

MIND THE GAP

short film

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2nd version

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FADE IN:

1. INT. KITCHEN - DAY

MATILDA is putting away dishes into the kitchen cabinet when PAUL appears at the door.

PAUL  
We're leaving now. See you later.

MATILDA  
But please remember that you are  
not a youngster anymore!

Eight-year-old JULIAN pushes past Paul.

JULIAN  
Don't worry grandma, I'm with him.  
I'll take care of grandpa!

Matilda and Paul look at each other with a smile.

PAUL  
You see? Nothing can happen to me.

Paul and Julian exit the kitchen.

2. INT. TRAIN COMPARTMENT - DAY

Julian and Paul sit opposite from each other at the window.

JULIAN  
Shall we go to the lions first?

PAUL  
Hm ... at the entrance first comes  
the capricorn enclosure. So it  
would be much more reasonable if we  
look at that first. The lions are  
way at the other end of the zoo.

JULIAN  
But the lions are my biggest wish.

PAUL

I know! Nevertheless, we have to get there first. And if we don't stroll around too much along the way, we'll make it.

3. INT. CENTRAL STATION - DAY

Paul and Julian walk through the station building. While Julian looks around curiously and with wide eyes, Paul tries to get his bearings. Julian pulls on Paul's sleeve.

JULIAN

Look. That man there!

Paul turns around and looks in the direction Julian is pointing. There, a STREET ARTIST is performing a pantomime.

PAUL

It's called pantomime. And it means that ...

Suddenly Paul freezes. The TRAVELER passes directly in front of the street artist. He pauses briefly when he notices that he is being stared at, turns to Paul, nods at him, smiles and then continues on his way. Paul's eyes widen in shock. His face turns white and he grabs his heart. He falters and tries to hold on to Julian.

JULIAN

Grandpa! Grandpa!

A RAILROAD EMPLOYEE notices the incident. Quick-witted, she comes to Paul's aid and leads him to a seat.

RAILROAD EMPLOYEE

Take a deep breath. I'll call the paramedics.

PAUL

No, no, please don't! It was nothing.

RAILROAD EMPLOYEE  
However, it didn't look like  
nothing.

PAUL  
Thank you. But I am really feeling  
much better now. Just a little  
scare, that's all.

RAILROAD EMPLOYEE  
A scare? I see ...

PAUL  
Yes. Let's leave it at that,  
please.

RAILROAD EMPLOYEE  
Alright. As you please. I don't  
mean to bother you, but if anything  
else should emerge do not hesitate  
to contact me or one of my  
colleagues.

PAUL  
Thank you. Will do.

The railroad employee takes one more look at Julian and then  
hesitantly moves away.

JULIAN  
Grandpa?

PAUL  
Yes?

JULIAN  
Did you know the man?

Paul turns to Julian and looks him deeply in the eyes.

PAUL  
So you've noticed him too.

JULIAN  
Who was that? A friend?

Paul lets out a dry, half-swallowed LAUGH.

PAUL

A Friend! I wouldn't necessarily call him that.

JULIAN

What then?

PAUL

Well, that's hard to explain. It's been so long ... and you probably won't understand it anyway ...

JULIAN

But I'm a grown boy already!

Paul smiles and tousles Julian's hair.

PAUL

Yes, of course you are quite a grown boy. Oh, what the heck - you actually deserve an explanation. But you have to promise me that you won't tell grandma anything about all this! Not a word, okay?

JULIAN

Oh yes, a secret!

PAUL

(sighing)

Yes. Our secret.

Paul gazes into the distance for a moment.

PAUL

Well, where do I start?

Then he reaches into his jacket from which he shows Julian a somewhat yellowed identity document and hands it to him.

PAUL

Do you know what this is? My student ID. Oh, it's a long time ago - I haven't thought about this for quiet some time.

Julian looks at the ID and then hands it back to Paul.

PAUL

It was the year in which the old librarian died suddenly. His successor then tried to put this, well, unconventional system of his predecessor in order. With the help of some students, he conducted a complete inventory of the university library. One of the students was me. As a volunteer! Because I have loved books since I was a boy. And there were many books in the library. A lot of books! A lot of old books, too. Really old books! It was wonderful. And, furthermore, an excellent opportunity to get hold of the really old scriptures that are usually kept under lock and key. Because they are either too valuable or too fragile, they said, or because they are in bad condition.

Paul looks at Julian conspiratorially.

PAUL

Well, today we think that people in the past were dumber than us today, but that's not true at all. They just had a completely different way of expressing themselves. If you take the trouble to learn to understand them, you can find quite wonderful things in the old treatises.

(MORE)

PAUL (CONT'D)

In some cases, the thoughts recorded in them are even much more modern than most of what is published today.

JULIAN

What is a treatise?

PAUL

These are short texts in which a topic is explained as plainly as possible. Mostly even quite difficult topics. And I came across such a difficult topic when I was working in the university library. The treatise, which I suddenly held in my hands, explained in a very clear way how to produce the "elixir of longevity".

JULIAN

What is a "ee-lik-seer"?

PAUL

In this case, it is a liquid that stops aging and should significantly prolong life.

JULIAN

So that one no longer has to die?

PAUL

At least, that's how it was described therein.

JULIAN

Everyone?

PAUL

Well, I think so. If it works for one person, why shouldn't it work for everyone else? Why?

JULIAN  
Because Dad said that you might not  
make it for long.

Paul breaks out in LAUGHTER.

PAUL  
Good thing my son doesn't have to  
decide that.

JULIAN  
And with the ee-lik-seer you don't  
have to die anymore?

PAUL  
Precisely that was described there.  
But that would be a sensation, of  
course! Because most people do not  
believe that such a thing could be  
possible at all.

JULIAN  
And you? Do you believe in it?

Paul becomes very thoughtful.

PAUL  
Yes. Today I believe it. But that  
wasn't always the case. At the  
time, I was very excited about my  
find, but realized very quickly  
that I was the only one who took  
this text seriously at all. The  
more I tried to convince others of  
this, the more they laughed at me.  
That was not very pleasant.

JULIAN  
Why? Didn't the others want to live  
long?



PAUL

You could easily believe that. But of course I didn't give up that quickly. I searched for everything I could find on this subject. And in the process came across a Professor Clutterbuck. This man was described as the expert in this field and had probably already done extensive research on it. So if anyone could help me, it would be him - I thought. And how happy do you think I was when I learned one day that he was coming to our university to give a guest lecture? That was "the" opportunity! I just had to get to him somehow to be able to approach him about it. So I signed up for the driving service, and eventually it was my job to pick up the professor from the train station ...

4. OUT. PLATFORM (IN THE PAST) - NIGHT

Young Paul sits alone on the deserted platform and watches the large station clock. It is so quiet that the CLACK with which the clock hand changes to 11:34 pm can be heard loud and clear.

Then suddenly, small in the distance, in the darkness of the night, the headlights of an incoming train appear. They grow larger and larger, steadily slowing down. Until the locomotive itself is recognizable, enters the station with LOUD SQUEALING brakes and finally comes to a halt.

Paul gets up and walks over to the edge of the platform. For a long moment, nothing happens at all. Paul looks nervously from one end of the train to the other.

Then a door is swung open after all. Out of it steps a middle-aged man - the traveler - in distinguished but slightly old-fashioned clothing. He stops and turns back to the door.

Next to be seen there is GHEORGHE - a true giant of a man. He then begins to unload some suitcases swiftly.

Paul averts his gaze from the two and looks again from one end of the train to the other. But no further door is opened. Then he stares at the traveler again. This one notices, turns around and nods at him.

TRAVELER

Good evening. Are you expecting someone?

PAUL

Yes, but ... actually he is supposed to arrive on this train.

Meanwhile, Gheorghe has unloaded the luggage and thrown the train door shut again. Immediately after that, a SCREECHING WHISTLE sounds and the train starts moving to leave the station.

TRAVELER

May I be of service to you?

PAUL

I don't see how. I'm supposed to pick up a Professor Clutterbuck.

TRAVELER

(interested)

Oh, "the" Professor Waldo Clutterbuck?

PAUL

You know him?

Gheorghe approaches and looks at the traveler. Both exchange a few sentences in a Slavic-sounding language. Gheorghe then turns his attention back to the luggage.

TRAVELER

Gheorghe will need some time to load my luggage into the automobile.

(MORE)

TRAVELER (CONT'D)

As for your professor, he hasn't shown up yet. So, it looks like we will have the opportunity for a little chat.

The traveler points over to the bench.

TRAVELER

Shall we have a seat?

Paul nods somewhat irritated, but then sits down together with the traveler.

TRAVELER

The good man is actually quite well known to me, because his work deals with a subject that is very close to my own heart, so to speak.

PAUL

(surprised)

The elixir of longevity?

TRAVELER

(smiling)

Yes, among others. And you? What do you think about it?

PAUL

I ... well ...

TRAVELER

Ah! So you wanted to talk to him about it.

PAUL

Yes. How do you know?

TRAVELER

That was obvious.

PAUL

In fact, I found a very old text that explains exactly how to make it!

TRAVELER

I know.

PAUL

Excuse me?

TRAVELER

There are many texts that contain sometimes more and sometimes less clear instructions on how to create it.

PAUL

You do not believe in it?

TRAVELER

Certainly, I do! I have not the slightest doubt. But why do you actually doubt it?

PAUL

I'm not doing that at all!

TRAVELER

Yes, yes - very much so.

PAUL

How do you came to this conclusion?

The traveler looks sternly at Paul.

TRAVELER

When did you start making the elixir?

PAUL

(meekly)

So far, not yet at all.

TRAVELER

That's what I meant. Instead of starting to make it, you are just busy asking other peoples opinions about it. You read books, ask questions, try to convince others - but you don't make it!

Paul looks at the traveler with concern.

TRAVELER

Why does the opinion of others mean so much to you? Does the existence of the elixir depend on the opinion of others?

PAUL

How can you claim such a thing?

TRAVELER

You know, when you get around as much as I do, you always see one thing very clearly: we all have our own way to go, not the way of others. If you don't realize what is given to you - who will?

Paul stares at the traveler, stunned.

TRAVELER

Life is kind to you. Reach out and grab it. Now it is only up to you.

Gheorghe joins in and says something unintelligible to the traveler again. The traveler nods and stands up. Then he looks Paul firmly in the eye again.

TRAVELER

It is within reach!

Then he turns around and leaves the platform together with Gheorghe. Only Paul is still sitting there, staring off into space.

## 5. INT. CENTRAL STATION - DAY

Old Paul stares into space. Then Julian nudges him.

JULIAN  
Hey, grandpa! The story isn't over yet.

Paul winces, catches himself and looks at Julian.

PAUL  
Yes, it is. Now it's over.

JULIAN  
The man before, was that the traveler from before?

PAUL  
Yes, Julian, that was him. And he recognized me, as well.

JULIAN  
But he looks much younger than you!

PAUL  
Of course, I was still young at the time. But the man really did look just like he did over sixty years ago. Exactly the same!

JULIAN  
Did you give him the ee-lik-seer?

PAUL  
I think it was the other way around. But I'm only realizing that now.

JULIAN  
But you wanted to talk to the professor about it, right?

PAUL

Oh. I did, actually. But it wasn't particularly successful. As I was sitting there, alone on the platform, and all sorts of things were going through my head, suddenly Professor Clutterbuck was standing in front of me. He was very angry! I don't know where he suddenly came from - after all, I hadn't even seen him get off the train. And there was no other train either. He was suddenly there - just like that! And he complained terribly that I had kept him waiting so long.

JULIAN

That's quite unfair! You were there the whole time. I wonder if he was hiding.

PAUL

To this day, I don't know what really happened back then. But he was quite angry with me. And when I asked him about the elixir, he even laughed at me! Just like all the others. I thought that he had found real evidence in his research. Instead, he made fun of such "fantasies" - reveries, nothing more. He meant, everything examined by him would have turned out without exception as ineffective!

JULIAN

But grandpa! You could have proved it to him.

PAUL

Maybe ...

JULIAN

Why didn't you actually take anything from the ee-lik-seer? Then you could also live much, much longer.

Paul inconspicuously wipes a small tear from the corner of his eye and then smiles at Julian.

PAUL

Because I made a mistake. A very, very stupid mistake! I believed the professor. He said that I had fallen asleep while waiting for the train and had only dreamed the strange encounter. Well, I really believed him. More than I believed myself. It all seemed so fantastic - so unreal. Such a thing can't exist. This is against all reason! So I also stopped to occupy myself any further with the elixir. Instead of continuing to make a fool of myself with reveries, I concentrated on my scientific career. What a waste of time!

Paul looks at Julian intensely.

PAUL

Julian, promise me one thing: Whatever may come, whatever others may think about you, do not let yourself be distracted! Trust yourself. And realize your dreams - no matter how crazy they may seem. There is nothing more important.

JULIAN

Sure!

PAUL

Good.



JULIAN

And when I grow up, I will make the  
ee-lik-seer. For you, for Grandma.  
And for mum and dad and everyone I  
know.

Paul takes Julian in his arms and cuddles him.

PAUL

Yes, you will.

FADE OUT.