

OLD FLAME

By

Eléonore Guislin

FADE IN:

EXT. PLATFORM OF A TRAIN STATION - DAY - 1953

People are walking hurriedly on the platform as WHISTLE and ENGINE sounds are being heard. A distinguished woman (30) is sat on a bench, reading the newspaper and smoking a cigarette. A man (late 40s) holding a cigar between his fingers comes to her.

MR ROBERTS

Hello there, Miss.

Her eyes don't leave the newspaper. She holds her cigarette in her right hand as she licks her left index before turning the page.

MR ROBERTS

I was hoping you could help me with my problem. See, I cannot seem to find my lighter.

She finally takes a look at him, unimpressed. Her eyes glance at the grey tone covering his face and at his unkept beard. His clothes are nothing too special, probably one size too big.

MR ROBERTS

I always put it in my pocket but it must have fallen out, you see. Such a silly mistake, really.

He turns his left pocket inside out: it is empty. The man doesn't seem to notice her stare filled with coldness and irritation.

MR ROBERTS

I was standing over there and saw you on the bench, smoking a cigarette. So I thought you would have a lighter or a match I could use, if it isn't too much to ask, Miss?

She doesn't say a word, looks into her purse and pulls out a small pearly pink lighter. She gives it to him nonchalantly. A charming laugh escapes from his mouth.

MR ROBERTS

This is a fancy little toy you have here.

He LIGHTS the cigar and places it between his lips. The first cloud of smoke covers his face. When it vanishes, he takes a look at the lighter and notices it is engraved.

MAUREEN

Are you planning on giving it back?

He keeps on staring at the fancy lighter.

MAUREEN

Sir?

She places the newspaper next to her, puts out her cigarette and stands up, now facing the man.

MAUREEN

Sir, could you please give my lighter back or I will have to call for help.

He takes a closer look at the engraved letters. It seems that they have almost been erased through the years. Still, he manages to read the initials: "T.R. & M.C.".

MAUREEN

Sir!

He suddenly snaps back to reality and looks at her.

MR ROBERTS

(confused)

Of course, I'm so sorry. I just cannot seem to -

Her hand reaches for the lighter but it is too tightly held by the man.

MAUREEN

I know I shouldn't have trusted a tramp. Give it back!

A lock of her perfectly tight bun falls down on the side of her face as she tries to grab the lighter from his hand like a wild cat. He DROPS it on the ground.

MR ROBERTS

I am sorry, I didn't mean to -

MAUREEN

I know exactly what you meant.

She kneels distinguishly to pick the lighter up and quickly tucks it away into her purse. She puts her hair back in place and takes a deep breath as she looks at the clock.

MR ROBERTS

I think there has been some sort of misunderstanding, I swear I didn't mean to steal the lighter from you. I was just trying to read the engraving.

MAUREEN

You really have no manners, do you?! Now if you will excuse me, I have to go.

She starts walking. He follows her pace.

MR ROBERTS

Please forgive me but I have to ask. Where did you get that lighter from?

MAUREEN

Why should I answer your question? It is none of your business and I don't even know you!

MR ROBERTS

You don't understand. I used to know a woman who had the exact same lighter!

MAUREEN

Not only are you a thief, but also a liar. Please, leave me alone, will you?

He grabs her arm.

MR ROBERTS

Madeleine Crawley!

She stops.

MR ROBERTS

Madeleine... She's... She's the woman I used to know.

She looks completely taken aback and stares at the man for a few seconds before she can bring herself to say something. He lets go of her arm.

MAUREEN

That's imp- How... My mother... She's my mother.

MR ROBERTS

Your mother?! Well, that's - I mean... So... I guess that makes you... Mau-

MAUREEN

(interrupting him)

Maureen, Maureen Crawley. How do you know my mother?

His eyes glance at the ground. He hesitates before answering.

MR ROBERTS

Madeleine was an old friend of mine. We lost contact a long time ago but I very much cared for her.

We hear a TRAIN arriving in the station. She looks at the clock and starts walking away from him again. He follows her.

MAUREEN

I always find it amusing how mother happened to have so many good friends. Yet, they all turned their back on her, and I assume you did exactly the same.

MR ROBERTS

I am not proud of my actions. Letting your mother down is one of the worst mistakes I have ever made. There is not a single day I wish things had been different.

She picks up the pace.

MAUREEN

(with a condescending tone)

Maybe it is for the best, after all. I don't think mother would appreciate being associated with a man like you.

He stops walking and glances at his reflection in one of the windows of the train station.

MR ROBERTS

You know, I used to be a decent looking young man, raised and brought up in a wealthy family, too.

She is standing next to him. Both of them are now looking at their reflections. She looks tiny compared to the man.

MAUREEN

Pardon me, but it is quite hard to believe looking at you today.

(pause)

What happened to this young man, then?

MR ROBERTS

He just couldn't keep up with the appearances and all of the lies... You know, your mother is not the only person I turned my back on.

MAUREEN

Why didn't you try harder? Why didn't you help her? Especially after the selfish and weak man I have to call my father abandoned her. She was expecting a child, not infected with the plague!

MR ROBERTS

Believe me, I tried. We all did. But there wasn't much that seventeen-year-old me could do. I had to listen to my parents and me being seen with your mother at that time would have compromised their reputation. The choice wasn't mine to make.

They start walking again without saying a word. They are now standing in front of the coach door, facing each other. A WHISTLE is heard.

MAUREEN

I have realised I haven't even asked you your name. You are?

He coughs to clear his throat.

MR ROBERTS

(hesitating)

... John... Thompson...

MAUREEN

I don't think mother has ever mentioned your name. I will ask her if she remembers you.

Eyes wide open, he looks embarrassed.

MR ROBERTS

Please, don't. I wouldn't want to remind your mother of how terrible a friend I was to her.

MAUREEN

Very well, then. I guess it's time for me to leave. I promised mother I wouldn't miss my train.

She grabs the handle of the door and puts one foot on the first step before turning around.

MAUREEN

Just so you know, mother is a very happy woman. She might have struggled in her youth, but she is doing fine now.

MR ROBERTS

There is no nicer thing I would have preferred to hear today. She deserves to be happy, your mother.

He smiles, almost relieved.

MR ROBERTS

And your father, I am certain he would be very proud of his daughter, there is no doubt.

MAUREEN

Goodbye, Mr Thompson. I hope you take care of yourself.

They shake hands and he doesn't let go of hers for a few seconds.

MR ROBERTS

(with tears in his voice)
Goodbye, Miss Crawley. It really was a pleasure to... finally... meet you.

She is now gone. One last WHISTLE is heard. The train leaves, slowly then faster. We see him taking his hat off. A label inside reads: "THOMAS ROBERTS". He tightens it onto his heart and tears start running down his face.

FADE OUT.

THE END