



Onion

Love

by

Clive La Pensée

Montag Publications

Onion Love is a  
free to read short  
story. Please observe  
normal copyright rules.

© Clive La Pensée  
Oct. 2015

# Onion Love

by Clive La Pensée.

I walk through the midday heat and cross the four lane carriageway to get to the discounter supermarket. I should go to the Turkish grocer on my way, because I know that the discounter will make me buy a sack of onions, most of which I won't be able to use. I should leave town.

I don't go to the Turkish grocer. It's hot, I'm lazy and assume I will find a small enough onion quantity and not have to bother with two shops. 'But the discounter only has pre-packed goods. It'll be a couple of kilos or nothing,' my inner voice of reason tells me. Today, my inner voice of reason is less persuasive than my inner idleness.

I buy the beer and mineral water and lo! There in the corner of a vegetable box is a single onion. Just what I need. In the basket it goes.

I put the onion on the checkout band with all the other goods. In front of me is a man with a defeated look. There is only one band open and a young woman scanning the goods. Her

face is thunder. She checks his stuff. I later realise she was making sure no alcohol or tobacco products were in the basket. She prices it up and looks at a slip of paper he hands over.

“Not enough,” she gruffly announces. “What shall I take out?”

He takes a few items out and she stores them under the counter. The rest he packs in a carrier and leaves. I assume he had a food docket. I don't know how it works. Somehow companies issue coupons worth one Euro per hour to otherwise unemployed people.

My stuff jerks erratically along the band like a metaphor for one Euro Jobs. It arrives in front of the woman working the check-out. She is young, has short blonde hair, a charming, slightly plump figure and a determined energetic working-woman face. She knows the realities of working long hours for low pay and it seems, does not have much time for men with food dockets. It's my turn.

“What's that?”

Her voice is well aggressive. She holds my onion in the air as though it smells more unpleasant than an onion should. Despite the heat, I'm feeling mischievous.

“An onion,” I reply truthfully and somewhat timidly. I soon regret my daft answer. She turns into a power woman.

“Well you can't have it for nothing.”

“I want to pay for it!

“Can’t! There is no way I can scan an individual onion so if you think you are getting it for nothing you are wrong!”

Wow! I draw breath and keep calm. She must have had some rubbish experiences at the hands of people trying to spice their lives with an onion.

“I don’t want it for nothing. I’ll pay for it.” Now I’m becoming assertive.

“You’ll have to take a two kilo sack. I can scan that.”

She is beginning to bristle. I try to explain, but she interrupts me and decides to shame me into submission. In a loud voice that goes twice round the supermarket she yells, “You can’t have it for nothing. I’ve told you twice. Stop trying to get things.....” she pauses for effect, “without paying for them; for nothing!”

I put the onion back in my basket. I know this is provocative. It works.

“You can’t take it without paying,” she screams, “and you can’t pay and you’re not getting it for nothing!”

She is becoming a little incoherent in her anger. By now, customers are looking to see what the commotion is by the checkout.

“No fear,” I say calmly although I am seething inside. “I just want to put it back in the box where I found it.”

“Give it to me,” she barks.

I take it out the basket and hand it to her. She throws it on the floor at her feet and starts scanning the rest of my stuff. I suspect she deliberately trod on my onion.

I'm too scared to risk her wrath by holding up the queue while I fetch an onion sack. The Turkish shop is a hot walk away. Thus, I pay for everything but the onion and then walk round the supermarket very slowly, expecting she has forgotten the incident. I return to the checkout with a sack of onions. There are now three checkouts open. Although her queue is longest, I wait in it. It's my bit of protest after my earlier pathetic performance and it's as much as I dare under the circumstances. The woman is ready to kill. She should audition for Lady Macbeth!

It's my turn again. She manages to scan the onion sack and take my money, without making eye contact.

I wonder why I am generous to a woman who tried so hard to humiliate me. A complaint in the right ear would see her shamed. A letter to head office would get her sacked.

I do neither, but walk home wondering about the confrontation and why I feel uncomfortable.

I have plenty of time to think about her; her lost dignity behind the checkout, enhanced by a scream worthy of an opera heroine. I'm becoming besotted by her. In deference to her power-performance, I make my usual carrot salad with extra onions and look up a recipe for an onion cake.

Two days have gone by since the check-out incident over an onion. I am armed with composure as I head for the discounter supermarket. I queue at the checkout with my mineral water and beer, and a bag of apples. A man is in front of me - possibly my age but he looks much older - and he piles bottles of cheap Schnapps on the band. Where is the food? No wonder staff get tetchy.

I look up to see my persecutor of two days ago. She sees me and recognition flickers across her face. I stay calm. She becomes nervous. Is she embarrassed about her behaviour the last time we met? Does she fear I will complain about her?

It is my turn and my goods come to €18.25. I give her a €20 note. She is so flustered that she loses concentration and gives me back €18.25. €1.75 goes in the till. I walk towards a bench put there for customers to pack their bags and consider my options. It would serve her right if I walk out the shop leaving her till €18.25 light. While packing my bag I glance up at her. She knows something is wrong. I wait for her to ask me to come back, do her a favour, but she doesn't. Her body language tells me she is furious with herself, but I don't think she is going to relent and go through the embarrassment of talking to me in a civil tone.

I finish packing my bag and see a gap in her queue. I hand her the receipt and the €18.25.

"Maybe you want to check that," I murmur.

She doesn't look at the bill or count the money. She has noticed her mistake, but doesn't care to challenge me. She is prepared to work two hours for nothing rather than admit she needs a kindness from a customer she taunted.

She puts the €18.25 in the till, and gives me €1.75, without looking at me.

"Thank you," I say with politeness and sincerity.

She ignores me and speaks to the next customer.

I leave the air-conditioned supermarket. Hot air rises from the car park tarmac, wavy striations distorting the view of the Turkish grocer opposite, across the four-lane carriageway. A pang of conscience hits me.

How long would it have taken me to go to the Turkish grocer? It can be a pain crossing the busy road, but I knew she couldn't scan an onion. I set her up for a fall and then caught her as she was looking at two hours unpaid work, which makes me a hero - the nice guy. If I'm honest, that was shoddy of me.

I hear a voice behind me of the Jehovah's Witness selling her paper. I try to ignore it. My indifference is a red flag to the Lord's messenger!

"Excuse me sir. Can I ask you if you have read the bible?"

"Yes! At school; of course I did," I call over my shoulder.

I turn round and see a handsome forty-something woman, staring me provocatively in the eyes. I thought that a good answer. Her face has a smile that tells me different.

“That was a long time ago,” she reminds me.

“Are you calling me old? Don’t be so personal,” I joke.

“NO, no!” she exclaims. “I merely wanted to say that you have some catching up to do.”

“Indeed I do! Nice of you to offer. Your place or mine,” and I put on a lascivious leer.

Her face shows the self-satisfied smirk that says, ‘I have received today’s lashes for the Lord. Now I can go home.’

That was bad of me, but I enjoyed it and it seems I have helped her on her way. I watch her walk to her car, her light summer dress oscillating with the rhythm of her majestic figure. I consider walking after her. ‘Have you read the bible,’ could mean any number of things in a modern parlance and that was a face to die for.

As she opens her car, her body language says, ‘it had only one meaning!’

I am distracted by another woman, who appears to be waving at me. She is standing in the doorway of the customer exit to the supermarket and judging by her blue smock, is an employee. I’m sure she is walking towards me, so I hesitate.

“I have a message from Trudi,” she shouts across the space between us.

I look blank.

“I don’t know a Trudi,” I say, trying to keep my voice down.

“Yes you do.” she chirps. “The check-out assistant, who gave you too much change.”

“Oh... right....,” I mumble. I smell trouble. I’m going to be accused of staff abuse or harassment and they are going to prosecute. Instead, I receive my orders.

“Her shift finishes at four. Meet her here, in the car park.”

She smiles briefly and turns to walk back to the entrance.

I know I have nothing on this afternoon and I would cancel the Queen to meet Trudi off the field of battle. I will be in the car park waiting, because there are riddles in life, to which every man wants the solution. Nevertheless, I feel the need to test the water.

“What if I am busy at four?” I call after her.

“That would be daft,” she twinkles over her shoulder. “I think she wants to say thank you properly.”

The sun has lost its strength and the car park is a patchwork of jagged geometrical shadows from the neighbouring buildings.

I see Trudi in the distance, leaving by the staff exit. She wears a skirt fractionally too short for her generous thighs and above it is a bosom, hoisted up for maximum effect. She moves with the confidence of a woman who knows she looks great.

‘Dressed to kill,’ crosses my mind.

She walks over, gives me a warm smile as she gets close, but says nothing. Instead she puts her arm in mine. We walk through the shadows, towards the car park exit, towards the Turkish grocer across the road, who could have ruined everything. I remember Watchtower woman, whose divine intervention, delayed my exit. She too played her part in getting me to heaven.

“Where are we going?” Trudi murmurs.

“You decide,” I tell her, “but I have an onion cake in the oven warming, if that helps you make up your mind.”

I feel her giggle. She takes my arm more firmly and presses her hip against mine.

Maybe I'll stay in town and use up those onions.

We hope you enjoyed this story. You will find other free to read short stories at [www.montagpublications.co.uk](http://www.montagpublications.co.uk)

Feedback please to [clapensee@clapensee.karoo.co.uk](mailto:clapensee@clapensee.karoo.co.uk).

Paypal - [clivelap@gmx.net](mailto:clivelap@gmx.net)

Also available.

The Fall. Book 1 and Book 2. (Ask your mum first).

The Bus Station and the Road to Troy.