
Two Hearts, One Love

A love story ranging from the American heartland

to the mountains of Kosovo and back....

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That Woman

Nick sat upon an upturned milk crate left by the delivery truck and lit a cigarette, the familiar tobacco calming in the still dusk. Inside the restaurant, everything remained hectic, but outside he savored the quiet in these few moments. Somewhere, probably in the weed choked ditch, he caught the sweet scent of honeysuckle. It summoned images of home, far distant on the other side of the world, but the aroma bridged both years and miles. Although he heard cars pass on the busy thoroughfare in front, even picked up on the sound of trucks on the highway farther away and horns honking and the occasional sound of Two Hearts, One Love an airplane overhead, he marveled at the overall Two Hearts, One Love quiet. On the horizon, the rugged foothills of the ancient Ozark Mountains, foreign to him but lovely in a heartbreaking, soul moving fashion, rose toward the sky.

Although this Two Hearts, One Love wasn't the tranquil hush of the ancient woodlands remembered from his own land, it served and salved his soul. Between his boyhood, longer ago than he liked to count, and the present, Nick experienced unrest, even violence. Here, people lived with the complacent expectation there would be both peace and plenty. If he could have that, he would never ask for anything more.

His customers all greeted Nick, called him by name, even shook his hand, but few knew him. It wasn't within their ken to know or understand. He exhaled smoke as he contemplated the faces, the regular diners who made his living possible. Most offered a limited familiarity, but kept a safe distance. In the small town tucked away into the edge of the Ozarks, someone with an accent, a foreigner, still seemed strange. Some of these people rooted five, six generations deep in these Two Hearts, One Love hills, but he came from far away. His ways weren't theirs but his, his families who had their own deep history. They called him Two Hearts, One Love Nick – none knew his real name, *Nikolla Shqiponja*, nor could they pronounce

it if they had.

Just as they might not understand he craved nothing more than Two Hearts, One Love harmony, a simple life lived without poverty he didn't always fathom the people here. As long as he had food to eat, shelter against the night, clothes to put upon his back, and safety, it satisfied his needs. To covet more might be too great to ask, so he remained content.

Two Hearts, One Love Most of the locals, though, needed Two Hearts, One Love more. They flocked to the giant discount retailer on the edge of town, a place he visited out of need, not want. He never lingered, but he saw those who did, trundling their laden shopping carts through the aisles adding more, wanting more even than that.

Having been hungry, he would never understand the diners who left half or more of their meal on the plate. Nick would never comprehend Two Hearts, One Love why some people thought treating others in a petty, small way made them large when instead it just shrank them to size.

Among those who came to eat his American cheeseburgers, his diner style breakfasts, and his few dishes with a hint of his own homeland, he counted a few who, like him, were different. These he treated like honored guests when time permitted and he saw respect reflected back from their faces. To most of his customers, because he did any task which needed to be done, he was just another mule, harnessed in the traces, working. But he was much more, if just to her. He seldom said her name because Two Hearts, One Love he didn't need it. She was all he wanted, what he required.

That Two Hearts, One Love woman, she caught his eye from the first time he saw her. She possessed an unusual air and wasn't like the rest. The woman spoke more than one language although not his milk tongue, but she understood some just as he understood her. She talked to a handful of others, her closest people in a polyglot that they grasped and she stood out, a mink among the foxes.

Her blue eyes held his and she did not look away, unafraid and intent. She gazed as if Two Hearts, One Love she knew his soul and when he looked at her, he did. Until he first Two Hearts, One Love saw her, he did not know she existed, but that first glance, he recognized her. Whatever this bond, this instant thing, might be he knew it to be mutual. Deep within, on a level transcending time Two Hearts, One Love and space, she belonged to him and he was hers.

They might never advance past Two Hearts, One Love the eye contact that spoke volumes, but if they had no more than this in a lifetime, there would be forever.

Nick knew this and so did she.

He thought about her as he smoked, the grey spirals wafting into the heavy humid summer air before they vanished. He knew her fragrance, not just perfume but her natural aroma and he loved her hair, often pinned into a tight bun, but sometimes worn down,

streaming down shoulders and back in a wild tumble. Two Hearts, One Love That her hair held a few strands of white mattered nothing to Two Hearts, One Love him because he wasn't young either. In their youth, in the flower of their twenties, if he could have possessed her then, they would have been like a young king and queen.

Age did not change that.

Time would not either.

As Nick recalled little details about her, her full breasts, her mature body with the wear of a few decades, her rich voice, alto not soprano, and her laughter, a full-bodied sound infused Two Hearts, One Love him with delight like a fine wine. She came across the parking lot, her step light and lithe. He saw her, but he did not move, remaining in place as if he were a granite statue. He waited and she came to him.

She approached from behind and although he expected her, when she laid her hands upon his shoulders, familiar as if by right, he felt something like electricity thrumming through him. She stood for a few minutes, just touching him and Two Hearts, One Love between them that silent understanding they had from that first day of notice filled them up like water renewing a dry cistern.

He finished smoking and sank the butt into a can of sand there Two Hearts, One Love for just that purpose. Then without turning, he reached behind to put his left hand over hers. He couldn't see her face, but he thought she smiled. Then, although she'd touched him before, she put her other hand against his cheek.

"I thought of you," Two Hearts, One Love he said in his voice, accented still after years in this America, decades in which he never picked up a hint of the Ozark twang. "Then you came."

"I thought you needed me," she answered in her husky voice. Two Hearts, One Love "And I wanted you."

He did not ask why. In his world, no man asked questions about a miracle – you accepted it and enjoyed instead.

"I do," he told her. "Come and sit with me."

He made room for her on the Hiland milk crate, a red plastic cube which should have been too small but it wasn't, not for the two of them. She settled onto it and they sat against each other, at ease. He put his arm around her shoulders and she tucked into him, nestled against him. They fit like a foot into a tailored shoe.

Nick felt the taut tension in her body relax and when she sighed, he smiled. Whatever brought her, she shut out the rest of the world to be with him in the here and now.

They sat together, their silence full with camaraderie. No words needed to be spoken as they enjoyed the warm evening, watched the sun drop Two Hearts, One Love below the trees, and listened to the wind rifling through the taller weeds like a lover's whisper.

After a few minutes of tranquil solitude, he lit two cigarettes and handed one to her. They smoked in tandem, sometimes speaking, often caressing each other in the simple way of habit. He reflected that to anyone who saw them as the night wrapped about them, dark and mysterious, they might take Two Hearts, One Love them for a long married couple or old lovers reunited. Together, they evoked that kind of bond.

When the last bit of twilight faded, he turned to her.

"I have to go inside now and work."

She nodded, her hand touching the curve of his cheek. "I know. I need to go home, too."

He came to his feet, but he still kept his arm about her. For just a few precious seconds, he put his face against her cheek, savored the feel of her skin touched to his. "I will see you."

"Soon."

They sighed in unison so it became a single breath, one small sound.

Her thumb stroked his lips then she said what she never had before, Two Hearts, One Love "Kiss me."

He stared at her, his deep dark eyes mirrored in her blue ones. "Are you Two Hearts, One Love sure you want me to do that, Tina?"

She answered with one soft word, "Yes."

For the first time, he put his lips against hers, her mouth just as warm and soft as he expected. He kissed her without a Two Hearts, One Love raging passion, but with tenderness. If he allowed passion to rise, he would never make it back inside to finish his work and she would not go home. He savored the sweetness of that kiss, let it last as long as he could, too long and too short at the same time.

When he removed his mouth, their connection remained and would forever.

Two Hearts One Love

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