

One summer can turn your whole life upside down ...

NOT THE BEST SUMMER

MON RON



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All characters are fictitious and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead,
is utterly coincidental.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Pandemic summer 2020 was different for many of us. I travelled less thus I had more time to be with myself. I used it to write my first story. I started spontaneously and surprisingly I've completed it with nearly 35k words.

I am not a professional writer. I am not even an English native speaker. Therefore the story may not be the best one you have read, but it's mine and I am proud of it.

This is the first novella I have ever written. I hope you'll enjoy it.

M.R.

PROLOGUE

When you think about summer you want it to be the best one. You start making plans as soon as spring comes. You want to chill, shake your stress off, and just do absolutely nothing. You want to spend as much time as possible with your friends. Friends, exactly. Sometimes I think that friendship is overrated. When you ask your best friend, if you lucky to have one, what she or he would do for you without hesitation, their answer would be something like - "*Well, depends what it would be.*" It's not what we want to hear. I don't expect my best friend to die for me, but to offer her kidney if I need a transplant, would be fair enough. We think that we are close with someone, because we spend time together, we chat on the phone for hours about silly things, or go clubbing. Friendship is not only about having fun. Friendship is about being for that particular person when she or he needs us the most. It's about listening her or his problems too, not only talking all the time about yours. Do you think there is a person in your life whom you can call a "best friend?" Think again.

Youth. Why can't this be easy? We still got time to struggle in life. And why is it so short? When you are young you want to do crazy stuff. If not then, so when? Unfortunately, many times life is unpredictable and decides for us. In many cases we need to rearrange it and adopt to a new way of living. Sometimes it's not even enough, because your fate was already planned for you. Even if you try very hard, it may sound a bit cliché, but what is meant to be will always finds its way.

That summer wasn't the best one. That summer I grew up. I became a woman. I met the love of my life and I lost my best friend. That summer I cried hard million times. That summer someone left and someone new arrived.

That was an unforgettable summer.

Anna

The first time I saw Samantha I knew we would become best friends forever. As they say "every brownie needs a blondie by her side", or something like that. Yes, Sam was blondie. Pretty, funny, sweet girl with blond hair. She was the most beautiful and the nicest girl I had ever met. We clicked instantly and never stayed apart again.

It was Monday morning. I just moved to a new place with my parents. We had lived in a small village, but dad was promoted and we had to move to the city. I didn't relish the moving idea. I was country girl at heart and Preston didn't sound like a countryside. I didn't have a choice. I was only eighteen.

That Monday morning I walked down the corridor of my new school. Alone. Nobody even looked in my direction and I didn't look at anybody either. However, I was in need. I was lost and time was ticking. The lesson was about to start and I was in the middle of...nowhere. Then I spotted her. Tall, beautiful, blonde girl. She saw me too. But she didn't say anything. She just passed me by. I was hypnotised with her beauty. For the first time in my whole life I was impressed by a beauty of another woman. I turned round and said

"Excuse me."

She was the first person whom I actually accosted. I never was shy to talk to people, but that time I felt a bit tensed. She stopped and turned around.

"Are you talking to me?" She asked.

"Actually, yes. I'm sorry to bother you. Could you help me? If that's okay with you." I replied.

To be honest, I had expected to hear completely different response than the one she gave.

"Of course, I could help you. What's the matter?" She asked.

I was flattered, because I had thought that she'd rather say "*Do you know whom are you talking to?*" or "*Do you know who am I?*" I was glad she had said something else.

- "I need to get to the history of English literature class by Professor Bernt and I'm completely lost. Could you be so kind and just tell me which direction I should go, please."

I looked at the clock and it was 8.03 a.m. The lesson had already started but I was still standing on the corridor asking for direction. And what more, she also was late to her own class because of me.

- "Mr Bent." She corrected with a smile. She had a beautiful smile.

- "Follow me. I am going to the same lesson, but we'd better hurry up. Mr Bent doesn't like when students are late for his class."

- "Oh sorry, I didn't introduce myself, I'm Anna." I said on the way to the lesson.

- "I'm Samantha. Nice to meet you, Anna." She responded, then we entered the classroom.

2

Mr Bent was in his 60s. I'd say in his early 60s. Maybe sixty two. Never knew for sure. He was an old soul though. What I recognized, he loved his job. I had always appreciated that in teachers. I could discern who relished the teaching subject, who didn't. For instance, Miss Galan, the English language teacher, was a very mean person. I wasn't sure if it was due to the fact that she was single in her 50s with no kids or just because she didn't like her job, or both. Many times I felt sorry for her. Why do people create their own misery? I later discovered why she was so unhappy. Who made her to feel unhappy.

Mr Bent taught with passion. He did. When he talked about prose, poems, essays, or drama you could feel it in his voice. Nobody ever complained that his lessons were a waste of time. He enjoyed when students discussed about literature. He wanted us to have different points of view. He used to say that everyone was a unique individual and

we should not have looked in one direction. We all must have had a different literacy taste. Initially I was glad I had met Mr Bent. I could come to him with any question and he was always ready to listen. I felt like he was more than just my teacher. I felt strong connection with him. A soul connection. Was he my soulmate? Who knows. He might have been. I regretted many times that the relation we once had changed due to life events.

One day when I was sitting with Sam on the corridor he approached us and asked

- "Anna, could I have a word with you, please? I'd like to talk to you about something important."

Sam and I glanced at each other then I agreed and followed him to a classroom. I wasn't sure what a problem he had, but after a short period of silence he said

- "Anna, you are my best student and I will need your help. If you are only ready to help me, of course."

I looked at him with my eyes wide open, and asked

- "Is everything okay, Mr Bent?"

I thought rather that he had needed my assistance with some classroom project, but not what I heard later.

- "Yes, but... look Anna. I have a son. He is your age and he is coming next week to stay with me."

I was quite surprised that Mr Bent could have a son at my age. It meant he was over forty when his son was born. Nevertheless, it could have been possible. There were many people who decided to have kids at late age.

- "Oh, that's great Mr Bent. Is he coming for long?" I responded.

Mr Bent seemed to be anxious about something.

- "Yes, he is coming for long. He will stay with me. His mother has passed away last month. We weren't in touch. I was just sending them money. His mother didn't want me to contact them. It's too complicated, Anna. I shouldn't even involve you in my personal

life, you are my student."

He approached a windowsill, stood there for a while in silence then turned round and...the bell rang.

"Mr Bent, I have to go now, but this is my last lesson, I can come back after it and we can finish our conversation, if you..."

"Go Ann." He interrupted.

I grabbed my bag and dashed to the class. After it I found out that Mr Bent had already left. I was worried about him. I could understand that he felt uncomfortable with the fact that his son, whom in fact he had never seen in his whole life, was going to live with him. Thus I decided to pay him a visit at home. He had asked me for help, but I still didn't know what I was supposed to do. We hadn't finished our conversation and I needed to know what had happened in Mr Bent's life. Why he wasn't allowed to see his own son. My curiosity grew strong.

Mr Bent lived in an apartment, which wasn't very big. Or, maybe just the amount of books he owned made it look smaller than it really was. I knocked the door.

"Anna?" He seemed to be surprised when he saw me at the doorstep.

"Yes, that's my name, Anna."

He smiled.

"We haven't finished our conversation, Mr Bent. I'm ready to help you, but you need to let me in and tell me what you are expecting me to do."

He smiled again and invited me inside.

It wasn't the first time I visited him. But that time the purpose was completely different. It wasn't about books as usually. It was about him and his son. I sat in a big armchair. There were two of them facing one another with a small round table between. Although the day was still bright, the living room in Mr Bent's house was dark. The window curtains were half opened and created a dull atmosphere.

"Would you like a cup of tea, Anna?" He shouted from the kitchen.

- "Oh yes please!" I responded.

- "How is everything at school, Ann?" He asked just to kill the silence or just to start talking about something else.

- "You know Mr Bent, school is good. You're one of my teachers." I responded and added

- "So Mr Bent, what's your son's name?" I decided to shift back to the main issue.

Mr Bent brought our tea and flopped down into the other armchair.

- "Thomas. His name is Thomas." He responded without looking in my direction.

- "Mr Bent, today at school you've said that you weren't allowed to see him. Do you want to tell me why was that?" I asked hesitantly.

I was curious, but I was also worried about Mr Bent. I hadn't seen him like that before. I had to know what was bothering him. Then he looked at me and started.

- "When I met his mother, she was married. I worked then in a primary school and I was teaching English language. I was doing my PhD at the same time and she was doing hers." He took a sip of tea and carried on. - "It was rainy day. I finished my lessons and left the building. I ran to my car. On my way home I noticed her at the bus stop, completely soaked. I stopped and offered to take her home. She hesitated at first, but after a while she decided to get into my car. My God, I should have let her to wait for that bus. But I didn't want her to get sick, you know Ann." There was a pause of silence, then he began talking again. - "Later she told me that her husband had taken the car because he needed to travel to some other town and her own one was in a service. When she got into my car she was shaking. I gave her my pullover, but it didn't help much. We stopped at my place because she lived outside the town and the road was blocked due to the flood. She took a shower. I gave her my clothes and let her own dry. We drank wine to warm up, we were chatting, laughing, like we knew each other for ages, and then...I kissed her. How stupid I was. I kissed her. I knew she was married and I kissed her anyway. You know Ann, you're big girl. You understand this. Sometimes we can't control it..."

- "Yeah, I know that." I added.

- "When I kissed her I felt embarrassed. I stepped aside and started apologizing, but she

pulled me back, and kissed me even deeper. Then I let it to be. It was amazing. We kissed and caressed our bodies, we rolled over the floor, the wall, and the bed. It was unusual to me, but it felt great. We did it, then we slept. When we woke up she checked her phone and there were many missed calls from her husband. She grabbed her clothes and left without a single word. Next day she approached me on the corridor. She apologized and asked me to forget about everything. How could I forget about it? I tried to talk to her again, but she was avoiding me. I didn't want to be the reason she was in trouble, so I didn't bother her any more. As she wanted, I let it go, but I didn't forget."

I was listening to the story with attention and created its image in my small head.

-"Let me guess, did she get pregnant then, when you two, you know...?" I asked.

-"Yes, she did. She sent me a letter. That she didn't want anything from me, but she felt that I should have known. Also wrote that her husband threatened her that if we ever met or I would like to get in touch with my son, he would kill both

of them and arrange as if it was an accident. He was able to do it. She was only sending me pictures of Tom once in a year, usually around Christmas period. I was sending money, even though she didn't need any and never asked. They were rich and I was just a poor teacher, but I wanted my son to know that I cared."

He took a deep breath, looked down, closed his eyes, and stayed like that for about a minute.

-"Her name was Natalie." He carried on.- "The most beautiful woman I have ever seen. Her husband died in a car accident. Coincidence, huh? All his money was sent to his foundation which he had created for his employees. He didn't leave anything for Tom and his mother. They moved in with her sister. When Natalie found out that she had a breast cancer decided to tell Thomas the whole true. She passed away last month." He looked up the ceiling, then looked at me. I was out of words.

-"Wow, what a story. So Tom is coming to meet you for the first time, right?"

-"Yes, he is. And I am stressed as I have never been in my whole life."

-"I can imagine, Mr Bent. You thought that you would never meet him and now he is coming. It must be really tough for you. I will help you with anything you need, Mr

Bent." I said.

Then, I realized that I had said "with anything".

- "Thank you, Ann. You're a good girl. I will ask you, although deep down I know I shouldn't, you know, to show him around. College, town, help him to make friends, the good ones, as you are, you know."

- "Yeah, of course. I will. You don't need to be worried about it."

- "I just don't want him to get under the bad influence of those, you know what I mean, right?"

- "Yes, I know. There are plenty of them around. Don't worry Mr Bent, he'll be fine. I promise."

I promised, but I wished I hadn't.

3

The day Thomas was expecting to arrive I woke up a bit stressed. I didn't know him, but I felt like I was expecting a visit of an old friend or my own son. It wasn't a regular feeling and I didn't like it. Why I had promised to take care of him? Was he my younger brother? No, he wasn't, but I took that responsibility to look after him.

I walked down the stairs to the kitchen. My dad had left already. My mum was still drinking her coffee and arranging some documents in her bag when I pop out a question

- "Mum, have you ever slept with another man? You know, after you got married to dad..."

She instantly put the cup down and looked at me with astonishment.

- "Why are you asking this kind of question? Of course, I didn't! What's on your mind,

girl?" She reacted like she had burned her tongue with the coffee.

- "I'm sorry, mum. It's nothing, just a thought I had. I read a story last night about a married woman who slept with a man, whom she hardly knew, then she told him to forget about it, then she found out she was pregnant, then she told him not to contact her or try to get in touch with the child, and so on..."

I tried to pretend that it was fiction, which indeed was a reality. I couldn't stop thinking about Thomas' mother. The fact that she slept with Mr Bent it wasn't very much shocking to me. Mr Bent was absolutely good looking man in his 60s. Thus in his 40s he must have been hunky. I was amazed that she kept the fact Mr Bent was Thomas' father as a secret for nearly twenty years.

- "And? Did he contact them or that poor child?" Mum wondered.

- "No, he didn't." I responded.

- "Men, they always cause trouble but never take responsibility for the effect." Mum added.

- "Mum, do not judge him. Maybe he couldn't, maybe he was worried about something or someone? Maybe he cared too much about her and that child? How do you know what he felt?! And she? She was married, she should have thought a little bit more before she had gone to bed with him!"

I was pissed that mum was so judgemental about one side only. I didn't like what she had said and she noticed it.

- "Ann, you're still very young. You don't know men well enough. They are not bad, but sometimes they just prefer to stay away and do absolutely nothing. Why didn't he try to get in touch with his child then?"

- "Her husband intimidated to kill her and the baby if they would get in touch again." I finished.

Mum stopped what she was doing. Raised her eyes and asked

- "Ann, who wrote that story?"

- "I don't remember the author. Oh no, mum, I have to rush, it's so late. Bye! See you

later!" And I escaped.

I felt like my mother would dig even deeper and than I would have to tell her the whole truth or keep lying. I didn't want to any of that. I never was a good liar. Additionally, I didn't want people to find out about Mr Bent's one night stand consequence. Should I call it a "*consequence*"? Well, it wasn't planned, so it was a result, an upshot, an effect, a bloody consequence. Why didn't they use protection?! Why did they even do it in a first place?! My head was spinning and I couldn't stop thinking about it. The words were still coming.

We didn't have literature class that day because Mr Bent took day off. I wasn't surprised. I bet he felt nuisance since early morning. We had agreed that I would take some books from his office and deliver them to his house at three in the afternoon to meet his son. Thomas was expected to be there at ten in the morning. I disliked the idea that I would come to meet him on the same day, but Mr Bent had begged me to do so. I was going to go shopping with Sam after lessons and I had to make something up.

- "Ann, look at this dress!"

Sam showed me an online store and the dress she had been talking about for a couple of days. Her dad had won a long term case and gave her some extra cash. Sam's parents were quite rich. Both lawyers. They had money, but they weren't snobbish, and I respected that. They were very generous and liberal.

- "Yeah, it's nice." I reacted without enthusiasm.

- "You don't like it, do you?" She noticed that I was disinterested.

- "Oh, I like it, Sam. The thing is..."

- "*I can't go shopping with you today.* Is what you wanted to say?" She interrupted.

- "Look Sam, I would love to and I know I promised, and we are best friends, but I really can't go today."

I felt so bad about it. I had promised to go with her. I had promised to visit Mr Bent too. Oh, why did I always want to be so helpful and make other people happy? Had anyone ever thought about me? What did I feel when they were asking me for a favour, when they burdened me with responsibility? I always was that way. To help everyone around.

To make them glad. Samantha was my best friend but Mr Bent was my soulmate, at least I thought so. He needed me more. The dress could wait.

- "What are you going to do then? If you can't go with me." She asked.

And that was the question I didn't want to hear. I thought that I would avoid it.

- "I can't tell you, Sam. I am sorry. Not now, not yet."

I just wanted to end that conversation as soon as possible and run away, so Sam would not ask me any more questions, but she couldn't stop.

- "You can't tell me? Not yet? What's going on, Anna? Are you in trouble? Please tell me. Forget about that stupid dress. I don't need it. I will stay with you. You're my best friend and I feel that you need my help. Please tell me, Ann. What's going on?"

What should I have told her? The same story which I had told my mum? She wouldn't believe it anyway. Sam was a smart girl. I couldn't tell her the whole truth without Mr Bent's permission, but to just leave her wondering and go it wasn't what I wanted to do either. *"Well done Ann."* I thought *"What shall you do now? Maybe I should call Mr Bent and tell him that I am coming with Sam. No, he will not let me. He talked to me about it, only me. He told me his life secret. He trusted me. I cannot do it."*

- "Sam, you know I love you. We are like sisters, we talk about everything and I tell you about everything, but with this one, I must deal on my own. I can just say that I am not in trouble. It's not about my family. It's something else. Sam, please, try to understand it. When I am allowed, you will know what's going on. Please. Can you do it, Sam? I promise, again, that tomorrow we will go shopping and you will buy this beautiful dress. You can call them and ask to keep it for you."

I looked at her with my begging eyes and she just nodded. Then said

- "Alright then. I can do that. It must be really top secret if you cannot share it even with me. I keep your word. Tomorrow."

- "Yes, Sam. Tomorrow. Let me go now. I will call you later. Bye!" I kissed her and she grabbed my hand.

- "Ann, please take care of yourself, okay?"

- "Okay, I will. I promise."

I smiled and walked away.

When I reached Mr Bent's house I felt like my heart was about to jump out of my chest. I knocked the door. I waited about a minute then the door was opened. It wasn't Mr Bent. It was him. Tall, 6'3 feet, I guessed. "*Does he play basketball?*" I thought. Good looking guy with dark hair and dark eyes.

- "Who's there, Thomas?"

I heard Mr Bent shouting from the kitchen.

- "Who are you?" He asked with a smile.

- "I'm Anna. I brought some books for Mr Bent." I responded.

- "Oh, okay. It's Anna!" He shouted back.

Mr Bent was already behind him. He smiled and winked at me.

- "Oh, Anna. I am glad you came. Please come in." Mr Bent played his role well.

I came into the house. Then the "basketball player" said

- "Sorry Anna, I haven't introduced myself. I'm Thomas."

- "Hi Thomas, nice to meet you."

Thomas was a good looking guy. I hadn't expected that he would also be a courteous one. In fact he and Mr Bent had a lot in common. They both were tall and handsome. As I had heard from Mr Bent Natalie was a gorgeous woman too. They both used gestures while they were speaking. The same way Italians do. They even looked a bit like Italians with that black hair and dark eyes. They must have had Italian ancestors.

The very next day Thomas arrived to pick me up to school. I had tried to avoid it, but Mr Bent suggested that it would be a great idea. Thus I had to give in.

- "Anna, is that boy waiting for you?" Dad asked when he saw Thomas' car parked in front of the house.

- "Yeah." I responded.

- "You didn't mention that you have a boyfriend, Ann. What's his name?" Mum added.

I expected that. Each time my mum saw me with a boy she assumed that he was my boyfriend.

- "His name is Thomas and he is not my boyfriend." I denied.

I didn't want them to think that way and, most importantly, I didn't want him to be my boyfriend either. I knew that type of pretty boys. They were one week with you then the very next one with someone else. It wasn't my style either to be with some kind of hunk. I rather thought we could only become good friends.

- "Oh, Anna..." Mum was carrying on- "you don't need to be shy, you are a grown woman. You should have a boyfriend, and as I can see this one..."

- "Mum! Please stop. He is not my boyfriend. End of the story. I need to go. Have a nice day dad, and you too, mother. Bye!" I interrupted and left the house.

I got into the car and located my mum staring at us through the window. "*This is crazy*" I thought.

- "Hi Ann, all good?" He asked.

- "Yes, all good. We can go."

We arrived to school and I felt anxious as Thomas was my long-lost brother. We had decided that everything I'd say to others was just his name and that he would be attending to college with us. It wasn't much. I was worried about those who would keep asking more questions. Nevertheless, my role was only limited to introducing him to the "best" students, show him around, and that's it. I had not signed any contract with Mr Bent to look after his son. His son was big enough to take care of himself. Coincidentally, the first person we met on the corridor was Samantha. The day when I had arrived

there Sam also was the first person I talked to. I had kept thinking about her mostly. What I would tell her. How I would satisfy her curiosity.

- "Hello Anna! I called you yesterday. Didn't you see it, did you? Where were you?" Sam started bombing me with questions, but surprisingly didn't ask about the tall guy standing next to me.

- "Hi Sam. I'm sorry I went early to bed and I saw it just in the morning." I responded and thought that she would never ask about Thomas, and he would go to a classroom, and made his own friends, and let me live my own life. Unfortunately, it was only my wish.

- "Oh, hello to you! I'm sorry for not introducing myself. I'm Samantha and you are?"

- "Hi Samantha, nice to meet you. I'm Thomas, you can call me Tommy."

"Tommy???" I thought. *"Maybe if she wanted she would call you Tommy. Maybe she wants to call you Thomas. Huh? You mustn't be prince charming right now. You must stay away from her, from us."* I looked at him and he kept looking at Sam, and she was glaring at him with her big blue eyes.

"No, no, no, this is not happening!" I thought.

- "So this is the reason you couldn't go with me shopping yesterday." Sam complained.

- "Partly yes, but it's not what you think." I tried to give her some logic explanation, but everything I thought about had no sense at all.

- "Well, if you say so, Ann, this is not what I think it is, then you are fine with everything that might be, right?"

Sam was using some kind of code while she was speaking, but I knew exactly what was on her mind.

- "No Sam, I am not fine with anything."

I didn't want her to get into trouble. I didn't want her to be with that guy, because deep down, I felt he was a troublemaker. Thomas looked at both of us with disorientation.

- "I think we should go to the lesson right now." I decided and moved towards the

classroom. Sam surprisingly stayed quiet and they both followed me.

- "Thomas this is our group." I introduced him to our class when we entered the classroom - "We are going to have some lessons together. Later you can chose your additional one." I explained to him.

- "Thanks Ann, for everything." He responded.

After the lesson Tom went to the principal office to finalise with documents and I could finally be alone with Sam.

- "Why you didn't tell me anything about him?" Sam started again.

- "What should I have told you?" I responded with some irritation in my voice. "*Was she going to talk only about him now?*" I thought.

- "I don't know, just anything." Sam responded.

I looked at her and frowned. I was amazed with her words.

- "Sam, he is not important. I don't care about him, so why should you? I can see that he caught your attention, but come on, Sam."

I was astonished that he could have impressed her so much. We never complained about lack of interest from boys, especially Sam. What more she never had to adore any of them. She was completely different person with Thomas. She was ready to chase him.

- "Yeah, he is very cute. And if you don't care about him it doesn't mean I shouldn't either. I just asked, you know, as we are best friends, I expected more loyalty from you. I can see I was wrong." She responded with an annoyance in her voice.

I couldn't believe that we were going that way, over a guy. He was the first one that we had an argument about. I didn't want to carry that on or go even deeper.

- "Sam, I'm loyal to you. I didn't tell you about him, because someone had asked me not to do it, not because I wanted to hide him from you. Let's not fight over him, please."

I looked at Sam and I hoped that she would give me her sweet smile, but she didn't. She just shrugged and expressed

- "Fine."

I left school without telling Thomas that I was leaving. I didn't meet Mr Bent either. I didn't see him at all that day. Was he even at school? I didn't want to care about any of them. I just walked with Sam talking about random stuff. We didn't go shopping. She forgot somehow about that dress she couldn't have stopped talking about the day before. It wasn't important to her any more. When I got home I just wanted to stay alone. I went to my bedroom, lied on bed, and fell asleep. I was tired, mentally tired, with all that crap which I had decided to take part in. I was angry with Mr Bent, myself, and Thomas. But when I thought about him, I had no reason to be angry. What should I have been angry at? It wasn't his fault that his mum had slept with Mr Bent. It wasn't his fault that he was good looking guy and attracted to Sam. It wasn't his fault that he had nobody, only a strange man who apparently was his only family. Then instantly my phone rang. It was unknown number.

- "Hello?" I answered with slight hesitation.

- "Is that Anna?" A voice asked.

- "Yes, this is she. I am sorry, who is calling?" I still couldn't recognise the caller.

- "It's me, Thomas. Am I interrupting you in anything?" He asked.

I knew where he had got my number from, but still asked

- "Where did you get my number from?"

- "From James. Sorry, Mr Bent, your teacher." He responded.

Of course he did. James. So he called him by his name. On the other hand how he should call him. Mr Bent was only his biological father. Moreover, they met only two days ago for the first time.

- "Hope you don't mind, do you?" He added.

Did I? I would less, if Mr Bent had asked me before doing it. Nevertheless, sooner or later I would give it to him on my own. I didn't care much any more. I was already in that whole absurdity.

- "I don't." I just responded briefly, then added - "So what's up?" There must have been a

reason he was calling.

- "I just wanted to thank you for taking me to school today and showing around. You just left and I didn't have a chance to do it." He mumbled.

He had already thanked me actually. The reason he called was completely different. I might say he wanted to just chat. I started realising how lonely he could have felt then. His mother had died, his dad, the one who brought him up hadn't left him a penny, his "James" was a complete stranger to him, but only person who he could live with. I started feeling sorry for him.

- "It's okay. I know how it's to be a complete novice in a new place. When we moved here I hadn't had anybody. Sam was the first person I met on the corridor. I can imagine how you may feel." I said with a much softer voice.

- "Yeah it's tough. Sam is a nice girl. Very pretty too."

- "Yes, she is." I confirmed although I knew why he said so.

Men do not talk about another woman's appearance without a point. If he said that she was beautiful and nice, it meant he was attracted to her. It meant she caught his eye too. Why I didn't want them to get closer? Was I just worried about Sam that he would break her heart? Or, I was just worried about myself not to stay alone when they'd start dating. I began believing in the latter one.

- "Look, it's pretty late and I still need to sort things out for tomorrow. It was really nice talking to you." I just wanted to finish that conversation before he would start asking me even more about Sam.

- "Okay, Ann, I know. I am just glad I met you. Do you want me to pick you up in the morning?" He asked.

I didn't want him to keep picking me up, but I had really enjoyed that morning ride. I didn't want to destroy my relation with Sam either. I figured out she fancied him.

- "Thank you, but my mum is going the same way tomorrow, so I'd go with her. Thanks, but I really need to go right now. See you at school. Good night, Tom."

- "Okay, I'll let you go. I don't want to hold you up any longer. Good night, Anna."

He ended.

I was thinking about him that night again.

The next day morning I woke up with a thought that no matter what happened it would happen. I was not Mother Therese to save everyone. Thus I left the house with a clear mind.

"If Sam fancies him, let her, I do not really care. She is not a child, she knows what she wants." I thought while walking down the road. *"Why should I even care? Apparently, she doesn't want me to."* I carried that monologue in my head until I reached school. Samantha was already there. Thomas too. They were sitting together on the stairs and laughing. I prayed that they wouldn't spot me, but unfortunately he did.

-*"Hey Anna!"* Tom shouted. -*"Anna!"*

I just turned my head and waved to them. Samantha just smiled at me. She didn't even run to me as she used to. *"I don't care, and it doesn't even bother me."* I kept paraphrasing it in my head. Then I entered the class. It was Mr Bent's lesson. I hadn't seen him since Thomas' arrival. He didn't even call me. But I didn't care. He was just my teacher and I stuck to it. Mission completed. His son was introduced to the best students, me and Samantha.

-*"Anna, please wait a minute."* Mr Bent asked after the lesson.- *"Anna, I'd like to thank you for your help."* He began.

-*"Mr Bent,"* I interrupted- *"I think we should stay on teacher - student terms. I did help you with Thomas, because nobody else would do it."* I added.

-*"Yes, I know that, Anna, that's why I had asked you not someone else. You are a good girl Anna and I believed that Thomas would find a good friend in you."* Mr Bent carried on.

-*"Mr Bent, we'll see. I think he has already found someone who'd love to be his close friend."*

I said it, but I felt that I did it due irritability. I regretted it. I never was sarcastic person.

I felt terrible and I just wanted to retreat somewhere that I could be alone.

- "Oh, I see, you mean Samantha, right?"

Mr Bent most probably had seen them together on the corridor before the lesson began.

- "Mr Bent, I'd rather go now. My next lesson is about to start. And please do not ask me about your son any more. He is here now with you. Talk to him. Don't waste it." I said it and left.

For the rest of the day I tried to keep avoiding all of them. I felt overwhelmed with that whole situation. What was the most ridiculous they all seemed to be very fine. Resting unaccompanied on the lawn I was thinking how people can drastically change in a blink of an eye.

- "Anna, why are you sitting here alone."

I heard from above. It was Sam.

- "I wanted to be on my own. Where is your new boy?" I used that harsh tone again. I was becoming slightly sarcastic. Sam sat on the ground and asked

- "Why are you saying this, Anna? Why have you been acting up?"

I thought for a while that she was right. I had decided not to care about them, but still was acting as it bothered me. I felt that I couldn't even understand myself any more.

- "Sorry Sam, I think you are right. I shouldn't be so mean." I finally agreed that I behaved silly.

- "You told me that you didn't care about him. Do you care, Ann? Like you know?" She asked.

Of course I knew what she was asking about. I didn't care, at least, I knew then that I did not the same way as she did.

- "No Sam, I do not. I mean he is fine and seems to be nice. But he's not even my type."

Did I have a type? I had never cared about the appearance, more I cared what a boy had inside his head and if he was a good person, not if he was tall and handsome.

- "So why have you been reacting like you are jealous or something?" She kept asking.

"And why are you keep torturing me?" I thought.

- "Look Sam, I am not jealous of anybody. Maybe I've acted a bit odd, but I have just been tired a bit, mentally tired. I am totally fine with the fact that you like him or want to even date him, or just hung out with him. Please, do not ask me any more questions about it. Please."

I hopped she understood what I meant and would let it go, and we could finally talk about mindless things.

- "Yes, I like him, and I think he likes me too, you know. I am glad that you're okay with this. I promise that our friendship will never change because of him."

She happily added. Then hugged me tight.

In spite of everything, I still felt that I cared.

5

- "Jane! Wait, Jane!"

- "What do you want from me, James?! You had enough time to tell me about your son. Don't you think so??? How old is he? Nineteen, right? Go the hell, James!"

- "No, Jane! Please, you need to just listen to me."

- "I don't have time to listen to you any more, James! Just leave me alone, for good!"

I was walking down the corridor when I overheard that conversation. It was rather a row. It seemed to be slightly strange one. They were fighting over Mr Bent's son. I couldn't understand why Miss Galan was angry with him for not telling her about Thomas. *"One second"* I thought *"No, it can be this. Do they have a romance? Are they or were they a couple? Oh, shit!!"*

I just tried to walk faster to avoid being noticed.

- "Oh, hello Anna."

Miss Galan retreated from the classroom. She didn't stop. She just greeted me and vanished.

- "Jane! Let me exp.... Oh, Anna. You're here."

Yes, unfortunately I was there. I was always at the wrong place on the wrong time. Mr Bent wanted to pursue her but I stood on his way.

- "Hello, Mr Bent. I was just walking down the corridor to the library."

I didn't want to even talk about what I had heard or saw. I just wanted to be a ghost at that moment.

- "Oh, okay. Is everything well?" He asked.

With me was everything fine, but there was something wrong with both of them. I should have rather asked him that question.

- "Yes all is fine, indeed. Thank you for asking." I responded.

I was about to ask him if he was well, but I bite my tongue. I had said teacher-student terms. The problem they had was none of my business. It was just my curiosity.

- "I'd better go now" I added.

- "Anna, how is Tom doing at school?" He asked rapidly.

- "You can ask him, Mr Bent." I responded and walked away, however I kept thinking about both of them, Miss Galan and Mr Bent.

- "Mum, you know Miss Jane Galan, right?" When I reached home my mum was there.

For the last couple of days she was working from home. The owner had sold the building without given notice and the whole company had to be transmitted to home office for a while until they would find something suitable.

Mum met Miss Galan once at yoga class. One of her close friends was also a friend

of Miss Galan's. Therefore I had expected that mum might have known something.

- "Yes, I know Jane. Why? Is she okay?" Mum asked.

- "Physically, I think she is fine, but mentally I am not sure." I answered, but with that response mum looked at me confusedly.

- "Oh my God! Has she gone mad? I don't know her well enough, but I heard that she was always a bit different and stand-offish. Poor Jane..." Mum added.

- "Mum, she hasn't gone mad. Yeah, she is a bit odd and bizarre at-times, but she has not lost her mind. Yet. I hope so."

- "So what's wrong with her, Ann? Just tell me!" Mum was getting worried.

- "Today, while I was walking down the hall, she and Mr Bent had small disagreement and she dashed away from the classroom. Then, Mr Bent wanted to pursue her, but he noticed me and ceased." I wanted to present the whole incident briefly.

Mum thought for a while. Like she had some flashback in her head or like she was hypnotised.

- "Mum?!"

- "Did you hear what they were quarrelling about?" She asked.

- "Over Mr Bent's son." When I had said it I took a deep breath. - "*Damn, Anna!*" I thought.

- "Does Mr Bent have a son??" Mum opened her eyes widely, put aside her work, and kept asking- "How old is he? Who is his mother? Does he live with her?" Mum was bombarding me with her questions.

- "Mum! Stop! Yes, I shouldn't have told you, because I don't know how Mr Bent wants to deal with it. Please, just leave it like that. Okay, mum, please?"

That was pretty challenging for my mum not to know any details. She always wanted to know everything and always wanted to be the first to know.

- "Well, Ann, if Mr Bent had told you about him and you are not sure if you can talk

about it even to your mother, I will respect that. However I am very curious right now." She responded.

- "Thank you, mum. So let's get back to the main case, Miss Galan. She was somehow irritated with the fact that Mr Bent didn't tell her about him, I mean that he had a son. Why was she so annoyed?"

- " Well, Ann..."

- "Mum, were Mr Bent and Miss Galan a couple?" I threw in out of curiosity. I couldn't help myself.

- "Ann, I don't know much..." Mum muttered.

- "Oh my God! I knew it!" I exclaimed and jumped up from my chair. - "Mum, you will not believe, the whole story becomes even more complicated. This is so incredible!"

Mum starred at me with a confusion in her eyes.

- "What story Anna?" Mum asked, but I still hesitated.

- "Mum, please tell me more about them, please, please..." I begged.

- "Anna, I don't understand why are you so excited about it?"

Mum tried to figure out why I was so much into their affair. I was just sitting and creating scenarios in my head.

- "Mum, there must be a link between those two cases." I was speaking out my thoughts.

- "What cases? What are you talking about, Anna?" Mum was really confused.

- "Mum, please tell me what you know about them. I promise, I will tell you what I know."

I promised, but I didn't even mean it.

- "Well, I can see it must be really important to you." She replied.

- "You have no idea, mum. It would clarify everything."

I was full of hope. I felt that I was about to solve an enigma and find the true reason of Miss Galan's miserable life.

- "When I met Jane, when I was introduced to her, she was rather reticent. The type of person who doesn't talk much about a personal life, or doesn't get involved in a casual conversation either. But she was alright. Then we met again at Julia's birthday party. She had introduced me to Jane, though. So she was also invited. It was ladies night. We were chatting about men, you know, when they are not around it's the best time to talk about them." Mum beamed and carried on - "Then one of Julia's other friends dropped a question, something like, what's your biggest regret about a man, and Jane responded that she regretted to fall in love with one."

- "She was stupid in love." I threw in.

- "We all have that one unhappy love, honey. Later Julia told me that she and Mr Bent had had a complicated relationship. I wondered what that meant, a complicated relationship, what could have complicated it, and Julia told me later that they were engaged, but Mr Bent called it off."

- "Oh my God! It explains everything!" I screamed.- "Mum, men are absolutely horrible creatures."

- "You bet! Later, she went away for a year, for a trip or something. Then she came back and got a job at your college, couple years later Mr Bent was also offered a teaching position there." Mum carried on.

- "That must have been terrible for her. Now I understand why she was so cold and mean so many times. Believe me, I will look at her from completely different perspective from now."

I felt really sorry for Miss Galan and I sensed some kind of aversion towards Mr Bent too. I didn't want to be judgemental, but what he had done was really nasty. I felt dizzy from all of that facts.

- "Yes, it must have been tough for her. But Anna, they are your teachers, do not get involved in their personal lives, okay sweetheart?" She looked into my eyes.

My mother felt that I would might use that information against Mr Bent.

- "Don't worry mum, I'll be fine. Thank you for sharing the story with me. I will go now to my room to digest it." I smiled.

- "Okay honey, I will call you downstairs when dinner is ready." She kissed my left cheek and let me go.

For the rest of the day I was trying to merge all pieces together. Mr Bent was engaged to Miss Galan when he stopped and invited Natalie into his car. Then, after what had happened he broke up with Jane. I felt Miss Galan's pain. I would have also escaped and presumably I would have never come back. That was too melodramatic for me. Mr Bent had never told her about his son and now she found out after all those years. Thomas was the reason he had cancelled the wedding. I tried not to think about it any more, because the more I did the more I loathed Mr Bent.

I hardly slept that night.

6

The school year passed really fast and summer holiday was just round the corner. Only one more day left.

- "Ann, are you excited about our camp? All planned!" Sam asked me on the very last day of school.

We had planned a camping by the lake. They needed it more than I did. I wasn't very excited and I didn't want to go either.

- "Not really." I responded.

- "Oh Anna, don't be boring. It will be fun." Sam embraced me with one arm, pulled closer, looked into my eyes and added- "I won't go without you."

She could go without me, she had her boyfriend. What she needed me there for? Fortunately, two other guys were going with us too. Adam and Mike. I was hanging out

with Adam when Sam was with Tom and she didn't have time for me. Mike was our classmate, Adam's best friend. I somehow trusted them more than Sam. Since she became Thomas' girlfriend she didn't have much time for me, for us. For our friendship. They were most of the time together. Sometimes she could find time to call me in the evening to tell me what they were doing, where they went, what they were watching, what Thomas cooked, and on and on. She never asked how I was. She wasn't the same Sam I knew.

"Yeah, you won't." I thought.

Adam and Mike came in the morning to pick me up. We were going to meet Thomas and Sam half way.

-*"Anna! Adam is here, hurry up!"* My dad called.

He knew Adam. They met few times when we were going out. He thought that we were together. I didn't want to explain it to him and I let it to be that way. Adam knew about it and didn't care either.

-*"Yeah, I am coming, dad!"* I shouted back.

We met Thomas and Sam at the camping place. They didn't have time to wait for us. The weather was going to be great and I had made a decision to forget about all drama I had went through the whole last year. I didn't want to think any more about Mr Bent and Miss Galan. I had also decided that I wouldn't let Sam and Thomas drag me into their relationship. It was time for me to chill.

-*"Hey you two!"* When we arrived at the place Adam greeted Thomas and Sam - *"What time did you wake up?"*

-*"Much earlier than all of you."* Thomas responded with a smile.

We unpacked our stuff and built a camp in a minute. The area was idyllic. The lake was located in a middle of green desert, surrounded by forest. One thing you heard it was the sound of silence. The surface of the lake was shining like a silver plate due to the sun reflection. It was beautiful and creepy at the same time. The nearest village was ten kilometres away. Somehow I felt uncomfortable about it. *"What if one of us will need a medical help?"* I thought *"Don't freak out Anna, it's only one weekend."* I tried to

comfort myself.

- "Anna..." Sam noticed that I was a bit too quiet. - "is everything alright?"

- "Yes, it is. Why?" I responded.

- "You haven't said a word since you guys arrived." She added.

"What does she want now? What should I have said again? Talk like an idiot about nothing? Gosh Sam!" I thought.

- "I'm fine, Sam. What do you want me to talk about? I have said that the place is beautiful. Is not enough?"

I assumed she noticed irritation in my voice, but I didn't care. It had been a while since we lost our deep connection. We weren't any more best friends. More like a schoolmates. I believed she also felt that way, but for her was different. She replaced me with Thomas.

- "Yeah, it's fine. I'm glad you are here." She answered - "While boys are gone fishing we may use that time to talk about us." She added.

"Really Sam? You glad that I am here because you want to talk?" I thought again *"I am here because I want to just relax a bit, not to stress over again or to listen same stories about you and your boyfriend."*

I didn't want to hear how great Thomas was on his last game, how fantastically Thomas passed his driving test, how great Thomas cooked, made love, and on and on. Every time she called me she talked only about him. Was there anything else I didn't know?

- "Sam.." I started - "do you think is this a best time and place? We can meet up when we back and talk."

- "Anna, I miss you. I miss our chit chats. Our stupid jokes, laughter, everything. Don't you miss us, do you?" She carried on without giving a damn if I wanted to hear it or wanted to talk about it.

- "Sam, I miss you too, but can't you see that you are the one who pulled away? I am not saying that you shouldn't have a boyfriend, but you has limited everything just to be with him. When was the last time you did a thing that you only wanted, not what he

did?" I asked.

I didn't want to go through that conversation, but I felt that Sam really needed it.

- "It's not that I don't do things I like, it's just we have a lot in common." She responded, but I noticed that her voice was shaking.

- "Like what Sam? Watching movies or basketball games? Since when are you a basketball fan?"

I knew that something was going on so I continued. - "Was this camping his idea too? To hung out with boys?"

- "No, no, I wanted it also. It was actually mine. I wanted to leave the house and to get away from the town."

Sam seemed to be very...miserable. It was long time since we last had had heart to heart conversation. She needed it and I felt that something bad was going on. We had to break it off because we noticed guys were coming back. I definitely wanted to talk to her again.

- "Don't worry, Sam. We'll find some you and me time later."

I ensured that Sam knew I was there for her. She really needed to talk. She didn't say anything, but nodded. I felt that relationship wasn't good for her any more.

The plan to use the weekend to just relax collapsed utterly.

I had never seen before so many shining stars on the sky at the same time as I saw that summer night. It was not only bright, but also very warm one. We built a bonfire close to the lake. Sitting around it and drinking beer with all of them was one of those nights that I would never forget. Especially after what happened later.

We were young, wild and free. With an emphasise on wild in some cases. All we wanted was to live for a moment. I wasn't even thinking about Sam that night much. She looked more content. We all seemed to be very happy.

- "Hey guys, any more beer?" Mike dropped a question.

I thought that we had drank everything we had, but to my surprise we hadn't. Mike was the party animal type. He always had alcohol where there was not. He always was ready for celebration, even on Monday morning. He never had a long term girlfriend and rather was in casual relations.

- "Is there left anything else?" I asked.

- "Sure honey. Mike is always prepared for a crisis." Mike joked.

Yes, he was.

- "So bring it on!" Adam added.

Although I wasn't sure if that was a good idea I didn't want to ruin the night. We had a good time and I didn't want to be an auntie Anna, who looked after everyone. Then, suddenly one of them dropped the most stupid idea ever.

- "Hey, let's go swimming naked!"

- "Hell yeah!" Tom responded.

- "No! YOU MUSTN'T DO IT!" I stood up and shouted.

I knew I had to stop it. They were drunk. It was late night and they didn't know the lake well.

- "Anna, relax. We'll be fine." Sam reacted.

I was absolutely amazed with her words. What else I could have expected. Her boyfriend relished the plan, so why she should have a different opinion. *"Oh, Sam,"* I thought *"what has he done to you? Where is your individuality, your independence, your confidence?"*

- "Are you crazy, Sam!? Can you even envision how this might end?"

While I was trying to persuade Sam that it was a terrible idea boys, already naked, were strolling into the water.

- "Come on, Anna! Lets' go!" Sam started pulling my hand but I wrenched it from her grasp.

She looked at me with her big eyes, turned around, took her clothes off and rushed after them. I was left alone by the camp fire. I heard them calling my name but I pretended that I didn't hear. I had read it on the Internet that every summer day about ten people die from drowning. *"They are stupid immature idiots!"* I was angry with all of them. I was even more pissed at Sam. *"Who is this girl?!"* I kept asking myself.

- "Adam! Adam!" All of sudden they started calling Adam's name.

- "Where are you mate? Come on, it's not funny!" Mike shouted.

"Oh my God! OH MY GOD!" I started panicking *"Please God, it can not happen, please, please, please!"* I begged God not to let Adam drown and instantly ran down to the lake.

- "What's going on?! Where is he?" I began screaming.- "Adam! Adam! Adam!"

I shouted as loud as I could. I felt like my vocal cords were about to break. Thomas and Mike were swimming and diving in the lake to find him. Sam was sitting on the ground shaking. I took my jumper off and covered her naked body.

- "We shouldn't have done it. You were right, Anna. We shouldn't have." Sam was repeating over and over the same phrase.

- "Shut up, Sam!" I said sharply.

She didn't say anything any more. *"Now, I was right?!"* I thought. Few seconds later Tom yelled. Those few seconds lasted whole eternity.

- "We got him!"

I felt like my heart was about to jump out of my chest. Sam jumped up like something had bitten her arse.

- "Is he alive?" She screamed.

- "Of course he is." I responded to her ridiculous question.

He must have been alive. I didn't want to accept any other information. Thomas and Mike pulled Adam on the shore. He lost consciousness but he was alive.

- "Check his pulse." I suggested.

- "I can feel it." Thomas responded and started CPR procedure.

Thirty compressions and two breaths. Although I knew the network was completely unavailable in the middle of "nowhere" I switched my phone on and tried to call for an ambulance.

- "What are you doing, Anna?" Mike asked while grabbing it from my hand - "You mustn't call for any help." He added.

- "Give me my bloody phone back!" I yelled. - "He needs help! He needs to be taken to hospital! He has lost his consciousness, can't you see?!" I screamed at Mike.

While Thomas was carrying on with CPR Mike retreated with my phone towards our camping place. I dashed after him yelling

- "Mike! Give me my phone back!"

- "Anna, don't you understand? You must not call for an ambulance. We were drinking, Adam was drinking. We're all screwed."

When I finally reached him Mike tried to persuade me that calling for an ambulance was a very bad idea.

- "You're saying this now?! To call for help is a bad idea but swimming naked, drunk naked, at night in an unknown lake was a perfect one?! What if he had drowned, Mr Smart Aleck?!"

I was so angry that I would rather scream out loud.

- "But he didn't." Mike replied.- "He'll be fine. Thomas will help him, we all will. Otherwise Anna, he might be in a big trouble. We all might be."

I sighed heavily. He saw fire in my eyes. I thought also that it could take ages until the

ambulance would arrive.

- "Give me my phone." I stuck my hand out. - "I won't call."

- "Alright. Thank you, Anna." He responded and handed it to me.

- "He is back! Adam is back!" Sam screamed.

We both immediately rushed back to the lake. I threw myself on Adam's body and kissed him.

- "Thank God you are alive." I looked into his eyes.

- "Thank you, Thomas." I raised my eyes up at Thomas.

He just nodded. I read from his lips *"You're welcome."*

The fact that all of them were still naked was totally ignored.

8

When I woke up Mike was already packing his and Adam's stuff. It was six a.m.

- "Good morning, Anna! I was going to wake you up." He greeted me as soon as he saw me - "We are leaving. Adam is not feeling well." He added.

- "Good morning, Mike." I responded and asked - "Is he up?"

- "No, he has managed to fall asleep finally. We both were up until morning. I didn't want to sleep. I wanted to keep my eyes on him. It's my fault. Everything it's just my fault. You know that, right?" He carried on.

I spotted tears in his eyes. He was shattered by the whole situation. He acted as a completely different person. As a sober one. I wasn't angry with him any more. Anger would not help there either.

- "Mike, it's not your fault. Okay? If they hadn't wanted to do it, they wouldn't have done it. We just need to take Adam as soon as possible to the nearest hospital." I wanted to cheer him up a bit, but it didn't help much.

- "You know Anna, if I hadn't offered more beer, if I hadn't popped out that foolish idea...He could have died! I was so stupid! I don't know what I would do without him, Anna. I love him like my own brother."

He burnt his face in a towel and began crying. I just embraced him like a mother, or just like a good friend. I felt sorry for him. I knew he wasn't innocent but I sensed his remorse.

- "But he is alive." I whispered the same words Mike had told me a few hours ago. They were friends ever since I had known them. Their parents used to hang out together, so Adam and Mike grew up side by side. They would spend every summer with each other, even some Christmas when their both families took ski trips. They always were like siblings. I could just imagine how Mike must have felt then. If the whole event had ended tragically, he would have lived for the rest of his life with a guilty conscience.

- "I'd better keep packing. Are you coming with us?" He asked while wiping his face.

- "Yes, of course. I will start packing my things too." I added.

Surprisingly, Thomas and Sam were peacefully sleeping, or they were just pretending. They might have overheard our conversation and they preferred not to get involved. Thomas did already something incredible. He had saved Adam's life. I didn't feel like to talk to Sam either. Thus I didn't wake them up to tell them that we were leaving. We left some food, water, matches, petrol and a short note for them

Dear lovebirds,

We didn't want to wake you up. Adam wasn't feeling well and we decided to take him to hospital.

We have left some stuff for you.

Enjoy your time together.

Anna

Adam was sleeping on the back seat and I was sitting on the passenger seat next to Mike. We were arguing the whole way to the hospital about conditions in which Adam had lost his consciousness, in what circumstances, if he was drinking or not, and so on.

- "Anna, we talked about it last night." Mike pointed out - "We cannot say that we were swimming drunk naked at night in a lake."

- "Alright, so what shall we say then? What are you suggesting, Mike? I am listening." He began being annoyed with his ideas.

- "We might get fine or be even jailed for all of that." Mike said.

I didn't know about it. I knew that it can happen when you drive under influence of drugs or alcohol but for swimming, I had never heard.

- "Are you sure about it?" I asked surprisingly

- "I'm sure. It might even end up with one year in a jail." Mike looked at me - "You understand now, Ann?"

I turned around. Adam was still sleeping. I couldn't imagine that one stupid decision would ruin his whole life.

- "What shall we say then?" I looked back at Mike and asked.

- "We need to figure out." Mike responded.

At the same moment Adam vomited. It wasn't getting any better. Mike pressed the gas pedal harder.

- "Hold on buddy, hold on! We almost there." He reassured Adam.

We drove like ten more minutes when hospital erected in front of us. "*Oh, thank God!*" I sighed with relief. Mike parked in front of the building. We both jumped out of the car and opened the back door. Mike held Adam's head and I ran into the building screaming

- "HELP! WE NEED HELP!"

Two nurses approached me instantly asking what happened. I pointed out towards the

front door. Mike was already there with one of paramedics. Two others rushed with a stretcher. They placed Adam on it and entered the building hurriedly. I just glanced at Adam for the last time. His face was as white as snow.

Then they vanished at the end of the corridor. I didn't even notice when Mike joined me.

- "Tell me he'll be fine." He whispered.

- "He'll be fine."

9

We were sitting in silence for about an hour when finally one of doctors emerged at the end of the corridor. We rushed towards him straight away.

- "How is Adam, doctor? How is he? Is he okay?" We both demanded a piece of information. We were throwing questions at him. We wanted to hear only good news.

- "Please, calm down. I will answer your questions if you let me talk, alright?" The doctor responded.

We agreed to that. I was worried about Adam as much as Mike was.

- "Yes. We're sorry, doctor. Can we get some information, please? How is he?" Mike apologized.

- "We have conducted x-ray and EEG. There was still water in his lungs, which caused a small injury. Fortunately, EEG hasn't diagnosed any brain damage." The doctor said.

I felt like heavy burden has dropped from my shoulder when he had said that there was no brain damage. They could heal his lungs a bit, but brain is incurable. If you damage it once... Simply, there is no gold cure for it.

- "Thank you, doctor. Thank you." I added.

- "Can we see him?" Mike asked.

- "Not today. He's going to sleep for the rest of the day." The doctor replayed.

At the same time one of nurses approached him and said

- "Excuse me doctor Hills, Mr Patrick's blood test result is ready." The nurse handed a file to the doctor.

While he was screening the test outcome I shifted closer to Mike and asked

- "Did you say anything about swimming to any of the paramedics?"

- "Yeah." Mike whispered.

"Great!" I thought. I knew it was the moment when the whole truth would need to be revealed. I created in my head a couple of plots. The first one was that we were swimming on a boat and Adam lost his balance, and fell into the lake. The second one was about that Adam was just swimming and felt dizzy. The third one that boys dropped him into the lake and he...

- "I think we need to contact Adam's parents." Doctor Hills looked at the result and interrupted my creative thinking.

Mike and I glanced at each other. We knew why he wanted to talk to his parents.

The x-ray didn't expose alcohol in Adam's system. They could have only found it through the blood test. The bloody blood test.

- "Is everything okay with Adam's test result, doctor Hills?" Mike tried to play stupid.

Doctor Hills raised his eyes up and stared at both of us like we were two pieces of art in National Gallery.

- "First of all we need to collect his personal data. Then, we need to call his parents."

The doctor didn't reveal what was the test outcome. I realized that there was something wrong. Although he was already nineteen years old his parents had to be informed. We moved to the nurses desk. We were given a personal data file.

- "Please, one of you need to complete it." One of the nurses said.

I took a pen without asking Mike if he would like to do it. I wrote Adam's first and

second name, age, home address, the phone number to his parents, which I had to get from Mike, and signed it. I took the responsibility for bringing him to hospital. I didn't want Mike to feel guilty of anything of that any more.

- "Here you go." I passed it to the nurse. - "Can I leave you also my phone number, just in case?" I asked hesitantly.

- "Are you a member of the family?" The nurse asked.

"Kind of." I thought. The family it's not necessary about blood or DNA. I was close friend of Adam's and I worried about him as his sister could, if he had one. Mike and Adam were inseparable since they were kids and they couldn't be perceived as a family either. Nevertheless, the strong bond they had, for government and its senseless rules they were strangers. The father who beat his child out had bigger rights than a stranger whose company that child enjoyed more. Politics was always Greek to me and therefore I sunk into literature.

- "No, I am not" I answered.

- "She wanted to say, not yet, but very soon." Mike put his oar in.

When he said that I instantly gave him a strong kick on his shin. He just grimaced and read my lips "*I WILL KILL YOU*". Then gave me his cheeky smile and a blink of an eye.

- "If you are his girlfriend I can take your number as an emergency one, just in case his parents won't respond to our calls. But we will only call you in this situation. Do not expect us to call you all the time, alright?" The nurse said with a smile.

- "Yes, ma'am. I understand, thank you." I cheerfully reacted, although I wasn't Adam's girlfriend. Mike kicked me back gently and whispered

- "You're welcome."

We left hospital without knowing the blood test outcome. We had to go home, unpack our stuff and come back. I was slightly worried about the test "*What if the test showed something else, not that bloody alcohol? What if it found a disease which has been developing in Adam's system?*" I didn't want to think about it at all. I was exhausted and I needed a good sleep. Mike looked very tired too.

- "Has Thomas called you yet?" I asked him.

- "No, he hasn't. And you, any of them?" He asked me too.

I checked my phone just in case I had missed a call, but to my surprise none of them had tried to reach me. I thought first, how selfish they were not caring about Adam's health. Later I had second thoughts the network was very bad down there in the forest. I looked at Mike and just shook my head to let him know that there were no calls from them.

- "I hope they are well." Mike added.

I didn't say a word. I didn't want to talk any more. I would not stand another tragedy.

Before Mike dropped me home we had gone together to Adam's house to leave his things and talk to his parents. We had decided that it would be better if we told them truth. The truth, which had already come out due to the blood test.

When we arrived Adam's father was in the garage.

- "Do you think the hospital has informed them already?" I asked Mike while he was parking his car on the road in front of Adam's house.

- "I think so." Mike responded.

We were sitting in silence for a while when Adam's dad took his car out of the garage. Then he noticed Mike's car and us sitting inside.

- "Let's go!" Mike pointed and got out of the car. I followed him instantly.

Adam's mother most probably saw us through the kitchen window, because a second later she left the house and ran towards us.

- "Good day, Mr Patrick." Mike greeted Adam's dad.

- "Do you think is a good day?" He responded.

"They already know." I thought.

- "Hello Mrs Patrick." I greeted Adam's mother when she got closer. Mike just nodded.

- "Hello Anna, Mike." Adam's mother responded.

They both seemed to be rather calm.

- "They have already called us from hospital. We know that you've brought Adam there this morning. What we'd like to know is what happened before that?" She carried on.

I spotted sparks in her eyes. Sparks. The bonfire we had been sitting around before the disaster. The moment when we were laughing. The moment just before everything collapsed. Those sparks reminded me about all of that.

- "Mike, can you give us some explanation?" Adam's dad asked- "Adam is a good swimmer, how the hell he could have nearly drown?" He articulated.

"Maybe they don't know anything about alcohol yet..." I thought constantly about it.

- "We were swimming and suddenly Adam disappeared." I told them - "But just few seconds later Mike and Thomas found him and Thomas gave him CPR, and he was fine." I added.

- "Briefly saying." Mike uttered.

Adam's parents looked at both of us with amazement. Everything I wished for was that they would go without asking us any questions, or if we were drinking before swimming. I wanted to leave Adam's stuff and go home as fast as possible.

- "Anyway, we need to go to the hospital right now. They called us and said that his condition is stable. He'll need to stay there for a couple of days, though. But the doctor, what was his name..?" Adam's dad paused.

- "Doctor Hills." I remarked.

- "Yes, thank you. He said that he wanted to talk to us. So we must go right now." He added.

Mrs Patrick was sitting in the car already. We wanted to leave Adam's stuff but we didn't want to hold his parents any longer.

- "Yes, you must go. I will bring Adam's things later." Mike suggested.

- "Alright, then we talk. I will let you know when we are back home." Mr Patrick said while starting his car hurriedly.

There was nobody in when Mike brought me home. I was beyond happy. All I needed was a warm shower and my own bed. I didn't want to talk to anyone. To explain everything and answer million questions. I just wanted to rest. I walked upstairs, dropped my stuff on the floor, took my clothes off and entered the bathroom. I turned the shower on and instantly burst into tears. I was holding them since the previous night. I didn't have to any more. I could finally cry. I was alone. I thought about Adam, about the accident, about his blood test, about his parents. I stood there and cried for about fifteen minutes. The water was running down my figure and I was weeping like a baby. Then I wiped my face, dried my body, put pyjamas on and laid down on my bed. For the first time I felt it to be so soft and comfortable as never before.

10

It was already dark outside when I woke up. My parents came back home. I heard them discussing downstairs. I checked my phone. There were ten miss calls from Mr Bent. *"Why did he call me so many times? I hope everything's fine with Thomas and Sam."* There was no miss call from any of them. Mike didn't call me either. I didn't want to talk Mr Bent, but if he had called me ten times he must have been worried about Tom. I dialled his number.

- "Hello Anna, thank you for calling back. I have been trying to reach you since three o'clock." Mr Bent started immediately after answering his phone.

- "Hello Mr Bent, I'm sorry I was sleeping." I responded.

- "Are you home, Anna?" He asked.

- "Yes, Mr Bent. I've come back a bit earlier than I planned." I said and added - "Thomas

and Sam decided to stay by the lake a day longer."

"Oh, I understand now. I tried to contact Thomas since morning but his phone is off. I've left him a message but he didn't call me back. I have been worried a little bit. Is everything okay, Anna? Did you guys have a fight or something that you decided be back home earlier?" Mr Bent was wondering.

There was a short pause of silence. I didn't want to tell him about the accident and talk to him about his son. I didn't feel like to talk to him at all.

"Anna, are you still there?" He asked.

"Yes, Mr Bent, I am here. Everything's fine. I came home earlier, because I didn't feel well. Thomas most probably couldn't call you back, because his phone died, or just the network. There is terrible network down there, I can tell you. I believe he'll be home in the morning. Trust me, Mr Bent." I tried to comfort him a bit.

I wanted to kill both of them, Sam and Tom. They were supposed to be back that night, or find a way to make a bloody call. While I was still on the phone my mum knocked the door.

"Anna, are you there?" I heard her voice calling me from the other side of the door.

"Yes, mum! I am home. Mum, please give me one second, I'm on the phone right now. I'll come down in a bit, okay?" I shouted back.

"Okay, honey." She responded and walked down the stairs.

"Mr Bent, I have to go. If any of them calls me, I'll let you know." I wanted to end the conversation as soon as possible.

"Please Anna. Have a good night then." He ended.

"Good night, Mr Bent."

When I walked downstairs my parents were sitting in a living room watching TV. It was a movie, "Good People" with Kate Hudson. She was one of my favourite actresses.

"It's a really good movie." I expressed while entering the room.

They both turned their heads towards me.

- "Anna. What time have you come home?" My dad asked first.

- "You look really tired. The camping must have been really exhausting." Mum interjected with a smile.

I approached them, dropped kisses on their cheeks and slumped heavily into the armchair standing next to a fireplace. My parents looked at me and paused the movie.

- "Anna, is everything alright?" Dad dropped a question.

I took a deep breath and burst into tears. I didn't want it to happen again, but I couldn't stop it. My tears were just falling, like a summer rain.

Mum jumped from the sofa and leaped towards me. She bent on her knees in front of the armchair, gripped my hands and began questioning

- "Anna, sweetheart, what's going on? What happened, honey? Please tell us. "

- "Has anybody hurt you, baby?" Dad threw in.

I was sobbing and I didn't know where to start from.

- "Adam almost drowned last night." I just exploded straight away.

Mum released my hands and sat on the floor. Dad buried his face in his hands. There was a long period of silence, then I started again.

- "We had a bonfire, we were having fun. Adam lost his consciousness while swimming in a lake, but it wasn't for long. Thomas gave him CPR and he was alright." I wanted to skip that drinking detail.

- "Were you drinking, Anna? Before swimming, was Adam drinking alcohol?" Dad asked.

I was gullible to think I would go away with that. I looked at both of them without saying a single word. They knew already the answer. Mum regained to her feet and yelled

- "Oh my God, Anna! Are you out of your mind?! What if he had drowned? What if you had?! Were you thinking a little bit about it?! Were you thinking a little bit about us?!"

She was walking around the room and kept shouting.

I wanted to interrupt and tell her that I was actually thinking but she couldn't stop. Then, I stood up on the armchair and screamed

-"MUM!"

She stood frozen. Both of them.

-"Mum, please stop." I carried on more quietly that time. I sat back in the armchair and added- "I was thinking about you. I didn't go swimming. I tried to deter them from doing it, but it didn't help. I thought that Sam would support me at least, but she went swimming too. I knew it was a terrible idea. I didn't do it, mum."

I felt as if I would cry again but luckily tears didn't well up in my eyes that time. Mum ran towards me and embraced me tight.

-"I am sorry, honey." She whispered to my ear. - "I should have known that you are a smart girl."

Dad came closer and hugged us both even tighter.

Then I started crying again.

11

It was very hot morning when Mike arrived at nine. We had arranged the night before to visit Adam at the hospital.

-"Have you talked to Adam's parents yet?" I asked on the way.

-"No, I haven't. They haven't called me yet. Adam's things are still at my house." Mike responded -"In fact, I have a couple of them indeed. It's like he's been gradually moving in." He added with a big smile.

I also smiled. I felt more relaxed, but I was still thinking about the test outcome.

- "Mike, do you think that Adam's blood result could expose alcohol in his body?" I asked.

- "It could, but don't think about it too much. In any case someone asks, we will say that he had drunk one beer long before swimming." Mike responded.

"If anyone believes in this." I thought.

- "Alright."

At the same time my phone rang. It was Samantha.

- "It's Sam." I said.

- "Finally." Mike added.

I thought exactly the same, then answered it.

- "Sam, have you lost your mind?" It was the first thing I said.

- "Anna, hello, good to hear you too." She replayed sarcastically and added- "How is Adam?"

- "He is in hospital, we are on the way to visit him. Are you guys back?"

- "Yes, we have come home early in the morning. Thank you for the note and things. Please let me know how Adam is doing. I won't manage to go and visit him today..."

- "Okay, I will let you know. Bye Sam." I just ended without giving her a chance to speak again. I didn't want to talk to her any more. At least they could have gone straight to the hospital to see Adam.

- "Are they back?" Mike asked.

- "Yes, they are."

I texted Mr Bent that Sam and Thomas were in town. I didn't know if Tom went to his house or he stayed with Sam. I had promised Mr Bent to let him know if any of them would contact me. So, I did.

We arrived at the hospital pretty fast. Mike parked his car and we walked in. The

hospital was busier than we had seen it the previous day. It was Monday morning. The weekend was over and everything came back to its normal routine. I approached the information desk and asked about Adam.

- "Good morning. My name is Anna Coss. Could I get information about the patient we brought yesterday morning?"

- "What's his name?" One of the nurses responded.

- "Adam Patrick." I said.

It took her a while to go through files on a computer screen, then she typed Adam's name and returned to us.

- "Mr Patrick is on the third floor, room 2011. The doctor might be still there. So if you want to see your friend you'd better wait." She added with a warm smile.

I thought it would rather be good idea to talk to Adam's doctor and find out what actually was going on with him. I also thought that most probably we wouldn't get any information from him, because it was confidential. Only family members were allowed to know it.

There was a group of people waiting for the elevator, so we took the stairs instead. When we finally reached the third floor Mike was out of his breath.

- "I need a glass of water." He muttered.

I looked at him. He was red as beetroot. *"Thanks God we're in a hospital this time."* I thought. I handed him a bottle of water which I had in my bag.

- "There you go, old man." I joked.

He just grabbed it and drank it all. Then we found Adam's room. The doctor was still there as the nurse had said. We sat on the corridor and waited patiently.

- "Doctor Hills." I stood in his way when he was leaving the room. - "Good morning. We brought Adam yesterday, you remember, right?" I said.

- "Good morning Miss..." He responded.

- "Anna." I cleared his memory

- "Miss Anna. Yes, I remember."

- "Please, could you tell us how is he doing? Is everything fine? You know, you had that test result yesterday and then you had to go, and we didn't have a chance to talk about it.." I tried to gather some details from him, although I knew it was impossible.

- "The information can only be shared with Mr Patrick's family members. Are you one of them?" He asked starring at me and looking deep into my eyes as if I had committed a crime.

There was no way I could have lied that time, or I would let Mike to lie again. He wouldn't believe anyway.

- "No, I am not, but I care about Adam, we both do, a lot." I thought I would soften his heart a bit.

- "I am sorry, only family members. You can go ahead to see your friend, though. Excuse me right now, I have a work to do." Doctor Hills concluded, turned round on his heel, and walked down the corridor.

"I bet you do." I thought.

When we entered the room Adam was awoken. The room was bright with a large window view on the inner side of the yard. The green area. There was nobody in. Only Adam's bed and TV set. We found out later that his parents had asked for it.

- "Hey buddy!" Mike greeted Adam as soon as he noticed him. They hugged.

I also embraced his arms. When I lifted my body Adam grasped it for a while and looked into my eyes.

- "Hey." He whispered and beamed.

- "Hey." I whispered back. Then he released me.

There was small tube inserted into a vein in his hand. Some unknown to me fluid was going through it to his system. There was also a monitor next to the bed that kept course of his heartbeat.

- "How do you feel, Adam?" I asked.

He looked much better than the last time I had seen him on the stretcher. His face wasn't white any more. It had natural complexion. His eyes were shining. And he smiled. Although his beard wasn't shaved for three days, he looked pretty good. I would say that even more handsome.

- "In spite of everything what had happened, I feel really well." He answered.

- "That's good mate. You really scared the shit out of me there. All of us." Mike said.

- "Yeah, I know. I am sorry. I just don't know how it happened. I only remember that I started loosing feeling in my legs. I remember that I heard you calling my name. I wanted to shout but I couldn't. Then nothing any more and when I woke up I saw Anna's face. This is all what I remember." Adam tried to recall the event.

We all remembered much more. We remembered that we were drinking beer. We remembered that Thomas gave him CPR. We remembered that Adam vomited in the car on the way to the hospital. I remembered his white face. And I also remembered that I kissed him.

- "You had lost consciousness. I pulled you out of the lake with Thomas and he performed CPR, and actually, he saved your life." Mike added.

If Thomas wasn't there with us, nobody would do it. I didn't know CPR, Mike was the most drunk and Sam was in such a big shock that everything she was doing was walking from one tree to another crying and repeating over and over "*We shouldn't have done it*".

I noticed that Adam's face expression changed slightly. He might have thought that I was the one who saved him, because he saw my face as soon as he opened his eyes, or he just thought that Thomas and Sam would come with us to visit him that morning too.

- "They stayed one more day and they have come back this morning. I believe that they will come later to visit you. Sam actually called while we were on the way to the hospital to ask after you." I said it to assure him that they also cared.

- "So, do you know how long are you going to be kept here?" Mike spontaneously shifted the conversation.

- "Not sure yet. Up to five days, presumably."

- "Do you need anything? We can bring you tomorrow, or we can even drop it to your parents, if they are coming later today?" I asked Adam.

- "No, thanks Anna. I am good."

We were still chatting when a nurse came and gave him some medication. Then she told us that we would need to leave in a bit. As soon as she left Thomas showed up at the door. Sam wasn't with him.

- "Hey bro." He approached Adam. Later he noticed me and Mike.

- "Oh, sorry Anna. I haven't seen you." He came closer and gave me a strong hug and shook hands with Mike.

- "We were about to leave, actually." I mentioned and pushed Mike gently towards the door.

- "Yeah, we were leaving. I will call you later buddy." Mike promised Adam and we left. I wanted them to just be alone and talk about the accident just face to face. I believed that would be much easier for Adam to thanks Thomas for saving his life. It was sensitive issue. The simple "thank you" was not enough.

When we reached the lift there was another bunch of people standing in front of it.

- "No way, I am not going to walk down the stairs again." Mike uttered seeing them.

- "Walking down is much easier than climbing up. Let's go!" I said and pulled his T-shirt to follow me.

"Hey Anna, please, could you find some time this afternoon. I really need to talk to you. Please."

It was really long since Sam last time asked for a "talk". I didn't have any plans that day, which I couldn't have changed. I agreed to see her. I was actually looking forward to it. It was sunny day. Sam and I had arranged to meet at the park. I didn't want to sit in my bedroom and waste such a beautiful weather. We could stay in the garden but I felt like she wanted to talk about something crucial to her. Thus it was better to leave the house.

I grabbed a blanket, packed the basket with mango juice, cookies, tissues and rode my bicycle down the road. Sam was already there. She spotted me from far and waved to me.

- "Hey Sam!" I was glad to see her.

I thought that finally we could have some time on our own. I didn't remember when was the last time we did something together. Just two of us.

- "Hey Ann." She greeted me with her lovely smile.

We walked down the path to find a good spot for a picnic on grass. When we finally found one we spread the blanket and relaxed.

- "Have you visited Adam today?" Sam started.

- "Yes, we have. I went there with Mike and while we were leaving Thomas arrived." I responded.

She just lowered her eyes without a single word.

- "Sam, is everything alright between you two?" I asked anxiously - "Do you want to talk about Tom, Sam? Is he the reason you asked me to see you?"

She raised her eyes and I spotted tears. I was aware why she had wanted to see me. I didn't expect that she had missed me or had wanted to have girls time. It was just about him.

- "Sam, did he hurt you somehow?" I kept asking.

- "We had a fight last night, that's why we've come back home early in the morning." She finally expressed - "We planned to stay one more day, but after all..." She started crying big time.

I cuddled her first, then I wiped her tears with my bare palm and later offered her a tissue.

- "Oh, Sam. We always disagree with them. There is no a perfect relationship. My parents get divorce every weekend." I wanted to cheer her up a bit. She barely smiled.

- "I know Ann, mine too." She said- "But we never had had a quarrel until last night. It was the first time we disagreed about something." She began explaining.

- "Sam, because you have been doing everything he wants. Maybe you had a fight because your opinion was finally unlike his one. What was the cause, Sam?"

If they were a perfect couple as Sam thought, there must have been something that created the disagreement. Something that Thomas didn't like or couldn't accept.

- "Ann, I signed up for a summer French language course." She said.

Sam had been learning French long before we became friends. Then she met Thomas and neglected it a bit, like everything else in her life. All I knew French language and culture were always her passion.

- "Sam, that's great!" I happily expressed - "I know how much you love it!"

She grimaced and added

- "It's in France."

That fact changed my mood too. I understood then why Thomas could have been angry. But I also thought if he loved her, he would let her do anything that made her happy. And French definitely did make her happy.

- "Thomas doesn't want you to go, right?" I asked.

Of course he didn't want to. France. It wasn't just another town. It was another country.

- "Yeah." She muttered under her breath.

There was a moment of silence between two of us. Kids were running barefoot on grass and I thought how beautiful childhood was. In that moment I wished I was a child again. I wanted to just take my shoes off and just run with them. Not to be bothered with

anything and anyone. I just wanted to be free. I took them off eventually to feel that freedom.

- "Take them off!" I ordered Sam.

She looked at me with disbelief.

- "Come on, take your shoes off, Sam! Otherwise I will do it." I added with a smile.

She followed my command that time and took her shoes off. Then I grasped her hand, pulled her up and we ran down the hill. Barefoot. Just like those little kids. Wind swept our hair, the sun rays reflected in the pond and we were just dancing on the grass. Then, we fell down. I turned my head towards her face.

- "I think you should go." I expressed breathing deeply. - "No man should ever stop you from following your dreams." She just smiled.

We lied on the ground for a while then we got up and walked back to the blanket.

- "Thank you, Ann. I have completely forgotten how great friend you can be. I have forgotten about myself. About things I always wanted. You are right, I should go."

- "When are you leaving, Sam?" I asked.

- "This Friday. For three weeks."

I thought that three weeks wasn't really long time but it wasn't short either.

- "Tomorrow I will go to visit Adam. Are you guys going to see him?" She asked.

- "Yes, you can come with us." I offered.

- "Thank you, that would be great." She responded.

We were laying on the blanket looking up the sky, counting clouds, laughing and chatting about silly stuff as we used to. I missed it. That afternoon brought me back to the moments we shared. The moments we were close friends. The moments when there were just two of us.

On Friday Sam left for France and Adam was discharged from hospital.

On Wednesday, two days before Adam left hospital, Mike finally had received a phone call from Mrs Patrick. She had asked him to bring Adam's stuff. As Mike told me later he felt quite anxious. He sensed like there was something serious they wanted to talk to him about. He was right. There was something that changed everything. Something that changed Adam's life forever and mine partly too.

On his way home Mike popped in and we went for a walk. He wanted to talk and share with me the details he had obtained from Adam's parents. While we were walking down the street he eventually declared

- "Adam has diabetes."

His words galvanized me. I tried to figure out if I heard Mike correctly. I wanted it to be a dream. I wanted last few days and all events to be just a bloody nightmare. Nothing else. Unfortunately, it was just my own unfulfilled wish.

- "I can't believe it." I finally said.

- "Neither do I." Mike added and began walking. I followed him.

I was worried about stupid alcohol that might have been discovered but everything they had found was a disease.

- "Has he ever complained about anything? You know, you guys talk about everything. He wouldn't have told me anything even if I had asked him." I uttered.

- "A couple of times he felt like he was becoming more fatigue than usually. We were just joking that he was getting old. And now I know, he wasn't. Anna, you know it will change his whole life. You know that?" Mike grew despondent.

- "I know, Mike." I sighed.

In that particular moment I wanted to scream. To yell it out. Everything. In one moment you're young wild and free, and in the very next one you are a grown up. I didn't want it. I didn't want to be a grown up.

While we were walking not speaking much we rested on a bench.

- "I always thought that diabetes relates only to fat people. Adam is fit, why has this affected him?" I tried to find some logic in that whole situation.

- "Don't ask me, Anna. Doctors asked about his family medical history, you know, if anyone in the family had suffered before. But nobody of them had." Mike cleared up my speculation.

- "Mike, does it mean that Adam will need to get insulin injections?" I asked him reluctantly.

- "His parents told me that for now it's not needed. He will get some oral medication, though. He will need to watch his diet too, eat healthy, you know, no more junk food. Be active, like he never was, duh. He will need to monitor his blood pressure and cholesterol, regularly. Blood sugar tests will become part of his routine." Mike explained.

I just looked at him with a disbelief. If it wasn't easy for me to accept, how difficult it had to be for Adam, or for his parents.

- "We need to help him, Mike. We need to help him to get through it. To adapt to his new lifestyle." I turned my body towards Mike – "When we are with him, we will also eat only healthy food, fruit and vegetables, no burgers, no more sugary drinks, only diet one, no more alcohol, you hear me Mike?" I wanted make sure that Mike got my point clearly enough. - "Do you hear me? He is your best friend and mine too. We own him this." I emphasised.

Mike stayed quiet for a minute or two.

- "You're right, Anna. I own him that. It will also be beneficial for me when I ditch that fast food." He finally responded and grinned at me.

We chatted a little bit again on the way back home. I was worried about Adam but I wasn't frightened any more. I knew that he would make it. He had not only his family, but also he had us. I was ready to be by his side at any time he needed me. I was ready for that. I was not only ready to help him to go through his disease but I was ready for more. I was ready for more with Adam.

After Mike had taken his car from my dad's garage and drove home I went upstairs to search the Internet. I wanted to know everything about diabetes. I read about symptoms. Mike told me that Adam had complained about getting tired faster than usually. It was one of them. They wrote also about being hungry and thirsty. *"Really?"* I thought *"I feel hungry constantly and I drink a lot too, so it means that I got diabetes, huh? Stupid, every second person would say that he or she is hungry all day long. Pff!"* I was contemplating. Then, I also found out that lack of exercise and overweight could be one of the reasons. *"Adam is not the case. He is fit, he plays volleyball, football, runs..any more?"* I thought again. Everything that I read was about healthy diet, physical activity, blood pressure and sugar control. The one thing that made me cry was the fact that it could not be cured. I was sitting in front of my PC and I was crying. Again. I felt so useless, so weak. I couldn't do anything. I wish I could have turned back time. But to which moment? To the day was he born? Then, I realised the accident, the camping and the swimming at night were meant to be. If we hadn't gone for the camping, if they hadn't swum, if Adam hadn't almost drowned, we wouldn't have brought him to hospital, they wouldn't have taken his blood for research and they

wouldn't have found that he had diabetes. Everything happened for a reason. That reflection created some kind of inner tranquillity. It calmed me down a bit.

I understood that in life nothing occurs by chance. Everything is already planned at the moment we are born. Even if we would like to change the course of our lives, fate always finds its way to catch us. While I was reflecting over life and its destiny I thought about Mr Bent and Miss Galan. She had run away from him but then fate brought them back together to work at the same place. *"Why Mr Bent didn't get a job offer from another school? Why exactly from that one? Wasn't it fate, was it?"* I thought. *"Or maybe he had planned it? Oh, no! Had he?"* I started putting chunks together. For a while I forgot about Adam and began thinking again about Mr Bent and his dark past. I felt that it was time I talked to him.

- "Anna, hurry up! They're already here!" Mike was rushing me when Mr Patrick's car appeared in front of the house.

Adam was coming back home and we wanted to surprise him. We didn't want to organize a huge party, because we knew it wasn't the right moment. We all just wanted to be there for him. Mike came only with his dad. His mum had been killed in a plane crash. She was an air hostess, or flight attendant as some people might call it. There had been only one survivor. A three-year-old girl. I brought my parents, obviously. For them we were already a couple long time before I had even kissed Adam. Thomas called to tell me that he would come but he had to take Sam to the airport. She had decided to go to France. I was content with her decision. She ultimately stoop up for herself. He said that he would pop in on the way back if we were still there, but he never arrived.

- "Welcome home Adam!" We yelled when Adam entered the house.

He looked good. He had shaved his beard in the end. There was no sign that he was coming from hospital. There was no sign that he was sick. You could not spot with a bald eye that he had diabetes. All I saw was his smile, which made me glad. I was worried that he would be stressed and rather dejected that we all were there. He walked around and greeted everyone with a hug when he eventually reached me to squeeze me tight with his arms.

- "I missed you." He whispered to my ear.

I missed him too, but I didn't know then yet what I knew later.

There was only healthy food. No cakes, no junk food, no sugary drinks. Only healthy snacks, fresh juice and water. We all decided that we needed to help Adam to go through it. To make it easier for him. We also didn't want to stay there for long.

- "Excuse me everyone." Mike raised his voice.

I figured out that he was about to say something special. Something that brought tears not only to my mum's eyes.

- "May I get your attention, please. Thank you." He carried on.- "Adam, buddy. I'm starting like it's your wedding. I hope I'll be invited." He laughed and everyone else did.
- "Adam, you are like my brother. We've been together for our whole lives. I remember the day when your mum was chasing you in a park, because you were about to eat a cat poop." Everyone started laughing again.

Adam had never told me that story. I looked at him and he held his fingers in a shape of a gun and pointed at Mike. I laughed even harder.

- "Bro, you can skip that, please." Adam threw in.

- "Okay, okay, I will save it for another special event. So since then we are like brothers. I love you, mate, and I can not imagine my life without you. I know that one day we might go in different directions with our plans, but I will always have your back. I'll be always by your side. I am glad that you are back safe and sound. And forgive me for everything." Mike ended.

Adam approached and embraced him with his arms. They stood like that for a while. I spotted my dad wiping tears on mum's face. Everyone in the room knew what had happened down there in the lake but not everyone knew that Mike had guilty conscience.

When they all left I stayed with Adam. He had asked me to. On one hand I knew that he needed to rest, on the other one I wanted to be with him. His parents had persuaded me to stay and I gave in. Dad, while he was leaving, remarked in jest that I didn't need to be home by midnight. When we were walking towards Adam's bedroom, for the first time I felt a little uneasy. I had visited him many times before, but we were just good friends then. In fact, I always thought that I wasn't his type. He was tall and handsome. He could have any girl and I never considered myself pretty. I was confident, but pretty? No, not me. Then we entered his bedroom. I felt like my blood pressure reached its highest point. My throat got dry as desert. My knees became weak. I started thinking about the diabetes symptoms I had read about the previous night. *"Now you can take me to hospital, because according to the Internet I can be qualified as diabetic patient."*

Adam asked me to drop his stuff on the floor beside the desk and sit next to him on a bed. *"If he's going to kiss me now I will definitely have a stroke or a heart attack."*

I thought.

-"How do you feel?" I asked.

-"I feel good, Ann." He responded. -"So many things have happened in a week, you know."

-"Tell me about it." I added.

-"The whole accident down there at the camping has changed my whole life."

-"You need to look at the positive side of it. The disease has been discovered earlier and from now you can control it because you know about it." I wanted to cheer him up a bit.

-"You are right, Ann. You're always right." He responded starring into my eyes.

It took him maybe two seconds to kiss me. I didn't push him away. I wanted it. I waited for it. He was kissing me gently, softly and passionately. His lips were pulling mine, sucking them. I had never felt that good. Then he started caressing my bust. Squeezing it. We were still kissing when he took my top off, then unhooked the bra. I didn't want him to stop, but I felt like it wasn't the right time.

He took his T-shirt off too. He didn't loose much weight in that hospital. His body was still strong. He wasn't very muscular, but he wasn't skinny either. Rather fit

one. He started kissing one of my boobs, then the other one and both of them. I felt like I was in the seventh heaven. Then, he started kissing my lips again. That time more powerfully, more strongly. I felt his rising desire. His fast heartbeat. He picked me up and shifted to the middle of his bed. I wanted it so badly but I had to stop it. I whispered

-"Adam.."

He lifted his eyes in my direction.

-"I can't." I added.

He laid his head on my naked torso. I felt his deep breathing. I stroked his hair. He raised his body up. Handed me his T-shirt.

-"I'm sorry." He apologized.

He didn't need to. I wanted him as much as he wanted me, but I couldn't do it with his parents behind the door.

- "Don't be, please. It's just not the right moment." I didn't want him to feel bad about it, or guilty.

- "Will you stay?" He asked.

- "Do you want me to stay?" I also asked.

- "I do."

We laid down on the bed just starrng at each other's faces. We chatted about the camping and the accident.

- "Ann, I couldn't stop thinking about you since I saw your face when I opened my eyes. I saw you and nobody else." Adam confessed - "Then you came to the hospital and I embraced your body, and I knew that I didn't want to be your friend any more."

- "Don't you?" I asked.

- "No, Ann. I want to be more than just a friend." Adam answered and kissed me gently.

I felt like I was falling for him. I realised that I had never looked at him as my potential boyfriend. I had never before seen how handsome he was. How beautiful green eyes he had. And never before had I known that he was such a good kisser.

- "Me too." I whispered.

For a long time I hadn't slept as peacefully as that night.

Do you call it love when you care about other person more than about yourself? Is it love when someone else's happiness is more important than your own? If so, then I was in love. Since the night in Adam's house I officially became his girlfriend. It wasn't new to my parents but it was new to me. Although the way we were spending time together changed I still cared about Mike and his friendship with Adam. I didn't want him to feel neglected, as I felt when Sam started dating Thomas. Three of us were hanging out together as we used to, but with one small difference, I was holding hands with Adam.

One week passed since Samantha went to France. She didn't call me much as I had expected. She texted me twice. Nevertheless, she was very happy and that was enough for me. The sun was going down and the evening began to be slightly chill. Mum and dad went to the cinema. They had their night out once in a while. They needed it. Weekend was the only time they could do something together. Otherwise, they would work, work and work. I wondered if they even noticed that I had changed my hairstyle. Mike and Adam had their boys night out. They went to watch football together with some other guys. Football wasn't my cup of tea anyway. I was left alone to be with myself then. After a lonely dinner, which I had made on my own, I decided to take a warm bath, go to bed early and read the book I had borrowed from Mr Bent long time ago. That was my idea for the evening. Nevertheless, the universe had planned something else.

"Oh, no! Why is he calling right now? Isn't he watching football?" I thought when I saw my phone ringing. It was Thomas. I didn't talk to him since Samantha's departure. He never arrived to Adam's welcome party either. I decided to ignore it. After another two missed calls he stopped. *"Thank you, Thomas."* I said to myself with a relief. I could finally relax in a warm, bubbly bath. Then someone rang the doorbell. *"Who the hell is that?"* I wondered and waited. After a moment of silence I thought again *"Okay, It's gone."* But suddenly

-*"Anna! Anna! Anna!"* Thomas shouted from outside.

"No way!" I couldn't believe that he came to my house. I jumped out of the bathtub, wrapped my wet body in a towel and barefoot walked downstairs. He was standing in

front of the house screaming. I opened the door.

- "Stop shouting!"

- "Hey Anna. I called you, you didn't answer and didn't call me back. I was worried." Thomas tried to explain while staring at my half naked body.

I let him in and went upstairs to get dressed. Then my whole plan flashed down with water from the bathtub.

- "Would you like something to drink?" I offered.

- "Water would be fine, thanks." He responded and added – "Why didn't you answer my calls? Or at least called me back?"

- "Oh, Thomas. I was taking bath and I wanted to relax a bit. Why are you upset?" I asked.

He looked a bit stressed. Sometimes when I thought about him I felt sorry for him. He didn't have a good friend, such as Adam and Mike. He could always come to me with any problem, but he needed man talk. What more, I was with Adam. It would complicate things a bit too, which I definitely didn't want. Maybe Mr Bent would love Tom asked him for a chat, but I could just imagine how hard it was for both of them to build a bridge. The connection.

- "Sam hasn't called me since she left." He said.

- "She hasn't called me either, Tom. She just texted me that she's doing well and she's been really enjoying the course. Maybe she needs that, maybe she needs to think about everything. I believe when she's back you guys need to talk." I wanted to comfort him a bit, but also wanted let him know that there was a problem in their relationship.

- "Did she tell you anything? Was she complaining about us?" Thomas started wondering.

- "Thomas, I don't know if I should.." I wanted to avoid it.

- "Please tell me, Anna. I won't tell her that we talked. I promise."

He looked slightly depressed. I didn't want to go that way but I didn't want him to be

heartbroken either.

- "We had chatted before she left. She said you two had small disagreement about her travelling to France, because you didn't want her to go." I eventually expressed.

- "Anna, it's not that I didn't want her to go. I had different plans for us and she told me just few days before her flight. I wanted to take her for a boat trip. It was a surprise. I had arranged everything and she just told me at the camp." Thomas declared. He was irritated with Sam's behaviour.

I was astonished too. I would also be angry if I were him. If she had planned to go, she should have told him about it as soon as she had signed for the course. Was she anxious to talk to him?

- "Why didn't she speak with you about it earlier?" I asked.

- "I don't know, Anna." He responded.

We were still chatting when my parents came back home.

- "Good evening, Mrs and Mr Coss. I was actually leaving." Thomas stood up from a stool just after he saw my parents.

- "Good evening, Thomas. It's okay, you guys keep talking." Dad responded.

- "No, no, thank you. I need to go and pick my dad from a book club meeting anyway."

"Has he just said 'my dad'?" My jaw dropped.

I walked Thomas to his car. He embraced me tight and placed a kiss on my right cheek. Then, still looking at my face, said

- "Thank you, Anna. You are really a good friend. You know, sometimes I think what if..."

- "You need to go, Thomas." I interrupted.

I didn't want to hear about his "what ifs." I thought at the beginning too. When I had seen him at Mr Bent's house for the first time. I had thought too. But there was no more "what if." There was Adam and there was Sam.

He got into his classic Ford Mustang and added starting it

- "Nice haircut." Then drove away.

I didn't want to think about it. About his eyes looking at me saying "*I wish it was you. I wish I had you.*" I loved Adam and nothing mattered any more.

After the match Adam came over.

- "Thomas has popped in." I said while we were lying on the bed.

- "I invited him to go with us but he said that he had to go somewhere. What did he want?"

- "He just needed to talk about Sam. I think they may break up when she's back." I concluded.

- "Why do you think so? They seem to be happy together." Adam expressed his opinion.

He didn't know what I knew. He didn't know that Sam wasn't happy with Thomas any more. That Thomas didn't really love her as much as he could love someone else. That there was a disagreement. That the path was rough.

- "It's just my point of view." I added- "Sam told me that she lost herself in that relationship, that she has forgotten about her passion, about things she loved doing, about people. You know what I mean, right?"

- "Yeah, babe, I do. That's why I don't want you to give up on your goals, on your friends, just because I'm your man now." He said it with a big smile.

- "And I want the same for you. I don't want you to neglect Mike, he was in your life before me and I must admit he is really a nice guy. Down there by the lake I wanted to kill him, but later since the moment I saw him crying I realised that he is not the person he pretends to be. Then we spent some time together while you were in hospital and I got to know him better. He is a nice guy and he cares about you a lot."

- "Yeah, he does. You know, at the game he was watching what I was eating, what snacks, what I was drinking, even though they brought only diet drinks. Can you believe it?"

We both started laughing.

- "He is worse than my mother!" He added and we laughed even harder. Then Adam began tickling me. I was laughing louder and louder. I didn't remember when was the last time I laughed so much. He tackled me down on the bed and kissed. He was the best kisser I ever had. The way he gently moved his lips round mine was a melody.

- "Anna..." He said looking into my eyes. - "I want you. Do you want me?"

Of course I wanted him. I didn't know how to tell him that he was going to be my first. I had dated boys before but with Adam was something else. We didn't want to just kiss and cuddle. We weren't kids any more. It was obvious that we both wanted to go further, but I wasn't ready.

- "I want you, Adam. I really do. The thing is. I never, I never..." I tried to tell him when he eventually figured it out.

- "Are you a virgin, Ann?" He dropped a question.

I felt embarrassed and just nodded. He pulled me closer, hugged me tight and said

- "It's okay, honey. I understand. Any time you are ready."

Then he kissed my head. We fell asleep cuddling.

16

On Wednesday morning Mike took Adam to the hospital to do his regular check up. I was glad that Mike was there for him. I wish Sam could still be there for me too, but she wasn't. She called me the night before and talked a lot about some French teacher who was "absolutely gorgeous". She didn't ask much about me. She didn't ask about Thomas at all. I felt that their relationship was on the edge. However there was something else on my mind. Someone else and it wasn't Adam that time. I was thinking about Mr Bent and Miss Galan. I wanted to solve the puzzle, which was their unfulfilled love. I had to see Mr Bent. I looked around and spotted the book I had borrowed from him. "*There you are*" I thought and smiled. I found an excuse to pay him a visit.

- "Thomas, hi. Sorry to bother you, is Mr Bent home right now?" I called Thomas immediately.

I didn't want to talk to him after our last meeting but avoiding him wasn't a great idea either. I rather thought that I'd pretend that nothing had happened. It hadn't happened anything anyway. It was better to play stupid.

- "Hey Anna, yes, he is home. Do you want me to pass him the phone?" Thomas responded.

I would have called Mr Bent directly if I had wanted to talk to him on the phone. The thing was I wanted to talk to him face to face. Additionally, he might have told me that he had no time and asked me to come some other day. I didn't want to wait. There was no time to wait.

- "No, no, don't do it! I want to speak with him but I'd prefer to do it in person" I told Tom.

- "Is everything alright, Anna?" Thomas asked anxiously.

- "Yes, it is. Don't tell him that I called, please. I'll be there in ten."

I hang up, grabbed the book and rushed down the stairs. Fortunately, Mr Bent lived in our neighbourhood, just two blocks away. As soon as I reached his house I was out of breath. I sat on the front stairs to rest a bit before knocking the door. Then suddenly someone opened it.

- "Anna? What are you doing here?" Mr Bent asked.

He was taking his garbage out. I raised my eyes up. He was looking at me from above like the Statue of Liberty. Then he helped me to get up.

- "Hello Mr Bent, I was about to knock the door actually. I brought your book." I said showing him the book.

- "Oh, I have completely forgotten about it. Please, come on in. Thomas is in the house. Let me just throw the rubbish out." He responded showing me the way.

I kept the book for almost a year, so he had the right to forget about it. When I entered the house I smelled something very tasteful. Thomas was in the kitchen, cooking. The

living room was very bright with the window curtains wide open. It seemed to be bigger. All books were arranged alphabetically. The old armchairs were replaced with new ones. There was no carpet on the floor any more. As I remembered the old one was also dark and ragged.

- "Smells good." I expressed when I approached the kitchen.

- "Hey Ann! You will stay to eat with us, right?" Thomas greeted me.

- "Well, I may, but first I need to talk to your... I mean Mr Bent." I said.

I was about to say "your dad" as Thomas had called him last time we saw each other, but I held my tongue.

- "I get it." Thomas responded. - "What do you want to talk to him about?" He asked out of curiosity.

Then I realised that Thomas shouldn't have been there. I shouldn't talk to Mr Bent about his love life, about his engagement to Miss Galan in Thomas presence. His mother was the reason they never got married. Thomas was the child that stood in the way to their happiness. I realised that it would be too much for him.

- "I want to ask..." I tried to make something up but I couldn't. Then Mr Bent returned.

- "Thank you for bringing the book, Anna. How have you been?" Mr Bent asked while placing the book on a bookshelf.

- "I've been good, Mr Bent." I responded.

However, Thomas looked at me with an expression as if he doubted my words. I wanted to ask Mr Bent about Miss Galan and confirm my speculations. I needed to know if they broke up because of Natalie. I was sitting like on a hot stone and was about to say something when all of sudden Mr Bent's phone rang.

- "Oh, I am sorry Anna, I need to get that." He said and went to another room.

That was the moment I could talk to Thomas and ask for details Mr Bent had told him about. They must have talked. They were apart for almost twenty years. He must have asked why Mr Bent never had contacted him or his mother. He must have known something. I shifted closer to Thomas and said

- "Thomas, I need to ask you about something very important. I am sorry in advance if this will hurt you somehow."

- "Anna, what is on your mind, girl? What is going on?" He finally wanted to know what I was planning and the real reason I visited them.

- "Thomas, has Mr Bent talked to you about him and your mother?" I eventually asked.

- "Why are you getting back to those events?" Thomas didn't seem to be content with my question.

- "Please, it's important. Has he?"

Tom hesitated for a while, but consequently pronounced

- "He told me the whole story, Anna. I know that they were studying together, I know that he collected her from the bus stop on a rainy day. I know that my dad, I mean the other one, my mum's husband, didn't let them to stay in touch. I know James was sending money to save it for my future. I know all of this, Ann. We had talked about it on the phone before my arrival and on the first day I came here. He showed me all the pictures mum had sent him. Why are you still curious about it, Anna? Why is this important again?"

I was looking at him and felt deep sorrow. I didn't want to hurt him any more. Life was tough enough for him. Maybe Natalie wasn't the real reason that Miss Galan and Mr Bent broke up. Maybe there was something else.

- "Thomas, Miss Galan and Mr Bent were engaged." I tried to hold my tongue but I couldn't.

- "No way! Miss Galan and James? When?" Thomas jumped out of his chair.

- "I don't know much. I know only this. My mum told me that Mr Bent had called the wedding off, then Jane, I mean Miss Galan, vanished for a year, when she got back she started teaching again and a few years later Mr Bent got a job at the same place. Was it a coincidence? What do you think?" I shortly explained the facts I knew.

Thomas kept walking from one wall to another morosely contemplating. We were only able to hear Mr Bent yelling to the phone in the other room.

- "Thomas, do you think that Natalie, I mean your mum, was the reason they... I am sorry for bringing it up, but it is not what I think? We must do something." I approached him. He stood in front of me.

- "What do you want to do, Anna? We can't do anything." He said. Then added - "Heart wants what it wants."

We were standing in front of each other when Mr Bent eventually came back to the room and broke the silence.

- "Shall we eat?"

17

We sat at the table and Thomas served the meal he had prepared. It was Hungarian stew he had learned to cook from his grandmother. Natalie's mother was Hungarian.

She lived in Budapest and Thomas once in a while travelled to visit her. Later he told me that it was the only good thing he remembered from his childhood.

I didn't want to trouble Mr Bent with my investigation. Thus I decided that as soon as I was done with the food I'd go. To my surprise Thomas dropped a bomb.

- "I sometimes think that Miss Galan is a mad woman, don't you think dad?"

I almost choked. Mr Bent stopped eating too. Lowered his spoon and turned in Thomas direction.

- "What caused you to think that?"

I was sitting still and carried on with my food. I wanted to stay away from that conversation, although deep down I knew I was the one who brought the issue up.

- "My observation." Tom retort abruptly then added - "Many times a woman loses her mind for a man, especially when the man leaves her for someone else. Well, I read it on the Internet."

It was said sarcastically. I felt raising tension and I had to say something to soothe it.

- "Men also get hurt when they are turned down by women." I threw it in.

Mr Bent looked at both of us and tried to figure out what the point of the unusual chat was.

- "What is this actually about? Can any of you enlighten me, please?"

We exchanged looks with Thomas and I gave him a sign to ask.

- "Look, James..." Thomas started - "I know you were engaged to Miss Galan. Don't ask where I know this from."

Mr Bent stretched his arms. Looked at him astonishingly, then glanced at me. Lifted his body up from the chair and leaned towards Thomas.

- "You are not the reason we are not married." Then looked at me again and added - "If you two have been wondering, okay, let me tell you." He approached the window and began pronouncing his story.

- "Jane, Miss Galan, was introduced to me by our mutual friend. She was still in her twenties and graduated with Master's degree. I was working already as the English language teacher. I was thirty three. She wasn't the most beautiful girl I met, like your mum Thomas, but she had that sparkle. She was very intriguing person. She had her own unique personality. She talked with passion about things she wanted to do in her life, places she wanted to visit. We started dating after a while, but it wasn't love from the first sight. We needed time to let the emotion evolve." While telling the story Mr Bent walked twice around the room and eventually sank into one of the armchairs. - "We travelled together to places she always wanted to see. We went to Thailand, Cambodia, Japan, Bali. She was completely different person then. You would not say..." There was a pause and then he started again. - "We got engaged one night when we were sitting on the roof of her house. We used to do it often during summer. I loved her. I wanted to be with her for the rest of my life. She was the one. I bought the ring and I proposed. She said yes. We began a wedding arrangement soon after it, then we found out that she was pregnant. Unfortunately, due to the flu she had caught, she lost the baby. It was very tough time for both of us. But I wanted to help her. I coped with it better, although it was difficult for me too. She was changing gradually. She didn't care

about the wedding any more. She wanted to postponed it. She became dull. She lost the energy she had. All she was doing was just laying on the couch and reading. I needed to cease it. I bought two tickets to Italy. It was May. I had heard Italy was beautiful in May. I packed hers and mine stuff in one bag. And we went to the airport. Waiting for boarding she told me that she needed to go to the toilet. She refused me to go with her. So I waited. We had to get on the plane but she was not coming back. I ran to the toilet to check if she was alright. She wasn't there. She vanished. Then I received a text message. All she said was "*I can't go with you.*" I had to decide to get on the plane or go back home. I chose to go to Italy. When I came back home. I brought her clothing, took rest of my stuff and broke up with her. I asked her to keep the ring. I tried to call her from Italy, to talk to her but she didn't want to, so I didn't want to bother her either, even though I loved her."

We both, Thomas and I, were sitting and listening attentively. We didn't want to interrupt or ask any questions. When Mr Bent ended I felt relived. I was worried that the story might have been related to Thomas' mother. That she was the reason Mr Bent broke up with Miss Galan. It would be heartbreaking. It still was. Mr Bent never got married after all. He was unlucky with women for his whole life. Even meeting Natalie was a mistake. Nevertheless, he had Thomas in the end.

- "I found out later that Jane moved to Philippines to teach English." Mr Bent added.

- "I have been wondering, Mr Bent. Does she still love you?" I asked out of blue.

Mr Bent didn't answer but his face expression said everything.

- "When I met Natalie, Thomas' mother, I wanted to forget about Jane. But Natalie turned me down. She didn't want to divorce her husband and told me to forget about her. The rest is just history you both know." Mr Bent said and leaned back in the armchair.

- "Mr Bent, I think you should talk to Miss Galan." I expressed.

I sensed that there was still love. He held onto her for so many years. She was lonely, miserable, single lady. It was time to change that.

Mr Bent bent forward, placed his elbows on his knees and declared

- "Anna, there is nothing to talk about. You heard the other day, I tried to explain to her but she didn't want to listen to me. She hates me."

- "No Mr Bent, she doesn't hate you. I think she loves you. Believe me. She might be angry with you or disappointed with the fact that there is a son in your life, but she still loves you."

I wanted to assure him, although I wasn't convinced with anything I had said. I just wished it was true. I wanted Mr Bent to be finally happy and Miss Galan to get, the sparkle she lost, back in her eyes.

- "We will take care of it, dad. Just leave it to me and Anna." Thomas suggested blinking in my direction.

I believed that he was content with the fact that they had broken up before he was even born. I saw that he also wanted Mr Bent to be happy. He had seen his house when he moved in. It was dull and dark. There was no light in it. As his life, dry and dust.

- "Thomas, just let it go, okay. It's gone." Mr Bent stood up and left the room.

I was sitting with Thomas in silence when we both eventually expressed at the same time

- "We need to set them up!"

Then we laughed.

Many times I thought what the first time would be like. I created the perfect scenery in my head. I also read about it a lot. Some girls wanted it to be really special, some others didn't care much and still others didn't remember when it had happened. I definitely didn't want to belong to the last group but I didn't want to make a very big deal of it either. It would stress even more both of us. Everything I knew I wanted to do it with Adam. I loved him and I felt that he loved me too, even though he hadn't said it. I didn't want to wait any longer, although, as he had mentioned, he would wait until I was

ready. I felt it was the right time. I was ready.

My parents were going to spend a few days out of the town. Mum sister's daughter had had a baby and she invited them for a weekend when mum called her to congratulate. They wanted me to go with them but as soon as I found out that I would stay home on my own I made something up to avoid the trip. I had been waiting to be alone with Adam long enough. And the moment arrived.

Friday morning I called him.

- "Hey honey. How are you?" He answered the phone.

- "Hey Adam. I'm fine, and you?" I asked.

- "I am good, Ann. I have just checked my blood pressure and it has satisfying rate. The test outcome was also pretty good. So I am doing well."

- "That's great! I'm calling to ask if you have any plans for tonight." I asked tentatively.

- "You're my plans, Ann." He answered.

I beamed hearing that.

- "Will you come over? My parents are going away for the weekend."

- "For the whole weekend?" I recognized satisfaction in his voice.

- "Yeah, and....I'm ready." I responded with a slight reluctance.

I hoped he knew what I meant. I wished he knew. My heart was beating very fast and he wasn't saying anything. I started becoming anxious if he still wanted the same. Maybe he had changed his mind.

- "I'm happy." He finally responded. - "I'll be there at seven, okay?"

- "Yes, seven suits me."

- "See you later, babe." Adam ended.

I didn't say anything any more. I just ended the call. I started doubting if I had made the right decision. I wanted him, but I wasn't sure if he still wanted me. I started

overthinking. *"He didn't sound excited. What if he doesn't want me any more? What if, he doesn't feel the same I feel? Maybe I just see what I want to see? Oh, poor me."*

My parents left and I began searching for the best outfit. I turned my closet upside down and eventually wore white plain T-shirt and boyfriend Jeans. *"Do I look sexy?"* I asked myself staring at the reflection in the mirror. Then the doorbell rang. *"Oh my God! Is he already here?"* I thought and glanced at the clock. It was 6.58 p.m. I couldn't believe time passed so fast. *"Thank God I managed to stuff my clothes back into the wardrobe."*

I walked downstairs. It was him.

-*"Hello, Ann."* Adam greeted me when I opened the door. -*"Looking good."*

"Sometimes simplicity is a key." I thought.

-*"Hey, Adam."* We kissed and he entered the house.

I didn't know what would be better, to go straight to my bedroom and do it, or just take it slowly. I chose the latter one. We grabbed some healthy snacks I had prepared earlier and went to the living room to watch a movie. I wanted to watch some romantic story to create the atmosphere but he selected a comedy. I wasn't very glad with that option but I didn't want to seem desperate either. Like everything I wanted was just having my first sex ever. I wanted, of course I did and the more I thought about it the more stressed I felt. *"Maybe it's just a game? He is testing me, how long I can wait. Well, I kept him waiting, so now he will pay me back. Fine!"* I was fighting with my thoughts while we were watching the movie. I couldn't even concentrate and there were moments I didn't laugh when I supposed to. Then I laughed when I didn't suppose to. When the movie ended I wanted to clap my hands for applause. Then Adam turned the TV off and played music. It was John Legend, "Tonight." He took my hand and asked for a dance. *"Really???"* I wondered. We were dancing barefoot in the middle of the living room as close as we could feel our heartbeats. Then he held my head in his both hands, looked into my eyes and began kissing. My head was spinning around. My hands were moving up and down his body. Then he stopped and, while still holding me close, said

-*"I love you, Anna. I want you to want me as I want you."*

-*"I want you Adam."* I whispered.

We started kissing again. More passionately. More intensely. He took my T-shirt off. I took off his. Then I unhooked my bra and let it to slide off. He started kissing my breast. Next unbuttoned my Jeans and pulled them down. I felt like my blood pressure was rising. He lifted my body up and carried to my bedroom. He placed me gently in the middle of my bed and took his pants off. *"So, this is really happening."* I thought. He pulled my pants down. I was only worried about protection. We hadn't talked about it.

- "Adam.." I whispered.

- "Yeah baby?" He looked at me.

- "Protection."

- "Don't worry. I got everything." He responded.

I trusted him. I didn't need to see it. I believed in everything he was saying. In that moment I wanted just feel him. Even if he wouldn't be mine forever, in that particular moment he was mine. I felt shivering went through my spine when he was kissing my naked body. He was going lower and lower when I stopped him again.

- "Adam.." I whispered one more time.

He lifted his head and eyes, and said

- "Don't be scared, honey. Trust me." And kept moving down until he reached my pelvic. Then spread my legs apart and began kissing my lady parts. It wasn't what I had expected. It was much better. Blood exploded in my brain. My breathing became deep and heavy from pleasure. I clutched his head. Pushed it and pulled it. I dipped my fingers into his hair. I wanted him to stop and keep carrying on at the same time. I wanted to scream but I was afraid to do it. My heart was beating as fast as never in my life. It felt so good. It felt like heaven. If I had only known how heaven felt. The pleasure was unbearably sweet. Then he stopped and raised up. Shifted, kissed my boobs, kissed my lips and asked looking into my eyes

- "Are you ready, baby?"

- "Yeah." I whispered stroking his hair.

And I felt him. Deep inside me. I felt just a small pain. Nothing much and only pure

pleasure. I felt him moving gently on my body, still kissing my lips and looking into my eyes. He gradually began moving faster and faster. I felt the blood again in my head. I started feeling like everything was boiling inside me. It was coming from down. His hips were hitting mine harder and more powerfully. He squeezed my palms tight. I felt my voice needed to be realised and I didn't want to

hold it back any more. I let it free. And then my legs were shaking, my whole body was shaking. Adam pressed his head against mine. We were starring into each other's eyes and it happened. We ended. I moaned with pleasure. Adam placed his sweat head on my bust. I kissed it. I wanted to maintain that moment forever.

- "I love you, Adam." I whispered.

He lifted his head, shifted closer, kissed my lips and responded

- "I love you too, Anna."

19

Although August arrived with rainy weather, nothing could change the fact that I was deeply in love with Adam. Since our first time together the emotion grew stronger. Apart from kissing and cuddling, we also made love. It was new to me but I wasn't afraid any more. It wasn't new to Adam. I could recognize that. He knew exactly what he was doing and what to do to please me. He also showed me the way to please him. He told me that he had had his first time at the summer camp when he was just sixteen. I didn't care much about it. It wasn't important. I felt secure with him. One night he said that he didn't want to lose me and that only mattered. His health also improved. He controlled it regularly.

Beside thinking constantly about Adam and how happy I was, I had to also figure out how to bring Mr Bent and Miss Galan together, so they could finally talk. Two days before Samantha's arrival I met Thomas to discuss our master plan.

- "Maybe we should arrange a blind date." Thomas suggested.

We drove up the hill. There was a very beautiful spot to view the town from above. Adam had brought me there one evening and the townscape was breathtaking indeed. I didn't know Thomas knew that place too. I guessed that every guy would bring his girlfriend there. I wondered if he had ever showed that place to Sam.

- "I don't think is a good idea." I grimaced and expressed my opinion.

- "Why not?"

- "If Miss Galan sees your dad she will instantly run away. And then they both would kill us for embarrassing them in a public place. No, this one is out. Think about something else." I explained.

- "Maybe we can bring them to a classroom, lock the door and wait until they explain everything to each other." Thomas dropped another notion.

I jumped off the cliff with a joy.

- "That's it! This is what we need to do. If we lock the room they won't be able to leave it and they will have to talk, or they will kill each other eventually."

We both started laughing. There was something between us that I couldn't explain. I had felt it before with Mr Bent. Something I called a soulmates connection. I began feeling the same with Thomas. We read each other's minds, we thought about the same things, we had similar ideas.

- "But how we get a classroom key during summer holiday?" Thomas figured out.

There was no chance to succeed with that one either. We had to arrange something else. We were sitting and thinking. From time to time one of us would suggest something more or less realistic when I eventually came up with a proposition.

- "We'll bring them to my house."

- "Under what circumstances?" Thomas asked doubtfully.

- "We'll figure out something. You just need to persuade your dad to get into your car and drive him to my place." I responded.

Thomas scratched his head and agreed consequently to my plan.

- "We need to do it as soon as possible." I added.

- "The day after tomorrow Sam is coming back from France, you know. And I want to go and pick her up from the airport. We also need to talk, so I might not be available for a couple of days."

I was content with his words. He wanted to work things out with Sam. I just hoped that Sam wanted the same.

- "That's great you want to speak with her. Communication is very important in a relationship. Look Thomas, Sam needs some time to rediscover herself. She told me that she had stopped doing things which she had loved doing before she met you. She said that she had forgotten about her passion, about me."

Thomas seemed to be surprised with everything I had said. Jumped out of the rock. Started rapidly kicking stones. And responded with a raised tone of his voice

- "What's going on with her, Anna?! If she wants to break up with me, fine! Let it be, but she shouldn't be such a liar. First the French course. Now this. The thing is, Ann, she gave up on everything and everyone. I told her many times to go and meet you. That you could spend some time together as you used to. But she preferred to stick to me like glue. She watches everything I do, she has become even a basketball fan. It's okay, maybe she really likes it..."

- "No, she doesn't." I interjected.

- "You see! She neglected her passion, she stopped learning French long time ago, only now, this course. I was glad that she had signed up, but you know, I told you already about my surprise for her. Anyway, I need to talk to her seriously when she's back."

He was very irritated with Sam. On one hand I thought that I shouldn't have told him that, but on the other one they shouldn't live in a lie any more. I felt that they would not last for long, although I wished they did. I wanted them to sort things out and be as happy as they were the first day I had seen them sitting together on stairs and laughing.

- "Thomas, I'm sorry, maybe I shouldn't have stuck my nose into your relationship, but I thought you needed to know."

- "It's okay, Ann. Thank you for telling me. I won't tell her that we talked. Let's better

think how to arrange Miss Galan and James' meeting." Thomas changed the topic.

"We can do it tomorrow morning. My parents are going to be at work. You can bring Mr Bent at nine. I will call Miss Galan."

"But what would the motive be? You know, when James asks why I need to take him to your house? What for?" Thomas kept asking.

"Tell him anything." I said.

"Yeah, anything.." Thomas murmured.

I checked my watch it was almost five p.m. and Adam was about to finish his training.

"Oh gosh! We need to go back. Adam will be at my house in about thirty minutes. Let's go, Tom!" I wanted to rush him but he rather was reluctant.

"Don't worry. We still got time."

"I need to make something up, if he asks what I was doing for the last two hours."

I was worried. I didn't want to lie but I wasn't sure if Adam would be happy to hear that I met Thomas again.

"Just tell him the truth. Believe me, it's much better than any beautiful lie." Thomas suggested.

I knew that too.

"You're right. I'll tell him."

"Mum, please, could you call Miss Galan and ask her to come to our house tomorrow morning?" I started begging my mother to help me with Miss Galan as soon as I got home. Adam had called me and said that he'd like to stop first at his house to change after the training. He had also mentioned that he had a "sweet little surprise" for me. I

couldn't wait to see what it was.

- "Anna, why do you want her to come to our house? We are not even close enough to visit each other." Mum responded surprisingly.

- "Mum, I will tell you, but you must promise that you won't try to talk me out of it. Alright?"

I hesitated sharing with my mother the arrangement I had planned with Thomas. I expected that she would be rather against it than support us and I was right.

- "It depends, Ann. I cannot promise on anything which consequences may affect you. I don't know, Anna." Mum responded.

- "Mum, come on... Anyway, listen mum, Thomas and I want to bring Mr Bent and Miss Galan back together. We know they still love each other." I told her straight away.

- "Have you lost your mind, Anna!? How may you be sure this is what they want? They're grown people if they wanted to talk they would do it. Anna, stay away from it."

Although mum wasn't enthusiastic with our concept, I wasn't ready to give in.

- "Mum, Miss Galan have lived her whole life in a misery. She needs to listen to Mr Bent for once. She thinks that he loved another woman and therefore gave up on her. If this doesn't help, we won't talk any more about them and we'll let it go. We just want that one try, mum."

I wanted to explain to my mother that it wasn't just some kind of stupid intention. It was a love story which started long time ago and it didn't have a happy ending.

- "Mum, if you think that they don't love each other, please tell me, why Miss Galan has never got married or Mr Bent has never been in a relationship with any other woman?" I asked first then added - "We don't count Thomas' mother."

Mum came closer to me. Looked into my eyes and uttered

- "Anna, why do you always want to save everyone?"

- "Because I care too much about people, mum." I responded.

Then doorbell rang. Adam was at the front door.

- "Mum, please, could you just think about it, please?" I tried to use the last few seconds before letting Adam in.

- "Open the door, Anna." Mum said.

Adam held a small box in front of him. The box was shaking and Adam could hardly keep it in his hands. Then the box barked. He handed it to me while saying

- "It was supposed to be a surprise but it has just betrayed me. It's for you, Ann. I saw it and I knew that you'd love it, and it's been practically a month."

It was almost an entire month since he had nearly drowned. I remembered how frightened and scared I was that he could have gone forever.

I took the box, opened it and one sweet little chocolate head stuck out of it. It was a puppy, Chocolate Labrador with blue eyes and a yellow ribbon attached to his neck. Yellow was my favourite colour. I always dreamed to have a Labrador, a chocolate one, but I never had the courage to get it. My parents used to say that a dog was a responsibility and when I eventually grew up they would say that it was time for me to take my own decisions. But I still hesitated. I had told Adam only once about it and he didn't.

- "Oh, Adam. Thank you! It's adorable! Thank you very much!" I hugged him and kissed.

- "Cough, cough..." My dad wanted to pull the attention and remind us that we were still in the kitchen. We took the puppy and went upstairs to my room.

- "How shall we call him?" I asked Adam.

- "Anyhow you want."

- "Maybe, Figaro?" I suggested.

- "Figaro is great. It suits him. Figaro! Come here Figaro!" Adam immediately began calling the puppy by his new name.

We were playing with Figaro for the whole evening. I completely forgot to tell Adam about Mr Bent and Miss Galan. He couldn't stay for night because he was going to the

hospital early in the morning. He didn't ask me to go with him. He wanted to keep me away from that place. I told him that the day we had brought him there with Mike was the worst day of my life. I thought we would lose him for good. He didn't want me to keep that memories and visiting hospital would not help to forget. After we had walked the puppy a bit Adam went home. Entering the house I found a note on the kitchen table

"Anna,

Jane will be here tomorrow at 9 in the morning.

Good luck

P.S. I still think it's a very bad idea.

Mum "

"Oh Mum, thank you" I thought and I realised that I hadn't told Adam about it. I instantly texted Thomas *"Tomorrow, 9 a.m."* I thought that he was sleeping already, it was 00.30, but he wasn't. *"Ok. It's actually today."* He texted me back.

He was right. It wasn't any more "tomorrow". It was "today." I began to feel slightly anxious. *"What if mum was right that we shouldn't get involved and we should let it go? But what if they would never find the way back to each other? And later at the age of ninety Mr Bent would say the only thing he regretted was that he hadn't pursued his true love?"* I was struggling with my own thoughts. Nevertheless, there was no way back. Miss Galan was coming to my house.

I hardly slept that night. I heard my parents leaving to work. It was 6.30 a.m. Figaro was also up. I looked at him and asked

"Do you want to pee?"

I would be surprised if he answered *"No, I don't."* He was pulling my duvet, barking and rolling his flabby body over. Then he began playing with one of my sleepers. He held it with his paws and started shaking and tearing it with his small teeth. I got up when I saw it.

"Oh no my little buddy. You need to give it to me right now."

I lifted Figaro up and pressed him tight to my chest.

- "You're our first baby. I love you already little boy." I said.

Then I dressed and took him out for a short walk. When I got back home I found two messages on my phone. One from Adam, good morning text, and the second one from Thomas, about my broken shower. *"And Mr Bent is coming to fix it? Interesting."* I thought.

It was 8.55 a.m. when Miss Galan parked her car in front of the house.

- "There she is." I looked at Figaro.

I texted Thomas immediately. He replayed that they were about to leave.

She stayed in the car for no longer than two minutes when she eventually got off. I waited until she rang the bell. I didn't want her to think that I was watching her for a while.

- "Good morning, Anna." She greeted me.

- "Good morning, Miss Galan." I responded and invited her in.

I didn't know what mum had told her that she agreed to come.

- "Please, Miss Galan, have a sit in the living room and I will get you a drink." I offered.

- "Water would be fine. Thank you." She responded.

"Water? Why not coffee or tea? It would take me much longer to prepare it. Not just water." I thought. Then she noticed Figaro.

- "What a cute puppy, Anna. What's his name?" She asked.

- "Figaro. I got him yesterday from Adam. You know Adam Patrick, Miss Galan." I responded passing her a glass of water.

- "Yes, I know him. How is he doing by the way? I heard that he was in hospital." She asked while playing with my dog. I was glad that Figaro was there to help me to kill time.

- "He's doing really well now. He has diabetes, though. It's type 2, so he doesn't need to take insulin injections." While I was explaining the door bell rang. My heart was about to jump out of my chest.

- "I am sorry, Miss Galan, let me check that." I excused her and went to open the door.

There was Thomas with Mr Bent. I invited them in.

- "Thomas told me that your shower is broken, Anna." Mr Bent started.

I only wished that Miss Galan wouldn't have heard his voice and escaped through the living room window.

- "Actually...Mr Bent, could you just wait a bit in the living room, please?" I responded hesitantly.

- "I don't know what's going on here but absolutely is not the shower."

Mr Bend said while walking reluctantly towards the living room, then entered it and spotted Miss Galan still playing with the puppy.

- "Jane? Are you here?"

She was galvanized with his voice. Jumped out of the sofa and responded with a question

- "What are you doing here, James?"

We had only one chance to get Figaro out of the room, close and lock the door.

- "Figaro!" I called the puppy.

He ran fast towards me. I grabbed him, then Thomas closed the door and locked it.

- "It's done!" I said. We sat on the floor with a relief.

They both leaped to the door bumping it rapidly and shouting

- "Thomas open the door!" Mr Bent yelled - " You guys are really in a big trouble right now!"

- "Anna! Anna! Please let me out!" Miss Galan screamed.

- "You need to talk first. Then we let you out." Thomas responded.

We heard them yelling from the other side of the door.

- "Is this some kind of joke!?" Miss Galan shouted.- "Was that your idea?" She shifted to Mr Brent.

- "Mine? If I had wanted to talked to you, I wouldn't have set a trap for myself." Mr Bent answered with an irritation in his voice.

- "You two need to talk!" I shouted back.

- "Anna! You guys should have stayed away from my private life!" Miss Galan reacted.

There was a moment of silence when they started talking more calmly.

- "Jane, maybe they are right. Maybe we should talk." Mr Bent began giving in.

I looked at Thomas. He smiled and said

- "Sweet puppy." Then asked - "From Adam, right?"

I just nodded.

- "James, there is nothing to talk about. It's been over twenty years. We had the chance to fix it once but you slept with Thomas' mother." Miss Galan responded.

We both were staggered.

- "He told us that Natalie wasn't the reason" I whispered.

- "Jane.." Mr Bent carried on - "I have always loved you. I met Natalie when you told me you never wanted to see me again, don't you remember?"

There was pause again. Then Mr Bent carried on.

- "I don't know why you hate me so much, Jane. I never cheated on you. I wanted marry you. I wanted to have a family with you. I tried to make it up for you after your miscarriage. It was tough for me too. You never asked."

Then we finally heard Miss Galan voice. It was breaking.

- "James, I never told you. When I lost the pregnancy I was completely shattered. The doctor told me that I would never be able to have a child again in my life. I was scarred to tell you about it. I was scarred that you would leave me anyway one day. I loved you James, but I couldn't let you live a life without kids. You see, you got Thomas now. If you had stayed with me he wouldn't be even in this world."

She stopped talking and started weeping. We heard only her crying.

- "Do you think that your dad is kissing her now?" I popped a question.

Thomas turned his head in my direction and answered

- "I would do that."

Then we heard again Mr Bent voice.

- "Oh, Jane. I would have never left you. There are doctors, Jane. There are children waiting for adoption. Jane, I loved you and... I still do."

That was the moment we were waiting for. It must have been tough for Thomas to hear that his dad loved Miss Galan for the whole time. There was silence again. Miss Galan wasn't crying any more.

- "Now they are kissing." Tom whispered.

- "Yeah." I added.

We didn't hear much any more but they were still talking. They lowered the tone of their voices intentionally. We didn't care much what they were saying, because we had heard enough. Figaro was shaking Thomas' shoelaces but he didn't pay attention to that at all.

- "Do you think they'll stay together now?" Thomas asked staring at me.

- "They will." I whispered.

Then they approached the door and knocked.

- "Are you there, you two?" Mr Bent asked.

- "Yes." We answered together.

- "We talked. So you can let us out now." He added.

Thomas wanted to unlock the door when I blocked his hand.

- "Have you explained everything to each other?" I asked.

- "Anna, we have! Let us out!" Miss Galan shouted.

I let Thomas turn the key in a lock. They opened the door. I knew we were in a jam but I was glad they finally had a chance to talk. Miss Galan left the room first.

She pointed her finger straight to my face.

- "You are in a big trouble, young lady." She said and walked away.

- "Let's go home, Thomas." Mr Bent winked at me while pulling Thomas' T-shirt towards the front door.

- "I will call you later." Thomas added while leaving the house.

They all left and I stayed alone again with my sweet little boy, which was finally sleeping peacefully. I just spotted through the window that Mr Bent and Miss Galan hugged and he opened for her the door of the car, then resting his arm on Thomas' shoulder walked with him home.

"I think we succeeded." I thought and smirked.

Some people wonder why life is tough or why it's the other way it supposed to be. People complain about lives they create. They make mistakes then ask why life treated them badly. We are responsible for our choices. We can learn lesson and move on, or we have to deal with consequences of the decision we had made for the rest of our lives. And nobody else is there to blame or cry that life was unfair.

Samantha arrived two days later than she had planned. She didn't call me. She didn't text me either. There was no bond between us any more. I felt it was high time we talked about it. I didn't want her to see me only when she needed to complain about her relationship or her own problems. It wasn't the friendship we had had and it was not the relationship I wanted to have with anybody. Summer was still very hot. Thomas organized evening garden party and invited all of us. It was welcome party for Samantha. He had told me that he wanted to work on their relationship. I believed that the party was more about her than him.

Adam collected me from the house at five in the afternoon. He came with Mike and, to my surprise, his girlfriend. Since the accident Mike wasn't the same person any more. He settled down. I also heard from Adam that he was planning to join the military service. I wished he hadn't. I wore yellow summer dress, which Adam loved, and flat orange sandals. I didn't put makeup. I wanted feel fresh and free. I grabbed the salad I had prepared the evening before, kissed my puppy and left the house.

- "Look at you!" Mike reacted when I reached the car.

Adam was waiting for me leaned against the side of his car.

- "Hi babe." He welcomed me with a kiss - "Looking sweet." Added and opened the door for me.

- "Thank you." I responded and kissed him back. God only knew how much I loved that guy.

When we arrived at Thomas' house Sam wasn't there. She didn't know about the party. He wanted to organize something for her that would cheer her up a bit . He had told me that she seemed to be depressed since her arrival.

- "Hey, guys! Please, come in." Thomas welcomed us with a big smile.

We walked straight to the garden. I didn't notice Mr Bent either. I approached

Thomas and asked

- "Is your dad coming?"

- "No, he's having a date with Miss Galan." He responded and winked at me. We both

smiled. I was glad that our mission was completed.

After a while Sam arrived. When she walked into the garden we shouted

- "Surprise!"

- "It's not my birthday." She reacted shockingly.

- "We know that, honey. " Thomas looked at her and added - "They just wanted to welcome you back home."

The evening was surprisingly warm and we were able to stay outdoor until late. I caught Thomas staring at me a few times. Mike was absorbed with his new girlfriend. I looked at Adam's face while we were dancing slowly alone down the garden. He looked at me and just smiled. Then he kissed my forehead and embraced me as tight as I could feel his breathing.

- "Anna." It was Samantha's voice - "I am sorry to bother you guys, but could we talk? Please." She asked.

I wanted to say *"No, we could not talk. I am tired of talking. No!"* but I excused Adam and followed her into the house. We sat in the kitchen. There was something wrong with her. She seemed to be afraid, worried, or event intimidated.

- "What's wrong, Sam?" I asked.

She was sitting and starring in one direction.

- "Look Sam, if you asked me to just sit here with you in silence, I am sorry, but I got better things to do right now." I sound annoyed.

Then she looked at me. And eventually began speaking.

- "I know that you got better things than your best friend. I am sorry Anna for neglecting you."

- "Sam, it's not the right moment and place to talk about our friendship. We can meet tomorrow. You can visit me. I have a puppy. We can go for a walk. But now and here, I don't think ..."

- "Anna, please listen to me. I can't wait until tomorrow. I can't keep it to myself any more." She interrupted.

I just frowned and asked

- "What keeping to yourself, Sam? What's going on?"

- "I slept with my French teacher. That guy I had told you about." She expressed straight away.

I froze. I was speechless. I was beyond shocked.

- "Have you lost your mind, Samantha?!" I leaned towards her and whispered. Then moved back and added - "I don't think you have told Thomas, otherwise there wouldn't be any party."

I was furious. I felt like I wanted to hit her, but I controlled my emotions. I wanted to just take Adam and leave that place, then I thought about Thomas again.

- "Anna, please don't be angry. I know, I was fool, I know that. I shouldn't have, but it happened."

- "How old is he? Is he married? What does he think about you? Does he want to be with you? But even, how?" I began popping out tons of questions with irritation in my voice.

- "Anna, stop!" Sam almost yelled. - "He is thirty years old and he is married. It was one night stand and he will not leave his family. Okay?!" She started crying.

I couldn't believe my ears. Mike was sitting in a living room with his girlfriend. He overheard Sam shouting and came to the kitchen. He spotted her crying.

- "Hey, Sam, what's the matter?" He bent in front of her and asked.

She lifted her head and looking at Mike responded.

- "I'm just an idiot, Mike. Dumb as hell!" She rested her head on his shoulder and kept weeping.

I didn't want Thomas to feel embarrassed in front of all of us. I didn't want him to find out about it in that circumstances. He arranged that party for her, just to find out she

had cheated on him. I had to prevent it.

- "Sam, stop crying. When the evening is over you need to talk to Thomas. Now you have to pretend that everything is fine. Don't do it to him in front of us. Are you getting me, Sam?"

Mike looked at me confused. Sam lifted her body from his arms, wiped her tears and said

- "You are right, Anna. He doesn't deserve it. I'll talk to him later."

Then she stood up, shook her hair, and grabbing my hand added

- "Let's go have fun!"

The next day Sam texted me. She didn't talk to Thomas. She was too scared. She also found out that she was pregnant and Thomas wasn't the father.

If you want to complicate your life stop paying attention to the most important parts of it. If you start feeling bored with your life you will definitely screw it. Life is simple, only people search for ways to make it difficult.

22

You can feel when storm is coming. Clouds cumulate together. Wind begins blowing stronger. The sound of thunder can be heard from far. And suddenly just after one flash of lighting it pours down.

Morning storm woke me up. I couldn't sleep anyway. The situation with Sam and her pregnancy kept me up the whole night. It seemed to be unreal. The entire summer felt unreal. I wished I could turn back time to the day of our graduation. The only positive thing was my relationship with Adam. He was still sleeping next to me when my phone rang. It was Samantha. I answered and got up from bed.

- "Hey Sam."

- "Hey Anna. Did I wake you up?" Sam asked reluctantly.

- "No, no. I was already up. How are you doing?" I asked.

Although I was angry with her and everything she had done, I didn't want to let my emotions take control over my logic. I also thought that I had no rights to judge her. She was already going to pay for her unconsidered mistake for the rest of her life. I only felt sorry for Thomas. The history repeated itself.

- "You know, Anna, I feel terrible. I was thinking if we could meet. I have to tell Thomas about it...and I thought, if you could help me. I mean, just to be there with me."

I had expected it. I had thought about it. They needed to talk face to face, alone. Was she scared of Thomas?

- "Sam, it's between you and him." I responded.

- "Anna, I am begging you." Her voice started trembling.

- "Are you scared of him, Sam?"

- "He may lose control, you know what I mean." She added.

"Everyone would." I thought.

- "Alright, I'll be there for you. Then we need to talk as well. You and me."

I agreed but it was the last time I was going to support her, or save her, or protect her, or anything that would make her life better. I was done with the fact that she only profited from our relation. We didn't talk about us, my problems, or even random stuff. There was she and her problems only. It was too much for me.

- "Okay, Anna, we will talk, if that's what you want. Can I come and pick you up in a half an hour, please?" She asked.

- "Yes, you can. See you soon, Sam."

When I came back to my bedroom Adam was already up.

- "Morning, sweetheart." I jumped on the bed I kissed him.

- "Where have you been?" Adam asked.

- "Sam called me. She had done something terrible when she was in France. She asked me if I could go with her to talk to Thomas about it." I needed to tell Adam about everything.

He made the same confusing face as Mike the other day at Thomas' garden party.

- "What did she do, Anna? Is she in trouble?"

- "Oh, Adam." I burned my face in my hands then looked at him and said

- "She's pregnant with some married French teacher."

Adam pulled his body up on the bed to a sitting position.

- "Oh My God, Anna! Is she sure that he is the father, maybe it's Thomas'? Is she sure about it?" He asked with a disbelief.

- "Yes, babe. She told me that with Thomas they always used protection. Always. He would not even believe if she'd like to lie to him. That's what she said."

That information was more shocking for Adam than I had expected. He even got up from bed. Walked to the bathroom and back like three times. Then hit the table and cursed Samantha.

- "Damn you Samantha!"

Since Thomas saved his life Adam felt close to him. Maybe he didn't show it often but he cared a lot about Thomas. He invited him many times for a boys night out, they began going to the gym together, they played football, watched movies and anything boys would do when girls are not around. They became good friends. Not as much as with Mike, but still close.

- "She's coming to pick me up to go with her to talk to Thomas." I informed Adam.

- "Oh, Anna, let her do it on her own! She should have thought before she slept with that French guy!" Adam responded with a tension in his voice.

I wasn't surprised he wasn't glad with that idea. I wouldn't do it, but that time I cared not about Sam but about Thomas. I was going to be there for him.

- "It's last time." I told Adam. - "Figaro has gone with my parents. You can have breakfast and watch something while waiting for me."

I approached him from behind. He didn't turn around. I embraced his naked body, and squeezed tight. He held my hands.

- "I love you, Adam. I will always do." I whispered.

He turned round and said the same, then we kissed and I walked downstairs. Sam was already waiting in front of the house.

- "Thank you for going with me, Anna." She said while starting the car.

I looked in her direction and added

- "I can't believe that we got to this point, Sam. One year has changed everything between us."

She didn't say anything, just drove straight to Mr Bent's house.

- "I can't do it." She said while parking her car in front of the house.

I took her hand and looked into her eyes.

- "Do you want to have that child, Sam?" I asked.

Tears fell down her cheeks. She nodded and mumbled

- "Yes, Anna, I do. I don't want to regret for the rest of my life that I killed my own baby."

- "Then you need to tell Thomas. You can just break up with him but he will see you around pregnant and it might be even tougher for him to cope with it. That you lied to him. You can escape, move to another place, town, country. But is it what you want?"

She was just holding my hand and heavily crying.

- "Did you even talk to that French teacher?" I asked.

- "After the night we spent together he told me that I should not expect anything from

him and should not even try to blackmail him in any case, because his wife would forgive him anyway. When I found out that I was pregnant I didn't even bother to call him. This is like a nightmare, Anna. I haven't told my parents yet."

"What a jerk!" I thought.

I wanted to calm her down a bit before entering the house. I pulled her head towards my chest and let her vent. I wondered also if Mr Bent was in. If she had even checked it.

- "What about Mr Bent? Did you ask if he was going to be in?"

- "No, he is not around. He has gone for a holiday trip with his girlfriend." Sam said.

I smiled slightly when I heard the "girlfriend" word. At least there was one positive summer outcome.

Sam wiped her tears and we got off the car. I held her hand while were walking towards the house. I felt that she squeezed strongly mine. Thomas opened the door after the first doorbell. He was surprised seeing both of us.

- "Oh, I am one lucky guy. Two beautiful girls at my door step. It must be my birthday." He smiled and made a way for us kissing Sam while she was passing next to him.

There was a lovely smell floating in the air. It was the aroma of baking cake.

- "What a delightful smell." I notified.

- "I am baking a cake. I couldn't sleep. I know it's not what men do but I found out that I enjoy being in the kitchen, you know." Thomas shared his passion for cooking and laughed.

- "Don't you know that men are much better in cooking than women, do you?" I added and blinked in his direction.

Sam looked miserable. She flopped in one of the armchairs without a single word. After a short period of silence tears started falling down her cheeks again. Thomas leaped towards her as soon as he spotted them. Bent in front of her, held her hands and began asking

- "What's the matter, honey? Why are you crying? Has anyone died or hurt you?"

She lifted her beautiful eyes and muttered sobbing

- "I'm pregnant."

Thomas released her hands and went silent. Then he grasped her hands back.

- "I don't know how this has happened, Sam, but I have to take the responsibility for it too. We always were careful, I always used protection. Maybe it wasn't strong enough? I don't know... Oh, Sam, It's okay, sweetheart. We will have that baby, don't worry. I will take care of both of you."

While I was listening to him tears welled up in my own eyes. I had to block them somehow. I came with a support not to cry. I just felt terribly sorry for Thomas. Then Sam looked in my direction.

- "Anna, please tell him." She begged.

Thomas released her hands again, sat on the floor and asked with a shaking voice.

- "Tell me what? Tell me what, Anna?"

My heart was beating like crazy and I wanted to retreat from that place. I regretted I had agreed to be there with Sam. I felt a lump in my throat. I couldn't express a single word. Thomas lifted his body up from the floor, looked at Sam then at me and said

- "Can anyone of you tell me what the hell is going on?"

- "Thomas, you are not the father. I am sorry." I finally uttered.

Thomas held his head with both his hands. Began walking around the room. Then he went to the bathroom and I heard like he hit something, and screamed. I wanted to check on him but I wasn't sure what to do. Eventually he came back to the room.

- "Who is the father?!" He asked Sam with a fury in his voice.

She was sobbing and shaking.

- "Thomas.." I started but he pointed at me and shouted.

- "Anna, stay quiet!"

I didn't continue. Sam looked at him and after a while told him who the father was.

-"Get out of my house, now! I don't want to see you any more! Now! Out!" He pulled her up from the armchair and dragged her towards the door. I wanted to stop him but he shoved me with his other hand, then slammed the door just behind Sam's back. When he came back to the living room I was in the kitchen. I took the cake out from the oven.

-"It's burned."

Thomas slid down the wall and sat on the floor and began crying. It was the first time I saw him being vulnerable. I always perceived him as a strong man. But then he was frail like a little boy. I sat in front of him. Stroked his head and said

-"Please don't cry, Tom. It's not your fault. You were good to her. Sam lost her track. She made a huge mistake and she knows that."

He raised his eyes and after a while looking into mine said

-"Anna, she was never in love with me. She was fascinated with things I had, with

things I was doing, with my body, with my car, but never with me. She never asked about my feelings, what I wanted. She was selfish all the time. She proved it by sleeping with that man. She should have never, I regret, oh, God! I made the party for her, I wanted to make up for her, for what? For what, Anna?" Then he sighed deeply and carried on - "The day when you came to this house I felt something, you know. Then you introduced me to Sam and the rest is just history. Ann, I always wanted you but you weren't into me. I never was attracted to you. Sam was witty, we began hanging out, but you were on my mind all the time. After the accident you got closer with Adam." Then he leaned in my direction- "Anna, the day when we went up the hill I realised that I got feelings for you. I know now that Sam wasn't the one. I wasn't the one for her. I thought she loved me. I love her Anna but it's not as I would love you."

He pulled my head and wanted to kiss me but I stopped him. He rested his forehead on mine.

-"Don't do it, Thomas. I am in love with Adam. I care about you and like you a lot. Now you're hurt and heartbroken. I must admit, when I met you I felt the same but I didn't want to get between you and Sam. The rest is just history, as you said." He shifted his

head back and I kept talking- "I don't want to lose you as my friend but don't expect from me anything more." I stood up and he did the same.

- "I'm sorry, Anna, I didn't want to offend you. I understand. Adam is one lucky guy." He said.

- "It's okay, Tom. I'd better go. Please, take care of yourself now."

We hugged, but it wasn't a regular hug. He smelled my hair and he pressed me close to his body. I could feel his fast heartbeat. I released myself from his arms and left the house.

Later at night Samantha was taken to hospital.

23

- "Anna, please could you talk to Thomas?" Mr Bent was asking me with a wobbling voice on the phone.

It was Sunday morning. I slept at Adam's house. The previous night his parents had celebrated 25th wedding anniversary. My parents were invited too. I felt like we all were getting closer. We were becoming one big happy family.

- "Anna, Thomas is leaving! He has started packing his stuff and said that he was overwhelmed with everything that has happened this summer and needed to leave. Anna, please you need to talk to him! He told me that he had broken up with Sam. Is that true?" Mr Bent sounded very stressed.

I jumped off the bed when I heard that Thomas was about to leave. I expected the situation with Sam could have hurt him and he was going through a rough time, but to run away?

- "Mr Bent, please calm down.." I started - "Yes, Tom and Samantha have broken up. I am not at my house right now. I will take Adam's car and come as soon as I can. Please just

relax, okay?"

Adam was still sleeping. I didn't want to wake him up. I just placed Figaro on the bed next to him and dressed quickly. I searched for Adam's car keys but I couldn't find them. I left the room and went to the kitchen. Adam's parents were sitting in the garden. I wanted to leave the house without being noticed. I detected the keys in the living room. I just flitted, grabbed them swiftly and escaped. I felt anxious. I still remembered well the day when Thomas wanted to kiss me. We didn't talk since then at all. I tried to understand his decision. The entire summer was beyond his nerve. Although he had broken up with Sam and was mad with her he still had the courage to visit her at the hospital. Sam told me that he was very gentle and apologized to her for the way he acted the other day.

When I reached Mr Bent's house Thomas' car was still in a garage but its door was open. He was there packing his things. I came closer and he noticed me.

- "Anna? What are you doing here on Sunday morning?" He asked surprisingly.

- "Hey, Thomas. I was just passing by. What are you doing?" I responded.

- "Passing by, right. James called you? Of course he did. Why he always needs to drag you into everything!" He dropped his bags in the trunk and closed it loudly.

- "It's not important why he does or not, the question is, why are you running away, Thomas?"

I walked closer to him. He just turned his back and sat on a wooden stool.

- "Anna, please do not lecture me now." He said.

I shifted closer and rested my body on the back of the car facing Thomas.

- "I am not going to lecture you, Tom. The thing is you can not escape from problems in life. You need to face them and deal with them." I had said I wouldn't rebuke him but slightly I did.- "People struggle with dilemma all the time. I can understand that Sam betrayed and hurt you, but this happens in life constantly. We just need to learn how to cope with it."

He was sitting in silence and watching me. I wondered if he even heard what I was

saying or just was starrng at me. Then responded with a smile

- "Okay girl, I'm getting you."

It was good to see him smiling again.

- "Your dad got you back not long ago and you are leaving him again." I added.

- "He'll be fine. There is Jane is life now ."

- "Oh, Thomas. Your dad needs you." I responded with annoyance in my voice and added. - "Don't you think about people that may miss you? Mike, Adam, me?"

He looked at me, grabbed my hand and said

- "I think of you, Anna. Day and night. This is one of the main reasons I am leaving."

I pulled my hand back. I felt like my heartbeat raised. I felt my blood was boiling. I felt dizzy. Then he stood up from the stool, pulled me closer, held my head with his right hand and squeezed my waist with the left one, and kissed my lips. He didn't hesitate. I didn't stop him either. Apparently, I wished it happened. He embraced me tight with his both hands. I didn't push him away. I kissed him back. He lifted me up and placed on the boot. He pulled my T-shirt up and began kissing my boobs. It was unlikely feeling. I felt passion and powerful tension. I knew it was wrong but it was stronger than me. Then he unzipped my jeans. I needed to cease it. I had to. I blocked his hand while he was trying to enter my pants. He stopped, looked into my eyes and whispered

- "I'm sorry. I couldn't help myself. I am sorry. I lost control, but I won't lie. I want you, Anna."

I held his head with my hands and said

- "Don't be sorry. I kissed you back. But I can't do it, I can't. You understand, right? I like you Thomas, a lot, and I care about you...."

- "But you will never leave Adam for me." He interrupted.

I just nodded.

He held me tight. Then we kissed again.

- "Anna, I am running away from you. From this feeling. I can't stay here and see you with another man. I saved his life but, I know it's wrong, but sometimes I think..." He tried to express his thoughts when I placed my finger on his lips.

- "Shush! Don't. Don't even think about it."

- "I'm sorry." He apologized.

I jumped out of the boot and looked at him with sorrowful eyes.

- "I will not stop you, Tom. Even if I don't want you to go. Maybe you are right, maybe it is what you need. Please, just stay in touch with your dad, with me. Visit us sometimes. I will miss you a lot." I held him tight. I felt tears started falling down my cheeks. He wiped them with his bare hand.

- "Don't cry Ann, please. Maybe in another lifetime." He said and placed a kiss on my forehead.

- "Please, talk to your dad, explain it to him. It's going to be tough for him to lose you again. Take care of yourself, Tommy."

I smiled and kissed his lips for the last time. Turned around and walked towards Adam's car. Tears were falling down and I couldn't stop them. I felt that he was watching me walking away. I felt his eyes on me but I didn't look back. I just wanted to get into the car and leave.

I cried a lot when I got home. I didn't go back to Adam. I had texted him that I had to ran home because mum and dad were fighting. I felt terrible that I had lied to him. I told him that I would come back later around lunch time. Was it bad that I didn't feel guilty for making out with Thomas? I touched my lips and thought about him. I loved Adam but I felt passion for Thomas. On the one hand I was heartbroken that he was leaving but on the other hand I felt relief. The whole situation could go beyond our control. I would not manage to control my desire. I would hurt and lose Adam. Then I would hate myself for the rest of my life.

While I was in the shower Mr Bent sent me a text message that Thomas left. They had talked and he accepted his decision.

*

It was sunny Sunday afternoon. Autumn just felt like summer. I grabbed my boyfriend's hand. Held it tight. We walked down the park alley. Our chocolate Labrador was running around us. He grew a lot in a year. We noticed Samantha from far. She was pushing a stroller with her new born baby in. She saw us too but only waved at us. She never talked to me again since she left hospital. There wasn't us any more. Life wasn't the same any more. One summer changed everything. Only we both were still together, and Figaro. Happy in love. We believed that nothing would change that, ever...

Italy

- "Do not open your eyes yet. Few more meters."

He holds my hand and leads me through the sand. I know I can trust him. I feel my feet sinking into the warm sand. After a while we stop and he removes the band from my head. The picture is slightly blurry initially, so I rub my eyes to make it more visible. Then I can see it clear. It's huge, white and blue, with a tall mast and long deck.

- "Oh wow! It's beautiful!" I express my excitement.

- "Do you like it?" He asks.

- "I love it!" I confirm, then he grabs my hand and we run into water. He helps me to get on a deck. I look straight to a horizon. It seems to be infinite.

Thomas has settled in Italy after all. He has opened his own restaurant by using the money Mr Bend had been sending Natalie to save for him. This summer he has rented a house and a boat on the Amalfi Coast. The place is breathtaking. I have never seen the sea water to be so clear. Due to the reflection of the unclouded sky it has the bluest colour.

Since Adam has passed away I haven't travelled at all. He had a heart attack and they couldn't have managed to rescue him. Before it, his condition had been getting

worse but he had ignored that fact. He was recommended to limit a bit his physical activities but he didn't listen. He had had a dream to become a volleyball coach. He had trained hard, but it was too much for his heart. One day it couldn't take any more. The first year was the toughest for me. I can count on the fingers of my both hands days on which I didn't cry. I lost weight. I hardly was promoted to the next class. I didn't talk to anybody. I just stayed in my room and cried. The only thing I cared about was Figaro. Each time I looked at him I thought about Adam. The second year I started getting my life back. I realized that Adam wouldn't be happy to see me in that condition. I wasn't able to bring my love back to life but I could get my life back. One day I walked downstairs to the kitchen and announced that I was done with crying and asked my mum to make an appointment at the hairdresser, because if Adam had seen me like that he wouldn't have recognized me. We both laughed and cried.

Thomas arrived at the funeral and left me his contact details in any case I needed to talk or any help. I didn't reach him for another fifteen months. When I eventually made a call he invited me to Italy. I hesitated but after some time I gave in. And now I am here. Catching the sun. Feeling the breeze and a sense of Adam's touch.

Mike has joined the military ranks after Adam's funeral. It was also very difficult for him to cope with the lose. I even think it was harder for him than for me. They had their special bond. Brotherhood. Before leaving he told me that he hadn't lost his best friend but his brother. Mr Bent and Miss Galan got married. They had got married before Adam's death. It was the last party we had gone together to. Thomas invited them to Italy later for they honeymoon. When they came back Mr Bent moved in with his wife and rented his own house, saying that one day he might needed it back. I didn't understand what he meant.

Samantha left the town too. I heard that she had moved to Dublin. Since the other day Adam and I saw her in the park I have never seen her again. She has never called or visited me. She left without saying goodbye.

Italy is the most beautiful place I have visited so far. Taking into account that I hardly travelled during the twenty-two years of my life. Time goes by slowly here, citizens are more happy and you wake up to a sunshine weather every day. Moreover, the food. People don't grab a sandwich and run back to work but they sit at a table with friends and celebrate it. They enjoy the moment. Life is created to be worshipped. We

don't appreciate it enough. We take it for granted. We postpone our dreams, plans, loves. We think that we still got time to contact someone, to complete the project, to become who, deep down, we want to be. Nothing could be more wrong. We don't have time at all. We are here today and right now is the moment to do everything we wished for. To tell the other person that you miss him or her or even declare your love. To catch a train and travel to the place you always wanted to see. To quit the job you hate and do what you love. My life with Adam wasn't long, but it was deep. I knew I could be with him forever. The passion I had felt for Thomas vanished. My love for Adam was stronger than that. I loved Adam for everything. He had good heart. He was ready to help everyone and fix everything. He wanted to train children from poor families free of charge. He wanted to create a team, which was only formed with those children. He also cared about disabled people. We both had volunteered in local centre, where handicapped and disabled teens had their meetings. He wanted to make the world a better place.

Thomas promised to take care of me, but I have to take care of myself. We haven't even kissed since I arrived. We are just good friends for now. He knows that Adam was the love of my life and he doesn't want to rush anything. I also don't want to block him from getting into a relationship with someone else. Italian girls are very beautiful and sexy. But everything he says is that his heart belongs only to one person. We may get closer one day, but not now, and not any time soon. We enjoy each other's company, and most importantly, we understand each other.

The sun is going down. The wind is as warm as the blow of a hair dryer. I'm sitting at the veranda, sipping white wine and watching the last few people collecting their stuff from the beach. There are also few other couples holding hands and walking down the sea shore. They're kissing from time to time. They are happy. They are happy at the moment. All they need is this moment. The boat is anchored just few meters away. Thomas is taking me sailing on the sea tomorrow morning.

"Dinner is served." Thomas invites me in for the meal he cooked. He is really a great cook. I will eat everything he prepares. Tonight we are having Florentine steak with Focaccia bread and Pistachio Panna Cotta for dessert.

Life gets better.

Thank you for reading

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