Love, from San Marino

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## Love, from San Marino

A short story

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In memory of a small trip to San Marino

San Marino—it is a very small place. In fact, it is also a small country. Only taking up about sixty square kilometres, it is known as one of the smallest countries in the world. But even small countries may have some excitement attached to them. Tourism is flourishing on a daily basis, and many tourists stop by during their trip throughout Italy to have a beautiful view from Mount Titano, to shop for much cheaper items, souvenirs, perfumes, watches, swords, and the list goes on.

The Sammarinese, the residents of this microstate, get education, as well as employment, like usual. However, it's difficult to get it there because of the country's size. Still, some people prefer to have a nice, peaceful, worry-free life there—and they certainly got it. Clean air, beautiful views, are just a few reasons to want to become a resident there.

But I will spare you the details.

This love story begins at a small hall, just a couple of kilometres from the capital town. It was 7 o'clock in the evening, and the sun had already set.

"Finished with your performance, Martino?" A guy said at the entrance to the hall.

"Yes, it was a fun one, like always." Martino answered.

"You're really good with that guitar of yours, let me tell you!"

"Thanks. I appreciate your compliment."

"So where are you heading now?"

"I'll head to the store to buy some food. Then home, like always."

"Hmm, I see. Are you sure you're alright, though?"

"Yes, I'm fine. Thanks for your concern."

"Then, take care on your way home."

"It'll be fine. San Marino is small, after all."

Martino waved to him as he sat in his car and drove where he needed to go. Once he arrived home, he prepared his meal. An hour later, after finishing it up, he sat down and started to tune in his guitar and played a couple of songs for about half an hour before getting bored and setting it aside.

"I'm running out of songs to play... Actually, I need to consider making some songs of my own. It's not... *that* hard, is it? Well, whatever. I'm really tired. I'm going to bed."

The next day, having nothing else to do, Martino had breakfast and set off to downtown San Marino to check out some stores. While climbing towards Prima Torre, he noticed a stand being built a little further from the San Marino Cathedral, by a woman. She was trying to nail down all the planks on it, and was clearly out of breath, so Martino stepped closer and offered to help her.

Within an hour, the two finished building, as well as painting, the stand.

"Oh, thank you for your help," the woman thanked him, "this would've taken another day if I did it alone."

"I'm glad I could help. Who left you to do this on your own, anyway?"

"Actually, I was on my own from the moment I left my home up until now."

"So you're not from here?"

"No... but I wanted to visit it and I thought it would be a great opportunity for me to make a living. Many people told me San Marino is a... customs-free zone? I don't remember the term, but everything here is cheaper than in any European country."

Martino nodded in approval.

"Don't mind if I introduce myself. I'm Felicia, and I come from Palermo. Yes, the trip here was... *oh, so long.*"

"Martino... I'm Sammarinese."

Felicia looked at him with astonishment.

"No way! You are a resident of this cute little country?!"

"It's hard to believe, but yes. Well, maybe it's harder to believe I was born here, too."

"So you are Sammarinese, in the flesh?! You sure you weren't born in, like... Rimini or whatever? And then, the... the ambulance brought you here or somethin'?!"

"No... we have a hospital here, too. And, even though I wasn't initially aware of that, my ID does, in fact, prove it."

He took out his ID card and showed it to her.

"This looks awesome!!" She said lively.

"Calm down, it's just a piece of plastic I have to carry around."

"B-but, it's cool to actually talk to someone who's been here for a long time... right?!"

"Trust me... the only thing tourists want from this place is souvenirs. And food. Because who doesn't like food?"

"Can you guide me through your country? I would be honored to be guided by someone who knows his place!"

"Wait, you wanna see the whole country?" Martino chuckled. "Do you really want to? Most people come to see the capital. And we could go down the road but don't expect anything historical. That's mostly what the capital is about."

"We can still go, I don't mind!" Felicia said, smiling at him.

Martino looked around.

"Then... I should head home to put some better clothes on."

"Don't!"

"Why not?"

"I think you're fine just the way you are. Plus, you're one cute guy!" Martino looked away from her.

"I'm not cute."

"Oh quiet you, you are cute, period! Now, how are we gonna get down..."

"Why don't we start from the top? We are close to it so it would only be natural to start from there."

"I'll be in your care, then, Mr Guide!"

Felicia stood behind Martino once he started moving towards the top. While they were walking, he talked to her about the history of San Marino, which he had learned in school, but also when he was a part-time guide. They slowly descended to the last few monuments and attractions throughout the capital and as they were driving down Mount Titano, Martino kept quiet as he had nothing else to say.

"Hey, what's the matter?" Felicia asked. "You don't feel like talking anymore?"

"Sorry... That's all I know about San Marino."

"Alright, then, how about we drop by a restaurant? I'm getting pretty hungry!"

"I am hungry as well... Would you be interested in pizza?"

"Of course I would! Where are you taking us?"

"I can suggest you a place where I usually go and eat, and their pizzas are really delicious, so I'm hoping you would like them as well."

"Drive us there, then! After all, I need to get acquainted with your country better."

Martino nodded again and continued to drive. Felicia was looking outside but she would occasionally peek at Martino. They soon reached a pizzeria, a little further from the capital, somewhere in Serravalle.

"It's a small restaurant," Martino explained, "but I occasionally come here not only to eat, but to perform as well."

"To perform?" Felicia asked out of curiosity. "Are you a musician?"

"Yes, I am. I'm a guitarist. Well, a stand-up guitarist, to be precise."

"Ohh, that sounds nice! You totally seem like the type who'd play such a calming instrument... Right?"

"Ah, yeah, I play acoustic. I like to play quiet songs."

Martino led Felicia to a seat on the balcony since it was warm outside. The waiter came and they first ordered some drinks, then two pizzas. While eating, the two got to know each other's background.

"So, you like knitting?" Martino was the one to ask.

"Yes, and I'm pretty happy with my skills, so I wanted to see if I could sell a thing or two here... You think I'll do well?"

"Why do you ask *me* that? It really just depends on whether people would be interested in buying whatever you're selling."

"But wait, there's more to it! It's true I can make just about anything. But my most favourite things to make are crochet dolls! Like these!" She pulled one out of her bag and gave it to him. It was a miniature giraffe.

"This is soft," Martino said, feeling it up. "You have quite a skill."

"Aww, thank you!" Felicia replied with a smile.

He gave back her plush and she put it back into her bag.

"Hey hey, I wanna see you perform sometimes, too! Do you have any places you usually play in?"

"I mean... this is one of them. But I go all around San Marino."

"I see... Do people like to listen to your music?"

"I shouldn't be the one who should answer that question... you should ask anyone *but* me."

Felicia nodded.

"Well, as long as you're accomplishing your goal of making others happy, that's all that matters, right?"

"Yes... You're right."

As they finish up the pizza and pay up, the two return to the car.

"Where do you live?" Martino asked Felicia.

"I'm actually in this settlement."

"Dogana? Then, tell me where I should drive you to."

"Actually, let's go to your place!"

Martino looked at her.

"Are you sure? Don't you have anything important to do?"

"Nooo, don't be so serious! It's fun being around you, I promise. Let's go, let's go!"

He looked to the front again, starting up the engine and leaving the small parking lot to return to the capital. Once there, he parked his car in the garage and took Felicia upstairs to his apartment.

"We're home."

Felicia looked around.

"It's not that big of an apartment, you know?" Martino told her.

"I don't mind!"

She sat down on his bed after taking her shoes off. Martino did the same and, before sitting down, asked:

"What would you like to drink?"

"Oh, just a glass of water, please. I can't drink any more juice."

He got into the kitchen and got themselves a glass of water, then sat down next to her.

"Hey, hey," Felicia said, "would it be too much to ask you to play a song on your guitar?"

Martino shook his head, then stood up and left the room. He quickly came back with the guitar.

"Such a bright guitar you have!" She said. "I think beige goes well with the outfit you're currently wearing."

Martino looked away in embarrassment for a bit, but he collected himself and played her a song he wrote for himself. While playing, Felicia was caught up in the rhythm and she moved along the song. When he finished, she clapped for a bit.

"That song had a happy rhythm but the lyrics were a bit... y'know... Is this how you usually write your songs?"

"No, not really. Like I said, this is my own song, and I didn't have anyone to play this song for, so I just play it to myself instead."

"Well, now you played it to me! Does that make you feel better?" She smiled.

"I loved the emotions flowing from that song!"

He nodded, without saying anything. He lay on the bed.

"Hey, what's the matter, Martino? You feeling okay?"

"It's been a couple of months since I finished educating myself in music... I only spend my time either entertaining people or sleeping."

"That doesn't sound all that bad! It's okay to want to rest often! Y'know, life's been busy for me, too! Though... I finished university a year ago. But still, it's good to be mostly worry-free!"

Martino sighed, yawned, then closed his eyes for a bit.

"Sorry. I'm such an awkward person. You wouldn't wanna hang out with someone like me, would you?"

Felicia lay down with him and, having no other choice, hugged him gently.

"Shhh. You're not awkward. I understand it can be difficult to talk to someone and I won't hate you for it. And of course I'd talk with you. You're a good person in heart, I can feel it."

Felicia thought to herself:

"I will accompany him in his sleep... He's really cute, he deserves to be happy. There's nothing wrong with wanting to sleep, and honestly, I could use some sleep myself."

It was six in the evening when the two fell asleep, and when Felicia opened her eyes for a bit, it was eleven o'clock. Martino was curled up in a ball. She slowly moved him towards his pillow, covered him with a blanket, and then she got under the covers herself, leaning her head on another pillow and hugging Martino from behind.

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Martino opened his eyes at nine in the morning to the smell of cooked food. He put on his slippers and headed to the dining room where he saw Felicia preparing the table.

"Morning, cutie!" She greeted, waving at him.

"Good morning," he greeted back, "but I'm not cute."

"Don't try to deny it! You are really cute, trust me."

Felicia placed some cooked pasta on the table and gestured him to sit down, which he did.

"Have you slept well?" Felicia asked him.

"Yes. Last night was kinda warm, don't you think?"

Felicia blushed. "Y-yes, definitely warmer than I expected!"

Once Felicia sat down, the two ate the food that was on the table, and both agreed that it was very good. As they finished up eating and washed the dishes together, Felicia invited Martino to join her at her stand where she prepared all the various crochet dolls that people might be interested in buying, and he agreed.

They quickly left the apartment and got into the car, then drove off close to downtown where he parked it. The two have soon arrived at their location, so they got busy with setting everything up. When ready, the two walked inside of the stand where they sat down, and Felicia rang a small bell.

"We are selling crochet dolls for low prices! Choose from this collection or ask for your custom one! Everyone's invited so come right up!"

After the short speech, she stood quiet, then nudged Martino, suggesting he should play something. He cleared his throat and started playing a song. Slowly but surely, people were attracted by the song and the dolls, and the sale has begun.

"I like this San Marino tower plush! How much for it, miss?"

"Only €2!"

"I'll have three! San Marino has three towers, after all!"

During the sale, Martino kept playing on his guitar and therefore attracted more customers. Some people gave tips into one or both jars to support the two of them.

"Would it be okay to ask for a custom plush?"

"Absolutely! Tell me what you want and I will tell you how much it'll be!"

The customer told Felicia they wanted a teddy bear, and that's what she started to knit. Martino helped her out by continuing with the business and selling the dolls which have already been made. They also received three more custom doll requests which Martino wrote down for Felicia, and once she was finished with the teddy bear and received payment, she got started on the rest of the requests.

It took her some time to finish and by the time she did, it was already six in the evening when it started to get dark, and she decided to call it a day. She closed down the little store and sat down again to count the money she earned, as well as the tips she received. Martino also took his jar and counted his.

"Woo!" Felicia cheered. "Today was a great day! Thank you for helping me gather customers!"

"I'm just glad you were able to get started."

"Hey now, you were also awesome today! I loved the variety in those songs you played!"

"Thank you..."

"Now, let's go home."

"Okay, let's take you home first..."

"Wait, actually..."

Felicia looked at him and held his hands high.

"So... About that one time I said I lived in Do... Dog..."

"Dogana?"

"Yes, that... remember that?"

"You told me that, yes..."

"Well... that was a lie."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm only temporarily staying there with someone else, because I have been looking for accomodation for myself, and I haven't found it... until now!"

Felicia leaned over to him.

"Please drive me back to Dogana! I wanna take my stuff from there! Then, drive us back here!"

Martino nodded as the two then went into the car. Felicia helped him navigate to that place. When they arrived, they both got out of the car to retrieve Felicia's clothes and various other things she brought with herself, and took it into the car. While Martino was packing up, Felicia went to the owner and thanked her for letting her stay for a while. Once the two were finished, they went back into the car and Felicia told him to drive to his place. When they were about to go upstairs, Martino stopped for a bit.

"Wait... Are you sure this is where you are staying?"

Felicia fidgeted a little.

"I hope you don't mind! After meeting you I wanted to get closer to you, so it's fine to want to live with that person, right?!"

"Well..."

"Let me stay at your place, please! I will pay the bills with you, I promise!"

"You don't need to go *that* far... But... I don't mind if you stayed here..."

Felicia gave him a hug.

"Oh thank you! I'm so happy to be your roommate!"

After a bit of a chit-chat, they soon took all of Felicia's belongings and brought them all upstairs to their apartment. Martino immediately lay down on the bed after locking the doors and curled up in the ball like last time.

"Yo, Martino, aren't you gonna have lunch?"

"Sorry... I'm not hungry."

"But, you only had a sandwich during break!"

"It's okay..."

Martino sobbed quietly and in the dark. Felicia left the dining room and walked to him.

"Hey... what's the matter?" Felicia asked with genuine worry. "Please don't be sad... You have someone you will spend time with, y'know? Would it have been better if I didn't—"

Before she said anything, Martino suddenly got up and hugged her.

"D-don't go... I'm just... not used to... the warmth... of another person."

"Wait, hold on a moment!"

Felicia went back to the dining room and switched off the lights. Now the entire apartment was in darkness. She then came back, put her glasses away, and lay next to him, giving him another warm hug and tucking themselves in a blanket.

"There, there... Let me make you feel better. Are you happy to have a roommate now?"

"Yes..."

"Don't you worry about anything, I'll have everything under control, I only want you to feel warm, and loved. Because someone as cute as you absolutely needs it."

"Am I... really that cute to you?"

"You are!"

Felicia kissed Martino on the forehead which made him blush.

"If you say so..."

"That is a fact!" She raised her tone, kissing him again. "Ah, sorry, I didn't mean to kiss your forehead again!"

They both blushed a bit and turned their backs to each other, but they quickly faced each other and embraced.

"Let's fall asleep like this, okay?" Felicia said quietly.

Martino didn't say a word since he closed his eyes and enjoyed the embrace.

"He's so cute!" Felicia thought to herself. "I'll make sure he becomes a warm person he needs to be—I'm his roommate and his friend, so I have to do my best!"

She caressed his soft, orange hair while whispering: "Good night, cutie."

\*

Martino and Felicia woke up together, still embracing one another.

"Are you ready for a new day?" Felicia asked, slowly getting out of bed.

"As ready as you are," Martino replied.

The two prepared breakfast, put on their clothes and went out to earn more money together. While Martino was playing on his guitar to attract customers, Felicia worked hard making custom dolls while also selling out the pre-made crochet dolls of San Marino towers, teddy bears, and some more animal plushies.

Every day, the two did their best, and sold as many of the dolls as they could.

After two weeks of constant hard work, Felicia felt like taking a break from the intense business, so they made a decision to spend the rest of their day resting in the apartment, as well as listening to songs and watching TV. They were wrapped up in a blanket, together.

They were both quiet while enjoying some shows, but Felicia decided to break the ice.

"It feels nice to take a break after a tiring week or two, don't you think?"

"Yes... Breaks are always important."

"Though... getting to spend a day together with someone as cute as you is what I truly adore!"

"Don't we always spend time together? Not that I have anything against it..."

"Aw, Martino, you really are adorable!"

"No, I'm not."

"You have no right to object to the truth!"

Felicia chuckled while caressing Martino's hair.

"And not to mention, I love how fluffy your hair is! How can you say you're not adorable?!"

Martino blushed and kept quiet.

"Yeah, that's how I thought you'd react!"

Felicia kept stroking his hair, which made Martino yawn.

"If you want to nap, why not take a nap in my arms? I don't mind if you do!"

Martino yawned again and closed his eyes.

"It's okay, we'll talk when you're awake, alright?"

He nodded and wrapped his arms around Felicia as well. He felt comfortable and warm beyond belief—he realised how much he needed someone to care for him and be there when he had nobody else. Though he was happy, he couldn't help but shed a few tears, and sobbed for a bit. Felicia felt his sobs, so she gave him plenty of head pats to make him feel better.

"I like it when you hold me and... when you stroke my hair."

Martino muttered while still quietly sobbing.

*"He's starting to warm up to me, I can feel it!"* Felicia thought while snuggling with Martino.

He finally calmed down and fell asleep. Due to the TV being on low volume, Felicia fell asleep with him.

They woke up a few hours later, when the sun had already set.

"Is it morning already?" Martino said.

"No, silly, it's evening! You must have slept so well."

"I did... thanks to you. It was really warm, and I... liked it."

Felicia was already hugging him, but when he said that, she squeezed him tightly.

"You're so adorable, especially when you sound so honest!"

"Do I?"

"Yes, you do!"

Felicia looked at him and smiled while Martino looked towards her and blushed.

"Y-your smile is... c-cute."

"I wanna see you smile, too!" Felicia said.

Martino smiled as well, but he hid his face before she was able to see

"Come on, Martino, let me see it!" She said cheerfully.

He slowly moved his hands away to reveal a very faint smile. Though that was enough for Felicia to react with a squeal.

"That is one super adorable smile!"

Felicia looked at the clock in his room and noticed it was nine o'clock.

"Hey, hey!" Felicia said. "Do you want to go outside?"

"What are we... going to do outside?" Martino asked, confused.

"There won't be a lot of people outside, and I feel like the fresh air will get us in a good mood!"

"It's not like I mind... If you want, we can go."

Felicia let Martino get up first, leaving the blanket, after which she stood up herself. They put on some clothes and headed outside. Both felt a little shy at first, but Felicia gathered some courage and took Martino's hand. Martino looked at her and blushed, then nodded, acknowledging he's okay with it. Neither of the two said any words while strolling through the streets of San Marino, and they were okay with being quiet, as long as they were walking together.

After taking in the fresh air, they returned to their cozy apartment, got comfortable and fell asleep once again.

it.

Felicia and Martino worked really hard together for the next few months, and they have continued to talk for hours on end. Most importantly, Martino warmed up to Felicia almost entirely, and he wasn't shy to express his feelings anymore, thanks to them still living together.

Then, one day, Martino and Felicia had a day off, since he had something to tell her.

"I have been invited to a concert," Martino said. "It takes place in Rimini, and it's a charity concert."

"Oh, I will most *definitely* come! When is it?"

"It's... tomorrow. At six in the evening."

"I'm looking forward to it!"

The next day, the two woke up at exactly the same time. Felicia took care of Martino by combing his hair, helping him choose the right clothes, and singing along with him while he tries to perform some songs. Once it was time, they drove off to a concert hall in Rimini, where the concert was meant to be held. They went separate ways once they reached the entrance; Martino headed backstage to meet with the people who organised the event, while Felicia went to find a seat somewhere.

A few minutes later, the people in the backstage were ready to perform. Martino was in one of the rooms backstage, since he was going to perform after everyone else. He spent some of his time playing songs quietly, and quickly deciding which song out of the two he wanted to dedicate to Felicia herself.

Soon, it was his turn to shine on stage. While there, he first played and sang one song. Afterwards, he got up from his chair and spoke into the microphone.

"I dedicate... this song to a very... special person."

He then played the second song, with a lot more confidence. When he hit the last few notes, the crowd applauded as Martino bowed to them and left the stage. On his way out, he met up with Felicia, who had an excited look on her face. "I loved your performance!" Felicia stated while hugging him. "I liked the whole concert but your songs made me feel the happiest!"

"Then that means... I'm doing my job correctly. I'm glad you enjoyed yourself today. I had fun as well."

They had a stroll from the hall to a small bar in Rimini.

"Hey, I'm just curious," Felicia said, "but... who is that special person you have mentioned before playing the second song?"

Martino kept quiet for a bit because he got nervous after being asked that question, even though he knew she would be curious. Naturally, he had to keep calm so he doesn't scare anyone off.

"The person I was talking about, you say..."

"Oh, if it's someone you don't wanna talk about, that's completely fine-"

"Y-you..."

"Huh?"

"The special person... I was talking about... you."

Martino looked away when he said that, in embarrassment. Felicia blushed but had a wide smile.

"Aw, shucks," Felicia said, "what could be so special about me, I wonder..."

He suddenly turned towards her and looked her in the eyes.

"It was thanks to you that... I finally felt true happiness. Your presence around me has made me accomplish my goals a lot easier. And not to mention... you're a really fun person to hang around with. And on top of that... cute... Especially your glasses... they fit you very well."

Martino looked away again while Felicia wrapped her arms around him.

"And... what else do you like about me?" She asked with a grin.

"I'm not sure... I don't want to make you feel embarrassed in front of the people here... And... I'm scared you may reject me or something like that..."

"What do you mean, reject you?"

It was at this point that she knew—she got the gist of what he was actually talking about.

"It's okay, go on, tell me what you had on your mind, and don't be scared!"

She gave him a thumbs up after letting go of him, to hear him out.

"You're right... I should give it a go. What good do I have if I don't?"

Martino let go of his fears, slowly but surely.

"I think... I've fallen for you. You're a gentle person and you helped me out in many ways. Thank you for all these wonderful things you did for me..."

"Oh don't mention it, you cutie!" Felicia said. "You had something else to say—"

"I... love you, and I want to go out with you. Like, you know. As a couple. You don't have to if you don't feel the same, I'm still happy I get to spend days with you in the apartment. It's okay..."

Felicia held her hand close to her chest as she was listening to his confession. She felt the same way, and the way he confessed to her made her realise how much she needs him as well. She lifted his head, stood frozen for a bit, but suddenly went for a kiss. It was a short one and, moving away from Martino's lips, Felicia said:

"Yes, I love you too! You're too adorable not to be loved! And, I want to go out with you as well!"

"Then... do you want me to take you somewhere? I feel like this bar isn't to my taste. We can have a date at a much better location."

"I like your thoughtfulness! I agree, we should save up some money and go somewhere a bit further away from here!"

"Well... it's not like I mind going to Rome or somewhere..."

"We totally should!!"

"Then... what are we waiting for? We should keep working hard and we will slowly build up the money needed for the trip."

Then, a few days later, the two set off to a date in Rome. This time, however, Felicia was the one to drive the car. A busy day was awaiting them...

## "Love, from San Marino"

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