, something changed within me. I had so anticipated seeing her, had put so much effort into seeing her, and here she was prepared to give back so little. She smiled, went back to her

work and I thought to myself, she doesn't deserve to know what I did to be with her. So I didn't bother telling her all I had gone through to be with her.

I walked away from Elisabetta and never thought of her again the way I had thought of her before.

From time to time our paths did cross. And while I was cordial and said hello, and sometimes made small talk, I knew I would never—could never--give myself to her. She felt something was different and looked at me curiously now and then.

I stopped chasing after the Picasso and Michaelangelo women of the world. I vowed to save my love for someone who was a hopeless romantic, just like me—and who would go the distance to prove it!