

Something I *have* to tell you

by

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*There's something I have to tell you.
I just can't remember what it is.*

I just read those words on the men's room wall and I know exactly how he feels. I'm sitting here in this waaay groovy East Village café – thinking: maybe I shouldn't have drunk so much coffee. Eleven espressos. Do you have any idea what happens to your mind after eleven espressos? Trust me, things start moving up here.

Me? I'm devouring every last word of the newspaper and coming up with comprehensive peace plans for intractable armed conflicts all over the world. I'm mentally replaying the pivotal moments of my last three relationships – and then *re*-replaying them the way they *should* have gone. I'm working out chronic problems I never knew I had and quickly coming to terms with the fact that I will *never sleep again*.

Just then – unseen by me – a woman walks into the café and looks the place over. She's French. If she'd just say something, you could tell. I haven't seen her yet – but she's about to change my life irreversibly. I don't see her because I'm surrounded by Section A of the New York Times – which is to say – surrounded by the world.

And so this French woman with a French accent takes in the entire room and immediately starts walking my way, reaches my table and says: "Pardon, tu es Frank, n'est-ce pas?... You are Frank, no?"

I let the world fall to the floor...and am lost forever....because she has soft hard grey eyes that seem to float miles away and *she...is.....beautiful*. It so happens...I have a slight weakness for that. Truth is, if this woman wanted to, she could treat me like complete and utter shit and it would probably take me five or six months to even pick up on it.

And she wants to know if I'm *Frank*.

"Yes I am."

Now this is without a doubt the most outrageous lie I've ever told in my life. And it makes no difference whether she's looking for Frank *the guy* or frank *the adjective* because I am neither one. But she just smiles and says, "Je suis Veronique."

And I say: Who else could you possibly be? Ca va?"

"Ca va bien, mais – vraiment I am a little nervous when I come here parceque.... well the truth is I am not certain you will be here."

"Oh I'm *definitely* here.... In fact - I've been *here* my whole life. But now that we're *both* here – what do you say we get *out of here* and.... take a little walk somewhere?"

She just stares at me for a fleeting eternity and finally says..."I was just thinking the same thing."

So far, this French woman and I – we agree about everything.

So I signal our unbelievably hip East Village waiter for the bill. But he takes his time noticing me because he's busy checking himself out in the mirror. And I guess in his shoes, I would be too – because this guy's got not *one* but *two* nose rings: a big diamond stud in the left nostril – a red commie hammer and sickle in the right.... which seems a bit counter-intuitive, but hey.

All I know is that when I was in my twenties, downtown guys like this used to intimidate the shit out of me. Now that I can barely *remember* my twenties, my attitude is more like: dude, you are so much cooler than I ever was or can ever hope to be. Now that we've settled that – could you please do me a favor and *bring me my fucking check*.

Which – finally – he does he does.

As I reach into my wallet, I cover up my driver's license. Part of me is wondering who this Frank guy really is. Another part of me is saying: don't make yourself crazy worrying about things that are beyond your control.

Moments later, Veronique and I are walking down the street - not saying anything and not needing to. She hasn't asked me where I'm taking her – and that's good – because I have no idea. It's early evening, early summer. Suddenly, she looks at me – starts laughing... and says: You know, you don't look anything like I expected.

I can't tell if she expected a lot better or a whole lot worse.

"Et moi? – she says – Am *I* as *you* expected?"

I gaze at her face for three seconds that will stay with me for the rest of my days. Take in every contour, every angle and every shade of color. The sublime arc of her lips. The faint shadow beneath her eyes. And the perfect curve of her cheek that catches the streetlight like it's never been caught before in the history of cheekbones... and say..."Yes, you are *exactly* the way I imagined you."

And it's true.

A faint smile flickers across her face. I've made her happy – and that's all I want.

You see...my mother died today.

Actually it was 21 days ago – but you know how time is... sometimes.

Then Veronique's smile fades away and she says: "There's something I have to tell you. The letters that you wrote me.... those letters saved my life."

I don't know *what* to say to that, so I just shake my head. But she grabs my arm and looks right into me so that there's no escaping and says: "Yes. *You* are the only reason that *I'm still here.*"

(end of excerpt)