

**\*Author notes available at the beginning of chapter one\***

**Note from the translator:**

*This is not a word for word translation. So there will be words missing, or words added when comparing the original. I tried my best not to change the contents. BUT, sometimes I just had to. The thing is that Kyoux plays a lot with form and tense, and that made it that much more difficult to translate. I wanted to leave as much as possible as it was in the original so that the atmosphere and her writing style were reflected. And that might get English people confused sometimes, as it probably would be written differently if the correct English were used. Of course you'll find mistakes in the text, so please, instead of mocking my language skills, just sit back and enjoy a beautiful love story. I decided to try and translate it because I adore their story so much that it would be a pity for others not to be able to read it. Especially since the artwork that goes with it is so beautiful. This piece took 13 hours to translate, so if you don't like the way it's done, please pay me some respect for the hours I've put into this and don't read. But, I really hope you'll like it as much as I do.*

*Sorry for the awful poem translation, but poetry is something that is better left alone. I just hope it'll do for the purpose of this story though.*

**Note from the editor:**

*When I recently began editing this story, I was struck not only by the beauty of the prose, but by the quality of the translation. Both the author, Kyoux, and translator, Schiotka, are incredibly talented, and their combined effort allows English speakers across the globe to enjoy this stunning story. I'd like to take credit for playing a part in bringing you this chapter, but I feel that would be in many ways unnecessary. (To be honest, all I really do is add commas). Please take the time to read this chapter carefully, and allow yourself to be captivated by the lust, fear, heartbreak, humor and love revealed through the writing. We hope you enjoy it.*

*"Dear Moon, you swiftly climbed up to the blue heights  
and with uncertain snow you covered the skies.  
And your rays, uncertain, pale and silver,  
Reflected in the clear crystals of the ice"*

The Moon, by Juliusz Slowacki.

## **27. Winter, Marcin, Nivan**

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*Winter*

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He was like an angel.

It seemed that he wouldn't have any trouble finding a new home... a new family. Because with those big, ocean-like eyes, all women fell in love.

But said angel had a dirty soul.

The quicker these women took him, the quicker he came back... And despite the fact that the women knew of all the problems he was bound to cause, his appearance put them under a spell, without him breaking a sweat.

I was jealous of the attention he got from everybody. Balling my fists, I watched how time and again he was taking another woman's hand, only to be brought back. While I waited for months on end for a new family, among all the other children who wanted the warmth of a female hand just as badly.

Mothers.

It seemed that he was the only one not needing anyone in his life.

He was usually quiet and calm. He had no friends, never talked to anyone.

He wasn't liked. All, however, were surprised that he always returned. Back and forth. All the time.

He didn't cry when they were walking away.

He wasn't excited when new ones came to take him.

He always had the same humble expression. And these big, sad eyes...

I, on the contrary, waited for my new family for a very long time... I wasn't a cute kid. I didn't have eyes like the ocean, but finally a foster home had been found for me.

It wasn't a nice looking one, nor was it big, either.

But I was happy to maybe finally have a taste of what normality was about.

I didn't get a new, better mom and dad. But I got an auntie and an uncle. And three stepbrothers.

I learned discipline and punishment.

But I felt better there than anywhere else.

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I am sure that the size of my eyes equaled his, when one day I saw him standing at the door of my new home.

He wasn't a baby anymore; he was a boy now, like me.

He was even more beautiful than I remembered. He was so bright...

Based on the fact that we "knew each other" from the orphanage, our auntie decided that we would share a room. I tried to somehow become friends, make some contact, but to no avail. He never answered a question I asked.

He never spoke. Not one word.

Besides the fact that he wasn't talking to anyone, he never caused trouble. He ate what he was given, he always made his bed, he cleaned the house and kept the fire going in the stove. Sometimes he disappeared for a while, but always came back before supper.

When I watched his back, waiting in hope to see his wings- still believing that he was an angel- we had a breakthrough.

I myself still don't know why I said to him, "God must have run out of colors when He made you."

That was the first time he concentrated his attention on me. I froze. He looked me up and down with disdain, and then for the first time I heard his voice:

"There is no God. Just like there are no angels."

He looked at me as if I were the dumbest creature on earth. And I wondered how he knew about my angels.

After quite some time, I realized that I talk in my sleep and thrash about in my bed.

I dream about him.

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It just happened. We became friends. Despite many differences and the short time we spent in the orphanage together, we became close.

We were like the angel and the devil. But in appearance only; on the surface...

My beautiful angel had the wings of a demon.

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We were standing in the yard, feeding chickens and geese.

He was raining questions down upon me. Undermining my faith.

I was a faithful believer at that time.

I recited my prayers before bed, always attended the Sunday mass. It was the only thing that I had left. The only certainty in my life.

He was laughing at me. He said I was stupid. He asked how I could believe in something whose existence I wasn't able to prove?

He asked where my angels were when they were taking me from my drugged mother?

He asked, and I wasn't able to answer.

I was angry. I yelled, said that he was stupid, that he doesn't believe.

That he, too, has an angel guarding him.

He laughed, and then took hold of one of the geese... So unbelievably deftly.

He was holding her neck. Tightly. So unbelievably tightly.

She was thrashing. Beating with her white wings.

I yelled for him to let her go. At first I was afraid of the punishment awaiting us, not the harm that was befalling the goose.

He took a knife out of his pocket.

I yelled again, but he didn't pay any attention.

I watched as...

He cut off her wings..

I heard her crying.

I heard her cries and her pain.

I stood there. Paralyzed. Scared.

And he...

He threw the wings at my feet.

Two almost-red wings.

"This is what I did to my angel, Sariel," he said.

I stood there. Terrified.

I stood. Fascinated.

I cried.

## *Marcin*

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Nivan, when he wanted to, could walk almost silently. It was most likely connected to his training, but still it astounded me. Standing at one-eighty-five, with such broad shoulders- it was really something. But at this moment his footsteps were heavy, as if he wanted to be heard. I heard him from a mile away.

I watched him from behind my white, damn boring office box. He paused to speak to a guy from the other shift, who was heading home. A guy whose name I hadn't bothered to remember.

...

Fine, the guy's name was David. He pissed me off, because he was the typical nerd type, oohing and ahing over an even bigger nerd, whom he called the GURU. And that guru, of course, had to be none other than Nivan.

David was short, pale, and skinny. Like me.  
He was smarter, too.  
And he was a freaking blond.

I knew well that Nivan liked short, pale, skinny blondes.

Angrily, I crumpled a piece of paper in my hand. I watched how they exchanged some nerdy comments, and laughed at each other's silly jokes. I was crushing them with my eyes.

I couldn't control it. It was absurd, I know.

But I had an advantage. I knew Nivan better. I was the one he fucked. I was the one who became his boyfriend...partner, or whatever.  
I had been that person for exactly five hours now.

It was me Nivan wanted to be with. I won the game.  
Yes.

But somehow I was jealous of the stupid relationship they had. This no-obligation, no-black-sides, no-secrets relationship. I was jealous of the smiles Nivan was sending toward this guy. I wondered then if we would ever be able to create something like that together, despite our memories, and the wounds we had inflicted upon each other.

I had a lot of questions pounding in my head. Why were we staggering into this? Wouldn't it be better to start again, fresh and clean, with someone new? Something that would be much easier?

I imagined that I allowed him to walk away. That I gave him to the hands of...let's just say, that guy over there, the guy I was already ripping apart in my thoughts.

Am I ever going to be ready to allow anyone else's hands to touch his broad shoulders? His lips? His red, soft hair?

I loosened the death grip I had going on. Which saved the life of my last pencil.

Just yesterday I had said we could remain friends after all. It wouldn't be easy. But I think I could manage.

Nivan didn't seem as exceptional to me as he did just a few months back. I was infatuated with him then. Poisonously in love. I'm not sure when that changed. When I started to notice his vices. I noticed many things which had eluded me before. I knew the way he smiled at that guy was a cover-up. It was a lie.

I added two and two. And I understood a lot of things.

But still, I wasn't sure I knew exactly what Nivan was capable of. I believed he had a good heart...I mean, I knew he did. But his body was conquered by his head, and not "useless" feelings.

"You are important to me, Marcin."

Important. I wanted to know what exactly those words meant in Nivan's mind.

The Redhead didn't feel the need to talk to me. He didn't have the urge to open up at all. To talk about the events of any particular day. As it turned out, he wanted me to talk; he wanted me to tell him everything that was going on. Despite me believing that I disturbed him by doing so. He very often treated me like an annoying fly, always buzzing over his head. Could it be that my chattering was important to him?

Sex. That is the one thing which binds us most strongly. But the fact is...I am not the best ass in the world, as there are many things I don't like. I'm sure he's had many pale asses that were better, more willing. He could have anyone with no fuss. I'm good at making him come. But that's not enough.

Nope.

I can't cook. I make a mess at home, which he hates. I yelled at him and hit him, hard.

But I dyed his hair, and shaved the side...

This doesn't make sense.

"Why am I so important to him?" I asked myself.

Because he fell in love with me once? Because I was his first love?

Was Nivan actually capable of love?

Maybe because Nivan was so unpredictable...perhaps that's why I was still wading into this? Deeper and deeper...Until I drowned in it. Until I choked on my own curiosity.

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*Later. That same day.*

I heard him open the door and take off his shoes. Heard him sigh in the heat that wasn't letting up, even after sunset.

He knocked on the door to my room.

I smiled, because he finally did what I wanted him to do. He wasn't avoiding me; he wanted to see me, straight after returning home. He didn't go to take a shower first, nor to have a bite to eat. The first thing he did was come to see me. It made me happy.

He smiled back. Why? Was he happy for the same reason, or did he just mimic the movement of my facial muscles? Or maybe he smiled because we were now in a real relationship?

I started to imagine how would we walk: holding hands, sending each other tender looks. Yeah. Sure.

We were grinning at each other for a few seconds like the dorks we were, probably unaware as to why we did it in the first place.

"Can I?" he asked, not sure he was allowed to enter.

"Sure." I said, making some space. I moved some bits to the edge of the mattress and pulled a pillow closer.

Nivan didn't sit, but lay down on his side, putting his head on the pillow. He looked at the screen of my laptop.

"What are you doing?" he asked, furrowing his brows.

"Writing a program."

„What for?“

I smiled, seeing his genuine curiosity.

"Top secret."

He gave me a threatening look. He still had a ridiculously swollen nose and bruises beneath his eyes. It was, not bragging, by my own doing.

"I am writing a PC user manual for the dumb people at work," I answered. "I have a few difficult cases, to whom I have to explain one thing over and over again, and they still don't get it. So I thought if they do it themselves with the help of an instruction manual, they'll be able to remember it more easily. The program is going to have remote access so I'll be able to update it anytime."

Nivan blinked a few times.

"I'm sorry, but it's not going to work on them." he said, upsetting me straight away. He turned to lie on his back and crossed his hands over his chest.

"And why is that?"

"I heard the ladies from the 10th floor chattering about you. They were over the moon about the fact the boss hired such a lovely, charming, young boy."

"Well, yes, that's all true...but what does it have to do with anything...?"

"Even if you write that program," - Nivan cut in - "they will still call by your desk, because they are looking for some entertainment, and they want to have a look at such a charming boy. I'm sure they ogle your ass whenever you turn around."

I think my eyebrows had reached the ceiling by this point.

"They were talking about your scrap metal decorations, too," Niv continued. "That you have a bit too much of it. But that's the way it is now. And despite it all, you are still very handsome," he added, mocking (really) the nice ladies from the 10th floor.

I couldn't prevent myself from smiling. Nivan gave me a stern glower.

"You are becoming arrogantly full of yourself."

"No, I'm not." I said, still not able to wipe the smile off my face.

"It was disgusting," Niv grimaced, "the way they talked about you."

"Oh, and they don't talk about you at all?" I asked playfully, pinching his cheek. He slapped my hand away.

"They look at me as if I killed their kids."

"Maybe that's because whenever you go to see the boss you really do look like you want to kill someone."

"If I had to go see those ladies instead of him, I would be a ray of fucking sunshine, too."

"No, you wouldn't."

"I would too," the Redhead was stubbornly arguing.

"No. Lately you've only smiled at that nerd guy of yours, the one who follows you like a shadow. I only get a passing "hello" from you. And that's it. That's all I see of you for the day.

"We exchanged maybe five sentences in total today. Don't blow it out of proportion. Besides, he initiated it."

"Can I ask why he initiated it?" I asked, out of curiosity.

Niv crossed his hands behind his head and closed his eyes.

"He said he just finished a game I recommended to him."

"Okay, then."

"I don't know what you expect of me, but I don't want to show off our relationship...at work." Niv said, looking at me with one eye.

He surprised me. Not by what he felt, but by actually sharing his feelings with me.

"I don't want that, either. But it would be nice if once in a while you would leave that hole of yours to actually talk to me for a bit. Or maybe have a coffee, or something. Have a laugh like with that nerd guy."

"Okay," he replied.

"You don't have to avoid me whenever you are afraid of something."



"I'm not afraid," he responded.  
I smiled and bent over his head.  
"My brave, courageous Nivan," I said, kissing his forehead.

He rolled his eyes at me, of course. I asked if he wanted something to drink, because I was parched. I also offered a sandwich, because I am a good boyfriend like that.  
"I'm not all that hungry... but you could make me some toast with cheese, and a glass of juice with ice."  
"Sure, no problem."

When I came back Nivan was sound asleep.  
I put the plate and glass down on the floor, and plopped down in my spot. I didn't have the heart to wake him. I leaned back, resting my head on my hand so that I could see his face better. I was close. I saw his sunken eyes and the exhaustion that painted his face.  
I gently stroked his skin. With my fingertips, I carefully pushed his hair off of his face.

I fell asleep next to him.  
Close, but not embraced. We didn't touch; we just lay there next to each other. No nightmares plagued us that night. We slept a deep, peaceful sleep.  
I am quite certain that both of us needed it.

Sleeping next to each other, we celebrated the first day of our relationship.

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I awoke with a blanket covering me. It was unbearably hot.  
Nivan wasn't there. Work, work...

I looked at the clock on my mobile phone. It was ten. I had slept for 13 hours and I felt alright with it.

I had the late shift that day. Slowly I was trying to sort myself out, starting with a shower and a meal. I was supposed to meet Niv on my way out.

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"Oh," he said, when I opened the door while he still rummaged for his keys.  
"I'm just leaving," I grimaced, "and you are returning."  
Niv mimicked my expression.  
"I'm sorry, but I can't make everybody happy with that damn schedule," he said, entering the flat.  
"I know, I get it..." I said, dropping my eyes to the floor. "Firka is coming back today...maybe you could buy some beer and junk, we could spend some time together, the three of us."

"Okay."

An awkward silence ensued.

The word "relationship" hung heavy above our heads, and neither of us could actually relate to the fact. As a rule, we should have felt more at ease with each other, but, quite to the contrary, we felt as if we had just met. That we were only beginning to know each other, whilst at the same time being aware that we were mutually attracted.

"This is pathetic," I said, not being able to handle the awkwardness anymore.

The playful Nivan disappeared somewhere; he stood there rigid and embarrassed. And after what I had just said, he looked like he was ready to bolt.

"Okay, I'm going, otherwise I'm going to be late. And you...chill."

"I am relaxed," he said automatically, letting his shoulders fall.

"You look like I was about to take your virginity," I added, not able to hold back.

I ran out of the flat, a little scared of Niv. I was laughing a bit inside, at the expression Niv was bound to have on his face.

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Firka came back. There were two sides to it.

One was that the time of total intimacy ended, one we didn't really use.

And the other...was totally awesome. Firka was back, and we stopped fighting, although we still behaved like total morons. And best of all, we could finally start recording the album.

"You can't imagine how glad I am to be back," she said, lying on Niv's bed. She was looking at us upside down, her head hanging down off the bed. "My family is still sick in the head. The only upside was the nice weather."

Firyal was back from Thailand. Her parents are very religious and don't support their daughter's choices in life. She was, after all, born a boy. I'm sure they thought they had been cursed, since Firyal's twin brother- Illyas- was gay.

"They tried to arrange a marriage for me," she continued, pouring her heart out while holding a beer on her belly.

"With a girl or a boy?" I laughed.

Together with Nivan, I sat comfortably across from Firka on big cushions.

"With a girl, what else? I wanted to say to them; don't worry, I like both pussies and dicks...But I was scared I would have their deaths on my conscience."

"And how's Illyas?" I asked.

"Still dumb as ever. He broke up with his partner. There was a wedding and supposedly some great love; all that's left is two dogs."

I grimaced. But before I could ask another question, Firka stood up and said:

"Okay, I'm going now, I can see Nivan is half dead. We can talk tomorrow."

I looked at Niv. I saw how hard he was trying not to fall asleep. But the desire overcame him. He roused a bit at Firka's words.

"I am so sorry, but I'm knackered," he said, catching her hand when she tried to walk by, and pulling her in for a hug.

I have often thought that Niv and Firyal could be siblings. They've always understood each other without words.

"Big kiss, Marcin," she said, waving goodbye.

And so we were left alone again.

I watched Nivan's exhausted state, resting my head in my hand. I was hoping for a little action that evening, but seeing him like that...I let him be.

"I'm going too, Niv."

Again he awoke.

"Where?" he asked, stupidly.

"To my room. You are already sleeping in your seat."

He was looking at me, and I knew he wanted to ask a question he could not push past his lips.

"Do you want me to sleep here?" I helped a bit.

"Yes," he replied.

I thought it impossible for this neanderthal to be a genius.

"But the thing is, I don't want to sleep yet," I said. "Maybe we could smoke a little something? Do you have anything left in your magic box?" I asked, standing up.

"I do," he replied while watching me lazily. "You roll, I lie down," he added, with a bit more life in his voice as he moved over to the bed.

"I'll roll you a piece of art you'll be so impressed with that it will make you straight."

The joke worked because Niv smiled a bit.

"I don't think you'll be able to do that."

I thought for a moment.

"What if...you were on a deserted island...?"

"Don't start."

"I want to check your level of gayness," I said, mixing the green with tobacco. "Would you rather make a hole in a coconut, or would you make use of soft female buttcheeks?"

Nivan's smile widened.

"My level of gayness is very high. Much higher than yours."

"You sure? Why do you think so?"

"Because I'm sure you'd fuck those soft cheeks before drilling a hole in a coconut."

I laughed.

"I hope you never find yourself on an island with a woman and a coconut. I already feel bad for that imaginary woman."

Finally, I managed to roll a nice joint. I turned off the light, leaving only the table lamp next to the bed switched on. I sat down next to Niv and gave him the piece of art.

"Well, it's not a masterpiece," he said, looking it over.

"I didn't want you to become straight," I replied. "All the hard work on my part would go to the shitter."

"Hard work, you say?" he asked, playfully raising a brow at me. He took a lungfull.

"Of course. If not for me, we would be in a relationship, in, like, maybe a hundred years or so."

He let out one circle of smoke, then another.

"You wanted it that badly?" he asked, letting the rest of the smoke out.

"Yes"

"Can I ask...what did you gain from this relationship?"

I didn't understand why, but the question hurt.

"It was you, you asked me. The question of a relationship fell from your lips, not mine."

"Hey, easy. I'm not asking because I think it didn't give us anything, I'm just curious why you wanted it so badly," he said, passing the joint to me as a peace offering.

"I know you are skeptic about my being faithful, but when I'm in a relationship I expect my partner to be faithful too."

"So it's about being faithful here? I wasn't doing it with anybody, even when you were in Oslo."

"Well, yes, but you could have. I couldn't expect you to wait for me," I replied, taking a deep breath of smoke into my lungs.

"I wasn't able to do it because I wouldn't have felt fair toward you. I was hellbent on you."

I smiled. I was quite shocked at how badly I didn't want to share Nivan with anybody.

Especially when he was saying things like that.

"Well, it was you who knew, not me. And besides...I wanted to be with you since I saw you at the uni," I said, looking intently at the ashtray.

"That, I won't believe," said Niv, taking the joint.

"Really. I was disgusted by these thoughts, but still, I had them between the words 'motherfucker' and 'why does he have such a great ass'."

Niv laughed.

I realized then that it had been a long time since I'd seen Nivan's laughing face.

"I was gobsmacked that day, when I saw you," he added after a while.

I was gobsmacked too, having Niv talking about our encounter at the uni with such ease...

"What were you thinking?" I asked, using the Redhead's eagerness to talk.

"I don't know... on one hand, it was hard to believe you had changed so much, and on the other, I was sure it was you. And I had the distinct impression I'd seen you not that long ago...and..."

I was looking at Niv's brows knot. And then at his lips. I loved his lips.

"...and?"

"I was shaken by the thought that I had already touched you, like...I wanted to...always," he said, then took a drag on the joint and turned his head away. I felt his embarrassment from the answer he'd given me.

"You wanted to touch me?" I asked, moving closer to him. I embraced him and rested my chin on his shoulder. I was approaching a line here with my questioning, but I couldn't hold back.

"I just said that I did, didn't I?"

"You remembered our unfortunate first time there. Do you remember anything? Any details?"

"Glimpses. To be honest, I thought it was a dream."

The Redhead had wet dreams about me. Priceless.

"Have you ever thought about me, fapping?" I asked with a smile.

Niv rolled his eyes at me.

"Come on..."

"What, it turns me on," I said, taking over the joint, "when I imagine you thinking of me while masturbating."

"I'm glad," he said sarcastically.

I finished the smoke. When I was putting it out in the ashtray he asked me:

"That night...did we, did we have sex? Or was it only, you know?"

I looked at him.

"We were in one of the unlocked cars. And no, we didn't have sex as such. But we made ourselves feel amazingly good with our mouths and hands. We were touching... you were touching me as if I were your dream Christmas gift."

"I'm sorry," he said looking in my eyes.

"What for? It was awesome...even better than that. It was the first time in a long while that I'd felt so unbelievably carefree and happy. I was happy that you still wanted to kiss my lips." I laughed, but inside I hurt.

"I still do," he said.

"So why are you not doing it?"

He answered with a kiss. A soft, longing one.

But he stopped when it got hot. I whined in disappointment.

"I won't be able to today," he said, his lips still touching my face. "I haven't had much rest lately...and all that..."

"I know, you don't have to explain," I said.

I put the ashtray back on the table and opened the window wider. Nivan switched off the table lamp.

We fell asleep cuddling together, like an old married couple.

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Sitting another day in the boring white box, I still had no clue as to what the guys next door did in that hole of theirs. I only heard the pissed voice of Niv and equally angry one that belonged to Alex.

Listening to these voices, I couldn't wait to go to the studio and record. To shout out all that still lingered on my liver. To just wear my throat down.

I was ripped out of my daydream by Niv storming out of their totally-hyper-top-secret room.

"You going home with me?" he asked, almost barking.

"Chill," I said, because I felt his need to let it all out on me. "I still have an hour to go."

"You can excuse yourself, you know," he said, already pulling his biker jacket on.

"If that's the case, then...I'm coming," I replied, throwing all my stuff into a bag. "By bike?" I asked, smiling.

"Yes. Wait, I have to get a second helmet from those idiots," said Niv.

And so he did as he said.

"What happened that caused you call your best buddy Alex, whom you defend always and everywhere, an idiot?" I asked, when we stepped into the elevator. I pushed the button.

"Because sometimes I can't deal with them. I say one thing, and they do another. And then I have to explain everything to the head moron."

'Head moron' being our boss.

"Just think of tomorrow, when you're off. You'll get some rest. I'm sure it's just the exhaustion."

I knew I wouldn't get any details on the case, so I was left with calming him down.

"I don't have the day off."

I lifted my brows.

Before I could ask, he stormed out of the elevator. I rolled my eyes.

He walked fast, as if he wanted to get away from me. I caught up at the bike, grimacing. I was pissed. I decided not to ask, that I didn't care why he was in such a mood, why he didn't have the day off. Yes, I really had it deep in my...consideration.

"Why is it you don't have the day off?" I asked anyway, thinking I would land in hell for my curiosity.

"I need to go for dinner with my family."

"Well, that's great, having a feast and all that..." I said, inwardly begging Karma for patience while I was pulling the helmet on.

He stood there looking at me, like a cat wanting food.

"What!?" I yelled. I threw my hands up, not understanding what he wanted of me.

"You are coming with me."

"Come again?" I grimaced. "I'm sorry, but I missed a 'please' in that sentence."

"Come with me," he said, gently.

I was silent, looking at him coldly.

"Will you go with me?" Dropping his gaze, he finally sort-of asked.

I smiled.

"See, you can be polite if you want to be," I said, hitting him playfully on the arm.

"Marcin."

Seeing him start to panic, I let it go.

"Okay, I'll go. I could never let a dinner at your mom's pass me by."

---

Leaving the store with bags full of groceries, a question struck me.

"Niv, but how on earth am I supposed to go there with you?"

Seeing Nivan's brows shoot up in triumph, and his nasty smile, a cold sweat broke out on my back. I stopped.

"I take it back. Your mom's dinner might be awesome, but I value my life much more than that."

Niv turned to me without breaking his stride.

"It's only mom and grandad."

"And what if your godforsaken brother shows up?" I asked, panicking. "Or even worse, your father? He always looked at me as if he wanted to kill me."

"Don't worry, he looks at me the same way. Come on, I'm hungry."

I started walking again, keeping to his left.

"We don't have to tell them we are together, you know."

"What are you actually saying?"

"Because it's so official, you know. A family dinner. We've only been together three days, for crying out loud."

"You know, considering that I actually flew to Oslo to get you back, I wouldn't say it's been three days."

"But Nivan...we don't need this," I said, panicking even more.

The Redhead smiled triumphantly and squinted his green eyes at me.

"Are you telling me you don't want to be in a relationship anymore?" he asked, with that stinking irony of his.

"I do, but we don't have to let the whole world know about it," I said, now standing in front of the block containing our flat. I put down the bags to take out the keys.

"I know that you still pretend in front of your parents that you have a girlfriend, but I won't play with mine like that. Do you intend to hide us in front of your band as well? And what about Firka, her too?"

"Don't be so caustic. Firka is different."

"What about the guys then?" he asked, lifting a brow sarcastically.

I opened the door, took the bags and started the climb to the fourth floor.

"What is it that you are actually afraid of?" I heard him ask behind my back. "These are my parents, they won't burn you at the stake. And with the guys? Are you afraid to lose your 'free cock' status, or what?"

I stopped. I looked down at him. Breathing heavily from the climb.

"I will break it to the boys. They know something is brewing, anyway, after what's been happening of late. And when it comes to parents, I wonder whether you'd be so cocky if we had to go to mine."

Nivan sobered.

"No, I don't think I would be. After all, I am not the busty blonde you talk about," he added with a smile.

"Ha ha." I gave him all the sarcasm I had.

We finally reached the fourth floor. Firka opened the door for us. Before she could say anything this is what she heard from my lips:

"I'm in a relationship with Nivan."

I gave her the grocery bags and squeezed past her, noticing her eyes growing big in surprise.

"Ehm...okay..." she said. "Then...congratulations...I guess?"

I saw her looking at Niv, who was taking off his shoes, in hope of a confirmation of some sort. I don't think she believed me.

"Really?" she asked, confirming my suspicions.

"Yes," said Niv.

"Oh...you two surprised me, that's all."

"It surprised us as well," I said, putting my shoes away.

I took the bags from Firka.

The three of us were bustling around the kitchen. Firka was looking awkwardly at us, at Niv especially.

"How did it actually happen?" she asked finally.

"Well, Nivan asked and I agreed," I said putting the cheese and ham into the fridge.

"Nivan? Really?"

Her eyes went even bigger. The Redhead grimaced.

"Hey, who do you think I am?" he asked, throwing the tea towel over his shoulder.

I smiled to myself.

"I just wasn't expecting it..." she said quickly. "Did you two have a heart to heart talk about everything?"

"Yes," I said, looking at Niv, trying to give him a broad hint.

"Phew..." she sighed with relief. "Because you know, the whole time I was away I was scared that there would only be one of you here on my return. Such a lovely surprise," she added with a radiant smile.

We looked at each other for a while. Me and Niv.

I think we both tried to imagine a situation just like that.

It was Niv who almost moved out.

Even if he had decided to do so... I wouldn't have let him. Firka needs him too much. Even more than me.

It would have been me who moved out, if we hadn't been able to fix things between us.



---

*The next day.*

Riding past the meadow. The one where everything started. I closed my eyes and snuggled tightly into his back, not wanting to reminisce about what I did that day.

We were riding his bike to his parents house on the outskirts of the town.

I was curious to see what had changed there, yet on the other hand I was afraid of what was waiting for me. I had changed.

I hoped I wouldn't scare Niv's mom to death with my pierced face....because she used to like me.

I wasn't getting any hopes up. I felt that the only reason Nivan was taking me was because he was scared to go there alone. Since we began living together, he had been home maybe a total of three times. So something must have happened that makes him avoid the place.

The fear of introducing me to his mom was smaller than facing them on his own.

Leaving the bike in the front yard, I felt my stomach knotting. The house hadn't changed all that much. It was well kept, surrounded by flowers and bushes, the names of which I didn't know. Perhaps someone who lived in this neighborhood would say otherwise, but for me- someone who had lived in the city his whole life- it was just magical.

After taking his helmet off, Nivan tried to comb through his mane with his fingers, to give his hair a semblance of order.

I liked the stubborn chaos on his head.

"It's nice here, Niv," I said, giving him my helmet.

"Mom always had a good hand with the plants," he replied.

"Are you nervous?" I asked, pretending that the whole situation didn't bother me at all.

"Aren't you?"

"A little," I replied with my best smile.

"Let's go, then," he said, waving his hand toward the front door.

The door was old, the paint was cracking in places. I remembered it like this- they had a doorknocker decorated with a wreath of dried flowers. I was almost sure that a skinny boy with a black, unruly mane would open it for me.

I knocked.

"Do you think your mom will remember me?" I asked, not looking at Niv. I stood in front of him, staring intently at the door as if it was my personal Karma that would open at any second.

"I don't know," the reply was short, and I felt the tension growing.

Niv's mom opened the door. I smiled when I saw her. Sincerely.

Those few years since I'd seen her last painted some sun wrinkles on her face, which added to her beautiful soul.

She had Niv's eye color, but in a lighter frame.

"Hi, mom," said the Redhead, but she was looking at me only, and her eyes were twinkling happily.

"Marcin. It is the very same Marcin!" she said, stretching her arms out to me. "It's so good to see you again," she was saying, and I truly don't know how I happened in her embrace.

She seemed a bit smaller, but she smelled just the same. Lovely.

"You've gotten quite handsome, sweetie," she said, still looking me over. She smiled radiantly.

"Unfortunately I didn't grow as tall as I wanted to, but I don't think the rest turned out too badly," I said, smiling.

"You are very handsome indeed."

She looked to Niv and added:

"Go get your granddad. And you," she turned to me, "do you still like my sugar butter cakes?"

"I absolutely love them," I said, saliva already pooling in my mouth. The sugar butter cakes by Niv's mom were spectacular.

"Come on, then."

I gave Niv a triumphant smile, following his mom. From the corner of my eye I saw Niv's granddad approaching the gate.

## *Nivan*

---

"I see Marcin has already been abducted, eh?"

"Hi yourself," I greeted my granddad, taking my biker boots off. "Mom fell in love with him all over again. And I was left on my own...again."

"Don't be so jealous, you should be glad. When you tell her that she is going to have another son, I don't think she will be all that worried."

"Son?" I grimaced.

"Are you planning on telling your mother?"

"You didn't do that already?" I asked, entering the front room.

"Me?" he expressed surprise. "I think it's your business, not mine. Your mother was the only one who accepted your preferences without complaint, so don't worry about a thing."

"The fact I told her is one thing, to show her is a totally different one."

I was hit across the back with the walking stick, as per usual whenever I did or said something stupid.

"You're a fool," he said. "A mother is a mother; she knows more than she lets on."

We entered the living room that was connected to the kitchen. Marcin stood with mom at the cooker and tried everything, with the expression of a happy kid. Mom was grinning, delighted. Nothing had changed.

Granddad was watching him intently. He squeezed my arm, and I knew what he was trying to say.

"He's changed. Me too," I said.

I smiled bitterly.

Only he knew exactly...how much...

And how difficult it was for me...

Back then.

"Well," granddad said, approaching the kitchen. "Marcin, the notorious candy thief, have you come back to return all you once so callously took?"

Mazur laughed. From his pocket he produced a full packet of candy, not surprising granddad at all. I realized they must have some candy pact going on.

"Of course I have," he said, handing the packet over.

Granddad embraced him lovingly, laughing cheerfully at the same time.

Yet again, Marcin stole the hearts of my loved ones.

---

The day ended quickly and the night came too soon.

It had been ages since I'd felt so...carefree. I rested and ate as if the world was ending tomorrow.

I felt good at home, yet still I had a feeling of dread crawling up my back, and my head was swimming with thoughts of my father or brother suddenly returning.

During dinner I once again discovered how Marcin swallows all the attention, how all eyes are focused on him. He was able to talk about everything, but he wasn't talking about himself all the time. He was able to split his attention between mom and granddad equally.

He was talking about how we met again. About work and the flat.

But he skipped over all the unpleasant facts we managed to produce, and he didn't mention us being together.

---

"I was looking for you," I said, finding him sitting on a bench next to the pond. "Granddad asked me to look at his PC, so I disappeared for a while."

"I got tea and biscuits," he said, taking a couple of them out of his pocket. "I decided to relish the moment out in the open."

"They won't last, will they?" I said, sitting down next to him.

"Nope. Want some?" he offered me the cup of tea without the biscuits, the miser.

"Nah, thanks."

We sat like that listening to the frogs and bugs.

"Look at the sky. The stars are awesome here," he said, letting his head fall back and watching the navy heights.

I didn't get to say anything, as I heard mom calling.

"I'll be right back," I said, heading towards the house. Mom stood in the door wiping her hands on a tea towel.

"What is it?"

"Maybe you two could stay the night? You shouldn't be driving in the dark," she said.

My brows shot north.

"Umm...yeah...but..."

"Father and Yun are away and not coming back until late tomorrow," she said. "Please stay, granddad and I would be delighted to have you both stay."

I knew arguing with mom is a lost cause. She always wins.

"Okay, we'll stay."

"I'll get you fresh linen and towels later. I even have a new toothbrush that you two will have to share, somehow."

After that I suspected mom knew about us after all. But then I reminded myself that sleepovers were the norm, so I didn't think much about it.

I went back to Marcin. Skipping on the stepping stones that made the path.

"We are staying the night," I announced.

He grimaced.

"Who came up with that, you or your mom?"

"Why would she call me over?" I didn't like stupid questions.

"I need to be in the studio tomorrow, we have our first rehearsals."

"I'll drive you."

"Okay, let's stay then."

We were sitting like that in silence for quite a while, looking at the moon reflected in the pond's small surface.

I felt like nothing had changed. Or as if time had been turned back.

And I...I grew up, just like that, sitting on that bench next to Marcin.

Nothing that happened between then and now was as important as this moment.

## *Marcin*

---

"Are you working tomorrow?" I asked, brushing my teeth.

"And you? Aw you wafkin tomowow?" he asked, mocking me. "Luckily, no."

I looked at his reflection in the mirror. I was absorbing the sight of Niv's wet body, which he was drying with a towel.

"You lost some weight, didn't you?" I asked, still brushing my teeth, standing in the bath of his parents' house.

"Yesh, I losht some," he said, the dork.

I spat the froth out and turned around to soak in the sight of Nivan's body.

"Maybe you could take me to one of your training sessions, because I think I gained some. I could swap it for a six pack," I said touching my stomach. "Not that my body is missing anything."

Nivan gave me a none too gentle onceover.

"I would recommend you work on your mass a bit more."

"What? You want me to be your size?" I asked, although I knew the answer.

"Not really."

I smiled, squinting my eyes at him.

"So what's it going to be? Will you take me to one of you training sessions?"

"If you want to," he said, pulling on his boxer shorts.

We quickly skittered to Niv's room. Niv's mom decided we should sleep in separate rooms, but we didn't like the idea.

"Holy fuck," I said quietly, entering the room. "Almost nothing's changed here."

The room was small, with laminate flooring. There was a window and a desk on the left, and a small bed on the right. Very humble, with little decoration.

Memories of us in this room hit me with a gale force.

"I forgot how small your bed was."

"Me too," said Niv, looking his room over. I realized he hadn't been here for quite some time.

The Redhead made the bed swift. I, on the other hand, rummaged through his CD collection that was collecting dust on a high shelf. Games, games, games, some music.

"You played all those?" I asked, a bit terrified.

"Some of them were crap, so I dropped them. The others I finished. Some of them twice."

"And you had time to do anything else?"

"I didn't sleep much."

I could well imagine that. Nivan and his constantly sunken, tired eyes. I had seen it too often.

I left the CD rack. Nivan was already crawling into bed.

"Why is it you always have to sleep next to the wall?" I asked, my arms akimbo.

"That's the law of nature," he said seriously.

"I don't give a rats ass about your law of nature. Move over, fattie."

Nivan moved closer to the wall, and I scooted next to him. I turned my back to him.

"Good night," I said, pulling the duvet over myself.

It didn't take long for the situation to get weird on me.

After years, here we were, in the same bed together. I remembered all the not-too-subtle situations between us that had taken place here. I felt hot all of a sudden. I threw the duvet back.

"It's awfully hot in here, can I open the window?"

"Sure," I heard from behind my back.

I stood up quickly and opened it. Not thinking, I jumped into the bed, facing Nivan.

The closeness hit me like a sledgehammer. The green, sparkling eyes in the darkness made me feel like I was fifteen all over again.

But Nivan was different this time. He was much bolder, more determined. It was me back then taking the initiative. It was me that came up with the weirdest ideas.

How had Niv felt about them? What was he thinking, lying in this bed?

Oh Karma.

All of a sudden, the Redhead was above me. I saw in his eyes what he wanted to do to me.

*Oh god of painfully fucked asses, please keep me in your good graces,* I thought to myself. He was kissing my neck, and once again I felt the fear paralyzing me.

"Niv?" I tried to stop him. "Maybe that's not such a good idea? Your mom is just next door."

"They moved their bedroom a while ago," he said. But feeling my rigidity, he pulled away and frowned.

"You don't want to?" he asked, and I felt the blood leave my face.

"I do, but..."

"But what?"

"We've already talked about it. It's the same with you sleeping next to the wall. Why is it I have to yield to you all the time?"

"If you really want to sleep next to the wall, then go ahead," he said, sitting on my hips.

"Oh Karma, you are so dumb sometimes."

He crossed arms over his chest.

"If you are you bothered by the fact that you always bottom for me," he stated, "you can be on top if you want." He said it with that sarcastic smile of his, and I felt anger rising in me.

"Well, then it's game over for you tonight," I said with a wide smile. "Get off of me." I tried to buck him off.

"In your dreams," he said, blocking my hands. He smiled insolently.

"Be careful, before I treat it as rape."

"And what then?" he asked, while I was trying to get away. Without result.

"I'll bite your dick off."

"My dick will be inside you long before that."

"So I'll bite it off afterwards. And then it's you who is going to be fucked in the ass." Resigned, I stopped struggling and dropped to the pillow.

Nivan was silent for a while, looking down at me.

"I don't want you to associate me with anything, you know...unpleasant. You know well I couldn't hurt you."

"You are turning the conversation on its head. All I want from you is for you to sometimes put yourself in my situation. Position." I added quickly.

"No."

"Why the fuck not?" I asked, thinking bloody murder at him.

"Just because. I will not be a bloody passive."

"And why is that?"

"Because I said so. I don't want it, end of."

Oh god of strength and muscles, why were you always so sparse with me?

"Sometimes you behave like a little spoiled brat, Niv. But as you wish. There will be no sex as of today."

The Redhead's face was threatening a massacre. But he said earlier he wouldn't hurt me. I was holding onto that like a liferaft.

"Okay then, there will be no head either," he said.

"Oh my, that really brings tears to my eyes," I said sarcastically.

"Why would I need a guy who doesn't want to fuck?" he said in anger. Normally such statement would hurt. But then... I knew he was desperate and angry.

"I could say the same," I replied. "Get off me."

Nivan lay down, turning his back to me.

I wasn't about to give up. My unending love for that red-headed pile of meat had reached its limits.

Still...I didn't want to spoil the day, which had otherwise been wonderful. A day that I spent pleasantly with said pile of red-headed meat.

I clung to his body, wrapping my arms around his waist, and kissed his tense shoulders.

"Don't be mad, Niv," I whispered. "I know you always get what you want, but I too am stubborn and determined. I just think it's unfair, because I would like you to sometimes...sacrifice yourself in some aspects."

He was silent and I stroked his head gently.

"You are the most important person to me," I said. "But that doesn't mean I will let you have your way all the time."

I kissed his shoulder again waiting for some kind of response.

Thank Karma he turned to his back.

"Will you hug me like you used to, or is that also too much of a sacrifice?" he asked, in that biting tone of his, of course.

"With pleasure."

I laid my head on his chest and wrapped my hands around him. I smiled, because I just learned that Nivan likes to be held like this.

"Good night," he said.

"Good night," was my reply.

---

"Are you asleep?" he asked, as I was drifting away.

"Almost." I slurred, with my cheek glued to his chest.

"I can't sleep here. I'm about to implode."

"Why? Is it uncomfortable?" I asked, without cracking my lids.

"Too many memories. Everything is coming back to me."

"But we are together now." I replied, only half listening.

"Exactly. And I would like to make those memories real once again, and you won't let me."

"What memories?" I asked lazily.

"Never mind, go to sleep," he said.

And I honestly would have, because I felt good and comfortable. But I wanted to pull the duvet over me a little more, as I felt a chill on my bare back.

My hand went to grab the duvet, and because it was close to Niv's crotch...I realized what he was talking about a moment ago.

I took him into my hand to make sure I wasn't making stuff up. Lazily opening my eyes, I lifted my head, and with a really intelligent look on my face, I said:

"You're hard."

"You don't say."

I smiled cheekily.

"What was it that was coming back to you? Memories? What kind of memories?" I said, while massaging him through the thin fabric of his boxer shorts.

"You know what memories I'm talking about," he said, half-angry, half-relaxed.

"I'm not quite sure what a highschool boy can think about his best friend."

"Don't torment me," he said, seeing my smile.

"Is that what I have been doing to you?" I asked, still massaging.



"You were doing it with your lips," he said, and I lifted my brows, all sleep forgotten.  
"Really. I was satisfying your needs with my mouth?" I asked, not really believing his words.  
"You should rather ask what it was you didn't do." said Niv, and I felt used in thousand different ways.  
"Oh Karma, I was such an innocent boy, I didn't see it."  
"Yeah, sure. If it wasn't for your moves, I probably wouldn't have been thinking about it."  
"I was innocent. I did it all without any hindsight." I said, continuing to massage.  
"Shall I remind you how you rubbed against me?"  
"Well, it was pleasant, so I rubbed." I said, laughing at myself.  
"Eh..." he sighed heavily. "You had good fun and I was dying here."  
"Nivan in love...I would love to see that," I said with a smile.

And that's when I noticed his gaze. Surprised...maybe a little shaken. Something inside me knotted.  
I said it as joke, not expecting anything.

I was scared. I wasn't sure what I was scared of most. A confirmation or denial..  
We looked at each other for a while. Our eyes wide open.  
In that moment I didn't realize what his gaze meant. He, too, probably wasn't aware of what my face was saying.  
We didn't go into details.

"Do you have a condom?" I asked, wanting to get out of the situation.  
Nivan frowned.  
"You said you didn't want to."  
"My image was used so many times in this bed...so I guess it's a good idea to celebrate the fact by putting it into motion."  
"Wallet in my pants."  
"Why am I not surprised?" I rolled my eyes and got off the bed.  
"Don't tell me you don't have one."  
"Since I know you always have one, I stopped bothering." I said, approaching the door.

Quickly and silently I skipped to the bathroom to get what was required.  
I splashed some cold water onto my face, since I felt hot once again. I looked at my own reflection in the mirror for a while, and then went back to the room.  
"I started worrying my mom caught you," Niv said, comfortably spread over the bed.  
"Catch."  
I threw the condom at him, which he expertly caught like the ninja he was.  
"Make some space," I said, and Niv scooted over.  
Before I jumped into the bed I took off my boxer shorts.  
"And now take care of me so that I can feel comfortable too."  
Nivan only smiled, and was practically instantly back on top of me, kissing my chest.  
"You can move to the lower parts straight away," I said, smiling like a fox.  
Seeing his expression, I added:

"I don't need much foreplay, you can lick me twice and I'll be ready."

I didn't mention that it was only him who had that effect on me. I'm not that easy. But...I kept it to myself...for another occasion.

"You are horrible today," he said gruffly, sliding lower.

I smiled, crossing hands behind my head.

"You are on my terms now, so you have to...oh."

Yes, definitely. Nivan was a master at making me feel good. His tongue and fingers worked magic. He knew where to touch, where to lick to make me feel relaxed. I was biting my lips hard, trying not to moan out loud, afraid of someone overhearing us.

I knew Nivan found his own satisfaction in it. He was getting hotter by the minute, with every move I made, with every stifled moan escaping my tightly squeezed lips.

I was grabbing at his hair, scratching his shoulder. I wanted him to know how good he made me feel, and I didn't want him to stop. But of course he had to do it.

I was almost there, hot and desperate to reach the climax, and that's when he entered me. At first I wanted to bite his ear, because only a moment ago I felt so good, and he spoiled everything. I dug my fingernails in his back and gritted my teeth.

"I hate you," I whispered in his ear, and bit down on his lobe.

He started to move his hips slowly, and with every slide I was forgetting that he ever made me feel uncomfortable. My dick was rubbing against his stomach and the closeness of Niv's body made me feel really good.

The red hair was pleasantly tickling my skin with every move. I felt him with every inch of my body. I listened to his breathing. The pleasure came to me in waves.

I was almost touching my fulfilment; it was at the stretch of my hand, when Nivan stopped. He collapsed onto my body, and I suddenly felt anxious, trying to come to terms with what had just happened.

"Nivan? Niv?" I asked.

And then it dawned on me.

"Niv, did you just...?"

I saw him coming around, and didn't need to hear the answer.

It had been a while since we last fucked, and he was tired lately...but he could last, when we were in Oslo, for example.

Was it the atmosphere of this place? The accumulation of all the memories?

I tried not to laugh, not to hurt his feelings. So I was biting down on my lips when he finally lifted his head, slightly stupefied.

Pulling off his condom he said:

"I'm getting old."

*Don't laugh, Marcin. Just don't.*

"It's good that we started sleeping together after gaining some experience, because otherwise it wouldn't last past one minute," I replied, still trying hard not to laugh.

"You're making fun of me," he said, looking at me from the corner of his eye.

"No way, I'm not."

Seeing my laughing face, he started smiling himself. He tried not to, but failed miserably.

"It's your fault," he said

"Sure, of course. Everything bad is Marcin's fault. And all that's...short..." I added, smiling bitingly.

Nivan hit me with a pillow.

"Ouch, you said you wouldn't hurt me," I said, laughing.

"You're not made of sugar, stop whining," he replied, smiling. "I'm going to get rid of this," he said, showing me the used condom.

I rolled my eyes at him.

"You don't have to show it off to me".

"Forgive me, your sugar highness."

"I could do with being in a relationship with a sugar butter biscuit prince, you know," I said to myself, because Nivan had already disappeared through the door.

---

"Did you sleep well?" Niv's mom asked as soon as I came down to the kitchen.

"Um, yes," I said, pushing my hands into my pockets, as if caught red-handed. But it wasn't my place to explain anything. It was between Nivan and his mom.

"Niv is still in the bathroom, he'll be right down."

"Good, good. The breakfast will be ready in a minute. It's good that you two are up."

"Yeah, today is an exception. Normally when we're off we sleep late."

"Do you have to get up early for work?" she asked, bustling around the kitchen. I, on the other hand, was looking around the living room, where I noticed an old piano.

"Depends. Morning shift starts at eight, and for the late shift we have to begin at eleven or twelve. Nivan claims to have a third shift sometimes, that's why he often doesn't get back before seven in the evening."

"I can see he's working a lot."

"Don't forget that he used to study alongside his work, which was definitely harder for him," I said, taking seat in front of the piano.

"Nivan finished the year?" she asked, while peeling vegetables.

Honestly, I felt awful that she asked those things of me and not Niv.

"Yes, he did, and very well I must add. I don't think he'll have any trouble in getting a full scholarship."

She smiled to herself delicately.

"Can I?" I asked, pointing to the piano. My fingers were already playing a tune. I couldn't hold myself back.

"Of course, I got it from my grandmother, but I can only play a few melodies."

## *Nivan*

---

Going down the stairs, I heard the piano.

But these weren't the averagely-played melodies my mom knew, nor my grandfathers...failed attempts.

I entered the living room. My mom was watching him, caught under a spell. Which isn't to say I didn't look the same stupid way. The world Marcin was creating, the trance he was in...

The speed with which his fingers flew over the keys surprised me. Their steadiness.

I knew he practiced for many, many years. But I never saw the result of it. I stood there, rooted to the floor, mesmerized by his hands.

Long fingers, skimming over the keys like little spiders. Unbelievable.

He cut the melody short, rousing me from the stupor.

He looked at his hands as if he saw them for the first time. He frowned and I felt the same thing he did. Nostalgia.

Then he smiled, dissipating all sense of sadness.

"I do remember something!" he said, discovering I was standing next to him.

We looked at each other for a while

"I think you remember quite a lot."

I smiled.

I looked at my mom.

She smiled at me.

She knew. She knew everything.

---

*Evening.*

"Don't wait for me, I'm going to be late," I said, standing in the door to his room.

"WOAH, HEY! WAIT!" he yelled when I was opening the door.

I backtracked to his room.

"What?"

He didn't move his ass. He was sitting on his mattress, dotting notes in his notepad.

"Where are you going?" he asked, biting down on his pencil. "And with whom?" he asked, lifting a brow.

I felt like he was taking all freedom away from me with those two questions.

"With nobody. I need to take care of something. Alone."

Seeing him unimpressed with my answer, I knew I had to add something more, and quick.

"I need to go to work to do something, really" I was explaining myself like a moron.

"It's late. Can't you just leave it till tomorrow?" he asked.

I rolled my eyes.

"I just remembered, and it's very important. I have to do it, otherwise I won't be able to sleep tonight."

"I was counting on some action today," he said.

"I'll make it up to you...can I take my leave now, my lord and master?" I could feel my patience evaporate.

"You can. Be careful."

---

I had to go back to our old hideout. To search it again, without Nazarij being scared of his own shadow.

After two good days, everything crushed me again.

I wanted to calm my head by at least sorting out this one case hanging over me.

And there were a lot of "cases" like that.

The fact that Marcin found out didn't make me happy, quite the contrary. I had sick dreams, I was freaking out. Nothing moved forward. Sonia has been swallowed by the earth, it seemed, and I still didn't have a clue why we found Marcin's old picture in this place. I had a feeling I missed something here.

When it felt like I was closer to getting answers about Sonia, all was turned on it's head, and I had the impression that once again I found myself further away from the answers than I was before.

I wasn't kidding myself, I knew she was capable of things like that. But I was better than her, I should have been able to find her a long time ago. The fact I hadn't meant only one thing: someone good had her back. Someone freakishly talented.

It had been a while since I'd felt so...frustrated, so jealous of someone's skills.

I was aware that Sonia was being placed on the back-burner. Just like the revenge.  
Now it was a race. A race between me and that other somebody.

I was sure that my opponent would show his face soon. He would want to surprise me, show himself in all his glory, make my jaw drop. I knew he wouldn't want to hide behind a woman's back for too long. He doesn't want to be anonymous. He'll want to show his power, his skills. He'll want to show off the masterpiece he's creating.  
I could almost feel his frustration, his impatience.

I was waiting for it.  
I was waiting for that feeling to consume him like it did me once.

I entered through the door I once broke through. I turned the flashlight on.  
In the past I was proud of being in this place, among so many talented people. Although I never showed it to anyone. It was me who was most important, most talented. It was me who learned himself all he knew. It was me they were supposed admire.  
I was proud, magnificent.  
Full of shit.

I wasn't one to be bossed around for long, so I made my own group. I was finally about to do what I wanted most. Those who admired me started hating me, because I was faster than them.  
Back then...me, Alex, Rav and Sonia... we had everything we wanted. What's funny is that very little of my and Alex's wealth is left. Because the more you have, the more you spend. On stupid things that give you only a moment of happiness.

I found myself in the room where I buried all the memories of him. I still sensed the lingering feelings of jealousy, desire and knowledge, which had long been covered by dust.

We were drawn to each other like magnets, simultaneously hating each other. We were cheating on each other. We loved the passion between us. Poisoning each other.  
Somewhere deep inside, even back then, I already knew we would never have a happily ever after.

Thinking about him, I looked through the cardboard boxes, throwing old keyboards and dusty cables aside. I was leafing through moldy notebooks that were filled with notes. And the more time I spent there, the more the atmosphere of the place crushed me.  
Feeling the urge to leave, I looked into the last of the boxes.  
I found a small notebook, which had been devoured by the teeth of passing time. The notebook seemed older than the stuff I'd been looking at earlier.

I found a diary. Blowing the dust off of the cover, I opened it.  
I read the first few words in my mind.

"Dear Moon, you swiftly climbed up to the blue heights..."

A poem in a child's handwriting.  
And the owners name.

*Sariel.*

*"Thousands of stars, in the blue skies twinkling,  
They seem to pour new life into nature;  
Every now and again silvery clouds pass by;  
You seem to be the lord of the sleeping nature.  
But why is it your trembling and pale rays  
Aren't able to dissipate the black of the night's shadows?  
You are the picture of hope in a sad soul:  
It'll wipe a few tears away, never drying them completely."*

The Moon, by Juliusz Slowacki.

## *Winter*

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"Sariel, Sariel!" He was pulling on my pajamas, wanting to wake me. In the darkness, the only thing I saw were his sparkling eyes.

"Come, come quick. I made something for you." He said, running amok. .

I didn't like it.

Uncle and auntie had left, leaving us with their youngest son, who was a snitch. I was afraid he would hear us and then tell on us. And we would be punished as usual.

"Can't we leave it till tomorrow?" I said. "It's late."

"No, no. We can't. Tonight, tonight. Come." He was pulling on me.

So I got up. Not rushing at all. I put my slippers on. And still only half-awake I followed him.

He was wearing only his pajama bottoms and a sleeveless shirt. It was only after a while when realized he was wet, all wet.

When we approached the front door I frowned.

"It's outside? What were you doing outside in the middle of the night?" I asked. "It's really cold."

It really was cold. Winter came early, and there was a lot of snow.

"Come with me, come. You have to see this. For you. I made it." He was babbling as if he'd lost his mind. I was afraid of him by now.

"Okay, but wait! Stop pulling me like that," I said, wondering about his unusual behavior. "I need to put a jacket and boots on. You should put something on, too," I added calmly.



He was impatient. He shivered.

I pulled a jacket over his wet, cold skin and he, in his slippers, led me into the woods.

"Are you mad?" I stopped. "I'm not going there at night."

"Don't be afraid. I will lead you," he said, pulling on my hand.

And all of a sudden, when we were walking like that through that dark, gloomy forest, I started to feel uneasy. Something terrible. A premonition.

"What did you do for me?" I asked, following him. I felt my voice quiver.

"You'll see, you'll see."

"WHAT did you do?" I yelled.

"Come. It's not far, not far at all." He didn't stop.

"WHAT DID YOU DO?!" I yelled, trying to free myself from his grip. "WHAT DID YOU DO?! WHAT DID YOU DO?!"

When tears gathered in my eyes, when I shook in the cold and from fright...he smiled.

He smiled with his beautiful, bright smile.

"Come."

He was walking backwards now, with that smile still on his face.

"Come, Sariel, come."

We entered a meadow covered in snow, bright with the moon reflecting in it. Surrounded by tall, black trees.

"I made you an angel, Sariel."

Snow.

White.

Snow. Red.

Wings made of feathers. Made of different sets of birds' wings.

They weren't white.

They were multiple colors. Many...many birds.

And in the middle of those wings, colorful...beautiful...lay my angel.

Red from blood.

With dead, white eyes. And pale skin. Like chalk.

I was choking on my tears.

My angel was my foster-brother.

The youngest son of my foster-parents.