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We will meet again

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Алекс Бранд
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Аннотация

Посвящается Дине Дурбин. Актрисе. Жене. Матери. Другу.
Придет время – мы снова встретимся, навсегда. На английском языке.

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Where to begin? Perhaps, from the fact that today is especially beautiful sunset. The magnificent riot of heavenly colors, from pale blue to glowing pink-red. And all this is permeated with white fluffy strokes of clouds slowly floating in the inaccessible height of the clouds. We can see how after few movements of the invisible brush in the hands of celestial wind-artist these foggy white strokes assembling... Look! The face... The fathomless eyes slowly opened and looked down for a moment – a blue dip on a white, surrounded by the tongues of the sunset flame. Another moment – and they will disappear to be opened in another place, to look again and again.

Why not? We can begin with the cloudy eyes looked at – what? What did they manage to see in the short minutes of ephemeral existence? The vast city sprawling on the banks of the majesty-flowing river spread across the banks of the city. No, not that. The magnificent royal palace illuminated by multi-colored searchlights? No. The glance slides farther, to where it is quiet, where the sea of lights gradually dies away. There,

where darkness is interspersed with islands of soft, homely light. Yellow, warm. The majestic walls of the palace dissolve into the twilight of the coming evening. One small town, another. But a gust of cool April wind comes and the little cloud disappears under its pressure. The wind flies, flies ... Further, below ... Here came the pointed roofs, narrow ancient streets, pavements and pavements of the old uneven stone. Windows, wooden shutters, massive carved doors with cast bronze handles, polished for hundreds of years and thousands of hands touching them. A small church at the intersection of two streets. Round square, the path to the closed high lancet entrance. In the rays of the setting sun, stained-glass windows, dark gray lead covers gleam. The faces of the saints majestically gazing at the worldly vanity, wide-open, stern eyes, prostrate, stretched out in blessing. So it was and so it will be. Stone lips whisper quietly – we remember. We remember how ... Long, long ago ... A modest wedding in the silence of an almost empty, booming room. The bride and groom, a few friends. The low voice of the priest, the eternal question. And the eternal answer. She pronounced it in French – " oui ". The groom's hand, no, already her husband, slightly squeezed her hot fingers, encouraging and confirming – “oui...”. From now and forever. Till death do them part.

She smiled with pale lips, ran her tongue over them. Dry. How thirsty she is ... Last days thirst, constant thirst burns her from the inside. Son said that she cannot drink much. He is a doctor

and his words should be listened to. She tried. But ... Today she felt that it already possible. Possible to drink plenty. A hand reached for the button, stopped for a moment – and lay back on a light blanket. Not. She doesn't want to call anyone, doesn't want to see anyone. Not now. She herself. Herself. Son ordered the decanter with water to be removed from the bedside table and allowed to drink according to a personal schedule. Doctor. A bitter smile twisted her lips – it would be better if he was just a son now. He is shackled by the chains of his profession, of filial duty, not realizing that this simply suffocates her, does not allow her ... Does not allow her to finally free herself. Today ... Well, she was always diligent and punctual. Perhaps that's enough. She lifted herself with an effort in the dim light of the room, squinting at the closed door. She turned her eyes to the medical equipment console lonely standing in the corner – a device for drip infusion, a heart monitor with a telemetry attachment, an apparatus for measuring pressure, an oxymeter. Is that really important how much oxygen is in her blood now? Something else gleaming with metal, plastic, glass. Buttons, screens, tubes, wires. All this is dead, disabled. Three days ago she demanded it. Son refused at first. He argued, insisted, convinced. Chided. Not. Oh, how well he knows her "no" ... Everyone knows. For fifty years she learned to pronounce it well. And those to whom it addressed, even better remembers – it's useless to argue. It will be as she wants. And what she does not want – will not to be. So the multicolored rainbow of lights in the room went out, the hum of the oxygen

apparatus fell silent. All this she no longer needs. And there was a silence in which she heard the world outside the window, which she ordered to open wide. The world came to her – a gust of wind, singing birds in dense crowns, the smell of lilac and jasmine. The world called her and she whispered – soon...

The bed is closed with a special rising wall after she tried to get up and could not hold onto her weak legs. The hip pierced pain when she sat down, leaning on the tubular barrier. How dizzy she is, her fingers tightened on the cold smooth metal with all their might. Hold on! A thought flashed for a moment – why? Why try to get up? What for? She can lie back on a soft pillow, press a button. A nurse will come and help. She will persuade her to bring water, a lot of cool water ... And they will not say anything to her son, it will be their secret. In response, the fingers clenched even more. Not! Not today, not now. Just not now. She looked at the door again, didn't it open ... Everything is quiet. So, now she can gently press here, at the head. A small smooth ledge, she found it herself a few days ago. A small click – and the wall smoothly went down, gliding silently in the slots. Now, she must lower her legs, find the floor with them ... How dizzy, the thin ringing growing in the ears, has darkened in her eyes. Or not... May be the evening shade just gathering in the corners of the room... A mattress slightly bent under her palms. She shuddered feeling the soft roundness of air chambers under a thin sheet. Her hands jerked away and got on the knees themselves.

She gritted her teeth in an effort to keep straight, not to stagger, not to fall. She does not want to touch this. Air mattress against bedsores, another manifestation of filial care, the latest model. Against the bedsores ... She must get up. A gust of cool wind from an open window touched her face, she inhaled it with a full chest, as was it once... Many, many years ago, when she first crossed the threshold of this ancient house. Dry, cracked lips smiled, she remembered her childhood delight on that first day. She like a girl ran around all the rooms, opening the doors one by one, filling everything with a cheerful laugh. The husband followed her without saying anything and there was happiness on his face.

In the silence of the room, in the silence of the hushed house a small greenish night light came on, illuminating her with a dim light, sitting on the edge of the bed. Having lit up the face still keeping traces of that beauty, which delighted everyone. Only traces ... Thin parchment skin, red streaks on cheekbones and cheeks, lips lost their cheerful brightness and freshness ... How they are dry, she ran her tongue again, gathered strength ... For a moment her eyes covered behind pale wrinkly eyelids, she sighed softly. Eyelids rose and from under them flashed the blue flame. She will rise! She will do what she decided. Fingers clenched into fists.

When she straightened stepping bare feet on the cool parquet

floor, she was pretty rocked. And she did not dare to bend down to look for slippers. Barefoot? Let be! How nice to feel the homey touch of an old polished wood ... And so that no one is near. Neither the nanny, nor the nurse, nor ... She shook her head, chasing away unsolicited thoughts. Let her finally be left alone, she does not want to call anyone, does not want to see anyone. The hand rested on the table, she made a first timid step. Just don't fall like that time. The thigh reminded of itself again, responding with a sharp pain in the bruised place. The son was afraid of a fracture, but she refused to go to the hospital for an x-ray – why? What then, even if a fracture? Nothing. So she said, looking him straight in the eyes – uttered by syllables, as in childhood, teaches him to speak. Teaches to understand what was said. He opened his mouth, intending to insist and ... He said nothing, turning his eyes away. She felt remorse, because he wanted to do better ... She softened her tone, put a narrow palm on his hand, stroked it. It's really not necessary, sonny. This will not change anything and only the noise will rise, it will be unpleasant for me. And this is not a fracture, well, and it does not really hurt. As proof, she lifted her leg and bent her knee, trying with all her might to smile and not wrinkle. Only the corners of her lips were trembled ... The son preferred not to notice.

Five steps. Nightstand, table, wall – milestones on the way to the goal, to the huge window. She leaned on a wide window-sill and carefully looked out – it was empty in the garden, no one

would notice. She slowly opened the shutters to the end, giving way to the sounds and smells, colors and paints of the evening sunset. Today it is great. She always loved this room and the space outside the window. The endless hilly fields stretching to the horizon. The house calmed down, her children were laid and sleeping peacefully in their beds. The husband would be back soon. And she sits, climbing with her feet on the window sill, and dreams, thinks. Sometimes she singing softly. Singing... Her lips parted, there was a whisper that suddenly broke off. She leaned back, pressed her hand to her mouth trying to silence coughing. No need to be heard now. Breathing is too fast, she tried to calm him down with half-forgotten exercises before going on stage. It took several painful minutes before the attack subsided. She tried again, stubbornly tried. No, the air does not obey, the lips are trembling, the parched throat cannot cope. Suddenly her eyes opened wide and understanding has come – she is just afraid. After all, everything is simple – she need to drink a glass of water, to soften burning thirst, and then ... Then she finally will can. That's the point... But after the first glass will be the next ones, she will not stop anymore. For why? What will it give? Nothing. She slowly whispered this word speaking to herself. Frowning, she turned to the bedside table, a wrinkle cut through her forehead. She decided and will do as decided. A soft sound of flowing water be heard, and a minute later when she turned back to the window, to the fiery red-silver sunset glowing outside ...

I'll be loving you always
With a love that's true always
When the things you've planned
Need a helping hand
I will understand always ...

A quiet tune, she was transferred again to that church, to that sad story, where the only time ... The only time she tried to become someone she had never been before. And from there – farther, farther ... She wants to be in time in these short quick minutes, until sunset, until darkness fell, until ... The far past arose in front of her flashing sight. It started like a foggy film strip... Places and sounds appeared here and there. Pictures of far past. Faces. Names. Events. She remembers someone and she only recognizes someone by sight. The years did not spare her memory, but a solution was found – she gave everyone a nickname, simple, naive, and sometimes even funny. In fact, the name is just a print, and if the memory weakens, it can disappear forever pulling the person. Now it's easy for her: here's the Master, here's Teddy. Bird. Just Friend. There are a lot of them ... Everybody left a long time ago, but now, when she stands near the window, when she calls – they have returned, even for a brief moment, they have come to her. And only herself she doesn't call by no means. Not a nickname, although there were a lot of them, not by name. She does not seem to want to see herself, either in the mirror or in memory. She does not want

... As all the past years she wanted to leave, to leave as far as possible from her past, too vain, bright, brilliant. From the past that betrayed her and she did not forgive. Once she even said that she despised herself – the old one ... The family, the children, the house – a long, quiet life, years and years of quiet happiness. So she decided, so she wanted. So it was. But why now, when a strange power suddenly lifted her out of bed, led her to the window – she is restless, she sees what she once forbade herself to see? She does not know. She grinned and whispered – I am just drifting. So she once told with youthful naivety to one of the journalists who besieged her. I am drifting. Let be. Now – she can. Now – all bans off. In the silence of the room the sound of pouring water was heard again. The hand that brought to the mouth the second glass almost did not tremble. How good ... Cool water is like a spring that has irrigated a dry, cracked ground. Here a timid narrow stream ran along it, so it gained strength and depth, spreading, stubbornly making its way into the unyielding dense soil. It seems that it is about to dry up, calm down, give up and disappear without a trace in the barren sand. Not. The blazing disk of the sun touched the line of a distant horizon, the colors of sunset flashed scarlet, silver, pink, hit the wide-open eyes. She wanted to shut them down for a moment – too brightly, as if she had been spotlighted again. At first, quiet music was heard, an orchestra began to play somewhere, she listened involuntarily to a familiar tune. Mozart. How strange, have never played orchestras on our street. But out of doubt and

extraneous thoughts, it's so beautiful! How long time she had not heard these magical modulations ... More, more! Running out was a trickle foamed by a wave and rushed to a gallop, as if she saddled it. The tight gust of wind hit in the face scattering her hair. Right in front of the window appeared a huge white slowly swaying cloth. The heart sank with a dull pain – this is a projection screen ... It is like the only spectator in the hall that no one is visible to anyone, standing frozen in expectation. Now ... Now ... She didn't want to remember? Wanted to move away from the past? An unknown force brought him right here, look! She heard the name, her name, pronounced in a chorus of thousands of voices, male, female, children's ... She raised her withered hand in protest, no, no! It's not me! My name is ... Her whisper was drowned out by music, a familiar splash screen appeared. And...

Pictures, scenes, moments ... She remembered a lot, she did not want to remember much, and she simply forgot a lot. Her life, a long, very long life, compressed to quick seconds, as if caught by a hidden camera, rushed in front of her.

Here she is, quite a girl, shyly stands in front of a microphone, squeezing the stand with both hands, and next to ... She wrinkled her forehead, trying to remember his name. She was captured by this magical act. What's his name? He left a long time ago, like the rest. She is the last one. Name ... Do not remember,

but ... Nickname. Suddenly she smiled – it's Teddy! On the first Christmas of their collaboration, he brought a bunch of plush toys, a wooden horse. She was ... Fourteen, fifteen? Or ten? Mom goggled at these gifts, and he held out a huge bear and laughed, shrugging his shoulders.

– I still do not know how to behave with her. But she is a child? Hold on!

– And what should I do with the horse?

– Put your daughter on it someday!

When they laughed, he knew how to amuse the whole country ... And then ... What then? Teddy has disappeared. A series of fast pictures, sometimes merging into a foggy strip. Someone looks out of it – and then disappears. How rapidly everything changed then, the time began to gallop, leaving, leaving ... And childhood went with it, then youth. Glory, recognition, money. The first million at eighteen, nine-room mansion, car. And she loved to sing, read, run a race with a barking Tippy, to walk unrecognized on the boulevard, eating spaghetti and fried potatoes with ketchup, going to the movies. Yes, go to the cinema. Strange? Perhaps ... Time passed. Her face, lit by the flashing, trembling light of the ghostly cloth, lit up with a quick smile that immediately disappeared. It's him. His name was ... No, she does not want to call this name. Let him be just the First. She loves and is loved, so it seemed. Not for long. No one is to

blame, they were just too, too inexperienced. She just hastened then... Someone said – it is impossible to destroy an image with a divorce. Her answer – how can I be with an unloved person for the sake of an “image”? The movement of the paintings has accelerated even more, as if an unknown operator is in a hurry to get rid of his visitor from painful memories as soon as possible. Now, now ... Her lips tightened, her eyes narrowed. Second. For a moment, a smile again – a daughter was born. Indifferent face. Near her in beginning and soon – disappeared, forever. He did not even try to be a father, to be a real husband. She was told later – this is how the Second applied to all his children, from other women. Did that comfort her? Not. She quickly learned not to forgive. The booming courtroom, her voice. Strong, clear, her pride – he suddenly weakened, became barely audible, almost a whisper. She stood and could not help it, the judge again and again asked to speak louder ... She does not want to see it. Further, further ... And another shadow came over – she would call him Doctor, although he had never been any doctor. There was a war and she so wanted to contribute to the fight, she even donated blood then, although it was not required. And after the shooting she felt unwell, dizzy, he supported ... Conversation, a look, a grip of a hand. Spark. No, don't! She remembers, do not show it! Damn night highway, damn car ... A moment of weakness. A woman silhouette with huge frilly hat on her head. Her name is Snake. Much things then happened because of her, and she doesn't want to remember any of this. She does not

want. Will not want. Never. Her eyelids trembled, a lonely slow tear rolled down her cheek. Then she realized that it was time to change something, it was time to change herself. The time has come to state that I am different, I am no longer a “sweet universal's sister”. I don't want to be her anymore. Probably, I never really was.

The book in hand, she read it for a day without stopping. Here it is! How she was convincing, persistent, just like her recent heroines. And – that church, a quiet song, she had just sang it standing by the window... She did not sleep at nights was tormented by insomnia – let the fatigue be real! No glycerin tears. It should, should have happened! Then for a moment it seemed that she had broken free from the fetters of the imposed image. She is a goddess again! Oh, really? There are no gods without believing in them. The love of the crowd is cruel and selfish, it is quick to worship. And to sentence with oblivion. A sad smile on a pale haggard face... She closed her eyes, not wanting to see. Now this letter will appear. Oh, yes... She remembers a few of his short lines perfectly. As she remembers that endless evening and herself sitting alone in the twilight of the living room. Only one thought was monotonously repeated – that's it... That's it. Phone call. It was him, a Friend.

– I'll be right now, the contract is with me, you will enter the amount yourself. They will regret it.

– No.

– But...

– Come. Without papers. Sit with me...

Silence, black shadows throwing on the walls and ceiling, the crackle of a flame in the fireplace, golden brittle gleams on two crystal glasses. She haven't took a drink of her own.

– Thank you for everything. For all.

– Where are you now, what will you do? May be...

– No. Sorry.

Of course, she was not alone – her parents, sister, daughter ... And soon ... She squeezed her fingers on the old polished wood of the window sill, how dizzy she is again ... Just like when He suddenly offered to leave with him, far away over the ocean. Leave everything. Forever and ever. Here is his face, these funny glasses ... He did not know where to put his hands, having lost his European charm. At first, she didn't even have something to say. Sure, before it happened she guessed and there were rumors about... All the same, it was unexpected and... Near him was warm, calm and joyful. She had never experienced anything like this before, and he felt it, with the eternal flair of a loving and beloved man. His eyes opened, still not fully believing ... Yes! And after a short time – pronounced in a ringing voice "'oui", already here, in this small town, in a church nearby.

– But you'll have to always protect me from ...

– Whom?

Look in the eyes, smile.

– From spiders, mosquitoes and reporters, dear. Do you agree?

He smiled back and squinted.

– From spiders with mosquitoes – no problem, you yourself do not want to communicate with them. But the reporters... Are you sure you won't go to them yourself? They will call you, time after time. And not only reporters.

Her face hardened, her look became serious, she put her hand on his arm, squeezed her fingers.

– I will not return there. Never.

Not everything was smooth at the beginning. They were very careful. Sometimes even too careful and this often led to suspicions and quarrels. Even to parting. Did she again make a mistake? No. The separation was short. They overcame everything together. They were meant for each other – nothing could separate them. Both went to this a long and difficult path. The birth of a son, home routines, family. She looks greedily, the past life unfolds before her in broad strokes. How much happiness and joy she had, just joy. Traveling, meeting with a few relatives and friends. Sometimes a Friend called from across the ocean, he did not forget her all these years.

- Are you still happy, dear?
- Yes.
- I will try another time.

But another time the answer remained the same. And the next, and again, and more... He backed down and remained just a Friend, to the bitter end.

No, she was not forgotten. Letters came a lot. It is impossible to read and answer to everyone, it was a kind of lottery for two – for her and the lucky one. What is there in the envelope? If it was decorated with a flower, a heart, or something similar, she sent the letter to the basket. She was attracted by simple outlines, firmly and simply written lines of the address and name. Then – reading. And again, everything was decided by the very first words, the handwriting could say a lot, the color of the ink. So she felt... Wishes of happiness, good luck, hopes for her return, questions about family and health. Even requests... There was one letter ... She does not remember where it came from and who sent it. Fingers touched hair. They are still long and thick, just now gray... Then she was proud of her hair mane and the fan asked for a curl. Of course, she did not answer. But remembered. And the moment came when this memory was useful. But more about that later, if there is time. How fast it goes ... And how much more she want to see, feel again, because... After all, everything passes in front of her for the last time. Then

– eternal darkness. She took a deep breath to get enough of it, to feel the coolness and freshness of this magic evening. Who gave her this, who did not want her to leave, slackening helplessly in her bed? No answer. Another breath... How much water has she already drunk? She carefully glanced at the decanter out of the corner of her eye, dreading to see the truth – a little lake on the very bottom. Let be. But she could stand here and watch, hear. To alive again! Not for a long time. Let be. Deep breathing has awakened long-standing chest pain – a trace of the road accident and broken ribs. The pain, however, reminded of something else, something that still sometimes causes a secret forbidden melancholy. How many years have passed? She does not remember exactly.

It was a bright summer populous day, he suddenly froze in the middle of the street, with his head up, staring at the church spire. She did not have time to brake and knocked him down, strongly hitting him in the side. Lord... He flew off to the sidewalk, rolled a few yards and froze. The surrounding people screamed in fright and she had already opened the door and jumped out, bent and took her hand. Then she was still fast, impetuous, slim, no one gave her more than thirty-five or forty, and she already was... She grinned, looking at the screen still hanging in front of the window, no matter how much she was. And it is important that everything with the poor fellow turned out to be in order, nothing broken. They were surrounded by excitedly speaking people, she

bent toward him, close... Quite young, long hair fell in disorder on his shoulders, his glasses slipped on the tip of his nose... The view would have been frivolous if not for firmly compressed lips and not a look. She was surprised – there was no anger or annoyance in him. Only participation, empathy and desire to help. Help her? Yes.

“How are you, monsieur, it's okay?”

He shook his head, do not understand French. I switched to English. The guy smiled, nodded, wincing a little. He tried to sit down. The crowd around worried, demanding to lie down and wait for the doctor, he was already called. The guy frowned and raised his hand, asking everyone to fall silent. He looked at me and realized how was I uncomfortable here. Did he recognized me? Not? I do not think. He is too young. Even local residents have long ceased to associate the once-famous name with the humble madame. I always introduce myself as my husband's name. So, as a rule, I enjoy my incognito. But I need to take the guy to the hospital, I can not leave him on the street. And there ... It will be necessary to fill out documents, to explain to the police. Publicity and a small scandal for the joy of the press. A newspaper headline appeared before my eyes. Oh, how I don't want to ... May be, I will wait for the promised doctor and then quietly disappear? No. It's dishonorable.

– Miss, I'm fine, do not worry and sorry. This is my fault,

staring and did not notice your car.

I shuddered when I heard this heavy accent. How did he get here? And this old-fashioned "Miss"... But thoughts off, if he's all right, then ...

– Are you sure? Maybe it's still necessary to wait for a doctor or do you want me to take you to the hospital? Not far from here. You never know, it may be a strong injury or fracture. Costs, of course, I ...

He did not let me continue and quickly sat down. Yet it hurts him, I can notice this, for many years I studied various facial expressions. And a great idea came to my mind ... I lowered my voice and said in a tone of conspirator.

– I guess we can disappear from here?

So he appeared in my home, it was the best way out – I did not leave him and at the same time avoided publicity. And then...

I laid him on the couch in the living room of the first floor. He was very embarrassed, but I insisted. He needs a little rest. I brought coffee, some sweets. Soon he was sitting, finding it impolite to lie in my presence. Easy conversation... He introduced himself, talked a little about himself... I called my name with some tension. Yes, as usual I told my husband's name, but... If my guest finds out? If so, what to do? Ask him not to tell

anything to anyone? What an absurdity... No, no reaction. The guy nodded politely, asked what I am doing and so on. Suddenly I was hurt by insult... I looked at him and thought – thousands of people would dream to be in your place. And you sit, drink coffee with my home-made cookies – and you do not even know who you are talking with, in whose house you are. And you will not know... I can even make a movie on this story. I could not stand it and laughed, the insult was gone. I did not think about it a long time – to make a movie... I can call my husband, he is a director. I will call a Friend, how he would be surprised... He may be my producer again. I can even write a script myself. Laughter has become even more fun, the guy looked at me wonderingly, put the cup on the table. I hurried to calm him down.

– Do not pay attention, I just ...

– What?

– I just thought that we are like in the old film – I hit you with a car, here we are now, at my home... Good beginning, don't you think? Just imagine...

He smiled back and took the cup again, took a small sip. Looked around the living room. I froze – there are pictures on the walls. Some are signed ...

– So you are an actress? But you said that you are engaged in the dress design.

Yes, so I said. And out of habit, I did something out of naughtiness. I do not know why ... Apparently, the atmosphere of happening has so affected me. And, he is just a boy, he will not

understand the hint, he certainly has not watched that old film. I showed him crossed fingers. He laughed.

– You lied to me!

– Yes! But when you cross your fingers, it's not so serious!

Our loud laughter filled the room, burst into the garden, into the free air and to the bright sun. Laughing, he pointed to the wall. I shrugged in response and sighed.

– Yes, I am an actress. Was.

He appreciated the pause, his face turned serious. He quietly asked.

– Can I see? Allow me?

He watched, I silently stood nearby and waited. After all, he will read the signatures, there are names. My name is there. I will never forget his wide-open eyes. My God ... No, there was not usual admiration, delight or something like that. Huge confusion, almost fear. I could not resist and asked when we sat back. I asked for an honest answer. Why? He answered honestly, looking into my eyes.

– I thought you are no longer alive. Please, sorry, I...

– You felt like you saw a ghost, yep?

He hesitated, looked away and shrugged. For a moment it seemed that he wanted to get up and leave. I suddenly wanted to put a palm on his hand, calm him down. I see how he felt uneasy here... Of course, I did not do that. He understood that I was waiting. What he said probably should have hurt me deadly.

As articles about how I gained two hundred pounds and I do not appear anywhere because I stopped getting into my evening dresses.

– I know nothing about you except the name. I have not seen your movies, never. Well, we were told at school...

I was curious, I leaned forward.

– What were you told?

He suddenly mischievously smiled at the corners of his mouth and squinted. We both felt that the involuntary tension between us was gone. And – I have not experienced any resentment, quite the contrary. It became very good. As it would be banal, a fan who accidentally came to me... A standard delight in the eyes, boring compliments and questions. Would he eventually ask for an autograph? I would not like... Stay yourself, we do not need this tinsel! Do not disappoint me, let it be a little unexpected adventure for both of us, as if we really in one of the old naive movies.

– So what they told you about me? Come across!

Suddenly I spoke to him like a friend. Why not? Will he take a step towards? Involuntarily I glanced at the wall clock, I wanted to know how much was left before my husband returned. I hope the guy did not notice. What am I doing? Not good. He noticed my quick glance. In his eyes I saw a doubt for a moment, and ...

– No, not really about you.

I did not manage to hide the disappointment, it came out funny, we laughed again. I am feeling better and happier, I do not

understand why... As if the sparkles flickered in the air merrily gleaming.

– What about?

– About how in one movie you sang romances, this movie called...

And then... I stopped him, raising my hand, slowly got up. Everything turned out on its own, the words of a foreign language poured into the thinly ringing silence of the living room. He froze, the impression that he was afraid to breathe while singing. Very quietly, in a small sound, so as not to carry it far. Not necessary. This is just for him. For me. For both of us. The words of the song subsided, I approached him, close. Eyes, his eyes. Warm, deep, dark brown, attractive. Magic of two in a quiet room. I know that my gaze fixed on him is now the same... Deep brown and clear blue. It's very easy to succumb. In my pictures at such moments the camera slowly ran down, and... He slightly, very slightly, hinted at the movement, moved back, barely perceptible, he doesn't want to hurt me. This is not a movie.

Not. There was nothing, could not be. Can not. For a moment there was a regret, if you would be a little older. Or I'm younger. And all overshadowed by the face of my husband. Not. Never. We will not destroy the intangible thing that united us in these moments. We will save it, together. I am sure that the same

thoughts and doubts are in my guest's soul. There were – and disappeared. And we stayed. But what unexpectedly connected us should have manifested itself. How, in what? And I...

I told him everything. So I wanted. How many times they asked me about it, what famous journalists... What amounts was offered just for the interview, just for the conversation. The answer has always been – no. But now... Wanted to finally speak out. I wanted an eye opposite, attentive gaze, understanding, sympathy. I need sympathy, why? After all, I'm happy. I have everything I dreamed of. But... But...

How good it is that in the dimness and quiet of the room, which only the small lamp lights up, you can just sit next to him – and talk, talk... I didn't even ask to keep everything in secret – I know that he will keep silence. Interview, which for decades sought from me – here and now. Next to me is not a journalist, not a historian of cinema – an unknown person, almost a young man. He knows only my name. He will know more. I want it. We both want, I see it in his eyes.

My long, very long story... I got carried away, soon I pulled out thick heavy photo albums, we didn't have enough space on the sofa and a table – we settled right on the carpet, on the floor. Little light here – a large chandelier flashed under the ceiling, illuminating the living room with a festive light. I asked if he

was hungry? Without waiting for an answer, I jumped up and swept into the kitchen, as if in an instant I became younger by... By much. I quickly made sandwiches and tea. So funny, he was very embarrassed, but he followed and tried to help. Of course, a living legend – and that's how it looks after him in a simple way. Smears butter on bread and asks if he want fry eggs with ham... No, honey, sit down – I am the hostess, and you are my guest. The story continued. Page after page of thick cardboard. Faces, events. Rows of photos, my finger sliding over them. Sometimes he froze for a moment, as if hesitated to tell. What on the next page... And what is hidden between the neatly pasted pictures. At some moments the voice of reason timidly tried to intervene – be silent, do not. If he wants, he will earn a fortune by simply telling the press... This is a big temptation, will he stand? But I am writing an autobiography... This will be published, everyone will read it anyway. But you also tell what you never write! Do you believe him so much? I believe. I want it. For all the time he did not try to ask anything more, he didn't show any surprise or emotion. Someone, looking from the side, could think that my guest is indifferent. But I saw what was going on in his soul, saw the fingers clench on the upholstery of the sofa. I saw everything and gave him to see everything, told the most intimate. Why? I do not know. But I am grateful to Providence for sending me this meeting, so unexpected, wonderful. Magic...

– Thank you for this evening ...

– Thank you, this is ... This is magic... I do not know how to say ...

– Do not say. And...

– What?

– You have to leave.

– Yes ... It's time.

We were delaying the inevitable moment of farewell – he asked to show him something. I thought for a moment, then the screen flashed – I chose two small passages, I don't want to waste time on long views. Short time remaining to us... If he wants, he will find everything himself, later. So we stood side by side, lighted by a trembling silvery shine, looked on. We listened. If someone saw us now, he would have thought that we were about to join hands. He would be right. But... Do not.



We must say goodbye. We both know that we will never meet again. How sadly... And yet not. Why? Because subsequent meetings would destroy what was lit between us. Routine... This is a terrible force. Both of us do not want the spark to go out in everyday life. We will keep it. But I want so much to leave something for him... Sometimes he will look at that and remember. I grinned: is it an autograph? To write on a photo? I have dozens of them for fans. "For the long memory, with best wishes, always..." Few simple words, signature. That's how the charm will disappear. What can I give him? I slowly walked over to the mirror, saw my reflection in it, he got up next. He is going to leave... What will I give him? Well, ask yourself, I do not know what to do... Last minutes leave, leave, you will not just disappear, I will give you... What? Flash. I remembered that old letter with a curious request. I did not answer then. And well, because not then, not him. You.

He even retreated a step when, in one motion, I freed my hair, letting them fall on my shoulders, shook my head so that they would scatter... They are still beautiful, right? Like before. Where is... Where did I put it? Here it is. He looked distractedly at what I handed to him, shook his head and whispered.

- Do not.

The silence thickened even more around us, involuntarily catching the sounds of the street, if a car drove up is not audible. My husband, wait . . . Just wait a bit, give us a few more minutes. I took a step forward without giving up.

– You want this and I want it. Do it yourself, – I smiled and winked, – just be careful, don't take too many. Here it will be unnoticeable.

He tried to smile back and carefully picked up the small scissors, our fingers flinched as they touched. I bowed my head, felt a timid touch, God... We seemed to perform some ancient ritual. I bit my lip, it's good that he does not see my face. How nice that I now do not see his face. Do not. Scissors blades clicked faintly, I lifted my head. A curl of my hair in his hand.

– Give me.

A light blue narrow ribbon wrapped a curl, slowly tied it with a butterfly knot. He silently watched, biting his lip in the same way as I had a moment ago.

– Here.

He looked at him for several long moments, I handed a small envelope... Goodbye, my Guest... Goodbye, my...

– Can I take them?

– No, leave it to me – I want to remember too.

I held out my hand, he put the scissors in my palm, our fingers touched once again. Last time.

I did not offer a ride, did not ask where he was staying. Not asked for a mailing address. I only know the name. He disappeared around the bend of the street. Never looked back. Goodbye. I touched the spot where he cut the curl. When he held it in his hand, I saw that he was struggling with the desire to bring it to face, to inhale the smell. I know that he will do it later. Tears filled my eyes, wiped them with a quick movement. We will remember each other. Forever.

Tears sprang to my eyes... Here it is, a turn, behind which her unexpected guest disappeared. How unusual and strange it was to see everything from the side, as if a mischievous thought came true and for that story someone made a picture. But where is the inscription "The end"? It will not be? What else will be shown? Subsequent life? Leaving and marriage of the daughter... Then the son healed his life. The death of her husband... She was with him and held his hand when he left. Long, long fourteen years in a quiet, empty house. Does she want to see it? Not. And it seems that the unknown force that has unfolded a whole life in front of her agrees.

Fingers squeezed the glass, she drank the rest of the water in it in one gulp, looked around. The carafe is empty. Scorching thirst receded, it was replaced by an ever-increasing subtle ringing in the ears, the heart suddenly gave an interruption, then another one... The son warned. Let be! She killed herself now, but it was worth it! If she didn't get up, if she didn't go to the window, if she didn't find the strength, she wouldn't be given her life again, she wouldn't have been able to see, hear, feel... Exchange it for some more days or even weeks on air mattress? A quiet stubborn whisper – no. No! The heartbeat is getting stronger, faster, the drumming louder in her ears, breathing has gone, she staggered, squeezed her fingers on the sill with all her might. Go back to the bed, press a button, call for help... No! Not. It seemed to her that these words she had shouted directly into the black sky, which was covered with the twinkling patterns of the constellations. The sun had set on the fields and night covered the garden. How hard it is to breathe, how scary... So this moment has come. Now she is ready. But what is it?

Suddenly everything around was lighted up with a bright festive light, everything disappeared in it's invincible radiance – the house, the room... Where is it? What with her? The pain disappeared, the breathing calmed down, the heart... It still pounding, but – exactly, strongly, quickly. She is just worried. Very worried, because now...

“What about singing, Patsy?”

Lord... She shuddered when she heard this romping cry from above, from the gallery. Patsy? Her name is different. This is not her name, so called... Gallery? Where did it come from? Who is this tall, broad-shouldered man leaning toward her, leaning heavily on the railing with his large, loaded hands? He is dressed in a tuxedo, a snow-white shirt is visible, but... It is evident that the man usually use completely different clothes, simple, working. Understanding came – he borrowed it all somewhere or rented to come here. He came to listen to her, look at her. Support and encourage her. She is scared... Why? Is it at her age to afraid of something? How old is she? The thought stumbled, reality and memories mixed up. She looked around... The bright light of searchlights, a lot of people, the glitter of jewels and glasses of theatrical binoculars. She need to say something... Oh... She forgot her cue, forgot the role. What to do? How bad...

– This is no longer a movie, you do not play a role. Everything is now for real. Do not be afraid... You're among friends, forever.

What? Who said this? She turned sharply. And she pressed her hand to her mouth. It does not happen! She called him the Bird because of thin tall figure, the flying gait, the rebellious head of hair and hands. When he worked, they looked like wings and she thought he about to take off. She admired him. But he died. A long time ago. How can he talk to her now? A calm thought has come – now he can. What a kind, encouraging smile

he has... So she is also dead? Not. Here she stands in front of everyone, young, strong, joyful again. The senile night gown has disappeared. A white glittering dress is on her and she even want to spin around. Almighty Lord... There in the front row – dad, mom. A sister waving her hand. Teddy. And here is a Friend. She froze for a moment, her eyes darting around, searching. He is not here. So, the time has not come yet. But they will meet, they will surely meet, now she knows! And now...

He approaches her, a little ungainly, just like on the first meeting, like on the first date. He is here – and could not be otherwise. They will not part. Never.

– I'm here, darling.

And everything disappeared, remaining behind the veil of silver shine. Like a curtain fell. The screen outside went out. Silence.

How slowly the glass sparkling in the light of a night-lamp falls... The sound of glass shattered to smithereens. A knock on the door wide open, a shadow on the threshold.

– Mother!

** On April 30, 2013, a son's message was published, according to which the actress died a few days ago. No other details of death and burial were available. According to rumors, the body was cremated, the ashes scattered.

The autobiography of the actress was never published. Told by

that magical evening – still remained between her and the Guest. He is alive, he remembers everything and keeps entrusted to him in silence. The time will come – they will meet again .



Pokotilov 2019

