

GERI DECHEVA

amantes  
amentes

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*Prologue*

# 1953

Isabella was one of the most beautiful girls in town. Not that it was a big town, but nevertheless men, local and tourists, twisted necks to check her out from behind with glistening, wet, lustful eyes. The women too stared at her. Like snakes.

She was young, just out of school, almost seventeen. Her parents had a bakery shop and she helped them out from morning till early afternoon when her fiancé Adrian finished work. They spent the evening till dusk in quiet long walks, at the cinema (at her request), or just talked.

Isabella was talkative, capricious, and vain. As any other woman. Her mother had taught her that a real lady had to radiate modesty, show some restraint, and be elegant and dignified. That is why Isabella allowed Adrian to kiss her on the lips only on extremely rare occasions – a well-mannered frivolity he accepted with gratitude, she assumed.

In those times, standards called for strict morale, didn't they?

Adrian was a strange boy, just like his mother. He was a silent man. Well, almost a man. He rarely talked a lot, but he always listened attentively to her while she was on about some things he couldn't quite understand, some constant rambling that poured out of her lovely mouth. He also remembered every word: about her sour mother, her strict and unforgiving father, about her stupid little sister who was always studying and reading meaningless books, about all her friends: who had bought a new hat, who had put on an ugly dress. And while Adrian was listening to her, he was

squeezing and turning a piece of clay in his hand, shaping it into figures which he later coloured. They were funny figures. Adrian was funny. He made her laugh.

He scared her, too.

In fact, those clay figures were not even funny. They were ridiculous. She didn't understand them.

Adrian's eyes were too big, too open, too honest, peeking into her very core, and she was always petrified that there he would eventually see the rather simple and quite harmless fact – Isabella didn't love him.

She had agreed to go out with him on a date two year ago because all her friends had admirers, while she was alone and no one would make a move towards her. Was it the smell of yeast and bakery that put them off? Or maybe she was too glamorous and the boys were afraid of being rejected and felt unworthy of such beauty. Maybe. Maybe.

And since Adrian was the first one to ask her out, she went along.

And maybe because he was the first to offer her marriage, she went along again, and they got engaged.

Adrian loved Isabella. She was not *that* silly not to notice. But he also loved other things which she didn't come to terms with. Not really. Isabella was one of those women who might never wear a dress more than once, and if the dress ended up in the rubbish, and if someone else found the unwanted dress and put it on, Isabella would immediately want it back. One can substitute "dress" with any other word and the result would be the same – Isabella hated when someone else wanted or had what she didn't need. Go figure. The case with Adrian was pretty similar. He was that dress she would never wear, but would let no one like or love.

Adrian loved going to the mountains, climbing some bare rocks, conquering peaks which were not even famous. Climbing made him sweat a lot, too. He also loved his mother unconditionally. They were a strange family. Even Isabella had to admit that his mother possessed that exotic and very rare beauty, but there

was an almost visible net around her – one of those nets people use to protect themselves against annoying insects. She rarely let anybody closer to her, but nonetheless, she was a pretty good judge of character.

Such things... such *people*, shall we say, disturbed Isabella's life of simplicity. Because who wants to be x-rayed when there is so much to be hidden? Isabella was well aware of her flaws. But it was so much easier to hide her foppishness and lack of insight from the stupid people, and almost down to impossible from people with eyes like his.

His father wasn't living with them, she had never seen him, but Adrian used to say that he was an incredible man who deeply loved his mother. He was a free spirit and cherished freedom.

Here, *that word*, that last word took Isabella aback, disgusted her. She was raised to believe in obedience, tradition, responsibility and to do whatever it took to observe the socially adopted morals and standards.

Adrian was too complicated for her. He never paid her a nice compliment on a new dress. He was just there, looking at her like a giant friendly bull, his hands always warm, scorching her delicate white fingers, and Isabella disliked being wrapped in so much warmth.

When he offered her marriage, and when (in the quiet words of Beyonce from many, many years later), he "put a ring on it", that ring she got was made of stalks of grass with a small daisy on top. Isabella could see the romantic gesture, but how was she going to explain home that her engagement ring was a beautiful, but rather small and fading away wild flower! Almost dead, on top of everything!

Her parents asked around about his family, but no one knew much because they had moved here about four years ago and his mother was not the gossipy type. She had a small ice-cream shop – not much of a job, to be perfectly honest. Nothing prestigious at all.

Isabella's parents were against the marriage, but their daughter

would be pushing eighteen soon and her time was getting close. Plus, one mouth less to feed? That is why Isabella and Adrian got their reluctant blessing.

They were engaged for two years, as the tradition demanded. The preparation for the wedding began a year earlier.

Isabella had a breathtakingly beautiful dress. Adrian had bought the cloth – white silk with embroidered lilies, pale and creamy like cushion-soft clouds wrapped in vanilla topping. The veil was of tulle, again embroidered, same lilies. His mother made them.

Isabella didn't like lilies. She loved roses, but white roses weren't lucky, were they? Or...?

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Two months before the wedding a circus came to town. Isabella wanted, yearned to go and see the tamed animals, but Adrian was rather unenthusiastic. Trying to avoid the shame of going alone, she went with a girl from her friends' circle. Alas, they couldn't find last-minute places one next to the other. To avoid the awkward situation of being sat there all alone (and people were already ogling her with suspicion), she kept turning back and waving at her friend, letting everyone know, that she was not there all by herself like a spinster, like she had no one to go with, which in fact was the case.

Oh, it was wonderful! Exotic! So much bravery to put your head in the stretched toothy mouth of the lion! She didn't quite like how they lashed at the animals with those whips, but she immediately strangled the rebellions thought. Everybody liked it, so it had to be quite in order. And she clapped till her palms started burning through the gloves.

It was an Italian circus, but the clown spoke perfect French. Oh, how funny he was! Oh, what tricks he played, how entertaining he was! And when at the end he threw a red rose, it landed in her

lap on her new blue dress. Isabella picked up the flower, smelled it with adoration, and hurried to apologize to the puritan couple next to her that it was a coincidence and *“No, I don’t know this man. I am engaged to be married.”*

After the performance, Isabella waited for Adrian to pick her up, but he was running late. It was *strange*.

She went wandering without direction amongst the caravans. There was a heavy unpleasant smell of bodies of circus animals crammed up in small cells. Strange sounds were deafening the noisy place with sorrow. One of the doors to a small caravan was cracked open and with her unsurpassable curiosity, she peeked in, still holding the red rose.

There, in front of a rusty mirror the clown was sitting and taking the white paint off his forehead. He had taken off the red nose, too, his eyes blue as the deepest ocean waters. Almost velvet and not smiling. His mouth was all smiles, though, but not the eyes.

He saw her in the mirror, turned round and his face lit up. All of it, but the eyes.

*“I... I’m sorry... I got lost... and...”* She stumbled through the words.

*“Come in. It’s getting chilly outside. Let me clean my face and I’ll take you to the exit,”* he offered.

*“Bad idea,”* thought Isabella, but did not say it aloud. As if something hooked the words on her throat and they died there. Her feet carried her up the two steps.

*“It was a great show! Do you always throw roses at the girls?”* she asked being horrifyingly flirtatious.

*“No, this was for you. Your dress is gorgeous. So is your blond hair – sunny,”* he shook his head slowly. *“I am Jerard.”*

*“Isabella,”* she introduced herself somehow mechanically, not taking her eyes off his.

*“This is wrong. So wrong. What will the people think? What if someone comes in?”* she kept thinking.

What if someone saw her? What if Adrian was already waiting for her?

“I have to go. It was nice meeting you,” she said, turned round and headed to the steps, but he leapt like one of those lions and squeezed her arm.

“Stay with me. Tonight only. I’m leaving tomorrow. Just for tonight. Tomorrow you will forget all about me, Isabella.”

And she stayed. Maybe because he was so sad. Maybe all clowns are.

Maybe because she had never done anything ugly, unmoral, low, degrading, sinful, and it was pulling, irresistible, tempting.

Jerard was gentle, and oh! so tender. Isabella felt things she had and would never experience with Adrian. Jerard was smiling, laughing. He made *her* laugh. He told her stories of travels and for the first time she felt no need to talk. His lips were smiling, his eyes too, but somewhere at the back of that violet blue she could see shadows, ghosts, horror, fear. Chasing each other like they were playing hide-and-seek.

She asked nothing.

He told her nothing.

She stayed till the dawn started creeping towards the horizon. She wanted to stay with him, run away with him, but she knew all too well how wrong it would be.

He never asked her to stay, he never offered her to run away with him. He promised nothing. He just held her in his arms till the bells of the bikes of the first milkmen and paperboys started clanking and jingling in the sleepy streets. Till the church bell banged five. And six. And seven. Till the alarm clocks started going off in the homes of the decent people, till the ruffling of bare women’s feet and autumn dresses became loud enough, till the smell of pancakes filled the air.

The church bell. Long, slow heavy strikes. Like tolls.

Why do all town clocks make that awful sound? As if they were made to warn people against an approaching inevitable disaster. Can’t someone think of a melodic sound? Not this metallic threatening noise?

Jerard let go of her.

“It’s time,” he said.

She nodded, disappointed and shaken. Insulted even. He had used her just for a night, hadn’t he?

She put on the blue dress, picked up the fading rose. She was in love, with a shattered into a million pieces being. Just as she would break Adrian’s heart. No, not yet, but she would, she most certainly would.

But we don’t choose who we fall in love with. We don’t choose when, either.



Isabella saw Adrian in the main shopping street. He was sitting at a table in the small cafe and was fooling around with a piece of clay.

“I...,” she started, but he interrupted her.

“I’m so sorry I was late. I thought you might have gone to spend the night at your friend’s place, so I haven’t called in at your house.”

“That’s exactly what I did. It was late to go home alone and her parents offered...,” she lied.

Isabella sat at the table opposite him. Her legs were shaking, her hands, too. Her face was burning with happiness and abysmal desperation. He ordered a croissant and some coffee for her and went on playing with the clay. Isabella resumed the routine between them – telling him all about the circus, the clothes of the people, the animals, the tricks, the acrobatic wonders.

He was listening, a mysterious smile stretching his lips.

“The clown was so funny! See, he threw a rose at the woman next to me, but she was with her husband and gave it to me. It would have been most rude to throw it away,” explained Isabella.

“Clowns are the saddest people in the world,” he said and stretched his palm with the thing he had made.

She looked at it and almost wanted to die. It was a heart.

Broken in half. One piece stabbed on a stick like a... like a twisted lollipop.

“I’ll keep the other half and when we get married, we’ll join them,” he smiled again, but it was the weirdest of smiles. His lips were so full, so beautiful. His face so handsome, so strange, like a bottomless well of mysteries. Scary.

And while they were talking, the sun was climbing high, warming up the earth. People were moving about, the first shops were opening, the owners were shouting their good mornings and snapping orders at their apprentices. The wind was sliding up the ankles of the first women to do the early shopping, and was playfully tilting the hats of the rushing off to work men. Children were laughing. Or crying. The flower girl from the florist’s at the corner was humming a tune and rearranging the bursting in colour foamy chrysanthemums.

And in the whole hue and cry of the most ordinary morning, no one heard the dull distant single lonely shot.

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No one wrote in the newspapers. The circus manager wanted to keep the spotless prestige of his enterprise, so not a word was mentioned. That stupid clown’s body was put away and his parents were summoned to take him the hell out of there.

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A week later, a day before the hurried wedding, Adrian got off the dusty bus and found the house. He told Jerard’s parents what a great actor he had been, how they had met accidentally and had become friends.

“Did he tell you how sick he was? We begged him to stay home and rest, and he promised after this tour he would...” his mother

was sobbing and wiping her tears with a red handkerchief.

His father was standing next to the window with eyes idly looking at the nothingness behind the transparent white curtain. Vineyards were stretching behind the small town houses as far as the eye could see.

“He was a great boy. But so sad. He would tell jokes and make everyone roar with laughter, and at home he would stay in his room, not eating, not talking to anyone. Depression, said the doctors. We never knew what it was. We shall never know what could have been.”

Adrian finished his tea, had a cookie out of good manners, and left.

A minute after the door closed behind him, Jerard’s mother saw one half of a clay heart. It was painted in red and lying with no judgment on the table. She ran to the door, but Adrian had gone. She put the red thing on the mantelpiece and the half-shaped heart stayed there for many, many years.



Adrian married Isabella. He never asked why she was not a virgin. He never told her he had looked for her among the caravans. He never told her that he had seen how her lips had covered Jerard’s, how she had kissed him – the way she never had and never would kiss Adrian – thirstily, with love.

The fruit of that love was born. She was the most extraordinarily beautiful thing Adrian had ever seen. Adrian loved the small girl more than anything.

Because she was the last thing one desperate soul had left behind. His last role, his last performance. Only... it was no role, it was no performance. And yet, utterly brilliant.

Isabella never understood a thing about her clown’s fate. Was it not better to hate him than be sad for the rest of her life?



# 2018

*"Come closer," he urged.*

*"I can't. You are way too warm. You'll burn me," she answered, appalled by the thought.*

*"I won't. I promise. Come, see how sweet and warm I am."*

*"It's cold – that much is true. It seems like winter never leaves this place."*

*"You can say that again. At least we both have hats. Come, let's get warm together."*

*"I see! You want to use me for my warmth, don't you? Admit it!"*

*"Use you? How? It will be good for both of us. It's a mutually beneficial thing, that is."*

*They went on arguing on the pros and cons and in the end, as expected, she consented. She was so cold, shivering. And then the almost dying flame of his phosphorous cap touched hers and the fire started.*

*The two matchsticks burned slowly. The hot tongues of the flames were hissing seductively like snakes around their bodies, twisting them, bending them, entangling them one into the other.*

*A few hours later the housewife went past the table, saw the ashen bodies of the two matchsticks, wiped them maliciously with the wet cloth she was carrying, and shouted:*

*"Have you not seen a lighter before? You know, one of these things which burn with no trace and dirty spots." And she flushed them down the toilet, polished the metal button, where she had left an ugly fingerprint, looked in the mirror approvingly and smiled with utmost satisfaction."*

Mirabelle was sitting on the low chair in the hall in front of the entrance of the cinema in the mall. She put the full stop of the tiny story with an irritating acrimony. She loved playing with words and making up some bullshit stuff like this one. Then she started colouring the picture in the new app of her phone, while her imagination was fooling around with what would have happened if the she-stick never approached the he-stick.

*“There would have been no fire? One would watch the other burn? Isn’t it a bit egocentric? Can two matchsticks talk? Do I have to go to a psychiatrist? What am I doing here? And Mirabelle? What the fuck? Mirabelle? But who wants to be known by a name like Milka? Like that chocolate cow? ‘Mirabelle’ is more aesthetic, more... sophisticated and allows for no associations with a cow’s udder,”* she thought and her face twisted in a sourer grimace.

Anyway, people choose neither their names, nor their addictions. Sunday, rainy, cold, and instead of lying in bed under the blanket, coffee and cigs at hand, book in the other, she had gone all this way to meet a guy she had seen only from the neck up (in a hat, in a profile picture). From the fifteen-minute chat, she had gathered that “the head with the hat” was aggressive and arrogant.

Her ever evolving interest in human psychopathy had driven her out of the small warm flat just to see what it was all about. Mirabelle wanted a relationship, no doubt... well, she wanted something like plaster to fill in the holes from the nails hammered and taken out of the wall of her life. But with the contemporary means for dating, through technologically advanced sites serving as pimps in human relationships, she had met some distinguishable specimens: a few psychopaths, one bisexual and one extremely clever and funny man, who unfortunately happened to be a neopaganist and used to talk to fire, as the fire was supposed to answer back and tell him what his next step in life should be. If he were not a man, she would have called him Meliasandre, but alas, he had never watched “Game of Thrones”.

In fact, human quirks had stopped puzzling her a long time ago. However, what never seized to amaze her was why

she seemed to be the only one attracting people who needed prescription pills.

Now she had strategically come earlier to see from afar what it was all about, and to diagnose the arrogance of the man, who had (with no shame) offered her a cup of strong coffee and a “magnificent blowjob” (for him) for dessert.

The place was busy, and even if he turned out to be a massive two-meter tall nutbrain, there was no place for panic. Sunday was not her day for her knees to hit the floor. Not this Sunday, anyway. Not for a blowjob.

She had just finished colouring the crown of the beautiful princess in the picture. It was so soothing and awarding. Just then, she got a text from the man, saying that he was coming in a few minutes. Mirabelle didn't miss the phrasing and laughed a little. She didn't reply and went on with the princess's dress, violently pressing the numbers for each colour.

*“Maybe in a previous life I was royalty? One must have a reason to hate corsets so much, despite never having worn one.”* But she loved long elegant dresses. No, not to wear them. Just to look at them. She glances at her worn out jeans and even more worn out military boots. *“Well, it's not my fault no one cares for long dresses anymore.”*

In a few moments, a pair of male shoes halted in front of her pinned down to the phone gaze. Mirabelle lifted her head up much too abruptly, but she couldn't see the rest of the body. Her gaze started sliding down, low, lower, even lower, till she saw the shining bald round head. The hat was not there. Alas.

Sat on the low chair Mirabelle was exactly as tall as was the man was in a standing up position. It took her time to grasp the fact that he was neither bent, nor squatted. He was definitely not a dwarf. He was just... very, very short. And very, very round.

Mirabelle could control most things in her life. In fact she could control many things in other people's lives. The one thing she could never control was her face deliverance. She could only

vaguely imagine what her expression might have been, and tried to plaster a kind smile and hide the shock.

Stretching her hand out for a shake, she chirped cheerfully (way too cheerfully):

“I am Mirabelle. Glad to meet you.”

*“How the hell am I supposed to stand up now? For fuck's sake! His head must reach somewhere around my belly button. Maybe I should stay seated to preserve the equilibrium of height?”* she thought.

“Joseph,” he said nonchalantly and checked her out with that searching stare one can see on a farmer's face while looking for the fattest turkey to slaughter for the Christmas dinner.

*“Yeah! Some Jose, judging by the natural Mediterranean tan,”* she thought, but she did like men from the Mediterranean. Not this one, though.

“Let's go sit for the promised strong coffee,” he offered and Mirabelle slowly began standing up. No, she was not a tall woman. With her one meter and sixty eight centimeters she was almost petite, but height-wise the man was shorter than Prince, may he rest in peace, but that was the only distant resemblance with the great performer.

Jose walked a meter and a half away from her. They reached the nearest café in the mall.

Now, the chairs there were rather low, but Joseph had to climb on his, and she sat shrinking into hers. He ordered a huge breakfast with his coffee, she ordered a latte. Mirabelle could not possibly enjoy that either because of the discrimination against smokers, so she kept fiddling with her red lighter (always red, it had to be red, and she never knew why). She also kept persuading herself that size does not matter, that: *“Poor man!”*, and *“How, how am I to run away?”*, and *“Why am I being so horrible?”*, and *“God knows what he's been through, what wounds has fate inflicted upon him because of this... this... shortage of... ok, shortage is enough.”*

Guilt was drowning her, she was appalled by her thoughts

and was desperately trying to wipe the dirt off her soul, but just then he spoke:

“These people don’t know how to make good coffee. My mother makes great coffee. She is a magnificent cook, too. It’s a shame I go home twice a year only.”

And he went on babbling about his mother, her cooking skills, about her home, waving about his very small hands with even smaller fingers. Mirabelle had long kissed her guilt goodbye, and her mind was drawing pictures of his mother with a ladle in hand, in front of the big saucepan. She also imagined her giving her son a foot massage and dipping his feet in salt water when she felt a cold was about to knock her beloved son off. Jose... Joseph...whatever- his-name-was, was at least forty five – way too old to stick to one single topic – his Mama.

“What kind of a relationship are you looking for?” asked Mirabelle only to stop Oedipus’s monologue.

“Nothing special, nothing exclusive. A good blowjob, not to interfere with my life, to make nice strong coffee, and to be obedient. No whore, too. All women are whores.”

Now, there was nothing strange in his statement, not really, if it wasn’t so badly timed. At the expression “good blow job” Mirabelle had bent down under the table to pick up her lighter, which she had dropped at “all women are whores”. Precisely at “a good blowjob” she was staring at his small feet dangling in the air under the table, never reaching the ground, like a small boy. No, it wasn’t funny, no. It became tragic when she banged her head on the edge of the marble coffee table and tears threatened to pour out of her eyes. Tears of pain and of a million unasked questions.

Mirabelle could never get rid of that vision. Those small legs up in the air, and some poor woman’s head between them. Where? How? Who? Whom? But how? Whose?

She almost started crying because of: the pain in her head, the struggle to strangle her ready to burst out laughter; the sympathy for a boy dominated by an overbearing mother – that oppression which had prevented him from growing up. Also

because of his napoleon complex and the things he was saying, of which she caught the essence only: *"They are all pigs", "Next week I'm starting my dream job and I'll show them what I can do!"* and *"I left the washing machine running."*

She imagined him: never having to bend down to take the washing out, how he reached up to get to the metal bars to hang his shirts and green-grass jumper which was now stretching, almost bursting under the pressure of his ballonish belly. And then she looked him in the eyes where she saw only lust, disgust, arrogance, hatred towards the "whores" and the "pigs".

Mirabelle asked for the bill. He never reached out for his wallet to pay his massive tray of food and coffee. He said he had no change.

*"Change? How come 30 quid is change?"* she kept running the question in her mind.

On the escalator he was positioned three steps behind her and was almost as tall as she was. His body was like a giant green balloon. Before Mirabelle had managed to run to the metro station, he stood on his toes, and she had to almost fall on her knees because he wanted to kiss her cheek. His last words crushed her.

*"You are going to call me, aren't you?"*

She smiled, thanked kindly for the coffee, which she had paid; he didn't thank her for the breakfast, which she had paid, too, and she ran down to the train.

All the way home she laughed though tears, hysterical, ashamed, confused.

The next morning she got a message from him:

**Joseph:** Where is my blowjob?

**Mirabelle:** Blow off.

Mirabelle decided: *"I'd rather end up in the toilet flushed down like an ashen matchstick because when you turn to ash, you don't know you are just a small piece of coal, but at least you have burnt before you die."*

# 2018

While Mirabelle was wasting her days basically doing nothing of significance to the world, things which made her happy, but also occupied all of her time and stretched every single nerve in her body, at one far-away point on the map, rather surprisingly mostly for him, a man was standing at the church altar waiting for the blushing bride and wondering what the score from last night's match was.

It was a story Mirabelle heard from an old drunken woman at nine o'clock in the morning in the local café, where she used to pop in after shopping. The woman had this very dry elephant skin, heavy make-up, a nice hairdo, elegant clothes, and also smoked like a chimney and drank like an Irishman. One morning she sat next to Mirabelle who had to take her earphones off and listen to the old woman's pain. So, her youngest son, forty five, had got married some time ago, and the story continued like this:

While standing in the church, Gunter was also wondering what the fuck was going on with Vivian. She hadn't answered a single text. This tendency had been going on for a few months and he never really understood why. Men aren't very clever when in love.

Vivian was an attractive woman, but not in that standard seductive way so typical for most beautiful women. One could also say she was not attractive at all, but she possessed great pulling manipulative force which many men usually mistake for mysteriousness. Vivi had that enigmatic aura which so few women possess. This enigma in most cases can be easily explained by the fact that sometimes women don't know what they want, but Vivian was one of those black holes who *never* knew what she wanted, but she wanted it anyway. She was comfortably married,

had a teenage son, a strict but fair husband, and some natural intelligence, leaving the impression that she was also clever.

Vivian and Gunter met in a forum. Some flirting and online frivolity, some exchange of personal information and soon they were so happy to learn they lived in the same town. They went out for coffee (with brandy), he took her to his small messy flat, they had sweaty and much desired sex, and he fell in love because he had a romantic soul and besides, he was so bloody naïve.

That night was followed by seven years of no pride and no prejudice. Gunter worked like a dog, Vivian was at home looking after her house, washing her husband's socks and stitching his buttons, but on Gunnie's days off (as she affectionately called him after an orgasm), she ran to him, whined how unhappy she was in that marriage, how she insisted on a divorce, how the divorce was in full swing now and how they could finally be happy. Together. Forever.

They also made plans for the future which only Gunter was visualizing in his mind and was waiting for the divorce. Seven years he waited. For seven years people get to know Tibet in the movies, but he waited.

Vivian was not clever, but she was most certainly shrewd. As much as she was fed up and pissed off with her husband's socks and farts, she didn't fail to notice the simple fact that if she moved in to live with Gunter, she would have to work – something she had never done in her life. One cannot easily change routine, right?

And instead of telling them the truth, she kept on taking her regular dose of sex, lied to both of them, and to enjoy the benefits coming from both competing sides.

One day Gunter told her that he was renting a new house with plenty of space for her and her kid. And he never saw her again. She never picked up the phone, changed the number, and disappeared from the face of the earth (flat or not). I am aware of the cliché, but that was the truth.

Gunter went to a friend's wedding, got drunk as a wild pig, stoned too, and woke up next to a woman. He could swear he had never seen her before.

*“Who are you, what are you? Why are you?”* – these were the questions scrambling through his pulsing mind for a couple of heavy painful minutes. But he didn’t have to ask because the naked lady opened her mouth:

“I know you were drunk last night. So, I’ll introduce myself again. I am Silvia, thirty-three, not married, not divorced, no kids. I have graduated university and I’m very clever. I live with my mum and dad, but I’m sure it won’t last for long.” Here she smiled.

He didn’t.

This was the point where he stopped listening and went to throw up, and sent her home in a cab. A month later he got the news that Silvia was pregnant and she was having the baby with or without him.

Gunter was facing an existential crisis. It took him two days to compose his reply to her message.

**Gunter:** Congratulations.

**Silvia:** The baby is yours. You, being the man you are, what are you going to do about it?

Gunter called a close friend, some Alberta or something, and shared his deep emotional grief. She advised him to ask Silvia to visit him and stay for a few weeks with him to get to know her and then to decide what to do.

The “get-to-know-her” period went painfully and painfully slowly, too. Gunter didn’t get to know much about the mother of his future child, but he found his manly balls and proposed marriage, as normal people do, and here he was, standing at the altar, sweating from the last night’s Bloody Mary-s, losing the ability to breathe in the tie (in bordo colour) like a dead man walking. Probably because of the nook around his neck, his “Yes” came out sunk in agony and all regrets and nostalgia associated with a carefree merry life in his cluttered small flat with the miserable coming and always leaving him Vivian, with the torment of a memory of a life full of condoms (not used only one night of drunkenness), life full of pints of lager, friends, some weed, a line or two of Cha, and all those could-have-never-beens.

It was a short and very spiritual wedding (assumption based on the quantity of spirits he drank), followed by a disastrous family drama. No, no, they never fought, they never shouted at each other. In fact, they never spoke to each other. She went to work and was constantly bitter. He went to work and was permanently sour.

The kid? The kid was born healthy, grew up with a bio diet and soaked in the intensity of the silence at home.

Only the future would show that any love won by force and manipulation could bring along so much shit – an eleven-year old alcoholic child, a deeply unhappy woman, and a crushed, weak, down-and-out man with no self esteem. Neither he, nor she had sex. Nether at home, nor outside of home – the battles at the home front and the cold war in between the grenades drained them out.

Silvia managed to fall asleep only after imagining how she was strangling him in his sleep.

He fell asleep under the humming noise of his own snoring, wondering when was the last time his happiness didn't depend on the promotional price of his boxer shorts. He dreamt of having money for new underwear. One day. One day.

In the end, the happiest was Vivian, who replaced Gunter with Nikolas. And then with someone else.

It was a story with a moral and Mirabelle thought about it for a long time, and decided to stay single. The old lady drank two bottles of wine while teaching her this life lesson.

What happened to love, you say? Love is like driving at 180 kilometers per hour on a shattered road, you know you will crash any second now, and yet, you never think of putting on a seat belt. Because it's much worse to waste your life riding on a horse cart with flat bare fields of dirt on both sides, on a smooth asphalt-laid straight road. No trees, no flowers, no breeze. Just the smell of horseshit under your nose.

And somewhere in the hidden haze of the horizon there are peaks, you could have climbed and conquered if you hadn't been too much of an idiot, too much of a schemer. Or if you hadn't drunk milk from two cows, sat on two chairs and ended up on your flat ass.