

New Morning - Unknown

Golubenko - Honkaneva

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Stockholm

White-gold diamond earrings sparkled in the bright bathroom lights as Lisa's long fingers with the polished manicure were fastening them. The jewellery was her husband's gift on their trip to Zurich, where they had celebrated their fifth wedding anniversary. That was spring 2010, when a volcanic eruption in Iceland had stopped air traffic preventing them from traveling on the wedding day. Memories of the dinner on the shore of Lake Zurich were vivid, even though three years had passed. A gorgeous jewellery box appeared as if from nowhere on an empty dinner table, though Lisa didn't expect any accolades for the anniversary. Marriage didn't rise to the very top of their values, though it did add some confidence to Lisa's political image.

Lake Zurich was a magical place, day to night. In the sunshine, a turquoise lake looked like a sea bay, while ducks and swans swimming in the shoreline were delighting passing by people. As darkness descended, the images of ornamental light poles on the water surface, the gentle sound of chatter and joyful laughs, the yellow moon rising from behind the mountains, - all were there for the romantic moment to pause and reflect on the enjoyable aspects of the relationship. Joint trips weren't very common as both of them were busy progressing in their careers towards ever more demanding positions. The most significant leap in Lisa's career was her breakthrough to the European Parliament in previous elections. Frequent traveling to the hearts of European determining politics had made Lisa a master of quick starts, but cut the possibilities to pamper herself and take care of their relationship. Still, it was crucial to look excellent and well-mannered to maintain credibility with colleagues and voters. Long, blonde hair and a captivating bun hairdo had been Lisa's trademark for years. Nordic elegance worked brilliantly for now. Hard work and perfect image were prized with several worthy job nominations over the last few years.

- Honey, did you put my new blue-yellow tie into my suitcase yesterday? was the sound from the bedroom's dressing room.

It was Lisa's spouse, Matts, vice president of a large Swedish listed company.

- Your suitcase is ready. You can take the bags down. The taxi is here in a few minutes, Lisa said over her shoulder while finishing her make-up with the last touch of lipstick in a sophisticated muted hue, closed the cap and dropped the stick into her new Louis Vuitton handbag.

The luxury lifestyle was not as self-evident to her as it seemed to be. Purposefulness and elbows used in the right place and right time transformed Lisa's life a bit at a time. It was a long way from an ordinary girl living in the middle of nowhere in the Central Finnish suburb to a resident of a posh area in Stockholm. She spent most of her childhood summers with her Aunt at their family house in Lidingö Island, a 20-minute metro trip from central Stockholm. First, only as a company for her cousins. Later on, working for the family, as they owned electronics import company, that always had room for multilingual summer workers. However, part-time, Lisa took care of the family's everyday affairs, when Aunt and Uncle were too busy. The family welcomed Lisa warmly, and over the years, her Aunt became like the second Mother. The hectic summers still felt like a holiday: moving in the hustle and bustle of a big city was a brilliant option for a change being just a girl from the Finnish countryside. Stockholm attracted Lisa with its endless opportunities and liberal atmosphere, and she ended up pursuing her studies in Sweden instead of Finland.

This time, Lisa was not searching for a flight to the exotic countries, Strasbourg or Brussels on the board of departures from Arlanda Airport, but for Simferopol in Ukraine. Lisa and Matts had

decided to travel there together, even though their final destinations were in different cities. This round of negotiations, called the *cultural tour* in the European Union's insiders, was arranged in Sevastopol, where they were supposed to discuss Ukraine's EU membership terms. Realistic or not, at least they addressed that possibility. It was 2013, eight years after the Orange Revolution, but still, politics in the country could not be called very stable.

On the other hand, Matts was on his way to Yalta, leading the board of directors to reach a significant deal, that would affect the everyday lives of over 40 million people in Ukraine. On a favourable schedule, both had the opportunity to arrange a couple of extra days off to explore the sights the Crimean Peninsula offered. Neither Lisa nor Matts had ever been as a tourist in this region.

There was also another group of EU representatives getting to the city at the same time, and their programs were partly joint. In addition to the ordinary meetings, the schedule included possibilities to meet representatives of the local Ministry of Education and, at least according to prior information, a visit to some old school. Education as an institution was not Lisa's favourite subject; namely, Lisa's Mother was teaching Finnish in junior high. Judging from her Mother's work, being a teacher was far from what Lisa found meaningful. After finishing her studies, Lisa subtly kept the distance from anything connected to scholarship.

Sevastopol

Autumn came surprisingly early this year. It wasn't cold, but it was raining for the fifth day running. The golden sunny days of early November suddenly turned grey, with chilly rains and howling winds. Gusts threw wet leaves into the car windows. Dina turned into the yard of her home block of flats. Desperate searching for a parking space eventually resulted in Dina's squeezing her car into a seemingly impossible crevice, so she started to unload the shopping bags from the trunk. The bags felt to weight a ton. Her toddler has fallen asleep in the car and began to whimper as Dina removed her seatbelt. The phone rang at the absolutely wrong moment. Dina knew from the ringtone it was Roman. As usual, he would have asked where the woman was hanging out. Dina was a few minutes late. The wind blew cold rain onto Dina's face, and it felt like a slap. Her throat tightened, letting her out of breath. Dina swallowed tears, lifted her three-year-old daughter Alina into her arms, and headed for the stairwell. Inside, stench smells of wet dogs and food scraps struck to the nose. The lift journey seemed to last forever.

At home, the same familiar chaos prevailed. Alina's elder brother, 10-year-old Nikita, was struggling with his math homework. Alina was screaming out her tiredness; Roman competed with her, loud about the mess and cold food. Dina didn't listen. That cacophony couldn't get through her internal firewall for years already. Dina dropped the bags on the floor and started stuffing the goods to the fridge furiously. Roman went berserk about something, pulled on his jacket, and went to buy cigarettes. Children became silent at the dining table, stooped themselves into their cell phones.

Dina had no appetite. Nor for food neither for life. She knew, she was the one to blame for it. She should have become a renowned marine biologist. That was her dream. Not even a dream, but a goal she had purposefully pursued all her life. She had taken a marine salvage course, a diving course, had an internship at the Institute of Marine Biology, practiced her English to perfection, got at her first attempt at the Faculty of Biology in the capital, studied as the best on her course... And then she got pregnant. Contraception failed, and abortion was out of the question. Roman even agreed to marry. No, Dina didn't quit her studies, and her career was not difficult to build. The dissertation was almost complete. Then something happened. Dina didn't even notice when she gave up. Making a doctoral dissertation didn't bring any money to the home cashier; raising a child had taken a lot of her power. In her Mum's opinion, teaching as a profession was much more secure than the surreal dream of the Nobel Prize.

And here Dina was now, in the Bermuda triangle of home, kitchen and school. And there could be more factors, sucking her to the bottom. Years were lost in between the three rooms apartment, which mortgage was ripping on Dina's neck like a stone, shopping and housekeeping, and the hairdressers. Well yeah, the hairdresser, where a busy Mother of a family, can speak out off her heart for someone to listen. Or have to listen.

Dina looked out into the black window, where raindrops occasionally shone into full diamond splendour as passing by cars' lights hit them.

Morning was as grey as many of the previous ones. Dina cooked breakfast, dressed, and packed the children in the car on full in-house autopilot. Along the way, she dropped Alina off to the nursery, pulled the phone from Nikita's hands, and parked in the schoolyard. Nikita slammed the door shut and ran after his friends. Dina was left alone in the car. These moments she called *the*

nano-minutes of her life when she had time to be and to be herself. The yearning for something more significant, more meaningful rose from the depth of her soul. For example, mascara. Dina chuckled. She looked at herself in the rear-view mirror and decided to put on some mascara anyway. Today, their school was supposed to be attended by guests from the European Parliament.